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

Minimalists at 80
Berlin Philharmonic in Toronto
Politics and Music at Teatro Colon
Prokofieff Ballets

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March/April 2017
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March 8-April 8
James Ehnes plays the world premiere of Aaron Jay Kernis’s Violin Concerto March 8 at the Toronto Symphony’s “New Creations Festival” at Roy Thomson Hall, with follow-up performances March 16-18 with the Seattle Symphony at Benaroya Hall and April 6-8 with the Dallas Symphony at the Meyerson Center.

March 9-11 and 15-18
Yo-Yo Ma performs the world premiere of Esa-Pekka Salonen’s Cello Concerto with the composer conducting the Chicago Symphony at Orchestra Hall; a week later Ma joins Music Director Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic in the concerto’s second outing at David Geffen Hall.

March 11-19
David Agler conducts the Minnesota Opera’s world premiere production of William Bolcom’s Dinner at Eight. Stephen Powell, Brenda Harris, Craig Irvin, and Susannah Biller star in four performances at St Paul’s Ordway Theater.

March 12 & 18; April 22 & 30
Artistic Director Andreas Mitisek conducts the Long Beach Opera’s US premiere of The Perfect American by Philip Glass at the Terrace Theater in March. He then brings his “Disney cast” of Justin Ryan, Lara Ryan, Zeffin Quinn Hollis, and Suzan Hanson to his other company, the Chicago Opera Theater, for performances at the Harris Theater in April. [World premiere reviewed May/June 2013, p. 18]

March 28-April 2
Creative programs and adventurous works are the main attraction as the Kennedy Center and Washington Performing Arts present four US orchestras at the first annual Shift Festival at the Kennedy Center’s Concert Hall. Michael Butterman and the Boulder Philharmonic, Grant Llewellyn and the North Carolina Symphony, Eric Jacobsen and The Knights, and Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus bring photographers, aerial dancers, and mandolin and violin soloists for works by 13 composers.

March 30, April 6, 19, 26
Carnegie Hall’s Zankel Hall is the location for four concerts of “Three Generations: Changing the Direction of Concert Music”. Brad Lubman conducts Ensemble Signal in Adams’s Shaker Loops and Riley’s In C; a piano quintet play works by Part, Glass, and Reich; Bang on a Can All-Stars and the JACK Quartet perform music by David Lang, Julia Wolfe, and Michael Gordon; and six players tackle new works by Bryce Dessner and Nico Muhly.

April 11 & 13-15
The Los Angeles Philharmonic’s Reykjavik Festival opens with Daniel Bjarnason conducting L A. Phil New Music Group, Schola Cantorum Reykjavik, and cellist Saeunn Thorsteinsdottir in works by five Icelandic composers. Esa-Pekka Salonen then conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic in three different concerts that include works by six more Icelandic composers including premieres of concertos for violin, piano, and organ. All concerts are at Disney Concert Hall.

April 20-May 13
The Canadian Opera Company celebrates the 150th anniversary of the Canadian confederation and the 50th anniversary of Harry Somer’s Louis Riel at Toronto’s Four Seasons Centre. Russell Braun leads the cast, and Johannes Debus conducts seven performances. The production runs concurrently with Puccini’s Tosca.

April 28-30
Nicholas McGegan conducts soloists, the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Chorale, and the New York Baroque Dance Company in the fully-staged world premiere of The Temple of Glory, music by Rameau, libretto by Voltaire, at the University of California-Berkeley’s Zellerbach Hall.
Hearing Everything and Understanding Simon Rattle
Gil French

In the past, when assessing Music Director Simon Rattle’s recordings with the Berlin Philharmonic, I have sometimes casually called him “a control freak.” No more, after hearing both of his programs in November at the Toronto Symphony’s Roy Thomson Hall during the orchestra’s fourth stop on its seven-city North American tour. Total control over the orchestra he had, but that wasn’t the problem.

Rattle’s strengths and weaknesses all played out in Mahler’s Symphony No. 7. First and foremost, Rattle hears everything, more so than any other conductor I’ve ever heard in concert. Here he often ceased beating pulse for a few seconds, so tight was his players’ ensemble, and then swooped toward the second violins or contrabassoon (the richest in the business) or one of the woodwind players or the string basses (the most lyrical, deeply expressive, perfectly and brightly tuned I’ve ever heard, from growls to whispers) to draw out an easily buried detail or tone color change in a line. How often I have said that the reason some conductors are skilled but not exciting is that they simply aren’t aware of details in a score—they can only draw out what they hear in their heads.

Second, it was visually obvious that the players are involved heart and soul. For them this is no mere job. It was also obvious that Rattle has honed the way they listen to one another. At one point the idle principal violist was punching out the string basses’ rhythms with his mouth as preparation for his section’s next vigorous entrance. Body language (including many smiles) and total concentration conveyed their emotional involvement. Their consummate ensemble reveals how the players of this democratic, self-governing orchestra relate to one another. Also, it helps that the orchestra has so many players (e.g., 23 first violins, 19 seconds) that not all are used in any one concert. Many principals at the second concert were different from the first, and some players had already flown to the West Coast. As a result, tour exhaustion is a lesser factor with the BPO.

Third, while the orchestra’s violins lacked the silken luster that Karajan used to create, the lower strings were utterly radiant, the woodwinds exquisitely balanced, and the brass gorgeously blended whether at double forte or piano. Only the French horns had occasional errors, and their tone sounded insecure,
though that more probably reflects a style of vibrato some European horn players prefer.

So where's the weakness? Mahler's symphonies are sprawling and (some would say) neurotic enough that each movement requires a large grasp of form to keep it together. The first movement lacked any over-arching sweep; instead, it was a composite of frequent tempo changes that didn't relate to each another. Each micro-section had careful shading and balance but didn't relate to the next. One cannot lose grasp of the forward pulse in a movement as complicated as this and still integrate its parts. The same happened in the second 'Night Music' (IV), not merely done at a very fast tempo but often rushed, then held back almost to an andante, then pushed to the verge of hysterics.

The first 'Night Music' was just the opposite. The whole movement flowed as one, even when moments verged on recitative, then were swept up into a grand lyrical sweep, leading to a coda that veritably floated on air. In the Scherzo too, from its wicked Scarbo, goblin-like opening through all of its exaggerated, highly angular parts, Rattle integrated its potentially disjunct parts into one consistent flowing point of view. The final movement began with this kind of discipline, but, as Mahler's many tempo changes came closer to the end, Rattle gave in to more hysteria. Fabulous playing, but not a satisfying whole.

The next night Rattle began by briefly addressing the audience saying, "Last night we heard Mahler's Symphony No. 7. If you were a composer in 1908, where do you go after that! Tonight we hear the answer", which was Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Works, Webern's Six, and Berg's Three. He added, "During rehearsals we discovered that they work best if played one after another without a break and without any applause in between, like a 14-movement suite, or maybe Mahler's Symphony No. 17—though if you feel like applauding a bit at the end, that would be appreciated." And work it did! In fact, the Berg emerged so organically from the Webern that one could easily have missed where they joined.

Rattle was supreme in the Schoenberg. It was the first time I ever thought of this Opus 16 as truly beautiful. I felt each movement's melodic and rhythmic consistency, as Rattle seamlessly drew out its constantly shifting tone colors, each instrument sometimes playing no more than one or two notes of the longer melodic lines. The same was true of Webern's Opus 6, which felt like a highly condensed, intellectualized version of the Schoenberg. In fact, Rattle's conducting gave both works a deeply felt intellectual consistency. Perhaps that was his downfall in Berg's Opus 6. Like Wozzeck, it has a surging, long-lined, romantic passion that makes its 12-tone nature secondary. Either Rattle was still consumed by that underlying control that made the Schoenberg and Webern work (thus missing Berg's sweep and passion), or I, like the lady next to me, simply succumbed to sheer overload by the time Berg's last two passionate movements arrived, which in effect were the 13th and 14th movements of a 65-70 minute 12-tone work.

At the second concert I was lucky enough to sit next to a producer for CBS's "60 minutes" who was touring with Rattle to create a segment on him for the program. She told me what a dream he is to work with—gregarious, on top of his game, yet at ease with everyone—musicians, reporters, and audience—frank, and fun to be around. After intermission, as the orchestra waited for Rattle to appear and conduct Brahms's Symphony No. 2, an orchestra manager came on stage, conferred with a player, and disappeared. Long pause. Audience began talking. He appeared again. Laughter and applause. Seems a player's part was missing. Rattle entered stage left, came to the edge of the stage without a microphone, and said, "All is well. There were no tantrums (laughter). This happens when touring." Completely at ease—both conductor, musicians, and audience. As the "60 minutes" producer said, "That's Rattle."

The Brahms, unfortunately, had three forgettable movements; there were beautiful moments, but irregular tempos distorted them. After a slow first movement introduction, Rattle finally worked up to an a tempo flow before the principal French horn rushed some key moments. The pulse in the second movement was also rushed, and, boy, was its development loud—not atmospheric at all. Then, behold, the third movement was free of tempo changes and blessed with an exquisite linear flow. The finale? Loud, rushed, rather heavily played with wallowing in the development section.

At the first concert, before the Mahler, for Pierre Boulez's Eclat, 15 players were spread out, sitting in their regular seats instead of...
together—a bad decision acoustically on a large stage. But the playing was exquisite as instruments dovetailed seamlessly and reverberations hung in the air. I asked an opera magazine editor who sat next to me if he understood a word of the short program note (translated from German). He said, “No. I was a student at the time of Eclat’s premiere; that’s what made me drop music as my major and shift to psychology and anthropology.” At home I had done my homework with Boulez’s own recording, and Eclat must be heard in concert to have an effect—but I still didn’t get it, despite Rattle’s care. Perhaps the Boulez was chosen because, like the Mahler, it’s a rare work that uses both guitar and mandolin.

The CBS producer said that, after playing at Carnegie Hall, Boston’s Symphony Hall, and Hill Auditorium in Ann Arbor, the musicians felt that Roy Thomson Hall was the worst of the four. Indeed, sitting right side the first night and left side the second was like listening in two different halls; also, on the left the French horns ricocheted off the wooden wall behind them. Ah, but the musicians thought that of the four locations Toronto had the best audience by far!

The Berlin Philharmonic invaded Los Angeles in November for the last time under Music Director Simon Rattle, but that wasn’t enough activity to suit three of the orchestra’s esteemed players. In league with violinist Ray Chen, they went moonlighting down the Santa Ana Freeway November 18 to Orange, the town that gave Orange County its name, for an evening of chamber music in a brand-new hall.

On the campus of Chapman University just a few blocks from Orange’s quaint old town center, the Musco Center for the Arts opened March 19, 2016, with a starry gala with Placido Domingo and Deborah Voigt. The 1044-seat hall with horseshoe-shaped balconies, plenty of wood surfaces, and the look of a small opera house proved to be an excellent room for the voice, even from a poor seat under the overhang. It would be instructive to hear if instrumental music fared as well, this time with the 55-ton portable “flying” orchestra shell in place.

It did. The quartet of Chen, Berlin Concertmaster Noah Bendix-Balgley, Principal Violist Amihai Grosz, and cellist Stephan Koncz produced a deep, luscious, plush collective sound with a dark resonance that favored the lower strings. The hall has plenty of reverberation but with enough detail that I could clearly hear every bounce of the bow on the strings. It was like being inside the body of a large cello. Yasuhisa Toyota, the acoustics wizard for several California halls, including Disney Hall, had done it again.

Chen and Balgley had met while competing at the Queen Elisabeth Music Competition in Brussels. Chen won, but they become good friends anyway and formed this quartet, which was making its North American debut here. The Berlin players are young, none are German (Balgley is American, Grosz Israeli, and Koncz Viennese), and they played with the emphatic assurance that seems to be an emblem of Berlin Philharmonic musicians.

But the quartet’s collective sound has yet to coalesce; they seemed like four assertive individuals pulling and tugging away at Wolf’s Italian Serenade and Mozart’s Adagio and Fugue, K. 546 (in place of the originally announced arrangement of the Suite Italienne by Stravinsky). Ravel’s String Quartet found them tempering their exuberance sufficiently in the slow movement; but when they dug in with the tremelos in the finale, they sounded like a small, loud string orchestra.

In the middle of the program, Chen and Balgley paired off in an energetic performance of the first movement of Ysaye’s Sonata for Two Violins, and the three Berliners displayed titanic virtuosity, if little humor, in Jean Françaix’s wonderfully irreverent String Trio. Koncz demonstrated an ingratiating compositional talent with his vigorous total re-composition of Satie’s Gymnopédie No. 1 (retitled ‘A New Satie’s-faction’) for string quartet. Gershwin’s ‘Sweet and Lowdown’ in a Kronos-like arrangement ended the evening.

This was the Orange County Philharmonic Society’s first presentation in the Musco Center, a venture away from their home turf, the Segerstrom Center in Costa Mesa. I hope there will be many more.
Taiwan Philharmonic’s North American Debut

China Philharmonic Also in Town

[The Taiwan Philharmonic, originally reviewed in ARG in J/F 2013 and most recently in M/A 2016, made its North American debut in December. ARG critics David Gordon Duke and Richard Ginell reviewed both of the concerts, with Ginell doing a further comparison to the China Philharmonic. —Editor]

Richard S. Ginell
Los Angeles area

Two leading Chinese orchestras, the China and Taiwan Philharmonics, both appeared on the West Coast in December 2016, one after another. That’s a newsworthy musical event in itself.

But when Donald Trump received a call from Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen shortly before the groups arrived, thus upsetting 37 years of diplomatic protocol, it placed the touring orchestras from the rival governments in a higher profile than they, or we, had bargained for. I can’t say whether there is a genuine rivalry between these groups; but, for our purposes, the situation begs for a piece about a battle of the bands.

The China Philharmonic, which arrived in Los Angeles on December 5, is a relatively young orchestra, even a baby, having been formed only in 2000. Artistic Director Long Yu counts them as the flagship of his musical empire, which also includes positions with the Shanghai and Guangzhou symphonies, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, and MISA Shanghai Summer and Beijing Music Festivals (even Herbert von Karajan at his peak didn’t have this much power).

As heard in the sharply detailed acoustics of Disney Hall, the China Philharmonic came off as a very good orchestra, the strings playing pretty much together, with soloists of good quality. The brasses can blaze, but they chose—or were told—not to push too hard in Disney Hall. Yu was a more efficient than inspirational conductor, with very few extravagant gestures and always with a score opened in front of him.

If you were stuck in LA’s awful traffic, even on a Monday night, you might have missed the best part of the concert, Enchantements Oubliés, a marvelous tone poem by the veteran Chinese composer Qigang Chen (he was the director of music for the 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony). It’s in one continuous movement, but you could make a case for it being a symmetrical four-movement symphony, each section almost exactly five minutes long plus an extended coda. It began with a beautifully layered opening for strings and percussion, a breeze from the Orient with its own irresistible impressionist sheen. Chen came up with many attractive doublings from various mallet instruments. The third “movement” finds a predictable tune rising out of dissonant stasis (yes, Chen also composes for film), and the busy timpanist got a big workout in the finale.

The pentatonic scale gives Enchantements Oubliés its location and ambience, and it was hard to leave this world for more conventional Western territory. But leave we did as 12-year-old pianist Serena Wang tackled Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 1 with disarming assurance and calm. There’s more to this music than that, but she has decades of experience ahead of her in order to find it.

Dvorak’s New World Symphony, after some early fortissimos woke everyone up, unfolded competently but without much new to say and shorn of any hints of a Czech lilt in the scherzo. I know, I know; everyone loves the New World, but would it be too much to ask if there could be a moratorium on this piece for a little while, at least around here, where almost every major and regional orchestra has been programming it more and more over the last year?

A week later on December 12, about 40 miles to the south, the Orange County Philharmonic Society presented the Taiwan Philharmonic (known on its home turf as the National Symphony) in its US debut at Costa Mesa’s Renee and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. The Taiwan Philharmonic, founded in 1986, is scarcely older than its Chinese counterpart, yet it seemed to have a much deeper connection with the ethos and traditions of Western classi-
cal music. I would attribute a lot of this to its excellent Viennese- and American-trained conductor, Shao-Chia Lü, whose physical motions were far more expressive and flowing than those of Yu, and whose ability to get a wealth of nuances and charged-up fervor from his players made a big difference. It also helped that the orchestra has had a distinguished list of resident and visiting guest conductors over the years to add to the general culture.

The orchestra’s texture was darkly shaded and sometimes a bit coagulated, but the latter probably was owing to the acoustics of the hall. The sound I heard in Segerstrom for the most part was consistent with the orchestra’s recordings, but they made huge progress over the years from shaky ill-tuned Brahms in 1986 to mastery in Richard Strauss by 2011. Here Lü got them to play above their heads in a stunning performance of Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 5, creating suspense in even the most predictable spots with strategic pacing and shaping of climaxes, sharp rhythms, and all kinds of subtle internal details. That’s how you make the overplayed Fifth sound like the great symphony it is.

Like the China Philharmonic, the Taiwan Philharmonic launched the evening with some music from their countrymen. First, from 26-year-old Chun-Wei Lee came the US premiere of his brief, fascinating Last Mile with pentatonic themes playfully mixed with dissonance and an abundance of percussive punctuation.

In the Violin Concerto (1988) by Tyzen Hsiao (1938-2015), the composer “tries to recall people’s sympathy with a more cordial syntax,” according to the awkwardly translated liner note. A wag might add that it could have been written in 1888. With Taiwanese folk songs woven into the tapestry, this may be the most unapologetically melodic, romantic concerto written in the last 30 years this side of Hollywood, tugging at the heartstrings as it tries to please escapist audiences.

There was much local significance in the choice of the concerto, for Hsiao wrote it while living in Los Angeles during his 18-year American residence. Furthermore, the famous Taiwanese-American soloist Cho-Liang Lin gave the concerto its world premiere in San Diego in 1992. He evidently loves the piece, having brought a wealth of micro-managed nuance and feeling into his playing.

Lü and the Taiwan Philharmonic closed the night in high-powered form with Tchaikovsky’s ‘Dance of the Tumblers’ from The Snow Maiden plus more beautifully played main-title-like music from Hsiao, ‘The Angel from Formosa’.

In this battle of the bands, leaving politics aside, I would say: advantage, Taiwan.

David Gordon Duke
Vancouver BC

The Taiwan Philharmonic undertook a late fall visit to North America with just two stops: December 9 at Vancouver BC’s Chan Center, and December 12 in the Los Angeles area (above). Readers in much of North America will find a measure of amusement in the plight of Vancouver concertgoers. The normally clement Pacific Northwest from Portland OR to Vancouver BC was dealing with cold tem-
temperatures and wet heavy snow. In Vancouver, a city ill-prepared for such, there were worries about whether the concert at the suburban University of British Columbia might be called off. As it turned out, it proved slushy but safe, and the Chan Centre was full for the TPO’s Canadian debut.

For its tour program Music Director Shao-Chi Lü chose two works by Taiwanese composers for the first half of his program, starting with Chun-Wei Lee’s Last Mile, a commission from Taiwan’s Council of Indigenous Peoples. (The title refers to Taiwan’s Truku people’s beliefs about posthumous judgement.) Lee (born in 1990) produced a colorful short piece that will go down well with orchestras looking to expand their concert offerings with music from Asia; it certainly delighted the Vancouver audience. Lee really knows his way around the orchestra; he gave generous opportunities for his musicians to sparkle with well-chosen colors combined with direct, easy to understand melodic materials.

This orchestra’s commitment to contemporary music by Taiwan composers is exemplary, including a lavish 12-volume set of CDs. (As a point of reference, Taiwan, with some 24 million inhabitants on an island about half the size of Ireland, has roughly the same population as Texas or Australia.) The degree of support given to classical music may be deduced from the stature of the NSO and the scope of its work.

Unlike the genial contemporary idiom of Lee’s Last Mile, Tyzen Hsiao’s Violin Concerto in D is another matter entirely, here performed by its great advocate, soloist Cho-Liang Lin. Hsiao (1938-2015) got his initial training in Taiwan, then studied for a short while in Japan in the mid-60s. In 1977 he began an extended stint in the USA, where the concerto was written in 1988 and then premiered by Lin with the San Diego Symphony in 1992, the same year Hsiao returned to Taiwan.

Promotional materials often refer to Hsiao as “Taiwan’s Rachmaninoff”. The epithet is evocative enough, but this particular work is more a celebration of the great violin concerto tradition stretching from Mendelssohn through Korngold. It is unabashedly romantic in spirit, though extra lashings of percussion betray its origin in the later years of the 20th Century. I consider it a welcome addition to the violin concerto genre, a work that will suit violinists of conservative tastes looking for an alternate to the Korngold and Barber concertos, but with the similar audience-pleasing lyricism and opportunities for display. It would be pointless to criticize it as not reflecting the post-Darmstadt values of the 1980s; rather, it is exactly what its composer willed it to be, and we are richer for it. As one would expect, Lin delivered the florid solo part with conviction; his sound was sweet, and he was prepared to court sentimentality where the score invites it.

But with all due respect for the engaging works of Lee and Hsiao, the showpiece of the concert was Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 5. I’ll confess to a stab of disappointment when I saw it on the program. Don’t we hear this old war horse more than enough from local ensembles? Hasn’t Tchaikovsky’s currency been devalued by countless unenthusiastic performances and mindless repetition? But this was a Symphony No. 5 to remember—one to stand up and cheer for.

Lü is a fastidious conductor with an huge vocabulary of gestures. He understands Tchaikovsky’s poetry may have its extreme moments, but he delivers them with an honesty and intensity that brooks no quibbles. He scrupulously avoids unnecessary theatrics but combines a great sensitivity and expressiveness with rock-solid technique.

The same blend of sensitivity and technique was exhibited by his orchestra. There was no backstand shirking, no inattention to balance, no playing the great solos as if from an orchestral excerpts book. Each player understood his place in the whole and exulted in making his own contribution. This was teamwork in the service of Tchaikovsky. The famous horn solo in the second movement was delivered with what can only be described as pathos and dignity, matched with passage work from the upper strings and the best sectional viola playing one could ask for. The brass section could purr out quiet halos of sound one moment, then raise the roof the next.

Vancouver is very much a Pacific Rim city with a multicultural character. The city has had concerts by an impressive number of ensembles and performers from China, Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan in recent seasons. Many fine groups have demonstrated how classical music is thriving in Asia. The Taiwan Philharmonic demonstrated something even more impressive: excellence, pure and simple.
L.A. Philharmonic in San Francisco
Andrew Norman, Tchaikovsky, and Mahler
Paul Hertelendy

On Halloween the Los Angeles Philharmonic knocked the socks off almost everyone at Davies Hall with Tchaikovsky's familiar Symphony No. 4. They played it like a virtuosic orchestra and sounded like a European ensemble. Music Director Gustavo Dudamel and his orchestra were one entity. In today's era of strict tempos, he stretched tempos with heartwarming ritards and rubatos, commonplace till about a century ago. There were pillow-soft descents from brassy heights into wind-and-string valleys. The music swelt along inexorably like a rushing river current. The slow movement had a melting solo from Associate Principal Oboist Marion Arthur Kuszyk, whom Dudamel later singled out for a bow.

My sole reservation about the interpretation was the assertiveness of the sinewy brass and timpani—welcome for the opening "Fate" theme but overpowering later on. It reminded me of the memorable quote from composer-conductor Richard Strauss: "Never look encouragingly at the brass section." (He also wrote, tongue-in-cheek, "Before the first downbeat, already the brass is too loud!")

The other work on the program, Andrew Norman’s demanding Play (2013), was as much a test of the orchestra as of the audience. The essence of the 40-minute opus was novel: the sound of the four percussionists acted like a switch, turning the rest of the orchestra on and off. The strings played at furious speed, the brass weighing in with potent gravity and irregular punctuations and the trumpets forming a sky-high sonic canopy over the orchestra. Imagine the percussionists' delight at running the show from the often overlooked back rows. This switching was a somewhat limited concept for a work of such dimensions. In its three sections or “levels,” Norman, 37, eventually chose a more effective tack in a lengthy ultra-soft segment of aching beauty with a relaxed theme, each note performed by a different player.

The performance was a power trip, making implicit assertions about dictatorships and totalitarian leadership. Dudamel conducted meticulously, achieving great articulation in the languid sections. For all Dudamel's great gifts at producing near-silent orchestral magic, he also has a strong love for brass and timpani—loud, sometimes deafening and oppressive. The next night, when I saw two rows of musicians protectively cleared out in front of the brass, it was clear that the LAPO has the loudest, strongest trumpets and trombones anywhere around—maybe not enough to wake the dead, but certainly enough to awaken any patrons nodding off after cocktails.

In Mahler's Symphony No. 9 at the second concert, most beautiful were the dulcet moments. This was especially true in the final Adagio, a plaintive half-hour outpouring that may be the most grief-stricken of all symphonic ventures—perhaps a requiem for the composer’s pre-school daughter, perhaps intimating his own swan song. The minor key, the many falling figures, and the diminuendos all seem to paint a picture of intensely emotional but understated mourning or welschmerz, garlanded with themes of heavenly length. This threnody, marked here by the great horn solos of Andrew Bain, narrowed down to a barely audible cello solo and higher strings, with the end of bows barely kissing their instruments. This subtlety was underlined when Dudamel and his musicians remained in silent rapture during several breaths (sighs) after the last note.

In the massive opening movement, also half an hour long, there was irresolute torment and soul-searching. The orchestra built a structure less like an Austrian palace, more like a rough-hewn building of sturdy logs. It had raw energy more than either polish or integration, with storm clouds swirling oppressively, sometimes displaying instrumental imbalances. Much of this was Mahler's own mandated stew, roughened by clarinets and horns playing with turned-up bells lacking the traditional leavening. The rustic country dance or ländler that followed was charming. In the Rondo Burleske Dudamel drew out the movement’s increasing instability with his immense forces.

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Two Fathers of Minimalism
Turn 80
Celebrating Steve Reich & Philip Glass

[New York native Steve Reich turned 80 on October 3, Baltimore-born Philip Glass on January 31.—Editor]

Steve Reich at Carnegie Hall
George Grella

November 1 was the official 80th birthday concert, hosted by Carnegie Hall. Eschewing the enduring and broad-reaching masterpieces like *Music for 18 Musicians* and *Different Trains*, the program—played by the combined forces of ICE, So Percussion, and Synergy Vocals with conductor David Robertson—comprised two new pieces, Quartet and the world premiere of *Pulse*, plus one of Reich’s seldom performed video operas, *Three Tales*.

Reich’s work during this century has been creatively restless. He has explored increasingly complex harmonic and rhythmic structures and a more exacting sense of form than in his earlier process music. Quartet and *Pulse* offer even more new ideas.

Quartet uses the prototypical Reich ensemble of two pianos and two percussionists playing metallophones. The piece is the composer’s most harmonically complex composition, with frequent modulations from one key to another and an episodic structure altogether different from his usual constant flow. Reich has repeatedly stated that he wants his music to reconcile Bach, Stravinsky, and jazz; Quartet sounded like jazz here.

The piece shifts from one set of materials to another in a larger whole, like Charles Mingus’s music, and there is even a rarity for Reich: solo instrumental lines, played by the percussionists. The three-movement fast-slow-fast form was familiar, but the identifiable melodic phrases and the modulatory motion that stuck in the memory gave the piece the flavor of sonata form. The playing was razor-sharp, the intricate ensemble interplay impeccable, and the ringing sound of the instruments beautiful, though Carnegie’s resonance brought the percussion forward and recessed the pianos.

Reich’s music is consistently beautiful, but most beautiful has to be *Pulse*, which is simple and luminous. Written for chamber orchestra, it uses a minimum of ideas; at the bottom of *Pulse* was just that, a constant eighth-note throb from an electric bass through shifting meters. On top there was a long-limbed lyrical melody, repeated sometimes in tutti, sometimes in a closely mirrored canon. That was it; but those elements, so gorgeous together, were performed with such warm and deep feeling from ICE and Robertson that it felt like a great work.

Reich’s greatness can withstand *Three Tales*, which is his weakest work. It is one of two video operas he has made in collaboration with his wife, Beryl Korot; and it pales compared with the other one, *The Cave*. *Three Tales* is not actually an opera but instead a video lecture accompanied by music. It is a jeremiad against the dangers of technology, though one that requires sophisticated digital technology for realization. It was dated even at its premiere in 2002—the opening ‘Hindenburg’ act was a ridiculous warning against technological hubris.

The knowingness of a scene titled “Nibelung Zeppelin” didn’t help, and the sophomoric thinking continued with the obvious atmospheric nuclear test at the Bikini Atoll and the now dated and generally forgotten cloning of a sheep to produce Dolly. The interviews with scientists rambled and jumped
neurotically to and fro. Scored for string quartet, percussion, and vocal ensemble, the accompaniment dutifully and dully follows the shape and rhythms of recorded speech fragments. There is no invention aside from the occasional snappy syncopation, and at this performance the dullness of the music was exacerbated by the poor sound mix.

An earlier version of this review first appeared in the New York Classical Review.

Glass’s Akhnaten at Los Angeles Opera
Richard S Ginell

At long last, the Los Angeles area has become a major Philip Glass center. We can probably fix the launch date around April 2006 when John Adams led a galvanizing performance of four scenes from Akhnaten with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Master Chorale. The movement for Glass really gathered steam with a region-wide Philip Glass Festival in 2011, Los Angeles Opera’s wildly effective import of the touring Einstein on the Beach production in 2013, and in 2015 Dracula with Glass’s music for the restoration of the 1931 film performed by keyboardist Michael Riesman and the Kronos Quartet.

On November 5 L.A. Opera took things one step further by presenting (in co-production with the English National Opera) the complete Akhnaten on its main stage, the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Given the results of the US election a few days later, the gist of the opera—an innovative new pharaoh tries to institute religious and cultural reforms but all are swept away by a conservative backlash—seemed a bit prescient.

Glass’s score is what carries the piece through its static series of set scenes in place of a narrative. The score has a tragic monumentality and a brooding A-minor eloquence, driven by good ideas that bear repetition. The skilled L.A. Opera Orchestra, however, had never had to keep up with the count of repetitive Glassian arpeggios before, and they sounded out of their comfort zone. Nor could conductor Matthew Aucoin, the company’s new 26-year-old artist-in-residence in his first assignment in the Chandler, find the rhythmic grooves of the powerful music for the Funeral of Amenhotep III. Nor could he create floating trances, until he finally relaxed somewhat in Act III.

But Phelim McDermott’s production achieved some spectacular moments, with a lot of the action taking place on a three-story steel-girder set of compartments that looked similar to the set in the last act of the Einstein production mentioned above. Lighting designer Bruno Poet aimed much attention on a giant orb representing Akhnaten’s sun god, Aten; the orb changed color and size at various times. The cast moved in the slow, sauntering Robert Wilson manner—another throwback to Einstein.

There was one altered bit of stage business at the end. When the time frame zoomed up to the present day, instead of a gaggle of tourists wandering in the Egyptian ruins, McDermott substituted a university classroom of attention-challenged students learning about Akhnaten. I prefer the original vision; the distancing effect is more ironic.

Anthony Roth Costanzo displayed a penetrating, beautiful countertenor voice in the title role, where the sometimes arduous staging required him to be totally naked, or upside-down, or weighed down in royal finery. Mezzo-soprano J’Nai Bridges sounded like Jessye Norman in her portrayal of Akhnaten’s wife Nefertiti, soprano Stacey Tappan sang Queen Tye, and Zachary James loudly declaimed the spoken role of the Scribe.

And there were jugglers—yes, jugglers—on stage, and that was no directorial lark. The art of juggling was displayed 4000 years ago on an Egyptian wall painting; so a wonderfully skilled, mute juggling team (choreographed by Sean Gandini) appeared, often performing their daredevil feats in time with the music. For sheer entertainment value, they ran off with the show, yet the power of the score was not compromised.
John Adams: *El Nino*

Los Angeles Philharmonic

Richard S Ginell

*El Nino* (2000) is essentially a 21st-Century answer to Handel’s *Messiah*. Both works deal with the Nativity, and Adams adds settings of Spanish-language poems by Latin American poets that comment directly and indirectly on the events, inspiring some of his most deeply felt music.

To program *Messiah* and *El Nino* back-to-back would seem to be an obvious idea for a December double-play. So that is what was done at Walt Disney Concert Hall, with Bernard Labadie leading members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic in *Messiah* December 15 and 17, and Grant Gershon leading the rest of the orchestra in *El Nino* December 16 and 18.

Gershon was also at the helm of Leonard Bernstein’s *Wonderful Town* at L.A. Opera two weeks earlier, and he led his usual sing-along *Messiah* and Christmas carol concerts with his Los Angeles Master Chorale, so led all three of the Music Center’s resident groups in the same month. Yet the workload didn’t seem to affect him at all, for he presided energetically over a scintillating *El Nino*, one of several California concerts honoring Berkeley resident Adams’s 70th birthday (February 15, 2017) this season.

In retrospect, *El Nino* can be seen as a turning point for Adams. From this work on, his music became more complex, more gorgeously orchestrated, and more sympathetic with the material that longtime co-conspirator Peter Sellars keeps handing him.

The first time Los Angeles heard the piece was in 2003 during the waning days of the Philharmonic’s residence in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion across the street. This time, in a room where no detail goes hidden, we heard a lot more of what’s in the score—the washes of tingling sparkling color from the glockenspiel, crotales, chimes, piano, harp, and Yamaha synthesizer that ripple through much of the texture. Gershon got the strings to fizz to a nearly devastating level of intensity in several passages. The Master Chorale glinted with clarity; the repetitive Adams engines ran on high-octane fuel.

Adams wrote the solo vocal parts specifically for Dawn Upshaw, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson (who died in 2006), and Willard White—a Golden Age trio and hard to match, yet their successors were up to the challenge. Soprano Julia Bullock shone with a rapid vibrato. Mezzo Jennifer Johnson Cano’s timbre resembled Hunt Lieberson’s to some degree. Bass-baritone Davone Tines, a young singer whom Adams says “owns this part now”, displayed unforced power and excellent diction. Daniel Bubeck and Brian Cummings from the original cast and newcomer Nathan Medley formed the tightly-harmonizing countertenor trio, and at the close the Los Angeles Children’s Chorus made a vibrant brief appearance in street clothes.

As in 2003, an accompanying film by Sellars told a parallel Nativity story, ostensibly depicting a young impoverished Latino woman going from place to place in Los Angeles and its neighboring desert with her bundled-up infant. The film is a glorified home movie, shot with a shaky hand—more of a distraction than an illumination. This time the L.A. Phil offered ticket buyers a choice: the December 16 performance (which I attended) used the film and the December 18 performance did not.
Tallis Scholars
Boston Early Music Festival
John W Ehrlich
For 28 consecutive seasons the Boston Early Music Festival has sponsored appearances of the Tallis Scholars in Cambridge, most if not all of these at the spacious and lofty St Paul’s Parish just off Harvard Square. This time the accustomed capacity crowd was in store for a small surprise: a change in their Christmas program from the promised pairing of Josquin’s motet ‘Praeter Rerum Seriem’ and Cipriano de Rore’s Praeter Rerum Seriem Mass to Palestrina’s motet and Mass, Assumpta Es Maria. The chant on which these two works are based preceded their performance.

Director Peter Phillips explained that the combination of winter weather and their demanding multi-concert touring schedule had put one of the ensemble’s two basses, Rob Macdonald, on the sidelines. Since the Rore programming required two bass vocalists, Palestrina was substituted. One could not help but be impressed by the ensemble’s seeming ease in switching the program.

This ensemble has been at the top of its particular game for most of its existence, bringing spot-on tuning, beautifully planned and flexible phrasing, and an almost uncanny vocal blend to whatever music is on their menu. Yet there was a certain sameness of style and approach and a somewhat unrelenting tone.

That sameness was especially evident in the concert’s first half. Palestrina is noted for his beautiful polyphony, never thorny, never abrupt. It’s like a pearl being rolled about in a pool of unctuous oil—everything is smooth and rich with never a trace of aural grit or impediment. This, when combined with their vocal perfection, made everything sound too much the same. Beautiful, by all means. In tune? Yes, perfectly. But 30-plus uninterrupted minutes or so of this became too much.

Things improved immediately after intermission with Rore’s felicitous setting of ‘Hodie, Christus Natus Est’, dense in counterpoint and particularly joyful with its cascading melismas when the text refers to singing angels.

Tomas Luis de Victoria’s setting of the Magnificat (primi toni a 8), divided between two choirs, one SSAT and the other SATB, resulted in a very rich vocal texture that exhibited the colors and text painting this composer is beloved for. Delightful rhythmic syncopation in the vocal lines reminded listeners of his Spanish roots.

It was instructive to hear how different two settings of the ‘Salve Regina’, a hymn of praise to the Virgin Mary, were from one another. Claudin de Sermisy’s (c 1490–1562) had a more severe and “Gothic” sound, especially following the richness of the Victoria. This notion was seconded by the very accomplished setting by another Spaniard, Hernando Franco (c 1532–85). This unfamiliar score and its composer surely deserve wider hearing.

Englishman John Taverner’s long and demanding setting of the antiphon ‘O Splendor Gloriar’ closed the concert. By now a couple of the singers had begun to show a bit of vocal fatigue, and the overall impression created was that of a lofty summit arduously though triumphantly ascended. Bravos resulted in a charming encore from the 20th Century, John Tavener’s beguiling and poignant setting of ‘The Lamb’ by William Blake.

Kevin Puts: Silent Night
Atlanta Opera
John Gresham
On November 5 the Atlanta Opera presented a stirring and ambitious performance of the 2012 Pulitzer Prize-winning opera Silent Night by American composer Kevin Puts. Sung in English, French, and German, plus a smattering of Italian and Latin, with English surtitles, the performance took place at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre. That one of three other performances was scheduled for Veterans Day was no accident.

The libretto by Mark Campbell is based on Christian Carion’s screenplay for the 2005 film Joyeux Noel. The story is a fictionalized account of the spontaneous 1914 Christmas truce between Scottish, French, and German combatants in World War I.

This production was a new one, first staged at the 2014 Wexford Opera Festival in Ireland. Atlanta Opera’s Artistic Director Tomer Zvulun was the production director for those European performances; in Atlanta his creative team did a bang-up job. Zvulun brought his own firsthand experience of war to the production table: he served as a medic in an Israeli combat infantry unit for three years. [The original production’s world premiere was reviewed in M/A 2012; reviews of two other companies’ productions of it were in S/O 2014.—Ed.]

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Replacing the turntable used in previous productions, most prominent here was a massive, unadorned, stark gray upstage structure in three tiers, representing the trenches of each nation’s soldiers—Scots on top, French in the middle, and Germans on bottom—portrayed by Chorus Master Walter Huff's 33-strong male chorus. At the end of the prologue, their national songs chaotically collide with each other in readiness for war; they are suddenly interrupted by greater chaos with a hair-raising portrayal of battle, replete with explosions, gunfire, and hand-to-hand combat. The story’s horrific context is set for the audience in a most unsentimental manner.

Against this are the small-scale human subplots played out among the characters of the large, capable, almost entirely male cast. German opera singers (and lovers) Nikolaus Sprink (tenor David Blalock) and Anna Soren sen (soprano Ava Pine) are separated as Nikolaus is conscripted into military service. Scottish brothers William and Jonathan Dale (bass-baritone Andrew Pardini and tenor Alexander Sprague) enlist with dreams of heroism, and their parish priest, Father Palmer (baritone Troy Cook), becomes a chaplain in their unit.

In Paris Lieutenant Audebert (baritone Matthew Worth) departs for war while his young wife Madeleine (soprano Bryn Holdsworth) is pregnant with their first child. In the trenches is Audebert’s cheerful aide-de-camp, Ponchel (baritone Andrew Wilkowske). Camaraderie develops between Audebert and the other lieutenants in charge—Horstmayer of Germany (baritone Craig Irvin) and Gordon of Scotland (baritone Alexander Hajek)—in the midst of the unexpected Christmas Eve truce they are able to manage. As their relationships play out, the audience develops feeling for them, as they do for each other, regardless of nationality.

Puts’s score uses dissonance and consonance as metaphors for war and peace. His necessarily eclectic music ranges from warmly luscious to emotionally churning to movingly simple at pivotal moments where it hangs poignantly in air, as in the ‘Dona Nobis Pacem,’ sung by Anna, who has made her way to the German encampment, at the conclusion of a makeshift celebration of Mass among all soldiers at the end of Act I.

Eventually the disapproving military high commands intervene and restore official order, represented by the German Kronprinz (tenor Brent Reilly Turner), a British major (bass-baritone Alan Higgs) and a French general (baritone Tom Fox), who we learn is Audebert’s father. The soldiers of each army are reassigned to other active fronts. They depart, and the battlefield lies empty, yet a war goes on.

Guest conductor Nicole Païement worked wonders with the Atlanta Opera Orchestra.

A longer version of this review first appeared on ArtsATL.com.

Prokofieff’s Cinderella and Romeo & Juliet
Noseda Conducts Toronto & National Symphonies

[A serendipitous confluence of events happened in one week in November: Gil French saw Prokofieff’s Cinderella and heard Gianandrea Noseda conduct the Toronto Symphony, while Charles McCardell heard Noseda conduct Prokofieff’s complete Romeo and Juliet in concert in Washington DC. Their reports are below. —Editor]

Prokofieff’s Cinderella and Romeo & Juliet
Noseda Conducts Toronto & National Symphonies

Because of the soaring lyricism and drama in Prokofieff’s Romeo and Juliet (1936), even in its complete form it can stand on its own as concert music without ballet. It is, after all, verismo ballet, rather parallel to verismo operas like Puccini’s Tosca or Leoncavallo’s Pagliacci. But Prokofieff’s Cinderella (1941) is not rewarding listening without the ballet. It’s fairy-tale descriptive picture music with pseudo-sinister comic elements. Also, by 1941 the Russian composer was no longer in as soaring a lyrical mood as he was in 1936, fresh after returning permanently to his homeland. In fact, he waited until after the war to orchestrate Cinderella.

American Record Guide
Ah, but add the ballet to the music, and *Cinderella* is a marvel. This was especially true at the National Ballet of Canada’s (NBC) production at the Four Seasons Centre in Toronto. Opened in 2006, the auditorium was built to serve both the Canadian Opera Company and the NBC. Sight lines are superb, seating feels intimate, and the incomparable acoustics make the pit orchestra sound far more radiant, balanced, and projected than any orchestra in Roy Thomson Hall (home of the Toronto Symphony) just a few blocks away. Being a lover of orchestra above all other classical forms, I can’t imagine a better place than the Four Seasons Centre for ballet.

Austrian guest conductor Ormsby Wilkins knew the territory well. He was music director at the NBC from 1989 to 2005 and has held the same position ever since with the American Ballet Theatre. The full NBC Orchestra (strings 12-10-7-7-5), once past a rather pastel Introduction, was rhythmically hot by the time the two ugly step-sisters entered to a wickedly sardonic dance. Soloists, especially woodwinds, were superb. Tuning and intonation were flawless, as was ensemble. Ormsby caught Prokofieff’s typical contrasting styles.

Other than the joy of hearing in this theater the full bloom of Prokofieff’s ingenious orchestration, what I will remember most a year from now are David Boechler’s gorgeous sets and costumes. The basic design was of huge arches within arches, giving depth to the stage; the basic color was—what else?—pumpkin. Indeed, the arches themselves reflected the shape of pumpkins. Most imaginative were 12 men in tuxedos with pumpkin heads—the 12 hours on a clock, arranged in a circle around Cinderella as the threatening music told the approach of midnight.

But the color designs didn’t stop there; a kaleidoscope of dazzling patterns subtly framed the night scenes. Act III was a wonder with large clouds moving swiftly across the night sky as Prince Charming (Guillaume Coté) searched a darkened world for Cinderella. And once he found her, the dark background set off their spotlight duet with a lyricism that matched Prokofieff’s score. Indeed, Cinderella’s dress in the final scene, pastel candy-stripe with an elegant strip of light pumpkin, summed up this marvelously integrated production.

The choreography was by James Kudelka, NBC artistic director from 1996 to 2005. I saw it danced by the NBC in 2004 in a different production at the then Hummingbird Centre (now Sony Centre). One principal difference then was that the mother and step-sisters were laugh-out-loud funny. In this new production the mother was a drunken caricature; her daughters, one with round black glasses that made her look like Agnes Gooch, performed with poor man’s Buster Keaton slapstick. The many kids in the audience thought they were funny. What was irritating was that their downstage adolescent antics often blocked the view, for example, of magnificent upstage ballroom scenes with 12 couples swept up in Prokofieff’s waltzes. “Enough of the clowns!” I said to myself. “Let me see the really thrilling ensemble dances!” In fact, all the dancers were members of the NBC—no need for outsiders here—though I must say that some of the supporting male dancers had more electricity than Coté, who otherwise was a highly gracious but unmemorable Prince. The lithe, girlish, sylph-like Rodriguez, on the other hand, was utterly inspired; and her flexibility—not just her steps but arms and entire torso—often made me forget all the others on stage.

The night before, I wound up with a critic’s conundrum at Roy Thomson Hall, where guest conductor Gianandrea Noseda led the Toronto Symphony in works by Casella, Ravel, and Saint-Saens. The two previous nights, at a pair of Berlin Philharmonic concerts when I sat main floor left one night and main floor right the other, it was like two different halls. For the TSO concert a box office person assured me that a center seat in the second row of the first balcony had the best sound in the house.

The program opened with Alfred Casella’s *Elegia Eroica*, written in 1915-16 to commemorate those who died in the slaughter known as World War I. At home I had listened repeatedly to Noseda’s Chandos recording of the work but couldn’t make sense of it—four sections alternating violence with calm, but only motifs rather than melodies, with no continuity of style or structure I could discern; after this performance I still can’t.

Casella’s opening sets the scene with strong outrites and a strong pulse, but all I could hear was screaming brass. Noseda gave violent gestures to the strings, but I couldn’t hear them at all. Even the percussion—a cymbal smash and strikes on the bass drum—were inaudible, and the woodwinds sounded un-
dernourished. Was the problem the conductor, the orchestra, the acoustics, or all three?

Then came Ravel’s Piano Concerto in G with jazz pianist-improvisationist Steffano Bollani. No piano lid—just a score hidden in the piano and a black cloth over the strings. No wonder it sounded muted. Motion rather than tone color was what interested this jazz pianist. But the orchestra too sounded muted, and articulation was quite sloppy. In fact, from that “ideal” seat the music sounded strictly in front of me (no surround sound) and far away. Noseda himself was as driven in the Ravel as in the Casella: strong angular up-and-down right arm, huge swoops with the left, and hyper-kinetic posture—not an ounce of subtlety, feathery touch, or playfulness. In the second movement, after a rather lovely piano introduction, the repetition where piano and orchestra switch roles felt rather flat-lined, and the woodwind soloists were prosaic at best. Even the jazzy finale was all energy without playfulness or swing—and curiously muted from where I sat. Pony-tailed Bollani, in a powder blue open-neck shirt with rolled-up sleeves and jeans, played two delightful encores, including his own riff on Joplin’s ‘Entertainer’, but even they sounded muted. Was it that dumb cloth over the piano strings or the hall’s acoustics?

At intermission I fled the balcony (never did like it up there) and moved to my favorite spot, main floor, fifth row middle, and sat next to a savvy gentleman. When I asked him if he could hear the strings during those blaring opening measures of the Casella, he said, “Oh yes, they were very strong. You can hear everything sitting here!” And so, in Saint-Saëns’s Organ Symphony, I also heard all the flaws. Here was a work far better suited than the Ravel to Noseda’s high-accent energy. But even here the woodwinds were prosaic and poorly projected. And while the strings responded well to the nervous off-beat patterns in the opening movement and the fugue in the finale, what struck me most was how timid so many of them appeared. Following two nights of the Berlin Philharmonic, I was especially aware of moments lacking ensemble, precision, and (above all) commitment.

In the Organ Symphony Noseda was in tightly wound projective mode—often too much so. At the organ was Patricia Krueger, principal keyboard player with the TSO since 1977, here playing her last concert as soloist before she retires at the end of the season. At the opening of the Poco Adagio she blended beautifully with the orchestra; but when the orchestra made the slow crescendo to the climax just before the coda, she went the opposite way, sucking the air out of the ecstatic moment. In the final movement I couldn’t tell if the problem was an inferior pipe organ or poor registration. It had little presence after the opening fanfare, and, in the grand descent of the organ’s concluding C-major scale, most of the notes couldn’t be heard.

I’ve enjoyed many concerts over the years with the Toronto Symphony in Roy Thomson Hall; in fact, the most memorable one was with Noseda conducting Verdi’s Requiem [May/June 2010], after which I couldn’t speak for about 10 minutes. But this was not one of them. It felt like the conundrum of having a dramatically different response to a painting I saw, say, six years earlier. Same painting (same hall); the painting hasn’t changed—I have. So read on for Charles McCardell’s response to a Noseda concert that he heard just one week earlier in Washington DC.

In an unusual touch at the end of the 88-minute concert, the orchestra stood not just for the downstairs patrons, but then turned toward the terrace customers in the rear, who were simply carried away by the gesture.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic’s two-night stint was under auspices of the San Francisco Symphony. They had last visited in 2014. (And a further update: for those unhappy about critics’ frequent remarks on female performers’ appearances, here’s some male-directed coiffure commentary: Dudamel has cut his mountainous explosion of hair.)
Prokofieff: *Romeo & Juliet*
National Symphony/ Noseda
Charles McCardell

One of the more prominent arts headlines of 2016 trumpeted the naming of Italian conductor Gianandrea Noseda, who turns 53 on April 23, as the Music Director of the National Symphony beginning next season. This was a big deal, securing a rising international star with an impressive resume both on the podium and in the opera pit for his first major post with an American orchestra. In his first concert with the NSO since the January 2016 announcement, Noseda honored one of his predecessors, Mstislav Rostropovich, who died in 2007, with “A Salute to Slava.” Four of the season’s programs were slated to celebrate the 90th birthday of Rostropovich, who bolstered the NSO’s standing and profile during his tenure from 1977 to 1994.

The “Slava” series had works by Prokofieff, Shostakovich, and Britten, whom Rostropovich had strong musical and personal ties with. Prokofieff’s *Romeo and Juliet*, presented on November 3 at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall, held a special place in Slava’s heart—as it does in Noseda’s. Rostropovich conducted dozens of fully staged performances of the ballet and recorded the two popular suites with the NSO. Noseda included one of the ballet suites at his professional conducting debut in his home town of Milan in 1994. He also informed the audience that he, Prokofieff, and Shakespeare share the same birth date (April 23) but “in different years.”

Prokofieff, Shakespeare, and Noseda also share the ability to convey an idea with the subtlest turn of phrase or grandest of gestures. Noseda and the NSO understood what they wanted to accomplish from the get-go. Clarity and passion prevailed, with tempos that remained brisk in Act 1. They pushed the music to the brink in the famous ‘Dance of the Knights’ but eased up slightly when the tenor sax introduced the final iteration of the theme.

The NSO responded to Noseda’s motions and glares. Bold, brash, dissonant statements came across pretty well, the quieter sections even better. Perhaps the crispest ensemble heard all evening occurred in the two dances at the beginning of Act 2. Also, the “sweet sorrow” of the violins in Romeo and Juliet’s final farewell in Act 3 delicately painted the scene. As for the pianissimo string swells that opened Act IV (Juliet’s Funeral), the increase in volume was so expertly controlled that it was as if Noseda held some hidden rheostat—a small detail in the big picture, yet when he challenged the players to achieve greatness they often did.

The one minor distraction was a large screen positioned behind the orchestra that posted Shakespearean quotes and an assortment of pictorial images. Ten pieces were cut from the score, so the music lasted under two hours. References on the screen helped listeners follow the action, but the audience didn’t need to be told “END OF ACT ONE”; at least there was no clock counting down the time of the intermission. Not that any of the patrons would’ve risked missing a note of *Romeo and Juliet*.

The NSO-Noseda partnership sounds promising. My own thought about Noseda: “How soon can you start full-time?”

**Politics and Music Mix at Teatro Colon**

**Dallapiccola’s Night Flight and Prisoner**

James L Paulk


The mid-20th-Century Italian composer probably gets more attention in Buenos Aires than anywhere else for reasons both political and musical. Part of it is Argentina’s special fondness for modernist music. The peak immigration here from Europe took place over a period when non-tonal music was most popular there. And in Argentina, this appetite, like the one for psychotherapy, never faded. But I suspect Dallapiccola is also popular here because so much of his work was frankly political and anti-Fascist. Argentina has had its own struggles with heavy-handed governments, and the messages in Dallapiccola’s works resonate here.
Dallapiccola was a pioneer, the first Italian to use 12-tone principles. Yet his sound in both operas is distinctly Italian and melodic, and is adapted nicely for the voice. Alban Berg might have been his strongest influence, but he carried around a lot of Verdi as well. Although his language was already fully developed for *Volo di Notte* (1939), one of my pleasures here was the juxtaposition of the earlier work with *Il Prigioniero* (1948), his masterpiece. The latter has a much larger sound and expert use of the chorus.

*Il Prigioniero* is set during the Spanish Inquisition. A condemned prisoner is visited by his mother. He is intermittently tortured, then visited by a jailer who tells of a revolutionary plot, giving him hope. In the end, he finds his door open and slips into a garden, only to discover that the Grand Inquisitor awaits him there. The jailer’s story was a ruse, and the suggestion is that false hope is the worst torture.

*Volo di Notte* is actually set in Buenos Aires. The head of an aviation company is obsessed with profits and willing to risk the lives of his brave pilots in night flights in bad weather. A pilot is in trouble and then goes missing, his messages relayed from the radio operator. The opera is a meditation on death and power, clearly meant as a reference to Mussolini’s Italy (Dallapiccola’s wife was Jewish, and they wound up going into hiding at one point).

Michal Znaniecki, the director, staged both works with heavy references to Argentina’s “Dirty War” of the 1970s and 1980s, when the military junta murdered as many as 30,000 people. For *Volo di Notte* the airfield became a military one. The flights (with a realistic biplane descending from the fly loft) became the infamous “death flights” when prisoners were thrown to their deaths. Riviere, the airfield director, seemed to represent General Galtieri, who headed the junta. Riviere drank constantly and appeared drunk—also a reference to Galtieri who was widely considered an alcoholic.

Simona Fabien, wife of the missing pilot, confronts Riviere in one of the opera’s most dramatic scenes. She appears with a group of women wearing white scarves, the symbol of the “Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo”—the courageous women who, after their children disappeared, mounted regular protests and hastened the end of the junta’s rule. (Their protests continue to this day.) The director added an angry mob to the final scene of the opera, bearing signs protesting Riviere.

*Il Prigioniero* was updated to the junta era and set in a dingy prison with gruesomely realistic torture scenes and bodies dragged into piles amid unremitting horror. The male chorus, dressed in military uniforms, appears in scenes where they are suspended on wires, tormenting women prisoners who were then dropped to their death—a link to the “death flights” in *Volo di Notte*. The prisoner’s mother is part of the “Mothers of the Plaza,” another link to Argentine history and to the first opera. The airplane even makes an appearance.

Almost anywhere else, this degree of updating and reworking might be considered heavy-handed. But in Argentina, with its recent history of torture, execution, and military excess, the effect was really staggering.

It helped that the musical performances were superb. In *Volo di Notte* baritone Victor Torres was a strong Riviere, his character more believable because of his complex, often sympathetic portrayal. Soprano Daniela Tabernig was a searing Simona; vocally and dramatically. And tenor Carlos Ullan was a standout as Pellerin, one of the pilots.

As the Prisoner in *Il Prigioniero*, baritone Leonardo Estevez delivered the full range of emotions from despair to unbounded optimism. Mezzo-soprano Adriana Mastrangelo gave a solid, moving portrayal of the Mother. Tenor Fernando Chalabe was chilling as the Grand Inquisitor and deceptively kind as Carcelero the jailer (he sang both roles).

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American Record Guide
Here & There

Appointments, Awards, & News

David Robertson, 58, music director of the St Louis Symphony since 2005, announced in December that he extended his contract for one year through 2019, after which will resign. He also is chief conductor of the Sydney Symphony in Australia.

Zubin Mehta, who turns 81 on April 29, will retire from the Israel Philharmonic in 2019. He was appointed music director in 1977 and music director-for-life in 1981.

In January James Conlon, music director of the Los Angeles Opera since 2006, extended his contract an additional three years through 2021. In 2016 he also became principal conductor of the RAI National Symphony in Torino, Italy.

American Robert Treviño, 32, signed a three-year contract to become music director of the Basque National Orchestra in the fall. He will replace Jun Märkl, who will leave at the end of his three-year contract. Treviño was associate conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony from 2011 to 2015.

Stephen Lord signed a contract to become principal conductor of Detroit’s Michigan Opera Theater, effective November 2016 through 2019. He will conduct two productions each season and assist in planning the coming seasons, while the company continues its search for a successor to founding General Director David DiChiera, 80, who retires July 1 with the title artistic director emeritus. Lord is also music director of the Opera Theatre of St Louis.

Music directors of California’s Ojai Festival will be composer Vijay Iyer for 2017, violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja for 2018 (replacing Esa-Pekka Salonen), soprano-conductor Barbara Hannigan for 2019, and pianist Mitsuko Uchida for 2021. The director of 2020 will be announced this spring.

Russian Alexander Vedernikov, 53, will become chief conductor and artistic director of the Royal Danish Opera in 2017 (“designate” for the first season), replacing Michael Boder, who left after four years. Vedernikov is also chief conductor of Denmark’s Odense Symphony and was music director of Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre from 2001 to 2009.

Petra Müllejans will step down as co-artistic director of the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra at the end of this season. Gottfried von der Goltz will continue in that position assisted by harpsichordist and fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout, who signed a three-year contract that begins next season.

Lan Shui [Shway], music director of the Singapore Symphony since 1997, will step down from his post in January 2019. During his tenure the conductor, who turns 60 this year, molded the SSO into a world-class ensemble and conducted 27 of 61 newly commissioned works.

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Michael Sanderling, principal conductor of the Dresden Philharmonic since 2011, will not renew his contract in 2019 because the city government cut 250,000 euros from the orchestra’s budget without consulting him. At the same time the city also cut 300,000 euros from the budget of the famed Dresden Music Festival.


Robert Kowalski has replaced Grzegorz Kotow as a violinist of the Szyma- nowski String Quartet. Kowalski is currently concert-manger of the Swiss Italian Orchestra in Lugano. Co-founder Kotow was with the ensemble since 1995.

Peter Kjome [CHO-mee], 49, became president and CEO of the Baltimore Symphony on February 1. He held the same positions with the Grand Rapids (MI) Symphony since 2008. He replaces Paul Meeham, who now holds the same positions with the Utah Symphony and Opera.

Virginia Hepner, 59, will resign on May 31 after five years as president and CEO of Atlanta’s Woodruff Arts Center, an organization that includes the Atlanta Symphony, Alliance Theatre, and High Museum of Art. After taking the reins of a troubled organization, her $110 million Transformation Campaign was completed last October with $10 million to spare.

Bogdan Roseic, 52, will become director of the Vienna State Opera in 2020. He is currently manager of Sony’s classical division. He was previously head of O3, Austria’s state-run radio. He will replace Dominique Meyer, who started in 2010.

Helen Sprott will become managing director of London’s Philharmonia Orchestra in April. She succeeds David Whelton, who retired in 2016 after 29 years with the orchestra. Sprott has been director of music at Arts Council England since 2005.

Andrew Norman was given the 2017 Grawemeyer Award of $100,000 from the University of Louisville for his 45-minute orchestral work Play, which it called “wildly inventive and idiomatic in an age of shortened attention spans”. [See Paul Hertelendy’s “L.A. Philharmonic in San Francisco”—p. 10—for a review.]

After a Pittsburgh Symphony strike that caused the cancellation of the 2016-17 classical season from October to December, the orchestra agreed in November to a five-year contract that cuts salaries 10.5% in the current season, freezes them for 2017-18, and has a 3.3% raise in 2018-19, a 2.2% raise in 2019-2020, and a restoration to the 2016 former base salary of $107,000 in 2020-21. Management agreed to keep the current number of players at 99 but will not fill three vacant positions during the contract.

Members of the Portland (ME) Symphony gave unanimous approval in October to a four-year contract covering rehearsals and performances that gives a 4% increase to players in each of the contract’s first two years, with the other two years remaining open to negotiations. Most PSO members are part-time and juggle commitments; many live in Massachusetts and perform in Boston as well.
Two appointments at Paris’s Theatre du Châtelet: Thomas Lauriot dit Prevost will become the new general director, and Britain’s Ruth Mackenzie, 59, the new artistic director in 2018. They applied for the positions as a team. Prevost is financial manager at La Monnaie in Brussels and was administrative director of Châtelet from 2006 to 2013. McKenzie is director of the Holland Festival. McKenzie succeeds Jean Luc Choplin whose eclectic programming during his 10 years ranged from musical and rock to opera and concerts. Theatre du Châtelet closes this March for renovations and is scheduled to reopen in September 2019.

Obituaries

Conductor Georges Prêtre, 92, died on January 4 in Naves, France, where he lived. No cause was stated. At the time of his death he had concerts scheduled at La Scala in Milan. While the quality of his performances was maddeningly erratic, at his best he was sensational. He spent most of his time outside of France, conducting from Boston and the Met to Europe, especially Vienna. His recordings of Poulenc’s Organ Concerto with Maurice Duruflé and the ORTF, and Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 3 with Alexis Weissenberg and the Chicago Symphony, are nonpareil.

Austrian cellist Heinrich Schiff, 65, died on December 23 in a hospital in Vienna. No cause was stated. After health problems forced him to give up the cello (he suffered a serious stroke from which he recovered), he turned to conducting in 2012. His most renowned soloist recordings are of Bach’s cello suites, Shostakovich’s cello concertos, and Lutoslawski’s Cello Concerto.

Conductor Christian Baldini, born in Argentina and based in California, is a rising force here and internationally. This performance showed why, with great transparency in the orchestra and fine attention to detail. He never overplayed his hand and supported his singers nicely. I don’t think I’ve ever heard the Colon orchestra play with such finesse.

Hearing these two operas in such strong performances, it’s impossible not to wonder why Dallapiccola is so neglected, especially in the US. True, 12-tone music can be a tough sell; but Berg’s operas are performed with some regularity, and Dallapiccola’s sound is more lyrical than Berg’s. Most of his operas are short, apparently so they could more easily be performed on the radio. All sorts of pairings are possible.

Composer Karel Husa, 95, died at his home in Apex NC on December 14. He was awarded the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for his String Quartet No. 3 and the 1993 Grawemeyer Award for his Cello Concerto. He was on the faculty of Cornell University for 38 years until he retired in 1992. Born in Czechoslovakia in 1921, he immigrated to the US in 1954 and became a citizen in 1959. His best-known work is Music for Prague 1968, inspired by the Soviet occupation of his homeland.

Roberta Peters, 86, the coloratura soprano who at 20 was catapulted to stardom by a phone call, a subway ride and a Met Opera debut—her first public performance anywhere—all in the space of five hours, died at her home in Rye, NY.

Elliott Schwartz, 80, Maine’s best-known classical composer, died at his home in Brunswick on December 7. His health had been rapidly deteriorating. He taught at Bowdoin College from 1964 to 2007.
Puts: *Letters from Georgia*  
(world premiere)  
Rochester NY

Kevin Puts’s new 23-minute song cycle, *Letters from Georgia*, is straight out of the tradition of Aaron Copland and Samuel Barber—Barber’s narrative *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* in particular. Comparisons are odious only to the loser, but, believe me, there are no losers here!

At its world premiere on November 12, even though the orchestra used slightly reduced strings, its sound was rich and full, yet wonderfully transparent, at least with 66-year-old Neil Varon, conducting professor at the Eastman School of Music, and the Eastman Philharmonia, the school’s senior student orchestra. Even though Rochester-born soprano Renée Fleming was the soloist, I found it impossible to think of the vocal lines without the orchestra, whose colors, harmonies, and lines are an integral part of what the texts are expressing.

The “Georgia” here is painter Georgia O’Keeffe; the letters were to her photographer-husband Alfred Stieglitz and her artist-suffragette friend Anita Pollitzer. In fact, in the opening movement, ‘Taos’, Fleming’s lieder voice (versus her operatic voice) was too small, especially in the large, nearly filled Eastman Theater, and her diction too swallowed to project “such rich saturated pigment, the brilliant sun and blue sky—I just feel so like expanding here”; it was the orchestra that conveyed the exuberant text. But with ‘Violin’, a short, comic movement about how O’Keeffe couldn’t stand listening to herself play the instrument, Fleming’s balance and diction found their mark, as Concertmaster Willa Finck’s mimicking sounds made people laugh out loud.

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words, 'Canyons' opens piano and descends to a whisper, a sentient end to Letters's marvelous amalgam of voice and orchestra.

Three things are striking in this work: Like Barber, Puts has a gift for turning narrative into emotional lyricism. Also, his orchestration is tasteful and subtle—free, for example, of corny tone painting like pounding percussion with crashing cymbals to depict "flashes of lightning". Lastly, the work is harmonically traditional in the manner of Copland's most famous works. If anyone dare criticize Letters for being "too traditional", I retort, "Who cares in the face of such beauty!"

The Eastman School of Music commissioned Letters from Georgia from alumnus Puts, written for alumna Fleming, as a vehicle to bring the Eastman Philharmonia back to New York (Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall) two nights later for the first time in over 25 years. It has been a long time since the glory days when Howard Hanson founded the orchestra in 1958 and took it on a 1961 State Department-sponsored tour of 16 European and Middle Eastern countries, playing 49 concerts in 93 days, or when David Efron conducted the 1985 RCA recording of John Corigliano's Pied Piper Fantasy and Voyage with James Galway and the orchestra.

The program for both concerts began with Ravel's Rapsodie Espagnole and ended with Prokofieff's Symphony No. 5. In the symphony I was struck with the similarities in brilliant orchestration between the two composers. In both works the huge orchestra (strings were 16-14-12-10-8) was honed to perfection. Ensemble and solo work were impeccable. Kudos especially to Principal Trumpet Stephanie Anderson.

My only reservation in both works was with some of Neil Varon's interpretations. In the more motor-like movements (Ravel's 'Malaguena' and Prokofieff's second and fourth) his ability to maintain sharp rhythmic ensemble with a tight pulse was stirring; but in the other more churning, moody, or deeply emotional movements his tempos often were unyielding and didn't let the music breathe. If counter-rhythms were not drawn out, it wasn't because of faulty balances or weaknesses in the players, but rather the conductor's unawareness of what was at hand—perhaps, I wondered, a result of his being wound too tight because of the occasion.

Joyce DiDonato: “In War and Peace”

Rochester NY

Call me dense, but in the final analysis I wasn’t swept away on December 12 by mezzo Joyce DiDonato’s "In War and Peace: Harmony Through Music", a multi-media production where the audience entered into a darkened hall with two figures (DiDonato and choreographer-dancer Manuel Palazzo) on the stage in still poses. The show arrived at the Eastman Theater from Vancouver and California via Kansas City and Chicago on its way to Carnegie Hall three days later. In the spring it will return to Europe for a second tour.

As the early music ensemble Il Pomo d’Oro (the name is the title of a 10-hour opera by Antonio Cesti) and its director-harpischordist Maxim Emelyanychev entered, the sound of wind blew through speakers. ‘And Darkness Covered the Earth’ would have been a fitting opener; instead, for Part I (‘War’) the mezzo chose ‘Scenes of Horror, Scenes of War’ from Handel’s Jeptha for the first of five vocal selections and three instrumental works. Swirling abstract figures were projected across the stage and the front of the hall, as Palazzo occasionally appeared, shirtless and with a light greyish cloth covering him from waist to floor, as he moved whirling-dervish fashion.

The first half of the concert was the more effective part because DiDonato excels both as a mezzo and an actress in portraying tragedy and impending disaster. Here she was helped by her gown, black with large triangular wedges stuffed in each side, gothic fashion; that plus her tattoos—slashes of war paint from throat to cleavage—gave the impression of a world consumed by the black plague, 100 Years War, and one suspects the world atmosphere created by both Europe’s catastrophic migrant crisis and the US presidential campaign. In the Handel and an aria from Leonard Leo’s Andromaca (“If you’re not happy with the death of my son, then murder his mother [me] and drink my blood!”), her voice was as centered as a laser—she has the art of stage-whispering to the last row as she sings; her body (face, arms, torso) was consumed with torment.

Two orchestral interludes broadened Pomo d’Oro’s stunning breadth from subtly heaving accompanist to stage-center attrac-
tion, as Emelyanychev rose from his bench with a cornett that looked like a mahogany whale’s penis and sounded like the mellowest of trumpets in a sinfonia by Emilio de’ Cavalieri. Later in the concert recorder soloists were also enchanting, one in a twittering bird duet with the concertmaster and DiDonato. From storming rages to the gentlest of zephyrs, the remarkable textures and subtle degrees of expression Emelyanychev got from his orchestra were breathtaking. None of the four instrumental interludes, however, are included on the new Erato “In War and Peace” album.

DiDonato then turned to ‘Dido’s Lament’ (Purcell). It was here that she displayed most effectively her exquisitely controlled vibrato. Every shudder had purpose. As she turned her repeated phrase into a ghost-like echo, she covered her head with a transparent shawl and concluded Part I with arias from Handel’s Agrippina and Rinaldo. In one an elegant oboe haunted her thoughts. But it was here that I began to lose sense of the production’s theme, as Agrippina vowed revenge on people who got in the way of her making her son the Roman emperor. The horrors of war were replaced by the self-centered derangement of a leading political figure. The theme of war is not the same as personal insanity.

After a generous 30-minute intermission (so marked in the program notes) came Part II, ‘Peace.’ DiDonato appeared in a mellow grey-toned gown, but her war paint (which reminded me of tattoos I saw while Christmas shopping the next day at Party City) was confusing. In one aria by Purcell and three by Handel, it was as if the theme of peace had sapped her powers of projection. She stood relatively still, seemingly concentrating on precision rather than meaning. Yes, in Handel’s ‘Tempeste il Lego Infranto’ from Julius Caesar she was the next best thing to Cecilia Bartoli; but even here she couldn’t convey Bartoli’s joy in simple happy texts. In the orchestral interlude, Pärt’s Da Pacem, Domine, Palazzo’s whirling dance contradicted Emelyanychev’s dial-tone pacing. In fact, Palazzo’s dancing seemed so incidental to the entire production that I found him as distracting as the abstract lighting. An invigorating aria by Nicolo Jommelli concluded the program. On the whole, Part II didn’t pack a concentrated thematic punch. To me it felt edited. I examined that new Erato CD afterwards, and it contains all the arias from the production; so we did get the whole show.

DiDonato concluded with some comments to the audience, best summarized in a quote of hers from Gramophone’s November 2016 issue with this production as its cover article: “The only sane place right now for many people is the arts and music. It’s the one place we can still be united”—a noble theme that I thought the production didn’t wrap into a united whole the way Tafelmusik’s yearly multi-media productions do [their next one will be reviewed in the next issue]. The enthusiastic audience of early music lovers, opera fans, Eastman subscribers, those attracted by large newspaper ads, and cheering students would probably call me Scrooge.

DiDonato’s final word was that the sun always rises—as in Richard Strauss’s ‘Morgen,’ which she sang molto lento with a light, almost straight tone that Elizabeth Schwarzkopf would have envied.

GIL FRENCH

American Record Guide

Music in Concert 25
Paul McCreesh’s ensemble, now simply called Gabrieli (formerly the Gabrieli Consort & Players), had its first big hit back in 1990 with the recording of “A Venetian Coronation”, a carefully researched re-creation of the coronation Mass held at the Basilica of St Mark for Doge Marino Grimani in April of 1595. The ensemble performs a far-ranging repertoire but has had its greatest successes with the early baroque period, in many ways the cradle of Western music.

In 2012, the group released a second recording of the same ceremony. In this new “Venetian Coronation”, the most significant change is the reduced reliance on mass voices, replaced by more complex arrangements with solos, which McCreesh tells us better reflects the practice of the day.

It is this version, for the most part, that was performed on October 12 at Alice Tully Hall as part of the Lincoln Center’s White Light Festival. The ensemble has re-created this event around the world for nearly 30 years, but this was its first performance in the New York area.

Fireworks can be heard on the recording but were omitted here—perhaps sensible in the current security environment.

McCreesh’s excellent program notes tell us that the Venetians took music seriously. Priests who interrupted could be fined. They also had their own style and sound, more sophisticated than the rest of Europe at the time. This program consists primarily of the works of Giovanni Gabrieli, one of the organists at the time, and Andrea Gabrieli, his uncle. It’s easy to see why McCreesh has championed these guys, even to the point of naming the ensemble after them.

After a sweet toccata on one of the two organs, the chorus arrived to sing the Introit. As this progressed, I heard a faint dissonant sound from behind me that I naturally assumed to be a ring-tone. As it became more insistent, I became irritated. Then it dawned on me that it was trumpets, announcing the arrival of the clergy and the doge. Well, neither actually arrived, but it was easy to imagine them taking their places on the stage, where the choir and players were spread out in sections as if around an altar. The processional music continued.

This was a complete service, with the scripture readings and chants, all spoken on pitch, serving to link up the mix of toccatas, sonatas, and sacred settings. As the Mass progressed, the brass players swapped their trumpets for sackbuts (the predecessor to the modern trombone) and were joined from time to time by cornett players (an early woodwind instrument with a sound quite distinct from any modern instrument) and a baroque string player, along with the organs. In all cases, this was early music performed at a virtuosic level, with fine solos and ensembles.

The extraordinary chorus consists of 11 men. Each was competent as a soloist, but the program failed to tell us who was singing what. The three countertenors were particularly appealing, each with a different resonance.

Among several high points, the final ‘Omnes Gentes a 16’ was perhaps the most thrilling, with countertenors often soaring above the ensemble. According to the projected titles, we heard the words, “God is gone up with a merry voice, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.” And that pretty much described the evening.

JAMES L PAULK
Bach: Mass in B minor
Cambridge MA

The wholly engaging Bach scholar and conductor Ton Koopman was in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at St Paul’s Church on November 18 with a large contingent of historically informed singers and instrumentalists to perform Bach’s remarkable Mass in B minor. He used the 1733 version of the Kyrie and Gloria, and the remaining music stemmed from the 1748-1749 expansion of the Credo, Sanctus, Hosanna, Benedictus, Agnus Dei, and Dona Nobis Pacem.

The program was presented by the Boston Early Music Festival as part of its annual concert series. Robert Mealy, noted baroque violin virtuoso and concertmaster of the BEMF Orchestra, wrote informative program notes that explained how this extraordinary set of separate pieces were first “combined” into a free-standing Mass for reasons unknown, and how today Bach would be “very surprised to find his Mass heard in a concert hall. To hear a Kyrie and Gloria, have an intermission, and then hear the last bits of Mass text is something that simply wouldn’t have happened in Bach’s day. It was only with the publication of the Mass in the 1840s that (following the fashion of grand mass performances inaugurated with Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis) Bach’s Mass in B minor began to be heard as a performance piece.”

What remains so remarkable, to me at least, is that, despite the fragmentary nature of its components, this great corpus works so well musically and dramatically. When led by a conductor with an ear for dramatic arc and musical structure—like Koopman—the music becomes a unified and powerful reflection of Bach’s primary devotion to creating music “to the glory of God”. This music takes believers and non-believers alike on a spiritual journey that undeniably bolsters and affirms faith. Somehow, we are all the better for having heard and performed it.

Koopman brought with him 35 instrumentalists and a choir of 28 choral scholars. 15 members of the Juilliard415 program (J) and 20 from the Royal Conservatory in The Hague (RC), playing side by side, populated the orchestra. The singers were all drawn from the Royal Conservatoire and were prepared by Janjoost van Elburg of The Hague, with language coach William Hobbs from Juilliard. These performers were all quite young—students, actually, though the performance hardly suffered from this. Rather, a real energy and enthusiasm for their individual roles was palpable. United in following Koopman’s obviously very rehearsed directions of nuance and tone production, there was no denying that this reflected a very specific approach to the music that all participants “bought into”.

Koopman is an ebullient conductor, yet he is so clear in his objectives that his concerts have an uncanny way of persuading all in the hall that his way is without question the way things “ought” to go. While I was not convinced that everything I heard was how I’d like to remember this music, I was never bored, was always engaged, and was impressed with the skill of the players and singers. Indeed, I was once again overwhelmed by the genius of the composer.

The program cited seven vocal soloists. I was particularly impressed by baritone Berend Eijkhout, who displayed extraordinary accuracy, elegant tone, and complete mastery of the many intricacies of his two demanding arias, the ‘Quoniam’ and ‘Et in Spiritum Sanctum’ from the Credo. I also enjoyed the timbre and elegance that male alto (countertenor) Aleksand Chobanov brought to his ‘Qui Sedes’ aria. I admired the fresh tone and facility of technique that tenor Joshua Blue brought to his ‘Domine Deus’ duet with the fluent and clear soprano, Aldona Bartnik. All the other vocal soloists were more than up to their challenges, in particular mezzo Kara Dugan, whose burnished tone was a good match for her many prominent moments, both in duet and as soloist.
Several soloists in the orchestra deserve mention for their extraordinary contributions to the arias. Violinist Noyuri Hazama (RC) was outstandingly musical with the obbligato challenges in the Gloria’s ‘Laudamus Te’. Oboe d’amore players Aga Mazur (RC), Fiona Last (J), and Karlijn Oost (RC) were consistently superb, as were natural horn player Kaci Cummings (J) and the rollicking bassoonists Neil Chen (J) and Luke Toppin (RC) in the ‘Quoni-am’. And Mili Chang’s traverse flute playing in the Credo’s ‘Benedictus’ was fluid, elegant, and, well, just lovely.

An effective performance of this Mass really depends on the chorus. I was especially impressed with how the individual voices in each section blended, and how utterly together they sang the many twists and turns of their challenging vocal lines. The sopranos and mezzos were especially well integrated and brilliant. Koopman required a somewhat straight European tone and a frequent crescendo-diminuendo swell. After a while I found this latter “affect” a little bit tiresome.

Koopman also has a tendency to push tempos to the very edge of performability—and there was an absence of human emotional involvement in the music-making. Everything was crisply and cleanly attended to—every I dotted, every T crossed. Yet I was left curiously unmoved. I was admiring—interested—but not moved. “HIP” performances like this can also be spiritual, emotional, and moving.

During intermission I heard several patrons complain about the diffuse acoustics of the very large church with a very high barrel-vaulted ceiling that apparently blurred the sound, especially for people seated toward the back.

JOHN W EHRICH

Elgar: Dream of Gerontius
Seattle Symphony and Chorale

The premiere of Edward Elgar’s new oratorio was so disastrous that he contemplated suicide, but both Elgar and his Dream of Gerontius went on to better times, though performances of the work that Elgar called “the best of me” are rare enough these days to garner some serious attention. (That’s particularly true on this side of the Atlantic, where Elgar is more of a niche market.) Composed to a text by Cardinal John Henry Newman, requiring the large forces of orchestra, chorus, and three soloists, the oratorio can have a strong effect when a conductor who really believes in it assembles a cast who does it full justice.

Seattle Symphony audiences got to hear two such performances this past December, when English conductor Edward Gardner arrived in Benaroya Hall with a slate of particularly fine soloists. Gardner, 42, has attracted a lot of attention for his recent Chandos recordings, not to mention his 2015 appointment as chief conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic, his international opera credits (Covent Garden, Paris Opera, the Met, Chicago Lyric), his transatlantic teaching posts, and his awards (including a 2012 OBE).

Gardner’s Seattle engagement, however, probably owes less to this list of credits than to his friendship with Music Director Ludovic Morlot; they studied together at the Royal Academy of Music. Morlot would have to look far to find a more impassioned interpreter of Gerontius, which hadn’t been heard in Seattle since Gerard Schwarz led it in 1991. Conducting with remarkable intensity, Gardner occasionally grabbed his baton with both hands in the more dramatic passages and swung it sideways with huge chopping gestures, as if wielding an axe. Sometimes he crouched on the podium and then shot upward, apparently levitating right along with the soul of Gerontius. He brought a surging urgency to the performance, met with unusual fervor by the orchestra and the Seattle Symphony Chorale.

It would be difficult to find more persuasive interpreters than the three soloists. As Gerontius, British tenor Robert Murray illuminated his extensive solo lines with pristine diction and a compelling lyrical clarity. David Soar, a British baritone of remarkable tonal beauty, gave nobility to the Priest’s lines and a resonant timbre to his solos as the Angel of the Agony. American mezzo Sasha Cooke, who had recently completed a run as Hansel in Seattle Opera’s Hansel and Gretel, was a

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standout, displaying a lovely warmth and a beautifully even tone quality across her register in the Angel's eloquent passages.

The Seattle Symphony Chorale, well prepared by chorus master Joseph Crnkow, transformed from angelic to demonic as the music required, rising to powerful menace when representing the chorus of demons.

The score itself, a constantly shifting tableau that flows from solo utterances to massive statements and back again, does have the occasional longueur; but at its best, this is music that thrills the listener, especially with the stage crammed with singers and instrumentalists, all underlain by the mighty pipes of the Fisk Watjen Concert Organ. It's enough to make listeners think seriously about the Last Judgement.

MELINDA BARGREEN

Florida Orchestra
Tampa

Cleverly themed programs are all the rage these days. The Florida Orchestra's November 11 program was about the sea, a richly fertile topic with no shortage of material. "Songs of the Sea" could be a yearly occurrence without ever having to repeat a program.

I heard the concert at the Straz Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Tampa. Unlike the last time I reviewed a concert at this locale, Ferguson Hall, the smaller of the two auditoriums, was used. If it is "more in your face" than Morsani Hall, its greater intimacy had some special benefits in clarifying many details. The same program followed across the water in St Petersburg and in Clearwater the following evenings.

Benjamin Britten's Four Sea Interludes from Peter Grimes dowses listeners with a liberal spray of salt water. The four orchestral movements form a suite and are, in the opinion of many, the best thing the opera has to offer. They are soaked with atmosphere and drenched with foreboding of the tragedy to come. Music Director Michael Francis, who turns 41 this year, knows this music intimately and conducted with excellent results. He made 'Dawn', 'Sunday Morning', 'Moonlight', and 'Storm' colorful and arresting. The orchestra embraced the idiom fully.

Edward Elgar’s song cycle, Sea Pictures, draws on disparate texts ranging from ‘In Haven (Capri)’ by the composer’s wife to ‘Sabbath Morning at Sea’ by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The first of the five songs, ‘Sea Slumber Song’ with text by Roden Noel, binds the cycle together as the vocal line appears several times. It must have been quite a sight at the 1899 premiere with Elgar conducting and Clara Butt singing, dressed in a mermaid costume. No such display was seen with mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton, whose thrillingly rich, deep, throaty voice was exquisitely suited to the rise and fall of Elgar’s vocal lines. Moreover, her voice was totally free of the music-destroying quavers that can send one into depression.

Barton also performed, along with cellist Anne Martindale Williams, in The Work at Hand by Jake Heggie. It is based on the little-known poetry of Laura Morefield (1960-2011). Heggie had previously set some poetry by her mother, Charlene Balbridge, and asked to see some of her dying daughter’s work. Impressed by the emotions of knowing when to say goodbye to our earth, he crafted this most beautiful composition. Not having been impressed by his opera, Moby-Dick, I was hardly expecting a piece of such emotional intensity. Barton and Williams were magnificent in their communicative ability; and Francis, who had conducted the world premiere of the orchestral version with the Pittsburgh Symphony in May 2015, gave us much cause for celebration at discovering a truly worthy new work. [The premiere of the version for mezzo, cello, and piano was reviewed in May/June 2015, page 6. —Editor]

La Mer is no stranger to the concert platform, and Michael Francis knew just how to shape its every phrase to produce a satisfying whole. He chose an edition that uses trumpet fanfares during the closing pages of ‘Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea’. Michael Tilson Thomas and Bernard Haitink are two conductors who use this, but most just leave the music with blank air instead of the forward-pushing brass. After many years of La Mer, I was pleased to finally hear it this way. Perhaps it’s not critical to the appreciation of the piece, but it really adds to the effectiveness of the work.

The Tampa Bay area is lucky to have such a refined and skilled orchestra and a music director who is one of today’s rising stars.

ALAN BECKER
“Bernstein and the Bostonsians”
American Symphony
New York

Leon Botstein was in Carnegie Hall again on November 18 with his merry band, the American Symphony, torturing his good-humored followers with two and a half hours of unpleasant pieces by mid-20th Century composers. These men worked in the shelter of academe—mostly at Brandeis University—and, like the notorious headline, didn’t care if you listen.

The program, called “Bernstein and the Bostonians,” subjected listeners (after the Candide Overture) to symphonic works of Arthur Berger, Harold Shapero, Richard Wernick (who attended), and Irving Fine. In a pre-concert talk Botstein defended his choices and spoke of musical flowering during the post-War decline of anti-Semitism. He begged listeners not to flee at intermission. It was a prime Botstein event.

That said, there were moments—minutes, even—of beauty and charm in surprising places—in Berger’s simple Ideas of Order, for one, and particularly, in Shapero’s 45-minute Symphony.

These teacher-composers were close friends and colleagues. They had ties to the Boston Symphony and Tanglewood; and they revered Aaron Copland, whose shade hung over the harmonic base from which they blasted off. A big difference between Bernstein and the others was that Bernstein, who taught on a public scale and not at Brandeis, was dying for you to listen. He twisted himself into a pretzel to get you to listen—to his words, his scores, his performances. The popular Candide Overture, in contrast to the other selections, allowed an unusual chance to compare the ASO’s performance to other ensembles. For example, the New York Philharmonic plays this without a conductor. This performance came up messy and didn’t cohere, let alone luxuriate in the second theme. It’s good the piece’s reputation doesn’t depend on Botstein.

Berger’s light Ideas of Order was simple in style, especially for Berger. Maybe its accessible little dances disparaged the listener, but the piece would fit on many classical programs.

Shapero’s four-movement tonal Symphony for Classical Orchestra was the longest at 45 minutes, a few of which were charming—beguiling even, in a dreamy Copland way. But its length overcame the charms. The composer knew it was too long for what it had to say but was unable to trim it down, and gave every section its full time in the spotlight. In his pre-concert talk, Botstein called it “relentless” and “taxing” on the players, cautioning the audience, “It’s not going to end.” It made manifold tries, but slogged on, as the audience drooped. The thought of lengthy rehearsals induces a shudder.

Wernick studied with Fine, Shapero and Berger. And a Time for Peace (1995), here in its US premiere, is in Hebrew and sets a famous passage in Ecclesiastes—also set in English by Pete Seeger in ‘Turn! Turn! Turn!’ The piece fluctuates, as does the text, between quietness and furious declamation. The text sets up the dichotomy—time for this, time for the opposite, but has nothing like the appeal of Seeger’s folk mode. Mezzo Katherine Pracht had her work cut out for her, putting across the Hebrew, but she managed coloratura passages with skill.

Fine, beloved by his colleagues, composed some charming trifles, but his Symphony from 1962, the year he died at age 47, wasn’t one. It grew, becoming slower and more ponderous, with sustained unpleasant harmonies. Here, and all during the concert, ensemble entrances were refreshingly clean, considering.

It’s admirable that Botstein has the guts to put this repertory out there. Scholars can learn from it, and certainly the audience did, most of whom stayed, coming out with perspective on the path that followed.

LESLIE KANDELL

Rouse: Organ Concerto
(world premiere)
Philadelphia Orchestra

Yannick Nezet-Seguin has an unabashed affinity for organ music and proudly celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Fred J Cooper Memorial Organ in Verizon Hall with an all-organ program that included the world premiere on November 17 of Christopher Rouse’s Organ Concerto, a co-commission by the Philadelphians, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the National Symphony, here on a bill with works by Samuel Barber and Camille Saint-Saëns.

The bountiful program didn’t attract a full house on opening night, but those in atten-
dance were unabashed organ devotees who lustily showed their approval. Co-piloting the evening with Nezet-Seguin was organist Paul Jacobs, seated at the imposing satellite console positioned in front of the lower strings for the Barber and Rouse, and at the console directly under the pipes on the upper tier loft for the Saint-Saëns.

Barber’s *Toccata Festiva* was a most fitting showpiece opener, the composer having foregone a fee by a rich patron to present it as a gift to the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1960. Nezet-Seguin emphasized its glittering orchestral drive as a contrast to Barber’s baroque (bordering on vampy) solo organ part. Nowadays it strikes me as more a clever study than an organically cohesive work. But its intricacies were lucidly crystallized by Jacobs. The soloist was so at ease as he joyously traversed the keyboards that he reminded me of Gene Kelly as he tap-danced on the foot pedals.

Before the concert Nezet-Seguin told the audience that hearing organ concertos can be like hearing two orchestras. It can also be a wrestling match, which seemed to be the dynamic, for better and worse, in Rouse’s Concerto. Jacobs essayed the opening Allegro’s avalanche of sonic chromatic keyboard spikes that Rouse hurled through a gushing orchestral stream—call it staccato in modernist fugue. The concerto’s organ-orchestral interlocks were arresting and carved adventurous territory right out of the gate.

Over the work’s three movements Rouse builds some lush textures and somber atmospheres—the quieter sections more musically compelling than the bursts of orchestral bombast, which seemed safely “cinematic”. The audience weighed in with their lusty approval at the end. Rouse was seated at the front of the hall and joined Jacobs and Nezet-Seguin for a triumphant bow.

A side note: Nezet-Seguin has been holding back on French repertoire in the five years since he’s been musical director, but he has a mid-season French music festival. A week before the organ program, he conducted a shimmering performance of Ravel’s complete ballet *Daphnis and Chloe*. And on this night the scene-stealing closing work was Saint-Saëns’s *Organ Symphony* (No. 3). The conductor’s precision and passion were fully on tap to conjure the full dimensions of Saint-Saëns’s fine lines and proportional concerto architecture, which actually uses the organ as a supporting element. But when the composer does lean on those pipes, he unleashes them majestically. Jacobs continued to be flawless in this keyboard marathon and actually was ready for more.

When Yannick asked the audience, “Are you ready for more organ?” they cheered, and Bach engulfed the hall, recalibrating the acoustics, if not our musical souls.

LEWIS WHITTINGTON

**Prokofieff:**

**Nevsky** and **Kije**

**Utah Symphony**

At an all-Prokofieff concert in November in Salt Lake City’s Abravanel Hall, the Utah Symphony unleashed the emotive precision that has become the new standard for this ensemble. The orchestra was conducted by Thierry Fischer, music director since 2009. The *Lieutenant Kije Suite*, Violin Concerto No. 2, and cantata *Alexander Nevsky* were rendered with a clarity and brilliance seldom encountered.
The suite and cantata were recorded for release later this year by Reference Recordings. ’Lt Kije’ was vibrant and stirring, a performance that emphasized warmth with an adept depth in the instrumental textures. ‘The Birth of Kije’ was supple and vigorous. The ‘Romance’s’ vaulting lyricism was captured in especially fine fashion as the flute line interwove with the saxophone. ‘Kije’s Wedding’ had smooth voicings. In the ‘Troika’ a lovely gripping arch and a glint in the high violins added to its lyricism, while ‘The Burial of Kije’ had a light sparkle in the horn solo with dusty and crisply pulsating rhythms.

The soloist in Violin Concerto No. 2 was the Utah Symphony’s new Concertmaster, Madeline Adkins, previously associate concertmaster of the Baltimore Symphony. Her demonstrative style of playing has added vigor to an orchestra that was already developing a far more textured and energetic mode of performance and interpretation under Fischer.

This darkly reticent yet luminous concerto was full of sparkle as Adkins’s pulsating flow blended with Fischer’s conducting to give the first movement’s phrases a light effervescence and concentrated poise. In the second movement Adkins gave carefree lyricism, light vibrato, and a prismatic quality to the high arching solo lines. The third movement had a lively duet with trumpet, with a resin-like light bray to the solo violin line and a clear, clean depth of sound to the orchestra. The ending was rhythmically vivacious. Most impressive was the ability of Adkins to play with all sections of the orchestra, and to even guide Thierry Fischer more deeply into an interpretation that was polished, yet possessed just enough seething passion.

Alexander Nevsky ended the evening in exquisitely exuberant fashion with the combined forces of the Utah Symphony Chorus, the University of Utah Chamber Choir, and the University of Utah A Cappella Choir, all prepared magnificently by Barlow Bradford. The choirs articulated their lines in a flowing yet meticulous manner. ‘Russia Under the Mongolian Yoke’ was notable for a biting subliminal quiet they supplied at the end proved an ideal link to Julia Adolphe’s new Viola Concerto, which opens with its own whispered sounds. [Its world premiere was reviewed in Nov/Dec 2016. —Editor]

Adolphe’s concerto, a New York Philharmonic co-commission, lasts only 19 minutes and makes a poetic impression. Adolphe is 28 years old and still in graduate school (at the University of Southern California), but her Viola Concerto, subtitled Unearth, Release,
better crafted than many recent Philharmonic commissions from senior composers with every imaginable pedigree and connection. The basic emotional movement is from darkness to light—from "drowning in uncertainty," as Adolphe wrote in a program note, to "embracing ambiguity." The entire piece is about shades of mystery and irresolution—anguished doubt in the first movement, unresolved competition between soloist and orchestra in the scherzo-like second, and gossamer mystery in the finale.

Soloist Cynthia Phelps, Principal Violist for the Philharmonic, scooped under, soared above, and blended uneasily with an orchestra that snarled and screamed in carefully calibrated climaxes, but mainly shimmered and searched for elusive cadences in Adolphe's quasi-tonal harmonies. Phelps played with a dark, powerful sound that refused to be overwhelmed by the orchestra's multi-layered strings and vibrant percussion.

Zweden maintained suspense and momentum in the concerto from start to finish. That's apparently what he does, as was dramatically evident in the second half of the concert, where Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 delivered an unexpected thrill. The woodwind solos by oboist Liang Wang, clarinetist Anthony McGill, and bassoonist Judith LeClair (all principals) were beautiful, as expected, but I was even more riveted by the tension in the pizzicato scherzo and by the crazy speed in the finale—the fastest I've ever heard, yet controlled, centered, and finely detailed. How the orchestra was able to play at this tempo and not sound frantic or chaotic was a bit of a wonder, but the Philharmonic players can do just about anything if a conductor pushes them and they are willing to follow.

The performance I heard was the second of three. Afterward, I told several orchestra players that I was completely unprepared for the Tchaikovsky. "The first time, we weren't prepared either," violist Rebecca Young told me, "but we were today." When I asked whether the orchestra is on board with their new conductor, who seems so radically different from the last four [Alan Gilbert, Lorin Maazel, Kurt Masur, and Zubin Mehta], she said, "Most of us are, which is the best you're going to get with this orchestra." This was Zweden's first concert with the Philharmonic since his appointment was announced. Apparently we're in for a wild ride.

JACK SULLIVAN

Salonen: Violin Concerto
Cincinnati Symphony

If you want (or are commissioned) to write a violin concerto in this day and age, your range of approaches is limited. You can't really just do a fast-slow-fast piece in classic concerto form. Nor can you use a typical concerto-accompanying orchestra, because a modern composer has to use every imaginable color to show how imaginative he is. So, for example, you need the usual huge percussion battery that living composers seem to pride themselves on writing for. Then you have the problem that the violin is a pretty soft instrument. The audience is going to feel sorry for the poor soloist, trying to stand up to a wall of drums and gongs. That, in turn, will force you to write very aggressive music for the violin.
All of this applies to such well-known works as Scheherazade 2 by John Adams—and it applies to the Violin Concerto by Esa-Pekka Salonen that was played by the Cincinnati Symphony in November. It was written in 2009 for the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Leila Josefowicz—who later gave first performances of the Adams, having proved her ability to stand up to a big, percussion-laden orchestra. The violinist in Cincinnati was Jennifer Koh, who has trained herself to do the same. The rear stage, from one side to the other and ten feet deep, was percussion. In the first movement (of four) we heard mainly the marimba-vibraphone instruments. In the last movement—the only real slow movement—the violin could also be more itself than in the two middle movements, where it seemed to be in a rage.

So if you had some old-fashioned, romantic notion of what a violin concerto should sound like, you were disappointed. If you wanted a thoroughly modern take on the genre, you had to expect the orchestra and soloist to do outrageous things because a composer these days feels he has to push the envelope. You had to be able to say to yourself, “What an original piece!” and “What an imaginative use of a rock (or jazz) drum set!” With a very open mind you can see the composer’s intelligence and daring.

But, you know, the romantic concerto was richly satisfying, and none of these new ones is—ingenious, yes; satisfying, no. You may find it “interesting”, but you are not likely to long to hear it again. Contemporary composers feel they have to be avant-garde, original, a little wild. They want to put the whole world (and orchestra) in every piece. They want to convey a huge emotional range along with a huge range of sounds, ingeniously deployed. And, in recent years, they want to do that without alienating an audience. Well, I think Mr Salonen has done that. The problem is that the music itself does not draw me in and draw me back. I am sure that intellectually I could listen to it again because there are hundreds of details (often fascinating ones) that I might have missed or only caught a glimpse of the first time. But I am not drawn emotionally to this music at all, and I think we have to be if the music is to live on.

The conductor was Santtu-Matias Rouvali, who is Finnish and young and probably has a strong affinity for this composer’s music—as he does for Sibelius, whose Symphony No. 6 was on the program, too. It would be hard to imagine a better performance of the Sibelius. Every phrase had meaning and every movement had shape. It would be easy to just plow through it and treat it as nothing but atmosphere—especially after that violin concerto.

The Cincinnati Symphony is playing in the Taft Theatre downtown this season, while a new hall is being constructed in the shell of Music Hall. They already sound quite different. It’s a thicker sound and more immediate—at least in the balcony, where I sat. It is not muddy and not weak, but it is also less elegant than in Music Hall. It worked quite well for Sibelius and for Smetana’s Moldau, which opened the program. There is no first chair clarinet or trumpet at the moment, so that affects their sound, too. And attendance has not been good because people have to develop new habits in a new place (parking, for example). The whole set-up seems clearly temporary, and I think many symphony followers are simply sitting out the season or only going to concerts they can’t bear to miss. This was not such a concert for very many people, but they missed some excellent Sibelius.

DONALD VROON
Handel, Theofanidis, Bermel, and Schumann
Albany Symphony

Contemporary music is such a staple of Albany Symphony concerts that an older piece can feel like an oddity or an add-on. This is not just because of particular divisions in sonic real estate, but also how Music Director David Alan Miller prepares and delivers the music. Performances of the newer works tend to feel more polished; they’re almost always introduced by the composer and often involve a soloist as well. In other words, new music is celebrated, and ASO audiences have become accustomed to being a part of the adventure.

All this comes as an introduction to why the November program at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall was something of a surprise. It consisted of a roughly 50-50 mix, with masterpieces at the start and finish and two newer sizeable pieces in between. That’s not uncommon. But this time it was music of Handel and Schumann that carried the day with performances that were satisfying and expansive, if not exactly revelatory.

Six excerpts from Handel’s Water Music opened the night with a crystalline string sound that was almost vibrato free. The busy harpsichord wasn’t emphasized but did add to the crisp texture. The cool sound warmed as the ensemble expanded. A trio of horns was crisp and articulate, while the woodwinds were agile and argumentative in a pleasant sort of way. The overall effect was vigorous and elegant.

Schumann’s Symphony No. 4 ended the night in a performance that was commanding and hearty. Miller’s tempos were brisk but not rushed, and the overarching form (four movements without breaks) was clear and intelligible. Fine solos were given by Assistant Principal Cello Erica Pickhardt, Principal Oboe Karen Hosmer, and Principal Clarinet Sergiy Dvonichenko.

A Thousand Cranes by Christopher Theofanidis closed the concert’s first half. It’s scored for harp and strings and was inspired by post-Hiroshima Japanese culture. The title refers to the practice of origami. The opening was austere, with isolated plucks on the harp and single notes bowed by a few back-bench violinists. Even as the music took on body and weight, the feeling of Zen and contemplation remained. Rather than being demanding or expressive, it was observant. Eventually a lush tune arrived and engaged the soul.

That would have been enough, but Theofanidis carries on for two more movements, filling out half an hour of time with a jumble of ideas that became tedious and draining. With two more major works of Theofanidis scheduled for this season and next, here’s hoping he has more to say and can say it more concisely.

A Shout, a Whisper, and a Trace by Derek Bermel, long a favorite of Miller, came after intermission and was a rare revival of something previously performed by the orchestra. The reason for hearing it now is that a new full-length all-Bermel CD is in the works. It will have two other pieces from past ASO seasons, one with the Portuguese jazz singer Sara Serpa, another with members of the Juilliard Jazz Orchestra.

A Shout, a Whisper, and a Trace spoke strongly with a second hearing. Though Bermel calls it his New York piece, the hustle and bustle of urban life only lurks on the perimeter. Bela Bartok’s lonely years in the city were also an inspiration. A vigorous syncopated opening subsides into a wrong note chorale in the brass. From there the music continues to abate. The second movement has an elegiac trumpet solo and slippery pitches in the strings. In the finale an eerie siren evokes the feeling of a step back in time or into the dream state.

JOSEPH DALTON

yMusic
Carnegie Hall

There were two kinds of playing at the sparkling Zankel Hall debut of yMusic December 2. One kind was the amplified sextet’s performance of genre-crossing 21st-Century pieces. The other was buoyant delight in making this music, which brought to memory a film of the young Itzhak Perlman, Daniel Barenboim, Jacqueline DuPre, Pinchas Zukerman, and Zubin Mehta exuberantly playing Schubert’s Trout Quintet.

The adventurers of yMusic, who formed the group in 2008 because they like each other, perform only pieces composed for them. They are violinist Rob Moose, violist Nadia Sirota, cellist Gabriel Cabezas, with Hideaki Aomori playing clarinets, Alex Sopp flutes, and CJ Camerieri both trumpet and horn. Individual-
ly they have appeared with indie rock bands and toured in the United States and Europe.

The program, with the hovering presences of Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Aaron Copland, and early Bang on a Can, showed the musicians thinking about sonorities and embracing them. No one wants to upset you here, the pieces said.

Some composers in attendance are having their 15 minutes of fame. Andrew Norman, winner of the Gravemeyer Award (for his full-length Play [reviewed above]) and Musical America's Composer of the Year, was there for his attractive Music in Circles, inspired—or rather, forced into being—by a knocking air-conditioner. The viola in this choral piece had short repeated notes, commented on by other strings, while the winds had long tones. The unusual effect came from instrumental styles the opposite of typical.

Two other composers in their hot time had less to say, musically, than they have had on other occasions. Draft of a High Rise by Pulitzer prizewinner Caroline Shaw had its premiere as part of Carnegie Hall's 125 Commissions Project. Gentle and tonal with a few Appalachian Spring-like sonorities, it fit the mood of this concert, but it ran long for Shaw and didn’t say that much. There were reasonable helpings of this and that, but no edge-of-your-seat originality.

The other 125 Project premiere was 134 Eldridge by Chris Thile, who holds a MacArthur grant. It’s amazing that he found time to compose while preparing to succeed Garrison Keillor as host of “Prairie Home Companion”. Without Thile’s signature mandolin, however, it wandered around episodically, though the last chord was lovely.

Missy Mazzoli’s brief, sustained Ecstatic Science was led by the flute, which explored sonorities of a rising scale, with a couple of chirps. Starting slowly and speeding up, it was not rich vintage Mazzoli.

Son Lux (the pen name of Ryan Lott) writes sweet minimalist-inflected pop-rock music found on YouTube videos—worth checking out—and this is not a first collaboration. His appealing Eleven, which opened the concert, had the steady lulling beat of Reich’s Different Trains. His Suite: Paris, Memory Wounds, First, whose repeated patterns allow time to consider sonority and texture, showed how much these matter to him.

The imaginative Sufjan Stevens (whose “Songs for Christmas” recording is to be avoided) was represented by Year of the Dragon, arranged by Nico Muhly. In the same mode, with piccolo prominent, was his Year of the Dog, arranged by Rob Moose as a brief comforting lullaby. It was a dialog between the leading clarinet and other instruments that interjected.

Safe Travels by Timo Andres played nicely with scale-like patterns, and Clearing, Dawn, Dance by Judd Greenstein busily iterated a major chord. The encore was Epimetheus by Robert Sirota, Nadia’s father.

YMusic is working on a film with choreographer Bill T Jones and has recorded three albums.

**Behavior Abduraimov, piano**

**Carnegie Hall**

Uzbekistani pianist Behzod Abduraimov, 26, returned to Carnegie Hall in November, now as a headliner on the main stage. Less than two years had passed since he made a highly praised debut in Carnegie’s small Weill Recital Hall. His international schedule in 2016 was nothing short of astonishing, and that continues well into 2017. In the four weeks following this Carnegie recital, he performed another 11 concerts, including three different piano concertos, a chamber program, and this same solo program in Israel, France, England, and the US.

**Leslie Kandell**

**March/April 2017**
The reviews of his 2016 and earlier performances are all good, even effusive, with praise for just about every aspect of his playing.

To begin with, here he constructed an excellent and balanced program. Yes, it might be considered a little heavy on the virtuoso aspect, but it was all great music, and he is a young virtuoso, exactly as I expected. His maturity showed right at the start: he was patient with last minute arrivers and able to achieve a true silence (rare at any concert) before he began playing.

The quiet, restrained Cortot transcription of Bach’s ‘Siciliano’ from the D minor Concerto drew the audience into the music. We were treated to a wide variety of keyboard colors and wonderful legato singing lines, all in a very intimate performance. He then made a dramatic musical shift with Busoni’s transcription of Bach’s best-known organ work. The venerable Toccata and Fugue in D minor gave Abduraimov the opportunity to show how he could create massive sound without harshness or banging. We also got our first taste of the technique this young man has.

Schubert’s Moment Musical No. 2 returned us to the dotted opening of the ‘Siciliano.’ Musical Moment No. 3 was originally entitled ‘Air Russe’ and reminded me of Liadov’s ‘Musical Snuffbox’ with its balanced eight-bar phrases. Beethoven’s mighty Appassionata Sonata finished off the first half with all the energy and drama one could ask for. Yet this was also a superb interpretation, balancing the many tempo changes and quick dynamic contrasts with an overall sense of the big picture of each movement. I was pleased to hear Abduraimov take the substantial repeat in the final movement, which balances the outer movements. He also delayed the quickening of tempo into the final coda—some of the most exciting Beethoven I have heard in a long time, which elicited a standing ovation.

The second half was all Russian: Prokofiev’s Sonata No. 6 and Balakirev’s Islamey. This first of Prokofiev’s war sonatas was composed in 1939–40 and is as much a reflection on the brutal conditions under Stalin as on the Nazi invasion of Russia. Outside of the second theme in the first movement and the slow waltz in the third, there is little relief from the dissonance. Abduraimov did his best to remind us that Prokofiev was working on his two ballet masterpieces, Romeo and Juliet and Cinderella, at the same time, and no melodic phrase was missed. The virtuosity all through this work is not gratuitous, despite the big leaps, hand crossings, dynamic shifts, and hair-raising passage work. There was an uncanny accuracy in Abduraimov’s playing; this was almost a note-perfect performance.

The musical intensity abated somewhat with Balakirev, but not the technical requirements. This was a noted virtuosic work from the start (1869). Ravel wrote that when he composed ‘Scarbo’ he wanted to write something more difficult than Islamey. Abduraimov played it as fast as I have ever heard it done. With a clear ABA form and fast-slow-fast sections, he was able to balance the waves of repeated notes and octave passages in the outer sections with the haunting Armenian melody in the middle section. There was thunderous applause for a thunderous ending.

There were two encores: Tchaikovsky’s Nocturne in C-sharp minor and Liszt’s incredible Paganini etude, ‘La Campanella.’ I felt I just heard someone early in his career whom I expect to hear a lot more from over the coming decades.

JAMES HARRINGTON

Augustin Hadelich and Joyce Yang
St Paul

They met casually as students at the Juilliard School some 10 years ago—German violinist Augustin Hadelich and Korean pianist Joyce Yang. But they didn’t play their first concert together until 2011 in Los Angeles when a desperate Hadelich called Yang to ask if she could sub for a pianist who had dropped out just three days before the concert. Yang said yes. She quickly learned a difficult program.

Hadelich and Yang have since become sought-after duo-recitalists, though both sustain their own careers. Their special rapport, their high degree of uniformity in matters of phrasing, nuance, and interpretive decisions were amply demonstrated in a program at the American Record Guide
Ordway Concert Hall in St Paul November 29 as part of the Schubert Club’s International Artist Series.

It was clear, too, that these are musicians who enjoy playing together. Their technical skill and careful attention to detail never precluded moments of spontaneity—the occasional stretched phrase, the slight pause for emphasis, the added rhythmic accent. They seem to enjoy surprising one another.

The program included sonatas by Mozart and Beethoven, works by Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky, and a recent piece by the Australian composer, Brett Dean.

Despite their concern for precision, balance between the two instruments was off in the opening work, Beethoven’s Violin Sonata No. 8. Yang’s piano occasionally overwhelmed Hadelich’s refined silvery tone with its quick vibrato. (The Ordway, which opened in 2014, has bright acoustics that tend to favor the piano in small ensembles.) The performance, nonetheless (the balance problem having been solved), was elegant, light, and fleet, with a gentle, songful treatment of the slow movement followed by a scampering reading of the finale.

Collaboration in Mozart’s Sonata in A, K 305, was deep and instinctive. Phrases in the second movement’s variations deftly overlapped as if there were just one instrument playing. Color, energy, and a sense of fantasy characterized the Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky: Divertimento and the Valse-Scherzo, Opus 34.

Dean’s fascinating five-movement Berlin Music is an evocation of the 15 years the composer spent in that city as a violist in the Berlin Philharmonic. The first four movements are brief character pieces. In comments to the audience, Yang aptly described the second of the four as “one of the creepiest lullabies you’ll ever hear”. The fourth, an exercise in perpetual motion, had Hadelich playing with breath-taking speed. The final larger movement brought all these elements together.

The encore was a delicate, sweetly nuanced version of ‘Estrellita’.

MICHAEL ANTHONY

Zwilich: Pas de Trois
(world premiere)
West Palm Beach

Dreyfoos Concert Hall was comfortably filled on December 14 for the first of two programs presented by three frequent visitors to South Florida, pianist Joseph Kalichstein, violinist Jaime Laredo, and cellist Sharon Robinson (the latter two are also husband and wife). Founded to perform in the White House when Jimmy Carter occupied it, the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio remained together and are now the longest established ensemble of its kind currently active. For these concerts, part of celebrations marking their 40th anniversary in January 2017, they performed familiar works by Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Brahms, and Shostakovich.

The first program offered a novelty as its opener, the world premiere of Pas de Trois by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, a brief work in two movements dedicated to the ensemble. The first, ‘Entrée’, opens with a quotation suggestive of the initial flourish of Beethoven’s Ghost Trio. Other playful touches occur here and there (but are never jokey), and familiar trio textures are handled most engagingly. The movement is a series of short episodes dissolving elegantly one to another. The second, ‘Variata e Coda’, is predominantly lyric, sometimes turning nostalgic and elegiac, then gradually resem-
bling the first movement. Occasional Stravinskian rhythms punctuate the material, except that he could never have written as attractively for strings and piano as Zwilich. Although technically a piece d’occasion, I predict this work will likely have independent life in the repertoire. It is highly appealing to concert audiences and crafted with a mastery attractive to performers.

In Mendelssohn’s Trio No. 2, years of performing together ensured that nothing pertaining to musical sense was out of place. But following a new work that seemed to interest the players so keenly, a certain enervation characterized their playing, particularly the strings. The room is a large one, probably too large for chamber music (similar to Carnegie Hall that way). Kalichstein’s Steinway D sounded superb always (I was pleased to see the piano technician credited on the main program page), but it also tended to cover violin and cello in the Scherzo as well as in the trio of the Scherzando in Schubert’s Trio No. 2, which concluded the program.

If restricted dynamics seemed a pervasive fault in both works, there were corresponding beauties. The Andante Espressivo of the Mendelssohn can often sound insipid, but these players instead supplied lyric eloquence and animation. Robinson’s cello sometimes sounded as if it had a cold in its head, but she used portamento most advantageously, and Laredo phrased with both sweetness and intelligence.

The Schubert Trio can last about 45 minutes if all the repeats are taken. Although the players wisely chose to cut the exposition repeat in the opening movement, their decision to observe the ones in the Rondo, when added to their dynamic constriction, made the finale seem awfully long.

DENNIS D. ROONEY

Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov
New York

Violinist Isabelle Faust and pianist Alexander Melnikov played a modernized version of the three Bs—a program of violin sonatas: Beethoven’s No. 2, Brahms’s No. 3, and Busoni’s No. 2—in Kaufmann Concert Hall at Manhattan’s 92nd Street Y on November 19. The sound in the hall was clear and resonant, and the balance between the instruments was effective. Isabelle Faust is a lovely player who appeared casual and lyrical but followed through on whatever she started with intensity and beautiful phrasing. Melnikov is a fine technician who brought out the music with a surprising vigor and passion that was matched by Faust. The two worked together in a way that created an unexpected balance of conversation, argument, and violence.

As you may imagine, Beethoven lends himself well to these extremes of emotion, but so do Brahms and Busoni. The surprise was the drama these musicians found in all three works. The Beethoven and the Brahms are not the most outwardly passionate violin sonatas by these great composers, but Faust and Melnikov brought out considerable depth and drama that most players don’t think to emphasize. All of this was done in a basically smooth and poetic way that made the contrasts all the more effective.

After intermission was the longest and least known work, Busoni’s half-hour three-movement Sonata No. 2, a turn-of-the-20th Century piece that has all of the fascinating technical variety that many composers of that period demonstrated. There are no real breaks between movements, a point that actually contributed to the music’s overall grandeur. Faust and Melnikov put it across with understanding and conviction, and the audience was highly enthusiastic. There was almost no coughing during the many silences. It was an unusually intense evening.

DAVID MOORE
Heggie: *It’s a Wonderful Life* (world premiere)
Houston Grand Opera

Big performing groups love the holiday season because their yuletide productions help pay for everything they do the rest of the year. Ballet companies stage *The Nutcracker*, theater troupes revive *A Christmas Carol*, and symphony orchestras often perform *Messiah*.

But there’s no similar cash cow for opera companies. Perhaps looking for a crowd-pleaser grander than Menotti’s *Amahl and the Night Visitors* or Hindemith’s *Long Christmas Dinner*, Houston Grand Opera’s Artistic and Music Director Patrick Summers knew just whom to turn to. A long-time champion of Jake Heggie (he has led the world premieres of all six of the composer’s major operas), Summers got HGO, San Francisco Opera, and Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music (his alma mater) to commission an operatic version of Frank Capra’s classic 1946 holiday film *It’s a Wonderful Life*. The two-and-a-half hour work was launched December 2016 in Wortham Theater Center’s Cullen Theater and will be staged in San Francisco in 2018.

Librettist Gene Scheer preserved many elements of the beloved movie and even many of its lines. For example, Mr Potter, the grasping moneybags who owns most of the idyllic town of Bedford Falls, is confined to a wheelchair because Lionel Barrymore played him in the film. But in Scheer’s operatic adaptation, Clarence, the guardian angel who earns his wings by convincing would-be suicide George Bailey that his life is worth preserving because it has touched the lives of so many people, is a soprano named Clara whose errand of mercy is aided by a quartet of higher-ranking, fully fledged angels.

Heggie’s score is mostly (often altitude-seeking) recitative over driving rhythms and colorful orchestration. But George and Mary Hatch, the future wife who has adored George since girlhood, have a most lyrical duet after a high-school dance. When Mr Potter tries to destroy the competing Bailey Building and Loan by tempting its do-gooder mainstay into a high-paying job in his sprawling real estate empire, a slyly seductive lilt snakes through the orchestra.

It was a bit too much of a good thing to have people repeatedly break into frenzied dances popular in George’s lifetime and, because George longs to travel to the Fiji Islands, fflail around in an ersatz tropical number called the Mekee-Mekee. But I liked one imaginative touch: when Clara magically erases George’s past until he comes to his senses, the orchestra falls silent, the characters stop singing and only speak over an eerie drone.

With Summers’s conducting on the lookout for every nuance, William Burden anchored the strong cast as George with his sturdy ringing tenor, and Andrea Carroll as stalwart Mary boasted a gleaming substantial soprano. HGO newcomer Talise Trevigne was a bright-toned Clara, and Joshua Hopkins sang
sonorously as Harry, the kid brother George saved from drowning in childhood. Tenor Anthony Dean Griffey was amiably befuddled as Uncle Billy, and Rod Gilfry grafted a powerful baritone onto two roles, Mr Potter and Mr Gower, the town druggist whom the alert teenaged George keeps from accidentally poisoning a sick child.

The eye-catching stage picture was supplied by Leonard Foglia (direction), Robert Brill (set), Brian Nason (lighting) and Elaine J. McCarthy (projections). The proceedings opened with Clara floating in mid-universe on a swing, counting stars and prayers. Down on earth, mirror-like panels opened like doors to reveal the events in George’s life—a life that demonstrates that, despite Mr Potter, money isn’t everything. The opera closes resoundingly with the entire population of Bedford Falls hymning “No matter how your story ends, no one is a failure who has friends.”

WILLIAM ALBRIGHT

Saariaho:
L’Amour de Loin
Metropolitan Opera

With its production last December of Kaija Saariaho’s *Amour de Loin* (2000), the Met made up for lost time on two important fronts. It’s the first opera composed by a woman to be staged at the Met in 113 years, and it was conducted by only the fourth woman ever to lead an opera at the Met. It was worth the wait.

It may be the strongest 21st-Century opera staged at the Met. Gerard Mortier, then intendant of the Salzburg Festival, commissioned it on hearing Saariaho’s setting of a troubadour song. It had its premiere at the Salzburg Festival the following year and was then produced at the Theatre du Chatelet and the Santa Fe Opera (reviewed Nov/Dec 2002), which shared in the co-commission. It won the Grawemeyer Award for composition in 2003 and has been staged many times since. [Also, the Canadian Opera Company’s production was reviewed in May/June 2012.—Editor]

The opera, in five acts, tells the story of Jaufré Rudel, Prince of Blaye in Aquitaine, who tires of the idle pleasures of the court and becomes a troubadour. He dreams of finding the ideal woman but fears she may not exist. A passing Pilgrim tells him that he knows of such a woman, the Countess of Tripoli, and Rudel becomes obsessed with the idea of her. When the Pilgrim, passing through Tripoli, tells the countess about her distant admirer, Clemence is at first offended but then becomes interested. When Rudel learns that Clemence knows that he sings of her, he persuades the Pilgrim to take him to Tripoli. The troubadour falls ill on the voyage and dies in the Countess’s arms. She rails against the fates and vows to join a convent.

The story is simple, but Amin Malouf’s libretto conveys poignant psychological nuance, uncovering the lovers’ doubts that an ideal love exists or is deserved, the Pilgrim’s casual manipulation, and the lovers’ ambivalence over the realization of the dream. The text is graceful but direct: layers of meaning are easy to understand, even with jumpy vocal writing. Despite the ritualized story and abstract music, the characters come across as believable human beings.

Neither minimalist nor conventionally tonal or melodic, the music creates a shimmering sound world, where timbre creates mood. With the huge orchestra fully heard only in rare moments, most of the instrumental writing is delicate, reinforced with ethereal electronic effects that seem almost imagined. The men’s and women’s choruses answer Rudel and Clemence’s inner thoughts in firm declamation; in other passages they augment the orchestral color with humming or wispy murmurs. The troubadour’s song, sung in full by the Pilgrim, supplied a central point of repose, but the overall impression was of atmosphere rather than narrative. While I found myself unmoved, I was nonetheless enchanted.

Continued on page 45
Heggie: *Moby-Dick*
Dallas Opera

Back in 2008, on learning that the Dallas Opera had commissioned composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer to turn Melville’s *Moby-Dick* into an opera as part of the opening season of the planned new opera house, my first response was, “That’s impossible.” There was, first of all, that great white whale. Not to mention all that water, all those complex characters, all that humor, and all that tragedy. Common sense said it just wouldn’t fit convincingly on the operatic stage.

The premiere in April 2010 at the new Winspear Opera House proved otherwise, of course. Scheer’s libretto perfectly distilled the most significant elements of Melville’s epic, with a twist in the final phrase to perfectly place the opera in relationship to the book. Heggie’s score proved unfailingly engaging and appropriately grand in the manner of 21st-Century eclecticism, drawing unabashedly and often thrillingly on the past. Leonard Foglia’s high-tech production worked perfectly to enhance the grandeur of the music and the intensity of the libretto.

Or were the music and libretto merely props for the special effects? In short, to what extent can—and should—the opera *Moby-Dick* exist without Foglia’s dazzling digital special effects?

In ensuing years, the reception of Heggie’s opera as far away as Adelaide and at major American companies in Washington, San Francisco, and Los Angeles (among others) boded well for the piece finding a permanent place in the repertoire. And the first repeated production by the originating company, last November in Dallas, clearly supplied a major test of the opera’s durability.

Heggie definitely ranks as a modern master of integrating the human voice, whether as solo or in chorus, with orchestra, and for producing a score (thanks to Scheer’s well-tuned sense of operatic drama) that engages the audience without let-up for three hours. The visual effects created by Foglia, in combination with the music and words, raised as many goosebumps in the performance I attended as at the premiere. It is reasonable to believe that the music and words are sufficiently strong to merit new productions when the time comes. The one drawback to the whole situation is that whatever productions are created will necessarily be costly and complex: this is a work that will always belong to major companies with major financial resources.

Dallas Opera Music Director Emmanuel Villaume took the baton for these performances (Patrick Summers had conducted the premiere) and demonstrated a steady command of the complex score as well as an imaginative take on the epic qualities at work in both words and music. Tenor Jay Hunter Morris took the role of Ahab (sung by Ben Heppner at the premiere), humanizing that character’s tragic fanaticism vocally and dramatically. Baritone Morgan Smith and tenor Stephen Costello returned to the roles of Starbuck and Greenhorn-Ishmael, also providing absolute vocal control combined with riveting dramatic presence. Soprano Jacqueline Echols, the only female on stage, in the trouser role of Pip, sang beautifully (and kept her balance while suspended in the near-drowning scene);

I’ll get that damn fish and if it’s the last thing I do!
Jay Hunter Morris as Ahab and Stephen Costello as Ishmael in Heggie’s *Moby Dick*
baritone Musa Ngqungwana convincingly sang and portrayed the gentle giant Queequeg. Six years after the premiere (a short time in operatic history), the music and words of *Moby-Dick* continue to resound. And the intertwined thrill and horror of charismatic leadership, so beautifully depicted when the audience itself is swept up in Ahab’s exultation at spotting the whale, hits home even harder—perhaps frighteningly so—for obvious reasons in the America of 2016.

WAYNE LEE GAY

**Berlioz: The Trojans**

**Lyric Opera of Chicago**

For decades, rumors of Lyric Opera of Chicago’s undertaking its first-ever production of *Les Troyens*, Berlioz’s epic music drama, floated around the grapevine but came to naught. Meanwhile, local Berlioz fanatics had to make do with concert versions by the Chicago Symphony, first under James Levine at the Ravinia Festival in 1978, later under Zubin Mehta at Orchestra Hall, where the masterpiece was split into its two parts, ‘The Taking of Troy’ in 2001 and ‘The Trojans at Carthage’ in 2002.

On November 13 *Les Troyens* arrived at last at the Lyric, plugging the last really gaping hole in the company’s repertory. It was worth the wait.

The stunning new production by British stage director Tim Albery met the inordinate requirements of Berlioz’s magnum opus with vigorous dramatic intelligence and spare but spectacular visual flair. A huge cast, strongly headed by Susan Graham as Queen Dido of Carthage, Brandon Jovanovich as the Trojan hero Aeneas, and Christine Goerke as the Trojan Princess Cassandra, along with Lyric’s stalwart orchestra and chorus, met the daunting musical challenges head-on under that seasoned Berliozan, Music Director Andrew Davis. All the principal singers but Graham were making their role debuts, and everybody met the superhuman demands of this long, complex, audacious opera, which was considered unperformable in Berlioz’s day (he wanted to have it staged at the Paris Opera).

The Albery production is entirely new and bears no relation to the much-praised *Troyens* he directed in the late 1980s and early 90s for several leading British opera companies. Lyric presented the five acts as three, and judicious musical trimming brought the running time to about five hours, including two intermissions. Albery’s aim was to integrate the many elements to create an overarching sense of historic mission and personal moral struggle. In keeping with that intention, designer Tobias Hoheisel’s handsome open set and modern costumes enforced continuity from the two acts set in besieged Troy to the three that take place in the newly built Carthage.

The towering, burned-out bowl that dominated the Trojan acts was restored to its pristine glory for the acts set in Carthage, where the retreating Trojan troops decamped and where Dido’s tragic destiny played out. This imposing structure, revolving on a turntable, framed scenes of intimate human interaction against the epic backdrop of clashing armies and ancient societies collapsing and arising anew. The lighting and projection designs, by David Finn and the two-man team known as Illuminos, reinforced the cinematic scene-painting. A large projection of a near-abstract Trojan horse moving across a ruined rampart was all that was needed to convey the catastrophe that awaited Troy.

Hoheisel’s costuming adhered to 21st-Century topicality. The Trojan troops sported guerilla fatigues, the Greek invaders dark military gear. The Carthaginians’ varied attire turned them into lower-middle-class laborers. Dido in her smartly tailored blue business suit could have been a modern CEO who had cracked the corporate glass ceiling. Aeneas traded his warrior’s regalia for loose summer wear before joining Dido in the sublime love duet ‘Nuit d’Ivresse’, which took place in a starry cyclorama of slow moving planet projections.

Berlioz strongly contrasted his two tragic heroines: Cassandra, who foresees doom for the clueless Trojans but is powerless to stop it, and the Carthaginian ruler Dido, who falls deeply in love with the conquering hero Aeneas, only to be abandoned by him as he and his followers depart for Rome to fulfill their historic destiny as founders of a new Trojan state.
A late replacement for French mezzo Sophie Koch, Graham is an experienced Dido—it was long one of her most signature roles at the Met and in other leading houses. It’s hard to imagine a more rounded portrayal, musically or dramatically. The great American mezzo was regal in Dido’s welcoming of her loyal subjects, rapturous in her love scene with Jovanovich’s ardent Aeneas, an avenging Fury when she felt herself betrayed by him, and a deeply tragic figure as she contemplated suicide. If notes at the top of her range no longer come comfortably to her, few noticed or cared. This was a performance to cherish.

The role of Aeneas is, of course, one of the most punishing tenor-killers in opera. Jovanovich was singing the Trojan general for the first time. He cut a handsome figure and sang and acted most creditably. The admirable dramatic tenor faltered a bit during the hero’s strenuous Act 5 aria, but the ringing high notes were there through the long performance, and so was the legato lyricism when needed.

Goerke—Lyric’s Brunnhilde-to-be in the three forthcoming segments of its new Wagner Ring Cycle—whetted expectations with her intensely sung Cassandra. Her full steady soprano was rich in dusky mezzo colors and carried like a laser beam across Berlioz’s huge orchestra without turning harsh. Her consonants had thrilling bite, all the better to convey her character’s deep frustration and inner torment.

The striking German mezzo Okka von der Damerau fully inhabited the role of Anna, whose duets with her sister Dido and the queen’s minister Narbal (bass-baritone Christian Van Horn, exemplary in the part) were great moments. Lucas Mechem made a hunky Chorebus, with a muscular baritone to match. Two promising lyric tenors from the Lyric apprentice program, Mingjie Lei (Iopas) and Jonathan Johnson (Hylas) lofted their tender songs exquisitely.

Davis had never conducted this masterpiece in any opera house. Like another great British Berliozan before him, Colin Davis, he proved responsive to orchestral color, musical shape, and the tension between the Gluck-like classicism of the Troy acts and the grand outpourings of romantic feeling in the Carthage acts. His responsive orchestra played wonderfully, conveying the Mediterranean languor of Dido’s realm especially well. The brass playing was full of majesty, without empty pomp.

Few grand operas rely more heavily on the quality of massed choral singing than Troyens, and director Michael Black’s exactingly prepared chorus, augmented to 94 voices for this production, gave the big crowd scenes the sonic oomph any performance of this grand choral opera must have. Helen Pickett’s choreography for the two ballets was beautifully integrated into the action, the first an orgy of torrid couplings representing the animal heat of Dido and Aeneas’s lovemaking, the second a more tender evocation of their developing relationship.

JOHN VON RHEIN

Barry: Alice’s Adventures Under Ground
(world premiere)
Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group

Amidst the parade of living composers whose works get played by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, there are a few who are singled out for more attention than others. John Adams, obviously—he’s been the LA Phil Creative Chair for new music since 2009. Louis Andriessen, Thomas Ades, and Andrew Norman also come to mind. And Gerald Barry, the 64-year-old Irish iconoclast who has been surfacing with unerring regularity every five years here with
concert performances of big, fast-paced, mind-bendingly difficult, often wildly funny pieces that he calls "operas".

Inevitably, Barry the trickster hit on the topic of "Alice In Wonderland" for his latest opus of mischief at Walt Disney Concert Hall on November 22, seizing on the original title of Lewis Carroll's book, Alice's Adventures Under Ground. We knew what we were in for right away, as the piece began with the fearless soprano Barbara Hannigan (Alice) going crazy and falling down the rabbit hole as she wailed through C-major arpeggios at top speed. From then on, Barry came at us with one zany episode after another, compressing the Alice stories so that they fit a 50-minute timespan. There was no narrative per se, just a string of surreal scenes where the words zoomed by so fast that even the projected supertitles had trouble keeping up.

Barry loves to taunt, grabbing onto a musical line or a phrase like "beautiful soup" or "eat me" and repeating it obsessively until it draws a laugh. As in previous pieces, he loves parody, coming up with a dandy send-up of blasting Britten-style brass (for me, the best part of the score) or a rollicking bit of bumpy Hindemith pastiche, fronted by the trumpets and tuba.

The "Jabberwocky" lyric was sung in Russian to a wildly dissonant backing, just to be perverse, and later in French, with razzing from the horns and trombones, and in German. For those looking for something familiar to hang on to, Barry adapted a lyric for a Beethoven 'Ode to Joy' parody, sung mostly unaccompanied by Humpty Dumpty (bass Joshua Bloom), followed by delicious cacophony, where Hannigan got a chance to wave her arms and practice her conducting (her other occupation).

Ades, who knows a kindred spirit when he sees one—he, too, occasionally likes to push his sopranos to ionospheric pitches in his operas—was the conductor, and he kept the Philharmonic New Music Group working hard. Alongside Hannigan, six other singers sang a total of 52 comic roles between them. Barry more often than not delegated Alice to the role of spectator. The singers were mezzo Allison Cook, contralto Hilary Summers (driven to the rock-bottom of her range as the White Queen), tenors Peter Tantsits and Allan Clayton, baritone Mark Stone, and Bloom.

It all made a kind of daffy sense if one hung on tightly for the ride—after all, surreal beats sweet Disney-fied "Alice" any day. Like Barry's Importance of Being Earnest, we can hope it will be recorded, for there was no way one could grasp everything Barry threw at us in one pass.

Essential to the magic was the deceptive simplicity of the production. Director Robert LePage devised an ephemeral seascape from 28,000 tiny LEDs strung across the stage in an ocean of light that undulated and changed intensity and color in to reflect the shifting moods of the music and story, precisely coordinated with the score. If the tilting girder platform from which Clemence and Rudel sang resembled an oil rig (and possibly reminded viewers of LePage's disastrous Ring Cycle machinery), the overall vision was seductive and other-worldly. Sets and costumes were by Michael Curry, lighting design by Kevin Adams, landscape image design by Edward Arnould, sound design by Mark Grey.

Of the three singers, Tamara Mumford as the Pilgrim gave the most fully realized performance. Her plummy mezzo easily managed Saariaho's distinctive vocal language, with its jumpy lines decorated with turns and trills that trail off into speech. Initially disorienting, the sing-song style became hypnotic. With subtle acting Mumford clarified the seemingly passive Pilgrim's essential agency.

Susanna Phillips deployed her luminous soprano and excellent French as Clemence, the troubadour's distant love. She sang the difficult lines with clarity and precision, though cheating the sprechgesang. Communicating the womanly emotions behind the aristocratic bearing, she gave one of the best performances I've seen from her at the Met.

Only the huge-voiced bass Eric Owens seemed miscast as the troubadour Jaufré Rudel, a role written for baritone. The sound was luxurious, but Saariaho's pointillistic style sounded uncomfortable for him and afforded us few chances to hear his rolling legatos.

In her company debut, conductor Susanna Mälkki propelled the score with energy, harnessing the power and precision of the Met Orchestra at its best. The Met chorus, seen mostly shoulders up as they bobbed in and out of the "water"; sounded terrific.

RICHARD S GINELL

L'Amour—from page 41

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SUSAN BRODIE
I am writing this first part the week of Christmas. Of course I hate Christmas and try to ignore it, but the thing about Christmas is that it is forced upon you everywhere, every day. It’s not just that people ask you what you are doing for the holidays. It’s not just the garish light displays and plastic snowmen and Santa Clauses. The worst thing about Christmas is certainly the music. It is everywhere and impossible to avoid. It’s in airports, gym, grocery stores, and of course all shops and malls. And it is worse than it ever was. There was junk Christmas music when I was a child, and my parents hated it; but now almost everything you hear is garbage. And you can’t not hear it. I feel positively persecuted by it. We classical music lovers are such nonconformists! Everyone else is misty-eyed and sentimental about those stupid songs that we hate so much. They all think we are Scrooges. I don’t care; I could never bring myself to even tolerate “Christmas” music, cards, movies, TV shows, and public sentimentality. I get downright angry about it. Why am I forced to listen to the wretched music everywhere I go for at a month or two every year? It is BAD that restaurants increasingly feel they have to blast music all the time. (Are there any silent restaurants? Tell me about them!) It is even worse when the music is “Christmas” music.

As with all music, I love the historic Christmas music. Give me Bach! Give me classic hymns and carols arranged by brilliant musicians and sung by great choirs! And I am perfectly happy to join the congregation at the cathedral late Christmas Eve—no Santa Claus, no wonderland of snow, no sentimentality. Just traditional music of great beauty and the historic words of the Bible.

But I wish I could go to a Muslim country to avoid all the rest! (I actually did one year—Egypt.) Bali might be nice: they are Buddhist and don’t do Christmas. I find the American Christmas harder to endure every year.

“News” expands to fill the space the media have given it—thus it is conveniently manufactured. I noticed when I worked in radio that a five-minute newscast came along every hour, even when nothing was happening. There was almost never five minutes of real news. The same thing happens with TV news and newspapers: they have the space to fill, and they’re certainly going to fill it, but most of it will not be real news. Celebrity publicity agents have become quite adept at filling such spaces. One survey many years ago showed that most “news” was just puffery from publicity people (including politicians, government agencies, and even corporations). What happened today to a Hollywood star is of no interest whatever to an intelligent person.

“News” also drags some things on and on. Every day during the “Iranian hostage crisis” (Carter years) there was something to remind us of it on TV newscasts—for many months. Nothing happened, of course, so it was not news at all.

It amazes me that people I thought of as intelligent tell me that they only watch television for “the news”. That is the worst thing TV does! They being brainwashed, and they will end up with a totally distorted view of the world, the city, the country. (TV is so deceptive that people routinely vote for candidates who are not only not qualified but often enemies of the very people who vote for them and will only strengthen the already strong—the rich.) People gobble up passive entertainment, but I guess they cherish the illusion that they are gaining information as painlessly as possible. It allows them to think better of themselves while they waste their time and stunt their brains.

Scientists (reported in Science Daily) tell us that the use of portable electronic devices (like smartphones) is associated with poor impulse control (such as with fat people) and “goes hand in hand with impatience and impulsivity”. This is a BAD technology that should never have been invented (like television), because so many people cannot resist it or control it, but become addicted to it and controlled by it. Yet of course that is why so many are addicted to it. Just as the sugar industry shamelessly addicted Americans to way too much sugar (telling us that it’s fats that make you fat!), so the computer industry gets rich on our slavery to these devices. Capitalism utterly supports this kind of profit-seeking. It’s what makes the whole economy work! Ethics and a sense of social responsibility have almost vanished entirely.
ClassicsOnline.com tells us they “combine extremely high-quality audio, a carefully curated catalog, and an exceptional search engine designed for classical music fans.” I have no idea what a “curated” catalog can be—and I suppose the catalog would be most of interest to classical music fans!

These sites are like libraries—but a library that charges you to read any book. You never own the music. A friend who keeps up with these things tells me that the European sites are better—but harder for an American to deal with. Remember, too, that the CD is very much alive in Europe. They never had the fiasco of Tower Records that we had (putting all the other record stores out of business and then going out of business themselves! How very American!).

I think “classical music fans” (if “fan” is short for “fanatic”, that describes most of our readers and writers) want to have a collection of favorite pieces and recordings physically present with them—at their fingertips. Their collections reflect good judgement about what is worth having—and their own taste. If they live in a house that reflects their taste, among its appointments are bookshelves and record shelves that show where their minds and ears are.

Streaming and downloads are the ways most music is sold—but not classical. Classical accounts for only 0.7 percent of streams and 1.8 percent of downloads. And the companies that try to sell that know perfectly well that classical music lovers are not thrilled with the new technology, and they offer little to appeal to them. Most downloaded or streamed music is for background; classical listeners put their music in the foreground. The most active classical audience in the USA is between the ages of 65 and 74. And they are predominantly male. Classics Online, a subscription service run by Naxos, includes at least 90 percent of available recordings. But the average user of the site is under 50 years old, so they haven’t reached the most active classical audience.

Of course, that may change with time; but one thing is clear so far: selling music to own is a declining business. The overall music business includes mostly music that is “popular”—that is, it won’t last anyway. If a person can get the latest hits online—“streaming”, downloading, or on YouTube, that is enough. But classical music is music that will not be replaced next year, next decade, next century. Its continued beauty and relevance will never be lost. The great performances will always be great.

So classical music lovers will never be content with not owning the music—any more than they can be content with whatever the radio stations are playing. We want to be able to play what we want to hear when we want to hear it—and we want to give it our full attention (not necessarily every time, but much of the time).

A bit of history that you should know.

In September 1997 Decca dismissed their entire production staff. The other Polygram labels followed. They decided to employ producers and engineers for classical recordings on a free-lance basis. From that point on there was no such thing as a DG sound, a Philips sound, or a Decca (London) sound. Engineers, producers, and places changed from recording to recording; and the quality has varied almost as much within a label as between labels.

Now almost all recordings are produced by freelancers, and that is one reason they sound pretty much alike and have little character. Another reason (along the same lines—it’s an economy) is that recordings are mostly made very quickly now, with almost no rehearsal and often without a previous performance. Often a pianist and conductor and orchestra meet for the first time at the recording session and just read their way thru the music. There is no time to develop any depth or point of view. And, add to all this, the people the companies decide to record are there because the companies think they can sell records—not because they are remarkable or outstanding in any way. Popularity governs much more of the recording industry than just the pop side.

Accountants at parent companies want everything to bring in a profit, so are unlikely to commit them to projects that are otherwise appealing musically. For example, the Takacs Quartet’s Beethoven cycle was financed more by the quartet and its friends than by the record label—and so it goes with the “big labels”. The excellence of the musicians no longer has much to do with it; it’s all a matter of how much a recording can earn, which often depends more on popularity than anything else. As a rule, there is no mass market for classical, so it is not a good financial investment if what matters is profit. Hence the big companies are not doing much classical.

VROON
ADAMS: Violin Concerto; HARRIS: Concerto
Tamsin Waley-Cohen; BBC Symphony/Andrew Litton—BBC 468—62 minutes

This excellent program brings back Roy Harris’s fascinating and moving violin concerto (1949), a work whose premiere—as reported in the liner notes—was scrapped because of discrepancies between the score and the parts. It would have been performed by Joseph Gingold. Gregory Fulkerson rediscovered the work and gave the first public performance in 1984, later recording it with the Louisville Orchestra (M/A 1988). Cast in one movement (with clear changes in tempo indicating sectional divisions), it is a sprawling and exuberant piece. Admiring Harris’s incredible gift for harmony, I particularly enjoy the beautiful chordal writing in the slow movement. I also keep returning to the short final section, which sounds to me like a series of vigorous farewell gestures in the strings with a final explosion of brass at the end.

I don’t know the Harris work, but I have a feeling the performance is the best imaginable, given the incredible account of the Adams concerto. This is one of Adams’s greatest scores and probably the last of his works that I find very gripping. It is now more than 20 years old, and all the performers play it with the perception and nuance of older music. Waley-Cohen makes all sorts of expressive slides and rubato in the first movement, where I also hear a great more of the intricate orchestral part than I have in any other recording. I still like Gidon Kremer’s lovely reading of the slow movement for Nonesuch (Sept/Oct 1996), which expresses the music’s melancholy more beautifully; but in every other instance I think Waley-Cohen’s interpretation is better. She even makes more sense than Robert McDuffie (Jan/Feb 2000) of the work’s enigmatic, O Henry style ending. I will return to this often.

HASKINS

ADOLPH: Chopin Dreams; Piano Puzzlers+
Carlo Grante, p
Naxos 559805—64 minutes

Published critics are listeners who can share their opinions more widely than other listeners. But we’re all—at least I know I am—also listeners with certain tastes and proclivities that shape our judgements. Often when I don’t like something I try to remember that someone else might like what I don’t and think about tempering what I say for such listeners.

These ideas occur to me as I listen to this; I find it disappointing more often than not. First off, to write a piano piece called Chopin’s Dreams is to my mind the height of compositional hubris. Chopin probably wrote for the piano better than any other composer: his
sense of harmony and sonority continue to surprise me some 40 years after hearing his music for the first time. Composing a piece that refers to him should mean that the composer takes his legacy very seriously and can measure up to it. Alas, Mr Adolphe, whose music I haven’t heard before, does not. The piece consists, all too often, of allusions or downright quotations of Chopin’s works that appear in extremely ham-handed and obvious ways. I find a hodgepodge of style and manner—a little neo-romanticism here, a little faux jazz there, with the whole never quite coming together and never rising above the level of somewhat superficial novelty.

There are several attractive moments—IV, in particular, almost works. But there are many other moments that seem to me slapped together, incoherent, and never profound: most egregious are the annoying II, ‘Jazzurca’; and the thoroughly ugly V, ‘Quaalude’ (which appears to riff on the G-major prelude in a slower tempo, substituting an absolutely sickening melody in the rhythms of the original): they take away whatever pleasure I have in the rest. The second major work, Seven Thoughts Considered as Music, fares better for me because at least there aren’t overt references to a particular composer (or they aren’t as obtrusive). The final piece, Piano Puzzlers, buries familiar tunes like ‘Happy Birthday’ in a more contemporary garb.

And then, reading the liner notes, I realize that pastiche is Mr Adolphe’s raison d’etre: he has for some time served as the piano puzzler on NPR’s Performance Today, writing light-hearted imitations of other composers and the puzzlers. I hate this kind of tomfoolery with every fiber of my being. It is the musical equivalent of NPR’s This American Life, where Ira Glass treats us to the endless minutiae of everyday people, the whole clothed in an anodyne, false sophistication that’s supposed to arouse sympathy but only evokes impatience and boredom. This music is too obvious, and the humorous references are so evident that they simply aren’t funny or charming. I cannot imagine how anyone who really loves and cares about music as an art can care about this stuff, though I suppose loyal NPR listeners—the ones who love Radiolab, On the Media, and Ira Glass—must count among the ones who do. I salute Carlo Grante, who plays the music very well. The recording sounds great. But I finish my time with this without the slightest desire ever to hear it again.

HASKINS

American Record Guide

ALABIEV: Trios; Piano Quintet; Violin Sonata
Beethoven Trio Bonn
AVI 853338—65:25

Alexander Alabiev (on this German release it’s spelled Alyabyev) was born in Siberia, moved to St Petersburg when he was 10 (1797) and then to Moscow in 1804. Almost all his music was written in the 18-teens, except his most famous piece, ‘The Nightingale’ (1822). From 1825 on he wrote very little, because he was under various forms of arrest. (But he had a piano in his prison cell!) Apparently he lost his temper at a card game and struck someone, who died. He was never actually convicted of murder, but he was never free again. He died in 1851.

He is the Russian Hummel. If you really like Hummel, this is very similar. No other comparison makes any sense, though the author of the Grove’s article mentions Beethoven instead!

I rather like Hummel, but in small doses—and one Hummel is enough. These are excellent performances of his chamber pieces. Both the first trio and the piano quintet seem unfinished—only an Allegro movement.

VROON

ALFYEYEV: Stabat Mater; Song of Ascents; Christmas Oratorio
Hibla Gerzmava, s; Viktor Shilovsky, bar; Nikolai Didenko, b; Moscow Sveshnikov Choral College Boys; Popov Academy Choir; Russian Philharmonic/ Vladimir Spivakov
Melodiya 2419 [2CD] 117 minutes

Again we hear the sacred choral fare of Hilari-on Alfeyev, the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan who is a priest, a prominent theologian and author, and an accomplished composer. Alfeyev’s Stabat Mater (sung in Latin) has been recorded before on a Pentatone release with the Metropolitan himself on the podium (S/O 2015). To learn more about the man and his music, you could have a look at Lindsay Koob’s discussion of his Passion of Matthew conducted by Vladimir Fedoseyev (Melodiya 2366, M/J 2016). Both releases won our approval, as this one does. In this set, Maestro Spivakov and his Russian musicians reprise the Stabat Mater and add an uplifting Psalmsfest called A Song of Ascents and Alfeyev’s full-length (70-minute) Christmas Oratorio.

The Stabat Mater is even more impressive this time around. The playing is blisteringly intense, the soprano wrings the pathos out of the text without losing her lovely tone, and the
composer's neo-baroque tips of the cap to Vivaldi and Bach are affectionate, sincere, and full of brio. So too with the ascending psalms, which begin "out of the depths" (Psalm 130) and conclude with the joyful Hallelujahs of 150.

The *Christmas Oratorio*, I have to say, is not as good. It has long, single-note recitatives from the Protodeacon to dull the action, and Melodiya's lack of texts and translations keeps us at arm's length from the proceedings. Still, there are some nice interludes (a rather chirpy 'Bogoritse Devo' and a white-hot fugue late in Part 2 for starters) to remind us of the Metropolitan's talent and taste.

Cool, clear recorded sound places everything forward. Given the inherent density of Mother Russia's musical idiom, clarity counts for a lot.

**GREENFIELD**

**AMBROSINI: Guitar Song Book**

Alberto Mesirca—Kairos 1501—75 minutes

This is a very new sound world. Claudio Ambrosini is a Venetian, born in 1948. He is what we used to call a modernist, with Bruno Maderna and Luigi Nono as his primary influences. He is no guitar specialist—indeed, the 21 works here performed have never been published.

As you’ll suspect from those two influences, much of this music is non-tonal. But that’s not the whole story. Much of it is quite tonal, at least in some passages. Most of the works are short, though a few run between 7 and 9 minutes. All of them use non-traditional means of making sounds. Articulation is often with the left hand instead of the right. Many passages have approximate pitch—the score might indicate a glissando that begins at one pitch and ends at another, but exactly how one gets there is up to the performer. There are passages taken from the Renaissance and others from modern practice. One piece, called ‘Rap’, slides the nails across the wound bass strings to imitate a scratchy LP.

Most of the passages are soft—I kept thinking of Webern’s music translated into the guitar, without his pointillistic effects. Some titles refer to classical figures: Tantalus, Priapus, Janus, even Moses. There is a funeral piece for Jimi Hendrix, though I can’t hear anything of Hendrix in it (that would be too obvious). Others refer to past forms—3 canzonas, 4 nocturnes, a chaconne. All through this set sounds strange and new commingle with flashes of the familiar—in the composer’s words, "living in the past but thinking (and composing) in the future”.

Ambrosini is fortunate to find a champion of his music in Alberto Mesirca, one of the greatest virtuosos of his generation. Much of this music seems quite challenging, but Mesirca not only has the technique but the imagination and taste to take this strange sound world and make it intelligible. I’m glad to have encountered this music, though I’m not sure how often I’ll return.

**KEATON**

**BACH, CPE: Quartets**

Linde Brunmayr-Tutz, fl; Ilia Korol, va; Wolfgang Brunner, fp—Hänssler 16016—60 minutes

If you don’t already know these three quartets from the very end of the long and productive life of Sebastian Bach’s most talented and original child, Carl Philipp Emanuel, they are a delight from beginning to end. They are not trios because the keyboard is obbligato for both the basso and the right hand; but unlike many works where the piano part is fully written out, the parts for flute and viola are not subsidiary, almost dispensable, but are entirely on the same level as the right hand. Further, not only is CPE skilled in creating athletic and compelling outer allegros (witness the flying counterpoint in the Presto which concludes H 539), but his spellbinding adagios are perhaps where he best displays his character. To fill out the program to an hour the performers include the trio with bass flute, H 588.

Other recordings of these fine works are not lacking. The premiere, at least on period instruments, was by Hogwood and company (reissued on CD, but apparently now deleted); there are also Staier and Les Adieux on DHM, and an excellent rendering by Boston’s Musical Offering from 2013 (self-produced). Brunmayr-Tutz and company are certainly competitive with all of these, with thoroughly fluent performances and idiomatic interpretations from all the players, using copies of period instruments.

**T MOORE**

**BACH, CPE: Cantata; Instrumental Pieces**

Rupert Charlesworth, t; Cafe Zimmermann Alpha 257—64 minutes

In an online interview, members of Cafe Zimmermann speak of their desire to introduce the public to more of the music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the most famous of JS Bach’s
sons. They have done so here with classy performances—crisp, clean, and sprightly.

Charlesworth has a sturdy lyric voice and sings with ardor in the solo cantata Der Frühling (9:06), a paean of joy for creation, in three short arias, and in two other short pieces.

More time is given to three exuberant three-movement instrumental works: Sinfonia in A minor for two violins; Trio Sonata in B-flat for two violins; and a concluding Sonata in D minor for two violins, viola, two flutes, two horns, and continuo.

Founded in France in 1998, Cafe Zimmermann takes its name from Gottfried Zimmermann’s coffee house in Leipzig where the Collegium Musicum would present concerts in the 18th Century. The nine members of the ensemble play with joy, energy, and precision.

This is an opportunity to hear works that look back to the Baroque and forward to the classical style of Haydn. Their playing makes about as good a case for this music as imaginable. If music of this transitional period appeals to you, you can’t go wrong with these warm and glowing performances.

Notes and texts.

R MOORE

BACH, JB: Ouvertures (4)
L’Acheron/ Francois Joubert-Caillet
Ricercar 373—76:53

Yet another of those innumerable Bachs!

This one is Johann Bernhard (1676-1749), whose life paralleled almost exactly his second cousin, Johann Sebastian (1685-1750). It can only be conjectured that they were in personal contact, but JS certainly did know the other’s music.

Not a great deal of that has survived, but herewith we have the most important bloc of his music that comes down to us. These works are in the form of the late-Baroque overture—which we nowadays call a “suite”. The four here are in G, E minor, G minor, and D, written mostly (though not totally) for strings and continuo. In format, they begin with a French-style overture and proceed through five or six movements, mostly in dance idioms.

Johann Bernhard’s treatments of the overture form are thoroughly competent, if not quite as full of imaginative touches as Telemann. But Johann Bernhard is put completely in the shade by Johann Sebastian, whose familiar four suites were composed a little later. They are quite individual in character and scoring and are full of experimental spirit. JB followed the crowd, while JS was plainly curious to see what new dimensions he could bring to this idiom.

All this seems to poor-mouth hapless JB Bach, and perhaps that is unfair: his great cousin was a genius, and he was not. So, while this program is pleasant listening, it is not exceptional (and might not even have come about without the Bach name). The performances are quite good, with 15 players reminding us that these mislabelled “orchestral” works were meant for chamber ensemble. If you are interested in the Bach family’s range, this is a worthwhile addition to the discography.

BARKER

BACH FAMILY: Music
Werner Ehrhardt, Concerto Koln; Gerald Hambitzer, hpsl
Capriccio 8007 — 73 minutes

This is a reissue of a 1988 recording. The original Capriccio release had these same six compositions, but in a different sequence.

From Johann Christian, the youngest son, we get a symphony in G minor from 1770. It sounds like Mozart’s G-minor Symphony 25, written just three years later; did the 17-year-old Mozart know it? Gerald Hambitzer plays a G-minor harpsichord concerto by Carl Philipp Emanuel. Wilhelm Friedemann, the oldest son, is represented by an Adagio and Fugue and a three-movement Sinfonia extracted from one of his cantatas. The two symphonies by Johann Christoph Friedrich (the “Buckeburg” Bach) are from his middle and late life. The manuscripts of at least a dozen other symphonies by him were destroyed in the second world war. If we may judge from these two pieces, JCF was less quirky than his brothers.

Concerto Koln plays on period instruments. All the performances sound alert, and the ensemble has an excellent blend in its string sections. The program is a fine single-disc introduction to these four composers. The booklet’s essay is minimal, saying little about the composers and nothing about the performers.

JCF’s E-flat Symphony was also recorded Burkhard Glaetzner in 1992 with modern instruments at a higher pitch and repeats in the slow movement. That performance is part of two different sets from Brilliant, each exploring more music by these four Bach sons. The 7CD set is very inexpensive and all on
modern instruments. The 10CD set, for only a slightly higher price, has five of those same discs, and the other half of it includes a few period-instrument performances.

BACH: Arias
Reinoud van Mechelen, t; A Nocte Temporis
Alpha 252—70 minutes

“Erbarme Dich” (Have Mercy) is the title of this program of tenor arias, chorale preludes for organ, and miscellaneous instrumental movements excerpted from larger works. This is Reinoud van Mechelen’s first album with A Nocte Temporis, a trio of flute, cello, and organ, which he founded. Aside from three purely instrumental works with no theological message, the theme of the program, as expressed in the notes, is “the sinner overwhelmed by the weight of his own sins, and of one yet hoping for redemption”.

This release was designed deliberately but not necessarily wisely. Mechelen sings eight arias for tenor with flute from cantatas. Three chorale preludes for organ are matched with arias.

The program begins with the tenor aria ‘Ach, ziehe die Seele mit Seilen der Liebe’ from Cantata 96, Herr Christ, der Einige Gottessohn, followed by the corresponding chorale prelude and then the surprising choice of the tenor singing the melody line of the closing chorale written for four-part chorus. This sequence concludes with another tenor recitative and aria from Cantata 82, Jesu, Der du Meine Seele.

Both tenor arias from Cantata 107, Was Willst du Dich Betrüben, are included. The first, ‘Wenn Auch Gleich aus der Hölle’, for continuo accompaniment is played with growing organ registration more forcefully than I’ve ever heard it. I presume it is intended to express Satan’s assault on the human soul. The second, ‘Drum Ich Mich ihm Ergebe’, is a serene movement expressing the believer’s confidence in God. In between these two arias is another aria from a different cantata and a chorale prelude.

The longest aria—and a very satisfying portion of the program—is ‘Wo Wird in Diesem Jammertale’ from Cantata 114, Ach, Lieben Christen, Seid Getrostan. The album concludes with a recitative and aria ‘Erbarme Dich!’ from Cantata 55, Ich Armer Mensch.

Instrumental works are between vocal selections. Flutist Anna Besson plays one movement from Bach’s only solo flute partita (S 1013), one movement from a flute sonata (S 1034), and one movement from a trio sonata (S 1039 written for two flutes but played here by one flute with the organ playing the second part using a flute stop that wondrously matches the timbre of the wooden transverse flute).

The biggest disappointment of this program is Benjamin Alard’s performance of three chorale preludes on the 1718 Silbermann organ of St Aurelia Church in Strasbourg (restored in 2015) where the program was recorded. His playing is expressive but idiosyncratic. The Orgelbüchlein setting of ‘Herr Christ, der Ein’ge Gottessohn’ is taken at an excessively fast tempo with a raucous solo stop. At the mid-point of the program he plays ‘Kyrie, Gott Heiliger Geist’ (S 671) from the Clavierübung III—which is wrongly identified in the track listing and program notes as ‘Wir Glauben All an Einen Gott’ (S 680). He takes it at a comfortable tempo, but again his registration is peculiar and he unaccountably cancels the tremolo in the solo stop on the very last note. In both of these he overemphasizes the organ’s reedy tonalities. Finally, ‘Erbarme dich Mein, O Herre Gott’ (S 721) sounds like he’s trying to get through it as fast as he can. Again his registration is unusual, though it does show off the silvery Silbermann sound.

Other than disappointing organ performances, there is a lot to like here. Mechelen’s light lyric voice is well suited to Bach, and he sings with stylish elegance. It is not a warm and sweet voice, but it is clear and well produced. The ensemble plays expressively together with good balance of voice, flute, and continuo. Their sound is vivid and at the same time warm and lovely.

If such a program of cherry-picked excerpts seems appealing, most of these pieces are performed very well here. But this is an odd program. Notes, texts, translations.

BACH: French Suites, all
Murray Perahia
DG 479 6565 [2CD] 91 minutes

This is Perahia’s first recording for Deutsche Grammophon. The switch is welcome because the sound of his recent recordings with Sony leaves me unsatisfied: the piano sounds a bit glassy and brittle. Not here, though; everything is warm, lustrous, and full-bodied.

The performances are fine, too. The French Suites are unassuming pieces—genial...
and in the same vein as the solo cello suites—and are often played by students. In the hands of someone as good as Perahia they are miniature masterpieces. His masterly understanding of the music results in a number of little details that elude other performers—for instance, some delightful emphasis of inner voices in the Allemandes from Suites 1 and 4. He also favors a more singing approach overall, and the few moments where detached playing occurs (odd places in, for instance, the Sarabande from Suite 5), it sounds so fantastic that I can almost accept it.

Some things are odd: he employs a hard-bitten style of trill in the gigue from Suite 2, almost like crushing acciacaturas, that I find ugly and distracting. But even at their least persuasive moments, these performances are far and away the best accounts of the French Suites that I’m likely to hear from a pianist. What a refreshing antidote to the too-precious Bach playing of Andras Schiff. I continue to pray that Perahia will record a WTC and more Chopin and Schumann.

HASKINS

BACH: Goldberg Variations
Mahan Esfahani, hpsi
DG 4795929—79 minutes

Bach’s Goldberg Variations is near-universally acknowledged as the summa of his keyboard music. It’s had so many interpreters over the years that for a while I found it difficult to say much about them and finally asked our editor to stop sending recordings to me. But I asked him to make an exception with this release, because I knew there’d be much to discuss.

Through his combination of intelligence, technical brilliance, and musical instincts, Mahan Esfahani has effectively called into question the harpsichord’s place in contemporary music performance; his recordings place the instrument firmly in the mainstream and away from some of the arcane and fastidious machinations indulged in by many a period instrument performer who aspires to nothing more than authenticity (and in so doing relegates musical expression to a secondary, tertiary, or even a non-existent place). With Esfahani, one becomes aware of the conviction and persuasive musical personality behind the music—as with Wanda Landowska and Glenn Gould, whose company he belongs in. This is, in short, a full-blooded, passionate, and completely human performance of the Goldberg and not to be missed.

BACH: Goldberg Variations
Aulos Quartet
MDG 903 1950—79 minutes

The Aulos Quartet is oboe, violin, tenor oboe, and cello. Did you know you needed an arrangement of the Goldberg for that combination of instruments? And not only that, arranged after the arrangement by Josef Rheinberger (for me, a talented composer with an original voice, spent, for better or worse, on music for the church). Bach’s counterpoint means that his music survives indestructibly in almost any version you care to name. My second thoughts on this one are that such a transcription is not so different from the many
arrangements of all sorts of repertoire for a quartet of wind instrument (flute, oboe, clarinet) plus string trio published in the early 19th Century, with the added advantage that the timbre of the tenor oboe helps to pick out the contrapuntal contributions in the tenor part in a way a viola would not. The performances are fine, the tempos are well chosen, the recording clear. A pleasant enough 80 minutes.

T MOORE

BACH: Goldberg Variations
Veronique Gobet, p
800-529-1696

This appears to be a private-run CD with no label or number. Gobet is Swiss, but her web site has a contact address in Bethesda MD. Her CDBaby page offers samples of this recording. Her web site says she has been performing the Goldberg Variations in the Washington DC area after making the recording. The packaging includes no booklet or remarks about the music, but only a few photos of the pianist.

Her performance sounds earnest but not competitive. She makes an attractive delicate sound in the slow variations, but sometimes plays the right hand’s part so quietly that it scarcely speaks. Variations 6 and 22 are eccentrically slow. In 7 and 16 she has trouble keeping track of the beat against the rhythms of dotted notes. She has other technical problems with the notes when the hands are interlocked or crossed: I heard stumbles in variations 5, 8, 10, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 28, and 29. The awkwardness here isn’t Bach’s fault; he did specify a two-manual harpsichord for this piece, not a single-keyboard piano, and the hands don’t have to crash together. Gobet takes no repeats. For recordings on piano, I’d recommend Derzhavina, Perahia, and all three of Zhu’s (especially her newest one).

B LEHMAN

BACH: Lute Suites
Giacomo Copiello, Victor Valisena, Michele Tedesco, Giacomo Susani, g
Stradavarius 37055—77 minute

So what sort of beast is this? The four canonical Bach Lute Suites, each played by a different young Italian guitarist? Turns out the connecting tissue is a common professor, Stefano Grondona at the Vicenza Conservatory.

I had encountered Grondona only once before, in a program of Tarrega and Llobet (J/A 2010). That may not sound like much, but his goal was nothing less than a re-examining of those two composers that found far more depth than their usual salon works might display. While his Tarrega was only partly convincing, I have not before or since found Llobet’s simple Catalan songs delivered with more richness.

And this disc demonstrates that Grondona is also a very fine teacher, because each of these suites is as fine as nearly any other performance I’ve heard. Copiello does the Suite in A minor, S 995, Bach’s transcription of his Cello Suite 5. Valisena does the Suite in E minor; Tedesco the other A minor suite, originally for lute; And Susani plays the E major, originally for violin in the same key. None of the four sound appreciably different—not unusual in Bach, where the best interpretations largely play with joy and let Bach’s beauty emerge on its own. Each of the players adds just a touch of ornamentation that always enhances, never obscures. Each has a fondness for short articulation, especially in the quicker movements, which gives a nice dancing feel.

There are other performances for those of us who constantly search for great performances of this transcendentally great music—Meng Su’s E major Suite (J/A 2017) or Jason Vieaux’s E minor (J/A 2009)—but each of these performances is technically without reproach, tasteful, and (most important) an expression of pure joy. And joy is what Bach best at expressing. Congratulations to Professor Grondona and to each of these fine soloists.

KEATON

BACH: Magnificat; KUHNAU: Wie Schön Leuchtet der Morgenstern
Johanna Winkel, Johannette Zomer, s; James Laing, ct; Zachary Wilder, t; Matthew Brook, b; Arion Baroque Orchestra/ Alexander Weimann
ATMA 2727—50 minutes

Among the first works JS Bach wrote on his appointment as Cantor of St Thomas Church in Leipzig was a festive Magnificat in E-flat. In his notes to this recording, Jacques-André Houle says that it was probably written for the Feast of the Visitation in July of 1723, but for Christmas Vespers of that year Bach added four seasonal movements that were inserted at various points. Some years later, between 1732 and 1735, Bach revised the work, transposing it to D, making some changes in instrumentation, and omitting the Christmas movements. That is the version most often heard. Here it is
performed with the Christmas inserts included and appropriately transposed. It is worth noting that Bach’s work is very similar in format and instrumentation to a Magnificat in C by Kuhnau, a work that also has four Christmas inserts with the same texts and inserted in the same places in the Magnificat text. Perhaps Bach was paying tribute to his predecessor, or was he demonstrating to the Leipzig city fathers, for whom Bach was the third choice for the job after Telemann and Graupner, that he could outplay Kuhnau at his own game?

Bach’s masterpiece is paired here with Kuhnau’s Christmas cantata Wie Schön Leuchtet der Morgenstern (How Brightly Shines the Morning Star). The opening and closing movements are based on the chorale, and the inner movements are alternating recitatives and arias plus a chorus, ‘Uns ist ein Kind Geboren’ (Unto us a child is born). The work thus embodies the ideal advanced by Erdmann Neumeister (1671-1756) that a church cantata should resemble a “piece out of an opera” in contrast with the sacred concertos of earlier generations of German composers.

These performances are sung by solo voices with an orchestra of period instruments. There is strong evidence that this repertory was originally sung one voice to a part, though many listeners may demand a more conventional choir for the choruses. I find the performances entirely convincing, with the possible exception of the two final choruses of the Bach Magnificat, where I miss the more massive choral sound. The singers themselves are vocally solid and display a keen stylistic understanding of the idiom. Alexander Weimann directs performances of great poise and elegance, though there are movements that seem rushed and driven. Perhaps the most extreme is the tenor aria ‘Deposuit’ from the Bach Magnificat. Tenor Zachary Wilder demonstrates that he is able to sing the aria at that tempo, but he shouldn’t have to. An increase in tempo does not necessarily translate into an increase in ferocity.

No single recording of a great and familiar work will ever be perfect, and opinions will differ as to performance decisions. Readers looking for a first Bach Magnificat recording could do far worse, if they find the solo voice satisfactory. Even if you have a few recordings you may wish to add this one. You will find the Kuhnau cantata a delicious bonus.

BACH: Organ Pieces

Toccatà & Fugue in D minor; Sonata 1; Piece; Schübler Chorales; Little Preludes & Fugues in E minor & C minor; chorale preludes
Signum 800—71 minutes

Preludes & Fugues in C, D, G minor; Sonata 2; Concerto in G after Ernst; Fugue in B minor after Corelli; chorale preludes
Signum 802—63 minutes

David Goode

These are the first two releases in David Goode’s project to record the complete organ works of JS Bach. The instrument is the 1976 Metzler organ at Trinity College, Cambridge. It is an organ of 3 manuals and 42 ranks of pipes that include 7 ranks from organs built for the college chapel by “Father” Bernard Smith in 1694 and 1708. Most of the great principal chorus comes from Smith’s 1708 organ. On the whole it is an instrument better suited to the works of Bach than to the accompaniment of the Anglican cathedral repertory. The acoustic is far from dry, but it is not the cavernous sound of so many large churches and cathedrals, where details of contrapuntal part writing are swallowed up in the reverberation. The clarity and warmth of these recordings is attractive.

Goode’s playing leaves a mixed impression. Sometimes his articulation is almost brittle in effect, with clipped phrases and a reluctance to allow the more rhetorical passages the space to speak. I found that to be the case in the famous Toccatà and Fugue in D minor that opens Volume 1. The detached articulation in ‘Meine Seele Erhebt den Herren’ from the Schübler Chorales interferes with the coherent flow of the phrases. In places where Bach invokes the stilus phantasticus of his North German forebears, as in the Preludes and Fugues in D and G minor ($532+535), I find the essential rhetorical character of the music miscalculated so that the passages tend to sound fitful and awkward. To his credit, Goode deftly conveys the chamber music quality of the trio sonatas with good pacing and registrations that allow the lightness and transparency of the music to shine forth. The acoustical properties of the chapel stand him in good stead here, as do the attractive and refined tones of the organ’s quieter registers. This is also true of the concerto after Duke Johann Ernst, though there the textures are fuller and the registrations appropriately heftier. Goode freely adds ornaments to the music, but I find them contrived and mostly annoying.
Each of these discs presents a cross section of Bach’s organ works, larger free works combined with the trio sonatas, the concerto transcription, the one-off Pièce d’Orgue, and items from the miscellaneous chorale preludes. The Schübler Chorales are presented as a group in their published order. Each program is thus a Bach recital drawing on various styles and genres.

Would this be a good set for readers to collect? It certainly has much to recommend it, but I would advise anyone to sample it if possible before committing to purchase. Elements that are delightful to one listener may rub another the wrong way. Of recent Bach sets, I am more attracted to Margaret Phillips (Regent) and Olivier Vernet (Ligia). And both the digital and pre-digital recordings by Marie-Claire Alain are available as boxed sets (Erato).

David Goode is currently organist at Eton College.

\[56\]

\begin{center}
\textbf{BACH: Partitas, all}  
Jory Vinikour, hpsi
\end{center}

\textbf{Sono Luminus 92209 [3CD] 154 minutes}

Bach’s Partitas are probably the most forward-thinking of his harpsichord pieces. The \textit{WTC}, beautiful and perfect as it is, seems to belong to an earlier time-that-never-really-was, and the Goldberg Variations and \textit{Art of Fugue} to some future-that-has-yet-to-come. (The other suites fit their time perfectly.) In the Partitas Bach seemed to be thinking of an altogether new way of playing the keyboard that harmonized with the turn toward greater subjective expression, and he created that world by presenting, as usual, an encyclopedic array of formal types through which this new expressivity could be channeled. If played on the harpsichord, the only appropriate one is a large, two-manual concert instrument. Christoph Wolff is really incorrect when he says that the partitas are meant for a one-manual instrument—I presume he says that because one is not explicitly called for, but a harpsichordist wouldn’t need to be told.) I wouldn’t be surprised if Bach considered them music for a piano that existed only in his imagination.

Needless to say, there’s no shortage of fine harpsichord recordings of them, and not one is perfect. (There’s no perfect \textit{Messiah} or Mass in B minor either, for that matter.) This release comes closer than many. Jory Vinikour has technique sufficient to play these pieces beautifully. In many movements he takes a fresh look at the music and its notation, often coming up with very imaginative ways to approach them so as to give the pieces more personality and expressive range than we are accustomed to. A few examples must suffice. The Praeludium from Partita 1 and Courante from Partita 2 have a few 32nd note passages in them that most—probably all—performers render with cruel precision. Vinikour treats many of them rather like ornaments that merely float above the more metrically anchored parts of the texture. In both movements the effect is of measured freedom—something that might well recall the improvisatory style of Bach himself; and the Courante also takes on an aristocratic and very French elegance that it seldom has.

I always listen carefully to the Allemandes on any performance of these works, and Vinikour gives each one its due, making all six sound very different and maintaining a kind of lyrical poise and nuance that’s just right. The Allemandes from Partitas 1, 2, and 4 are perfect—I’ve heard none better and can imagine none better. The one from No. 3 is fine, but here my sympathies lie more with Rousset’s more French-inflected approach (Oiseau-Lyre, Sept/Oct 1994); the one from No. 6 could be a little more incisive, and I find unpersuasive the decision to play the 32nd notes as triplets in 5.

I continue to be amazed by his fascinating solution for the strange gigue from Partita 6. The time signature for this piece is a very old one, a circle with a vertical line dividing it: it looks like it should be played as a duple-meter piece, though many performers (including Rousset) perform it in triple time. Vinikour seems to follow suit for a bit, but I realized that he sometimes nudges the triple-divisions audibly toward duple ones—a kind of reverse \textit{notes inégales}. That’s the first time I’ve ever heard the gigue done that way, and I’ve been listening to this music for well over 30 years. It’s not simply contrarianism: the result is thoroughly musical and expressive. And there are many other moments where Vinikour is just as imaginative but still musical. In short, his performance is one of the most refreshing I’ve heard in quite a while—the kind I’d like to play for today’s famous pianists, though I’d probably have to sit down with them and help them understand what they’re hearing.

The sound is first-rate, and the two-manual instrument by Thomas and Barbara Wolf (modeled after a single-manual Vater) is perfect for the job.

\[\text{HASKINS}\]
**BACH:** Partitas, all
Charles Owen, p
Avie 2366 [2CD] 142 minutes

Charles Owen, professor of piano at my alma mater, The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, studied with Irina Zaritskaya, Imogen Cooper, and Valeria Szervanszky. He is a fine pianist but I cannot really sympathize with his conception of Bach’s music and its interpretation, which usually is too rhythmically and expressively straitjacketed, has too light a tone (and little tonal contrast), and emphasizes the perennial bad penny of almost ubiquitous detached bass lines. Some examples that demonstrate these problems can be found in the fugal section of Partita 6’s opening movement (metronomic trills, detached bass, very little rhythmic give and take); the tendency toward constant detached playing also plagues the second and third sections of Partita 2’s Sinfonia.

Nor do I much care for the sound, which attempts to suggest a concert-like acoustic and only makes the interpretations seem more emotionally remote. For the Partitas on piano, I prefer by far Igor Levit on Sony (Jan/Feb 2015) and Sergey Schepkin on Steinway (Nov/Dec 2016).

**HASKINS**

**BACH:** Violin Concerto 1; 2-Violin Concerto; Toccata & Fugue; Gavotte; Air; Chaconne; BACH,JC: Viola Concerto
Nemanja Radulovic, v, va; Tijana Milosevic, v; Double Sens; Les Trilles du Diable
DG 4795933—63 minutes

Nemanja Radulovic is a Serbian violinist whom I have heard before. I reviewed his recording of works for solo violin in 2006 (Sept/Oct) and was very impressed, especially by his Ysaye. When I heard his recording of Vivaldi’s Four Seasons, again I liked it very much (May/June 2012).

Bach’s Concerto for two violins has some very good counterpoint that was illumined in a masterly way by Amandine Beyer (March/April 2015). Radulovic, who apparently leads the orchestra along with playing the first solo part, doesn’t pay as much attention to the counterpart as Beyer does, but the orchestra sounds fine and plays with enthusiasm. Radulovic has plenty of zest and personality. Sometimes the extra care that he lavishes on his part is quite obvious. Like many others, he interprets the Vivace tempo marking of I to mean faster than Allegro, though, as Don Vroon has pointed out, it should be a bit slower. The famous Toccata and Fugue in D minor is here arranged by Aleksandar Sedlar for violin and orchestra. Sedlar takes many liberties with the work, and the arrangement is glitzy. The little Gavotte from Partita 3 for solo violin follows this. The effect of moving from the grandiose organ masterpiece to a short dance for solo violin is that the Gavotte sounds cute. I’m sure this was very conscious programming.

Violin Concerto 1 is played beautifully and sensitively, again with Radulovic paying more attention to his own part than to the orchestra. Again a mistake is made with tempo, this time in the Allegro Assai finale. Allegro Assai originally meant somewhat fast—fast enough, not very fast, which is how it is played here. The Air from the Orchestral Suite 3 is here arranged for solo violin and orchestra by Sedlar.

The last work by the elder Bach is the famous Chaconne from the Solo Violin Partita 2. Radulovic made the unfortunate decision to play this in an arrangement for violin and orchestra, again by Sedlar. The Chaconne explores the range of emotions like few compositions ever have, and to come off right it must be played with absolute sincerity. It is not here. It is sensational and superficial. I grant that Radulovic is a superb, charismatic violinist with a powerful personality and tremendous technique, but Bach is one of those composers I expect to hear played with the highest level of artistry, which requires that the performer plumb his own emotional depths and reveal what he finds to the listener. This was obviously programmed as a sort of display for people who aren’t really familiar with classical music and don’t understand art that is not about surface.

There is also a viola concerto that was wrongly attributed to Johann Christian Bach in the past but is now believed to be the work of the French violinist Henri Casadesus (1879-1947). It is included here as a work by JC Bach “reconstructed” by Casadesus. Listening to it, I get the impression, especially in the slow movement, that it is not an authentic 18th-Century work. I still enjoy it, and Radulovic is as impressive and polished a violinist as he is a violinist.

The violin was made in 1843 by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume.

**MAGIL**
BACH: Well-Tempered Clavier
Daniele Boccaccio, org
Brilliant 95157 [4CD] 266 minutes

The performance is Apollonian: once each piece starts with a given tempo and profile of articulation, it goes all the way to the end with no surprises or risks along the way. The tempos tend to be fast, and Daniele Boccaccio’s basic touch is non-legato. Such a consistent and objective delivery is impressive, but I’d like to hear him find more interesting events to underline along the way, projecting more of a sense that each piece has somewhere to go. Each time I have listened to this, I have wished that he’d found more places to slur two or three notes together in the longer phrases, to emphasize that some of Bach’s notes have functions different from others. I understand that some listeners might want exactly what this offers: a demonstration of reliable dexterity, and a low-cost way to get all 48 of these preludes and fugues played very well on organ. The tonal quality is beautiful, and the recording is clear.

Boccaccio plays an organ in Padua, built in 2006 by Francesco Zanin. It has two manuals and pedal, 25 stops. He says in the booklet essay: “I tried to make the performance as varied as possible from the tonal point of view, merging together all the available colours of the organ stops, according to the technical and stylistic suggestions of the time.” He does that well, though his registrations are conservative; he has not given us anything outlandish (which Bach himself was reputed to have done at the organ, setting up tonal combinations that surprised other musicians as supposedly unworkable). The music never sounds odd, humorous, or flippanant. It comes across as serious business.

The B-flat Prelude of Book 1 is big and exciting. The B-flat minor Prelude and Fugue are fast and loud, the opposite of the sorrowful and introspектив way I prefer them. The unmarked first section of the E-minor Prelude is remarkably fast, and that approach works well: its Presto second section is more a change of musical character (and Boccaccio’s registration) than a change of tempo. The most controversial interpretation in this book is the C-sharp minor Prelude, which Boccaccio renders with a consistent long-short swing. He makes it sound mechanical and pedantic, rather than gracefully lilting. Why single out only this piece for a pseudo-French delivery?

In Book 2 the D major Prelude is bright and jaunty, making a compelling case for playing this fanfare-like music on the organ. The D minor Fugue and B-flat minor Fugue of this book work very well, too. Boccaccio’s frequent manual changes in the E-flat Prelude seem too complicated for such a simple-textured and short piece. With an opposite approach to the B-flat Prelude, he resists any urges to change registrations and stays with light-toned flute stops for more than eight minutes (with all the repeats).

Readers who don’t care much about intonation details may skip the rest of this review—my pedantic rant. The organ is tuned in “Werckmeister III” temperament, from a 1691 publication. In simplest terms, this temperament makes the music sound spicy or exotic in the keys farthest from C major and D minor. Every scale sounds melodically and harmonically different from every other. Major-key music with fewer than three sharps or flats in the key signature sounds mostly OK, but minor-key music gets quickly thorny. Bach’s widely-modulating music stretches far beyond what this temperament can handle—in every direction. The temperament does sound less obtrusive here on organ than it does on harpsichords. The ears can become desensitized to it over several hours of listening. Still, in this recording the B-major Fugue of Book 1 hurts my head, with the combination of the reed stops and the harsh intervals. The C-sharp major compositions in both books are too far out of tune to enjoy, and the tone and articulation remind me of calliope music.

For a historical case, I disagree with the thin and selective premises of Boccaccio’s tuning argument as printed in the booklet. The argument repeats glib assumptions typical of the 1970s and ignores all evidence to the contrary, along with the most recent 40 years of research in this field. It especially ignores what Bach’s music does in these books, requiring 27 differently-named notes: from E-double-flat to D-double-sharp. As is easily demonstrated both in practice at a harpsichord and mathematically, this temperament makes the notes in some of the sharp-key scales palatable, but does badly with music written in flats. Werckmeister himself didn’t present it in any direct practical terms (to set this up directly by ear at a keyboard instrument), but offered only mathematical calculations to prepare a monochord. Nor did he call it “III,” a labeling shortcut that stemmed from early 20th Century musicology. He abandoned this melodically-lumpy scheme in his later publications, in
favor of other temperaments that handle all the scales more smoothly.

Why would Bach ever promote a rough-sounding speculative method, one that was already 30 years out of date when he started compiling these books? For a practicing expert who knows how to tune harpsichords and clavichords by ear, it doesn’t take longer to tune a musically-refined temperament than a crude one. Bach had already done at least 20 years of regular harpsichord maintenance when he assembled the first of these books at age 37, and (as reported by one of his sons) it never took him more than 15 minutes to tune an entire harpsichord (more than 50 strings). Bach’s expertise was the control of sound in all aspects of his profession. He had direct physical control of intonation on every instrument he played, except organs, and there is no record that he ever played on any organ tuned this way. So, it’s preposterous to hitch this particular Werckmeister relic to Bach’s music, except as a “what-if” experiment on bizarre premises.

Many of Boccaccio’s tempos are fast and articulations short. It’s hard for me to avoid the impression that he’s blasting through the music and not giving the farthest out-of-tune intervals time to speak their presence. Whether intentionally by him, or not, this recording would be a great way to gaslight people into ignoring everything that’s musically and historically wrong with Werckmeister III. The fast tempos are good for the long phrases, in the conception of this interpretation, and the slick performance is attractive in its own way.

Bartok: Piano Pieces
Romanian Folk Dances; 14 Bagatelles; Allegro Barbaro; Hungarian Peasant Songs; Mikrokosmos 5
Cedric Tiberghien—Hyperion 68133 — 73 mins

I reviewed Tiberghien’s previous Bartok recording (Hyperion 68123; S/O 2016), praising his rhythmically driven and delicately phrased approach to the Mikrokosmos and Bartok’s Out of Doors Suite, some of my favorite works. A high point here is Book 5 of the pedagogically important Mikrokosmos. People may find these works unapproachable or mere tools for technique for children, but Tiberghien offers us glimpses of expression in these small gems. He infuses these works with a sense of fun. The ‘Allegro Barbaro’ has an incredible range of sound. He is one of my favorite Bartok interpreters.

Beer: Polish Wedding
Martina Ruping (Jaděra), Susanne Bernhard (Suza), Florence Losseau (Stasi), Nikolai Schukoff (Count Zagorsky); Munich Radio/ Ulf Schirmer
CPO 555059 [2CD] 101 minutes

Joseph Beer was one of a number of late-period German-language operetta composers who continued to write into the 1930s after Lehar’s last “silver-age” operetta, Giuditta (1934). Beer, who at age 24 had a previous success with Der Prinz von Schirás, premiered in Zurich owing to Beer’s Jewish background. Die Polnische Hochzeit (The Polish Wedding) (1937) also required a premiere in Zurich and although it went over well, it had a short life-span owing to
the Nazi domination of Europe. Beer escaped to Nice, where he was able to survive the War. *Die Polnische Hochzeit* was not performed again until it was reconstructed in 2012.

Like Abraham’s *Victoria and her Hussar* (1930) also reviewed in this issue, Beer’s show is more musical comedy or singspiel than operetta, and the many secondary characters are far more interesting than the primary noble characters. The emphasis is on modern songs and dances (two-steps, Charleston) along with the expected waltzes and big production numbers that mimic 1930s American movie musicals. There are some beautiful solos and duets for opera-trained voices, but most of the up-beat songs don’t require it.

I had a difficult time following the very confusing plot, which has something to do with Polish nobility and peasantry during Poland’s occupation by Czarist Russia. After several misunderstandings all of the many couples are properly sorted out and the *Polish Wedding* takes place. This 2015 Munich performance is divided into several scenes that don’t necessarily flow into one another. There are dialog sequences to help bridge the gaps, but it’s difficult to tell whether the performance or recording is complete. As there is no libretto, the only guide is the scene-by-scene scenario in the German and English booklet. The booklet includes some excellent background information on Beer and German theater of the period.

My suggestion is to forget the plot and enjoy the impressive and highly entertaining score. In the operetta canon, this is a true musical find. There are beautiful love songs, lively dances and choruses, and snappy comedy numbers that will not only raise your spirits but will require immediate replay. The performances are effervescent, and you can sense that the cast and audience is having a good time. All the performers in the very large cast are excellent. The sound is very good.

**FISCH**

**BEETHOVEN: Folk Song Settings & Variations**

Linda Tsatsanis, s; Ingrid Matthews, v; Nathan Whittaker, vc; Byron Shenkman, p
Centaur 3497—66 minutes

George Thomson published many British folk songs as arranged for violin, cello, and piano by leading musicians of his time, particularly Haydn, and intended to be easy enough for amateurs to perform. When Thompson approached Beethoven for this task, Beethoven, who did not know English, took it very seriously and insisted that Thompson explain the meaning of the texts to him. Beethoven’s results did not entirely please Thompson, who complained that these settings were more challenging than he wanted and too difficult for amateurs. Beethoven called his works compositions rather than settings, implying that they were not simple rustic accompaniments but works deserving serious attention.

Groups of these songs alternate with piano pieces in this enjoyable collection of lesser-known works. Three of Beethoven’s 25 Scottish Songs are followed by the longest work of the program: the Variations on ‘See the Conqu’ring Hero Comes’ (12 minutes) and the ‘Rule Britannia’ Variations. Three of his 26 Welsh Songs are followed by the ‘God Save the King’ Variations and 6 National Airs with Variations. The program concludes with five Irish songs drawn from three collections.

The notes tell little about this music but much about the piano used for this recording—a 1799 Joseph Kirckman fortepiano restored in 2011. The instrument sounds terrific, and Shenkman plays vividly in these variations. Tsatsanis is a light-voiced singer with a bright sound, well-suited to these songs.

If you’d like to hear more of Beethoven’s folk song arrangements you can get a 6 CD set of them all (Brilliant 94925) for just a little more than the cost of this one disc. And it’s quite good.

Notes and texts.

R MOORE

**BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonatas 7, 14, 15**

Jane Coop—Skylark 1601—58 minutes

This release, called “Beethoven: The Young Innovator”, presents three well-known sonatas from the composer’s earlier years. Jane Coop (b. 1950) is an experienced Canadian artist with many recordings to her credit. She offers her own liner notes, where she attempts to justify the selection of works, though the main criterion seems to have been that they are favorites of hers.

The performances of Nos. 7 (D major, Op. 10:3) and 15 (D major, Op. 28) are crisp and engaging, though without any outstanding elements that would elevate them above other fine recordings. An occasional hardness of touch is notable in loud passages. No. 14 (C-sharp minor, Op. 27:2) is not as good. Although Coop explains her choice of half-pedaling in 1,
I dislike the resulting blurring of harmonies. And the “passionate urgency” she is trying to achieve in III is not really evident. One contributing factor is that this sonata seems to have been recorded with less clarity and at a lower level than the others.

So, this will mainly appeal to admirers of the artist and to people who want this combination of sonatas. It comes in a cardboard sleeve with a thin insert, and the biographical sketch is commendably brief and modest.

**BEETHOVEN:** Piano Sonatas 22-32
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet
Chandos 10925 [3CD] 212 minutes

This is the third and final installment in Bavouzet’s chronological recording of all Beethoven sonatas. I have not heard the two previous volumes, which have been reviewed in ARG by Mark Koldys (May/June 2012) and Sang Woo Kang (Sept/Oct 2014); but I am familiar with the artist, having heard him play Debussy, Ravel, Massenet, Pierné, Prokofiev, and Liszt on recordings and on BBC Radio 3. His playing has always struck me as clean but rather faceless, so I did not have high expectations for this release.

My expectations were confirmed. Bavouzet’s style of playing is extremely consistent. It is clean, fleet, well articulated, and hard-edged. There is no warmth, the expression is superficial, and the performances leave me unmoved. I am not alone with these impressions. Mr Koldys thought the early sonatas were “gorgeously played but not especially gripping.” Mr Kang considered the middle sonatas “impressive” but “too effortless.”

So, what is the point of issuing yet another set of all the Beethoven sonatas? Bavouzet is aware of the problem and addresses it in the booklet. He argues that new recordings will enable listeners “to examine how our views of a particular body of work have evolved across time” and “to associate the new insights of living musicians with this immortal repertoire”. These arguments make sense only if the recording does offer “new insights” or reflect an evolution of views. This one does neither.

As always with Chandos, the production is excellent, with good if somewhat clinical sound and extensive notes in three languages, in part by Bavouzet himself. In his writings he comes across as thoughtful and modest. Too bad the performances are stillborn.

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**BEETHOVEN:** Symphonies 1+4
London Philharmonic/ Kurt Masur
LPO 93—57 minutes

Masur, who died a little over a year ago at 88 from complications of Parkinson’s disease, led the Gewandhaus Orchestra for more than a quarter century before taking the post at the NY Philharmonic; his term in New York ended (with some acrimony) in 2002. These recordings were made shortly afterward, in 2004, at Royal Festival Hall concerts.

Both symphonies are quite well done, fast and crisp, with excellent playing, particularly in the finales. The performances never sound safe or robotic, and nothing will strike you as careful, programmed, or automatic. Masur brings excitement and passion to music that many orchestras and conductors play routinely. One can point to small imperfections, but they are of little importance. (We should remember that great performances are about much more than the avoidance of error.) In both symphonies I prefer the slow movements a little broader, but I will concede that slower, more romantic playing would probably mess up Masur’s conceptions of both pieces.

Masur recorded the Beethoven Nine in the 1970s, early in his Gewandhaus career. These were greatly appreciated by John McKelvey (J/F 1997) for clarity and attention to detail. But he also pointed to occasional lack of warmth and nuance—shortcomings noticed also by Kurt Moses (J/F 1991). I understand and do not quarrel with their views. Masur’s Beethoven is not distinctive or personal. It is, however, very well played and exciting, worthy of shelf space, if not at the top of the heap.

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**BEETHOVEN:** Symphony 9
Westminster Choir; Vienna Chamber Orchestra/ Mark Laycock—WCC 1610—73 minutes

This 2016 release was the result of a performance at Richardson Auditorium, Princeton University, celebrating the 100th birthday (Jan. 6, 2014) of the late Maecenas and collector William H. Scheide, who passed away later that year. The instrumental contributions of the strings and winds of the Vienna Chamber Orchestra are quite professional; the sound of the chorus is on the superhuman level one would expect from the Westminster Choir College. There are some major ensemble problems in portions of the fourth movement (the soprano soloist is considerably behind
between letters D and E; the surprising move to F—"vor Gott"—is sloppy); these are disturbing enough to disqualify this. To compensate, the final Prestissimo is fast, astounding, breathtaking. A document of a moment, but not for eternity.

**BEETHOVEN: Violin Concerto; BRUCH: Concerto I**

Salvatore Accardo; Leipzig Gewandhaus/ Kurt Masur

Pentatone 5186 237 [SACD] 71 minutes

These performances, recorded by Philips in quadraphonic sound in 1977, have been remastered in SACD format, where they sound splendid. While no one is likely to object to the sonics, Accardo’s interpretation of the Beethoven concerto will probably divide the room. His playing, elegant and rich, is very lyrical and always beautiful; but tempos in the first two movements are leisurely in the extreme. It is wonderful to hear his tiny inflections and musical turns of phrase, but after awhile you realize qualities that are missing: drama, intensity, virtuosity, fire. I will concede that he (and Masur) have a consistent conception, and we should be grateful they didn’t just run through the piece without much thought. If this relaxed style appeals to you, you’ll like the recording; it is quite well played. Masur, whose Beethoven is generally on the brisk side, seems wholly in agreement with his soloist, and the orchestra sounds great. Accardo, by the way, plays cadenzas that I don’t recall hearing before; they are, unfortunately, not identified in the notes.

The Bruch is more conventional. I note that our Editor didn’t care for this performance (J/A 1998), and I agree that the piece often has more feeling and sentiment with other players. I did, nonetheless, find it nicely lyrical and enjoyable, a tribute that probably should go primarily to the composer. It is a tough piece to kill.

This is an interesting release, even if we end up rejecting it. The Beethoven reminds me of Barbirolli’s *Eroica*, another slow performance that is probably "wrong," even as it makes us re-think a work we have known so well and for so long.

**BELLA: Festive Mass; Deus, Meus ad te Luce Vigilo; Heil’ge Nacht; Weinacht auf dem Friedhof; Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden; Hungarian Concert Piece**

Eva Suskova, Lucie Hilscherova, Juraj Holly, Tomas Selc; Brno Philharmonic Choir; Janacek Philharmonic/ David Porcelijn

Phaedra 292033—67 minutes

This is billed as *A Tribute to Jan Levoslav Bella*, and it’s certainly that. Bella (1843-1936) was a Slovak organist, conductor, and composer—and, for a time, was also an ordained Catholic priest. I say for a time because in his late 30s he left the church, got married, and converted to Protestantism. (How’s that for a mid-life crisis?) In fact, this *Festive Mass* won a major competition for sacred music, but was scotched by the Catholic hierarchy when it was found that the composer (who submitted it anonymously) had left the church.

‘Deus, Meus,’ an ‘Offertorium for Soprano and Orchestra,’ also dates from Bella’s Catholic years. The rest of this repertoire was crafted in his years as a Protestant musician settled in Transylvanian Sibiu, a city a couple hundred kilometers from Bucharest in what is now Romania. The program notes describe his ‘Heil’ge Nacht’ (an aria for bass) and ‘Weinacht auf dem Friedhof’ for soprano solo as rooted in both religion and folk-art. The latter was composed in memory of Bella’s 7-year-old daughter, who died of scarlet fever. (Translations are not supplied, which is a shame.) *Lobet den Herrn*, a brief Mendelssohn-like *Cantata for Epiphany* for solo soprano and bass, choir, and orchestra, was written in Sibiu in 1884. Bella’s 10-minute Konzertstuck is the one instrumental work on the program. (It’s also the least interesting.)

There are things to admire about Bella’s writing. In his 26-minute Mass, the centerpiece of the program, the liturgy plays off a plush orchestral backdrop reminiscent of Brahms and Dvorak. (It’s beautifully recorded as well.) The solo writing for the soprano is lovely, with the flutes and clarinets cuddling the melodies as they ascend. (Her voice matches the instruments beautifully.) Harmonies are rich, and there’s no mistaking Bella’s wonder at God’s glory and the staunchness of his faith. The choir and orchestra are top-notch and are caught in excellent sound by the engineers. But what you also might notice is the episodic nature of the writing, which can keep individual interludes set off from the rest. Portions of the Mass seem to end...
in media res, a problem exacerbated by close tracking that doesn’t always let the old music clear before the new music starts. The bass aria is another work that ends without coming full circle; and while the fellow sings attractively, I find him too light for the heavy lifting the composer requires. So while there are good times to be had in becoming acquainted with Jan Leivoslav Bella, I don’t think his music and I are headed for a long-term relationship.

GREENFIELD

**Berlioz: Romeo & Juliet**

Katiya Dragojevic, mz; Andrew Staples, t; Alastair Miles, b; Swedish Radio Symphony/ Robin Ticciati—Linn 521 [2CD] 94 minutes

Berlioz’s *Romeo et Juliette* is numbered among his symphonies—the composer called it a “dramatic symphony”—but it’s hardly a symphony by any conventional definition. Nor is it an oratorio or an opera. The plot of Shakespeare’s play is sort of there, mostly related by choral narrative, even if the text, written by Emile Deschamps, has no Shakespearean lines at all. Berlioz included three soloists, who represent minor characters (Mercutio, Friar Laurence) with a contralto narrator. The ill-fated lovers are represented by the orchestra, and the double chorus becomes the warring families. In short it’s hard to say what this piece is. To me it seems like a sure recipe for failure, but somehow the creativity and enthusiasm of Berlioz carry the day. In its way it is a fine piece, whatever the genre.

Robin Ticciati, still in his early 30s, already has three Berlioz recordings to his credit, and he shows here again that he is a young conductor to watch. He whips up lots of enthusiasm in the Introduction and the ball scene, and the vocal scherzetto is taken at top speed. The Radio Symphony has fine brass players and sounds very good, despite minimal string vibrato. The Choir is likewise first rate, lovely in tone and large enough to make the end of the piece convincing. The soloists are all very good. Dragojevic has a lovely, rich sound, but unfortunately not a great deal to do. Staples’s lean, fairly light tenor voice is well cast for his tricky, swift passage work. Miles has some gruffness in his voice, but this quality gives him the gravity and authority needed for Friar Laurence’s long solo at the end of the work.

I would be happy to live with this recording, but if I were shopping anew, I would try to get one of the old Munch recordings, either the monaural or the stereo. Ticciati’s recording includes good notes and text with translation, but it comes at full price for two CDs that average 47 minutes per disc.

**Borrewijk-Roepman: Chamber Pieces; Songs**

Irene Maessen, s; Jose Scholte, a; Ursula Schoch, v; Marcel Worms, p

Zefir 9648—70 minutes

One of the pleasures of writing for American Record Guide is hearing some music for the first time. Such is the case here. I knew of Johanna Borrewijk-Roepman, but this is the first disc devoted to her music I’ve heard. We are treated to several of her solo piano pieces, a sonata for violin and piano, and a number of her songs in three languages (German, Dutch, and English). The notes are very informative and explain the context of the selections.

Johanna Borrewijk-Roepman (Rotterdam, 1892–The Hague, 1971) composed music for piano, small ensembles, full orchestra, choir, and carillon. She was not only versatile and talented, but also self-willed and original. She largely taught herself to compose and, by the end of the 1930s, began to make a name for herself. Until the 1950s her compositions were performed both nationally and internationally.

The first track is one of her later compositions, ‘Debout, eveille-toi!’ (1953). It is a moody piece, full of color and contrasts, that should be heard more often. Another piano piece, Impromptu (1960), was the result of a commission from the Government Office of Education, Arts, and Sciences. In contrast to the earlier work, this “improvisation” is dramatic and takes the listener through a variety of emotions. The Violin Sonata (1923) is the earliest piece here. In preparation for its composition, she consulted music theory treatises and dedicated it to the violinist Jan Deggeler who, as it turns out, did not give the first performance.

Borrewijk-Roepman’s settings of some of AA Milne’s poems (1948) are charming and picturesque, yet there is a wistful undertone that seems to yearn for happier times. Her settings of some German poems by Otto Bierbaum display her versatility. The poetry itself is shaded with religious subtexts. She later reworked these pieces for soprano and orchestra (one would like to hear those some time).

The performers here are all more than adequate. In particular, I enjoyed Marcel Worms’s musicality and the colors he brings to
Bordewijk-Roepman's piano writing. It would be wonderful if this recital inspired other singers and instrumentalists to investigate this composer's work. She has been neglected for far too long. Excellent sound. Original language texts are supplied, but no translations.

REYNOLDS

BORUP-JORGENSEN: Piano Pieces
Erik Kaltoft
OUR 6220616—66 minutes

As pianist Erik Kaltoft observes in his short introductory note for this program, the Danish composer Axel Borup-Jorgensen (1924-2012) included the piano prominently in many of his works, but wrote comparatively little solo composer's work. She has been neglected for too long. Excellent sound. Original language texts are supplied, but no translations.

REYNOLDS

BOYNE: Piano Concerto;
HILL: Concerto; Sonata
Piers Lane; Adelaide Symphony/ Johannes Fritzsch—Hyperion 68135—81 minutes

Alfred Hill (1869-1960) was the unofficial Grand Old Man of Australian music. Born in Melbourne, he got a good German education and even played violin in the Gewandhaus Orchestra. He composed in all the major classical genres—concertos, overtures, symphonies, and tone poems—as well as chamber music. This is another entry in Hyperion's catalog of romantic piano concertos. Dating from 1941, the concerto is an orchestration of Hill's A major Sonata included here. I is titled 'The Question' and builds from a motif in that rhetorical form. It's thoughtful music, at first relaxed, but then with some Hollywood flair. (That's a compliment.) II is a very brief scherzo. III, titled Nocturne, is a pleasing tribute to Chopin. IV opens with a fugato—in the concerto the first entry is on the bassoon. A descending third (cuckoo call) is a key element, the music playing off from it and extending it into several variations. The finale, especially in its concerto dress, is grandiose. An interesting aspect of the Sonata (1920) is that its rhetorical conflicts are more perceptible in the original. Orchestration for the concerto, some of these become integrated into the coloring. The general language is late 19th Century, with several good tunes in both variants.

George Frederick Boyle (1886-1948) was from Sydney. Five years' study with Busoni kicked off a good career in the US as an instructor at Peabody, Curtis, and Juilliard. His concerto (1911) starts with a mysterious treading introduction, which becomes more forceful. The movement makes fascinating contrasts of color—such as the piano in highest register playing off the lower register of the orchestra. II after a hesitant beginning develops more of both a dialog between the soloist and orchestra as well and a soliloquy for the soloist. The movement works up to a strong peak. The finale begins with a martial tune in the orchestra, then rounds off on the piano. The jaunty second theme is conspicuously well scored. The martial theme returns; and whether or not Boyle so intended, it gives the organizational effect of a classical rondo. The music of the movement is generally gracious and transparent.

The recorded sound is fine, with Fritzsch's conducting attentive and to the point. Lane's performances have a fluid touch, with good phrasing. His interpretations offer the delicacy and authority to make a good case for all three works.

O'CONNOR

BRAHMS: Cello Sonata 2; Violin Sonata 2;
SCHUBERT: Violin Sonata in A
Pieter Wispelwey, vc; Paolo Giacometti, p
Evil Penguin 22 — 70 minutes

This program is mainly violin music played on the cello. Wispelwey is always worth hearing. The exposition repeat in Brahms's Opus 100 first movement is omitted. Wispelwey's transcription emphasizes the high end of the cello until the coda, where the sound is suddenly deep and sad. The second movement is played with a bit more emphasis on individual deemphases than I'm used to hearing on the...
violin, the second note played shorter than usual, though the unity of phrasing with the piano is a plus.

Next we have the one full-length Schubert Violin Sonata played with love and warmth. Then it’s back to Brahms with a real cello sonata that serves to remind us that we have been playing in stratospheric heights up till now. On the other hand, Brahms does go up there with the cello, but not often. This is also a fine musical performance, though I think I could have done without the scratchy interpretation of a phrase towards the close of the scherzo. At any rate, this is a polished and musically imaginative program, played and recorded with warmth. The liner notes are in the form of a conversation between Wispelwey and Stefan Grondelaers.

**D MOORE**

**BRAHMS: Piano Quartets 1+3**

Anton Barakhovsky, v; Alexander Zemtsov, va; Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt, vc; Eldar Nebolsin, p
Naxos 572798—74 minutes

These quartets, particularly the first in G minor, show Brahms’s chamber music at its most accessible. In the G minor the opening movement is a wonderful, clear example of Brahms deriving his material from small motives (in this case the first four notes). The intermezzo creates distinctive textures with muted strings, and the finale is a romping Hungarian gypsy rondo. The third quartet can be considered an earlier work since it was begun in 1855-56, but it was thoroughly revised in 1875, when it appeared as Opus 60.

The four players here have been active over much of Western Europe, but all have had some Russian training. Their Brahms is rich and expressive, unmannered and technically secure. Tempos are in the conventional range with no attempts at showiness or virtuosity. All four are terrific players, but I was most taken with pianist Nebolsin, who plays with subtle grace and admirable clarity.

A fine job all around.

**ALTHOUSE**

**BRAHMS: Viola Sonatas; 2 Songs**

Luca Sanzo, va; Sara Mingardo, a; Maurizio Paciariello, p
Brilliant 95281—59 minutes

Brahms’s viola sonatas are very late works. He met the clarinetist Richard Muhlfeld in 1891. The sonatas were written in 1894, originally for clarinet, but they were arranged for the viola at the request of Joseph Joachim, who owned a superb viola made by Gasparo da Salo that is now in the National Music Museum in Vermilion, SD. They have become better known in their arrangement for viola than in the original.

Luca Sanzo and Maurizio Paciariello have excellent taste and choose just the right tempos here. Paciariello draws just the right rich, Brahmsian sonority from his piano; and Sanzo’s viola produces a clear, pleasing tone. Sanzo has a problem, though, in that his tone production fluctuates from very refined to unrefined, sometimes very quickly. His vibrato isn’t consistent either, and it seems that it is not always by choice that he leaves notes un vibbrated. There are times when his passagework sounds a bit labored. It is sad when a performer’s technique doesn’t match his musicianship.

Alto Sara Mingardo is one of the very best singers I have heard in these songs, which were written across a span of 21 years. ‘Satisfied Longing’ was written in 1884 as an attempt to patch up Joseph Joachim’s marriage to the alto Amalie Weiss, but ‘Sacred Lullaby’ was written in 1863 in anticipation of the birth
of the couple’s first son. Minardo has just the right color and sings with great involvement. Again, Sanzo is not as consistently refined as he should be. He plays a viola made by Pierre Gaggini in 1977.

BRAHMS: Violin Concerto; Double Concerto
Julia Fischer, v; Daniel Müller-Schott, vc; Netherlands Philharmonic/ Yakov Kreizberg
Pentatone 5186 592—73 minutes

These performances seem to be appearing for the first time, but the recordings were done in 2005 (Double) and 2006. Those dates make the playing of violinist Julia Fischer all the more remarkable, for if she is 33 now, she must have been 23 when the concerto was recorded (and 22 for the Double). Her concerto is simply wonderful, a beautifully sensitive job with slight touches of rubato everywhere and a good deal of tempo variation. The passage after the first cadenza, one of the most beautiful in all of Brahms, is very slow, milked beyond belief, and heightened by her courage to play very softly. I confess it brought tears, and from that moment she had stolen my heart.

She has an admirable partner in Kreizberg, who responds to Brahms in similar fashion (and with whom she has made other recordings). The Double Concerto is also excellent—a bracing, youthful performance that doesn’t let the piece sound like “late” Brahms, which, of course, it is! The two soloists seem well matched, so it comes as no surprise to learn they have collaborated often in recent years.

Just a word about Pentatone’s notes. They give two copyright dates (2007, 2016). Some of the notes refer to recent years, so I would assume they were written for this 2016 release. But they tell us that Kreizberg “currently holds posts [with the] Netherlands Philharmonic and the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra”—and in fact, he died in 2011 at the age of 51. On the basis of this recording he was a fine talent from whom we undoubtedly would have heard more.

This is a special recording. Some may find it a bit indulgent and thus argue for something sturdier, and I wonder if she would be as daring in the concert hall. I would also be curious to hear what Fischer might do with the concerto now or in the coming years. No matter what, though, I’ll keep space on my shelf for this one, right next to Oistrakh, who, I’ll concede, has a richer, more opulent tone than Fischer.

ALTHOUSE

BRAUNFELS: 3 Chinese Songs; Romantic Songs: God-Loving Soul; Death Of Cleopatra; 4 Japanese Songs
Camilla Nylund, Genia Kuhmeier, Ricardo Merzbeth, s; Berlin Concert House Orchestra/ Hansjörg Albrecht
Oehms 1847—68 minutes

This is the second volume of orchestral songs by German composer Walter Braunfels (1882-1954) from this source. The works here are all for soprano soloist.

Braunfels started out to be a lawyer or economist but exposure to Richard Wagner led him to music, where he worked mainly as a pianist and composer (after studying with Felix Mottl and Ludwig Thuille). He was the first director of the Cologne Academy of Music, serving from 1925 to 1933. His first success was the opera Die Vogel (1921), but the fact that he was half Jewish led to his ban as a composer (even though he was born a Protestant and converted to Catholicism in World War I). Unlike many German composers, Braunfels did not flee his homeland in the Hitler era, even though he lost his position at the Academy and his works were not performed. He continued to compose, and his life was reasonably peaceful. After the war, he resumed public life and returned to the directorship at the Cologne Academy.

Though well known as a composer in his lifetime, Braunfels faded into obscurity after he died in 1954. The 1996 recording of Die Vogel began a Braunfels revival, and many of his works are now being recorded. The three here are presented in chronological order: 1914, 1918-1942, 1936, 1944, and 1945. As a result, we can hear Braunfels’s evolution from neo-Straussian to somewhat of a modernist.

Braunfels drew Three Chinese Songs from the same source Mahler used for Das Lied von der Erde. Chinese Flute by Li Po in an edition by Hans Bethge. Unlike Mahler, Braunfels avoided Chinese influence for these straightforwardly romantic German songs. According to annotator Eva Gesine Bauer, they represent the composer’s yearning for faraway places. The first two are slow, lyrical, and Straussian, with a touch of Wagner’s Parsifal. The third is more militant and aggressive, and the ending is dramatic.

Romantic Songs are on texts by Clemens Brentano and Joseph von Eichendorff. Braunfels began them after World War I (in which he served) but did not complete them until 1942. They are influenced by his “longing for the
ability to want to die. The songs are colored by an active orchestra with a lot of woodwind activity, combined with writing that is often slow, dark, and pensive. That sound is brightened effectively by Finnish soprano Camilla Nylund. The last two songs are martial and dramatic, with added brass presence; and Nylund is up to that, as well.

The God Loving Soul, to a text by Mechthild von Magdeburg, was written in 1936 when Braunfels had turned inward to communicate with God in a simple manner. The composer's medievalist approach pared his romanticism down to something shorn of decoration and adornment. The last song sounds a little like Alexander Zemlinsky. Genia Kuhmeier's soprano is darker and plumier than Nylund's, to the point of almost sounding like a mezzo.

Death of Cleopatra is taken from Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. In some ways it is related to the Romantic Songs, where Braunfels tried to come to grips with dying. The shimmering cast to the opening suggests Franz Schreker's Chamber Symphony, with later parts approaching that composer's Memnon. When the voice enters, the music leans to Wagner with Ricarda Merbeth's larger voice and a manner that is more direct than her colleagues. When pushed, it can seem a bit strained, but overall she does a good job with this music. An interesting element is a prominent saxophone solo.

Four Japanese Songs was written with texts by Hans Bethge. Like Four Chinese Songs it avoids any sign of (in this case) Japanese influence. In a sad bit of irony, Braunfels told his son that he found the songs “less effective” than his other works, partly because he believed he had laid the orchestration on too thickly. In 1945 his son disappeared in Asia and was never heard from again. Braunfels then completed the cycle. The last of the three songs deals with longing, in this case an abandoned female lover, but the parallel with Braunfels's lost and presumed dead son is hard to avoid. These are the most modern songs on this program, sometimes suggesting Strauss's more aggressive operas.

Conductor Albrecht and the orchestra have the neo-Straussian idiom down, and the sound is first-rate. The notes are informative but not especially thorough. German texts are supplied but no translations.

**BRITTEN: Bridge Variations; VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Tallis Fantasy; ELGAR: Introduction & Variations**

London Symphony Strings/ Roman Simovic
LSO 792 [SACD] 54 minutes

The Britten work comes from 1937. The other two were written in 1904 and 1910 for the London Symphony strings. Both are well-loved pieces in England, and the Vaughan Williams fantasy is loved way beyond England. In the last issue we reviewed two recordings of the Britten, and one also had the Tallis Fantasy. They were both with small orchestras of 20 or so musicians. This one is not very different: 26 musicians. They do sound like more, and that must be partly the acoustic and the microphone placement.

The Tallis Fantasy is best with big, rich string sections, from Stokowski to Zukerman. And there is no ecstasy here. The Elgar doesn't require that and works quite well. (The conductor plays first violin in all these pieces.)

As for the Britten, I cannot offer a clear recommendation, because the three recordings are not alike, yet all of them seem to do well with the work. If I really loved the music I might be fussier. I guess I was surprised that this was not clearly a better recording than the others, which are not by English orchestras. The sound is superb, but many passages sound better in the other recordings because of the expression.

VROON

**BRITTEN: 3 Solo Cello Suites**

Quirine Viersen
Globe 5259 — 67 minutes

These are some of the most technically demanding and musically obscure works that I know of for solo cello. No one has been able to both play them accurately and bring out their emotional intent effectively. This is discussed at length in the Cello Overview (March/April 2009). There are some good performances there, but each one has limitations.

Viersen plays this music with notable accuracy mixed with a passionate determination that goes a long way towards making them work. She is not always clear in her voice-leading, playing some of the lines less than completely when mixed with other voices; but her overall accuracy is quite remarkable. She also expresses certain elements—particularly the slides in Suite 3—with humor that balances the angry attitude necessary for much of this
music. Her intonation is excellent as well. I am still not ready to call these ideal performances, but they stand up well. That is saying something in music of this demanding difficulty. The recording is very clear as well.

D MOORE

BRUCH: Violin Concerto 3; Romanze; Konzertstück
Antje Weithaas, NDR Philharmonic/ Hermann Bäumer
CPO 777 847—69 minutes

This release is the third and final installment of Bruch's complete works for violin and orchestra. The earlier releases (S/O 2014 & M/A 2016) showed Weithaas to be a capable, persuasive violinist, if not particularly flashy. The Third Concerto has many passages with quite high tessitura, and her sound is ever sweet, with pinpoint intonation. These pieces, all seldom heard, are shown in nearly ideal form by violinist and orchestra alike.

This also gives support to the idea that Bruch was a one-work composer (the First Concerto). The pieces here are all competently composed, and nothing sounds sloppy or cheap, but the music is curiously unmemorable (unlike the G minor). If your taste runs to late romantic violin concertos, you could certainly sample all three of these discs with pleasure, but do note that the G minor has been recorded by every violinist who ever got a recording contract, and therefore the competition is steep for that piece.

ALTHOUSE

BRUCKNER: Quintet
with BARBER: Adagio
Berlin Concert House Orchestra/ Sayako Kusaka; Michael Erxleben
Cugate 13 [SACD] 51 minutes
with Intermezzo; ZEMLINSKY: Quintet
Bartholdy Quintet
Avi 855 3348—69 minutes

In the first release, the Bruckner Quintet is arrangement for 18 string players by concertmaster Michael Erxleben. I generally don’t like string orchestras playing chamber music. Erxleben’s reworking reveals a full symphony strainning to get out of a chamber piece. The enlargement of scale makes the music sound epic and intimate at once. Some of this is the all-string color, but unlike in his symphonies, Bruckner’s music sounds less layered out in blocks. Erxleben’s interpretation is a good one—broad but never dragging.

The Bartholdy’s interpretation is leaner, as you would expect from the smaller ensemble. Their performance includes Bruckner’s original scherzo. Joseph Hellmesberger, who commissioned the work, thought that was too difficult. So Bruckner, as a substitute, wrote the Intermezzo. I’m not a string player, but the two movements don’t sound that disparate in difficulty. It’s a pleasing piece, if a bit episodic.

Barber himself expanded his Adagio from a quartet movement to one for string orchestra. Kusaka’s tempos allow the right depth of emotion in the music, and her conducting of its details seems ever to have in mind the overall form of the movement.

Zemlinsky’s quintet (1896) was praised even by Brahms. Only the outer movements survive, but there’s still enough to understand Brahms’s enthusiasm. I is a nicely voiced movement, with sunny themes. The musical logic is clear, and its structure is readily grasped. One of its themes plays tribute, no doubt consciously, to Brahms’s Symphony 2. It is a brief movement built over a perpetual motion figure in the violins. A lot of the virtue of the work traces to the performance. The playing in both recordings is not only skilled, but has a rewarding depth of sonority. With the Zemlinsky, you wish the more that the whole piece had survived.

O’CONNOR

BRUCKNER: Symphony 2
Montreal Metropolitan Orchestra/ Yannick Nezet-Seguin
ATMA 2708—62 minutes

Symphony 3
Dresden Staatskapelle/ Nezet-Seguin
Profil 12011—72 minutes

Nezet-Seguin, now in his early 40s, is rapidly moving into the ranks of the most celebrated conductors. He became music director of this Montreal Orchestra in 2000, then added on the Rotterdam Philharmonic in 2008 and the Philadelphia Orchestra in 2012. He will retain his positions with Montreal and Philadelphia for several years, but his tenure at Rotterdam will end in 2018. In addition he has appeared regularly with the Metropolitan Opera since 2009 and in 2020 will assume the role of Music Director there, succeeding James Levine.

Most of the other Bruckner symphonies have appeared with these Canadian forces, and the responses of our ARG reviewers have

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been mixed. I understand the apprehensions about the orchestra, not for reasons for quality, but for size. I count only 22 violins, 8 violas, 8 cellos, and 5 double basses, and the whole orchestra numbers about 60. As a result the big, climactic passages don’t have much weight, and tempos are rather quick, though with these lean forces they don’t sound too fast. The music, though, is beautifully played, and people who find Bruckner too heavy and pompous might like this approach.

I return, though, to the question: why record Bruckner with this group? We know that the conductor, who was born in Montreal, has a special affinity for this orchestra, but nonetheless it seems strange to pair a small orchestra with Bruckner (and Mahler, whom they’ve also played). If any music is to be played “big” shouldn’t it be Bruckner?

Another area of apprehension comes from Nezet-Seguin’s choice of edition. The Second Symphony, as we know, is a rat’s nest of editions, many intermingling passages from many sources. The first modern edition came from Robert Haas in 1938. He used Bruckner’s last version (1877) and enriched it with passages from earlier attempts. When Leopold Nowak took over from Haas, he tended to re-do Haas’s work, thus creating more choices. Most recently in the Second Symphony William Carragan has sorted out Bruckner’s various versions, keeping them separate from each other. His edition of the 1872 original (which places the scherzo second, not third) appeared in 1991. So a conductor now has several choices. Before Carragan there were fewer, and many conductors used Haas. It made reasonable musical sense, but had a serious flaw: Haas, in combining different versions and even composing some music to link things together, presented a symphony that no one—not even Bruckner—had ever heard! Older conductors who used Haas no doubt are continuing with it, but the consensus today favors Carragan. Why, then, does Nezet-Seguin, who, age 16 in 1991 and hence not qualifying as an “older” conductor, use an edition that has been widely discredited?

Taken on its own terms, this is an attractive recording, but I don’t see much reason to recommend it. A better bet would be Janowski, who uses Carragan’s edition of 1877. Tintner and Eichhorn use Carragan 1872 if you want Bruckner’s original thoughts. If for some reason you want Haas with bigger orchestra and slower tempos, try Chailly. If this isn’t enough, some conductors (e.g. Karajan) have started with an edition and then made their own emendations. As I say, a rat’s nest.

The Third Symphony, with three distinct versions and several variants, is hardly neater, but here Nezet-Seguin makes a more reasonable choice: the original version from 1873. Even so, this raises questions. In the early 20th Century the usual version was the Schalk-influenced third version from 1889; this was edited and issued by Nowak in 1959. In other words the popular version was one that had been shortened by someone other than Bruckner. Back in 1944, though, Haas had completed his edition of the original 1873 version, which would have been Bruckner’s original thoughts, but it never reached the public because the printing plates were destroyed in the war. Nonetheless, some proofs survived, and these were used by Keilberth in his Dresden cycle of the symphonies—and that is what Nezet-Seguin uses here. It may be the same or close to Nowak’s edition of the original 1873, published in 1977. At any rate the original Third from 1873 is a troublesome piece, 15-20 minutes longer than the later versions and full of ideas that tend to ramble rather than cohere. It is easy to sympathize with Bruckner’s supporters like Schalk, who urged him to shorten his works in order to make them more accessible. With modern equipment we have the luxury of hearing something like the rambling 1873 version again and again, and with time we can reach an understanding of the piece. Even better, we have the luxury of hearing both versions; and if you’re stuck on Bruckner, it would make sense to have both.

Nezet-Seguin has two recordings of the Third now available. In addition to this one, recorded in a Dresden concert in 2008, we have a later one with his Montreal orchestra, issued two years ago, but not reviewed in ARG. I haven’t heard the Montreal, but I have the timings and can report that Montreal is faster in every movement, more than five minutes quicker overall. This is almost certainly a case of small versus large orchestra; the Dresden Staatskapelle is full-sized and glorious in sound. Hearing this reinforces my ambivalent feelings about Nezet-Seguin’s Second and reminds me that “bigness” is perhaps an essential element of Bruckner. This Third, appearing, by the way, as Vol. 39 of the Dresden Staatskapelle Edition, is more appealing than the Montreal Second. Nezet-Seguin ties Bruckner’s loose ends together with considerable skill for a then 33-year-old conductor, and the orchestra knows the style well. What I miss.

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is a sense of struggle and effort, a sense that the players are really digging in because life-or-death issues are at stake. I wouldn’t doubt Nezet-Seguin’s sincerity or dedication to Bruckner: he’s not yet 43 and he’s recorded almost all the symphonies! I do miss, though, a deep communion with the music—something that perhaps is conferred only with age.

Where does this leave us? Probably your first choice should be a later, shortened Third, where Vienna/Böhm (1889) would be fine, or if you want something more modern, the Suisse Romande/Janowski, also 1889 (J/F 2013). If you want the 1873, I will defer to John McKelvey’s recommendation of the Deutsches Symphony with Nagano (J/F 2005). I also cannot sum up this situation better than McKelvey when he said a decade ago (J/A 2007): “When all is said and done, it is clear that neither Bruckner himself nor anyone else has ever managed to put together all of his disparate musical ideas for this work. Nowak and Haas have tried, but have gone too far and left out too much. Despite the obvious splendor of all this musical substance, it has never in any juxtaposition revealed a truly unified, complete, and structurally perfect symphonic work.”

**BRYARS:** *Fifth Century; 2 Love Songs*
Prism Quartet; The Crossing/ Donald Nally
ECM 25869—51 minutes

*Madrigals, Book 5+*
Singer Pur; Priska Eser, s; Andreas Pehl, ct
GB 26—52 minutes

I think I’ve mentioned before the many happy memories that I have of Gavin Bryars when I was studying harpsichord in England. With my friend Scott Pender, who was studying composition with him at the time, I performed several pieces at Leicester Polytechnic, where Bryars was head of the music department, and we enjoyed several wonderful curries at Curry Fever, the local Indian eatery. What I liked best of all was the well-heated guest room I stayed in on the Leicester campus—quite a wonderful change from the inhumanly cold digs I lived in when I studied in London. And every time Gavin saw me at a concert, he bought me a gin and tonic.

The first pieces of his I heard included *My First Homage* (to Bill Evans), music from his opera *Medea*, and the first string quartet. I was impressed with the wistful quality of the music and the deft harmony. Both those qualities are much in evidence on the ECM release, which offers an extended work called *The Fifth Century* for chorus and sax quartet and two short Petrarch settings for women’s voices. Bryars has moved away from the frank minimalist style of his earlier work to a more ordinary temporal unfolding; but unlike other recent composers whose music is similar, Bryars’s tonal music sounds new, not like a bad imitation of, say, a modern Schumann.

*The Fifth Century* is dedicated in memory to Jeff Dinsmore, though no information is furnished in the liner notes. (He was a co-founder of the chorus that performs here, The Crossing, and died tragically on the stage of Disney Hall in a 2014 rehearsal.) Texts for the work come from the 17th Century writer Thomas Traherne and harmonize perfectly with the expressive world Bryars inhabits. My favorite movement is the fourth, where nearto-motionless music is used to set a text that begins “Eternity is a mysterious absence of times and ages”. The recording and performance are, in a word, flawless. Quickly add this disc to your collection.

In the *Fifth Century* liner notes, Bryars observed that he would love nothing more than to write vocal music. His fifth book of madrigals—11 settings by poets including Petrarch, Bronzino, and Laura Battiferri—springs from a series of commissions from the famous Villa I Tatti. They were composed for Singer Pur, whose makeup of one soprano, three tenors, a baritone, and a bass makes for an unusual timbral palette that would be challenging to many composers. Bryars, as always subtle and understated in his approach, responds with a series of pieces in moderate to slow tempos and without a great deal of variety in the number of singers in play at any given moment. The settings follow the rhythm of the poetry beautifully, and in that sense are elegant tributes to the intricate and pliant verse. The sound is reverberant and responsive.

**HASKINS**

**BRYARS:** *Nothing Like the Sun*
Peyee Chen, s; John Potter, t; Gavin Friday, narr; Bryars Ensemble
GB 24—54 minutes

*Nothing Like the Sun* (2007) is dark settings of 8 Shakespeare sonnets about death for soprano, tenor, and seven instruments with emphasis on low timbres. (Bryars is a bassist, and is among these players.) The sonnets are read by a spooky Gavin Friday with accompaniment...
before they are set as vocal pieces. The gloom is suffocating.

Recorded cavernously in concert at the 2015 Adelaide International Festival. The wild applause apparently in celebration of demise is ludicrous, if not tasteless. Texts included.

GIMBEL

BUSONI: Organ Pieces
Prelude & Fugue, op 5; 12 Preludes, op 37; 3 Medieval Macchiette; Antique Dances, op 11; Fantastic Tales; Preluditto and Fughetta; Contrapuntal Dance Piece

Paolo Bottini
Bongiovanni 5191—73 minutes

I don’t know what to think of this—piano pieces simply played on the organ “as is”. These are juvenilia, short (the longest is 6 minutes), and reflect the influence of the Chopin, Schumann, and Mendelssohn “character piece”; Busoni wrote only two original works for the organ; the Praedulium Op. 7 and a Doppelfuge sum Choral Op. 76, usually published together as Prelude and Fugue—neither appearing on this program.

The playing is competent, the registrations colorful, the organ excellent, but the information on the organ is in Italian and not translated. Extensive notes on Busoni’s early career but not on the music itself. Instead, in an extensive essay reminiscent of and as incomprehensible as most “art speak”, much is made of the symbolism of the booklet cover color, graphics, and title! Pretentious.

DELCAMP

CALSADA: In Praise of Mary
Magnificat Anima; Haece est Regina; Suscepit Israel; Salva Regina; Stabat Mater
Berlin Vocal Academy & Bassano Ensemble/ Frank Markowitsch
Rondeau 6118—64 minutes

Antonio Caldara (1670-1736) was an Italian baroque composer probably best known for some of his operas (Tito e Berenice, L’Olimpiade) and oratorios (La passione di Gesu Cristo, Maddalena ai piedi di Cristo). He became a court composer in Vienna in 1716 and remained there for the rest of his life. He also wrote a large number of choral pieces, most of which have remained unknown until fairly recently. This is Vokalakademie Berlin’s second disc (the first was devoted to Alessandro Scarlatti) and is devoted to texts centered on the Virgin Mary. Three of the selections are world premiere recordings: the opening Magnificat, the Ave Maris Stella, and the Salve Regina. Most of the music here is sung by the full choir, but several are solo pieces, including the Salve Regina. Half way through the program we are treated to a performance of the purely instrumental Trio Sonata, Op.1.

Caldara’s music is not only beautiful and sensual, but much more dramatic than many another composer setting these texts at that time. The Stabat Mater is especially rich in dark colors and sometimes unsettling contrasts.

There are a number of difficult double choir settings here, none of which faze this group in the slightest. The soloists (all drawn from the chorus) are excellent. Frank Markowitsch leads the Bassano Ensemble Berlin and his chorus with spirit and a keen ear for the drama.

Rondeau offers detailed notes about the compositions and texts in Latin with German and English translations. Recorded in the Lindenkirche, Berlin-Wilmersdorf, the sound is cool and clear without obscuring the complex choral parts. I look forward to more from these forces.

REYNOLDS

CASTELLO: Sonate Concertate in Stil
Moderno, Book 1
Academy of Ancient Music/ Richard Egarr
AAM 5—69 minutes

Director Richard Egarr first played the music of the 17th-Century Venetian composer Dario Castello some 34 years ago at Cambridge University, almost exactly the same time that I first heard Castello in a concert in Liverpool (played by Bruce Dickey and Charles Toet’s ensemble). I completely understand Egarr’s instant attraction to the music, and his continued enthusiasm—he plays organ and harpsichord here—is palpable in this excellent recording of the Book 1 (1621) sonatas.

The Academy of Ancient Music followed Castello’s instrument specifications for each sonata, so we have the special treat of hearing dulcian, violleta, cornetto, and trombone in addition to solo violins. The elaborate ornamentation (for all the solo instruments) isn’t some egoistic indulgence on the part of the AAM players: it’s written out by the composer.

The playing is warm, engaging, spirited, and brimming with virtuosic ease and beauty. Richard Egarr has great affection for Castello’s music and he relishes this opportunity to record it with seven of his AAM colleagues.
They plan to record Book 2 (published 1629) in 2017.

Very fine booklet design and content, with notes, bios, essays about Venice, AAM musicians describing their instruments, etc. Spending the time, trouble, and expense to do this lets the listener know that the musicians care about all aspects of making recordings and want us to enjoy this music as much as they do.

C MOORE

CAVAZZONI: Organ Pieces, all
Ivana Valotti; Gianluca Ferrarini, bar
Tactus 510391 [2CD] 147 minutes

At the risk of sounding like an awards-show recipient, I’d like to thank: all who in the past 30+ years have funded restorations of Italian Renaissance pipe organs, all the organ builders who have learned old skills anew in order to do the work, and all teachers who have mastered early techniques of playing and listening and passed them on to new generations.

In 1565, as an organist in the Gonzaga court in Mantua, Girolamo Cavazzoni (c 1506 to after 1577, and son of the organist and composer Marco Antonio) supervised the design and construction of the organ used here to record all his organ music. Let’s pause for a moment to linger on that fact. This program connects us directly to the place, repertoire, and sound in and for which this organ was built 452 years ago. It’s a remarkable achievement.

The organ is probably the only instrument that can survive for centuries in exactly the same place, often with financial and design records of its original construction (carillons and bell towers are the only other). But this recording is not just precious historically, it’s also musically stunning.

Ivana Valotti plays the 1565 organ, built by Antegnati in the Basilica Palatina Di Santa Barbara in Mantua, restored 1995-2006 by Giorgio Carli. She plays with confidence, complete command of the range of registrations; the phrasing is fluid and singing, and the mean-tone keyboard temperament animates the harmonic richness of the compositions. Tempos are all well chosen to “play” the church as well as the organ. Dancelike imitative sections are spritely, ricercars and canzons bold and stately, calm passages invite reflection.

The program includes Cavazzoni’s two published books of organ music (Book 1 is dated 1543; Book 2 is missing its date page) plus two ricercars from collections published in 1540 and 1551. For the pieces with texts—3 extended Masses; 4 Magnificats; 12 Hymn settings—plainchant passages alternate with organ. Gianluca Ferrarini sings the chant with expressive phrasing and fervent beauty.

Notes by the organist and bio in English; organ details in Italian; photos. For another fine recording of an early Italian organ, see my review of a program of music for organ and percussion in this issue.

C MOORE

CHAMBONNIERES: Harpsichord Suites
Franz Silvestri
Brilliant 95339 [2CD] 89 minutes

This low-priced set is a suitably enticing introduction to this composer, “the father of French harpsichord music”. Franz Silvestri plays about a quarter of Chambonniere’s music here, assembling eight short suites by selecting four to six available pieces in each key: C, D, D minor, F, G, G minor, B-flat, and A minor.

Karen Flint’s in-progress encyclopedic series (Vol 1, S/O 2015) makes the music sound more serious, carefully putting everything into place and scrupulously documenting all the sources. Silvestri makes it more entertaining and finds a wider range of character. His expressive touch varies from an extreme staccato to tasteful over-holding of notes past their notated lengths. The G major Minuet sounds odd to me with so many ornaments played before the beat, but I hear that as welcome risk-taking. Silvestri’s daringly slow tempos in the D minor and F major suites supply contrast, too. The one thing I’d most like to hear differently would be more breathing space (less continuous legato) in the bass line, particularly at the ends of phrases. This would give the music more lift. Still, the present package is quite good, and I’d be glad to hear more from Silvestri.

This same recording is also available as part of a 26-disc boxed set from Brilliant called “French Harpsichord Music”. My gold standard for a short Chambonniere’s recital is Skip Sempe’s on DHM from 1993. He reveals more layers in the music.

B LEHMAN

As they get older intelligent people appreciate classical music more. They eventually get bored with 3-minute pop songs that are manufactured like fast food.

Jack Liebeck
Cherubini: Requiem
Santa Cecilia Orchestra & Chorus/ Carlo Maria Giulini
Profil 16056—51 minutes

with PLANTADE: Requiem
Concert Spirituel/ Hervé Niquet
Alpha 251—69 minutes

How attitudes toward musical performance have changed in 60-plus years! Here we have the CD re-release of a 1952 recording of Cherubini's Requiem in C minor conducted by Giulini and a new one by a prominent early-music group. The differences in approach are so extreme that one might be forgiven for wondering sometimes if one was hearing a different composition altogether.

Cherubini (1760-1842) was trained in his native Italy but spent most of his long career in Paris, writing operas and ending up as long-time director of the Conservatoire. This Requiem for mixed chorus and orchestra (no vocal soloists) was first performed in 1816 in the Saint-Denis basilica—soon after the beginning of the Bourbon Restoration—at a mass in memory of Louis XVI, the king who had been executed by guillotine in 1793. (The remains of the king and of his wife Marie Antoinette had been moved there the year before.) This setting of the Requiem text was widely performed thereafter through the 19th Century. It was played at Beethoven's funeral, Schumann and Bruckner admired and studied it, and Berlioz considered it Cherubini's masterpiece. In his late years Cherubini wrote a second Requiem (in D minor), that time for men's chorus and orchestra, as a response to an edict from church authorities forbidding women's voices at funerals.

The C minor Requiem has had several fine recordings, e.g., by Toscanini (May/June 1991), Muti (Jan/Feb 2011), and Boston Baroque (Mar/Apr 2007). Its strengths—including some subtleties of orchestration and the marvels of the 'Quam olim Abraham' triple-fugue—have been well described by Michael Steinberg in his Choral Masterworks and Mark Seto in the book 19th Century Choral Music (published by Routledge). Unlike some other Requiem settings, the work includes the Graduale (which begins by stating again the words of the opening, 'Requiem aeternam'; but then continues differently) and also—like the Fauré Requiem decades later—the 'Pie Jesu'. In 1820 Cherubini added a funeral march to open the work and 'In Paradisum' to close it. Diego Fasolis included the march on his Naxos recording (Jan/Feb 2001), and Christophe Speringer included both of these wonderful pieces on his recording on the Opus 111 label (not reviewed in ARG). Giulini and Niquet omit both pieces, as do most other conductors.

Cherubini has a remarkable ability to create continuity across phrases, and this comes across in nearly any decent recording, including these two. Particularly evocative are the final pages, where (as Steinberg put it) "the chorus repeats 'luceat eis', dominated by deep and solemn tolling Cs in the voices and the orchestra's lowest and darkest instruments'.

Giulini was 38 when he recorded the C-Minor Requiem. It was his first studio recording of any work. To today's ears, the choral singing may sound a little provincial: vibrato is prominent, and the frequent portamentos can border on swoops. But the contrasts of tempo and dynamics that Giulini imposes always feel motivated by the music and text. That the Requiem lasts 51 minutes traces to the tempo. Some of the tracks are nearly 50 percent longer than the equivalent tracks in the Niquet recording. I admit to finding Giulini's performance quite convincing, at least when listening to it by itself (less so in comparison). The spacious tempos certainly add seriousness and solemnity and bring out the similarities to major choral works of later composers (Gounod, Verdi, Bruckner).

Giulini was accustomed to conducting large-scale choral works in large halls, for which large performing forces and slow tempos were appropriate or even necessary. The brisk tempos that Hervé Niquet and his period-instrument group choose would be appropriate to smaller spaces. Niquet's recording of both works was made in the royal chapel at Versailles. Though the chapel—with all its hard surfaces—is no doubt prone to echo, textures on the recording are very clear.

Niquet's Cherubini lasts only 35 minutes. The quicker speed for the opening 'Requiem' movement certainly drains the music of much of the sorrow that one hears in performances like Giulini's or Mutti's. Niquet also does not shape phrases in the standard (traditional romantic) manner—e.g., through measures-long crescendos and decrescendos. But there are wonderful compensations. The active accompanimental lines for strings (sometimes with bassoons) register more forcefully here than they do in the Giulini performance. The 'Dies Irae' movement maintains great thrust and, despite the quick tempo, never sounds either routine or jaunty. Niquet adds a bit of
chant before two of the movements, but the text booklet—otherwise very carefully put together—neglects to supply the words for them (nor the six words of the Benedictus, beautifully set by Cherubini).

Niquet completes his recording with a work that was written by a contemporary of Cherubini and that is directly parallel to the Cherubini work. Charles-Henri Plantade (1764-1839) was best admired in his lifetime as a song composer, but he also was a prominent keyboard accompanist to singers and, for some years, directed the choir at the Chapelle Royale in Paris. This Requiem setting, in D minor, was performed at a commemorative mass in 1823 in the chapel of the Tuileries palace (in Paris), the honoree being Marie Antoinette, who, like Louis XVI, was guillotined in 1793.

This Requiem is modest—like the Cherubini, it has no vocal soloists—and full of imaginative responses to the text. Plantade may well have studied Cherubini’s Requiem: in both of them the tamtam is used sparingly but to well-gauged effect; and Plantade, like his predecessor, adds the Graduale movement and a Pie Jesu. In both, the lengthy Dies Irae text—all 57 lines of it—is treated as a single movement, with the changing images reflected in alert shifts of mode, phrase length, orchestral figuration, and choral texture. Many vivid phrases that are given extended treatment in other requiem settings (Mozart’s and Berlioz’s ‘Tuba Mirum,’ Verdi’s ‘Ingemisco’) pass by rather quickly.

There is a remarkable moaning horn solo in Plantade’s ‘Pie Jesu’ on the notes D-D-flat-D. The score specifies that the three notes be performed open (not stopped with the fist in the bell) and that they be slurred together. The horn player here interprets the slur as an eerie portamento between the notes. This eerie solo—heard three times—suggests the soul of a dead person looking for rest. If Berlioz knew the Plantade Requiem (perhaps from its score), he would surely have been fascinated by this moment. He wrote notable wind solos that sound offstage—”calls from afar”—in Symphonie Fantastique and Lelio and in Damnation of Faust.

Other notable elements include a choral layout that was clearly influenced by 18th Century French traditions: women all singing together, high tenors (hautes-contre), tenors, and basses. (Cherubini uses the standard Italian SATB layout.) The men have a vividly stern passage—sung with grim, intentionally wiry tone—on the words ‘Libera animas omnium...’ (Deliver their souls from the bottomless pit). At one point in the ‘Dies Irae’ movement, Plantade quotes, in full, the opening three phrases of the ‘Dies Irae’ chant, harmonizing and accompanying them in his own style.

In both Requiem settings I noticed a few moments where the music seems mismatched to the text. Why did Cherubini set ‘Mors stupebit’ in the major mode? Why did Plantade create a fierce minor-mode outburst on ‘Hosanna in excelsis’ that ends the Sanctus? Overall, though, these are two remarkably satisfying settings of the Requiem text, and are well worth getting to know—and, I bet, to sing.

Niquet’s chorus is small. In both works it has excellent pitch and tone. The performance follows many of the accepted practices of Historically Informed Performance (HIP). For example, the chorus gives nice biting accents to certain words and phrases. The strings play nearly without vibrato, sometimes doing a quick, “squeezed” crescendo or decrescendo on one note after another—a practice that, in many HIP recordings, can seem a mannerism but here works just fine. The tuning is lower than A=440.

The Latin pronunciation follows the best scholarly evidence about how the language was pronounced in France in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Jesu is the not Yeh-zoo but, more or less, Zhay-zyoo. and ejus is eh-zhyoos. Vowels followed by an M or N are nasalized. Some words are hard to recognize.

I have grown to like Niquet’s recording a lot, not least the determined Frenchness of the pronunciations. All too many performances nowadays—instrumental, especially, but also vocal—are devoid of regional, personalized, or closely observed period flavor. This recording has character and is performed at a very high level.

You can hear excerpts from Niquet’s recording of both works on youtube.

LOtE

**Chopin: Ballades & Scherzos**
Islam Manafov
Solo Musica 246 [2CD] 82 minutes

The pianist is Azeri—from Baku, Azerbaijan. He is probably Muslim, with a first name like that (and Azeris are Shiites). One disc is the Ballades, the other the Scherzos, followed by a posthumous Nocturne as a sort of encore. The piano is a Steinway D, and the recording was made in Hanover in 2014.

March/April 2017
Since I prefer the Ballades to the Scherzos, I listened to the Scherzos first. They seemed “normal” to me—no special touches of genius. The Ballades seemed better, and I think it is more than my preference for them. I think he dug into them with more gusto; maybe he takes to them as I do. They have more varied moods, less sound and fury. They seem more romantic.

Of course hundreds of pianists have recorded Chopin, and there are a good many excellent recordings. Since that is the case, it is hard to listen to yet another and become convinced that it is the best ever. As subjective as it may sound, I can only say that I liked the Ballades here but not the Scherzos. The exact reason why is not clear, but it may have something to with the fact that when one plays the Scherzos there is a need for impetus that can distract one from details and nuances. There is less chance, it seems to me, to be expressive.

VROON

**CHOPIN: Mazurkas**
Andrew Rangell, p
Steinway 30071 [2CD] 145 minutes

Rangell’s Mazurkas are competent but dry. Op. 6:1 shows crisp articulation with a slightly tinny quality to the high register. He creates legato through minimum use of the pedal here and in 6:3 and 7:1. The playing sounds unrestrained and cheerful, with generous rubato. The middle section of Op. 7:2 seems weak. I would have liked more pedaling owing to the nature of the piece, and his terse approach to the dotted rhythms make it sound more fragmented. Rangell’s dry touch works well in Op. 7:3, emphasizing the folk character of the piece. His approach is consistent, but more range of sound would have been appreciated.

**CHOPIN: Piano Pieces**
David Korevaar
MSR 1626—77 minutes

This is a mixed program of Chopin: 2 Ballades, 1 Scherzo, 4 Nocturnes, 3 Mazurkas, and the Berceuse and Barcarolle.

It’s great music but an odd program. The playing is OK but never outstanding—never so good that you have to have this collection. The piano is a Shigeru (new to me, too!).

**CHOPIN: Preludes**
with SCHUMANN: Fantasy
Horatio Gutierrez, p
Bridge 9479—66 minutes

This is a mixed program of Chopin: 2 Ballades, 1 Scherzo, 4 Nocturnes, 3 Mazurkas, and the Berceuse and Barcarolle.

It’s great music but an odd program. The playing is OK but never outstanding—never so good that you have to have this collection. The piano is a Shigeru (new to me, too!).

KANG

**CHOPIN: Piano Sonata 3; Mazurkas op 59; Barcarolle; Berceuse; Polonaise-Fantasy; Souvenir de Paganini**
Georgijs Osokins
Piano Classics 109—70 minutes

I am very picky with my Chopin recordings, but Osokins offers the type of Chopin playing I like most: restrained yet muscular with finely spun phrasings. This is especially evident in the excellent Piano Sonata 3. He deploys great amounts of color, while manipulating the rhythms for optimal dramatic effect. It is at once muscular and lyrical and profound. His use of pedal is especially effective. The mazurkas have a singing quality.

Some listeners may not care for his capriciousness with the rhythm, but it adds a welcome spontaneity that is not out of keeping with the character of the pieces. The sound in the Barcarolle is full and dramatic. The Souvenir caps off the program effectively.

KANG

**CHOPIN: Preludes**
with SCHUMANN: Fantasy
Diana Jaworska, p
Centaur 3502—70 minutes

Polish born but now living in Southern France, Jaworska gives us all 26 completed Chopin Preludes. Her pleasant photograph adorns the cover, and this label has given us many fine recordings in the past. I’m afraid that things have really gone wrong this time.

To begin with, the sound made at the recording studio in Rzeszow, Poland is lacking in resonance, giving a slightly wooden tone to the piano. In addition, for all her efforts Jaworska’s faulty technique limits her ability to convey the essence of the more demanding pieces. For example, Prelude 3 in G has a treacherous left hand and must be articulated with absolute evenness. Here it is not, and the struggle is evident. Even in some of the slow Preludes, the playing can sound plodding and uneven.

More annoying still is the lack of subtlety as notes sound hammered out without nuance. There is also a certain caution that plays weird tricks with rubato.

The F minor Fantasy surprises me; it’s played much quicker than I have ever heard. It is also played detache. Other strange interpr-
tive decisions leave me unmoved by one of the composer’s finest creations. The Berceuse goes slightly better, if not particularly “gentle into the night”. This will not do.

It has been many years since Cuban-American pianist Gutierrez visited the recording studio. The loss has been ours, and his return is welcome. Although he only does the standard 24 Preludes Op.28 they are worlds apart from Jaworska.

Prelude 1 has both sweep and passion, and 2 has a depth of expression without distortion. The rippling left hand of 3 is played evenly and seemingly without effort. And so it goes, with each brief piece occupying a secure world of its own. Prelude 8 sweeps us along with its dynamism, and 9 flows naturally from its predecessor. The power of 12 chugs forward with relentless drive and 15 (Raindrop) begins delicately but grows in its terrifying foreboding. The articulation of 16 is astonishing.

The recitative of 18 is dynamically thrilling, and 23 flows with grace and gentility. 24 is all one could wish for in terms of dynamic sweep and powerful utterance. Gutierrez ranks extraordinarily high among performances of this wonderful cycle.

Schumann’s amazing Fantasy has not been lacking recordings. This one instantly jumps to the top among my choices for its dynamism, flow, and organization. It sweeps one along in a sea of rarely experienced emotion, but it’s not indulgent.

All this magnificence is captured in some of the best sound I have heard from a Steinway D in a long time. Stephen Wigler’s notes are worthy of mention. I must restrain myself from playing this over and over. There are other recordings to review!

BECKER

COMELLAS: Piano Pieces
Jose Raul Lopez
Toccata 347—64 minutes

While I am familiar with a lot of music, Toccata makes me realize there is even more awaiting discovery. The worth of these discoveries tends to vary depending on your acceptance of the idiom, and willingness to enjoy the second rate. Much of the time it is quite enjoyable, but sometimes a discovery is pretty close to the first rank. In the case of Cuban composer Jose Comellas (1842-88) first rate escapes him. I think of him as a lesser Louis Moreau Gottschalk.

Some of the short pieces are lyrically quite pleasant, well written, and evoke the parlor of days long gone. There are Mazurkas, Nocturnes, a Waltz, and even a song without words. While they only occasionally sound like Chopin, the melodic contours are similar. For Comellas’s appearances in America and his residency in Baltimore he even produced a patriotic, but not bombastic Elegy in memory of Washington and Lincoln.

With studies in Leipzig, Comellas had excellent credentials. He produced the first full-scale piano sonata from his island nation. At 18 minutes in three movements it is by far his most ambitious work—and most enjoyable as well.

Pianist Lopez is Coordinator of the Keyboard Department at Florida International University in Miami and plays with precision and enthusiasm. While a bit more virtuosity would not be out of order, nothing is distorted or out of place. The sound from Wertheim Performing Arts Center at FSU is excellent, and the pianist’s notes as thorough as they come. A modest but worthwhile discovery.

BECKER

CONUS: Violin Concerto; Elegy; KORGOLD: Concerto; Much Ado About Nothing Pieces
Thomas Albertus Imberger v; Barbara Moser, p; Israel Symphony/ Doron Salomon
Gramola 99108 [SACD] 64 minutes

A common bond for both concertos is that Jascha Heifetz championed them. The Korgold is well done, Imberger’s interpretation beautiful but without schmaltz. He gets that this piece if played as written already has plenty of emotion. What it needs, he supplies—beauty of tone, accuracy of pitch, and fluidity of phrasing. The Much Ado About Nothing Suite is an arrangement for violin and piano. Imberger teams up with pianist Barbara Moser for a performance long on delicacy and taste.

As there are well over 30 other readings of Korgold’s concerto available, the couplers may be decisive. Julius Conus’s concerto was popular from its 1904 premiere till well into the 1950s, when it fell into disuse. Conus’s name should be spelled Konyus. (Our transliterations of Russian words, especially names, were so incompetent that during the Cold War it’s amazing the Russians knew who or what the hell we were getting at.) Conus was father-in-law to Rachmaninoff’s daughter. Having played in many overseas countries, including the US and France, he returned to the Soviet Union in 1940. As an “emigrant” he was shut
COPPOLA: Proserpina; see FALCONIERI
COSTANZI: Cello Sonatas; see PORPORA

COSTE: 25 Etudes; Grande Serenade
Flavio Apro, g
Brilliant 95255—73 minutes

Napoleon Coste (1805–83) is a French (who else at that time would name their son Napoleon?) guitarist and composer of the generation after Sor—a true romantic, rather than the transition from classic to romantic. Indeed, he was Sor’s student and son-in-law. I’ve always loved his music, ever since playing these very etudes as an undergraduate. I have read through all of his collected works, performed several, published five in modern editions. I even play a seven-stringed instrument, inspired by his guitar. And I’ve never understood his comparative neglect, especially in favor of Mertz. His music for solo guitar hasn’t been reviewed in these pages for well over a decade, so this release is most welcome.

I reviewed Apro in a recital of Brazilian music (M/A 2015) that was infectiously joyous and brilliantly programmed. The playing here is just as fine. Apro’s approach is dramatic and bold. His rubato is a bit more than I like in Coste—he was a romantic, but he was a French romantic, and that tradition has always been tempered by a classical restraint. I prefer Jeffrey McFadden on Naxos—he plays with just the right sense of freedom, and he had a series going of the complete works of Coste.

But Apro never overdoes his rubato to the point of distortion. Both readings are very fine, and Apro includes the Grande Serenade, an eight movement, quasi-programmatic work. It’s a compact work, with three of the movements less than a minute long, but it’s an attractive piece. Thanks to Dr Apro for championing one of my favorite composers.

O’CONNOR

COUPERIN: Harpsichord Pieces 1
Mark Kroll
Centaur 3513—62 minutes

American harpsichordist Mark Kroll has started this Couperin cycle with Ordres 4, 6, and 18, which have some of the composer’s most popular pieces in them. Ordre 6 is also the one from which JS Bach copied out a piece for use by his wife and children. When Kroll finishes the series of all four of Couperin’s books, over the next years, it will probably run to 11 or 12 CDs. Overall, this is a strong start to a promising series, with good sound and all the repeats. The instrument is by Jacques Germain, 1785, part of the terrific collection at the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota. The gift shop there sells other recordings made on this harpsichord, played by Edward Parmentier and Arthur Haas.

I have reread Kroll’s textbook, Playing the Harpsichord Expressively: A Practical and Historical Guide (2004), where he summarized techniques from more than 30 years of teaching. We hear here some musical examples that are in the book. I noticed something I had already picked up from hearing his performance here: he is reluctant to use unsynchronized notes as a technique (playing the right hand’s notes slightly after or before the left hand’s steadier beat, rather like a Frank Sinatra vocal delivery). He does not say much about such tasteful dislocation of the melody’s notes, except to supply a few historical sources and then warn against overusing it. To my ears, he doesn’t use it enough, and that makes the music sound aggressive.

A technique that he overuses is an extreme and perhaps unnecessary ritardando at the end of pieces, not in current fashion for interpretation of this repertoire. One aspect that I especially appreciate in Kroll’s delivery is his strong projection of dance, playing as if to a big room with real people moving and grooving to the music. The ritardandos turn the endings into grand gestures.

His book says nothing about intonation or unequal temperaments, which I consider to be a crucial element of expression, highlighting the tensions and relaxations in the music. How is his intonation here in practice? He uses an unspecified temperament that sounds like
modified meantone. It sounds euphonious in the pieces in F and B-flat, most of the present program, but remarkably sour in F minor: the A-flat and D-flat are tuned too low, and they spoil the shapes of the melodies and harmonies. I wish he had modified these notes to be higher, or will do so as the series continues, because rough intonation calls too much attention to itself and ruins the tender affekt of the pieces. Fortunately, there are only a few F-minor pieces here.

I like Michael Borgstede’s recording of these three Ordres better, in his 11-disc set (Brilliant, recorded 2004-5, reviewed J/F 2007). Where Kroll keeps the music striding along firmly, Borgstede plays more with the phrasing (gently). Borgstede also projects a longer and clearer shape to the melodic lines. That recording has its own small flaws, though: his harpsichord for Ordre 18 has some wayward treble notes. If Borgstede’s approach is the one I favor for late-night relaxation, Kroll’s works very well for brisk exercise in the daylight.

**B LEHMAN**

**CRUSELL:** Clarinet Concerto; see MIKALSEN

**D ANIELPOUR:** Songs of Solitude; War Songs
Thomas Hampson, bar; Nashville Symphony/ Giancarlo Guerrero
Naxos 559792—61 minutes

Two recent song cycles by Richard Danielpour, sung by and written for the great Thomas Hampson. These are all meant to deal with the tragedies of war, the earlier cycle the events of 9-11, the second the war in Iraq.

**Songs of Solitude** (2002) is a cycle of six poems of Yeats. These songs open with a motto and move through drama, a jazzy drinking song, bells, and a melancholy lullaby, before closing with a return to the opening. Mr Hampson delivers with his usual sympathy and flawless musicality.

**War Songs** (2008), on poems of Whitman from ‘Drum Taps’ (the Civil War section from *Leaves of Grass*), were composed in memory of the victims of the Iraq war. The first is a march with an Ivesian quote of ‘The Battle Cry of Freedom;’ the second another touching lullaby, the third a moving arioso, and the fourth a questioning lamentation. The set closes with an earlier setting of ‘Come Up from the Fields, Father’ also from *Leaves of Grass*, a touching lullaby with solo cello documenting the death of a mother’s son, which gives the set a moving close. Again Mr Hampson could not be more touching.

The program avoids ultimate darkness with the early *Toward the Splendid City* (1992), a sunny, joyful overture maybe a bit too cheerful given the main gist of the program. The composer couldn’t ask for better performances or engineering. Texts included. Notes by the composer.

**GIMBEL**

**D AVIS:** Napoleon (2016 Soundtrack)
Philharmonia/ Carl Davis
Carl Davis Collection 28 [2CD] 147 minutes

Carl Davis has written an updated score for the silent Abel Gance film *Napoleon* (1927). The film is considered a masterpiece for storytelling, its innovative camerawork, and the use of the Polyvision triple screen process, a precursor to Cinerama. The film has had several different versions of various lengths since its rediscovery in the 1950s. Davis wrote a score for the 1980 version reconstructed by Kevin Brownlow (then thought to be mostly complete) and performed in concert to accompany the film. It was later recorded for the initial British television showing in 1983. That version is available on Carl Davis Collection 7. This expanded version includes sections added to the film since 1980, bringing the film’s length to almost 5-1/2 hours, the longest movie score written to date. This recording includes 19 key tracks from the complete score.

Davis is well known for scoring silent films and often uses period music and his own compositions to create the required atmosphere. For *Napoleon* Davis used many sources, including Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5, the *Creatures of Prometheus* ballet, as well as music by Mozart, Haydn, and Cherubini composed in the Napoleonic period. He also uses some popular tunes from the era, and ‘La Marsillaise’. These are all played as riffs or short themes used in longer tracks that sometime combine a few scores from the same composer. The use of the composer themes, Davis’s own music, and other musical elements are discussed in the super-deluxe slip-cased book that holds the discs. The book is the size of a DVD case, but a DVD of the film is not included (nor is it available). But this is a very impressive presentation for a very famous movie.

Davis’s score is not the only score that has been written for the film. In the late 1970s the film was obtained for US release by director Francis Ford Coppola, who had his father

March/April 2017
Carmine Coppola write the score. I saw this shortened version at Hollywood’s Cinerama Dome which took advantage of the huge screen for the Polyvision sections of the film. I don’t recall the score except that ‘La Marseillaise’ was frequent quoted. Coppola’s score is available on Sony 27230. When Brownlow’s longer version was premiered in Europe in 1980, it used Davis’s score.

The English-only booklet contains a scene by scene synopsis of the film’s action to match the 19 tracks. There is also an interesting interview with Davis about composing and conducting the 1980 music score and the later changes. The music includes leitmotifs for the major characters and themes to underscore the action. This is fine as a movie souvenir if you want to hear musical snippets and themes by the various composers. Unless you are familiar with the film and how the music is used, you’re probably better off listening to the composer’s original scores. The sound is excellent.

**FISCH**

**DEBUSSY:** *La Mer; Afternoon of a Faun; Images*

Jean-Pierre Armengaud & Olivier Chauzu, p Naxos 573463—69 minutes

This is Volume 2 of Debussy’s 4-hands piano music—at one piano. Volume 1 got an excellent review (Naxos 572979, Sept/Oct 2013). There is another Naxos disc of early Debussy piano duets by Soos and Haag (Naxos 572385, Sept/Oct 2011). The arrangements here are by Ravel (Faun), Debussy (La Mer), and André Caplet (Images). All are accurate and effective transcriptions, but given the brilliant Debussy orchestrations, this will have limited appeal. A performance could be wonderful in an intimate setting, with pianists this good and a small audience. Listening to the CD we can appreciate the clarity of voices.

I hear Ravel’s piano solo and duo arrangements of his own La Valse more often than the original orchestral version. I have no doubt that his transcription of Debussy’s work required the same skill and ear for piano colors. Debussy’s own arrangement (1895) of this work was for two pianos; Ravel was commissioned in 1910 by publisher Fromont. There is still no way to replace that flute part, regardless of pianistic ability. Galway recorded a version of the *Afternoon of a Faun* for flute and piano (RCA 68351, July/Aug 1996) that works quite well. Of the three works on this disc, I miss the orchestra most here.

**HARRINGTON**

**DEBUSSY:** *Preludes I; Images I; Nocturne*

Alessandra Ammara, p Piano Classics 110—65 minutes

This is a fine Debussy piano recital composed of well known and widely recorded pieces with the small exception of the Nocturne, which is heard less often. Ammara has an excellent touch and employs a wide range of colors. She is a master of all the different aural depictions of water we find in Debussy. Even the loudest and most technically demanding sections are treated with musicality and a conspicuous lack of harshness. From the opening ‘Reflets dans l'eau’ to the power of the sea in ‘Ce qu’a Vu le Vent d’Ouest’ to the magical cathedral rising from its depths in ‘La Cathédrale Engloutie’ we are treated to best of Debussy’s compositional genius. The sound is very good, capturing all of the nuances the great Italian Fazioli piano is capable of. Booklet notes are originally in Italian, and the translation is better than usual.

While I hear nothing out of place and a lot of interesting piano playing, this release does not edge out recordings by great pianists like Gieseking (EMI 65855, S/O 1997), Michelangeli (DG 4778569, M/A 2010) and Pollini (DG 445187, I/F 2000). My current favorite is Bavouzet (Chandos 10421, S/O 2007 & 10497, M/A 2009).

**HARRINGTON**
DEBUSSY: Violin Sonata; see GUNST

DE LA RUE: Cum Jocunditate Mass
Cappella Pratensis/Stratton Bull
Challenge 72710 [SACD] 64:24

Lurking in the background of this recording is the Hieronymus Bosch, a native of ‘s-Hertogenbosch in the Duchy of Brabant and a lifelong member of the Brotherhood of Our Illustrious Lady. Every Wednesday the Brotherhood celebrated a votive Mass in honor of the Virgin Mary in the Church of St John the Evangelist, where they endowed a chapel and maintained an organ. Fortunately, three manuscripts made in the workshop of Petrus Alamire commissioned by the Brotherhood are still preserved, and one of them includes De la Rue’s Cum Jocunditate Mass. This is used as the centerpiece of this sonic recreation of a Marian Mass as it might have been celebrated by the singers hired by the Brotherhood. Appropriate chants and motets are interpolated in the Mass from other manuscripts owned by the Brotherhood, except the final motet, De la Rue’s ‘Gaude Virgo’. The Mass is based on the first six notes of an antiphon for the Nativity of the Virgin, ‘Cum jocunditate nativitatem’, which is used as an ostinato in the tenor voice at different pitch levels and also permeates the contrapuntal fabric of the other voices. Though four movements are for four voices, in the Credo De la Rue adds an extra treble part.

This is the third recording of this Mass. The earliest I know was released by the Hilliard Ensemble in 1992 (EMI), which was sung by the four core members of the group with an additional countertenor added for the Credo. In 1999 the Mass was recorded by Henry’s Eight (Nov/Dec 1999) by a small ensemble of eight men. The Cappella Pratensis is also only eight male singers, with pairs of countertenors, high tenors, lower tenors, and basses.

A number of factors distinguish this new release from the earlier recordings. The first might be sonority, and the surround sound helps the eight singers sound full and resonant, but there is no loss of clarity in the polyphony, in contrast to the recording by Henry’s Eight, which I found rather dry. A second factor is tempo. Mr Barker, in his review of Henry’s Eight, noted both the Hilliard Ensemble’s “somewhat more robust, energetic, and colorful” interpretation in comparison to Henry’s Eight’s “more stately approach”. Cappella Pratensis is slightly slower than Henry’s Eight, but I never sensed any loss of momentum, especially as De la Rue introduces ever shorter note values and points of imitation as he approaches a cadence. A third factor is subtlety, but Cappella Pratensis, perhaps because they perform from a lightly edited facsimile of the Brotherhood’s manuscript for the Mass, have not attempted to homogenize the harmonic texture of De la Rue’s writing through extensive musica ficta, which means there are some nice cross relations that I did not notice on the earlier releases. And finally, the Mass is sung here in Flemish Latin, for an added touch of “historically informed performance”.

It should be noted that the documents of the Brotherhood show that the music was often sung by a choir of men and boys, and that might have eliminated the need to even slightly transpose the music down for the countenors, which made the bass part a bit low for the singers on this new release. The organ interludes in the Mass are stylishly improvised by Wim Diepenhorst on the 16th Century organ of the Church of St Mary in Lemgo, Germany.

The booklet, in addition to an informative essay by M. Jennifer Bloxam about the Brotherhood and the Mass, includes full texts and translations. In sum, this is an excellent recording of an important Mass by one of the most creative polyphonists around Josquin.

BREWER

DINESCU: Flute Pieces
Carin Levine; Stephan Bahn, p; Cynthia Oppermann, hp; Susanne Zapf, v; Dauprat Horn Quartet—Wergo 7324—67 minutes

Avant-garde composer Violeta Dinescu (b 1953) lived in Romania until she moved to Germany in 1982. Her music consists of “labyrinthine sound spaces whose rigorous structures and emotionally-charged atmospheres take every perspective to its extreme”. Although listeners cannot expect narrative or tonality from Dinescu, the sounds, textures, and combinations she creates can be quite fascinating in two pieces here for flute and four horns and flute and harp. Most of the program consists of pieces for unaccompanied flute or mixtures of flutes that are harder to take. Often they degenerate into air sounds and flutters that few listeners might describe as “music”.

American-born Carin Levine meets all the challenges of this writing, and her collaborators play with fine precision that may, alas, impress only a limited audience. There is a book-
DODGSON: Cello Sonata; 2 Romantic Pieces; 5 Occasional Pieces
Evva Mizerska, vc; Emma Abbate, p

This is listed as Stephen Dodgson’s complete music for cello and piano. Dodgson (1924-2013) was a London-born composer whose music is relatively tonal, very expressive, and full of life. His sonata from 1969 is a strong and lyrical work in three movements. The Occasional Pieces were written the next year and are also full of imagination and variety. The two pairs of Romantic Pieces are from 1996 and 2008 and show us how full of thought and feeling an old man can be.

The Evva & Emma Duo performs this music with notable warmth and style. One might imagine performances with more verve in places, but the musicianship and involvement here is highly satisfying. These are first recordings and well worth your time. The recorded balance is excellent.

DONIZETTI: Parisina
Mariella Devia (Parisina), Tiziana Tramonti (Imelda), Dalmarce Gonzalez (Ugo), Giorgio Zancanaro (Azzo), Dimitr Kavrakos (Ernesto); Florence May Festival/ Bruno Bartoletti

From its foreboding prelude to its melodramatic conclusion, this opera is one tuneful delight after another. The epitome of a 19th Century Italian bel canto opera, Parisina is packed with arias and cabalettas, duets, and good tunes. The plot is based on a supposedly true incident in Renaissance court life. After the death of his first wife, Azzo d’Este, Duke of Ferrara, has married the beautiful Parisina. Aware that Parisina loves Ugo, his son by his first wife, Azzo suspects she is unfaithful. She tries to keep their love secret, but she murmurs Ugo’s name in her sleep. Azzo resolves revenge on them. The lovers attempt to escape, but Ugo is captured and executed. When Azzo presents her with Ugo’s corpse, Parisina falls lifeless.

It is perhaps a little melodramatic, but the story is presented with no miscellaneous digressions—love and revenge is what it’s all about.
about. The opera opens with a scene that is the reverse of the opening of Verdi’s *Trovatore*. Here the chorus explains to the bass the situation and background of the plot.

Is it possible? This is the sixth recording of *Parisina.* And I have reviewed all six! I will briefly summarize them. GDS 21020 with Marcello Pobbe, Renato Cioni (Nov/Dec 1990) is probably deleted, and not worth looking for. Legato 836: find it if you can! It is Montserrat Caballé at her best in 1974. Dynamic’s recording is from the Swiss Radio, complete with an enthusiastic but unintrusive audience. It has the best recorded sound and includes more of the score than the other recordings. The gentlemen do not fare so well, but Pendaratchankska is a major vocal talent (July/Aug 2000). Opera Rara (Jan/Feb 2010) is the best so far. At 162 minutes it includes more of the opera than the others. Giannattasio’s mezzo-tinted soprano is gutsy, coping strongly with Parisina’s ridiculously low notes and grabbing the honors elsewhere—strongly projected and strongly musical. Hers is a massive voice curiously reminiscent sometimes of Sutherland. Bros’s clear, bright tenor is used full forte—he’s not the most subtle singer—attacking the music with relentless gusto. But then much of Ugo’s music is hardly subtle, but he Pendaratchankska is a major vocal talent (July/Aug 2000).

There are several voice-and-guitar arrangements of songs culled from Dowland’s first three books of ayres. Among them the guitarists perform arrangements for one or two guitars of a variety of Dowland’s dance pieces. It is a fine program. The guitar playing is expert and nuanced. McKenzie’s singing is full of expression, but I must admit that I’m not used to hearing Dowland’s ayres sung with quite as much vibrato as she uses.

**LOEWEN**

**DURANTE:** *Requiem in C minor; Organ Concerto in B-flat*

Francesco Durante (1684-1755) was a foundational figure of the Neapolitan school of composition in the 18th Century, both as a composer and as a teacher. His pupils included Pergolesi, Traetta, Piccini, and Paisiello. Durante himself studied in Rome with Pitrone and Pasquini, but the greater part of his career was in Naples, where he taught at three of the four conservatories for orphan boys. These institutions were not exclusively schools of music, but music was taught and cultivated in them to a high standard. Durante was not a composer of operas. Nearly the whole of his output consists of sacred and instrumental works. He was highly regarded as a composer in his own day and long after.

Durante wrote at least three Requiem Masses. The Requiem in C minor recorded here is the most ambitious of them. It is possible that it was commissioned for the memorial of King Philip V of Spain that took place in September of 1746 at the church of S. Giacomo degli Spagnoli in Rome, though the evidence

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Additional text on page:

If we renounce all art associated with politically incorrect regimes we will have to banish the ancient Greeks since they practiced slavery. In other words where does it end?

Arthur Miller
for that is not beyond dispute. It is scored for eight voice parts and string orchestra. Two horns play in the 'Tuba Mirum,' but are not heard elsewhere. There is a five-voice choir (SSATB) that includes the five vocal soloists, and a ripieno choir (ATB) whose role is sometimes to reinforce the other choir and sometimes to enrich the texture. The work was not published, but there are more than 50 manuscript sources for it ranging from the autograph of 1746 to a copy dating from 1871. Stephen Darlington consulted 14 of those sources, primarily one in the British Library, in preparing his edition. This recording is the first of that edition.

In his notes Darlington elaborates on the noteworthy technical elements of the work in its harmony, counterpoint, and structure. It may be an important historical landmark among orchestral Requiems of the 18th Century, but it will not make us forget Mozart. I came away feeling that the composer exhibits more skill than imagination.

As we expect from Darlington and the choir of Christ Church, Oxford, the technical standard is very high. But it sounds excessively forward, almost blatant, most of the time. How much of this is the performance itself and how much how it was recorded, I am not prepared to say. I just found myself longing for more dynamic variety and nuance.

The recording is filled out with a keyboard concerto in B-flat by Durante with the solo part played on the organ by Clive Driskill-Smith. It is a brief work with two sprightly outer movements surrounding a meditative Grave.

**DURON: Sacred Music**
La Grande Chapelle/ Albert Recasens
Lauda 16—67 minutes

The title for this recording, "Music for Two Dynasties", apparently refers to the services that Sebastian Duron (1660-1716) rendered to the church and King Carlos II. Following a series of ecclesiastical posts outside of Madrid, he was appointed as an organist to the court in 1691 and was elevated to chapel master in 1701. He served the court until the coronation of Philip V in 1706, after which he mostly lived in exile in southern France owing to his Hapsburg sympathies. Duron's secular works have been well represented on a number of recent recordings, including his one-act opera, *La Guerra de los Gigantes* (Sept/Oct 2013), and selections of his *tonadas* (secular songs, mostly taken from his zarzuelas, S/O 2010, S/O 2011, J/A 2016, & Naxos 570458 from 2007).

Here we have a selection of his sacred works in Spanish, most of which predate his court appointment; they are from a manuscript of *villancicos* copied in 1690. Most are dedicated to the veneration of the Blessed Sacrament and could have been used on the Feast of Corpus Christi or, as discussed in the booklet, other more personal or communal occasions, such as the Forty-Hours Devotion. The selections range from the solo *Jacara* for Christmas, 'Vaya, pues, rompiendo el aire' (also included on the 2016 collection mentioned above) to the double-choir responses for St Francisco Xavier and the Blessed Sacrament, both of which also include a virtuoso part for solo trumpet. This concerto-like use of the trumpet, brilliantly played by Hannes Rux, also reflects Duron's incorporation of a decidedly Italian and operatic style—some of his more conservative colleagues complained about that.

The nine singers and nine instrumentalists, led by Recasens, supply interpretations that are both assured and vibrant. The booklet is informative and offers full texts and translations.

**DUTILLEUX: Sur le Meme Accord; Les Citations; Mystère de l’instant; Timbres, Espace, Mouvement**
Augustin Hadelich, v; Mary Lynch, ob; Mahan Esfahani, hp; Jordan Anderson, b; Michael A Werner, perc; Chester Englander, cimb; Seattle Symphony/ Ludovic Morlot
SSM 1012—60 minutes

Ludovic Morlot and the Seattle Symphony present the third volume of the orchestra's Grammy Award-winning Dutilleux cycle. Again it's good to have entire CDs devoted to the mature orchestral works of Dutilleux, who was one of the greatest living composers when he died three years ago at 97. The recording is also a testament to the enterprising Morlot and his forward-looking leadership of the Seattle Symphony, which plays splendidly.

Dutilleux was not connected to any school, though there are hints of Messiaen and an elegance that recalls Ravel. He is one of those in-between composers—Lukas Foss and Frank Martin are two others—whose music is hard to tag but is actually more enjoyable than the work of many better-known ones.

The program opens and closes with two
nocturnes, an apt choice given that much of this music is mysterious and nocturnal. Sur le Même Accord, the opening piece, was written for Anne-Sophie Mutter in 2002 and is superbly played by Augustin Hadelich. Typical of Dutilleux’s later work, it is basically nontonal but easy on the ears. The high harmonics are pure magic, as are the shimmering orchestral effects. At the end, a wind choir and soaring violin lead to a dramatic coda with both loud and delicate percussion played with consummate control by Michael A. Werner.

Timbres, Espace, Movement, depicting Van Gogh’s “Starry Night”, opens with sensuous gongs soon joined by cellos and basses. Again, the mood is quietly poetic but full of drama. The orchestra swirls and flickers like Van Gogh’s painting.

In the middle of the program are two works for unusual ensembles, Le Citations, a quirky piece for harpsichord, oboe, percussion, and double bass, and the 1989 Mystère de L’Instant, another ethereal work, for strings, cimbalom, and percussion. The latter consists of ten brief movements in a variety of structures, including chants, chorales, solos, static soundscapes, and busy polyphonic textures. Again, there is a unifying mood of enraptured mystery reinforced by the vivid interaction of cimbalon and strings. Le Citations reveals the excellent musicianship of Mahan Esfahani on harpsichord, Chester Englander on cimbalon, and Mary Lynch on oboe. The neo-Baroque ensemble adds texture and variety to the program, rounding off a fascinating release.

SULLIVAN

EBEN: Biblical Dances; see HAMPTON
ELGAR: Intro & Variations; see BRITTEN

ENGLUND, KLAMI: Violin Concertos
Benjamin Schmid; Oulu Symphony/ Johannes Gustavsson

Ondine 1278—57 minutes

If you like Holmboe, Nielsen, or Vainberg, you’ll like Einar Englund’s 1981 violin concerto. The language is stoic and noble, chromatic but essentially tonal, and romantic in spirit. It opens with a gorgeous, memorable flourish and five chromatic chords in sequence, echoed at once in double stops by the soloist. These five chords unify melodically and harmonically the first movement, and are reprised in the closing moments of III. Englund’s orchestration is characteristically spare and lean, but colorful, shot through with gleaming woodwind sonorities. The clarity keeps the athletic and grandly rhetorical soloist always to the fore. II is disappointing, bleak and unhappy, lacking distinctive melodies or textures, turgid, like weak Shostakovich—bad-mood music. The finale in an instant dispels the murr with another brilliant and beautifully vaulting flourish, violin and orchestra at their most intricate and virtuosic, ending with a recap of the five iron chords that started it all. It’s a satisfying and moving concerto, one of the best I know from the 1980s.

Uuno Klami’s eclecticism is at full flower in his 1954 violin concerto: recycled Sibelius in I, faux-syrupy romanticism in II, and a loopy III that would make Satie smile. I’m not sure if Klami’s blatant quotes from Sibelius’s violin concerto are mockery or homage—though I lean to the former. Every quote somehow wanders off course, slamming into a chromatic wall of brass or snipped at by sickly, dissonant woodwinds and strings. The violin is restless, angry, sneering. I don’t know what Klami’s trying to say here. Weary woodwinds introduce II, before the violin croons a sticky-sweet melody evoking Bruch or Gade. Sour woodwind commentary gently undermines the soloist’s earnest sentimentality; their heckling ropes him into a hospitable display of self-deprecation. Then a solo horn takes up the soloist’s earnest first tune while the violin wanders high up into the ether. French dancehall music informs the mischievous, fleet III. Roller coaster oscillating trumpets wave at us, handing off their rapid figure to the soloist, then either he or someone in the orchestra always whips the momentum forward. It’s an exciting and amusing moto perpetuo that sounds like the finale to Poulenc’s unwritten violin concerto.

Sound is good, performances strong, though the Lahti Symphony’s brass under Osmo Vanska (BIS 696) are more crisp and animated in Klami’s finale.

FAIROUZ: Zabur
Dann Coakwell, t; Michael Kelly, bar; Indianapolis Symphony & Choirs/ Eric Stark

Naxos 559803—56 minutes

Fairouz’s oratorio Zabur (2015), with a libretto by Najla Said, tells the story of a young poet and blogger, Dawoud, who finds himself unable to publish his work online as he customarily does because he is forced to live in a shelter in wartime in an unnamed Middle Eastern location. With the assistance of his
friend and muse Jibreel, he writes music and words, sharing them with the men, women, and children in the shelter. Although the people are killed at the end of the work when the shelter is bombed, their shared creativity allows for a miracle of sorts. In Fairouz’s words, “all the pages of their collective labor are left and a full final hymn has been created”.

The music for this work is well made, responding to the text with an elevated nobility that creates a certain distant formality perhaps appropriate for oratorio. His text setting is particularly fine—Fairouz’s long acquaintance with vocal music shows in his skill at making the words easily understandable almost all the time. The performance is good but I sense that the musicians, especially Coakwell and Kelly, want to make their expressive points a little too forcefully. (Fairouz’s music doesn’t benefit from this sort of musical overemphasis.) The sound is clear but a little too flat.

HASKINS

FALCONIERI: Italian Seicento in Spanish Style; COPPOLA: Proserpina
Coro Polifonico Santo Spirito/ Francesco Pinaumont; Cappella Musicale di San Giacomo Maggiore/ Roberto Cascarino
Tactus 640001—57 minutes

When Andrea Falconieri (1585-1656) died of the plague, Filippo Coppola (1628-80) succeeded him as head of the royal chapel music in Naples. Neapolitan music was very influenced by Spanish culture when Spain ruled Naples and Sicily in the 16th and 17th Centuries, and Coppola’s short dramatic piece about the abduction of Proserpina sets a text in “Italianized Spanish”.

To bring Proserpina—premiered at the royal court in 1677-78—to modern listeners the performers here insert instrumental music by Falconieri between the vocal pieces, all effectively telling the story. There are especially fine passages for chorus as well as bass solo here (well performed by Cesare Lana).

Vocal and instrumental pieces by Falconieri, many with a Spanish flavor, round out the rest of the program. The playing is very good, and there’s often a nice flair and lively character in the instrumental dance movements. Some tempos in the Coppola are on the slow side (and the recording sounds distant), leading to a certain tentative quality sometimes.

First recording of the Coppola. Notes; texts in original language, track-by-track performer list, and music sources on label website.

C MOORE

FANO: Cello Sonata; 2 Pieces; Rimembranza; OMIZZOLe: Sonata Breve
Rocco Filippini, vc; Andrea Bacchetti, p
Tactus 870001 — 63 minutes

Here are two Paduan composers writing for cello & piano and piano solo. Guido Alberto Fano (1875-1961) wrote his Cello Sonata early in life in 1898. That’s nothing; his Remembrances of Padua for piano were written in 1892 when he was only 17! As you might expect, these are romantic works; but the sonata is by no means immature in feeling. It is a four-movement work of considerable verve and beauty. The same goes for the Two Pieces that follow, though the louder recording is a bit unprofessional. The second of the pieces gives us a taste of Fano’s later style. Written in 1933, it is amusing and uses harmonics and other effects.

This prepares us for Sylvio Omizzolo’s little three-movement cello sonata from 1970, an attractive work by a composer that neither I nor ARG appears to have come across before. This is another imaginatively sonic composition that puts both instruments through relatively unexpected paces. It is an enjoyable work.

Now we meet Fano in his teens with the five piano pieces in remembrance of Padua. These are surprising in places for their exploratory nature.

The two performers are musical and competent, if not always technically polished. I hope to hear from them and from these little-known composers again.

D MOORE

FARKAS: Hungarian Dance 2; All’antica; Ballade; Folk Song Sonatina; Solo Cello Sonata; Arioso; 4 Pieces; Fruit Basket
Miklos Perenyi, vc; Denes Varjon, p; Lucia Megyesi Schwartz, mz; Kristof Barati, v; Lajos Rozman, cl
Toccata 345 — 67 minutes

Ferenc Farkas (1905-2000) was a long-lived and popular Hungarian composer. Here is some of his music for cello played by Perenyi and Varjon with their customary polish and enthusiasm. Many of these pieces are recorded for the first time. All’antica is a three-movement suite evoking the Baroque to good effect. The rest of the cello pieces are more harmoni-
cally modern but very listenable. The Folk Song Sonatina is another evocative threemovement work. The following solo sonata is recorded a bit close for comfort but is a strong work nevertheless. The Ballade and Arioso are the only works that have been heard before, and they are fine pieces that do very well here. 4 Pieces is the most recent composition, written in 1965, a notably lively and rhythmic collection that may prepare us for the biggest work here, a 12-song cycle based on poems by Sandor Weores called Fruit Basket. These are some of the nuttiest texts I have seen set to music. They are poems directed at children and evocative of a surprising variety of subjects. The cycle is here scored for mezzo-soprano, violin, cello, clarinet, and piano and is very effective that way. It only lasts 17 minutes and is beautifully performed.

This is a fine collection of Farkas’s music. It is listed as Complete Chamber Music for Cello, Volume 1. I look forward to hearing Volume 2 and there are five more Farkas collections listed in the booklet. Go to it, Toccata. He’s well worth collecting.

D MOORE

FAURE: 9 Preludes; 3 Barcarolles; 2 Nocturnes; Pavane; Après un Rêve; Pelleas et Melisande Suite

Louis Lortie, p
Chandos 10915—75 minutes

This wonderful Fauré recital is labeled Volume 1, so I expect several more discs to come. Only the 9 Preludes, Op. 103 is a complete set or opus here. Otherwise, we get 3 of Fauré’s 13 Barcarolles, 2 of the 13 Nocturnes, Lortie’s own transcription of the Pavane, and Percy Grainger’s ‘Après un Rêve.’ The largest and most unusual piano work here is the 17-minute, 4-movement Pelleas & Melisande Suite. It is composed of Fauré’s original piano score of three movements from his incidental music to the play and another movement arranged by Cortot. It includes the well known ‘Sicilienne’.

Young Fauré had encounters with Liszt (who once complained that he had run out of fingers when reading through Fauré’s Ballade) and was a student of Saint-Saens. He became organist at La Madeleine and a professor, then director, of the Paris Conservatoire. He could have been a piano virtuoso except that he did not have the temperament or drive. He outlived Debussy and was very proud of his greatest student, Ravel. He did compose a huge amount of music, almost all of which involved the piano. His songs and chamber music are probably heard more often than his solo piano music, which generally has the disadvantage of being more difficult than it sounds. His unique chromatic harmonies make for continual interest, but it is probably his melodic abilities above all that makes his music so rewarding. The piano music is unjustly neglected in the concert hall. I have been attending piano recitals for over 50 years and cannot recall hearing a Fauré solo piano work in concert.

The current recital draws from over 25 years of compositions. The 20 tracks are a well thought and well ordered group that has been a pleasure to listen to many times. Lortie, a renowned French-Canadian pianist, has the maturity, musical sensibilities, and technique to begin a series in such a promising manner. Other sets of Fauré’s “complete” piano music variously occupy 3, 4, or 5 discs; and Lortie has given us at least 25 minutes of music here that are not listed as part of sets by Collard (Brilliant 94035, Mar/Apr 2011), Stott (Hyperion 44601, July/Aug 1999) or Crossley (CRD 5006, May/June 1988). He plays a beautifully prepared Fazioli piano, with exemplary sound captured by Chandos and excellent booklet essays.

HARRINGTON

FAURE: Piano Quartet 1; see RAVEL

FELDMAN: Orchestra: Elemental Procedures; Routine Investigations
Claudia Barainsky, s; West German Radio/ Peter Rundel
Wergo 7325—44 minutes

The three compositions here were written in the summer of 1976 and, according to Sebastian Claren’s excellent liner notes, were originally intended as studies for and material to incorporate into Feldman’s opera Neither, to a text by Samuel Beckett. Though Feldman didn’t use any of the material after all, Claren rightly discerns an important emphasis on melody in these pieces that probably translates well into the lyrical idiom appropriate to opera. (I haven’t heard Neither.)

Listeners who know Feldman as well as I do—and I am very familiar with his work but not an expert—will find in Orchestra a surprising amount of contrast. His ineffable sense of sonority, pacing, and harmony is all still there, of course. The longer Elemental Procedures (for soprano, chorus, and orchestra) is, if any-
thing, even more beautiful, the solo voice sounding a bit like a celestial Theremin. The text set in this work is also by Beckett and one that Claren reports Feldman looked hard to find; unfortunately, it is not included in the booklet (possibly a copyright or permissions problem).

Performances, sound, and programming are all excellent. This is a very important release.

HASKINS

FINCK: Ave Praeclara Mass; Sacred Pieces
Josquin Capella/ Meinolf Bruser
CPO 555066—60 minutes

Does the music of Heinrich Finck (1444-1527) rank among the luminaries of his day? The choral works of Isaac, Josquin, Obrecht, and the like have been so thoroughly vetted by scholars and musicians (recordings abound) that any unfamiliar name is bound to be relegated to 'kleinmeister' status. But would the canon stand up in a blind "taste test", especially when performed by an ensemble as refined as the Josquin Capella?

I find it difficult to say how Finck’s music is at all inferior to his more famous contemporaries. He exhibits as much mastery over the techniques of counterpoint. And his penchant for exploiting the low range of his bass voices betrays the influence of mainstream French composers. One might consider, then, that the reason we are unfamiliar with Finck’s music is the circumstances of his employment. Most of the great Franco-Flemish composers travelled between the power centers of Burgundy, France, and Italy, and their music is richly preserved in manuscripts and early printed books copied in these regions. Finck, on the other hand, travelled between posts in the smaller centers of Germany, Poland, and Lithuania. The sphere of influence where moved was simply not as great.

The program includes the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, and Sanctus of Finck’s Ave Praeclara Mass, the Magnificat Octavi Toni, motets Veni Sancte Spiritus and O Domine Jesu Christe, and the two sacred songs, ‘Hab’s ie Getan’ and ‘Ich Stund an Einem Morgen’.

The mass seems to lack some of the genius of his contemporaries, but even the luminaries are at their best when writing motets. So is Finck. The descending chains of thirds he tosses against the textures of both his motets are really quite delicate and breathtaking. The thoroughly imitative textures of the lieder give them a learned quality reminiscent of the songs of Ludwig Senfl, another composer who has languished in obscurity. This recording should help. Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

FOLKERTSMA: Quartets (2); Andante; Romance; In Memoriam
Vondel Quartet
Aliud 73—45 minutes

Paulus Folkertsma (1901-72) is a minor Dutch composer whom Aliud hopes to rescue from obscurity with this new release. (Pretty much total obscurity: I haven’t been able to find any other recordings of his music.) He studied violin but was self-taught as a composer and made his career as a schoolteacher. His music is old-fashioned, well put together, and clearly indebted to Brahms, with kinships to Brahms’s Germanic late-romantic followers like Karl Weigl, Hans Pfitzner, and Franz Schmidt. Performances seem adequate, but it’s not easy to be sure—the recording isn’t clear or detailed enough and certainly doesn’t show the players in an ideal light. The liner notes offer a useful sketch of Folkertsma’s background along with an (unintentionally?) amusing mix of proud celebration of his achievements and candid admission of his occasional shortcomings.

Each of Folkertsma’s two string quartets, the first from 1925 and the second from two decades later, is in four compact movements and about a quarter-hour long. The first two movements of Quartet in G, though certainly listenable, are somewhat tentative; but the last two, a brisk and very concise scherzo and a vivace finale, are more persuasive, carrying the listener along with their tuneful energy. Quartet in D minor is more assured and more individual, especially III, where poignantly sighing phrases built from enriched harmonies (with a tinge of dissonance almost Alban Berg-ish in its melancholy) convey deeper and more personal introspection with a touching understatement that gently underscores its authenticity.

Three shorter, one-movement works complete the program. Romance (for violin and piano) combines decorative melodies and bravura violin roulades no doubt inspired by the composer’s study of the instrument. Andante (for cello and piano), measured in its phrases and solemn in mood, uses the cello’s innate nobility of timbre and elocution to evoke autumnal longing. Even more elegiac in purpose, In Memoriam (for string quartet) is
another andante, this one explicitly written to honor three Allied pilots who crashed in Friesland (the composer’s home province) in World War II. It builds slowly to an intense climax, then quickly subsides; the war is over for these fighters, but many others remain to survive or be sacrificed.

I’m not sure how to judge this music fairly, but it’s reasonable to assume that better recorded sound and possibly more polished playing would offer a more flattering portrait of it. As it stands, the reflective sadness of Folkertsma’s Quartet in D minor’s third movement remains for me the most moving and memorable thing here. Perhaps an undemonstrative and self-effacing melancholy is appropriate for a man whose life spans two world wars that did so much damage to people who lived in and fought over his supposedly neutral homeland.

LEHMANN

FOSS: *Tashi; Solo Observed; Echoi*
Jean Kopperud, cl; Stephen Gossling, p; Linda Quan, Deborah Wang, v; Lois Martin, va; Christopher Finckel, vc; Stephen Gossling, p; Daniel Druckman, perc; David Broome, org
Albany 1644—62 minutes

Back in the 1980s I wrote program notes for the Brooklyn Philharmonic conducted by Lukas Foss. The greatest pleasure of the experience (aside from learning an incredibly varied repertory and hearing deeply thoughtful performances) was getting to know the maestro. He was one of the most charismatic and fascinating people I’ve met, with endless intellectual curiosity and a sparkling personality with bright eyes that lit up any room—and there were many of them, for Foss was an avian concert-goer with wide-ranging tastes. Then in his 60s, he seemed far younger and more alive than most people I knew who were half his age.

His music is much the same—full of charm, brilliance, playfulness, and bewildering variety. This welcome recital gives us three chamber works from various eras, each distinctly different, performed by the superb New York New Music Ensemble. The recording opens with *Tashi* from 1986, then moves backwards through *Solo Observed* (1982), to *Echoi* (1961–63). This allows us to begin with a work that is, as the notes put it, “the culmination of more than 40 years of compositional inquiry. The significance of *Tashi*’s assimilation of stylistic elements is then understood retrospectively through the other two works, each more strongly associated with forward-looking compositional techniques than the last. Foss himself, who as a conductor was known for his innovative programming, would undoubtedly have appreciated this approach.”

And so he would; Foss was indeed a lover of unusual programming. The strategy works well. *Tashi*, written for the remarkable ensemble that took the work’s title, seems a concise culmination of Foss’s career and also a premonition of the “world music” trends of the 90s and 2000s. The opening movement is Asian in its harmonies and atmospheres; II is a colorful, syncopated minuet with a trio for strings; III, with its improvised patterns, gets Foss into the “indeterminancy” game so popular in that era. As if to make up for this leap into ultramodernism, the lively finale offers neo-Mozartian tunes, while sustaining a contemporary profile. The main melody, swaying and beckoning, is a winning idea that carries the piece to its magical conclusion, a variation on the harmonics in the opening.

*Solo Observed* is Foss’s take on minimalism. “You’re not supposed to develop in minimalist music,” says Foss, “You’re supposed to repeat. But I thought, life isn’t like that.” Steven Gossling’s terrific pianism, an extended opening solo developing a dense polyphonic web of motifs, is “observed” by the other musicians for ten minutes before they join in. Once they do, the piece becomes looser, more pop-oriented. The minimalist pulse continues, but the piece journeys into unexpected, more playful territory. The bright vibraphone and thumping timpani push toward an ending that is both witty and ecstatic. This piece “violates all the rules” says Foss. “You’re not supposed to change styles. Well, this one changes styles ruthlessly.” The same holds true for individual pieces. *Echoi* is in such a different style than the first two that one would never guess Foss is the composer. He is not, of course, the only chameleon-like artist. One thinks of Martínu, Milhaud, Krenek, and Ginastera, not to mention the many serial composers who stopped fiddling with tone rows and went on to something radically different. *Echoi*, the most fragmented, atonal piece on this program, captures the anxieties of the Cuban Missile crisis, the Berlin Wall, and other early-60s traumas. Foss’s most overtly avant-garde piece, it is more colorful and imaginatively scored than many more recognized non-tonal pieces from its genre. The sounds made by the New York New Music ensemble are by turns delicate,
violent, and poetic. This cerebral finale offers one more layer in a complex and vibrant musical personality.

SULLIVAN

GABRIELLI: Madrigals & Ricercars, 1589
Speculum Ensemble; Tastar de Corde
Centaur 3471—76 minutes

Andrea is a lesser-known Gabrieli, a generation older than his famous nephew Giovanni, and dying before the flowering of instrumental music post 1600 (d. August 1585, the same year as Thomas Tallis). He was only moderately prolific in the area of the madrigal, with two books each of madrigals for five and six parts, and one for three parts. The collection presented here is posthumous and divided between madrigals and instrumental ricercars. Gabrieli’s idiom is conservative, with none of the expressive devices found in contemporaries like Marenzio and Wert, nor the chromaticism of Gesualdo, nor the forward-looking instrumentalism of Monteverdi. It is not surprising that the book opens with a sestina by Petrarch, who was the idol of the madrigalists of the mid-century, but was very old-fashioned by the 1580s and 1590s—particularly the difficult, long form of the sestina, rather than the sonnet.

I’m not much enamored of the style of the performances here, with the madrigals mixing rather weak vocalism (think fluty upper-voices) with instrumental coverage of some of the parts. The whole effect is effete rather than brawny. I would welcome more of this repertoire, but this is far from ideal or even satisfactory.

T MOORE

GABUNIA: Quartet; see TSINTSADZE

GAL: Clarinet Chamber Pieces
Ensemble Burlletta—Toccata 377—66 minutes

Hans Gal was born in Vienna in 1890 and quickly established a career in Germany (especially with his operas) that was cut short in 1933 with the rise of the Nazi regime. Forced to flee in 1938, he relocated in England for the rest of his very productive life, composing well into his last years and living to be 97. Through it all Gal remained immune to the disruptions and innovations of modernism, staunchly upholding the traditions of his Austro-German heritage, writing chaste, genteel, beautifully crafted music in the lineage of Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms (whom he also published books on and scholarly editions of). Though he suffered terrible losses from the turmoil around him (most of his family was murdered by the Third Reich, and Gal himself was for a time imprisoned in England as an “alien German”), these misfortunes are not reflected in his music. Music was his refuge from pain, reflecting and no doubt reinforcing the temperament of his music. Music was his refuge from pain, reflecting and no doubt reinforcing the temperament of his music. Music was his refuge from pain, reflecting and no doubt reinforcing the temperament of his music. Music was his refuge from pain, reflecting and no doubt reinforcing the temperament of his music. Music was his refuge from pain, reflecting and no doubt reinforcing the temperament of his music. Music was his refuge from pain, reflecting and no doubt reinforcing the temperament of his music. Music was his refuge from pain, reflecting and no doubt reinforcing the temperament of his music. Music was his refuge from pain, reflecting and no doubt reinforcing the temperament of his music. Music was his refuge from pain, reflecting and no doubt reinforcing the temperament of his music. Music was his refuge from pain, reflecting and no doubt reinforcing the temperament of his music. Music was his refuge from pain, reflecting and no doubt reinforcing

This inward tranquility is immediately apparent in his music, which seldom adopts the bold, strong-profiled thematic contours of Beethoven and Brahms and tends to avoid the accompanimental patterns and strongly contrasted colors that throw tunes into relief. Instead Gal is more interested in motive development through intricately interwoven contrapuntal lines—a tendency that, curiously enough, allies him with forward-looking figures like Mahler, Hindemith, and even Schoenberg, though stylistically there are similarities only to Mahler, and even there only at Mahler’s most pastoral and nostalgic. Emotional restraint prevails, often manifesting as late-Brahmsian autumnal lyricism that alternates decorous gaiety and reflective sadness. There are consoling warmth and nuance aplenty in this music, but nothing excessive, strident, threatening, or deeply agitated.

A fair portion of Gal’s output has appeared on records in the past two decades, including symphonies, concertos, chamber pieces, and piano pieces (see our index). This new Toccata release of three chamber works with clarinet, each about 20 minutes long, adds two first-ever recordings to the catalog: the 1935 Serenade for clarinet, violin, and cello, and the 1977 Clarinet Quintet. Also included is the 1950 Clarinet Trio. Dates of composition mean little, as Gal’s voice and vocabulary didn’t change a lot, though the later works tend to have a greater emphasis on polyphony, the earlier Serenade on simpler textures, sensuous color, and melodic charm.

First-time listeners might enter these pieces quickly and easily through the Trio’s theme-and-variations finale or the two final movements of the Serenade. These offer delightful contrasts of tempo and texture while setting forth winsome tunes in lilting or bustling rhythms that sway and caper, aglow with the fresh, innocent sensuality of a pretty girl in the earliest blush of womanhood. The more complex movements offer somewhat more subtle pleasures that require a bit more discernment.

American Record Guide
Gal’s music is offered here in polished, sensitive performances, well captured in Toccata’s top-notch recorded sound. The very useful annotations by Gal’s daughter Eva Fox-Gal are elegantly written and packed with astute observations about her father and the music on this very rewarding release.

LEHMANN

GESUALDO: Sacrae Cantiones 1
Marian Consort/ Rory Mc Cleery
Delphian 34176—61 minutes

The Marian Consort’s six members (SAGTTB) sing with a fervent and devotional otherworldly quality that suits the music very well. Much is often made of how the salacious and madman details of Carlo Gesualdo’s life influenced his music, and that sometimes obscures our understanding of the ways that his music has a universality and significance well beyond any personal traits of its creator.

Published in 1603, the motets in the Sacrae Cantiones Book 1 demonstrate Gesualdo’s deep understanding of the human condition. Several motets are on dark themes such as grief, fear of death, sorrow, and unrepentant sin—with music that has more than just a veneer of despair. Several texts are prayers for protection, for mercy, for strength against foes, for a cleansed heart.

The Marian Consort captures this power and complexity with both a high level of skill and conviction. The network web of voices and calm pace of performance combine to create a sense of the music being suspended in the air. At first I found this a little disconcerting because the music seemed not to flow forward, but the more I listened the more the singers’ approach drew me in. There’s a lovely blend and profound reflection on the meaning of the texts.

Notes, bios, texts, translations.

C. MOORE

GILBERT & SULLIVAN: HMS Pinafore
F. Lawrence Ewing (Sir Joseph Porter), Jonathan Spencer (Captain Corcoran), Aaron Gallington (Ralph Rackstraw), Charles Martin (Dick Dead-eye), Jennifer Ashworth (Josephine), Cabi ria Jacobsen (Hebe), Sonja Gariaeff (Buttercup); Lamplighters Theater, San Francisco/ David Moschler Lamplighter 2015 [2CD] 86 minutes (469 Bryant St SF CA 94107)

HMS Pinafore has had an extraordinary run since 1878, and the performances keep coming. This excellent, complete recording is from a 2015 performance by the Lamplighters Music Theater in San Francisco. The production won several San Francisco Bay area awards including Outstanding Production of a Musical. Listening to these discs it’s easy to hear why. I’ve always considered the 1959 D’Oyly Carte recording on Decca definitive, but this new recording is as good. The English accents are perfect, the singing and characterizations are excellent, the dialog delivery is sincere, the voices match the character’s peculiarities, and the orchestra accompanies all this as if they had been performing the score for years. Most of all, this is such fun, with Gilbert’s matchless wit coming through.

Standouts in this excellent cast include Sonja Gariaeff’s Little Buttercup and F. Lawrence Ewing’s Sir Joseph Porter (played as both snide and effete).

Of the many performances I have seen, Gilbert and Sullivan always work best when they are played straight. The show has had many director influenced productions, including updates, performances in warehouses and on ships, changes in location, changing the characters to gangsters, and other horrors inflicted to make it more accessible to modern audiences. But the best performances are true to the original. I only wish there was a video of this performance, as the few videos that have been produced have been mangled.

My last review of Pinafore was of an abridged version on Linn 522 (S/O 2016) which I did not recommend. My top two picks would be this new Lamplighter recording and the 1959 Decca D’Oyly Carte recording with dialog. The 2013 complete Ohio Light Opera recording on Albany is also recommended (1459; M/A 2014).

FISCH

GINASTERA: Orchestral Works 2
Xiayin Wang, p; BBC Philharmonic/ Juanjo Mena
Chandos 10923—69 minutes

This is the second in a series of orchestral discs from Mena and the BBC Philharmonic. The first included the most popular of Ginastera’s works for orchestra, Estancia. Here we have Panambi, which is a “choreographic legend in one act”, and the Second Piano Concerto.

The opening of Panambi manages to evoke both the beginning of the Rite of Spring (solo bassoon and contrabassoon, in the depths, rather than the heights) and the watery Rhine from Wagner’s Ring. The extended and atmospheric ballet is divided into 18 movements,
with some percussive dances (‘The Tribe is Uneasy’), and closing with a French apotheosis with woman’s voices.

The other work, the Second Piano Concerto (1972), is very much on the other side of the divide between nationalism and abstraction, part of the high tide for high modernism. One would certainly not imagine that this difficult and noisy abstraction is by the same composer, nor that it has anything to do with Latin culture. Pianistic it is, and how. Xiaofei Wang brilliantly navigates the plethora of notes at high speed and high volume, particularly in the closing Prestissimo (the notes confess that she does use two hands for the scherzo for the left hand alone—II).

T MOORE

GINASTERA: Harp Concerto; Pampeana 1; Guitar Sonata; Danzas Argentinas

Yolanda Kondonassis, hp; Gil Shaham, v; Orli Shaham, p; Jason Vieaux, g; Oberlin Orchestra/ Raphael Jimenez
Oberlin 16-04—55 minutes

So that you won’t miss it, this is boldly titled “Ginastera: One Hundred”. For us less-informed North Americans, Ginastera and Villa-Lobos stand in roughly the same position in their countries of Argentina and Brazil—the only composer we have heard of and heard any music by. But the major differences are age (Villa-Lobos, born in 1887, is a more than a full generation older), style (Villa-Lobos showed the influence of Paris and of Brazilian popular music), and Ginastera’s move to a much more abstract “neo-expressionism” when he abandoned nationalism.

Oberlin’s selection of four works from 1937, 1947, 1956, and 1976 wisely avoids anything truly rebarbative; and the first two (the Danzas, Op. 2, and the Pampeana, Op. 16) are explicitly nationalist. Even the harp concerto and the quite late guitar sonata will certainly register as Latin American with most listeners, the former quite lyrical, the latter idomatic for the guitar. Both the opening and closing movements of the sonata begin with a strummed chord of the open strings, and the dissonances are often built on fourths, rather than grinding seconds or tritones.

The performances and the extremely clear recordings are absolutely first-rate. In a very difficult period for higher education in the USA, it is good to know that Oberlin continues to operate at this level.

T MOORE

GLASS: Piano Etudes; Illusionist Suite; Wichita Vortex Sutra; Dreaming Awake; Metamorphosis 2

Bruce Levingston, p; Ethan Hawke, narr
Sono Luminus 92205 [2CD] 110 minutes

I have enjoyed Bruce Levingston’s previous Glass release, but am even more excited about this one. It is a program centered around Glass’s remarkable etudes, adding in earlier pieces like ‘Metamorphosis 2’ and Wichita Vortex Sutra (beautifully narrated by Ethan Hawke). There are at present a number of fine interpreters of Glass’s piano music—among them Paul Barnes (Orange Mountain, July/Aug 2016) and Maki Namekawa (OM, Mar/Apr 2015). Levingston’s approach is more measured and often freer than either Barnes or Namekawa. The famous Etude 2, for instance, contains extreme rubato—possibly more than I think is appropriate, but musical and thought-provoking nevertheless. The perpetuum mobile of Etude 10 benefits from a tempo slightly slower than other performances, more nuanced phrasing, and great clarity of articulation. Sono Luminus’s production captures the piano (a Steinway D) perfectly. One of the best Glass piano programs I have ever heard.

HASKINS

GLAZOUNOV: Violin Concerto; see KHACHATURIAN
GODOWSKY: Transcriptions
Chopin, Bach, Schubert, Schumann, Strauss, Albéniz, Saint-Saens, Smith
Laurent Wagschal, p
Evidence 26 — 76 minutes

While Godowsky’s transcriptions seem predictably virtuosic after a while, Wagschal wields the necessary dexterity. The Chopin transcriptions, notable Etude 3, are played with clarity and organization, though without bravura or an ultra-romantic feeling. Rather, his playing is clear and pristine, more akin to one’s approach to Bach or Mozart than to Liszt. In Op. 25:5, Wagschal’s playing seems textbook, allowing one to hear a more academic interpretation, but maybe not in the late-romantic tradition. The Bach transcriptions have incredible transparency, especially in the Fugue and Siciliano movements; the Presto movement poses no problems for him.

I prefer the shorter transcriptions, such as the charming Schubert set, though they do not virtuosically astonish in the same way that the Strauss and Albéniz might. The highly embellished Saint-Saens Carnival is especially lovely.

KANG

GOLDBERG: Beyond the Variations
Rebel; Jörg-Michael Schwarz
Bridge 9478—59:30

The husband & wife team of Jörg-Michael Schwarz and Karen Marie Marmer and their Ensemble Rebel have an enviable track record among American early music bands, with 25 years of activity (moving to the US from Germany in 1992), and 20 years of CDs, for Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, Dorian, Naxos (the complete Haydn masses), and, most recently, Bridge.

The name of Johann Gottlieb Goldberg (1727-56) is known to us through the variations that Bach gave him to entertain his employer’s insomnia, but his brief life means that very little music from him survives; the five works included here—four trio sonatas and a quartet—are the complete chamber music (two sonatas for flute, violin, and continuo are lost). In addition there are two harpsichord concertos and 24 polonaises and a handful of other works for solo keyboard. Given the composer’s youth (he was closer to the galant JC Bach in age than to CPE or WF), one would expect his style to be much more modern, but it is more like Sebastian than any of Bach’s children—contrapuntal, serious, and quite long-winded.

Rebel treats these works to appropriately fiery interpretations, which are beyond reproach. I find only one other recording (Musica Alta Ripa on MDG; Nov/Dec 2008).

T MOORE

GOLDMARK: Violin Suite 2; Trio I
Thomas Albertus Irnberger, v; Michal Kanka, vc; Pavel Kaspar, p
Gramola 99082 [SACD] 61 minutes

Karl Goldmark’s Suite No. 2 for violin and piano is a Brahmsian piece from 1892. The melodies are cheery, graceful, and well proportioned but not that creative or attention-getting. The piano’s accompanying figures stay unvaried for long stretches. The trio is from the 1850s, and it’s closer to Schumann and Beethoven than to Brahms. The melodies are less chipper, and they’re better for it; there is more dynamic variety and more ebb and flow to the phrases. The Scherzo is lively and interesting, the best movement on the program. The violinist is expressive, but his tone is insistently bright and his intonation often wide of the mark. In the trio the cello tends to get submerged in the piano while the violin stands out too much, mostly owing to playing rather than placement. Notes are in English and German.

ESTEP

GOUNOD: Cinq-Mars
Mathias Vidal (Cinq-Mars), Veronique Gens (Princesse Marie), Tassis Christoyannis (De Thou); Bavarian Radio/ Ulf Schimer
ES 11 [2CD] 144 minutes

The mission of the Plazetto Bro Zane (in Venice) is the recording and promotion of lesser known French operas. In this respect they are similar to Opera Rara (which is Italian bel canto). This is a lavish presentation: two discs in a hardcover book with a complete French-English libretto, artwork, and essays about the opera. All copies of the recording are numbered. This is 1508.

Cinq-Mars is the 11th of Gounod’s 14 operas. In September 1876, Leon Carvalho became director of the Opera-Comique in Paris. He needed a new opera to secure his position. As director of the Theatre-Lyrique he had had great success with the premieres of Gounod’s Faust, Mireille, and Romeo and Juliet. Composed in just three months, Cinq-Mars opened at the Opera-Comique, April 5, 1877. The libretto by Paul Poirson and Louis Gallet
is based on Alfred de Vigny’s 1826 novel Cinq-Mars.

The audience responded to the work coolly. Critics thought it was a mess, as it combined—straddled—the genres of grand opera and opera comique. For another production Gounod took this criticism to heart and composed recitatives for the spoken scenes and added a cantabile in Act 3.

The plot follows the novel only partly. Forming the framework is a revolt by French nobility against Cardinal Richelieu’s consolidation of power. Added is a secret love affair between the Marquis Cinq-Mars and Princesse Marie de Gonzague. Cinq-Mars enters politics only on hearing of a planned marriage between Marie and the king of Poland, not to gain equal social status with Marie as in the novel. Cinq-Mars joins the conspiracy against Richelieu. But he has privately arranged for Spanish armies to come to their aid. A group of courtesans led by Marion Delorme and their noble lovers discuss the political situation. Marion reveals that Cardinal Richelieu threatens to exile Cinq-Mars. She announces that she will organize a ball at which the conspirators can recruit more members. Cinq-Mars and Marie are reunited. But an emissary from Richelieu arrives to announce that although the Cinq-Mars and Marie marriage is approved by the king, Marie is to marry the king of Poland instead. Delorme’s ball begins with lavish pastoral entertainment: readings, ballet, a sonnet sung by a shepherd. Cinq-Mars reveals the Spanish treaty, only to be denounced by counselor De Thou. Cinq-Mars and Marie are married, but Richelieu orders the execution of Cinq-Mars for betraying France by dealing independently with a foreign power. Marie can save him only by agreeing to the Polish wedding. She capitulates. While he awaits his execution Cinq-Mars sings of his regret that Marie has abandoned him. Marie arrives and confesses that she has always loved him. De Thou has a plan for their escape the next day. But Cinq-Mars is to be executed before dawn. Before he is led to the gallows he and De Thou sing a final prayer.

There are an unusually large number of manuscripts of the opera: revisions, new material, eliminated sections, orchestrations, vocal scores in French, Italian, and German. These are discussed in detail in the book. The recording is of what is believed to be Gounod’s final version. The publishers expected many revivals and performances, but the opera soon disappeared from the stage.

The performance recorded here is an outstanding one, making a strong case for the opera’s revival. It has not been performed since Gounod’s time. Mathias Vidal alone could spark a revival (and of other French operas of the same period). His reedy tenor voice is capable of nuance and power, elegant in musicianship and characterization. Veronique Gen’s voice blooms with exquisite beauty in a delicate rendering of the suffering Princesse Marie. There is much style and eloquence from baritone Tassis Christoyannis as the stalwart friend De Thou. The Bavarian forces and conductor respond with much beauty and elan.

Oddly enough, this recording can be heard for free on You Tube!

PARSONS

GRAUPNER, TELEMAN: Trios
Harmonie Universelle Atlanta
ACA 20114—63 minutes

I should be a big fan of this: it’s high Baroque repertoire, an important but under-appreciated composer (Graupner), and American performers using appropriate reproductions of period instruments (details in the booklet). But it is evident from the very first notes that in spite of her credentials (study with Wilbert Hazelzet, masterclasses with Brüggen and Bart Kuijken), these performances by Catherine Bull are perhaps the worst I have heard from a professional flutist. Her intonation is simply exceptionally poor, and not only in the first two trios, which are in keys that offer more challenges in this respect (D minor, and B-flat), but also in works in keys that should be unchallenging even to the amateur (D, E minor). I’m not convinced about the use of the lutenwerk as continuo in these works either, but the flute is so distracting it is difficult to even discern lesser liabilities.

T. MOORE

GRECO: Geografías del Silencio; In Passing; Swallow; Off With Its Head!
Duncan Gifford, p; Jan Kouwenhoven, ob; Peter Brunt, v; Arjen Uitenbogaard, vc; Ellen Corver, p; Netherlands Wind Ensemble; Enigma Ensemble/ Klaus Simon; Czech National Symphony/ Adrian Leaper—Naxos 559816—71 minutes

The three works for piano and ensemble—Geografías, In Passing, and Swallow—are dreamscapes, often nightmarish, fragmentary, and elusive, brimming with anguish, tension, and a transitory profundity and poignancy that
lingers after the players fall silent and the dreamer wakes—and, like dreams, it’s hard to recall details even minutes later.

Jose Luis Greco was born 1953 in New York to Spanish parents—hence he’s included in the Naxos “American Classics” series, though just the last piece, *Off With Its Head!,* evokes Americana. Most of this has a strong French flavor, pianism descended from Debussy and Messiaen, some fleeting jazz qualities, and use of bird song in both piano and woodwinds. Greco favors woodwind sonorities and percussion and often treats strings like winds, their lines warbling and throaty. Greco is a pianist and writes for his instrument with a scintillating flare that sometimes reminds me of Nikolai Kapustin’s knuckle-busting style. You’ll search in vain for conventional classical structures—the listener is carried aloft by a fluid stream of consciousness, taking in the hallucinatory scenes as they flow past. The last work here with the mock-grisly title *Off With Its Head* is a tongue-in-cheek medley of old “Looney Tunes” cartoon and TV show themes from the black-and-white era, all set to a jazzy, bouncy, percussion-heavy backbeat. It’s amusing and vapid—once is more than enough.

The recordings span 1992 to 2011 and were made in a church, studio, the Concertgebouw, and the Zaragoza Auditorium in Spain—but the sound quality is remarkably homogenous. The audience for *Swallow* is a bit phlegmatic, but silent elsewhere. Sometimes ensemble is ragged in *Geografias,* but performances are otherwise faultless.

It’d be easy to overlook this, but you’d miss out on some beautiful strange sounds and viscerally thrilling pianism.

**GRETRY: L’epreuve Villageoise**

Sophie Junker (Denise), Talise Trevigne (Madame Hubert), Thomas Dolie (La France), Francisco Fernandez-Rueda (Andre); Opera Lafayette/ Ryan Brown

Naxos 660377—54 minutes

*L’epreuve Villageoise* (The Village Trial) is a revision of an opera originally titled *Theodore et Paulin.* It was composed by Andre-Ernest-Modeste Gretry and Baptiste Choudard and was the only time Gretry collaborated on an opera. He composed many popular operas and opera comiques in the late 18th and early 19th Century. He would often revise his longer operas into shorter works to suit a different audience. *Theodore et Paulin* was a failure when it was presented at the court of Marie Antoinette (March 1784), who could relate to the aristocratic characters, but not the rural ones. The authors quickly re-worked the opera, recognizing that the rural characters were more interesting and had greater appeal to the general French audience. The opera was revised from three to two acts, using only the rural characters. *L’epreuve Villageoise* premiered in June 1784 (Gretry worked fast) and became one of his most popular operas. It was performed at major opera houses around the world for over 100 years, but the 18th Century style and comic contrivances fell out of favor as audience tastes changed.

The opera involves the courting of Denise, the daughter of Madame Hubert, by La France, a city sophisticate, and Andre, her rural fiancé. After many misunderstandings, Denise rejects La France for Andre as the chorus happily sings about the coming marriage. There is an interesting overture and a short ballet that ends the opera. The two acts and all of the action, including an entr’acte, take 54 minutes. The simple plot and melodic and brisk score move very quickly.

Opera Lafayette is an opera company in Washington, DC, that has specialized in 18th Century operas. This performance is a complete success. The singers are excellent and know how to stress the comic elements and keep the plot light and fluffy. Ryan Brown conducts the orchestra and chorus in a fleet-footed manner. Having reviewed several recordings of Gretry’s operas (N/D 2014) I found this short comic one a delight. The sound is excellent, and Naxos offers a French and English libretto on its website. The included English-only booklet offers background on the opera and performer biographies.

**GUBAIDULINA: Make a Joyful Noise; Light and Darkness; Canticle of the Sun**

Ivan Monighetti, vc; Christian Schmitt, org; Elbtonal Percussion; NDR Choir/ Philipp Ahmann

BIS 2276 [SACD] 62 minutes

This collection is released under the title “Declaration from Faith” and reflects the composer’s intense religious sentiments. *Make a Joyful Noise Unto God* (Jauchzt vor Gott) (1989), for mixed choir and organ, was commissioned by Gidon Kremer for a chamber music festival in Austria where he was artistic director. The work contrasts chant with spooky, quasi-Polish avant-gardisms inter-
rupted by a blazingly radiant triad, before wildness fear and trauma take over. The noise does not appear joyful.

Light and Darkness (1976), for organ solo, opens with a scary, Gothic improvisation and continues with turgid chaos, but ends with diminishing and the ozone.

Canticle of the Sun (1997), for cello, chamber choir, and percussion, with text by St Francis of Assisi, originally written for Rostropovich, may be Ms Gubaidulina’s most performed work. Rostropovich recorded it himself (EMI 57153, M/A 2002). I saw no need for further exploration in my review (M/A 2004), but it seems that everyone didn’t take my advice and this is the third recording I know of. Chandos 10106 (with David Geringas and the Danish National Choir) is competent (different coupling) but it’s hard to compete with BIS’s impressive SACD sonics and more secure performance.

Texts and translations.

GIMBEL

GUNST: 7 Pieces; Symphonie Fantastique; Piano Pieces; DEBUSSY: Violin Sonata; Suite Bergamasque
Elena Denisova, v; Susanne Lang, p
Oehms 1842—75 minutes

Yevgeny (or Eugen) Gunst was born in Moscow in 1877 and studied law at the University of Moscow and music at the Conservatory. He wrote the first biography of Scriabin shortly after he died, taught theory and counterpoint, conducted, and composed. He and his wife fled to Estonia and then France in 1920, where he died in 1950. His Seven Pieces for violin and piano are from 1936, so conservative in their tonality and four-bar melodies that they are almost naive; they have considerable charm, though.

The Symphonie Fantastique is a piano reduction of an orchestral piece from 1921, strongly influenced by Scriabin and impressionism. There are many interesting passages where blurry, free-ranging lines quickly become rhythmically pointed—for only a few seconds. Some listeners will be turned off by the lack of a plot, and I’d be sympathetic; but ones who like a loose, rhapsodic structure and a touch of mysticism (though Gunst is earthier than Scriabin) will find a lot here to love.

The first of 1937’s Deux Morceaux for piano is more like the violin pieces—simpler yet endearing, and more Germanic; the second strikes an interesting balance between that and Gunst’s impressionist side. The first of the Two Mood Pictures, probably from around 1910, is the most emotionally direct, the most Russian. The second is more forward-looking and beautifully written. Rob Haskins commended Lang’s recital of some of Gunst’s other piano music (Oehms 899, Nov/Dec 2014). It appears that most or all of Gunst’s manuscripts were only rediscovered in 2010.

I would rather hear more Gunst, but maybe there isn’t enough ready or extant to fill out the program. Denisova is a caring, fairly expressive player, but her tone is a little thin and her intonation a little shaky, so I’m not interested in her Debussy. She’s good enough to put the Gunst across, though there is room for improvement. Lang has a solid technique and a lovely tone. My only complaint is that I wish she would really roar a few times, but in all fairness Gunst seems rarely to call for that. The sound is fine; notes are in English and German.

GIMBEL

HAMPSON: Old 100th Variations; MESSIAEN: L’Ascension; EBEN: Biblical Dances
Kola Owolabi, org
Raven 996—67 minutes

A program of three 20th Century works played on the 1950 Holtkamp organ in Crouse College at Syracuse University. This significant installation by Walter Holtkamp Sr. used many ranks from earlier Roosevelt and Aeolian instruments found on the campus. The result is his greatest achievement, conceived in the aesthetic of the then burgeoning organ reform movement, which sought to resurrect the tonal aspects of the Baroque organ.

I find this sound too heavy and the predominantly high-pitched mixtures harsh and sometimes seemingly out-of-tune—all exacerbated by the extremely dry acoustic and an “in-your-face” recorded sound. The Hampton and Eben pieces don’t do much for me—lots of notes but not musically engaging. The Messiaen needs a warmer sound and a spacious acoustical environment to underline its mystical aspects.

Owolabi is Associate Professor of Organ at the University of Michigan, having previously been University Organist at Syracuse. He is a fine player—gets all the notes—but it all sounds somewhat academic and lacking in personality. Notes on the music and the organ.

DELCAMP
HANDEL: Italian Cantatas (5) & Duets (2)
Yetzabel Arias Fernandez, s; Klaus Mertens, b; Amsterdam Baroque/ Ton Koopman
Challenge 72265—64:16

Programs of the cantatas that Handel composed (mostly) in Italy nowadays appear regularly. This one is a little different. It offers two singers, not just one. Not only does it give us just vocal works, without the “intermissions” of instrumental chamber pieces, but it mixes cantatas with Italian duets.

There are three cantatas written for soprano: Tu fel? Tu Constants? with oboe, strings, and continuo; Pensieri Notturni di Filli (‘Nel dolce dell’oblio’) with recorder and continuo; and Aure Soave, e Liete with continuo. The first and last of these are taken from a manuscript named after the manuscript made for one Serafino Agostini (and now belonging to Ton Koopman). What is particularly interesting is that the version given for Tu Fedel? differs considerably from the one we have had in many earlier recordings. It lacks the opening sonata, and most of its eight vocal movements involve divergent settings of the text. For that item alone, this is an important release for Handel collectors.

There are two cantatas here for bass voice, both familiar from numerous recordings: Dalla Guerra Amorosa, with continuo; and Cuopre tal Volta il Cielo, with two violins and continuo—the first of these also given in a variant version. Finally our two singers join in two duets for soprano and bass: the three-movement Tacete, Ohime, Tacete, and the two-movement Giu nei Tartarei Regni.

I don’t recall encountering before the work of Fernandez: she has a precise, clear voice, its ringing projection just slightly verging on the edgy. Mertens needs no introduction to record collectors, of course. Separately or together, these singers deliver confident and impeccable performances, while Koopman and his players guarantee stylistic reliability.

Beautiful sound, good booklet, texts with translations.

HANNENHEIM: Pieces 1, 3, 4; Violin & Viola Duo; Viola Suite; Viola Sonatas 1+2
Aida-Carment Soanea, v, va; Adrian Pinzaru, v; Igor Kamenz, p
Challenge 72734—52 minutes

I had never heard of Norbert von Hannenheim (1898-1945) until I received this disc. Hannenheim was part of the avant-garde in central Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. The 1930s were the worst time to belong to the Central European avant-garde because of the rise of the Nazis, and he soon found that he could no longer compose for a living. His friends persuaded him to place the manuscripts of his compositions in a suitcase and deposit in the Commerzbank in Berlin, but it was bombed in November 1943 and all was lost. Several of his works have come to light recently, and some are collected here.

Although Hannenheim studied with Arnold Schoenberg in Berlin, his music is not as dissonant as his teacher’s. There is a dark sound to the music in keeping with the time and also owing to the viola’s timbre, but the mood is not always dark. His music has a certain flow to it, so it doesn’t sound as tightly structured as the neoclassical works most composers were writing at the time. Schoenberg wrote that he was impressed by Hannenheim’s prolific output, but I hear little of interest in the music. He had some unusual compositional techniques, like composing tone rows that were 54 notes long—but that does not translate into especially interesting music.

Soanea plays a viola made in Cremona by Lorenzo Storioni of the late-18th and early-19th Centuries.

HAYDN: Baryton Divertimentos
Esterhazy Machine
FoM 36811—67 minutes

The baryton is an odd and ancient instrument with 6 or 7 strings to be played with a bow and 9 or 10 more that run up the back of the neck and may be plucked with the left thumb or left to vibrate sympathetically with the front strings. Prince Nicolaus Esterhazy, Haydn’s employer, played the instrument and Haydn wrote duets, quintets, and octets including it; but his major output was these 124 trios with viola and cello. Esterhazy originally felt that all the works should be written in A or D, but Haydn learned the instrument himself and gradually introduced other keys. These trios are written relatively early in Haydn’s career but they are polished pieces, particularly the huge seven-movement Trio 97 in D, written for the Prince’s birthday. The rest of the trios are in three movements, the earlier ones ending with a minuet.

The fine players here are Kenneth Slovik

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on the baryton, Steven Dann on viola, and Myron Lutzke on cello. They play not only with technical polish but with attention to balances between instruments. This is not the easiest element in these works, where the viola and the baryton alternate as to who is playing melody and who accompaniment. My brother Ronald Moore has arranged these pieces for the modern string trio and has found them fascinating since the range of those two instruments is similar and the pizzicato low notes in the baryton parts are not in the violin range and yet they play off against the cello part that also contains a good deal of pizzicato. We were together over the holidays and read 1 thru 30 with my violinist son Ian. I wish Ron could have stayed longer. I hope he can get them published.

Returning to the character of these readings, all repeats are observed, including the return of the minuets after the trios. I haven’t heard that done before in any classical work, but since all of the minuets are very concise it sounds fine. The only trio where the return repeat is omitted is 101 in C major, which concludes the program. That minuet is a little longer than the rest and it works fine.

As you may have gathered by now, I find these performances very convincing and enjoyable. This is listed as Volume I. If they record all of the trios, it should take at least 20 CDs. I hope we all live so long.

— D MOORE

Haydn: Opera Gala

Simone Kermer, Juanita Lascarro, Siphiwe McKenzie-Edelmann, s; Chen Reiss, mz; Andreas Schieddegger, Thomas Michael Allen, Rainer Trost, t; Paul Armin Edelmann, Wolfgang Holzmair, Jurgen Sacher, bar; Ivan Paley, b; West German Radio/Markus Poschner & Manuel Hernandez-Silva

Capriccio 5255 [2CD] 142 minutes

From the title Opera Gala I was expecting an extensive sampling of several of Haydn’s operas. But it is actually highlights from only two: L’Infedelta Delusa (1773) and La Vera Costanza (1779). For all the popularity of Haydn’s music his operas are rarely performed or recorded. This recording is “two galas”. The West German Radio orchestra accompanies both. Both are studio recordings.

CD 1, the Infedelta highlights, was recorded January 19, 2009 with Markus Poschner conducting. The Vera Costanza highlights were recorded February 19, 2011 with Manuel Hernandez-Silva on the podium.

Both operas have been recorded complete. If one only wants to sample the pair, this is a delightful sampling. Who sings what is indicated, but it is difficult to put together the singer’s name, which number, and which opera. At least they are all young-sounding, fresh voices with a credible amount of vocal pizzazz and characterization. The soprano fireworks are handled with ease by Kermer in L’Infedelta. The soprano charms in Vera Costanza are taken on by Lascarro. Both conductors lead a merry romp.

There are brief plot synopses, historical notes, and bios of the 12 singers, but no texts.

— PARSONS

Haydn: Piano Sonatas

20, 32, 34, 36, 44
Bernd Glemser
Oehms 455—79 minutes

20, 23, 32, 46, 48
John O’Conor
Steinway 30058—70 minutes

24, 25, 26, 29, 31, 32
Einav Yarden
Challenge 72742—63 minutes

Haydn’s piano sonatas are not heard or recorded often, but they are delightful and varied works, if not quite at the same level of ingenuity as his string quartets and symphonies. Therefore, three new issues of selected sonatas must be welcomed, especially since they all offer fine performances of mature works, with little overlap. Only No. 32 is on all three releases and No. 20 on two.

The artists represent three different countries and generations. John O’Conor (b. 1947) is a senior Irish pianist known especially for his Beethoven recordings. Bernd Glemser (b. 1962), a German, is in mid-career and has numerous CDs to his credit (about 35 according to the booklet). Einav Yarden, who seems to be in her early 30s (I wish women’s birthdates were not so often suppressed), is Israeli and has made only one previous recording (July/Aug 2014). In each case, however, this seems to be the pianist’s first recording of Haydn sonatas. I have enjoyed listening to all three but have ended up with clear preferences.

Glemser’s selection consists of all surviving sonatas in minor keys, played in the order of their Hoboken numbers. The performances are meticulous, clear, and well articulated, but somewhat prosaic. Although Haydn’s music

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cannot tolerate too much flexibility, this artist seems too reserved, even stiff at times. The resulting mild tedium is exacerbated by Glemser’s penchant for repeating the second halves of movements, which accounts for the long timing. I don’t think these repeats, which go back to Baroque practice, are advisable in Haydn, but some experts may disagree. The sobriety of Glemser’s performances is at odds with the exuberant praise bestowed on him in the booklet’s biographical notes (“the German pianistic miracle of his generation”, “piano poet”, “has continuously reaffirmed himself as a world-class pianist”). The preceding musicological notes (in German and English) veer from a consideration of major-minor key connotations to those of individual minor key signatures and go on to quote 18th Century attributions that are exceedingly quaint and seem quite irrelevant to Haydn’s music. Among the three releases reviewed here, this one is clearly not my first choice.

While Glemser is somewhat short on expression, O’Conor pushes the limits. To be sure, everything he does is tasteful and well considered, and he is not trying to draw attention to himself. But I think he gives Haydn’s music more subtlety than it requires, milking it for expression and thereby almost romanticizing it. In fact, at some point during a slow movement John Field came to my mind, whose music O’Conor recorded in the 1990s. I compared two of his Haydn performances with other recordings I have in my collection and in each case preferred the others, which were more straightforward and stylistically closer to the mark (No. 46: Emanuel Ax, Sony 89363; No. 23: Anne-Marie McDermott, Bridge 9438). In No. 23:II O’Conor stretches out the melodic ornaments, whereas McDermott plays them the way I expected to hear them. This CD comes in a cardboard sleeve with brief notes in English only.

It is Yarden who strikes the right balance, I think. Her performances are lively, intelligent, and have just the right degree of expressivity. In the booklet (English only) she justifies her selection of six sonatas, most of them rarely heard. (In fact, one was completely new to me.) They are arranged on the CD in an individual, non-chronological order, as are O’Conor’s. The notes on the music (not by Yarden) contain a few blunders but are otherwise good, and the biographical sketch, while perhaps more extensive than necessary, is not adulatory. This is my favorite among the three recordings.

All three releases have excellent sound and, despite my reservations, can be recommended to all who wish to familiarize themselves with Haydn’s rewarding keyboard music.

REPP

**HAYDN: Quartets, opp 1:1; 33:5; 77:1**
Goldmund Quartet
Naxos 573701—57 minutes

This young German ensemble plays beautifully with a light touch, fleet tempos, and no disfiguring HIP mannerisms. The first two works shine with this treatment.

The first quartet, from 1762-4, is a simple piece: beautiful tunes, carefully built textures, but no ability to build these into bigger structures. The longest movement is a 5-minute adagio that shines here, but seems over in a few minutes.

The second, written some 20 years later, is far from simple. It begins with a two-bar introduction that appears and disappears like the sardines in *Noises Off* and leads into a movement that always seems off balance but somehow coherent. The aria slow movement is a subtly-crafted song and inside-joke competition between first and second violins. The scherzo is back to the off-balance first movement. Here everything is about upbeats and rhythmic unease. Was Haydn thinking about drunken players? The finale is a set of elegant variations built around a siciliano dotted rhythm.

There’s little to complain about in these performances. Op. 1 is luminously and swiftly played; Op. 33 has humor in I, lyricism in II, lovely, dirty portamento upbeats in III (I can imagine Haydn elbowing Johann Strauss in the next world and smiling) and an elegant set of variations to round things off in the finale.

It’s a different story with the third, alas. This quartet is the second-to-last that Haydn wrote, and he put a lifetime of craft and humanity into it. The Goldmunds play it the way they play the other works, but that’s not good enough. If you compare the Alban Berg EMI recording with this, you’ll hear the difference in an instant. The Goldmunds offer beautiful playing and forward-moving tempos, but with the older ensemble every note, every accent, every tone color, is there to tell part of the story of the music. It’s the difference between a well-painted picture and the subject of the picture walking into the room.

I think this quartet has a bright future.

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ahead of it, but that the time for it to record profound masterpieces like Haydn’s last quartets isn’t here yet.

I will go back to this recording for the first two performances, some of the best Haydn quartet playing I’ve heard in recent years.

CHAKWIN

HENSEL: Cello Pieces; see MENDELSSOHN
HILL: Piano Concerto; see BOYLE
HINDEMITH: Trauermusik; see Collections

HOLBROOKE: Raven; Violin Concerto; Auld Lang Syne
Judith Ingolfsson, v.; Brandenburg Orchestra / Howard Griffiths
CPO 777636—67 minutes

There was a time when English composer Joseph Holbrooke (1878-1958, later Josef) was a major figure in English music, but one would never know that today. I discussed him in a review in May/June 2012, as did Don O’Connor earlier (Nov/Dec 2009). Holbrooke attended the Royal Academy of Music but did not graduate. In addition to composing, he earned a living as a pianist and as a show director. His output included symphonies, tone poems, piano concertos, chamber music, and choral works. His grandest project was the opera trilogy, The Cauldron Annum from the Welsh epic, Mabinogion. Holbrooke’s style was colorful, chromatic, and often rooted in Welsh folklore and other exotic influences.

The Raven brought Holbrooke to the attention of the English public in 1899. He was not the first composer to write music involving Poe—Stanley Hawley, who introduced him to Poe’s work, has that honor—but Holbrooke leads the way in number of works (35) and minutes of playing time. This is the first work that treats Poe with an orchestral tone poem. Holbrooke even wrote some of Poe’s lines in the score over the parts they reflected. The Raven expresses dark anticipation, mystery, foreboding, stormy agitation, etc. There is a lot of interesting writing—such as the opening lines in the basses and the prominence of low strings, spooky trombone chords playing “never more”, and skipping 6/8 passages in the strings and winds that touch remotely on Elektra’s dance in the Strauss opera. Franz Groborz’s booklet notes point out important parts.

That same year, Edward Elgar wrote Enigma Variations, describing himself and 20 musician friends, each with an initialed variation. Unlike Elgar, Holbrooke was given to revising. The musical adjustments for Auld Lang Syne dealt mainly with the orchestration, particularly the brass. More interesting are the changes to the subjects of the variations. Over the years, the opinion of some of them toward his music turned negative. The composer responded by retaining his variation but attaching a new friend to it. Thus, Ethel Smyth (E.S.) became John Saunders (J.S.), and Gustav Mahler became Joseph Ivimey.

Auld Lang Syne Variations is elegant, nicely scored, and reasonably inventive. It does not have the power, emotional depth, and mystery of Enigma Variations; but it is a satisfying work nonetheless. Worth noting is that some people think Auld Lang Syne is the unidentified “enigma” theme in Elgar’s variations.

The birth of Holbrooke’s Violin Concerto (Grasshopper, 1916) is a convoluted mystery. The composer began work on it in 1909 (or 1906) and produced it in three formats: violin concerto, Sonata Concerto, and Romantic Sonata. The last two are for violin and piano. One is available on Naxos. Two versions, including the orchestral version recorded here, were first played in 1917. Groborz’s notes cover all this in some detail. Robert Stevenson’s notes for Naxos are even more detailed, and the two writers do not agree on everything. Both are worth reading.

There are several theories about the nickname Grasshopper. Groborz believes it was a “popularizing subtitle”, and the hopping qualities in I do resemble a grasshopper. In contrast with that motif is a gliding lyrical theme in the violins’ upper register. Sometimes that gliding theme is heard over a simulated insect-like hum in the strings or to similar effect in the clarinets, and some parts do dart about like insects. In the end, the gliding theme carries the day, as the work conjures up a summer day at a concert in the park.

The cadenza in the soloist’s stratosphere is delightful. The beginning of II in the basses soon gives way to a sweet, sentimental tune in the violin. This tune, more Italian in nature, also has a glide to it. At one point, woodwind chords suggest a similar passage in Gustav Holst’s ‘Saturn’, and the following violin line
has a feeling of aging about it. Like I, the vigorous III leaps about, but more pyrotechnically, like most romantic-era concertos. After a cadenza, a nice downward and wistful “meow-like” theme is heard before the work concludes as it started. I would not compare this violin concerto with Elgar’s, but it is a good one with a few dark and yearning moments.

All these performances are first rate. The orchestra has a nice dark sound, and the recording is very good. Icelandic violinist Judith Ingolfsson is a fine player, whose deft light touch, bright, pretty tone, and light, sweet high register are perfect for the concerto. Groborz’s notes are up to CPO’s usual high standard.

The one work with an alternate recording is *The Raven* with Adrian Leaper and the Czecho-Slovak Radio Symphony (Marco Polo, Nov/Dec 1993). The Griffiths is a minute faster, to good effect. It also has darker ambience and a more refined orchestra, especially in the strings. The Leaper is an OK part of an interesting Holbrooke program, but it will be obsolete if CPO continues its Holbrooke series.

**HECHT**

**HONEGGER: Symphonies 3+5: Rugby**

Bern Symphony/ Mario Venzago
Musiques Suisses 8287—57 minutes

There has been a slow but steady stream of Honegger symphony recordings in recent years, many from the composer’s homeland of Switzerland. For a while the Swiss standards were the Suisse Romande full set with Fabio Luisi and the Third and Fourth Symphonies with Ernest Ansermet. The most recent was a set from Basel with Dennis Russell Davies. Now there is this entry from Bern with Mario Venzago.

In previous reviews of these works, I have noted French and German approaches to the music. That seemed fitting, given the French and German components that make up Switzerland. For a while the Swiss standards were the Suisse Romande full set with Fabio Luisi and the Third and Fourth Symphonies with Ernest Ansermet. The most recent was a set from Basel with Dennis Russell Davies. Now there is this entry from Bern with Mario Venzago.

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Rugby's tempo is a little on the slow side, and that works well at depicting the ebb and flow of the game. The clear sound is a great help to hearing some of the intricate inner effects of the piece.

If this recording is the first issue of a Honegger symphony set, and the rest is of this quality, it will be a strong contender. It is of a style: brilliant, detailed, lean in its way, and aggressive. If you like that I would take this over the Davies for the Third Symphony because Venzago's Rugby and his quirky Fifth Symphony are superior to Davies's performance of the coupled First Symphony. Both conductors lead better Thirds than Broglie-Sacher, who turns in a very good Fifth, which I prefer in the outer movements to Venzago. Denève's very different Third is richer, heavier, and weightier.

Peter Hope (born 1930) is an English composer and arranger of songs who also writes occasional accompaniment for radio and other commercial endeavors. His music is tuneful, harmonically lush or pungent as appropriate but always comfortingly tonal, unpretentious, and likable—all these qualities enhanced by his characteristic use of vernacular dance rhythms. I didn’t find any string quartets or symphonies by Hope on recordings, and I don’t know whether he’s ventured into such more ambitious genres. But he appears on a half-dozen or so CDs, including a collection of his serenades, dance sequences, and divertimentos for smallish ensembles on Dutton 7192 that Paul Cook liked (M/J 2008), finding them akin to Malcolm Arnold’s efforts for similar forces. Hope also shows up on various anthologies of orchestral “English light music”.

This new release of Hope’s recent music on Divine Art includes four sonatas for wind instruments: one each for oboe, clarinet, recorder, and bassoon, each with piano and cast in three well-contrasted movements, with lengths from 11 to 15 minutes. Two short items fill out the program: Tallis Remembered for clarinet, recorder, and piano and A Walk with my Dog, Molly for speaker and recorder. Allegros are light-footed and breezy, with many (sometimes whimsical) borrowings from popular styles; moderatos and andantes are lilting and pastoral, some shaded with wistful melancholy, some interweaving more active dance interludes into the slower tempos.

A good portion of this music is quite fetching—for example, the 5-minute first movement of the clarinet sonata; much of it is clever; and all of it is shapely, idiomatic, and ingratiating. The piano writing and exchanges between accompaniment and solo instrument are models of clarity and effectiveness; listen, for instance, to the sparkling interplay in the oboe sonata's vivace or the tender central section of clarinet sonata’s scherzo that hauntingly recalls (could this be intentional?) the gorgeous clarinet sonatina of Douglas Lilburn. And there’s plenty of variety, as Hope obviously enjoys displaying his versatility; why else would he finish off the clarinet sonata with a klezmer-style portrait of 'The Clarinetist on the Roof’ that first dances, then muses quietly in the darkness? Performances are sensitive and polished and sonics clear, clean, and realistic. Wind players and listeners drawn to their repertoire will find much of interest in these unpretentious and enjoyable sonatas.

Each suite here takes about 20 minutes. They’re not symphonic syntheses of the music, but rather “greatest hit” medleys from each opera—the booklet admits they’re essentially collages. There are some mid-suite pauses, arbitrary and non-rhetorical silences, that make me think sometimes the suite is over. It’s not. Each suite is given a single track—a breakdown with short descriptions of each bleeding chunk would keep the listener better oriented, as Peter Breiner did in his Naxos series (J/A 2009, S/O 2009, J/F 2010).

Janacek’s operas have some of his best orchestral music, so this is a good way to get a taste of Janacek at his most distinctive and colorful without the declamatory Czech vocals getting in the way. These suites whetted my appetite for the full operas, dusty from sitting on my shelves, too long untouched. Performance and sound are excellent, the notes skimpily—synopses of the operas aren’t included.

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Jenkins: Cantata Memoria
Elin Manahan Thomas, s; Bryn Terfel, bar; Catrin Finch, hp; David Childs, eu; Joo Yeon Sir, v; Jody Jenkins, perc; Rosie, Jody & Karl Jenkins, rec; Cywir, Cf1, Cor Heoly March, Cory Cwm; Sinfonia Cymru/Karl Jenkins
DG 4796486—56 minutes

Cantata Memoria commemorates the 50th anniversary of a disaster that struck the Welsh village of Aberfan on 21 October 1966. More than 5 million cubic feet of water-saturated debris broke free from the mining installation above the town, creating a preventable avalanche that took the lives of 144 people, 118 of them children. Karl Jenkins and his librettist, Mererid Hopwood, have crafted a multilingual choral work that memorializes the dead in English, Welsh, and in selections from the Latin Requiem.

Cantata Memoria is constructed in two sections. The first recalls that deadly October morning directly, and the second notes the passage of time since the event and dispenses some healing energy with an affectionate commentary on childhood and a 'Lux Aeterna' that concludes the proceedings.

You might remember Karl Jenkins from The Armed Man, his Mass for Peace that had critical tongues wagging when it was released over a decade ago (Sept/Oct 2005). Jenkins remains an eclectic composer who can write classically-scaled music when he wants to, but doesn’t hesitate to embrace the pop idiom with full force when he feels a need to cross over. Whatever you want to say about his final results, the guy knows how to write a melody— and some nice ones, too. Cantata Memoria’s most affecting moments are inspired by the folk songs of Wales, and they are sung attractively by the young Welsh voices and by Bryn Terfel in a restrained, lyrical mode. Jenkins’s 8-minute ‘Cortege’ where the names of the victims are intoned amid the words of the Benedictus is the work’s most ringing (and wringing) interlude.

Other elements, though, will have classical music purists muttering to themselves in short order. As presented here, the cantata evolves more like a movie soundtrack than a unified choral composition. The music is downright scenic to start with, the orchestration is Pop all the way, and as the songs grow sweeter and sweeter in Part II we move further and further away from any notion of an integral sacred work. By the time the ‘Lux aeterna’ appears at the end, it’s close to a non-sequitur. You also get a feeling that this was put together without the unifying energy of a comprehensive performance; that it’s a studio job assembled in pieces. There’s more to say, but the point has been made. Not my cup of tea.

GREENFIELD

Jiranek: Concertos
Sergio Azzolini; bn; Xenia Löffler, ob; Jana Semeradova, fl; Lenka Torgersen, v; Collegium Marianum
Supraphon 4208—69 minutes

The true identity of Frantisek Jiranek (1698-1778) and the authenticity of music attributed to him has been the source of controversy over the years. It appears that his patron Count Vaclav Morzin sent him to Venice to study with Antonio Vivaldi. At around the same time (c. 1718), the Count named Vivaldi as his “maestro di musica in Italia”, which meant that Vivaldi supplied him with music for his ensemble in Prague. In fact, Vivaldi’s bassoon concertos may have been intended for the bassoon virtuoso Anton Möser, who played in Morzin’s ensemble. It would be hard to beat Sergio Azzolini’s playing, though. His style is both lively and graceful.

To complicate matters further, the student appears to have learned the style of the master so well that it is difficult to tell one from the other. For some time the Violin Concerto in D that opens this program had been attributed to Jiranek, but it has since been given to Vivaldi. Programing Vivaldi’s music with Jiranek’s, then, offers an excellent opportunity to compare them and to measure the style that Vivaldi imparted to his student.

In fact, the resemblance is uncanny, judging from the six concertos on this program, all in three-movement form. Like Vivaldi, Jiranek uses ritornello forms in the fast, outer movements. First movements tend toward the serious, and final movements are typically light and dance-like. Slow inner movements are lyrical, aria-like, and sometimes rely on expressive dissonance, usually arising from suspensions. Solo episodes in fast movements typically develop ideas motivically through sequences that lead to new harmonic regions.

Jiranek is also sensitive to the idioms of virtuosity associated with each instrument. For example, Vivaldi’s violin concerto expresses virtuosity through rapid string crossings and leaps; whereas Jiranek’s episodes for oboe, bassoon, and flute tend to rely more on scales and simple arpeggiation. These idiomatic dif-
ferences are on view in Jiranek’s Triple Concerto in A for flute, violin, and viola d’amore, beautifully performed by Jana Semeradova, Lenka Torgersen, and Vojtech Semerad.

LOEWEN

JOSQUIN: Masses, Di Dadi; Mousse de Biscaye
Tallis Scholars/ Peter Phillips
Gimell 48—71 minutes

The Tallis Scholars have already recorded 10 of the 22 surviving Mass settings of Josquin. Here are two more. There are always arguments and speculation over the dating of the composer’s Masses, but strong opinion makes these early examples in his output. There is also debate as to whether either or both of them are actually by Josquin, but prevailing opinions accept both as authentic.

Both are for four voices and are based on secular antecedents. Une mousse [or musque] de Biscaye uses the melody of a popular song from the multilingual Biscay region of northern Spain and is a dialog between a French-speaking lad and a Basque-speaking girl. (The words “mousse” or “musque”, from the Basque “moza”, refer to a young girl.)

The other uses the tenor voice of the chanson by Robert Morton, ‘N’aray je Jamais Mieuks’, as a cantus firmus. But the title of Josquin’s Mass refers to dice (dadi) because of the drawings of pairs of dice, in various readings, placed at the beginning of many, though not all, of the Mass’s tenor parts. The meaning of these dice markings constitutes the kind of problem that keeps musicologists in business. It is thought that Josquin composed the work at the Sforza court of Milan, where gaming and gambling was a major preoccupation, perhaps even for the composer himself. Known as the Dice Mass, this work is a marvel of innovative skill and fascinating enigmas. I am not aware of any earlier recording of it, though I do know of one very early LP of the Biscaye Mass.

These are beautiful works, though coming to terms with their secrets really requires repeated listening and even score study (The Dice Mass has in fact been prepared in a modern edition, dice markings and all, and is noted as available on Gimell’s website.) The performances here involve slightly different personnel for each work, but normally with two singers per part, save in the reduced-parts sections where individual singers are used. Phillips’s experienced leadership weds these mixed-voice groups into suave yet lucid polyphonic flow.

This is a worthy addition to this group’s Josquin series. The notes are characteristically fine, and full texts and translations are included. My one regret is that the Morton chanson and the Franco-Basque song were not included for background—though, given the pretty generous length of the program, that is perhaps a little ungracious of me.

BARKER

KANCHELI: Piano Concerto; see SILVESTROV

KAPSBERGER: Intavolatura
Stefano Maiorana, chitarrone
Fra Bernardo 1603777 — 64 minutes

“Intavolatura” refers to tablature, the method of writing out plucked-string music and some keyboard music in fingering numerals, instead of with note-heads in a score. Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger (c1580-1651) published six books of music for chitarrone (like a theorbo or bass lute), along with some for other plucked instruments, and vocal music. Books 2, 5, and 6 are lost. Stefano Maiorana has selected pieces from the other three books (1604, 1626, and 1640) to give a survey of the varied styles, and appended a coda of his own to one of the pieces. I can see from the tablature that he is adding much more than that—all to the good, getting inside each piece and playing it like a fresh improvisation. We get dance music, variation sets, free-sounding toccatas and preludes, a battle piece, and several of the composer’s ornamented arrangements of madrigals by Gesualdo and Arcadelt.

The packaging disagrees with itself, spelling the composer’s name both as “Kapsberger” and “Kapsperger”. The composer’s first book (very neatly printed) has it with the second P, but you will usually find it as in our heading.

Even in the most vigorous sections, the instrument’s tone is gentle and low. I find it relaxing to turn off my brain and let this spontaneous-sounding and often amorphous music wash over me. It’s difficult to guess what is coming next in it, but it all sounds secure and clever.

The booklet says Maiorana is a professor of lute, having also earned degrees in guitar and architecture. Let’s hope for sequels from this terrific player. There isn’t much competition for this album; it fills a repertoire niche. I have not heard the recording of Book 1 by Hopkin-

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son Smith (J/F 2003). Book 3 was not available to Paul O’Dette in 1989 for his excellent album “Il Tedesco della Tiorba” (Harmonia Mundi, July/Aug 2008). Half of that program is played on lute, and half on chitarrone. There is only one two-minute piece in common with Maioranca, who plays it at a slightly lower pitch and elaborates its texture.

B LEHMAN

KARAIANDROU: David
Kim Kashkashian, va; Irini Karagianni, mz; Tassis Christoyannopoulos, bar; Ert Choir; Camerata Orchestra/Alexandros Myrat
ECM 4814499—44 minutes

Manfred Eicher’s idea of what “new music” is and mine diverge ever more widely with the release of his latest blue light special, a “stage cantata” by Greek film music composer Eleni Karaindrou. The texts come from an anonymous 18th Century poet and are vaguely spiritual (“The virtues of our life do not remain the same/ they all fall down and shatter/ as flakes of snow/ so calm and slow”). It is impossible for me to tell whether all the original Greek texts appear in English translation.

The music sounds like a cross between a tiny Baptist church’s annual Christmas cantata and a bad B-movie soundtrack, treacly and embarrassingly tonal: no Ennio Morricone here. In short, more grist for the so-called culture mavens at NPR. (I can almost hear them gushing over it.) The performers are merely competent, no doubt because they are unchallenged by the music; Kashkashian’s phoning it in.

HASKINS

KHACHATURIAN, GLAZOUNOV: Violin Concerto; PROKOFIEFF: Violin Concerto I
Julia Fischer; Russian National Orchestra/ Yakov Kreizberg
Pentatone 5186591 [SACD] 79 minutes

The notes say this was recorded in May 2004. That is when Fischer’s brief liner notes were written. But the short biography of Kreizberg was written after he died in 2011. Meanwhile, the release is copyright 2016. The production has different engineering for each of the concertos and a significantly higher volume level for the Prokofieff, placed between the other two. I became skeptical—something that listening to the album confirmed.

The Khachaturian and Prokofieff are quite awful. Often both soloist and conductor are not rhythmically secure; other times they’re rhythmically foursquare. How anyone can be foursquare in the Khachaturian, given the spiky tempos, is beyond me—and that applies also to II, which has an undeniable lil’ written into it! Fischer often rushes; Kreizburg passes over key rhythmic elements as if they don’t exist (a prime example is the rhythms underpinning the opening of Khachaturian III). Fischer’s style is generic at best—no tone color; wiry, crunched, nasal tone; skipped grace notes. Both she and the conductor have poor articulation; inner details are not projected. Just listen to the very opening of the Prokofieff: insecure, foursquare, and no long-lined lyrical flow, just a 1-2-3-4 beat. And the finale has absolutely no poetry or atmosphere, just blunt playing. Also, principals in the Russian National Orchestra are prosaic at best. How the RNO has fallen since its early glory days under founding music director Mikhail Pletnev!

Szeryng and Dorati on Mercury still reign supreme in the Khachaturian. In the Prokofieff I recommend Stern, Ormandy, and the Philadelphia Orchestra on CBS; Bell, Dutoit, and the Montreal Symphony on Decca; or Shaham, Previn, and the London Symphony on DG.

On the other hand, Fischer exhibits some poetry in Glazounov’s incredibly beautiful concerto. She opens with fine flow and tone color until she gets to the first big Andante (the start of the second theme) where she and Kreizberg becomes foursquare once again. This is a rare piece of classical music that “plays itself”: Glazounov wrote it so well that reading things into it isn’t necessary, as Jascha Heifetz understood. In the long written-out cadenza (as in the rest of the concerto) Fischer is technically excellent but searches too often for places she can tweak with rubatos, retards, etc. No one plays this cadenza like Heifetz and Walter Hendl on RCA, who wrap the entire concerto into one incomparable seamless take. If the closet-like acoustics on RCA bother you, Vadim Gluzman, Andrew Litton, and the Bergen Philharmonic on BIS and Aaron Rosand, Kees Bakels, and the Malaysian Philharmonic on Vox are also very good.

FRENCH

KIRCHEN: Book of the Rejoicing Soul
Di Tsaytmashin/ Avishai Aleksander Fisz
Brilliant 95338—62:45

In 1727, Rabbi Elkhanan Kirchen (1666-1757; the last name is also transliterated as Kirchhan or Kirkhhan) published the second part of his Seyfer Simkhes HaNeyfesh (Book of the

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Rejoicing Soul), which includes some of the earliest music for Central European Yiddish songs. In the preface, Kirchen wrote that "Here is the music I've written; it is for dancing with the klezmorim. . . . Even if you can't read music, there are musicians who can, and they will be able to read it for you."

Avishai Aleksander Fisz, who made the arrangements and is the only singer, notes in the very short booklet that there are problems in interpreting the musical notation in Kirchen's collection. I was able to obtain a copy of the facsimile of Kirchen's collection published in 1926, and many of those problems are evident. Perhaps the most significant—which also affects the interpretation of Salamone Rossi's Ha-shirin asher li-Shlomo (Songs of Solomon—complete recordings by New York Baroque [M/A 1997, N/D 2000] and the Kühn Chamber Soloists, Panton 232; selections, M/J 1998, N/D 2006)—is that western notation is read from left to right, while Hebrew or Yiddish is printed right to left, so that the performer had to determine how to fit the words to the music. With Rossi, who was quite careful, this is not as much of a problem as with Kirchen, whose melodies have a number of problems in both their notation and how to adapt them to the Yiddish texts.

The songs themselves were meant by Kirchen as moral guides, and include songs for preparing a home for the Sabbath or Passover, about the eternal fate of false souls on Yom Kipper, for weddings and circumcisions, and a bridal song designed to frighten the bride with stories of a difficult married life. It is important to remember that the liberties Fisz took in preparing his arrangements are just one of many possibilities. Since Kirchen only published the melodies, the ensemble of 11 instrumentalists (in various combinations, playing on a mixture of period and modern instruments) is very effective in interpreting Fisz's elaborate arrangements. Fisz, as the only singer, carries much of the weight for this recording, but his use of falsetto as the primary vocal timbre can be tiring.

There are two deficiencies with this release. Only 12 of the 13 melodies in Kirchen's collection are included; there certainly was room for that last melody to create a complete recording. And most unfortunate is that we are given only short synopses of the Old Yiddish texts. This could have done so much more to make this unique repertoire of Baroque music familiar to listeners.

**American Record Guide**

**KLAMI:** Violin Concerto; see ENGLUND

**KLENGEL:** Hymnus; see REGER

**KORNGOLD:** Trio; see Collections

**Violin Concerto; see CONUS**

**KOZELUCH:** Piano Concertos 1, 5, 6

London Mozart Players/ Howard Shelley

Hyperion 68154—76 minutes

Leopold Kozeluch was born near Prague in 1747 and studied with a cousin who had his same name (Jan Antonin), so he changed his first name to Leopold when he moved to Vienna in 1778, three years before Mozart arrived there. With that head start he won a lot of public support and attention. These concertos are from 1784, 85, and 86. In those years Mozart was writing great concertos (14-25), and these are very modest in comparison. There is less melody, and the orchestra has less to do. They are roughly comparable to Haydn's concertos, which are also vastly inferior to Mozart's.

The problem is not one of skill—they are very well crafted—but simply that they do not stand out next to the competition. History has narrowed the classical piano concerto down to Mozart—no one comes near him. These sound a bit like early Mozart, but Mozart went on to greater things. For me they are a pleasant diversion, but not something to hear repeatedly. Life is too short—and there is Mozart!

The orchestra is 20 strings plus 4 wind players (2 oboes, 2 horns). That, too, sounds weak next to what Mozart often called for.

Carl Bauman was our resident expert on Kozeluch, and if you check our index you will find many of his reviews and you will be able to read what he thinks of this composer, which may be more helpful than what I have said.

**VROON**

**KRAFT:** Timpani Concertos: Octopus

Thomas Akins, David Herbert, timp; Alabama Symphony, Silicon Valley Symphony/ Paul Polivnick

Laurel 867—48 minutes

This is definitely a CD for timpani enthusiasts, but it may well appeal to others as well. Born in 1923, William Kraft has enjoyed a long career as percussionist and composer. This is the world premiere recording of Timpani Concerto 2, The Grand Encounter, commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony and Michael Tilson Thomas for David Herbert, who plays it here. The program also includes 'Octopus,' an Etude for 15 Timpani written for Herbert in

**BREWER**
preparation for the Second Concerto, and the re-release of Kraft’s Concerto 1.

Concerto 1 has become something of a classic with timpani enthusiasts, and one can see why. Written in the early 1980s, it is full of effects both aggressive and poetic for the instrument, and is a satisfying piece in other ways as well. A bit on the short side, it never wears out its exotic “neo-impressionist” gestures (the composer’s label); it makes a vivid statement, then stops. The first movement opens with a mysterious timpani solo, setting a slightly sinister tone that persists. The motifs are dramatic and easy to follow. The timpani presents novel ideas, but Kraft is also deft at orchestration. Strings, winds, and brass have a great deal say and interact seamlessly with the orchestration. Strings, winds, and brass have an identity. Again, as it established its own identity,” says Kraft, “as it established its own identity.” The slow movement for strings, percussion, and celeste is spooky and nocturnal, a bit like Bartok’s Music for the same group. The wonderfully creepy drum glissandos are surely a reference to Bartok’s masterpiece, which was revolutionary in its use of the device. The restless, exciting finale sounds a bit like William Schuman, a great champion of the piece. The first of two extended cadenzas, a swingy interlude, testifies to Kraft’s immersion in jazz.

Soloist Thomas Akins is fiery and subtle in equal measure, and the Alabama Symphony plays with solidity and verve. (I heard them at Carnegie Hall’s Spring for Music Festival a few years ago, so I wasn’t surprised.)

Concerto 2, from 2004 (later revised), is a more grandiose affair, employing some 15 timpani of various types referred to as the “timpani array.” Kraft’s harmonies are in the twilight zone between tonality and atonality inhabited by many current composers. Again, he is interested in all the orchestral colors, not just timpani-percussion, as the inventive flute solo and dense brass illustrate. David Herbert, timpanist for the San Francisco Symphony, had performed Concerto 1 some 14 times, so he certainly knew what to do in Kraft’s next concerto. The sound of different timpani with varying pitches playing off one another is scintillating. The first movement is relentless and rather grim, the next two full of delicate lines and a quiet sense of the sinister that is a Kraft trademark. Almglocken, flexatone, sleigh bells, gamelan gongs, and an array of other exotic percussion add more color to the already-vivid timpani sounds. The soft fade-out over distant drums in IV is magical. In the finale, ostinatos and other driving rhythmic figures move toward a final Varesian crash.

What Kraft can accomplish with timpani alone is demonstrated in ‘Octopus,’ a 2-minute tour de force. An octopus is what one must be to play this stuff; and Herbert, for whom this fiendish piece was written, rises to the occasion.

SULLIVAN

KREISLER: Quartet; see ZEMLINSKY

KRENEK: Reisebuch aus den Oesterreichischen Alpen; ZEMLINSKY: Songs
Florian Boesch, bar; Roger Vignoles, p
Hyperion 68158—59 minutes

Krenek’s 1929 travelog of the Austrian Alps is a fusion of remembrance of things past—Schubert, the Alps, the glories of tonality—with contemporary sensibility. By turns lyrical, witty, brusque, and nostalgic, these songs offer an expressive demonstration of Krenek’s conviction that tonality was not dead. He believed it possible to rejuvenate an earlier vocabulary and to restore its former vitality and freshness through a new and original experience: “This theory is probably wrong, though it cannot simply be refuted by an opposing theory, so long as a single work based on the theory remains valid and alive, and today it would seem that my Reisebuch still has.” Also “valid and alive” are numerous works by Weill, Hindemith, and others that demonstrate the stubborn survival of tonality. These songs flirt with atonality but sustain a tonal center and feeling, a “homeland” paralleling the Austrian homeland celebrated in the cycle. Alas, the homeland was wiped away shortly after the publication of the Reisebuch. Hitler came to power and Krenek was forced to emigrate to the US.

The album is nicely rounded out with songs by Zemlinsky, who also fled to America and who also wrote in a lyrical, late romantic style that refreshed rather than abolished tonality. These are early songs, so they are much closer to the 19th Century than the 20th. They have an unspoiled charm and youthfulness.

Florian Boesch and Roger Vignoles perform with confidence and deep musicality,
aided by a warm recording. There is an unforced naturalness to Boesch's singing that makes this recording special—all the more so since the repertory is unfamiliar to most listeners.

**SULLIVAN**

**KUHNAU: Wie Schön...; see BACH**

**KVANDAL: Piano Pieces, all**
Joachim Knoph  
Grand Piano 739—71 minutes

If Grieg were born around 1880, his advanced folk dance settings like *Slutter* would sound like these pieces of Johan Kvandal (1919-99). Even Kvandal's titles are similar to Grieg's, like *Slattefantasier* (Country Fantasies) and *Lyric Pieces*. Kvandal is influenced on occasion by Russian and French modernists, but most of this hearkens back to the late 19th Century. I loved it right away.

Everything was written between 1940 and 1998, and there's little stylistic change at all, though the earliest work, a 13-minute sonatina, has a lean Hindemithian linearity and clarity, but with a thick and expressive Norwegian accent. Also like Grieg, Kvandal lacks ambition: not one movement here exceeds six minutes and most are under two. Some of the pieces are painfully naive, almost embarrassing, but it's easy to skip ahead to the next track. The technical demands vary, but most of this lies in the grasp of dedicated amateurs. Mr Knoph's playing is lusty and craggy—more suavity is easy to imagine—but I like his rude energy. Sound is close and revealing, the notes illuminating. About half this is recorded for the first time, including the sonatina.

**WRIGHT**

**LALO & COQUARD: La Jacquerie**
Veronique Gens (Blanche), Nora Gubiach (Jeanne), Charles Castronovo (Robert), Boris Pinkhasovich (Guillaume), Jean-Seebastien Bou (Comte de Sainte-Croix), Patrick Bolleire (the Seneschal), Enguerrand de Hys (Baron de Savigny); Radio France/ Patrick Davin  
Ediciones Singulares 23 [2CD] 113 minutes

*La Jacquerie*—here recorded for the first time—proves to be a wonderful opera, bringing delight on delight.

The work had a tortuous genesis. In 1889, three years before he died, Edouard Lalo began working on it. He managed to complete the first act, interpolating into it—with new words—some extended passages from *Fiesque*, an early opera of his that never reached the stage. (*Fiesque* survives and has in recent years been recorded—starring Roberto Alagna—and has even been staged.) Lalo orchestrated the first half or so of the first act—very effectively, as people who know his famous *Symphonie Espagnole* will not be surprised to learn.

After Lalo died, Arthur Coquard, a composer friend, completed the orchestration of the first act and wrote the remaining three acts, sometimes bringing back some of Lalo's music from Act 1 and reworking it. Coquard is not entirely unknown today. Clarinetists still play one lovely instrumental work of his: 'Melodie et Scherzetto'. Coquard also wrote notable music criticism and published two books that are still worth reading: one on the history of French music, the other a "critical biography" (as Coquard titled it) of Berlioz.

The libretto of *La Jacquerie* was begun by Edouard Blau and completed, at Coquard's invitation, by Simone Arnaud, a playwright who attained substantial public success.

*La Jacquerie* had its first three productions in Monte Carlo, Aix-les-Bains, and Paris—all in 1895—and then more or less vanished. The small hardcover book that comes with the recording reprints an extended review of the Paris production (at the Opera-Comique). Written by Arthur Pougin, a celebrated critic and scholar of the day, the review praises the entire second act ("utterly moving and poignant") and much of the fourth. The book also contains three essays by present-day scholars, one of which, by Gerard Condé, points out some attractive moments in the sung verses as well as recurring musical elements that help unify the score.

When *La Jacquerie* reached the Opera-Comique, the performers that made the strongest impression were mezzo-soprano Marie Delna, as the widowed farm-owner Jeanne, and tenor Henri Jerome, as her politically idealistic son Robert. On the recording, the tenor playing Robert, New York-born Charles Castronovo, is first-rate. Some readers may recall him as Natalie Dessay's sweet-voiced co-star in the documentary film *Becoming Traviata*. Here he is even more remarkable, emitting clarion phrases that may remind opera lovers of Bizet's Don José or Saint-Saëns's Samson. The soprano, Veronique Gens, is utterly magnificent as Blanche, a count's daughter, whom Robert loves despite the social gulf between them. Her tone has a delightful shimmer, yet she also conveys the
changing phases of Blanche's devotion, distress, and—at several points—bitter anger. The other singers are capable and mostly firm; only Nora Gubisch reveals a touch of wobble, but this is not out of character for the aging farm-owner Jeanne.

The singers, mostly French-born, deliver the text clearly and naturally, helping the listener appreciate Lalo's and Coquard's sensitivity to words and to dramatic situations. The only serious problems in pronunciation come from the 29-year-old Russian-born Boris Pinkhasovich as the hotheaded revolutionary Guillaume. I often had to check the libretto to find out what he was saying. Also, Pinkhasovich's voice lies high for the role, making it difficult for him to deliver low notes with sufficient menace. Jean- Sébastien Bou, as Blanche's father, likewise is strong in his high register—indeed eloquent and powerful—and weak where the role lies low. The choral forces of Radio-France sing superbly in their several crucial scenes.

The plot derives freely from an experimentialist play (in 36 highly episodic scenes, without division into acts) by Prosper Merimée, who also wrote the novella that is the source of Bizet's Carmen. The two librettists added numerous then-standard operatic elements, including a central love story and a choral prayer (Stabat Mater) by a wayside cross. At the dramatic climax, the heroine, Blanche, shields her aristocratic father from attack by the peasant mob and is, in turn, shielded by her beloved Robert. The moment seems an elaborate riff on the climax of Beethoven's Fidelio, where Leonore interposes herself between her beloved Florestan and the tyrant about to murder him. Though these elements may seem very familiar when one reads the libretto by itself, in practice they supply welcome opportunities for extended, sonorous, dramatic musical numbers. And, despite these moments of expansion, the opera as a whole moves forward at a satisfyingly brisk pace. I particularly love the moment when the rousing orchestral music that opens Act 4 returns to signal that the army of the feudal landowners is arriving to put down the rebellion. The soldiers are not seen on stage: the music speaks for them.

The Jacquerie was a major uprising of peasants and farmers in northern France in the summer of 1358. "Jacquerie" refers to the condescending nickname for a man from the rural provinces: "Jacques Bonhomme" (Jack Goodfellow). The Jacquerie uprising was finally put down by the landowners, but memory of it remained strong in France for centuries. By the time of Lalo and Coquard, a tale of a peasant uprising could resonate also with memories of more recent French revolutions and revolts. A letter from Lalo drew just such a parallel, calling Guillaume a communard, i.e., someone who, had he been born centuries later, would have been a leader of the heavily socialistic Paris Commune (which ruled Paris for two months in 1871 until it was suppressed by the government).

Some of the strongest material in Acts 1 and 2 occurs when Guillaume, Robert, and the chorus bewail the lot of the working poor and argue over how much violence to undertake against the overlords. The single best scene occurs toward the end of Act 2, where Jeanne pleads with Robert not to risk his life by leading the revolt. (The scene resembles in some ways a famous one between John of Leyden and his mother Fides in Meyerbeer's Prophète.) Also particularly strong are two numbers in the final act: a duet for Jeanne and Blanche—both of whom are obsessed, in different ways, with Robert—and the later duet where Robert and Blanche finally confess their love for each other. Though Lalo had begged Blau, without success, to de-emphasize the love element in the libretto, this long-awaited interchange between soprano and tenor ended up inspiring some of Coquard's best music. And why not? This is opera, after all!

In the love duet, as elsewhere in the work, the orchestra is given stirring phrases that the voices either soar over or join, as in many of the mature operas of Wagner and other composers of the time. There is also an attention-getting chromatic sequence (over a rapid descending line in the low strings) that is the demands of the peasants in Acts 2 and 3 and that seems directly inspired by Wagner's Ring Cycle. The passage is introduced in the prelude to Act 2, and it gets reworked in fascinating ways, such as when Jeanne—no revolutionary herself—is singing about the uprising.

The phrase structure in the work is generally quite un-Wagnerian and close to what one finds in mid-19th Century Italian and French operas. The work as a whole consists largely of a succession of self-enclosed numbers. The Blanche-Robert duet even ends with a cabaletta that gets repeated in full, but the repeat is dramatically enlivened by death threats from the peasant warriors who have just broken into the lovers' hideaway. Two fascinating rhythms in the orchestral accompaniment reminded
me of specific works by Brahms: a dotted rhythm on the upbeat, prominent in Brahms's "Tragic Overture" (here at the beginning of Act 1, after the prelude) and a sarabande-like rhythm—triple meter with lengthened second beat—heard midway through the finale to the Fourth Symphony (near the beginning of Act 4 when Jeanne waits in agony for word of Robert's fate). A propulsive triple-meter dotted rhythm in Lalo's Act 1 may have been inspired by various polonaise- or bolero-style cabalettas by Verdi ('Di quella pira'), Ambroise Thomas ('Je suis Titania'), and others. It comes back toward the end of Act 3 to help ratchet up the tension as the revolutionaries face off against the nobles. These and other echoes of different European traditions remind us how cosmopolitan French music could be at the turn of the 20th Century.

The orchestral preludes and postludes to the acts are full of character, as are the three ballet numbers plus the choral hymn-to-springtime that begin Act 3. Some enterprising conductor could make a fine suite for orchestra—perhaps with chorus—out of these.

The nicely detailed sound allows the orchestral part to make its full effect without scanting the solo voices or chorus. The numerous passages of commentary for solo winds (notably flute, horn, English horn, and saxophone) are beautifully rendered, and the engineers have balanced them well against the larger fabric. The brass plays superbly. But sometimes the pizzicato playing by the strings is so quiet that I have to strain to decipher the harmonic progressions.

The book contains a synopsis and libretto plus essays and documents about the work and its history—all in both French and English.

The English translations are largely smooth and clear, but some are a bit misleading. Jeanne is described as a "farmer's wife"; but a fermière can be—as Jeanne indeed is—a woman who owns a farm and works it. Most confusingly of all, the translated synopsis tells us that, in the final duet, Robert "conceals" his love from Blanche, but the French word means "reveal".

I think "La Jacquerie" would hold the stage very well today. (The recording was made at a performance at Montpellier.) I will now be on the lookout for other works by Arthur Coquard. And I await eagerly the next offerings in the Palazzetto's "Opera Français" series. The difficulty of singing French correctly and sensitively may have worked against many fine French operas that deserve a hearing at least as much as—or even more than—familiar Italian works by Boito, Cilea, Giordano, Ponchielli, or Zandonai.

LOCKE

LALO: Symphony Espagnole;
MANEN: Violin Concerto I
Tianwa Yang, v; Barcelona Symphony/ Darrell Ang
Naxos 573 067—63 minutes

As the Lalo is a repertoire staple, suffice it to say this performance is competitive. Yang's playing is accurate, with a solid tone, and expressive.

Joan Manen (1883-1971) is a new name to me. Born in Barcelona, he was in his younger days as highly regarded in Spain as Casals. His concerto (1898) is consistently interesting. The opening, after a horn solo, soon glides down into Spanish rhythms with resplendent color. A fingerprint of the music is Manen's constantly moving in and out of keys in the manner of Prokofieff, if not with his sound. The second subject is an expansive dotted-note melody. The solo part is a stiff assignment, with the modulations as well as frequent multi-stop passages and precipitate register leaps. The string writing towards the end of the movement has a hint of Debussy's "Iberia". It would be interesting to know if they were in the original or a result of his 1935 revision.

II is labeled Lamento, and while it's serious, it's not gloomy. It opens with a solo clarinet, whose melody has some whole-tone bits, followed by beautiful Spanish strains. The violin enters with the harp, suggesting a serenade; and the music becomes more impassioned. The accompaniment has many solo woodwinds playing ornamental lines. The movement combines virtuosity with an intelligent and perceptible thread. Yang's skill at maintaining a long line contributes much to it.

III is a triple-time dance, again with good parts for all, the soloist flying all over her instrument's range. The movement is well constructed. I found especially ingenious the way the soloist rather than the orchestra must harmonically resolve the movement. The work is an excellent piece of music and a great showpiece. Yang's grasp of a difficult and unfamiliar work is just first class. The Barcelona ensemble, though a small orchestra doesn't sound like one, having a full, rich sound in tutti passages. Ang's conducting shows sympathy with the music.

O'CONNOR

American Record Guide 109
LE FLEM: Piano Pieces
Giorgio Koukl—Grand Piano 695—68 minutes

Paul Le Flem (1881-1984) was a student of Vincent D’Indy and Albert Roussel. His students included Erik Satie and André Jolivet. This is labeled Complete Piano Music, and 6 of the 22 tracks are first recordings. Koukl has an excellent track record, with superb complete piano music recordings of Martinu (7 volumes on Naxos) and Tcherepnin (8 volumes on Grand Piano).

The ARG index only lists four discs of Le Flem’s music, and two of them have the Seven Children’s Pieces (1911), which are included here. There are five pieces under the title Le Chant des Genets (1910) and four individual pieces from 1907 and 1910. These have all been recorded before. The world premiere recordings are of early (1896-97) and later music (1939, 1961) plus a couple of undated items.

The opening work here, Avril, is an energetic celebration of Spring with strong overtones of Debussy’s Spanish style (think Iberia). Le Flem was obviously a fine pianist, and his writing requires a secure technique. I found the other works pleasant and varied, but not particularly memorable, with two exceptions. The 1961 atonal piece ‘Pour le Main Droite’ is like nothing else on the program. There may be a huge quantity of music written for the left hand alone, but very few for just the right, so this is one to look for if you ever hurt your left hand. The ‘Pavane de Mademoiselle’ in the style of Louis XIV is also out of character with the rest of the music here.

The booklet notes are excellent, performances everything you could hope for in obscure music, and the piano sound is up to Grand Piano’s established high standards.

HARRINGTON

LE ROUX: Harpsichord Pieces, all
Pieter-Jan Belder & Siebe Henstra
Brilliant 95245 [2CD] 105 minutes

Little is known about Gaspard Le Roux, the man, but he published a single book of harpsichord music in Paris, 1705. At the bottom of each page, the score has smaller staves suggesting ways to arrange the music for two harpsichords (or other instruments), instead of playing them as solos. There are secondary melodic lines and figured-bass symbols for improvised accompaniments. Belder and Henstra have taken full advantage of this, playing all of the suites as duos. Their interaction is delightfully responsive as they accompany one another with further improvisation and embellishment, making the music sound spontaneous. The two well-matched harpsichords were both built by Titus Crijnen in 2013 and 2014, modeled after Blanchet and Ruckers.

Belder plays one of the suites again at the end of the program, as a solo, and includes an Allemande and Courante that they did not arrange as a duo. This was going to be a two-disc set anyway, and the repetition of that suite makes good use of the available space. It also emphasizes that this music doesn’t have to go in only one fixed manner.

This is more interesting than the recording by Akutagawa and Wilson (Naxos), where they arranged fewer of the pieces to use two harpsichords and omitted some repeats to get all the suites onto a single disc. Christophe Rousset’s album of the solo version (Oiseau-Lyre, 1993) is reliably smooth and graceful, but I prefer the extravagance of the extra notes from Belder and Henstra.

B LEHMAN

LESHNOFF: Symphony 2; Zohar
Jessica Rivera, s; Nimon Ford, bar; Atlanta Symphony & Chorus/ Robert Spano
ASO 1008—67 minutes

Jonathan Leshnoff (b. 1973) is strongly enmeshed in Jewish theology and rabbinical philosophy. His Symphony 2 (2014), subtitled Innerspace, is a substantial work in the normative four movements, with a serious introduction and transcendent coda. The language is a modern tonality, fitting in with much of the neo-tonal American music of the previous century: vivacious, expressive, and often filled with sturdy, often fugal counterpoint. The work ends with radiant transcendence. Orchestration is not particularly splashy, concentrating instead on a rather classical muscularity. The slow movement owes much to Mahler and Beethoven. There is no question of the composer’s devotion and inspiration from his Jewish sources, but (and I’m surprised to hear myself of all people saying this) their details are thoroughly irrelevant to the musical workings of the piece, which is arresting and thoughtful in itself. This is a major work—a significant contribution.

Zohar (2015), certainly by virtue of the presence of texts, is far easier to interpret. This is a set of 6 biblical texts, from Psalm 8 and Daniel, the remainder from rabbinical sources, including a moving story about an illiterate
shepherd boy who can only recite letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Those letters are exposed in a bracing scherzo in the previous movement. There is a transcendent coda ending with the assertion that “there is no thought that can grasp You”, the final name fading quietly into the distance. The piece is supremely effective, and the two soloists are breathtaking. The Atlantans are superb. Texts and translations. Don’t miss this.

GIMBEL

LIADOV: Piano Pieces, Vol 3+4
Olga Solovieva
Northern Flowers 99113 [2CD] 136 minutes

With this release, Solovieva completes her transversal of Liadov’s solo piano music that began in 2004. These releases spell the composer’s name Lyadov. I enjoyed Volumes 1 and 2 (99106, May/June 2013) and have been waiting for this. It offers a number of world premiere recordings that were not in Marco Rapetti’s Complete Piano Works 5CD box set (Brilliant 94155, Nov/Dec 2011). Rapetti does include Liadov’s music for piano 4-hands. The forms and style in most of the music are modeled after the lyrical side of Chopin. There still is a full range of emotions—and a balance of brilliance and tenderness. Solovieva’s excellent technical abilities are called on almost as often as her ability to spin a beautiful legato melody. There are more than 70 tracks here: three are a little over four minutes and two others of more than 11 minutes each are large sets of variations. Clearly Liadov was a miniaturist, most comfortable with short preludes, etudes, mazurkas, morceaux, bagatelles, and the like. Chopin is never very far away and a few pieces are very closely related—Liadov’s Prelude Op. 36:2 and Chopin’s Op. 28:8 for instance. They both wrote a Barcarolle in F-sharp with a beautiful melody that begins simply over a rocking bass line and increases in ornamentation. Only the late Morceaux, Op. 64 show that Liadov was also under the influence of Scriabin.

The St Petersburg Conservatory sent a mourning ribbon to Liadov’s funeral that contained the words “For the Prophet of the Eternal Beauty”. Liadov felt that every bar should please and said that “Beauty is the only Queen of the World.” Ms Solovieva wrote to me and said his music deserves to be much better known; I cannot agree more, and I like her performances.

HARRINGTON

American Record Guide

LISZT: Hungarian Rhapsodies, all
Vincenzo Maltempo, p
Piano 108 [2CD] 150 minutes

The Hungarian Rhapsodies were show-stopping virtuosic works that no doubt satisfied 19th Century audiences’ unquenchable thirst for exciting solo display. I myself played one of them—No. 11—years and years ago, studying it under George Imbragulio, who had himself studied with Firkusny and Arrau. Up until the end of her life, my mother loved hearing me struggle thru it and always said that I was better than Horowitz when I played it. Well, I she would have realized that Mr Maltempo is far better. His formidable technique, which he’s already demonstrated in a couple of albums devoted to Alkan (Nov/Dec 2014) make him perfect for the music.

His playing is free and very open-hearted; I love certain touches of wit that he brings to Nos. 2 and 10, for instance. And while many similar phrases appear more than once over the course of the 19 pieces, Maltempo acknowledges the similarity without seeming to tire of it—other pianists might become bored by Liszt’s manner. There are of course other, older recordings of the pieces. I listened to Arrau and Dichter when I was growing up. But the sound on this release is much better than what was available in the 1970s.

A comparable-sounding set, Leslie Howard on Hyperion, didn’t thrill Mr Morin (Jan/Feb 2000), and seasoned listeners might prefer, as our writers do, Roberto Szidon on DG and a Hungaroton set with contributions from Erika Lux, Kornél Zempléni, Erzsébet Tusa, Gabriella Torma, and Gábor Gabos (see Liszt Overviews, May/June 1999 & July/Aug 2016). For me, though, Maltempo has got the goods, and his obvious relish for the music seals the deal. I’d love hearing him tackle the Transcendental Etudes (he has already recorded one on a 2009 Liszt program for Gramola).

HASKINS

LUTOSLAWSKI: Piano Pieces
Corinna Simon—Avi 8553341—63 minutes

Lutoslawski’s complete works for piano solo (1934-68). That covers the early to middle portions of his career (his dates are 1913-94). I’ll follow these in chronological order, though the release scrambles them for maximal incoherence.

Earliest, and by far most substantial, is the 1934 Sonata, a half-hour three-movement
work with Ravel as the primary influence. There is nothing at all Polish about this beautiful piece, which would make an ideal drop the laser entry. Opening with a little Gaspard we enter a more finely sculpted neoclassical world, much like his mentor following his Impressionist explorations. Lutoslawski had the style down pat, but most will see no reason to substitute it for the originals.

2 Studies followed in the next decade (1941). The first could be a Debussy etude, the second a Polish dance that could have come from Lutoslawski’s contemporaneous Concerto for Orchestra.

Folk Melodies (1945) are nine little sketches suitable for children. The same could be said for the five Shepherd Songs (1952), though they seem somewhat riper.

The three Pieces for the Young (1953) are exercises a la Chopin, and 'Overheard Tune' (1957) is a cheery rondo for four hands over-dubbed by Ms Simon. The latest piece, written while the composer was at the height of his avant-gardism, is the tiny, amorphous 'Invention' (1968), a one-minute trifle best ignored.

Ms Simon is a fine pianist, clearly recorded. It’s good to have these all in one place.

MACMILLAN: Violin Concerto; Symphony 4
Vadim Repin; Scottish Symphony/ Donald Runnicles—Onyx 4157—65 minutes

James MacMillan’s Violin Concerto (2010) is a dreamlike three-movement affair that approximates the standard form but drifts through unpredictable fantasy. The work begins with a somewhat jazzy theme that alternates with episodes of reflection. The piece undergoes various changes of character but still maintains its principal argument. The sorrowful slow movement reflects the death of his mother and concludes with folk tune reminiscences of childhood. The finale begins with a dark march with a lone speaker driving the forces along in German. Dancelike episodes culminate in hysteric. The pleading cadenza concludes with a violent coda in the minor. The tone is autobiographical (of his mother?) and is effective and expressive. Mr Repin plays with sympathy and secure technique.

The sprawling Symphony 4 (2014-15) is one extensive excursion into MacMillan’s scrambled subconscious. Opening quietly in a state of meditation, the principal thematic idea is soon subjected to overlaid specters from another world. These become fuzzier but strive for tonality (and fail), eventually settling into an expressive chorale that eventually breaks apart. A forbidding march leads to chaos and violence until quiet trembling interrupts. Bells are heard in the distance. The march continues and opens out into a dizzy scherzo with the chorale as climax. Consort music appears. The overlays continue, but soon the music becomes breathtakingly beautiful in the manner of Pettersson (I wondered if maybe MacMillan knew his music). The dizzy overlays reappear until interrupted by thunder. The chorale returns, is distorted again, and threatens to end in major triumph as bells ring and there is a messy drive to the climax. Applause follows.

I get the feeling that MacMillan has perhaps bitten off more than he can chew, and his courage and ambition may have gotten the better of him. I salute the effort, though, and look forward to what comes next.

MACMILLAN: Mass; see MCGLYNN

MAHLER: Das Lied von der Erde;
Wayfarer Songs
Susan Platt, mz; Charles Reid, t; Roderick Williams, b; Attacca Quartet, Virginia Arts Festival/ JoAnn Falletta
Naxos 573536—82 minutes

In the years before recordings, there were two ways (other than concerts) to hear new big-scale music: you could get (or create) a piano arrangement or you could assemble a small group of musicians and play a reduction of the work. Arnold Schoenberg, who had one of the great orchestration ears in history, founded an ensemble in 1918 to play arrangements of Mahler’s Wayfarer songs and Das Lied von der Erde.

The former came off much the better. Williams, the baritone soloist, has a decent voice and adjusts cannily to the accompanying forces that he’s paired with. He doesn’t have a pianist that he has to avoid shouting over. He doesn’t have a full orchestra that will bury him if he isn’t careful. Instead, he has a golden mean: a chamber ensemble that will let him sing his high notes in head voice (almost a falsetto) if he wants to and won’t bury him if he has to go into low register (not the strongest part of his voice). With this help he gives us a
very decent lyrical reading of the songs. He can go back and forth between motion and static self-pity in the first song, the joy of nature in the second, the over-the-top drama of the third, and the trance of the fourth easily.

Things don’t go so well with Das Lied. The tenor is overparted. His best song is the first one, which he delivers with force (though he drops an important line: no ape in this graveyard). He can’t manage the delicacy of the third song or the inspired despair of the fifth. His voice dries out as he goes along, and he doesn’t have much left for what should be the manic brilliance of the end of the fifth song. The alto (actually a light-voiced mezzo) is competent in her part, but is not going to make anyone forget Thorborg, Ferrier, Ludwig, or Fassbaender. It’s distracting that she doesn’t quite have her German in order. For example, the letter S in German is close to an English Z in pronunciation. Her vowels also wander around, but that may be a function of her vocal production.

Falletta doesn’t make much of an impression here. Whether she’s a low-key interpreter or inhibited by the chamber-size forces is beyond me, but there’s more intensity in this music than she lets loose.

Schoenberg’s arrangements are extraordinary. He has managed to capture so much of the sound profile of Mahler’s works: the brightness and darkness of the Wayfarer Songs the extraordinary orchestration of Das Lied. He brings in a harp, a gong, many woodwinds, and a solo horn who practically plays a concerto.

If you are interested in Schoenberg’s genius or want to hear Mahler from a different angle, these are worth hearing. There are much better performances of these pieces if you go back to Mahler’s originals.

**CHAKWIN**

**MAHLER: Symphony 10 (arr. Gamzou)**

International Mahler Orchestra/ Yoel Gamzou
Wergo 5122—79 minutes

Yoel Gamzou is an Israeli-American musician in his 20s who has done his own realization of Mahler’s sketches and manuscript for this work. The editing itself doesn’t sound very different from the usual Cooke performing version: there are some different orchestrations, some counter-voices here and there, but the overall sound is very similar, which I think speaks well of both reconstructors.

Where Gamzou goes in his own direction is how he conducts what he has reconstructed.

He is extraordinarily free with tempo and tempo changes. His Berlin-based orchestra of young musicians is with him all the way, but it’s still odd to hear.

It’s hard to pin down why this is. The conductor he most reminds me of (other than the unique Konwitschny Bruckner 9 performance) is Mengelberg, who sped up and slowed down all the time and drove critics who were used to Toscanini-type steady tempos wild. But I enjoy Mengelberg performances. His grand rhetoric in Tchaikovsky and Beethoven (whose music he treated alike!) and his more subtle adjustments in Mahler (you can hear his superb performances of the Adagietto from the Mahler 5 and all of Mahler 4 on recordings) catches my ears and my mind and I can follow him through these fluctuations to the grand climaxes he built so well.

I don’t get that with Gamzou. This sounds more like Bernstein rhetoric applied onto the music and slowing down and speeding up arbitrarily. It doesn’t sound as if it grows from the music and enhances it (Mengelberg) but as if it’s something extraneous added onto it.

So what I find here is a beautifully played, superbly recorded performance that is finally about the music, as Gamzou understands it, instead of a performance of the music.

I went from this performance back to last year’s Seattle performance conducted by Thomas Dausgaard (Nov/Dec 2016). The difference was extraordinary. The Dausgaard performance is ablaze with intensity and a kind of pure sincerity that is immensely powerful, especially in such personal and emotional music. This one is simply a well-played rendition of an eccentric vision of the piece. It’s worth hearing and I will go back to it to keep finding what I can in it, but it shouldn’t be anyone’s first or only performance of this work.

Gamzou’s notes are extensive and interesting, though I think there’s more to say about the symphony.

**CHAKWIN**

**MAIER: Violin Concerto; Piano Quartet; Swedish Tunes & Dances**

Gregory Maytan, v; Bernt Lysell, va; Sara Wijk, vc; Ann-Sofi Klingberg, p; Helsingborg Symphony/ Andreas Stoehr
DB 174—63 minutes

By assiduously resisting the influence of any particular 19th-Century composer, Swedish violinist-composer Amanda Maier (1853-94) wrote a violin concerto that sounds like no one
and everyone. This 17-minute movement from 1875 (II and III are lost) has the requisite masculine, surging, dotted-note first theme contrasted with a flowing, mellifluous secondary theme, lots of virtuosity for the soloist, here an agitated sequence in the minor, there a relaxed episode in the major. It’s composition by number, composition by invisible committee, and sounds like a graduation exercise, utterly forgettable and unnecessary.

The piano quartet (1891) tries an opposite tack: now she blatantly pilfers the music of other composers, specifically Grieg and Brahms. I must admit this later work is much better written than the early concerto—the exchanges among strings is eloquent, the pianism idiomatic, there’s a good mix of counterpoint and homophony. It improves as it goes, and the finale’s rapid five-note scalar passages, both humorous and soaring, remind me of similar passages in Beethoven, Saint-Saens, and even Debussy. Yet Brahms remains the overwhelming influence. There are a number of interesting, even moving textural and harmonic touches, but I doubt you’d want to hear this more than a couple times.

Swedish Tunes & Dances for violin and piano was written with her husband, the prolific composer Julius Rontgen (another Brahms acolyte). They’re redolent of Grieg at his most conservative, not bothering with the harmonic innovations of his late Slatter for example, but they’re charming and amusing, and the virtuosity of both instruments is rather high.

Performances and sound are wonderful and accomplished, the notes comprehensive, and these are all premiere studio recordings. The cover says this is Volume 1, so stay tuned.

MALIPIERO: Quartets 1+8; Symphony 6
Mitja Quartet; Artes Orchestra/ Andrea Vitello
Tactus 881303—57 minutes

Here we have Malipiero’s first and longest quartet paired with his last and shortest quartet, plus his “Symphony 6” for strings, really his 10th Symphony; for reasons mysterious, Malipiero bestowed numbers on just 11 of his 18 symphonies.

All eight of Malipiero’s quartets are in a single movement and never follow the typical Haydn-esque four-movement layout. I’m not sure Malipiero wrote a sonata-form movement in his life, but instead preferred flowing, ad hoc constructs. His language, harmonies, and technique are pure 20th Century, but not harsh or atonal, and he eschews conventional classical quartet dialog—both quartets are quite symphonic.

Quartet 1 (1920) launches with an arresting, aggressive flourish that returns many times, each recurrence heralding a shift in tone or argument, each section possessing its own mood and spirit. Every recap of the flourish is transformed slightly, from alarmed to angry to triumphant. If any section bores or confuses you, hang in there because the next section may please you more.

His last and shortest quartet of 1964 is dour and tortured. It puts me in a foul mood. The writing is thick and chromatic, dissonant, and I can make no sense of it—nor do I have the patience to bother.

Symphony 6 of 1945 closes the program and is airy and diaphanous, full of buzzing, excited, irrepressible life, a great relief after the congested and bleak Quartet 8. I is a really beautiful movement, full of spring warmth—you can feel the sun on your face. The slow II is soulful and resigned, the allegro vivo III muscular, revisiting the ceaseless activity of I—it reminds me of Stravinsky’s neoclassical Apollo. IV is more typical of Malipiero; employing a similar structure and procedure as Quartet I, it recycles the wistful theme of II in place of Quartet 1’s bright flourish, inserting more animated episodes between. It’s a satisfying and moving symphony, one of Malipiero’s most approachable.

The quartets are recorded close, but the symphony was recorded in a very reverberant hall that flatters the strings beautifully—this is a gorgeous recording, much better sound and performance than the Moscow Symphony under Almeida (Naxos 570880, Nov/Dec 2009). Quartet 1 and the symphony alone make this disc worth your time and money.

MANEN: Violin Concerto 1; see LALO

FRANK MARTIN: Ein Totentanz zu Basel im Jahre 1943
Edith Habraken, Christine von Arx, Eduard Grass-Hass, Basel drums; Geoffrey Madge, p; Breda Sacrament Choir; ARMAB Orchestra & Hineni String Orchestra/ Bastiaan Blomhert
CPO 777997—66 minutes

Frank Martin’s niece, Mariette von Meyenburg, was a mime artist in Switzerland during the Second World War. And when she came up
with an idea to mix dance and mime into a theatrical piece crafted to encounter death one dying person at a time, she asked her uncle to supply the music. That he did. In short, colorful bursts of incidental music scored for strings, woodwinds, brass, guitar, bass, piano, and percussion, Martin pictures death as it comes to the old, the young, the athletic, the rich, the beautiful, and the lonely. With interludes running the gamut from choral chants to jazz with a cabaret twist, the music goes all over the place. Some of the encounters are imbued with a sacred feel, while others stick resolutely to the earthly plane.

To inject local color into the proceedings, Martin wrote in marches and fanfares for the large military drums played at ceremonies in Basel. We’re fortunate that the booklet contains not only translations but the stage directions describing what the performers are meant to be doing in the various scenes. The result is a strange and moody score written to enhance what must have been an altogether strange and moody night at the theater back in wartime Switzerland.

This performance by performers from Portugal and The Netherlands conveys the work’s content quite effectively, though in the end I was left with short musical bits that didn’t quite add up to anything memorable. This is a quirky piece, though, and I’m not going to pretend that my response to it will define yours. If the historical circumstances and odd blending of mediums and genres stir your interest, far be it from me to steer you away.

MARTIN: Everyman; see SCHUMANN

MARTINI: Ariane; Double Concerto
Baurzhan Anderzhanov, t; Baurzhan Anderzhanov, s; Zoltan Nagy, bar; Essen Philharmonic/ Toma Netopil
Supraphon 4205—56 minutes

Here we have an early and a mature work by a superb composer who never quite got the recognition he deserved. One is a mini-opera, the other a chamber orchestra piece. Despite its tragic subject, the story of Ariadne and Theseus, Martinu’s Ariane, from the late 1950s, is light and charming. There is occasional dissonance, always suited to the moment, where spiky brass are allowed to blatt away, but the neo-classical idiom is lively and tuneful.

The overture offers an enchanting tune that sets the tone and returns with wistful quiet at the end to conclude the piece with a lone glockenspiel. The soprano, Baurzhan Anderzhanov, has a strong, expressive voice; her final aria, a high point of the work, is tender and soaring. The rest of the cast is excellent as well. The scoring, full of lyrical strings and colorful percussion, is imaginative and often calls attention to itself, as in the haunting instrumental number on track 7. This is an actual performance, captured by Supraphon’s engineers with warmth and sensitivity. The last recording was 30 years ago, so this is a welcome release.

The earlier Martinu work, the Double Concerto for two string orchestras, piano, and timpani, is much more angular and astringent, reflecting the tumult of the 1930s, but it has an underlying lyricism. By turns smoldering, mysterious, and aggressive, it makes a powerful impression, especially the anguished piano in II and the frenzied finale, which builds to a tragic catharsis. The work ends with a beautiful major chord dying away before a final thump. The Essen Philharmonic plays it with command and intensity. Supraphon, which offers ample program notes, is to be commended for a splendid release.

SULLIVAN

Giuseppe Martucci (1856-1909) served the music world admirably as pianist, conductor, composer, and teacher. His compositions range from harmonically sophisticated salon pieces to substantial symphonies and chamber music. Stylistically his piano music makes little effort to please by means of the obvious. Melody, while always present, is subtle and full of twists that remind me of the great master of modulation, Gabriel Fauré. He is particularly attracted to capricious harmonic shifts and swift moving tempos, though not averse to writing Nocturnes and other slower musical forms.

Alberto Miodini handles his selection with skill and knows how to execute the many colorful twists and turns required of him—and has written his own brief, but to the point notes. His nearest competition is from Francesco Caramiello (July/Aug 1996), who gives a wider selection on two ASV recordings and even more highly developed notes.

A piece by piece comparison of the two pianists leaves no preference. Both do this music proud, and both are well recorded. If


you have Caramiello, stick with it. Miodini does add in the *Novella*, Op.50.  

**BECKER**

**MAZZONE: Canzoni for 4, Book 1**  
Natalia Bonello, fl; Maria Antonietta Cancellaro, hpsi, org; Ensemble Le Vaghe Ninfe/ Maria Antonietta Cancellaro  
Brilliant 95416—64 minutes

I like the instrumental combinations and vocal style here, including the idea of having an actor read the poetic text to precede each of the seven instrumental versions of the songs. The Book 1 collection, published in 1591, uses 10 sacred texts (mostly related to the Madonna) and 11 secular ones.

There’s quite a good range of color and timbres, such as four unaccompanied voices in ‘Ne’ Miei Gravosi Affanni’, solo guitar in ‘Fiorite Valli Amene’, and serpent plus violin, organ, and two recorders in ‘Se D’Amoroso Foco’. It’s important that the musicians—SSATB plus 8 players on 11 instruments—supply this kind of variety, because the canzoni themselves tend to be quite similar in style and structure,  

Notes, bios, texts in original language.  

**C.MOORE**

**MCGLYNN: Celtic Mass; MACMILLAN: Mass**  
Taylor Festival Choir/ Robert Taylor  
Delos 3493—68 minutes

Two contrasting settings of the Ordinary of the Mass, both influenced by traditional Celtic music. Dublin born composer Michael McGlynn has created a setting “seen though a folk music lens” incorporating a variety of elements: Gaelic texts, Celtic rhythms, and influences from Dufay to Britten as well as the Bulgarian choral tradition. Amidst the texts of the Ordinary, McGlynn “tropes” movements in Gaelic and Latin: ‘Codhlaím go Suan,’ ‘Alleluia,’ ‘Ave Maria,’ ‘Pater Noster’. Scored for choir, soloists, organ, string quartet, and harp, it displays an inventive and uniquely creative treatment of the texts. Of particular note is the ethereal Sanctus and the shimmering Agnus Dei, which ends on a note of uncertainty, suggesting the search for peace continues.

Sir James MacMillan, a prominent Scottish composer, has achieved international status. He has written music ranging from symphonies and choral-orchestral works to chamber music for instruments and voices, but choral music stands at the center of his output. He has stated that “Music seeks out the sacred—in a sense, all music is sacred” and his *Mass* reflects his firm grounding in the culture and heritage of his native Scotland, coupled with his devout Catholic faith.

Scored for choir and organ, it is the only one of his three masses in the vernacular, and it also includes settings of the Celebrant’s part—Sursum Corda, Preface, Eucharist Prayer, and the Memorial Acclamation. This marvelous music is mystical, ecstatic, joyous. One wishes to hear it as part of a real celebration of the Eucharist. The movements are unified by a motive in the tradition of Renaissance Mass settings—a rising fifth followed by a rising melisma—infusing them with a sense of yearning. A climax is reached in the *Sanctus* that combines the motive, contrapuntal rigor, and virtuosic organ flourishes to create an atmosphere of choral ecstasy. Fine choir in fine performances. Notes on the music and texts.

**DELCAMP**

**MCGUIRE: Chamber Pieces**  
Red Note Ensemble—Delphian 34157—68 mins

Eddie McGuire is a Scotch composer born in 1948. Though little known outside of his homeland he has slowly but surely built up a body of works that are positively luminous in their beauty, expressiveness, and originality and certainly deserve to be much more widely known. I’ve seen only one recording of McGuire’s compositions before now, a collection (on Delphian) of pieces for guitar, flute, and piano (in various combinations). But performances of both his chamber and orchestral works have been broadcast going back to the early 1980s on the BBC, and it’s from tapes of them that I’ve come to know and love his music.

Even so I wasn’t prepared for this stunning new Delphian release of five larger (10 to 15 minutes long) chamber pieces dating from 1980 to the early 2000s and played by the marvelous Red Note Ensemble. They include a string trio, a piano trio, a mixed quartet, Quintet 2 (for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano), and *Euphoria*, which adds a percussionist (on marimba, chimes, and blocks) to the forces in Quintet 2. Every one of these works is a wonder and a revelation, and together they offer authoritative recorded evidence that McGuire is one of our best active composers, fully equal in stature to such well-known figures of his generation as John Adams, Philip Glass, Frederic Rzewski, and John Corigliano.
Especially for a musical idiom that often uses minimalist devices, McGuire’s music is exceedingly varied and, in truth, far more maximalist and inclusive than otherwise. It’s an idiosyncratic (and widely varied) mix of highland fiddle tunes, old-fashioned sentimental songs, melodies long and singing or spiky and disjointed, harmonies modal, traditional, and chromatically biting, elaborate polyphonic interplay, minimalist reiterations, avant-garde instrumental effects, fanciful improvised-sounding cadenzas, and chaotic-seeming eruptions of sheer energy. The compositional result is intricate but airy, “experimental” but tribal, avant-garde but sweetly beguiling, recondite but brightly colored. The music constantly evolves and refracts with the joyously unpredictable percolations of a sonic kaleidoscope, yet beneath the ever-shifting iridescence and seemingly free-form surface one feels both a deeply humane aesthetic and a shapely large-scale architecture that seems less the product of human contrivance than something that simply grew, like a willow tree reaching out over a stream, with the blend of happenstance and inevitability of a natural process.

Two works exemplify the reach and variety of McGuire’s music. Elegy (for piano trio) is a lovely exhibition of McGuire’s more reflective side. Written in memory of his father, it’s dreamy, lyrical, nostalgic, and touched with a wistful, Chaplinesque longing that evokes the composer’s (and the listener’s) haunting long-ago memories, particularly in the lilting sentimental tune that threads its way, in various guises, through the piece, recalling the lost happiness of childhood days and loving family that, if we were blessed, we once knew. I’m not aware of another piece of music that might be called “avant-garde” in some of its technical devices yet remains so profoundly and openly romantic in the feelings it arouses. The only other music it brings to my mind is Enesco’s late-period chamber music (explicitly his Impressions of Childhood). Euphoria offers strong contrast but at the same time is obviously from the same hand. It’s active and ever-evolving, at once invigorating, dazzling, hypnotic, and yes, as its title suggests, exhilarating in its density of incident and elaboration, burbling along with repeated notes and rippling marimba-laced ostinatos, ornaments and curlicues, disrupted by sudden climaxes and slowed again by attenuations that mimic the languors and latency of organic life.

McGuire’s string trio, Quintet 2, and Entangled Fortunes (for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano) fall somewhere between Elegy and Euphoria in overall “sound” and mood though each has its own distinct character. As strongly profiled and easily recognizable as McGuire’s compositional voice is, he doesn’t repeat himself. Each work evolves through different sequences of tempo and tenor, the “multivalent” (as the notes put it) string trio building from the pregnant quietude of soft, unhurried drones to various kinds of activity that include (sometimes overlapping) chanting, pirouetting, dancing, and fiddling. Quintet 2 and Entangled Fortunes are somewhat more abstracted from primal musical sources and emotions, with less use of folk-style themes, modal harmonies, dance rhythms, and minimalist figurations, and more concentration on spinning out chromatic and fragmentary ideas with (in Entangled Fortunes) a sort of quasi-neoclassic rigor, and (in Quintet 2) an unpredictable, improvisatory freedom.

The Ireland-based Red Note Ensemble plays McGuire with absolute conviction, meticulous sensitivity, and technical finesse, and is captured in sonics of ideal purity, transparency, timbral accuracy, and presence. This is one of the best recordings of recent chamber music that I’ve come across in many a moon—in the quality of the compositions, the performances, and the sound. Anyone who cares about the music of our time should hear it.

**MENDELSSOHN: Cello Sonatas; HENSEL: Fantasia; Capriccio; BENNETT: Sonata Duo**

Alice Neary, vc; Benjamin Frith, p
Champs Hill 105—82 minutes

Here’s an impressively long record containing both of Felix’s sonatas and two pieces by his sister Fanny Hensel as well as a considerable sonata by his contemporary and friend William Sterndale Bennett (1816-75). The latter piece is interesting since it treats the two instruments in an equal way, giving the pianist as much to express as the cellist without making a point of it. The pieces by Fanny are quite impressively emotional and make me wonder that they are so little known. The familiar two sonatas by Felix are placed at the beginning and end of the program and are played with enjoyable verve, virtuosity and poetry. Altogether, this is a highly charged and well-played program recorded with clarity and balance. I am glad to have it, particularly for the little-known works.

**D MOORE**
MENDELSSOHN: Quartets
3+5: Parker Quartet
Nimbus 6327—62 minutes
5+6; 2 Pieces: Escher Quartet
BIS 2160 [SACD] 71 minutes

We have reviewed dozens of Mendelssohn quartet recordings, but the people who reviewed most of them are no longer writing for us (maybe they got tired of Mendelssohn quartets). I will try to characterize these two rather different recordings, both by young American quartets. The Parker is most active around Boston, the Escher around New York. The Parker has three members with Asian names, and that may account for their remarkable blend—no one stands out. The Eschers are more typically American: everyone tries to stand out!

The Parker is recorded in a more European way, enhancing the blend. The BIS recording seems closer-up, but the sound is very good. They have Quartet 5 in E-flat in common, and the Parker is more fleet all the way thru. There's less lingering, less point-making, but the teamwork is superb. The Escher is more lively and dramatic, the Parker more laid-back and subdued. The Escher adds two of the four pieces for quartet of Opus 81.

If I had to choose between these two recordings I would choose the Parker, but that is largely because of the way I feel the music. Look at our index and read past reviews before you decide. In No. 3, for example, Paul Althouse liked the Leipzig Quartet (Nov/Dec 2003) for its "strength and vigor". Neither of these recordings would have evoked those words. There's no reason why you should prefer what we prefer. Both of these are excellent recordings, and there have been many others. I think my favorite Mendelssohn quartet is No. 2—not under consideration here.

FRENCH

MENDELSSOHN: Violin Sonatas
Madeline Adkins; Luis Magalhaes, p
Two Pianists 1039329—73 minutes

Mendelssohn's violin sonatas are unjustly neglected: only the first movement of an unfinished sonata is from his 16th year, the same year as his miraculous Octet. Two sonatas are juvenilia, written age 11 and 15, and the last from 1838 he left unpublished. So we have no complete violin works from Mendelssohn's prime years.

It's a mystery that Mendelssohn hid the mature Sonata 3 in F, as it's ebullient and stirring, cut from the same expressive cloth as his Italian Symphony. Here Ms Adkins and Mr Magalhaes are ardent and spontaneous,
ecstatic, like mature Schumann—but Schumann had yet to publish any chamber music by 1838.

The juvenile Sonata 2 in F minor would be the pride of any seasoned composer—it is masterly, dark, and profound, like the best early Beethoven, especially at the exceedingly moderato tempo in I; these players take 10-1/2 minutes where most take about 8. It’s a risky choice, and teases more adolescent angst out of a movement that can sound like a petulant snit fit at faster tempos. The soulful Beethovenian II is soothing, the grumpy Mozartean finale agitated and sec, where the fierce coordination of these musicians is breathtaking.

The unfinished D minor Sonata comes next, fiery and brooding. It’s too bad Mendelssohn didn’t finish it.

His first childhood sonata comes last and owes much to Beethoven’s early violin sonatas. It’s playful and not at all profound. The performers toss off its considerable technical demands with ease.

I thought the performers sounded distant at first, but grew to enjoy the realistic concert perspective and blend. Ms Adkins has a lovely and intense tone, very passionate. Magalhaes’s piano is a bit bass-shy. This is a desirable release in every way, and I have a hard time imagining the music done better.

**MESSIAEN: Organ Pieces**

*Livre d’Orgue; Le Banquet Celeste; Diptyque; Apparition de l’Eglise Eternelle; Monodie; Offrande au Sainte Sacrement; Prelude*  
Loft 1148 [2CD] 98 minutes  
*Meditations sur le Mystere de la Sainte Trinité*  
Loft 1150—78 minutes  
*Mieux: Sacred Choral*  
*Hallelujah; Psalm 91; Cantique; Pater Noster; 7 Sacred Songs; To Mozart*  
Rheinische Kantorei/ Hermann Max  
CPO 555065—58 minutes

Not so long ago I had a huge collection of CDs that included all the Meyerbeer operas. In the cases of the more famous operas (*Les Huguenets, L’africaine*, etc.) I had a number of performances. Recordings of Meyerbeer’s operas have never been plentiful because they are expensive to produce and because the works themselves have gone out of fashion. Over the years I also managed to collect recordings of his songs as well (Thomas Hampson recorded half a disc for EMI, Ning Liang recorded an entire disc for CPO, and there is another disc or two on Naxos), but his choral works have remained elusive until now.

Meyerbeer’s best work was done for the theater, and several of the works here sound like they could have been excerpted from one of his operas. The opening ‘Hallelujah’ contains instructions concerning articulation and dynamics that verge on stage directions. The women echo the men’s cries of “Hallelujah!” as if they are an angelic host calling from afar. And the *Cantique* is a dramatic cantata-like piece that calls for a bass solo in the recitatives in between the choral utterances. The piece dedicated to Mozart (text by Ludwig Rellstab) is colorful, if not very memorable. That is a problem with some of the other pieces preserved here. The Seven Sacred Songs, for example, are attractive and rich in intricate harmonies, but sound rather generic. Meyerbeer was a hit-or-miss composer. At his best, he can be truly inspired. When less than fully engaged, he can be a little dull.
The Rheinische Kantorei proves a worthy advocate for Meyerbeer, singing with excellent tone and diction. The many soloists are drawn from the chorus. Hermann Max is their fearless leader. The sound is rich and free of congestion. CPO offers excellent notes not only on the works themselves, but on Meyerbeer’s place in the musical milieu of his time. Texts and translations are also supplied. If you’re a Meyerbeer admirer, you’re going to want this.

REYNOLDS

MIKALSEN: Clarinet Concerto; CRUSELL: Concerto 2; DEBUSSY: Premiere Rhapsodie
Bjørn Nyman, cl; Norwegian Radio Orchestra/ Olari Elts & Thomas Sondegard
LAWO 1099—63 minutes

Rising Norwegian composer Jan Erik Mikalsen and Norwegian Radio Orchestra Principal Clarinet Bjørn Nyman are part of the newest generation of classical musicians in Scandinavia.

The clarinet concerto, commissioned for Nyman, was finished in 2009 and had its premiere in January 2010 at the Oslo Opera House. This is its first recording.

Mikalsen weaves a dizzying web of strange hues and timbres through three long movements and a full half hour of music, writing quarter-tone harmonies, requesting unusual percussion instruments, and evoking his favorite influences—Mahler, Stravinsky, Messiaen, and Ligeti. Danish conductor Thomas Sondegard takes the podium for this challenging score. In a separate recording session, Nyman performs the Debussy Premiere Rhapsodie and Crusell Concerto No. 2 with Estonian maestro Olari Elts.

Nyman plays with a beautiful and resonant tone, exquisite phrasing, and superb technique, and the orchestra handles each piece with expertise and authority. The opening Debussy is a breathtaking achievement in precision, balance, instrumental color, and sublime expression. The Crusell is also excellent, a perfect balance between elegant classical touch and fiery romantic character that recalls the musical atmosphere of post-Mozart Vienna.

The Mikalsen is a radical departure, immediately throwing the listener onto an alien planet that is creepy, startling, and violent. Each movement is an abstract tone poem that begins in the ether and grows into a cacophony of anxious strings, screeching woodwinds, and terrifying brass. Each of the first two movements builds to such an astounding intensity that the music succumbs to its own power, crashing and burning with amazing ferocity. Only in the final movement do the soloist and the orchestra retain their wits amidst the hostile soundscape, quietly slipping into the mist and exiting with a nervous whisper.

The album may vex readers who prefer to keep the established canon separate from the avant-garde. Even so, Nyman and his colleagues render each selection with a rare combination of skill and artistic commitment.

HANUDEL

MILHAUD: Violin Sonatas; Viola Sonatas; Spring: Caprice 13 of Paganini; 4 Faces for Viola
Gran Duo Italiano
Brilliant 95232 [2CD] 73 minutes

Gran Duo Italiano is violinist-violist Mauro Tortorelli and pianist Angela Meluso. They have assembled Darius Milhaud’s violin sonatas and viola sonatas along with several other works. This is an interesting collection because the works for violin were, except for the Paganini Caprice arrangement, products of his youth. The works for viola were composed while he was in exile in the United States during WW II. Violin Sonata 1 was composed in 1911, just two years after he entered the Paris Conservatory, and Violin Sonata 2 was written in 1917 while he was in Brazil. The two works share a wistful quality, and only the finale of Sonata 2 so much as hints at the horrors of the Great War.

The viola disc opens with the charming Four Faces, sound portraits of girls from California, Wisconsin, Brussels, and Paris. As it was composed in 1943, the somewhat wistful California girl in no way resembles the grossly vulgar variety that I have known since I moved to the Los Angeles area in 1991! The two viola sonatas are in the neoclassical idiom that was so popular in the US at that time. Only the finale of Sonata 2 hints at any sort of discord, even though it was composed in 1944.

One thing that is apparent in listening to music written over a span of more than 30 years in Milhaud’s life and across two world wars is a certain serenity in the composer’s character. He didn’t seem to feel the upset that Schoenberg did when he left Germany and ended up in California too.

Gran Duo Italiano is very competent and musical. Tortorelli is obviously as comfortable on the viola as he is on the violin. Good sound.

MAGIL
**MOLIQUE: Quartets 7+8**  
Mannheim Quartet  
CPO 777632—49 minutes

The album identifies these quartets as Opus 42 and 44. Judging from the liner notes, they are Quartets 7 (1851) and 8 (1852), and this album is the last of four covering the complete quartets of Bernhard Molique (1802-69), who was born in Alsace but was raised in Nuremberg. The music is definitely German, not French.

In fact, these two quartets are as good as Mendelssohn’s best, with an occasional touch of Beethoven’s early quartet style. Quartet 7 is 29 minutes, 8 is 19, and both are replete with marvelous melodies, ingenious harmonic progressions and counterpoint, and solid form. Each work is in the traditional four movements. The invention in both works is amazing.

Both quartets are also very beautiful, not only because of Molique’s gift for string quartet voicing but also because of the Mannheim Quartet’s playing. The forward flow in each movement always feels natural, never manipulated, with enough flexibility to make the results exquisitely musical. Their instruments are perfectly matched, as is their performance style. There is no excessive vibrato, just enough to flavor the right line at the right time. The sound is perfectly balanced and transparent.

Here’s the perfect gift for something who thinks he has everything.

**MONDONVILLE: Trio Sonatas, op 2**  
Ensemble Diderot  
Audax 13707—67:22

If you can imagine a musical souffle that combines Corelli trio sonatas with Vivaldi concertos and a rich French sauce, you would have a recipe for the trios sonatas of Jean-Joseph Cassanea de Mondoville (c.1711-72). While also a composer of operas (Sept/Oct 1992) and grand motets for the Concert Spirituel (Jan/Feb & Mar/Apr 1998), he was especially known as a violinist whose instrumental music sought to combine the French and Italian “tastes” in music.

The six trio sonatas of Mondoville’s Opus 2 (1734) have much more variety than Jean-Marie Leclair’s Opus 4 (1730; Purcell Quartet, Sept/Oct 1993 & London Baroque, HM 901617), which stayed very close to the Corellian model. Mondoville filled his first violin part with bariolage, difficult string crossings, and an extensive use of double stops. While the second violin part for the even-numbered sonatas is as difficult as the first violin, the odd numbered-sonatas are designated for flute or violin (an option taken on this new release for Sonatas 3 and 5). Like Corelli, the second movements in the trios by both Leclair and Mondoville are titled ‘fuga,’ but where Leclair’s are very strict and academic (and selected passages were even quoted in Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg’s *Abhandlung von der Fuge* in 1753), Mondoville’s imitative writing is freer and often sounds more like a double violin concerto. A further example of Mondoville’s playfulness is the last movement of Sonata 4, where the first violin’s part is a simple melody in cut time accompanied by the second violin in a gigue-like 6/8 meter, over equal quarter notes in the continuo (the booklet note opines, “Mondonville’s depiction of a group of inebriates?”).

Ensemble Diderot handles all the difficulties of these six sonatas with ease, especially the violinists Johannes Pramsohler and Roldan Bernabé. Flutist Kristen Huebner is their match. With so many early music recordings made in echoing churches, it is refreshing to hear the clarity of a recording that was apparently made in an actual room.

**MONK: On Behalf Of Nature**  
Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble  
ECM 25808—61 minutes

Meredith Monk’s *On Behalf Of Nature* (2013) is a series of 19 small minimalist pieces for Ms Monk and her ensemble, inspired by poet-environmentalist Gary Snyder, recruiting spokesmen for “nonhuman entities communicating to the human world through song or dance”. The theatrical presentation is of course not available on the purely audio disc. Monk’s repetitive bits accompany her company’s vocal exhortations over her small chamber group of both normal and unusual instruments, creating a quiet ritualistic atmosphere. Monk fans will know what to expect and will not be disappointed.

*American Record Guide*  

GIMBEL

**BREWER**
MONTEVERDI: 7 Peccati Capitali
Cappella Mediterranea/ Leonardo Garcia Alarcon
Alpha 249—72:21

This is a musically appealing program built around a dubious conceit.

Recognizing the wondrous range of Monteverdi’s musical portrayals of human emotions and motivations, Alarcon has chosen to match some of them to the old imagery of the Seven Deadly Sins. Not content with just those vices, he has also given balanced attention to the Cardinal Virtues.

Now, one problem with this idea, from the outset, is identifying just what are these Sins and Virtues. By some reckonings, the official Seven Deadly Sins are: Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy, and Sloth. Alarcon finds Monteverdi addressing all seven of these, plus an eighth, Extravagance. The Seven Cardinal Virtues have been identified as, first, the “natural” ones of Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude, supplemented by the “theological” ones of Faith, Hope, and Charity. Alarcon seems to have dismissed Prudence, Justice, and Faith, replacing them only with Chastity and Humility. So we have an imbalance between 8 Sins and only 6 Virtues, for a total of 14.

To match each of his 14 moral qualities, Alarcon has chosen selections from all three of the composer’s surviving operas (especially from Poppea), from four madrigal publications, and from a sacred collection. The matches are sometimes obvious, but often so strained as to be almost meaningless.

What matters, however, is that the performances are superb. I appreciate that Alarcon has understood the passionate ‘Si ch’o Vorrei Moire’ from the Fourth Book of Madrigals as an expression of Lust, but I regret that his following the prevailing performing fashion of taking it at a slow tempo destroys its point. The individual singers, eight of them (three sopranos, countertenor, two tenors, two basses) are unfamiliar to me, but they have fine voices and use them with both dramatic and stylistic confidence. A team of seven [sic!] instrumentalists (two violins and a bunch of continuo players) contributes most ably.

It seems to me that the Vices-and-Virtues concept is really of little substantive point. What we have here is, quite simply, a fine program giving yet more evidence of Monteverdi’s genius in conveying human types, emotions, and situations in powerfully dramatic music, admirably performed. It is a most enjoyable Monteverdi anthology.

The standard-sized album is in the format of a bound book, richly illustrated, with good annotations and full texts with French and English translations.

MONTEVERDI: Canzonette a 3
Armoniosoincanto/ Franco Radicchia
Brilliant 95348—71:49

Precocious as a teenager, Monteverdi published his first vocal collection, the three-voice Sacrae Cantiunculae, in 1582, at age 15, following that the next year with his four-voice Madrigali Spirituali. Then, at an experienced age 17, he published in 1584 his first set of secular pieces, the Canzonette a tre voci—which preceded by three years his first volume of five-voice madrigals.

This 1584 collection consists of 21 items, composed under the influence of Orazio Vecchi and Luzzasco Luzzaschi. The pieces are for three high (women’s) voices, setting mostly strophic texts on light subjects in relatively simple part writing, with often good melodies. They are entertaining and enjoyable, for both singers and listeners.

To the best of my knowledge, the only previous recording of this complete set was made by Sergio Vartolo (Naxos 553316: M/J 1999). Like Radicchia here, Vartolo gave the pieces complete and in published order. To relieve the potential monotony of just three female voices, Vartolo introduced instrumentalists on two violins, cello, lute, and harpsichord, who doubled or replaced singers in a number of the pieces. His three singers (two sopranos, contralto) worked efficiently, if with certain limitations in expression often leading to blandness.

Radicchia has gone a bit further. He uses a pool of five singers (two sopranos, mezzo, two contraltos), who are sometimes doubled. He expands the instrumental roles by drawing on a larger ensemble of six players (two recorders, violas da braccio and gamba, theobo, and harpsichord).

Generally speaking, Radicchia’s performances are more varied and vocally more satisfying than Vartolo’s, and they make up a pleasing recorded program. But Brilliant has sabotaged its offering by failing to supply the texts and translations that are essential for appreciating and enjoying this music. Fight your way through the web site where they are locked away, if you can. Better, if you do not already
have the Vartolo recording, try to find it, for in that case Naxos has included texts and translations. When will Brilliant abandon its foolish Law of False Economy and do its customers proper justice in such matters?

BARKER

MOREL: Guitar Pieces
Celil Refik Kaya
Naxos 573514—66 minutes

Refik Kaya is a Turkish guitarist, a doctoral student under Adam Holzman at the University of Texas Austin (not sure if he’s finished yet). I first encountered him in a set of past winners of the JoAnn Falletta Guitar Concerto Competition (S/O 2016). He took first prize in 2012 with Roberto Sierra’s hauntingly beautiful Folias, and that disc was on my Best of the Year list.

Now he turns his attention to Argentine guitarist (and Orlando, FL resident) Jorge Morel. As popular as his music is with guitarists, I was surprised to see no previous recordings dedicated to his music. I haven’t seen an all-Morel disc in the ten years I’ve been reviewing here. So, better late than never. Most of his music is short, nationalist, tuneful stuff with catchy rhythms—but he does it so well! Four of the works—‘Otro Tango,’ ‘A mi Barrio,’ ‘Giga Criollo,’ and ‘Prelude and Celil’s Dance’ (for this performer)—are world premier recordings. He also plays my favorite Morel work, the Sonatina. I think it is his only extended work. One of my graduate students played it recently, and I fell in love with it—I even hear a touch of Celtic music in the finale.

And Refik Kaya surely loves this music. The performances are just perfect—he doesn’t try to make the music more than it is, but he does realize the real heart in these pieces. If you don’t know Morel’s music, this is a wonderful chance to hear a healthy helping of pure delight.

KEATON

MOSZKOWSKI: From Foreign Lands; 6 Aires de Ballet
San Francisco Ballet Orchestra/ Martin West
Reference 138—73 minutes

Moritz Moszkowski (1854-1925) was born in Breslau, Germany (now Wroclaw, Poland) into a modestly well off Jewish family. His early musical training took place at home until 1865 when the Moszkowskis moved to Dresden, where he attended the conservatory as a pianist. Three years later they moved to Berlin, where he studied piano with Eduard Franck and composition with Friedrich Kiel. He transferred to the Akademie der Tonkunst in 1855, where in 1871 he began teaching.

Moszkowski’s career began with a performance of his Two-Piano Concerto with Franz Liszt as his partner. He toured as a pianist and did some work as a conductor until arm problems forced him to give up performing and concentrate on composing and teaching. In 1897 he moved to Paris where he taught people like Thomas Beecham and Joseph Hoffman. His health declined seriously in his later years, and the loss of copyrights during the Great War was financially devastating. The efforts of former pupils and friends improved his financial situation somewhat, but he died in 1925.

Moszkowski wrote an opera, a ballet, concertos, orchestral music, and hundreds of piano pieces, many of which he orchestrated. Today that output is mostly forgotten or dismissed as “light music”, though annotators Marina and Victor Ledin argue strongly and with authority that such a judgement is unfair.

The title work, From Foreign Lands, originated as a suite of six piano pieces, each reflecting a different country. Moszkowski’s orchestration was used by the San Francisco Ballet for a new commission in 2013. The rest of this program consists of other short works by the composer. All are rich and full-blooded in a light-hearted kind of way. Most of the titles imply foreign stylizing, but the heavyish rhythms, brooding, and dark, rich harmonies of Middle and Eastern Europe ooze from all of them.

The best known work here is probably Spanish Dances, but the deepest and most sweeping is Six Aires de Ballet. It may not be wise to listen to the entire program in one sitting because there is a sameness about it all. Nor are these the deepest pieces you will hear, but they are all enjoyable even to me, and I do not like light music. It is easy to lean back and imagine yourself in a dance hall or ballet performance in Poland, Germany, or Austria, or even a Vienna Philharmonic New Year’s Eve concert.

The performances of the earlier works on the program could use a little more life and drive, but things go from very good to excellent as the program proceeds. The booklet notes are probably the most comprehensive material you can easily find about Moritz Moszkowski.

The Reference Recording is from a seat midway back in a heavily wooded concert hall.
The tonal cast is rather soft, with none of the bright, medium to close-miked “hi-fi” sound of many of today’s recordings. High frequencies may seem missing, and you may or may not get used to that. Nor does Reference supply the sharp detailing that many listeners demand. Most recordings from Reference exhibit this general character, but I know of none that takes it this far. I came to like it for its lifelike quality. People who listen to music mostly or entirely on home systems may not agree.

HECHT

**MOTALLA: L’amore e Poesia**
Elena Mosuc, s; Royal Philharmonic/ John Scott
Solo Musica 247—52 minutes

Since his arrival in the United States, Swiss composer Flavio Motalla has been busy arranging and orchestrating dozens of film scores of any genre, style, and budget (according to the notes for this release). Some of his projects have included work on “Spiderman III,” “Drag Me to Hell,” and “Swordfish.” Aside from his work in film, he has continued to write concert music that is rooted in the late romantic era and is often compared to Sibelius, Debussy, and Rachmaninoff.

The composer tells us that the work here is a song cycle for soprano and orchestra, built around four vocalises and an orchestral interlude. “The various pieces were written over the course of nearly a decade and at very different stages of my life. But they are all connected with each other by the underlying theme set forth in the title.”

Motalla’s music is certainly very tonal and enjoyable. It has more substance and color than many another score I’ve heard recently. There are melodic themes that recur, and he writes well for the voice, in this case the high soprano of Elena Mosuc. She has been a part of the international opera scene for well over two decades, distinguishing herself mainly in the bel canto repertoire, but also in Mozart, Strauss, and Puccini. She is capable of brilliant coloratura and can knock out a ringing high D, E, even F effortlessly. Lower down and at slower tempos, the voice can turn unwieldy and rather unsteady. It’s not a particularly sensuous or beautiful sound, and sometimes I wanted to hear more of that in this music. The soprano sings no words (Motalla thought a written text would be a distraction for the audience). Instead she vocalizes on “Ah” or “Oh”, soaring up to what is probably at least high E (I don’t have the score in front of me) or joins and comments on the orchestra’s outbursts. I listened to this twice in a row just to bask in the interplay between voice and orchestra.

Under John Scott’s direction, the Royal Philharmonic plays very well. The sound is good, though I got the impression that Mosuc was recorded at a separate session. I’d recommend this to listeners who love the combination of the soprano voice and orchestra, admirers of Mosuc, and ones who enjoy something different and exciting.

REYNOLDS

**MOUSSORGSKY: Pictures at an Exhibition; Night on Bald Mountain; TCHAIKOVSKY: Swan Lake Waltz**
Vienna Philharmonic/ Gustavo Dudamel
DG 4796297—51 minutes

Here’s proof that Gustavo Dudamel is one of the world’s greatest conductors. He makes Pictures at an Exhibition sound so natural and easy, but the artistry behind it is jaw-dropping. In the opening ‘Promenade,’ ‘Old Castle,’ ‘Tuileries,’ and ‘Samuel Goldberg and Schmuyle’ his phrasing is exquisite. And what an ear he has for instrumental balances and tone color! In ‘Tuileries’ I’d swear the flute playing an octave higher in a repeated phrase is a piccolo; and, in the promenade that follows, the balance of the trombone against the tuba has to be heard to be believed. As the cattle lumber along in ‘Bydlo,’ the sweet tuba sounds as elegant as a Wagner horn. And who else gets piccolo squeals to sound like ‘Unhatched Chicks’ or captures that little rhythmic flip in its final three measures—even with the score I can’t figure out how he does it. Or listen to the brass in ‘Goldberg and Schmuyle’—yes, the VPO has silken, mellow brass to begin with; but the smoothness in the exquisitely shaped phrases here is Dudamel’s doing. The same is true of the French horns, trombones, and tuba in ‘Catacombs’ and ‘Cum Mortuis.’

Perhaps most remarkable of all is ‘The Market at Limoges’ where Dudamel gets the up-tempo orchestra to “simply” drop in elegantly shaped phrases as if this is just everyday stuff as the music moves right along. Nothing has to be accommodated with a tempo change here or there—all this happens with pacing that feels utterly natural and not manipulated. That includes ‘Baba-Yaga’ and ‘The Great Gate at Kiev,’ taken from a different performance (the room ambience disappears before ‘Baba’)

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and at a slightly slower tempo than I anticipated, yet played with a strong, solid point of view—no gimmicks necessary. This is without question the best Pictures I’ve ever heard; it is structured as one united whole and played not just with perfection but with eloquent artistry.

Fully satisfied, I couldn’t believe that Night on Bald Mountain has even more to offer. Having no score in hand, I looked up at all the monsters on our Christmas tree—wide-eyed Chinese cats, a skeleton bride and groom, a black skull with a red light in the eyes, a red devil with his penis hanging out, dolls suspended by their necks, nests of birds, Italian harlequins, Indonesian eggs, Indian dancers, etc. as Dudamel swept gurgling woodwinds and smashing percussion along, playing with the classiest abandon in the business in this devil-worshippin’ or gyro, until it reached a refined quiet conclusion (I think this is Rimsky-Korsakoff’s orchestration—the liner notes say nothing about the music).

What to follow that with? Tchaikovsky’s Waltz from Swan Lake, with its quiet opening is perfect. Dudamel then delivers the waltz with a sweeping lift that one can’t help dancing to—and listen to those string basses in their rich massive introductory lead up to the main tune and right to the end!

This was recorded in concert, yet the engineering is rich and transparent, with no applause. With music-making this supreme, the album’s short timing is immaterial.

FRENCH

MOUSSORRCKY: Pictures at an Exhibition; CLEMENTI: Piano Sonata in F-sharp minor; SCHUMANN: Faschingsschwank aus Wien

This is a good but not great recording of Pictures at an Exhibition, with a major production flaw: there is only one 33-minute track. Come on, this is standard repertoire and it can’t be hard to find an engineer that can follow the music and punch in track markers. Recently I heard Khatia Buniatshvili play this in New York and enjoyed the performance less than her recording—I fully agreed with our editor’s negative review of the recording (Sony 17003, S/O 2015). At the other end of the spectrum, I reviewed Antonii Baryshevskyi last issue (Avi 8553332, J/F 2017). He had many more new ideas (without ever going overboard like Buniatshvili) and his recorded sound was top-notch. The Centaur piano sound is satisfactory and actually gets better as things go along—the three works were recorded at different times in the same place. Seifetdinova’s good performance is far more enjoyable than the Sony disc but not quite as interesting as the Avi.

The Clementi Sonata, in the standard three-movement classical format, is relatively short (12 minutes) and very well played. The Schumann is one of his big works (23 minutes) that does not come my way very often. Seifetdinova’s winning performance here is the reason I’ll return to the disc. Booklet notes by the pianist are good. I hope her next recording has production values up to the level of her pianism.

HARRINGTON

MOZART: Flute Concerto in G; Flute & Harp Concerto; Andante

Philippe Bernold; Emmanuel Ceysson, hp; Paris Chamber Orchestra/ Philippe Bernold

Aparté 115—56 minutes

These performances on modern instruments are generally very enjoyable. Tempos are a little on the brisk side, which is ideal in the Concerto for flute and harp: the best rendition I’ve heard! The detailed recording balances the two soloists well along with the contributions from the winds in the orchestra. The ensemble puts contrast in quieter episodes where you sometimes don’t encounter it. The flutist’s sound is fantastic, and his nuanced phrasing is a treat. The harpist could be a little louder when playing up high.

There are just a few minor regrets, and to articulate these, we’ll turn first to the booklet notes. The traditional numbering for the solo flute concertos placed the G major as No. 1 (K 313) and the D major as No. 2 (K 314); both were thought to have been written very early in 1778. The notes refer to the recent research and conclusions of flutist Henrik Wiese (see Kirnberger, Mar/Apr 2011), who appears to present no new evidence but disagrees with the earlier research and conclusions of flutist Frans Vester and oboist Ingo Goritzki.

It is impossible to determine with the evidence we have which concerto was written first, so numbers should not be used for these. It seems most probable that the Concerto in G was not the one written first. And what the notes say is incorrect: “We now know for sure that the D major is a transcription of an earlier Concerto in G major for oboe that Mozart rearranged for his patron on the fly.” Not so! Frans Vester says, “Ingo Goritzki’s analysis of certain fragments establishes without a doubt...
that at any rate the oboe part of this version cannot be the original. According to Goritzki the [solo oboe] part is an anonymous simplification. I am convinced that it is an arrangement and Mozart had no hand in it.” He concludes in exasperation a page later, “Musicology’s blindness to this possibility astonishes me.” This example illustrates two separate problems: that even basic questions about some of Mozart’s concertos are unsolved, but also that we do have some evidence but often the best research by the best musicologists is ignored when people write program notes. It’s even worse when you consider that one of the foremost archival researchers of our time—who lives in Austria—iSmarginalized and unfunded instead of spending every day of his life researching and correcting errors of the past, which he should and could and wishes to be doing! (Contact me through ARG if you want to know who that is.)

In the Con certo in G, Bernold puts resolutions on even the short trills in the development section of I, which may sound unnecessary or fussy to some people. Also in the opening movement, he takes an alternate reading that gives whole notes of F-sharp to C that you’ll notice in the first movement of the Flute Concerto; the first note is usually played as an A. There are reasons to do it each way, but this seems to be the weaker choice. Most appoggiaturas are done the traditional way, as half of the primary note’s value—which Frans Vester calls “a last resort, to be adopted when all else fails” in his book on Mozart interpretation.

The cadenzas in the Con certo in G are by Maxence Larrieu (I), Bernold himself (II), and Jean-Pierre Rampal (III). The cadenzas in the flute and harp piece are by Marius Flothius, and Bernold plays his own in the Andante. Although I objected to some of the notes in the booklet and the playing, I enjoyed this program and recommend it to anyone who’s not a stickler for historical accuracy.

GORMAN

MOZART: Marriage of Figaro
Lisa Della Casa (Countess), Roberta Peters (Susanna), Rosalind Elias (Cherubino), George London (Count), Giorgio Tozzi (Figaro); Vienna Opera/ Erich Leinsdorf
with HAYDN, M: Symphony in G
Urania 121.304 [3CD] 179 minutes

This famous Living Stereo recording, a co-production of RCA Victor and English Decca, is now available again, well remastered. Recorded in 1958, it won a Grammy for Best Opera or Choral Performance. The elements noted by many previous critics (eg, Blyth’s Opera on Record, Vol. 1, and the Metropolitan Opera Guide to Recorded Opera) still register vividly today. The vocalism is splendid in the five central roles and strong even in the smaller ones.

Of the five leading roles, four are filled by Americans. Della Casa was Swiss; and the comprimarios, orchestra, and chorus are nearly all European. The one exception in the small roles is that Marcellina is sung by Sandra Warfield (who performed 172 times at the Met and also appeared often in Europe). George London—a Canadian by birth, renowned for his performances in Wagner—makes a very resonant and powerf u1 -sounding Count. Scholars stress that Figaro is, for musical and dramatic reasons, the more bass-like of the two roles, whereas the Count should be a suave baritone. London was a bass-baritone but never sounds uncomfortable on high notes. Gabor Carelli, a character tenor I’d never encountered before, nicely differentiates the two roles of Basilio and Don Curzio and does Basilio’s Act 4 aria as well as anyone could wish.

The singing is rarely very soft, but this is no stand-and-shout performance: dramatic continuity is often paramount and is enhanced by welcome moments of overlap between the end of one recitative and the beginning of the next musical number.

Leinsdorf’s conducting is brisk and somewhat metronomic. He actually wrote a book explaining his belief in trusting the letter of the score: The Composer’s Advocate: A Radical Orthodoxy for Musicians. Few embellishments are made to the vocal lines.

The recording quality is still vivid, 55 years later, with fine use of stereo directionality to help clarify stage movement, especially in the famously intricate Act 4. The performance is nearly note-complete: the only trims made in the recording sessions were in the Act 2 finale. Thus we get both Marcellina’s and Basilio’s arias in Act 4, unlike on some other recordings and in many concert performances.

To Urania’s credit, it has allowed the opera to spill over onto a third disc; thus nothing from the original release has been removed. (EMI omitted Basilio’s Act 4 aria when it squeezed the famous Glyndebourne/Gui recording onto two discs—and the performance of that aria by Hugues Cuenod had been singled out for special praise by critics.) The CD breaks are sensible ones: middle of the long Act 2 and beginning of Act 4.
With an opera as oft-recorded as *Figaro*, it is inevitable that some musical numbers have been performed more magically somewhere else, as on a recital disc. Ezio Pinza, for example, made two wonderful renderings of Figaro’s sarcastic ‘Se vuol ballare’. But certain arias in the present recording are a near-ideal wedding of vocal command and dramatic intent. These include—to restrict myself to a single act (III)—the marvelously timed duet between the Count and Susanna, Lisa Della Casa’s exquisitely floated yet fully characterized ‘Dove sono’, the duet ‘Sull’aria’—with a nicely flowing accompaniment that somehow manages to suggest Susanna’s action of writing the Countess’s dictated words—and the scene where, while a fandango is danced (conducted with an air of electric anticipation by Leinsdorf), the Count surreptitiously is given the letter from Susanna and inadvertently pricks himself with a pin. I have to add the late Roberta Peters’s marvelous ‘Deh vieni’ in Act 4, where she suggests that she is at once trying to imitate the Countess’s (creamy) voice and also expressing her own abiding love for Figaro—who, she knows, is hiding in the shadows, overhearing her. No wonder many people have loved this recording for decades.

The set’s third disc has enough free space to include what was used to be called Mozart’s Symphony 37, which we now know was composed by Michael Haydn (Perger 16). (Mozart simply wrote the slow introduction.) As played by Leinsdorf and the Royal Philharmonic, it is tuneful, compact, and consistently engaging. The performance is presumably the same one found in the conductor’s long-prized recording of the “complete” Mozart symphonies (reissued on DG CD). The sound is relatively clear monaural, with a nice balance between winds and strings. On the original releases the Royal Philharmonic was called the Philharmonic Symphony of London.

Leinsdorf’s 1958 *Figaro* remains dramatically vital and musically gratifying and could easily be anybody’s first choice. The booklet contains nothing but a track list—which, by the way, erroneously assigns Basilio’s aria to Bartolo.

This is the final installment in these musicians’ recording of all Mozart piano concertos. I have not heard any of the earlier releases and am glad I haven’t, for I loathe the sound of the fortepiano and of vibrato-less string playing. Two have been reviewed in ARG (Lawrence Hansen, May/June 2012; Alan Becker, Mar/Apr 2014). Although Brautigam apparently plays several different instruments by the same maker, Mr Becker’s conclusion—”relentless and painfully ugly”—is fully applicable here also. Even the more tolerant Mr Hansen found that “the pianist is tinkling away like a desperate Old West saloon player in a cyclone”.

My intense suffering in having to listen to this recording was exacerbated by the fact that the music is not interesting. These are the so-called Pasticcio Concertos: the 11-year-old Mozart took other composers’ insignificant music and fashioned it into piano concertos with his father’s help. These student exercises should not be considered part of Mozart’s oeuvre and should be excluded from “complete” recordings. Nobody plays them in concert, and I doubt that anyone wants to hear them on a recording.

Each of these concertos is with a different conductor and orchestra, and all have been associated with Serkin in his long career. 1962 is the magical year for all these stereo recordings, though the sound varies.

Capitalism isn’t just an unjust economic system. It’s a way of life that leads to a corruption of important values. Television is only one example.

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tle to carp with. Serkin had an addiction to Mozart’s concertos, but did not record them all. Ones he did record are choice among the many recordings.

Bartok’s Concerto 1 is a tough hewn work. Sometimes it almost beats you into submission with its percussion, brass, and powerful rhythms. All of this is well captured with the orchestra under George Szell. Others have played it well, but this performance is something special.

I have nothing but praise for the uncredited notes, and for our re-introduction to a pianist who, as one of the great ones, departed from us just 25 years ago.

**BECKER**

**MOZART**: Piano Concertos 17+25
Mitsuko Uchida; Cleveland Orchestra
Decca 4830716—67 minutes

As a pianist Mitsuko Uchida is the usual in both concertos: velvet touch, caressed phrases, a relaxed sensitive flow, lovely original ornamentation in the slow movements. But talk about Jekyll and Hyde: as a conductor she is a total disaster. Orchestral introductions to both concertos are sluggish and labored with an old-fashioned romantic style that holds notes to full value and has that slightly-behind-the-beat feel to it. She can’t hold a steady tempo for more than three measures, making the flow feel labored and tentative. Viola, cellos, and string basses often sound lazy and without inflection, especially in repeated patterns. Only in the final movement of 25 does she begin to maintain some spirit, though Mozart’s writing surely helps a lot there. Uchida is in desperate need of a conductor.

**FRENCH**

**MOZART**: Piano Concertos 17+18;
Divertimento K 137
Jean-Afflamm Bavouzet; Manchester Camerata/
Gabor Takacs-Nagy
Chandos 10929—75 minutes

The pianist writes about the aims of this performance: they wanted to play modern instruments, but with a much smaller orchestra than we often hear in recordings (here it’s about 25 musicians). Also, they reduce it to a quartet in a number of passages where the piano dominates.

It is not unusual to hear these recorded with less than full orchestras. The English Chamber Orchestra that accompanied Peter Serkin is not big, but it does sound fuller than this one. So does the Academy on the Brendel recording of 17 (N/D 2016). And there are recordings of that one with the Minnesota Orchestra (Klien) and the Philadelphia Orchestra (Richter) that are simply wonderful. Here the winds dominate completely, and the strings seem reticent or weak. I want more string sound.

I also think the pianist sets too fast a tempo in III; it’s just a bit too fast to seem witty and mincing. It seems to fly past, even though its total time isn’t outrageous. The failure may be the pianist’s phrasing—or lack of it.

Concerto 18 is seldom played, and there have been far fewer recordings. The Peter Serkin recording with the English Chamber Orchestra under Alexander Schneider (an “old-school” conductor for sure!) is much more string-dominated than this one, and I like everything about it. I even prefer the piano playing to Bavouzet’s.

He is very good, but as we have pointed out often before, it is easy to find recordings of piano concertos by excellent pianists. The hard part is always the orchestra—or the teamwork between soloist and orchestra. It often seems that record companies don’t care about the orchestra and assume the pianist will “sell” the recording. M Bavouzet has a growing crowd of “fans”, but that is not enough for me. In a concerto the orchestra must also be seductive—and it simply isn’t here. It delivers a sensible, routine, and rather “English” performance—that is, no emotion or flair or enthusiasm, just accurate. It’s lively and chipper but never warm.

But this is not a bad recording; it’s just not good enough to be preferred over the older recordings that it is supposed to replace.

**VROON**

**MOZART**: Piano Quintet;
**BEETHOVEN**: Piano Quintet
Edoardo Torbianelli, p; Katharina Suske, ob;
Pierre-Andre Taillard, cl; Lyndon Watts, bn; Olivier Darbellay, hn
Winter & Winter 910219—50 minutes

Founded in 1993 by Austrian oboist Katharina Suske, the Freitagsakademie Bern is an ensemble dedicated to period performance practice in the Swiss capital. Here the group presents two late 18th Century masterworks—the Mozart Quintet for piano and winds (1784) and the Beethoven for the same (1797). While the former is considered a seminal work in the woodwind quintet genre, the latter is a superb
contribution as well. Beethoven’s early compositional style may owe much to Haydn, but his affinity for wind instruments has roots in Mozart’s innovative scoring.

The recital is robust, vigorous, and very bumpy. Torbianelli is fantastic at the keyboard, with amazingly fluid technique and perfect classical nuance and touch. The winds are too uneven. Moments of wonderful control and musicianship that rise above technological limits are often followed by instances of dreadful tone, poor balance, and shoddy intonation. Moreover, the group seems to take the same assertive approach in all the movements, disregarding introspective and personal utterances in favor of grandiose statements.

Mozart: Piano Sonatas, all; Fantasy, K 475
Fazil Say—Warner 94206 [6CD] 206 minutes

I started listening to this set with some trepidation. I am not fond of hearing massed works by the same composer played by the same artist. There are already too many “complete” recordings of this and that. I prefer to hear a composer’s works played by different artists, and a single artist in a varied program. Moreover, this was my first encounter with the Turkish pianist Fazil Say (b. 1970), about whom I had read many previous reviews suggesting that he was eccentric and better avoided. So I thought I might not like this release.

To my astonishment, I was swept off my feet right away by playing of exceptional ardor and conviction. Say’s interpretations are unorthodox but compelling. This, to me, is the sign of a real artist. In fact, I have rarely heard such unselfconscious playing despite many idiosyncrasies. Each of his keyboard actions clearly serves musical ends and is not done arbitrarily. He is totally immersed in the music, which spills out of him. The sympathetic listener is pulled along with magnetic force. Mozart emerges dramatic and full of character.

There is nothing scholarly or prissy in Say’s approach. His touch is forceful, and sometimes he plays rather loud. Tempo choices, phrasing, and articulation are often surprising but always interesting. He takes all repeats. Only occasionally I felt let down by his interpretation, as in K 533:I (which he himself confesses being uncomfortable with) and in much of K 457. He also sometimes emits vocal sounds, but this is intermittent and not as distracting as Glenn Gould’s incessant humming.

The 18 sonatas are arranged not chronologically but by key signature. The charming and extensive booklet notes (in English, German, and French) are by Say himself. They convey his view of each sonata’s character in fanciful images, and he even gives them nicknames. The imagery need not be taken seriously, but it shows us a source of his inspiration. In an initial note he lays down his intention to “transport [him]self to as natural a state as possible. It is impossible to play Mozart’s music by simple articulation. It requires us to assimilate it with our own bodies and beings. It requires us to live it and breathe it.” This may seem platitudinous at first, but after hearing his performances I think that it is exactly what he has accomplished. For once it seems appropriate that there is no artist biography in the booklet. This release is neither about Say nor about Mozart, but about the unique amalgam they have formed.

Almost two decades ago, the young pianist recorded three Mozart sonatas that were reviewed unfavorably in ARG by Alexander Morin (N/D 1998). Mr Morin thought Say had “a lot to learn about musicianship in general and playing Mozart in particular” and “we’ll have to wait for Say to grow up to know whether he can become an artist worth hearing.” Let me assure you that he has grown up and is definitely worth hearing. In this age of perfectionism and conformism, agreeable mavericks should be welcomed with open arms.

Mozart: 6 Preludes & Fugues, K 404a
Il Furibondo
Stradivarius 37044 — 51 minutes

Really? Did Mozart write the preludes to these fugues from JS Bach’s Well-tempered Clavier and Wilhelm Friedemann’s Keyboard Fugues and arrange them all for string trio? It’s anyone’s guess, but it makes a pleasant collection that has been recorded previously by the Vienna String Trio (Calig 50 920, M/A 1994), members of the Turner Quartet (Adda 581230, J/A 1992) and l’Archibudeli (Son 46497, M/A 1992). There may be many more as well, but those are the ones I know. If you want a complete set we can eliminate the otherwise excellent Archibudeli, since they play only 4 of the 6.

The present performances are notable for drama. Prelude 1 begins here with early music purity and pushes on into romantic tempo changes and 21st century violence on its way to Bach’s fugue. These are basically leisurely and detailed readings, this first one taking up...
10-1/2 minutes while Archibudeli takes 7 and the Turner takes 8. The music can take this leisurely approach, though I find a bit less violence easier to take in the long run. The playing is fine, though the program is short. Of course, so is the Turner, though they add five four-voice fugues, K 405, by Mozart to the stew. All in all, I prefer their program and playing.

D MOORE

MOZART: Quartets 22+23;
String Quintet, K 406
Dover Quartet; Michael Tree, va
Cedille 167—73 minutes

No matter what anyone says, no two quartets sound alike. This group formed at Curtis, and the players were all enamored of the Guarneri Quartet and coached by Guarneri members. This disc, they proudly announce, comes 50 years after the first release by the Guarneri (of the same two Mozart quartets), and the second viola player in the quintet here is Michael Tree of the Guarneri Quartet. But the sound of this group is more treble-dominated and less rich than the Guarneri sound. (As you would expect, the quintet sounds richer than the two quartets.) If you like a bright, cheerful sound you may like this.

I'm not sure these last two Mozart quartets were a good idea for a debut disc (despite the Guarneri!). They are much less appealing than Mozart's middle quartets (especially 15-17)—more abstract, I'd say. And I made the mistake of playing this for the first time after listening to the Quartetto Italiano play Mozart. They are so silky-smooth that no other group could match them. In these late pieces I like the guttier sound of the Leipzig Quartet, too.

Still, the almost frothy brightness and cheer in the playing can be quite winsome.

VROON

MOZART: Gran Partita
Dialogue Quartet; Ewald Demeyer, p
Challenge 72697 [SACD] 52 minutes

This is the seven-movement work for 13 wind instruments arranged by Christian Schwencke (1767-1822) for oboe, violin, viola, cello, and piano. This performance with period instruments uses no vibrato, which makes for a gratifying introduction. The sound has an immediacy and forcefulness that doesn’t soften the effect. Although the playing has spirit and vigor, the harsh sound will be enough to put some listeners off, including this one!

Do the string players know what Leopold’s treatise says?

The booklet essay opens with a quotation from Antonio Salieri taken from the Peter Shaffer movie Amadeus. Although the other six pages are fine, the start is enough to rub you the wrong way even without hearing the first note. People who collect Mozart and can tolerate the harsh but accomplished period playing may add this release to Hummel’s transcriptions of the symphonies. Be forewarned, though: you may need aspirin and considerable resolve to make it through.

GORMAN

MOZART: Songs
Marianne Beate Kjelland, mz; Nils Anders Mortensen, p
LAWO 1111—65 minutes

Mozart only wrote about three dozen songs, and there are 21 of them here, so it’s probably all most of us will need. He is not known for his songs, but they often sound a lot like Schubert’s (who was known for songs). We have songs from all of his life, starting at 12 years old and ending the year he died. His widow published 30 songs in 1800, and that is the basic collection. You can hear Mozart in these songs, naturally, but sometimes you go a long stretch where you are not sure who wrote a given song, and then suddenly you know it is Mozart—something leaps out at you.

This is an excellent collection if you want a single singer. She is really very good, and her voice is easy to listen to. But after a while everything sounds alike, and you wish a few singers had shared the recital, just for variety of timbre.

There are Mozart song records where the songs are shared by two singers—male and female. Kurt Moses reviewed one such, with Joan Rodgers and John Mark Ainsley (July/Aug 1999). He found that the soprano had a far more beautiful voice than the tenor, as well as better technique and expression. The contrast made the program unacceptable.

The other shared recitals were reviewed by Ralph Lucano (Sept/Oct 2008). Ruth Ziesak on Naxos was wonderful, but the tenor who shared the recital (Lothar Odinius) had a tight voice and a nagging manner that gets tiresome. Sophie Karthhauser and Stephan Loges (a baritone) on Cypres sound much better matched and even do a few songs as duets. Both of those are two discs and claim completeness but are not identical.

March/April 2017
There are 20 or 30 solo albums of these songs, by people from Schwarzkopf to Schreier. I like this new one because I like her voice—she reminds me of Janet Baker—but many of our readers already have favorite voices in these songs.

**MOZART:** *Quartets;* see SCHOENBERG & Collections

**NEUWIRTH:** *Marsyas;* see SCHUMANN

**NICOLAI:** *The Return of the Exiles*

Hans Christoph Begermann (Count Edmund), Bernhard Berchtold (Lord Arthur), Julia Bauer (Leonora); Opera Chemnitz/ Frank Beerman CPO 777654 [2CD] 145 minutes

Some composers are identified by a single work and little else. Otto Nicolai is best known for his opera *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1849) which is still performed in Europe, but rarely in the United States. It is a light and frothy version of Shakespeare's play, and Nicolai's music is consistently delightful.

Nicolai's early works were written in Austria and well received, but he moved to Rome to work at the Prussian embassy. There he was greatly influenced by Donizetti's and Bellini's operas, and he wrote four dramatic operas in Italian that were not successful. *Die Heimkehr des Verbannten* (The Return of the Exiles) premiered at La Scala in Italian as *Il Proscritto* (1841), based on a libretto rejected by Verdi. On returning to Vienna, Nicolai revised the libretto and re-wrote the opera in German. *Die Heimkehr des Verbannten* was premiered in Vienna in 1844, but it was still not a success. He kept re-working the opera until he died, and a third "Berlin" version was premiered in 1849, again a failure and thereafter forgotten. When you hear the opera, you'll wonder how an opera with so much beautiful music could be forgotten.

The action takes place in the 13th Century War of the Roses. In Act 1, the war is in full force and Lord Arthur, who is married to Leonora, is thought to have been executed for being a member of the losing House of the White Rose. Thinking him dead, Leonora agrees to marry Count Edmund of the House of the Red Rose. Arthur reappears and Leonora must decide between them. In Act 2 the White Roses plot to overtake the Red Roses but are defeated. In Act 3 Arthur returns to reclaim Leonora. She begs him to leave, as she now loves Edmund. Edmund finds the two together and thinks the worst, rejecting Leonora. Leonora runs from the scene, but quickly returns after taking poison. She dies before the two men, pleading that they peacefully settle their differences.

Acts 1 and 2 have some really fine arias, duets, and choral work. But Act 3 is astonishing. The music is very beautiful, the drama is intense, and the final arguments of Edmund, Arthur, and Leonora, and her deteriorating mental state and death are truly moving. Nicolai ends the opera quietly with very soft, ethereal music.

This 2011 recording from Opera Chemnitz uses a reconstructed version by conductor Frank Beerman that has elements of all three versions. The performers are excellent. Julia Bauer as Leonora is outstanding from her early scenes through her Act 3 mental torment and death. Hans Christoph Begermann as Edmund and Bernhard Berchtold as Arthur have rock-solid voices. Even the many secondary characters and excellent chorus help propel the action with engaging performances. The Robert Schumann orchestra plays with conviction, and conductor Frank Beerman keeps the energy flowing. The sound is excellent. The informative booklet includes an explanation of the opera's history and reconstruction, and a complete German and English libretto.

FISCH

**NIELSEN:** *Violin Sonata;* see Collections

**NYMAN:** *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*

Matthew Trevino (Dr P), Rebecca Sjowall (Mrs P), Ryan MacPherson (Neurologist); Nashville Opera/ Dean Williamson Naxos 660398—58 minutes

I haven't heard Nyman's first opera in some time—in fact, when I pulled the original Sony recording off the shelf to compare it with the new release, I had to dust off the top of the case. I don’t think I really understood what the opera was about when I first heard it, and I know I certainly didn’t understand Nyman’s musical setting. Listening again, I find it masterly: a completely satisfying piece of music and a brief but highly effective theater piece.

The three characters are represented perfectly by the music, which often appropriates the music of Schumann (I'm sure I don’t recognize all the references) to illustrate the interior world of the opera singer and teacher, Dr P, who can no longer recognize faces or indeed assemble the individual elements of a visual...
image to create meaning. As the music unfolds, I feel an incredible sympathy for Dr P and his wife, who use music as a way to remain connected to each other even as it seems that his descent into complete unawareness inexorably approaches. On the level of musical structure alone, Nyman’s deft approach to form—a kind of cross-cutting between different musical ideas and tempos—complements the drama perfectly. In fact, he offers a thoroughly engaging example of form in the era of what has come to be called postminimalism, where form is often rudimentary in many works of his contemporaries.

Given my esteem for this opera, I am much in favor of new recordings of it. The original Sony recording is pretty good, but the piano (played by Nyman) sounds much too harsh. In the new production, the engineers seem to be aiming for a more concert-like acoustic, so the piano is too buried under the other instruments. In spite of the sonic deficiencies, the musicians acquit themselves well. I prefer Emile Belcourt’s and Frederick Westcott’s characterizations of Dr S and Dr P on the Sony release to Ryan MacPherson and Matthew Trevino, though they are very good. And I have never warmed to the cottony timbre of Sarah Leonard’s voice (she portrayed Mrs P in the original production); Rebecca Sjowall’s singing is eerily like Leonard’s—not a good thing. What I’d like to hear in the role is a clearer, lighter, and more lyric voice. Perhaps it will happen one day.

HASKINS

**PACHELBEL: Organ Pieces 2**

Jürgen Essl, Michael Belotti, James David Christie
CPO 777 557 [2SACD] 117 minutes

Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706) is now recognized as the pre-eminent figure in central German organ music of the later 17th Century, though his works also show the influence of the organ schools of northern and southern Germany as well as France and Italy. He was born in Nuremberg, where his teachers included the city’s music director Heinrich Schwemmer and organist Georg Caspar Wecker. Pachelbel held organist positions in Eisenach, Erfurt, and Stuttgart before returning to Nuremberg in 1695 as organist at St Sebaldus church on the death of Wecker.

This is the second volume of Pachelbel’s organ works on historic instruments. The complete set will consist of ten discs. Volume 1 (CPO 777 556) had five discs. The recordings are the first to be based on the new edition of Pachelbel’s keyboard works edited by Michael Belotti, one of the three organists here, and published by Wayne Leupold Editions of Colfax, North Carolina. The new edition runs to 12 volumes, some of them still in preparation.

According to Belotti, some of the pieces in the new edition are based on better source material than was available to previous editors. Hitherto unknown works are included for the first time, and many spurious ones have been expunged.

Many works attributed to Pachelbel cannot be authenticated. Some are transmitted anonymously and others are attributed to different composers in different sources. Belotti appears to have erred on the side of inclusion in such cases. A good example is the chorale prelude ‘Christe, der du bist Tag und Licht’. A common formula in Pachelbel’s chorale preludes is to begin with a fugghetta based on the opening line of the melody followed by an accompanied statement of the complete chorale as a cantus firmus in relatively long notes. One source transmits the prelude in question as a fugghetta only with the initials “JP”. A complete version appears in the *Neumeister Chorales* of JS Bach (S 1096). It is unknown whether Bach’s version reproduces a now lost source for Pachelbel. In any case, Bach’s version is performed here. Another notable rarity is a Ciaccona in G that survives in fragmentary form. Belotti has completed the piece to make it performable.

The framework for the recorded programs is the chorale preludes grouped according to the seasons of the church year and other categories. The first disc of the present set contains chorale preludes for Advent and Christmas. The second disc involves chorales based on the psalms. Interspersed with the chorale preludes are works in other genres. These include preludes, toccatas, fugues, works on a ground bass, and sets of variations. Magnificat fugues constitute an important part of Pachelbel’s output. They are short pieces intended to be performed *alternatim* with a choir, and they date from his time at St Sebaldus.

The first disc is recorded by Jürgen Essl on the 1782 Stumm organ at St Stephen’s church in Simmern. It is a two-manual instrument, and although the pedalboard is short—only an octave and a half—it is adequate for the pedal parts of these works. The instrument represents the Middle Rhine tradition of organ building, but with the influence of southern Germany and France, making it a good stylistic
match for the works of Pachelbel, even though it was built long after he died. It has a bold tone, and the chorus reeds are especially pungent. I believe they should have been used more sparingly.

The second disc is evenly divided between Michael Belotti and James David Christie. It is played at St Kilian’s church in the Thuringian town of Bedheim, where there are two historic organs linked by trackers. The main organ in the loft (1711) is by Caspar Schippel. The second organ (1721) by Nicolaus Seeber is mounted above the choir arch near the church ceiling and known affectionately as the “swallow’s nest organ”. This composite instrument has a gentler sound than the Simmern organ. Its only reed is a very understated oboe. The organs in both churches are very attractively recorded here.

The organ works of Pachelbel may not be endlessly fascinating to the general listener. They may seem slight in texture and scope compared with the larger works of Bach or Buxtehude, but they are important for the specialist and student. The playing by all three organists here is fluent and stylish without ostentation.

GATENS

PALESTRINA: Pope Marcellus Mass; motets
Sistine Chapel Choir/ Massimo Palombella
DG 479 6131—60 minutes

Palestrina’s Pope Marcellus Mass has acquired an almost mythic reputation. It is dedicated to the memory of a pope who reigned for only three weeks in April of 1555, but on Good Friday of that year lectured the papal choir on clarity and propriety in their rendering of liturgical music. It was the first six-part composition published by the composer. It is extravagant to claim that this setting was solely responsible for saving polyphonic music from the threat of abolition by the Council of Trent, but it is a prime example of the new style of vocal polyphony written in such a way as to make the text intelligible to the listener according to the Tridentine ideal.

In his notes to this recording, Massimo Palombella stresses the importance of taking a fresh approach to the work rather than merely reproducing elements of other performances. Without going into detail, he mentions that aspects of the notational system then in use encoded a variety of tempos and other interpretive elements. The music is meant to be expressive, but he also cautions against mere subjectivity in its rendering.

The edition used for this recording is based primarily on three early sources: the first publication in 1567 of Palestrina’s Second Book of Masses, a Venetian copy of 1598, and a Roman one of 1599-1600. More recent editions, including the Haberl (1881) and Casmiri (1934) editions of the collected works, give a seven-part Agnus Dei II that is sung in most performances. That movement is missing in the early sources, and the Venetian source includes an explicit direction that Agnus Dei II is to be sung to the same music as Agnus Dei I with the substitution of the text “Dona nobis pacem” for “Miserere nobis”. That direction is followed here.

Perhaps most decisive in determining the character of this performance is the fact that it was recorded in the Sistine Chapel itself by the choir of men and boys that regularly sings there. My first impression on hearing the recording was of an overwhelming reverberation that would badly obscure the part writing. The reverberation is indeed sumptuous, but the ear quickly adjusts to it, and the smudging of the polyphonic lines is far less than one might expect. Palombella has discovered that the style of singing that works best in the chapel is lighter and more intimate than what is required in St Peter’s Basilica. It is worth noting that in Palestrina’s lifetime papal ceremonies would have taken place in the chapel, since the basilica was under construction and would not be consecrated until 1626.

I find Palombella’s performance remarkably persuasive. The tempos vary considerably but always to good effect. For example, the “Et incarnatus” from the Credo is taken very slowly, but it does not sound static. I would describe the effect as a mysterious stillness. The music moves well from start to finish. Palombella clearly knows how Palestrina’s polyphony breathes. The choral sound is excellent, but I suspect it might not be quite as well blended in a less sumptuous acoustic.

The remainder of the program is nine motets by Palestrina. Most are on the subject of mercy and the forgiveness of sin, in keeping with the Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis from December 2015 to November 2016. The group begins with the five-part ‘Tu Es Pastor Ovium’, written in 1585 for the coronation of Pope Sixtus V. This is claimed as its first studio recording. The program concludes with a four-part ‘Ave Maria’, but not with the standard Ave Maria text. It is sung from the...
choir gallery of the chapel with countertenors singing the cantus part. The effect is somewhat distant and otherworldly. The rest of the program is recorded with the choir on the steps in front of the altar.

GATENS

PAPINEAU-COUTURE: Quartets, all; String Trio
Molinari Quartet—ATMA 2751—60 minutes

Canadian composer Jean Papineau-Couture (1916-2000) embraced atonality by the time he composed his string trio and last three quartets. They all sound the same, so unless I watch my CD player’s display I have no idea which one I’m hearing. There’s lots of eerie serrated tremolos, ghostly harmonics, and startling ricochet pizzicatos—whack-plink! No melodies. Atonal harmonies. Anyone can scribble notes on four-stave music paper and create music as compelling. The short two-movement Quartet 1 is a doleful, gruff threnody followed by a fleet toccata: Mendelssohn meets Hindemith. It’s the best work here.

I suppose the performances are good—but if the Molinaris played a thousand wrong notes, none would be the wiser.

WRIGHT

PART: Canon of Repentance
Cappella Amsterdam/ Daniel Reuss
Harmonia Mundi 905274—60 minutes

Arvo Pärt’s Canon of Repentance (1998) is a hymn composed of nine odes on the Canticles of Moses in Exodus and Deuteronomy, Luke, and a couple of Saints, sung in Church Slavonic. Pärt’s phrases are brief and relentlessly dreary, interrupted by quiet prayers with his patented tintinabulation technique of internal pedals depicting the resonance of bells. The harmonic stasis, representing timelessness, underlies the entire cycle. Contrast is minimal, in keeping with the undying lamentation. This is pretty deadly stuff, unless you are committed to this sort of spiritual abuse.

This is an outstanding group, well attuned to the intense demands. Texts and translations, and excellent notes.

HASKINS

PEERSON: Consort Songs
James Johnstone, org; I Fagiolini; Fretwork
Regent 497—73 minutes

This is the first recording of a set of 25 consort songs for voices and viols with organ by Martin Peerson (c1572-1651). It was published in 1630 under the title Mottecks or Grave Chamber Musique. The title may be somewhat misleading to modern readers. In the 17th Century the word “motet” did not necessarily mean a piece of sacred music but rather one that was very carefully crafted, and “grave” did not mean somber but serious. The texts are drawn from Caelica, a sequence of 109 poems by Sir Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke of Warwick (1554-1628). Peerson set all or part of 13 of the poems, in

The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety), by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.

HL Mencken
some cases setting individual stanzas as separate songs. Appended to them are two laments in memory of Greville. Each lament is set twice: once in five parts like the other songs in the book, and once in six parts.

In format the songs are a parallel to the church anthems of the day. Some are “verse”, for solo voices with viols, the full complement of five voices joining together for a chorus. Others are “full”, with all five parts texted and sung from start to finish. The organ part is said to be the first instance of figured bass in England. It is printed in an organ score as opposed to a separate part—also a first for England.

Peerson worked extensively as a domestic musician to notable families. In 1623 he was appointed sacrist at Westminster Abbey, and in 1625 Almoner and Master of Children at St Paul’s Cathedral, one of the most distinguished ecclesiastical appointments of the time. If he wrote music for the cathedral choir, almost none of it survives. It was around 1609 that Peerson began working for Greville.

Greville was a close friend of Sir Philip Sidney, and he held important posts in the courts of Elizabeth I and James I. He was also a patron of artists, writers, and intellectuals of the day.

_Caelica_ spans his career as a writer. The earliest poems date from the late 1570s or early 1580s. More were added later, and he was still engaged in revision of them in the 1620s. The sequence begins with love poems, but it progresses as a philosophical disquisition on love, drawing heavily on political and religious metaphors. As Gavin Alexander puts it in the notes, “By its end the sequence is entirely taken up with the contemplation of God and eternity.” The poetry is dense and complex, “rich with interwoven strands of thought and experience.”

Greville would not allow the publication of any of his writings in his lifetime. In 1628, just a few days before what would have been his 74th birthday, he was stabbed to death by a disgruntled servant. The way was thus open for the publication of Peerson’s songs and their dedication to Greville’s son and successor Robert.

To describe Peerson’s songs as skillfully crafted would be an understatement. They are technically fluent and richly expressive. There are instances of unusual harmonic progression and striking dissonance, but these are grafted onto the stock of the period’s common practice, so the context that makes such audacious touches all the more telling. The performances by the vocal consort I Fagiolini, viol consort Fretwork, and organist James Johnstone are technically irreproachable, with finely nuanced expression. It might be possible to imagine more vivid expression, but I would be reluctant to sacrifice the poised elegance of these readings.

This recording uses the edition by Richard Rastall, who has edited the collected works of Peerson in six volumes for Antico Edition. He also wrote the booklet notes on Peerson for this recording, as Gavin Alexander wrote the notes on Greville. Both essays are highly informative. Readers with any interest in English music or poetry of the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods will not want to be without this recording.

**PERGOLESI: Adriano in Siria**

Yuriy Mynenko (Adriano), Romina Basso (Emirena), Franco Fagioli (Farnaspe), Dilyara Idrisova (Sabina), Juan Sancho (Osroa), Cigdem Soyarslan (Aquilo), Capella Cracoviensis/Jan Tomasz Adamu—Decca 483 0004 [3CD] 177:48

I would not normally be prone to say this, but here we have a case where a DVD of a well-staged opera production is distinctly more satisfying, musically as well as dramatically, than a studio-made audio recording. My point of contrast here is the Opus Arte DVD release of this same opera that I reviewed not long ago (M/J 2012, p. 248).

The work dates from 1734. It sets a libretto by the famous Metastasio. _Adriano in Siria_ (Hadrian in Syria) was among the more popular of that prolific poet’s librettos and was set a good 64 times between 1731 and 1857. Pergolesi’s setting was one of the very earliest. Most other composers who used it are forgotten today, with a few exceptions (Caldara, the first, Galuppi, Graun, Haasse, JC Bach, Myslivecek, Sarti, Cherubini [†], Mayr, Mehul, and Mercadante), who nevertheless created treatments that have not achieved any enduring life.

The libretto itself is a terrible muddle of fiction in a very vague historical context. The title character is supposed to be the Roman Emperor Hadrian, victorious over the neighboring Parthians. But the historical Hadrian fought those campaigns before he was emperor, and Sabina was by then his actual wife and not merely his “betrothed”. The typically complicated plot has Hadrian fall in love with Eriema, daughter of Osroa, the Parthian king he has conquered; she, however, is in love with the Parthian prince Farnaspe, who loves her;
the Roman Tribune Aquilio lusts after the rejected Sabina and contrives no end of misunderstandings and intrigues to that end. All characters other than Adriano and Sabina, be it noted, are fictional. Needless to say, all the plot complications are worked out by the end, with the proper couples paired.

While Pergolesi’s score is no masterpiece by our standards, it was a very accomplished piece of work designed to fit the tastes of its Neapolitan audience. The melodic material is good, and vocally very well designed. But the 1734 audiences also wanted virtuosic fireworks from the cast of greatly admired vocal stars, and Pergolesi designed them in quantity (keeping his orchestration spare so as not to compete with the singers). At the same time, serving both the vocal tastes of the day and the politics of casting, he composed a score for mostly high voices, with characteristic gender-bending. The leading role was not the title character, but Farnaspe, written for the sensational castrato star, Caffarelli. Adriano was given secondary status and written for a soprano. Of the two female soprano roles, Erismena was the first-ranked, Sabina the second. The villain Aquilio was written for a soprano experienced in travesty roles. The only actual male voice—the under-appreciated tenor—was Osroa.

The casting worked out for this recording is to use countertenors for Farnaspe and Adriano, a tenor (of course) for Osroa, and sopranos for everyone else, male or female. Of the two previous recordings, the first (Bongiovanni 2078, 3CD: N/D 1990) presented the first modern revival of the opera in 1986, in the composer’s home town of Jesi, conducted by Marcello Panni and using a new critical edition by Dale Monson. Also using the Monson edition was the staged production also given in Jesi, in 2010, conducted by Ottavio Dantone (Opus Arte 1065, DVD). The Monson edition is used again in this new audio recording, studio-made in 2015 at the facilities of Cracow Radio.

Those Polish forces make a good impression, though the orchestral role is limited, so that it is not the best display of the period-instrument group’s full capacities. Of the singers, only the two Italians, Basso and Fagiolari, are fairly well known. They bring off their roles with style, as do the other singers, who are up to the virtuosic challenges. The other two recordings also have consistently able vocal teams. The Bongiovanni set had at least a few of the leading Italian stars of the day. Dantone’s team consisted of young and new singers, all very effective. So cast comparisons do not yield any clear preferences.

Dantone’s partner as stage director, Ignacio Garcia, brought fine theatrical imagination to his production, avoiding the risks of static Baroque theatrics. Since there are so many high voices, it is not always easy to distinguish the characters from each other, but the visual element naturally helps. Above all, Garcia’s direction really brings the plot and the characters to dramatic life in ways that the audio-only recordings cannot.

Of course, this new release has the advantage of containing the full libretto, with French and English translations. The DVD set has a further advantage. Pergolesi’s original 1734 production was paired, as was the Neapolitan custom, with an Intermezzo. Pergolesi’s Serva Padrona is an example. For Adriano, his comedy was Livietta e Traculo, its two parts interspersed between the acts of the main work. The Dantone-Garcia production includes that as part of the show.

Barker

Perosi: Oratorios

Angelicum 104 [4CD] 236 minutes

Birth of the Redeemer
Mirella Freni, Jeda Valtriani, s; Ornensia Beggiato, mz; Giuseppe Nati, t; Claudio Strudhoff, b; Angelicum Chorus & Orchestra/ Carlo Felice CILLARIO

St Mark Passion
Alfredo Nobile, t; Renato Capecchi, Giuseppe Zecchillo, bar; Giorgio Taddeo, b; Angelicum/ Ennio Gerelli

Resurrection of Christ
Giuseppe Campora, Annamaria Rota, Nicoletta Panni; Angelicum/ Carlo Felice CILLARIO

Transitus Animae
Fiorenza Cossotto, mz; Angelicum/ Giulio Bertola

I suspect that most of us who’ve heard the large-scale choral works of Lorenzo Perosi (1872-1956) have done so via the releases conducted by Arturo Sacchetti on the Bongiovanni label. Those performances ran a variable gamut from wildly inept to pretty good. The best of the lot was Perosi’s Christmas oratorio, Il Natale del Redentore (N/D 2009). You can chart the ups and downs of some of the others in Lindsay Koob’s take on Perosi’s Passion of Mark (J/A 2007) and in some additional comments on the composer (July/Aug 1998, N/D 1999, J/F 2001). As Mr Koob summed things up in 2007, our general view has been that Perosi was a com-
poser of some ability whose works deserved better recordings than they were getting.

Will this new set of recordings offer us a better opportunity to appreciate Perosi’s work? Well, maybe. The quality is more consistent than in the Bongiovanni set—especially from the soloists. The baritones are excellent, as are the tenors, save for the overwrought Angel in Natale. The distinguished baritone Renato Cappecchi, who sings Christ in La Passione and in Natale from the Bongiovanni set and hope for first-class reinforcements to arrive someday. Chandos, after all, has recorded two hand-some programs of works by Gofreddo Petrassi, one of Perosi’s countrymen. Maybe Perosi, who was a priest as well as a pretty fair composer, will one day be accorded the same respect. He deserves better than he’s gotten.

GREENFIELD

PLANTADE: Requiem; see CHERUBINI

PPORPORA, COSTANZI: Cello Sonatas
Adriano Maria Fazio, Anna Camporini, v; Katarzyna Solecka, v; Pedro Alcacer, theorbo; Lorenzo Profita, hpsi
Brilliant 95408—57 minutes

Here is a curious collection of chamber pieces by Nicola Porpora (1686-1768), a composer known better for his operas and other vocal works than for his instrumental music. According to Carlo Fiore’s liner notes, he enlisted cel-

list Giovanni Battista Costanzi to help him make this music more suitable for instrumental performance. Unfortunately, the liner notes, as translated into English by Giuseppe Leone, are very unclear sometimes. That complaint goes along with the music itself, which begins not with a cello but with a violin!

These are quite lovely four-movement early classical sonatas or trios. They do give most of the solos to the cello. Baker’s Biographical Dictionary lists these sonatas as for two violins, cello, and basso continuo. And to continue complaining about Brilliant’s listings, Sonata 4 claims to be in B but is actually in B-flat. Since these performers are using early music styles, it is actually in A to these modern ears.

The playing is fine and the music likewise. The cello does get much of the tough stuff and plays with little vibrato but with expression. These pieces have not been recorded much before, and I am glad to have them played as they are here, with taste and enthusiasm—and recorded clarity.

D MOORE

PRAETORIUS, J
& SIEFERT: Organ Pieces (all)
Friedhelm Flamme
CPO 777 959 [2SACD] 139 minutes

This release is Volume 14 in Friedhelm Flamme’s encyclopedic traversal of the organ works of the North German baroque masters played on historic instruments.

Jakob Praetorius (1586-1651) was the eldest son of Hieronymus Praetorius (1560-1629). They were part of a distinguished family of Hamburg organists, and they were not related to their much better known contemporary, Michael Praetorius (1571-1621). Jakob II—his grandfather was also named Jakob Praetorius—was born in Hamburg and had his first lessons from his father. Like so many North German organists, Jakob studied with Sweelinck in Amsterdam. He returned to Hamburg and in 1603 at the age of 17 was named organist of St Peter’s Church. Johann Mattheson characterized Praetorius’s artistry as an organist and composer as “serious” in comparison with the geniality of Heinrich Scheidemann, organist of St Catherine’s Church, Hamburg, and a friend of Praetorius.

There are only three free compositions among Praetorius’s surviving organ works. Those three preludes combine a brief introductory passage with a concise fugue, and so might be seen as precursors of the fully devel-
oped prelude & fugue genre. The other works are based on chorales or other liturgical melodies. Most consist of brief passages intended to be played in alternation with choir or congregational singing. The ones based on chorales are like a series of short chorale preludes. Among them are verses for the German Te Deum (‘Herr Gott, dich Loben wir’) and Magnificat. It is unfortunate that Praetorius’s intended to be played in alternation with choirudes. Among them are verses for the German Te Deum (‘Herr Gott, dich Loben wir’) and fantasy on ‘Durch Adams Fall’, survives only as a fragment.

Praetorius’s works occupy most of the first disc. It concludes with a piece by Praetorius’s pupil Jakob Kortkamp (c1615-65)—a set of verses for the German Te Deum. The third verse is more extensively developed than the others in the manner of a chorale fantasy. These pieces are played on the two-manual organ of 1650 by Hermann Kröger and Berendt Hus at St Lawrence Church in Langwarden. The instrument has a bold but refined tone that is recorded here with impressive presence and clarity. Action noise, especially in quieter registrations, is distracting.

The second disc contains the organ works of Paul Siefert (1586-1666), who was born in Danzig (Gdansk) and also studied with Sweelinck in Amsterdam. On returning to Danzig, he became assistant to Cajus Schmedeke, the organist of St Mary’s Church, but did not succeed to that position when Schmedeke died. He held positions in Königsberg and Warsaw before returning to Danzig in 1623, when he was appointed organist of St Mary’s.

All of Siefert’s surviving organ works show the strong influence of the English virginalists, undoubtedly as transmitted by Sweelinck. At the heart of his output are 13 contrapuntal fantasies where this influence is decidedly pronounced. ‘Benedicam Dominum’ is the elaborated intabulation of a motet by Lassus. A multi-sectional Padoana (Pavane) continues in the English vein, but so also do his variations on the chorale melodies ‘Puer Natus in Bethlehem’ and ‘Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland.’

Flamme plays Siefert’s works on the 1831 Ernst Wilhelm Meyer organ in the Martin Luther Church at Schönhagen. It is a modest instrument of one manual and pedal with only 13 stops, but suited to these pieces. As with the Langwarden organ, action noise can be a serious distraction. The organ Siefert played at St Mary’s in Danzig was a large three-manual instrument, but Siefert’s surviving organ works do not involve the multi-manual effects so characteristic of the North German school. Although Meyer’s instrument was built long after the composer’s death, it is designed according to late baroque principles.

I have reviewed other recordings in this series including works by Vincent Lübeck (CPO 777 198; Nov/Dec 2006), Hieronymus Praetorius (CPO 777 345; Jan Feb 2013), and Michael Praetorius (CPO 777 716; July/Aug 2015). Flam’s playing in this repertory leaves a mixed impression. His intimate knowledge of this music gives his playing authority, but often his detached articulation causes the music to move awkwardly and obscures the broader phrase trajectory.

PREVIN: Clarinet Sonata & Quintet
Thomas Martin cl; Andre Previn, p; Si-Jing Huang, Bonan Lefkowitz, v; Mark Ludwig, va; Sato Knudsen, vc
Terezin 161031—40 minutes

In the early 20th Century, as Western art music splintered alongside the ugliness and tragedy of war, dozens of European-born musicians immigrated to the United States and made a big imprint on American musical life. And while Andre Previn (b. 1929) may not be mentioned in the same breath as giants such as Stravinsky and Hindemith, he probably should be. Born to a Jewish household in Berlin, the young Previn fled Nazi Germany just before World War II, settling in Los Angeles, where his great uncle, the Brooklyn-born composer Charles Previn (1888-1973) was the music director at Universal Studios.

The young Previn studied piano, became a naturalized citizen, graduated from Beverly Hills High School, and quickly built a dual career as a Hollywood film composer and touring jazz pianist, winning four Academy Awards and working with some of the eminent names in jazz. He also earned a reputation as one of the finest and most versatile recording artists, releasing albums that range from solo classical piano and chamber music to popular collaborations, including a set of Christmas carols with Julie Andrews.

In the late 1960s, at the height of his fame, Previn launched another career as a conductor, leading the Houston Symphony, the London Symphony, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Oslo Philharmonic, among others. Like Leonard Bernstein, he used the medium of television to bring classical music
to a wider audience, and off the podium he continued to compose, building a respected catalog of orchestral, chamber, and theater music, including two operas and several instrumental concertos.

Here we have two recent works that reflect his affinity for the musicians in the Boston Symphony. In the liner notes, Previn mentions his preference to write for specific artists, his admiration for BSO Associate Principal Clarinet Tom Martin, and his confidence in the Hawthorne Quartet, longtime members of the BSO strings. The two upshots of these relationships are the Clarinet Sonata and the Clarinet Quintet, each of which appears as a world premiere. The Clarinet Sonata is taken from a 28 May 2010 broadcast by Czech Television in the Rudolfinum, Prague, and the Clarinet Quintet is taken from a 14 November 2011 chamber concert in Symphony Hall, Boston.

Both the Sonata and the Quintet deserve an immediate place in the modern repertoire, and these performances should ensure that. Previn writes superbly for the clarinet, employing its natural lyricism in dark, brooding slow movements and taking advantage of its quirky personality in playful disjunct and dissonant technical acrobatics. Martin plays with a wonderfully smooth and resonant sound all through, and he handles all of Previn’s mood changes with ease, juxtaposing expressive phrasing with impressive fingers and articulation. The Hawthorne Quartet gives their parts breathtaking vigor, grace, sophistication, and teamwork, allowing the score to be as pensive or jocular as it wishes to be; and Previn brings the same level of expertise and artistic commitment to the keyboard as he does on the podium.

The only drawback is the gulf in quality between the recordings. The quintet is a fully professional endeavor with perfectly placed microphones, mixing, and editing, and the product is clear and beautiful, placing the listener in the front row inches away from the stage. The sonata, though, is poorly taped, carrying a noticeable background hiss and giving the feeling of sitting in the back of a cavernous hall with questionable acoustics. While Martin and Previn make a convincing presentation, the recording often turns the piano muddy and distorts the clarinet timbre in the high register. Even so, Previn’s new contributions are masterly, and clarinetists who are eager to hear them and learn them should start here.

**HANUDEL**

**PROKOFIEFF:** Cello Sonata; Adagio from Cinderella; **RACHMANINOV:** Cello Sonata; Vocalise; **SCRIABIN:** Romance

Johannes Moser; Andrei Korobeinikov, p
Pentatone 5186 594—72 minutes

What is it about these Russian cello sonatas that is so incredibly moving? Well, Prokofiev’s late works like this one mark a return to romanticism on his part, to which the modern fast and furious moments serve here as a deliberately annoying interruption that makes the whole emotional intent of the music more serious. That is the way these musicians treat it, and it is most meaningful, perhaps particularly owing to the state of the world at present.

Whether this attitude works as well for the Rachmaninoff Sonata is open to question. The Finale, in particular, feels a bit overdone in some of the slower passages, though the reason behind it is clear and he can take it.

All in all, this is a beautiful and emotionally convincing interpretation of all of this music, played to the hilt. Even the encores are part of the game—even the little Scriabin piece, originally for horn and piano. The recording is very fine, contributing to the dramatic mood.

**D MOORE**

**PROKOFIEFF:** Violin Concerto 1; see KHACHATURIAN

**RACHMANINOFF:** Cello Sonata; see PROKOFIEFF

**RAFF:** Cello Pieces
Sonata, op 183; Duo, op 59; 2 Fantasy Pieces, op 86; 2 Romances, op 182
Joseph Mendoza; Taeyeon Lim, p
Toccata 341—67 minutes

Joachim Raff (1822-82) was a fine Swiss composer whose music fell out of favor after he died. This collection of his cello music may be a first. The two Romances that open this program are beautiful lyrical pieces written in 1873 that also exist in a version for horn and piano. The two Fantasy Pieces written in 1854 are longer and more idiomatic for the cello, containing amusing pizzicato passages in the first and harmonic and dramatic adventures in 2. The earliest piece is the Duo of 1848, revised in 1867. This is a somewhat more Mendelssohnian work, but it is imaginative in concept and well worth having. This piece also exists in a version for violin. (By the way, there is little time between tracks on this disc.)
Finally, we reach a 4-movement 27-minute Sonata in D that makes a stirring ending to a very enjoyable program. Mendoza and Lim play well together. Mendoza is not the most colorful of cellists but he is very musical, and Lim has a good personality for this music. The sound is fine and Raff is an imaginative and warmhearted composer. The sonata prepares us for the more famous two cello concertos that Raff wrote immediately afterward.

D MOORE

RASMUSSEN: Symphony 2
Cyndia Sieden, s; Bo Skovhus, bar; Helsinki Academic Male Choir; Merry Musicians; Helsinki Philharmonic/ John Storgards
DaCapo 8226175—53 minutes

Todd Gorman (DaCapo 8226567, N/D 2011) and Josh Mailman (DaCapo 6220506, J/A 2005, new music) found things to like about Sunleif Rasmussen’s solo and ensemble music and Symphony No. 1, but this symphony is bereft of inspiration and full of attempts at dark grandeur and polyrhythms that sound like clutter instead of conflict. The cartoonish III treats us to the quacking of muted trumpets and, in what has to be a new low for symphonic music, a wolf whistle. Most offensive are the squirming handfuls of notes that only move up and down chromatically. They’re a cheap, lazy way of depicting whatever mythological chaos Rasmussen is trying to portray, and they leave the ears exhausted before the symphony is half finished.

ESTEP

RAVEL: Quartet; MACHE: Eridan; FAURE: Piano Quartet I
Jane Coop; Satie Quartet
Skylark 601—76 minutes

This is my first encounter with the Satie Quartet, formed in 1999 by students at the Lyon Conservatory. Despite their biography mentioning only second and fourth place prizes at competitions, they deserve a first place prize for two works on this recording, made in Vancouver BC in 2006.

This performance of the Ravel is like hearing the music for the first time. I was immediately conscious of the players’ textures; their tone colors vary the atmosphere from treble airiness to, at one point in IV, sliding closer to the bridge to convey the eerie effect of a particular juncture. As a result, I was aware of all of the harmonies, non-melodic voice leadings, and counter-rhythms in every movement.

Their flow always moves forward but with a subtle flexibility that frames long phrases and lets the music breathe. Especially remarkable is the balance among the four instruments; not only are the players totally at one stylistically, but their instruments too are perfectly matched—no one player dominates. Of course, part of this is because the engineers have captured them with a warm, mellow, blended sound; though recorded in a church, there is little resonance—just enough to allow the instruments to sound natural and to let final notes fade on their own, no gimmicks necessary.

This recording also made me keenly aware of the ingenious construction of Ravel’s Quartet. All of the above qualities were revealed amply in I, which sets the motto theme. II adds pizzicato against legato, 16th against quarter notes, and an assez vif opening and closing against a lent midsection, all drawn out marvelously by the players. The slow movement develops these materials even further, adding subtle tempo changes and themes against twos, again all drawn out by the players. And in the rapid finale they integrate Ravel’s sly shifts from 5/8 to 5/4 to 3/4 and back again so seamlessly that I was swept up into a veritable waltz instead of a foot-tapping counted rhythm. In brief, it doesn’t come any better than this.

Francois-Bernard Mache’s Eridan, subtitled Quartet, Op. 57, was premiered in 1987 by the Arditti Quartet, which says something important right off the bat (they play only avant-garde works). The opening sounds like a traffic jam as brusquely played strings form chords that modulate for the first 60 seconds. They then turn into a nervous jumble that very slowly descends into silence. There is then a section of hiccups with coarse scrapes that sound like the winding up of the mechanical doll in The Tales of Hoffman. Those are the basic materials that the composer says are structured “A-B-C-B-A-B-C-D-C-B-etc”; each varied on its return. I hasten to add, they are varied so cleverly that the work seemed shorter to me than the 20 minutes it takes to play it, despite the disappointing ending that made me write, “All to what end?” The work definitely held my attention.

The players seem utterly at home with Mache’s material—I’d say “virtuosic”, but their ease, precision, and alertness feels second nature. And again, the engineering allows pppp playing and fades to be fully audible without having to fiddle with the volume control. I can’t resist adding that only a French-
man could write such a pretentious program note: “Eridan is one of the Greek mythic rivers in the realm of Hades. Eridan was also the name given to a river found in Celtic land, perhaps the Rhone. [Where??] The close similitude between the Celtic god Ogmois and Herakles are [sic] interesting and little-known conjunctions obliterated by the Roman conquest.” And so on.

It’s a shame then that Fauré’s Piano Quartet 1 is recorded so poorly. I must admit too that I have a tough time enduring Fauré’s endless modulations and piano arpeggios, not to mention melodies I can never remember. Thus the need for the players to give the music sharp definition. But as happens so often in church recordings, the piano sounds hooty. It so predominates over the strings that I had to concentrate to pay attention to them. Also I had to turn the bass up to get any quality out of the lower notes.

Coop plays with a generic style, missing both the importance of her bass line and the languid character of the triplets that would draw out the contrast of threes against twos in the slow movement—in fact, she rushes them. In addition, the strings, which often play in unison, here are not perfectly tuned; they have that slight sour edge one hears in second-rate string chamber orchestras. And, while I hesitated to mention that the violinist needs to project more in the Ravel, here it becomes clear that he (she?—the individual players are not listed!) needs to project more, period.

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**FRENCH**

RAVEL: Quartet; see Collections

**REBER:** Trios 2,4,6

Trios Elegiaque—Timpani 1239—68 minutes

Napoleon-Henri Reber (Ray-BEHR, 1807-80) was roughly a contemporary of Berlioz but is not at all as well known, though he taught composition at the Paris Conservatory from 1851 on. His music is graceful and flowing—nothing like Berlioz’s. He certainly had a gift of melody.

Steven Haller reviewed his Symphony 4 (N/D 2012) and liked its “gentle French lyricism” very much. Gil French reviewed Trios 3, 5, and 7 (J/F 2014) by the same group on the same label. He commented on the balanced engineering and the rather modest approach of this group. He wanted more excitement and sparkle.

I don’t. I like the gentleness of it all; I like players who let the music shine and don’t goose it or make it more than it is. This is subtle and tender music, and they play it that way. Yes, it is always graceful, elegant, flowing—never thrown in your face. Part of that is, of course, the composer.

There is certainly an audience—even in these days of everything wildly exaggerated—for sweet and gentle music that is always easy on the ears. This is chamber music, not symphonic. It need not project into a large hall or stir you or envelop you. You may use it mostly for background, but you will not fail to notice moments of great beauty—especially, for some reason, in the first movements.

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**REGER:** Chamber Pieces

Violin Sonatas, op 42:1+2; op 91:2+6; Duos, op 131b:1-3; Trio, op 2; Viola Suites, op 131d:1-3; Cello Sonata, op 116; Wiegenlied, op 79d:1; Caprice & Kleine Romanze, op 79e:1+2; Aria, op 103a:3; 3 Little Pieces, op 103c; Suite in G, op 131c:1; Romanze, Albumblatt & Caprice, WoO II:10, 13, 15; KLENGEL: Scherzo, op 6; Hymnus for 12 Cellos, op 57; Andante & Gavotte

Various Artists

Querstand 1617 [3CD] 3:26

Cello Sonatas, opp 5, 28, 78, 116; Caprice & Kleine Romanze, op 79e:2; Aria, op 103a; Romanze & Caprice, WoO II:10+15

Guido Schiefen; Jacob Leuschner, p

Oehms 456 [2CD] 2 hours

The first of these albums of chamber music by Max Reger (1873-1916) looks as if it is going to cover the material for violin, viola, and cello completely—but it doesn’t. Still, it does contain a number of little-known works by this curiously concentrated composer, performed by an incredible number of musicians.

Disc 1 is called Works for Violin. It is entirely violin pieces: two Solo Sonatas, Op. 42, two from Op. 91, and two Duos for 2 Violins from Opus 131b. Each work is played by a different violinist. Meyerscough starts off with Op. 42:1, musically phrased if technically a bit careful, though not inaccurate. This piece is by far the longest one played here, at 22 minutes in four movements. Then comes the first of the Op. 131b Duos, a tiny two-movement piece played by Hobarth and Giombitza. Why Hobarth is listed on the cover as the main protagonist is unclear, since he plays no solo sonatas, just duos. He is joined in Duo 2 by Burchardt and in 3 by Yang. These pieces last about 5 minutes apiece. Yes, he has a nice vibrato and phrases well. So does Giombitza,
Disc 2 claims to be a viola collection with Masurenko. Actually, she only plays in the Trio, Op. 2 with Hobarth on violin and Schmalcz on piano. Enjoy them while you can. The rest of the disc is pure viola, the three suites, Opus 131d played by Hecker, Bhraian, and Shifron, all students of Masurenko at the Leipzig Conservatory. I came in feeling that Reger’s music, while eminently listenable, is mostly unmemorable, but I find that many of these works are based on familiar-sounding melodies handled with imagination. It is a shame that he died so young. The variations that make up the Finale of the Opus 2 Trio, for instance (not listed as variations in the listings) build beautifully. The suits are from 1915, a year before he died at 43. They are played here with aplomb. The movement listins for Suite 2 don’t conform to the tempos. They are identical with the ones for Suite 3. There are also three sonatas with piano not played here but available (Westphal on Bridge 9075, Jan/Feb 1999 & Kluson on Praga 250152. July/Aug 2001). Both were reviewed favorably.

In the cello disc things get really strange. It begins with two Bruns’s on cello & piano playing an Aria, Op. 103a:3. Then we have a Caprice and a Kleine Romanze, Opus 79e:1+2 played by Hopkins and Tanaka. Suddenly we’re into Julius Klengel (1859-1933), a friend of Reger, who dedicated several of these pieces to him. From his Kleine Suite for three cellos, Opus 59 we have an Andante and a Gavotte, played by Hopkins, Klauk, and Legasa. Klengel is less harmonically adventurous than Reger but sounds fine. Back home to Reger, we get an Albumblatt, Wo11:13 played by Sorozobai with Waki on piano. Now we finally meet a solo cello in a Suite, Opus 131c:1 played by Klauk. This ends with a Fugue that Reger rearranged for two cellos; Klauk is joined by Legasa. This is a nice touch, but why don’t we have the other two suites from this opus? Instead, we get more little cello-piano pieces, a Romanze and Caprice from Wo11:10 & 15 played by Dressler and Huh on cello and Waki and Tanaka on piano. Then the Brunses take over again with Reger’s last and longest Cello Sonata, Opus 116, a huge 32-minute work. If they had substituted the rest of Opus 131c solo suites this album would have covered more consistent ground, even with the inclusion of Klengel’s pieces. As it is, this is one of the lesser performances, since Bruns’s cello playing, though excellent in verve and intonation, has a rather unvarying vibrato that loses the listener’s attention in the more lyrical passages—and there are many in this sonata. Then we get a Cradle Song, Opus 79d:1 played by Blomdi. Now it’s back to Klengel with a Scherzo, Opus 6 played by Thiele, both of these accompanied on piano by Tanaka. We finish off Reger with three little pieces from his Opus 103c played by Villanueva with Waki on piano. Then we finish off Klengel with his 5-minute ‘Hymnus’ for 12 cellos, Opus 57.

All of this is quite lovely and if the idea attracts you, I can recommend these readings without much reservation. If you want the unincuded solo cello suites, Opus 131c, I can push you towards the sensitive recording by Pieter Wispelwey (Channel 9596, Nov/Dec 1996).

And then there are the four cello sonatas played by Schiefen and Lauschner. Besides the sonatas, it contains most of the short cello-piano pieces in the album we have just discussed. The Oehms album plays the sonatas in their opus order, separating them with the little pieces. It begins with the jaunty little Caprice, Wo11:15. Then Sonata 1 tries to make things serious. Schiefen is a cellist with considerable variety of touch, and both he and pianist Lauschner seem determined to emphasize the variety of emotion implied in Reger’s style. These four sonatas contain some of his most memorable ideas, and these players bring out some of the best that’s in them. They do not cause me to forget my favorite collection—Reimund Korupp and Rudolf Meister (CPO 999394 & 999884, March/April 2003), but they are right up there with those masters of contrast.

All in all, this has been an interesting Reger day for me. Both of these new releases are beautifully balanced in sound and well worth investigating.

D Moore

March/April 2017
REGER: Organ Pieces
Wie Schön Leuchtet; Straf Mich Nicht in Deinem Zorn; Pieces, op 59; 3–8
Ulfert Smidt
Rondeau 6131—60 minutes

Another entrant in the spate of releases marking the 100th anniversary of Reger’s death in May of 1916 (S/O 2016). Smidt offers a program of pieces that have been recorded many times; he plays with technical assurance and engaging musicality on a magnificent 2009 Goll organ in the Marienkirche in Hanover. His main competition, as with any future recording of Reger’s organ music, will remain Schmeding (Cybele, below), whose playing, organs, and recorded sound will be hard to beat. Specification and interesting notes on the composer and music.

DELCAMP

REGER: Organ Pieces, all
Martin Schmeding
Cybele 51500 [17SACD] 19:25

I reviewed three volumes from this series (S/O 2016) and was bowled over by the playing, the organs, and the sound. Now it is complete and is absolutely superb in every way. It comes in a handsome box with a 160 page color booklet containing extensive information on the composer, music, performer, production details, and the 13 Walcker and Sauer period instruments used. It also includes the largest collection of photographs of Reger, his family, students, and colleagues I have ever seen. Volume 17 is an interview (in German) with Schmeding and the producer Mirjam Wiesemann about Reger, the project, and the organs.

From an organist’s standpoint, it is truly astonishing that one performer could record this huge repertoire, which contains some of the most technically demanding pieces ever written for the organ. Schmeding plays it with astonishing ease and a fluid musicality, coupled with an innate understanding of the peculiar aesthetic of Reger’s music. The recorded sound is SACD and is stunning. “Just wait. In ten years from now I too will be seen as reactionary and will be shelved. But I will return.” And return he does. This magnificent production will remain the benchmark for a long time to come.

DELCAMP

RESPIGHI: Piano Pieces
Michele D’Ambrosio
Brilliant 94442 [2CD] 133 minutes

This appears to be the largest conspectus of Respighi’s solo piano music yet, and purports to be complete. It’s hard to believe that one of the world’s great orchestral colorists produced so much for piano solo. Looking into it a bit further reveals that his father ran a piano school and young Respighi, who had studied violin, eventually found his way to the piano. He even appeared as soloist in the late 1920s at Carnegie Hall with Wilhelm Mengelberg conducting.

Both the Ancient Airs and Dances (Suite 1 with the “Passacaglia” from Suite 3) and Three Preludes on Gregorian Melody exist in orchestral versions—the latter as Church Windows. They make a fascinating contrast when one
compares them to their orchestral versions. These are probably the only items that are familiar to most collectors. While they can be appreciated on the keyboard, few would deny their improvement when heard in full orchestral regalia—especially *Church Windows*.

The two piano sonatas (1895-96+1897) are products of his late teens. Both are student works in three movements. As such they are perfectly respectable but not yet characteristic. There is plenty of movement, pleasant but not particularly distinguished melody, and the self-conscious craftsmanship one would expect. There are strong glimpses of Schumann’s influence, along with Martucci.

Six Pieces from 1903-05 are brief, tuneful, and fall in the realm of occasional pieces. They were pulled together to form this suite and are certainly likable enough, if undistinguishable from so many genre pieces of the day. The Suite from 1898 originally had six movements, but only five have survived. The references are heavy with remembrances of a ballet he had composed 20 years earlier. What we have is somewhat faux Baroque, mostly entertaining, and among the set’s high points.

The solo piano version of the *Symphonic Variations* is said to be making its first appearance here. It’s a strong work, powerfully developed, and differs slightly from the orchestral version. It dates from around 1900.

All of this piano music, including some short Andantes, an Allegro, and three Preludes help us to form some idea as to the composer’s early interests and his compositional roots. Italian pianist D’Ambrosio presents the music with skill and attractiveness. If I give an extra nod towards the single disc recording of Konstantin Scherbakov, you do get a lot more music with this one. Notes and sound are exemplary.

**BECKER**

**RESPIGHI**: Violin Sonata; see Collections

**RODGERS**: Organ Pieces
*Sonatas; Scherzoso; Berceuse; Prelude in D*
Charles Echols—Raven 978—71 minutes

James Rodgers (1857-1940) is one of those forgotten American composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He is probably best remembered today for his art songs, which sometimes appear on student voice recitals. He studied in Germany and in Paris for three years with Widor and Guilmant. He eventually settled in Cleveland, serving as organist for several churches, teaching piano, theory, and composition (the Bach scholar Albert Riemen- schneider was one of his pupils). He ran his own publishing company and was music critic for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. An indication of his popularity at the time is that Marcel Dupré programmed his *Concert Overture in B minor* on a recital given at Baldwin-Wallace College during his 1929 American tour.

He wrote 40 organ works between 1905 and 1929: character pieces, a concert overture, two suites, and three sonatas. The style is conservative late romanticism; melodic, with traditional harmonies, clear formal structures, and wholly indifferent to the influences of Impressionism, neo-classicism, jazz, or atonality.

The sonatas have a predictable structure, and one sounds much like the other. The most interesting is No. 2, with an emotionally engaging first movement and a splendid concluding Toccata.

Echols is a fine player and makes as good a case as possible for this music. The real star is the splendid 1927 108-rank Casavant in St Andrew’s Lutheran Church, Mahtomedi, Minnesota. It has a wonderful array of power and color, perfect for music of this period. Notes about the composer, music, and specifications.

**DELCAMP**

**RODRIGO**: Sonata Pimpante; 7 Valencian Songs; Capriccio; Serenata; 2 Sketches; Rumaniana
Eva Leon, v; Virginia Luque, g; Olga Vinokur, p
Naxos 572648—56 minutes

Violinist Leon Ara recorded this same program, minus the *Serenata al Alba del Dia*, years ago (CPO 999186, May/June 1994), and Mark Lehman was considerably more enthusiastic about it than I am about this. Eva Leon’s playing is often amateurish: her tone is sometimes thin, her intonation and technique are shaky, and there’s no atmosphere, mystery, or charm to any of the pieces. These pieces don’t measure up to the wit and wonder of Rodrigo’s justly-famous hits, but they may very well be worthwhile on a different recording.

**ESTEP**

**ROVETTA**: Mass for the Birth of Louis XIV
Galilei Consort/ Benjamin Chenier
Alpha 965—66 minutes

In 1638, Amelot de la Houssaye, the French ambassador to Venice, arranged for a solemn high Mass at the Church of St George to celebrate the birth of Louis XIII and Anne of Aus-
Rovetta's understanding of Monteverdi's secon
dona pratice. Only the Kyrie, Gloria, and Credo were composed for the Mass, since the Sanctus and Agnus Dei movements would have been breve more Veneto (in the short Venetian manner), because the Venetians preferred to have more interesting vocal concertos and instrumental music in this part of the Mass. To fill this lacuna Chenier took these short movements and an instrumental sonata (together lasting only 7:24) from a 1640 publication by Giovanni Antonio Rigatti. For the other parts of the Proper of the Mass missing in Rovetta's publication, Chenier made intelligent choices from Rovetta's smaller vocal works, added two short motets by Monteverdi ('Christe adoramus te' performed by instruments, and 'Adoramus te, Christe'), and a final motet, 'Omnes gentes plaudite manibus', by the leader of the instrumentalists at San Marco, Giovanni Bassano.

While there are single concerted motets by Rovetta in various recorded collections of Venetian sacred music from the early 17th Century, the only previous complete recording was of the Vespers music from his 1639 publication (Sept/Oct 2008). The music for the Vespers psalms requires a smaller instrumental ensemble, and Junghänel follows the one-per-part performance practice. Because Rovetta's Mass has a clear solo-tutti contrast, Chenier adds a tutti choir of six voices to the core group of eight solo singers. Rovetta's Credo was included on Andrew Parrott's reconstruction of the Venetian Mass of Thanksgiving from 1631 (Sept/Oct 1994) but three sections were replaced by Monteverdi's compositions. Parrott also used a much larger vocal ensemble, so the solo-tutti contrast is much stronger. This type of strong contrast is also evident on the complete recording of Rigatti's Mass with a 40-voice chamber choir (Mar/Apr 1999).

The performance is of a very high standard by both vocalists and instrumentalists. This is not a full liturgical reconstruction (as in Parro
tott's) since some of the chanted portions and liturgical readings are missing. Chenier's essay is instructive, and full texts and translations are included. But this was a concert—and the applause was a bit of a shock at the end.

BREWER

RUTTER: Requiem; Visions
Alice Halstead, s; Kerson Leong, v; Temple Church Boy's Choir, Cambridge Singers; Aurora Orchestra/John Rutter
Collegium 139—58 minutes

In the notes John Rutter tells us he hasn’t listened to his first recording of his 1985 Requiem in years, and he was drawn to the idea of giving his current crop of Cambridge Singers a crack at the piece. (Many of them, after all, hadn’t been born when the Requiem was new and the premiere recording was released.) The younger generation rose to the occasion, and this is a handsome account of the composer’s gentle and uplifting memorial to the departed. It can be counted among the excellent performances we’ve admired from the likes of Rutter himself, Stephen Layton (N/D 1997), Timothy Brown (J/A 2003), and Stephen Cleobury (J/F 1999). Cleobury’s account in particular has stood the test of time by imparting a spiritual presence that comes eerily out of the quiet. By contrast, the sound here is brighter and more forward, which really turns the cello loose in ‘Out of the Deep’ (For a few bars, the soloist’s urgency might remind you of the opening cadenza of the Brahms Double Concerto.) Kudos to the young soprano who sings brightly and with commendable sensitivity to words. (The best ‘Pie Jesu’ of all, though, comes from Layton, who entrusted the sweet melody to an adult lyric soprano.) In sum, this is a lovely Requiem that’s up there with the best that have come our way.

The Rutter premiere du jour is Visions, a 4-
movement, 20-minute work set for solo violin, harp, strings, and the boy choristers of Lon
don’s Temple Church Choir. 19-year-old Cana
dian violinist Kerson Leong does the honors as soloist in this eclectic work that affirms the holiness of Jerusalem with words from Isaiah and the Book of Revelation and melodies inspired by Gregorian chant and bits of William Byrd. The work’s opening ‘Procession’
starts off with an edgy intensity that would have you unsure of the composer’s identity if you didn’t know it in advance. But by the time the lads of Temple Church chirp in luminously with ‘Arise, Shine’ in II, the Rutter imprimatur is embossed on the music to stay. III gives the violin a plush, Hebraic ‘Lament for Jerusalem’ that might be fair game for Itzhak Perlman’s next klezmer album. The concluding ode to the ‘Holy City’ has the choir intoning the words of John as the violin ascends radiant in a Vaughan Williamsy arc. By the end, we have been treated once again to vintage Rutter, handsomely played and sung by one and all.

GREENFIELD

SAINT-SAENS: Piano Duo & Duet
Martin Jones & Adrian Farmer
Nimbus 5940—66 minutes

Martin Jones (b. 1940) is one of the most prolific active recording artists. A glance at a list of his Nimbus recordings shows no less than a dozen composers’ complete piano music. In my memory only Michael Ponti’s Vox Boxes compare in quantity and breadth. Piano duets or two piano works are often included, and Adrian Farmer is a regular partner. Farmer has been associated with Nimbus 1979 as a pianist, principal record producer, and music director. There is a Volume II advertised in the booklet (Nimbus 5941).

The opening Tarantella sets the mood and tone for this release. It was originally for flute, clarinet, and piano. All three parts seem complete in the composer’s arrangement for two pianos, but the difficulties go well beyond the original piano part. Other arrangements include Le Rouet d’Omphale and two movements from the Septet for two pianos, and Pas Redouble for piano duet—all by the composer.

Original works for two pianists make up the rest of the tracks here, and the ones written in forms we most often associate with Chopin are the best. The Polonaise, Scherzo, and Berceuse are inspired works. Recorded sound is a little more distant than I like, but acceptable. There are excellent booklet notes, and the ensemble here is as good as it gets.

HARRINGTON

SARASATE: Spanish Dances; Carmen Fantasy; Zigeuenerweisen; Introduction & Tarantella; Caprice Basque; Serenade Andalouse
Ruggiero Ricci; Brooks Smith, p; London Symphony/Pierino Gamba—IDIS 6717—67:32

Ruggiero Ricci was born in 1918 in San Francisco as Roger Rich. He made his San Francisco and New York debuts at the age of 10, and someone must have decided that the Italian version of his name would help his career. He didn’t need much help. He matured naturally, and he became widely known for his way with Paganini and the romantic bravura repertory. He played a Guarneri violin with an exciting edge to its sound, and for most of his career he had few competitors in his favored pieces. Much of what he does in these pieces—and did routinely in his recitals—seems not just difficult but close to impossible.

MHS released an LP of Ricci playing the Sarasate Spanish Dances, and it was the recording to have until Mark Kaplan’s Arabesque recording (N/D 1991). Since then, other violinists have recorded them quite well, too (see our index). Ricci Spanish Dances were released on CD by EMI (J/F 1993), but only 7 of them. There are 8 here, and that’s all of them, though it’s a matter of name only, because much of what Sarasate wrote is Spanish dances. Here we have his Opuses 20 to 26 plus Opuses 28 and 43. There is an orchestra only in the Carmen and Gypsy Airs. Orchestras have sometimes been added to the other pieces, but why would Ricci do that? He carries it all quite well with only the piano alongside.

These were London and Decca recordings, and they always sounded wonderful—well, in the case of Ricci it doesn’t matter that the microphone is right next to the violin, because you want to hear every detail. If you are a connoisseur of violin virtuosity you have to have these recordings.

VROON

SCARLATTI, A: Keyboard Works 5
Francesco Tasini, organ
Tactus 661915—76 minutes

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725) is known primarily as a prolific composer of vocal music, with over 60 operas, more than 600 chamber cantatas, and a considerable number of serenatas, oratorios, motets, and liturgical works to his credit. He also left a smaller but substantial body of instrumental music, including a good deal of keyboard music. Between 2000 and

If you suppress the things that make you unique, if you blur and dilute the qualities that make you different from others, then you have weakened the very benefits that it is in your power to confer upon the world.

John Garlock, edited
2012 Francesco Tasini collated some 25 manuscript sources of Scarlatti's keyboard works and edited them for publication in six volumes. A seventh volume will contain critical commentary and a thematic catalog.

The organ was built in 1836 by Carlo Serassi. It is a modest instrument of one manual and pedals with 14 stops. It has a specification clearly derived from classic Italian instruments of the 17th and 18th centuries, so it is an appropriate vehicle for Scarlatti. Many of the pieces could be played on either organ or harpsichord. Italian organ writing of the period used the pedals sparingly if at all.

The attributions are sometimes equivocal, but Tasini includes pieces whose stylistic elements make Scarlatti's authorship likely. The predominant genre is the toccata, but many of the pieces so designated are multi-movement works that we might more likely call sonatas. Some of the pieces are keyboard transcriptions of chamber sonatas for a solo instrument with keyboard continuo.

This recording contains some of the most boring music I have ever heard. Far too often there are unimaginative keyboard figures running up and down the scale in sequence or arpeggios endlessly repeated with little change of harmony. The clunky action noise of the 1836 organ does nothing to promote musical coherence. Tasini's playing is marked by hesitations. I would guess that these are intended asagogic nuances, but they sound as if the player cannot keep a steady tempo. The organ has a pleasant tone, but I find it a trifle blatant.

A few years ago I reviewed a two-disc set of Scarlatti keyboard works played on the organ by Alexander Weimann (ATMA 2528; S/O 2010). He released an earlier disc of Scarlatti toccatas played on the harpsichord (ATMA 2321). Apparently no further recordings in the series have appeared. Weimann played a 1993 chancel organ of two manuals and pedals with 15 stops in a Montreal church. There is no distracting action noise, and Weimann's playing is far more fluent and animated than Tasini's. My response to the music itself is pretty much the same.

GATENS

SCARLATTI, A: Requiem; Magnificat
Odhecaton, Paolo da Col
Arcana 398—76:32

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725) was one of the most prolific and influential of Baroque operatic composers. Recordings are gradually, if still slowly, exploring his vast output in that form. But attention is also being paid to his important sacred music. The current program testifies to the composer's experimentation with several different styles, with impressive results.

The initial work here, and the longest in the program, is a Missa Defunctorum or Requiem Mass, dating from around 1717. It is written for four voices, and though it contains a basso continuo it clearly reflects Scarlatti's interest in going back to the polyphonic traditions of the Renaissance, if in his own terms. It is a work of dignity and restraint, perhaps a bit long for its austerity, but full of very lovely music.

The most "polyphonic" of the works here is a setting of Psalm 51, Miserere Meus, for a nine-voice double choir, written in 1708. Scarlatti achieves an antidote to Allegri's simplistic but popular treatment of the same text. The earliest piece here, dating from 1697, is the one I find most fetching: a Salve Regina for four singers with two violins and continuo, using an assimilation of Renaissance madrigalian and Baroque textural styles.

Such assimilation of styles, if with prevailing Baroque flavors, is displayed in a 1715 setting of the Magnificat for five voices and continuo. Solo sections for the singers abound, and there is a lively vigor to the piece.

There are 15 singers and 5 instrumentalists (including organist Luwe Tamminga), and they blend nicely.

Good notes, full texts with translations. A very worthwhile addition to this composer's discography.

BARKER

SCCHMIDT: Piano Quintet
Konstanze Eickhorst, p; Rainer Muller van Recum, cl; Winfried Rademacher, v; Matthias Buchholz, va; Mario Blaumer, vc
CPO 555 026—64 minutes

In December 1913, a 26-year-old pianist named Paul Wittgenstein, the seventh of eight children of Austrian steel magnate Karl Wittgenstein and his wife Leopoldine Kallmus, made his concert debut in Vienna to great acclaim. With the death earlier that year of his domineering father, a former violinist who loved music but regarded the vocation as too lowly to pursue, Paul was free to chase his dream. Six months later, world events threw it into a tailspin.

Drafted into the Austrian military and
commissioned as a second lieutenant, Wittgenstein marched east with the 6th Regiment of the 5th Dragoon Squadron to head off the Russians. At the Battle of Galicia in the Ukraine in August, a large bullet shattered Wittgenstein’s right elbow, and he awoke in a hospital with his entire right arm gone. In a prisoner-of-war camp in Siberia, the shaken Wittgenstein sketched piano keys on a crate and wondered if he could train his left hand to carry on. He didn’t have to look far for inspiration—Hungarian count Geza Vichy (1849-1924), who at age 15 lost his right arm in a hunting accident, went on to study piano with Franz Liszt, built an effective performing career, and wrote the first known left hand piano concerto (1895). Despite his wealth, though, Zichy declined to ask the composers of his day to write original works for him, and the repertoire for piano left hand remained his lone concerto and a handful of etudes and novelty pieces.

Wittgenstein decided to use his family fortune to change that. He wrote his old teacher, the blind keyboard pedagogue Josef Labor, and after returning to Austria the next year in a prisoner-of-war exchange, he appeared in a December 1915 Vienna concert with Labor’s Concertpiece for piano left hand and orchestra. Buoyed by his critical triumph, he began to request concertos from Europe’s most famous composers, notably Korngold, Hindemith, Strauss, Ravel, Prokofieff, and Britten. Wittgenstein’s prickly personality and preference for old school romanticism sometimes led to clashes between composer and performer, and in a few cases he didn’t even perform the work. Yet his undertaking threw open the doors for piano left hand and paved an avenue for future keyboardists afflicted by right hand trauma, particularly Leon Fleisher, Gary Graffman, and the young British pianist Nicholas McCarthy.

Wittgenstein’s efforts also bore fruit in the recital hall. Until he died in 1924, Labor continued to write for his former student, enriching the chamber music genre with several works that called for piano left hand. Wittgenstein also formed a close friendship with the respected Austrian composer, cellist, and pianist Franz Schmidt (1874-1939), who wrote for him a solo toccata, two works for piano and orchestra, and three piano quintets, including the composer’s last finished piece, the Quintet in A for piano, clarinet, and string trio.

Schmidt may have been a perfect collaborator for Wittgenstein. He seamlessly fused Leipzig conservatism with Weimar progres-
ing masterpiece that deserves a central place in the canon.  

HANDELM

SCHNEIDER: Earth’s Eyes; Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde; Sisyphos (Symphony 2)  
Ingolf Turban, v; Cello Duello; Johannes Fischer, perc; German Symphony Berlin/ Wolfgang Lischke—Wergo 5113—84 minutes

Born in 1950, Enjott Schneider took a doctorate in philosophy; he taught at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Munich—theory and composition as well as religious studies. He has composed over 600 film and television scores. His music is extremely colorful, straightforwardly expressive, and aware of modern techniques and sensibilities without holding to them too strongly.

Each of the three works here is essentially a concerto with an extremely important orchestra part. The violin concerto Earth’s Eyes, the strongest work, is in three movements, each titled with the name of a body of water. I did not so much think of water as a cello soloists for where the back of tonality was finally broken; and, as is true of many breakthroughs in music, text and the human voice were needed to justify the revolution. The first three movements are fundamentally atonal, but they have key signatures, sporadic triadic harmonies, and end on tonic triads. IV, though, has no key signature (even though it too has sporadic triads), but nevertheless ends on F-sharp. With the opening movement in F-sharp minor we can say that F-sharp is the key for the quartet, but the grammar of tonality—that is, the interrelationship of chords in a key—is wholly absent.

The texts ‘Litanei’ and ‘Entrückung’ of Stefan George reinforce and help define Schoenberg’s expressionist music. The first begins, “Deep is the sorrow that darkens around me”, and the second says, “I feel air from another planet.” This is complicated music, and I am relieved that my Philharmonia score includes a summary of each movement’s form.

The Amaryllis Quartet is a young Berlin-based group, well able to handle the complexities of the Schoenberg. They play with assurance and passion where needed; but the soft, wispy music, such as the openings to II and IV, is just as effective in its spookiness. Katharina Persicke is a fine soprano who sings the pitches accurately and includes a thrilling high C at the end of III. A fine performance all around.

The Amaryllis also includes two Mozart quartets, the Dissonant and the Hunt. The Hunt is very impressive, moderate enough in tempo for subtle shading to take place and never exaggerated or overplayed. Particular credit should go to violinist Gustav Frielinghaus for his lovely shaping of Mozart’s themes. For some reason, though, the Dissonant isn’t as good. The opening movement seemed unsteady rhythmically, and dynamic shading felt overdone, as if they were playing in a large hall and worried their points wouldn’t come across to the audience.

And now, the annoyances. No. 1: The Amaryllis disc is called Yellow to complement their other releases, which also have colors as titles. Yellow has no significance except perhaps for the yellow surface of Kandinsky’s Impression III (Concert), which he painted after hearing a concert that included the Schoenberg quartet. Is this a smart marketing ploy? Or is it pretentious? Or just dumb? At any rate the players have lots of yellow clothing in their photos.

Annoyance No. 2: Genuin includes a handsome 42-page booklet that has bios and 11 pictures of the performers (mostly hanging out, looking cool), but nowhere do we find the Ste-
fan George texts, which we really need! Can we get a little serious here? And No. 3: We have two discs, one of which contains less than 27 minutes of music. Couldn’t they find anything to fill out the disc?

In the Schoenberg the Kuss Quartet takes almost the same tempos as the Amaryllis, but their playing seems a little less intense, a little less sinister. I am overstating the differences, but the Amaryllis stresses the revolutionary aspect of the piece, while the Kuss makes it more conventionally musical. Soprano Mojca Erdmann is very good, with a slightly leaner voice than Persicke, resulting in less vibrato. I find her preferable to Persicke, if only by a small margin, and she is lovely in the Brahms songs as well.

In the Brahms quartet the Kuss players seem light, almost playful in the opening movement, and the remaining movements are happier and more cheerful than usual. The notes remind us that Brahms told Georg Hen schel, who was to become the first conductor of the Boston Symphony, that III was “the most amorous, affectionate thing he had written”. (Henschel once reported having dinner with Brahms when the two other diners were Grieg and Nikisch. Oh, to be a fly on the wall!)

The three songs, with piano accompaniment arranged for quartet by Igor Loboda, make a mixed impression. The wide-ranging passagework in ‘Wie Melodien’ is very effective, but in the other two songs I would prefer the percussive exactness of the piano to the suave, constant-legato style of strings.

Even though I like the playing on both discs, the Kuss strikes me as preferable. The coupling of Brahms and Schoenberg makes more sense, I slightly prefer their soprano, the whole thing is on one disc, and they include texts and translations.

ALTHOUSE

**Schreker:** Symphonic Interlude; Preludes to *Die Gezeichneten*, *Das Spielwerk*, *Grand Opera*; *Nachtstuck*

Royal Swedish Orchestra/ Lawrence Renes

BIS 2212 [SACD] 69 minutes

Although Franz Schreker was mainly an opera composer, he is probably best known for orchestral works from his operas. That is partly because his operas are not performed often, along with the notion that Schreker’s vocal writing is not as good as his scoring for orchestra. That latter observation is unfair. It is true that Schreker’s operas are not full of memo-

rable arias, but the vocal writing works very well in carrying the drama of works that deserve a much better reputation. That said, these orchestral pieces supply an excellent introduction to Schreker’s mix of neo-Straussian color and romanticism, Debussy’s delicacy and impressionism, and the luminosity unique to Schreker.

Three of these titles are confusing. The Prelude to *Die Gezeichneten* is a nine-minute introduction to the opera. *Prelude to a Drama* is a 15-minute expansion of that prelude that Schreker produced later (1913). Despite its depraved subject matter, *Die Gezeichneten* is a lushly romantic and luminous work. Its prelude is one of Schreker’s most striking pieces, and the expansion gives you that much more to enjoy. I prefer it, but this recording has only the opera prelude.

*Prelude to a Grand Opera* is a tone poem drawn from Schreker’s late and unfulfilled intent to write an opera based on Greco-Egyptian mythology called *Memnon*. It lacks the luminosity of the other works here, and it is more traditionally romantic. The influence of Strauss is stronger than Debussy, and there are anticipations of Respighi. (Sometimes *Prelude to a Grand Opera* is known simply as *Memnon*.)

The Symphonic Interlude from *Der Schatzgraber* varies in mood from ominous to romantic to delicate to celestial. It climaxes into conflict, and the ending is portentous. The Prelude to *Das Spielwerk* sounds big and romantic. In spots it is almost Italian in style. ‘Nachtstuck’ from *Der Ferne Klang* is a powerful and dramatic piece. What it is not is a simple nocturne.

Performances and sound are excellent. The Royal Swedish Orchestra plays with a dark tonal richness that emphasizes the midrange, which is not a bad sound world for this music, and the slightly slow tempos add a touch of mystery. BIS’s recording is big, rich, and detailed; and Horst Scholz’s informative and detailed notes are excellent.

The main competition for this program comes from two CDs with Vassily Sinaisky and the BBC Philharmonic (Chandos) that contain most of these works plus other orchestral pieces from this composer (Sept/Oct 2000, Jan/Feb 2003). Sinaisky chooses *Prelude to a Drama* over *Die Gezeichneten*. He is hard to avoid if you want all of Schreker’s orchestral music, which you should. The Chandos sound is broader and more blended. Both the BIS and Chandos are superior to similar material.
from Naxos (S/O 2002; M/A 2003). James Conlon led some of these works in Cologne (EMI). Kurt Moses and I agree they are good performances. He liked the sound, too, but I find all the Schreker and Zemlinsky recordings Conlon made for EMI on the misty side (M/A 2000).

HECHT

SCHUBERT: Piano Pieces
*Impromptus, D 899; 6 German Dances; Moments Musicaux*

Lars Vogt
Ondine 1285—67 minutes

Lars Vogt (b. 1970) is one of Germany’s most eminent pianists and a fine Schubertian. While the pieces on this program, apart from the German Dances, are familiar and have been recorded many times, Vogt’s interpretations need not fear comparisons. His ability to play quietly and thereby create a rapt atmosphere must be especially commended.

I have two minor reservations. One is that when playing softly he also plays the melodic line rather quietly, perhaps intending to convey introversion or resignation. Sometimes I would prefer to hear Schubert’s song more clearly and ardently, for example in Impromptu No. 3. Vogt’s reticence also has the consequence that contrasts with loud passages are sometimes too stark.

The other thing is that he sometimes introduces too much rubato, which Schubert’s music generally does not need. I prefer to hear the German Dances (especially) played in strict time, with appropriate rhythmic characterization. Impromptu No. 1 also has too many hesitations, especially at the beginning, where Vogt seems too eager to make expressive points. A more even and dispassionate flow of the music would be preferable in that melancholy piece. But these are minor quibbles in the face of considerable artistry.

The recorded sound is excellent. The booklet (in English and German) contains an interview where Vogt expresses his feelings about the music. The biographical information is appropriately sober, and the photographs convey his dedication.

KANG

SCHUBERT: Winterreise

John Elwes, t; Kenneth Slowik, p
FoM 20001—68 minutes

Having disliked the recording these two artists made of *Die Schöne Müllerin* (M/A 2008), I was dubious when this arrived; but here Elwes and Slowik offer a thoughtful reading that sensitively narrates this long day’s journey into night. His enunciation is very clear and his deep involvement in the work is palpable. Some details in this performance were nice to hear (e.g. the retard near the end of ‘Mut’). The timing is shorter than most other performances, but it doesn’t feel fast. The balance favors the voice; Slowik accompanies on a fortepiano made by Rod Regier of Freeport, Maine after early 19th Century instruments of Conrad Graf and Bösendorfer. The sound is probably very much what Schubert would have known.

A small print note indicates that “The Lieder are all performed in their pre-publication, manuscript keys.” A good case can be made for that, but I wish they had maintained a seamless transition of tonality from ‘Die Nebensonnen’ into ‘Der Leiermann’ to conclude the cycle.

This is a decent performance. The trouble is that there are better tenor readings available. For sheer vocal beauty and interpretive excellence my first choices are Gür’s reading with Berner’s vivid accompaniment on a splendid sounding 1872 Ronisch fortepiano (J/A 2010) and Pregardien’s reading with Gees accompanying on concert grand (N/D 2013).

An excellent essay about Winterreise by Susan Youens adds value to this release. Texts and translations.

R MOORE

American Record Guide
Erwin Schulhoff was born in Prague in 1894, and a recommendation by Dvorak accompanied him to the Prague Conservatory when he was only 10 years old. He studied further with Max Reger and others, and even had a few lessons with Debussy. He made occasional forays into jazz, and Bartok and Janacek were major influences on him. He has a Sonata Erotica for Solo Mother-Trumpet to his credit, and he wrote a page of silence into a piano suite. The Nazis labeled him a degenerate, and he died in a concentration camp in 1942. He had considerable compositional talent, including the talent of not taking himself too seriously.

Almost every piece of his impresses me from the first hearing. The Sextet begins with a dense gallop, and then there’s a pause before a mournful, rocking theme takes over; the third part takes full advantage of the thick textures a sextet can produce. The whole movement is a thrilling mystery. ‘Tranquillo’ also has a repeating, rocking motif under an alluring theme, but it doesn’t lack for dark drama. III is a rather impressionist burlesque of little consequence. IV is an adagio full of intrigue and arguments, in keeping with the rest of the piece. The shadows of Bartok and late German romanticism lies over everything.

The Second Violin Sonata is a well-cut gem, fluid and attractive. It has a French lightness to it, and the first movement, Allegro Impetuoso, is intently playful. The Andante has a plodding left-hand accompaniment, while the violin and the pianist’s right hand trade declamatory melodies back and forth. As in the Sextet, III is a burlesque, but here it sounds more like one. The finale is consistently good-natured and harmonically adventurous while staying tonally grounded.

The Duo for violin and cello is fanciful and imaginative, several steps above commonplace duo writing. The passages in the Moderato with harmonics are especially ingenious. The ‘Zingaresca’ has some astounding left-hand pizzicato work for the violin; in other places, the interplay is so well scored that the two instruments seem as one.

The Cinq Etudes de Jazz are for piano—‘Charleston (for Zez Confrey),’ ‘Blues (for Paul Whiteman),’ ‘Chanson (for Robert Stolz),’ ‘Tango (for Eduard Kunnecke),’ and ‘Toccata sur le Shimmy Kitten on the Keys de Zez Confrey’ (for Alfred Baresel). The sweet, steamy ‘Chanson’ is the most detailed and interesting, and it’s played the best, too. The ‘Tango’ is a little too florid; the Toccata isn’t as wild as I thought it would be, though it’s certainly virtuosic.

The violinist in the sonata has too bright a tone in some places, and other times he is too gritty; Tanja Becker-Bender is better (Hyperion 67833, July/Aug 2011). The Sextet is well played; the violinist in the duo has a richer sound, and the cellist is just as good. The sonics are reverberant but clear.

This recording presents works by Clara Schumann in conjunction with composers who surrounded her, including Brahms and Robert Schumann, and often about Robert Schumann (the variations).

Played adeptly and with passion, Schumann’s Scherzo is simple, but has a lovely singing tone and a shot of drama. The Preludes and Fugues are more solidly situated in the romantic tradition; the fugues are played with much conviction and clarity of voicing.

It is nice to hear Clara’s Variations, as compared to the more famous and substantial Brahms; the treatment is highly romantic and full of arpeggations, much in the vein of Chopin or even Mendelssohn.

Placing these works in dialog with the other composers allows Sasaki to emphasize Clara’s achievement. This should be regarded as a quintessential recording of Schumann.

The Castle Trio is Lambert Orkis with a parallel-strung Streicher piano from 1846, Marilyn McDonald with a 1670 Guarneri violin, and Kenneth Slowik with a cello from around 1730 made by Carlo Antonio Testore. There’s a little pocket in the artwork where the booklet sits, and behind that is a paragraph explaining how the use of the period instruments eliminates the problem of the piano drowning out the strings.

The strings are played with little vibrato,
but the intonation is usually fine, and there's no metallic harshness to the sound. The piano may fix balance problems, but it has a shallow, twangy tone and a limited dynamic range, and it doesn’t respond well to phrasing. The vast acoustics of Ashburnham Community Church take away most of the emotional immediacy. The performance comes across as bloodless and placid. Just shy of halfway through I of Clara's trio, the piano has high repeated chords while the strings play the bottom notes of the chords in unusual voicings; that passage could be very charming, but it has no magic whatsoever here. The climax that follows has no force to it, either.

By no stretch of the imagination am I an expert on period instruments, but my gut strings make me consider that if this is what the Schumanns had to hear their music on, they were writing for the future.

**ESTEP**

**SCHUMANN:** *Fantasy in C*  
with *Carnaval*  
Sophia Agranovich, p  
Centaur 3504—57 minutes

with **STRAVINSKY:** *Petrrouchka Movements*;  
**NEUWIRTH:** *Marsyas*  
Christopher Park, p  
Oehms 1863—64 minutes

The Fantasy is celebrated by many as Schumann's finest pianistic creation, and it's the one work common to both of these releases. If the music world hardly needs yet another recording, they continue to come forth as if unleashed from some never ending lava flow deep in the Earth's crust. I have made an effort to assist the reader in choosing before, and have even added yet a new contender elsewhere in this issue. My comparison of these will attempt to place them in the scheme of things (at least as of this date).

I have written about Agranovich before (M/A 2016) and mentioned her gentle, somewhat restrained playing and tendency to over-interpret the music. Those comments continue to apply to much of this new recording. While I cannot say she is particularly gentle, her wide dynamic range seems to exaggerate her quieter moments. This Fantasy opens with a flexibility that stretches the music's flow to extremes. I will not describe it as distortion, but it does come perilously close to that as tempos are stretched almost to the breaking point. Rubato is not just applied, it's lathered on. This is not a momentary thing; it continues through the first movement, though I give her credit for playing that breaks, nay, destroys the mold.

Part 2 seems maniacal sometimes, but definitely shows imagination along with an unsettling feeling that will not be to all tastes. Part 3 has much beauty, along with a restraint that works up to an unbelievably massive climax. While I doubt if anyone will be bored by the performance, it is not one I'd care to live with, at least on my more normal days.

*Carnaval* is another of those works that continues to add recordings almost monthly. Agranovich delivers an impetuous and rather speedy performance that is not lacking in warmth. Aided by a recording that adds tremendous depth to the low bass of her Steinway D, it is a fascinating traversal of the score. Still not free of dynamic exaggeration, she plays with limited pedal, immaculate articulation, and an abandon that, in this case, shows off her talent in a positive way. While the playing is often thrilling, listeners with high blood pressure...
pressure may wish to resist. I give credit to the lady for her daring and resourcefulness. It works quite well if you like this sort of performance. If you prefer your Carnaval calmer and with a gentle smile, there are others.

Christopher Park is a young German-Korean pianist who has already given us several recordings. His Schumann Fantasy is about as distant from Agranovich as possible. Call it a kinder, gentler reading. To begin with, he is placed further back in the sound spectrum. Instead of inside the piano we are several rows distant. He also uses far more pedal and is given a less stark recording. This is entirely suitable to his poetic approach, his more even flow, and—dare I say it—his less interesting reading. Nothing is exaggerated, nothing goes amiss, but all is more generalized. If fails to excite with its jagged rhythms, but III is all promise in the D uparc songs. The Jedermann songs take more oomph than he can effectively produce. I wish the recorded sound were more lucent and less muffled, especially for the piano.

Sharp and Slowik give a more engaging performance of Dichterliebe. It is well shaped, with more nuance and imagination. Sharp’s voice is more arresting—more color and more vocal variety—but overall the reading still lacks the subtlety of the best ones (e.g. ‘Ich Hab’ im Traum Geweinet’ lacks the needed sorrowful poignancy). Neither Sharp nor Hempel takes the higher option at the climax of ‘Ich Grolle Nicht’; that is always a disappointment to me—not taking it greatly diminishes the song’s power. Their performance of Liederkreis, Op. 39 is nicely paced and shaped but still is not among the best. Sharp sings ‘Mondnacht’ more forcefully than necessary and robs the song of some of its magic.

Sharp is accompanied expressively by Slowik on a fortepiano made by Rod Regier of Freeport, Maine after early 19th Century instruments of Conrad Graf and Bösendorfer. The sound is probably very much what Schumann would have known. His arpeggiated playing in the postlude of ‘Die Alten Bosen Lieder’ is more clearly articulated than you will usually hear it when played on a modern concert grand.

Schuen, the best singer of the three, shines as a major talent in this, his first solo release. His program begins with the other Liederkreis, Op. 24 and six more of Schumann’s Heine settings. Immediately on hearing him it is clear that this is a great lieder voice, rich in color.

Here are three baritones singing Robert Schumann, and two of them also singing Frank Martin, so there is enough common ground for a joint review. Sharp sing an all-Schumann program. Hempel’s program begins with Dichterliebe and includes five songs of Duparc; Frank Martin’s Six Monologues from Everyman, Hofmannsthals’s tale of a man taking stock of his life as he realizes its end is imminent; and Schubert’s ‘Litanie’. Schuen sings Schumann, Wolf, and Martin’s Jedermann songs. All three CDs come with notes. Only Sharp’s includes texts and translations; the other two have neither.

Hempel has the lightest voice of the three. His reading of Dichterliebe conveys the sadness of the text effectively, but his voice doesn’t have a lot of color and he doesn’t use much dynamic variety from strophe to strophe or from song to song. It’s a pretty low-key performance from both singer and pianist. His voice has a Gallic sound and comes across best in the Duparc songs. The Jedermann songs take more oomph than he can effectively produce. I wish the recorded sound were more lucent and less muffled, especially for the piano.

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BECKER

SCHUMANN: Liederkreis, op 39; Dichterliebe
William Sharp, bar; Kenneth Slowik, p
FoM 20002—55 minutes

Dichterliebe; MARTIN: Everyman Monologs;
Songs of Duparc; Schubert
Martin Hempel, bar; Katarina Kegler, p
Hanssler 16051—64 minutes

iederkreis, op 24; Songs; MARTIN: Everyman
Monologs; Songs of Wolf
André Schuen, bar; Daniel Heide, p
Avi 8553330—64 minutes

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and tonal depth. He sings with laudable command of dynamics, vocal shading, and textual elucidation. His soft lyrical singing is gorgeous. In Wolf’s three melancholy songs of the blind harpist from Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, Schuen conveys the pathos effectively.

A feeling of angst finds strong expression in Martin’s *Jedermann* songs. Martin set Hofmannsthal’s text in six songs that summarize the full work about a man facing death and going through stages of defiance, terror, and finally humble prayer in a way described as “spare, rhythmically incisive, and tonally edgy”. Schuen presents that emotional journey clearly and powerfully. He employs a more dramatic approach suitable to the songs and makes the existential struggle of the songs deeply palpable. By contrast, Hopel’s approach is tamer and lacks the tone of raging against the dying of the light.

Schuen’s entire program brings you into a confrontation with loss and death. The final track of the CD is not even listed in the booklet except for a reference to a “surprise” and you are referred to a website to learn its title. That song is Schumann’s ‘Alte Laute’ from the Opus 35 Kerner songs, which he sings with sublime soft-voiced delicacy. It quite well sums up the program with its closing words of realizing that pleasant days of old are gone and that healing for “this fearful dream” will come “only when an angel will awaken me”.

R MOORE

SCHUMANN: Fantasy; see CHOPIN & Collections
Faschingsschwank; see MOUSSORGSKY
Violin Concerto; see MENDELSSOHN

SEGOVIA: Guitar Pieces
Alberto La Rocca
Brilliant 95369—70 minutes

Just as Clara Schumann thought of herself as a performer first, a mother second, and a composer third, Segovia defined himself as a performer more than anything else. And not just as a performer: almost as a missionary on behalf of the guitar, seeking to earn its recognition and create legions of followers. At this he succeeded admirably. But though one of his life goals was to enrich the repertory with new works from great composers, rediscovered works from the past, and transcriptions from other media, he never made a priority of his own compositions. Indeed, though he composed over 50 works, he only published (and recorded) a few of them.

The only other disc I’m aware of that is devoted entirely to his compositions is by Agustin Mauri (J/A 2014). That ran only 45 minutes. LaRocca’s is better filled, mostly by adding an interesting set of 23 popular songs from various countries (a literal translation of the title). The set dates from 1941. He had moved to Montevideo in 1935, but all these are European. It’s quite a range—England, Ireland, Scotland, Russia, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Serbia, Croatia, Poland, France—and he considers Brittany, Catalonia, and the Basque region separate countries. Each is brief—one passes 2 minutes in length, and none is longer than 4.

Segovia was self-taught as both a guitarist and as a composer, and may have never mastered the tools to develop his ideas into larger structures. In some ways that’s a pity, because he did have a gift for melody and for interesting turns of harmony. There is an obvious influence from Moreno Torroba—if I heard any of these pieces without knowing the composer, I would certainly have guessed him.

LaRocca clearly loves these works. Although I can’t agree with his assessment that the music contains “true masterpieces waiting to be discovered”, there is charm and beauty here. The music is tonal and, like Segovia, conservative. LaRocca gives a convincing imitation of Segovia’s interpretive style—lots of rolled chords and rubato and a rich sound. Mauri also did this, and even achieved a good imitation of Segovia’s tone, playing on his old Hauser. But each recording is well executed, and each catches the true spirit of the maestro’s compositions.

KEATON

SHAW: Piano Concertos 1+2
Martin Jones; Slovak Symphony/ Francis Shaw
Lyrita 356—54 minutes

Francis Shaw is a British composer born in 1942; he’s a composition professor, and he has written a lot for film and television. These are serious, dissonant, big-boned concertos; the tonality is almost serialist, but the structure, rhythms, and development are traditional. Except for the bluesy slow movement of the First Concerto, the writing is argumentative and often steely and ponderous. It’s like taking a journey on foot with someone who constantly stops to re-tie his shoes and fuss with his...
walking stick, and who insists on taking shortcuts through thickets.

The First Concerto is the better of the two, partly for its slow movement and partly because it is more coherent. Devotees of the turgid British style may be interested in this, and I say that without judgement. The pianist is excellent, and the orchestra is good, though in 1:III they sound like they’re ready to go home and watch the game. The sonics are fine; notes are in English.

Howard Shore is one of the most prolific composers of film music. His styles vary considerably from melodic to atonal scores. He is releasing many of his soundtrack recordings in complete editions on his own HOWE label. In some instances the soundtracks were originally issued in shortened versions on other labels when the films were released.

Shore wrote the score for the film Denial, which is about a famous English case where a survivor of the Holocaust had to prove that the Holocaust actually occurred to win a libel case against a Holocaust denier. The film was released in September 2016 and had limited showings in major cities. I had planned to see the film when it went into wider release, but it seems to have been pulled after the election of Donald Trump (possibly to avoid negative reactions from other Holocaust deniers).

Shore has written a very moody and depressing score to match the film’s dramatic content. There are few actual melodies, with slowly emerging chords, simple repeating notes, and other content to enhance the good or menacing characters and scenes. There is not much variation in tempo, though there is some walking paced music that fades into the general grim mood.

Although Shore’s music is very accomplished and effective for the film, it isn’t something I would listen to often. I might have a better appreciation for the score once I see the film. The Royal Philharmonic plays well, and the sound is excellent. The small pamphlet inside the cardboard case has a few production pictures and a list of personnel responsible for the recording. There is no plot synopsis to indicate how the film’s actions match to the named, but untimed 18 tracks.

This is a collection of concert works written by Howard Shore. The recordings are from various dates in various places by various orchestras, choral groups, singers, and conductors. The booklet contains full texts in English, German, and French including translations where necessary for the vocal and choral pieces.

A Palace Upon the Ruins was first performed in 2014. It is a six-part vocal score that according to the booklet notes by Shore and lyricist Elizabeth Cotnoir, “explores themes of loss, awareness, healing, and redemption”. They further note that “the number six is one of harmony”. Six water forms (Fog, Ice, Water, Cloud, Rain, and Sun) are used to describe each music section performed by six musicians (Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival) with vocal accompaniment in German by soprano Jennifer Johnson Cano. The music is atmospheric with some dissonance. The performances, recorded in New York (most likely in 2014), are very good and the song cycle is interesting.

Peace written in 2007, is an English language choral work accompanied by organ. The text is based on Eleanor Roosevelt’s commentaries in her “My Day” newspaper column from the 1940s and 1950s. It is beautifully performed by the Essential Voices USA Youth Workshop in 2009. Benjamin Hutto accompanies on the National Cathedral organ. The Garden (2006) is another choral work, with a text based on a poem by Robert Penn Warren. It is nicely performed by the 21st Century Chamber Choir but not as harmonically blended as Peace. It was recorded in 2014 in Switzerland. The English language texts are difficult to understand.

Six Pieces are performed by various orchestras and conductors, including the Kronos Quartet and the Irish Radio Concert Orchestra conducted by Shore and Ludwig Wicki. The Kronos piece, ‘III’, was recorded in San Francisco; III, IV, V, and VI were recorded in Ireland. Soloist Clara Sanabras is the vocalist on ‘V’ with lyrics by Cotnoir, who “dreamed” the text. The Six Pieces are similar to Shore’s modernist movie scores.

Catania is performed by Lang Lang and recorded in Berlin. The piece was written for the wedding of Sara DiMaggio and Jean-Jacques Cesbron. Lang Lang plays the intricate
music effectively, though it did not remind me of anything remotely Italian.

This is a good sampler of more current concert work by Shore performed very well. It is difficult to comment on all the works as the content is so varied. I found all the pieces interesting, except the Six Pieces which lacked a central theme. Considering the various recording venues and dates, the sound is excellent.

**SHORE: Seven**
Lucas Richman conducting
Howe 1012—65 minutes

In a series of expanded editions, Howard Shore is re-releasing some of his movie soundtracks on his own label. The 1995 film Seven, directed by David Fincher, has a plot that involves two detectives who look for a serial murderer who targets people who have committed one of Dante’s seven deadly sins. In the end we understand that the detectives, in tracking down the murderer, have descended into their own private Hell by committing the same deadly sins as the serial murderer’s victims. At least, that’s how I understood it. Fincher is known for unusual and unsettling story lines, and Seven not only fits the bill, but Shore’s music also presents a claustrophobic world with no escape. The abstract and moody music underscores the plot’s ominous and menacing scenes and creates a sense of foreboding and tension.

The soundtrack has few melodies. Instead Shore uses atmospheric sounds and progressive chords to create a threatening mood. The English-only booklet describes Shore’s use of 20th Century acoustical techniques, what Shore terms “industrial sounds”, computer generated notes, and a full sized orchestra to create the score. Of the 16 tracks, the seven deadly sins are identified by slow, low chords and chromatic scales played by strings, tam-tams, cellos, celeste, and xylophones, as well as unusual electronic sounds. The non-deadly sin sections are somewhat lighter (but not by much) to develop character themes and the few action scenes. It’s all fairly grim and repetitive, which probably served the director’s purposes and added to the movie’s effectiveness. It makes for interesting listening and displays Shore’s versatility.

According to the booklet, the original soundtrack release was only 20 minutes. This expanded version is 65 minutes and includes unused tracks. The unnamed orchestra plays very well under conductor Lucas Richman’s controlled tempos. If you like modern, moody soundscapes and are a fan of Shore’s music or the film, you’ll find this expanded soundtrack worthwhile.

**SHOSTAKOVICH: Chamber Symphonies**
*(Quartets 3+8)*

Smithsonian Chamber Orchestra/ Kenneth Slowik
FoM 36900—57 minutes

I have always agreed with our Shostakovich 2 Overview (Mar/Apr 2006) that the chamber symphonies—Rudolf Barshai’s arrangements of five Shostakovich quartets—violate the personal nature of the original pieces (even though Shostakovich was, paradoxically, able to conjure an orchestra’s worth of power with just four players). The string orchestra, with its thicker textures, has never sounded right in the Eighth. It is usually less urgent and incisive. If I had to hear any arrangement of it, I’d rather hear one for full orchestra. Go big or go home!

The Third is scored for strings, flute, oboe, English horn, clarinet, bassoon, and harp; and the parts where the winds are out in relative force are the most compelling. In IV and V the orchestration illuminates the music enough to justify the changes; these are the only movements where I didn’t keep wishing for the originals. The bassoon and English horn solos in IV are poignant and well suited to the actual notes.

Some readers, I’m sure, find the chamber symphonies convincing, and the Overview recommends Barshai’s own recording (DG 477 5442). The Smithsonian Players’ Eighth lacks any atmosphere of dread; the Third is better but still not satisfying. The Barshai is clearly superior. The notes are in English only and have a long biographical sketch of Shostakovich and details about the quartets. They also quote a letter from the composer to Isaac Glikman that lists the melodies he quoted in the Eighth, and the editors have given us the track numbers and times where the quotations happen—that’s handy to have.

The degradation of language is always the surest sign of the degradation of a people.

Maistre
SHOSTAKOVICH: Violin Concertos
Frank Peter Zimmermann; NDR Philharmonic/Alan Gilbert
BIS 2247 [SACD] 62 minutes

This is wonderful music by a composer whose every new work I had to hear in concert when he was still alive—perhaps the last great composer. I enjoy hearing these pieces every time.

But performances vary. Zimmermann certainly presents the fastest readings I have ever heard. I have recordings of No. 1 by Oistrakh, Mullova, and Vengerov—all are much slower, especially in the slow movements (I and III). In No. 2 Vengerov again takes 2 minutes longer in I and II, the Moderato and Adagio. Zimmermann takes 4 minutes less than Vengerov in I and III of No. 1. Oistrakh is also slower, as is Mullova—neither by quite as much, but significantly. To me it is the difference between very nice music and music that moves me deeply. People who knew the composer take it slower. Does this mean that the music is now just “music” and has lost its tragic depth? Maybe that is what has to happen. But I heard these pieces first played by Oistrakh, who knew the composer well. In fact, they were both written for Oistrakh, and he played the first performances of both. Anyone who heard Oistrakh play, as I did, is a lifelong fan of his. Certainly he and the composer understood each other perfectly.

So, although the sound is beautiful and the orchestra wonderful, I cannot get used to this different approach. Maybe in time I will, but I think this is made for people who did not grow up with an awareness of Soviet tyranny and tremendous feeling for the Shostakoviches and Oistrakhs of the time.

No. 1 was composed in 1948, but there was no actual performance until 1955, after Stalin died. Oistrakh “edited” the music for that performance, and BIS tells us that this performance goes back to the original, without the Oistrakh edits. I don’t think that makes much difference. The Second Concerto comes from about 1967—that was the year he wrote Oistrakh and said, “As I wrote this I thought of you.” The Oistrakh recordings still sound good. Vengerov recorded them with Rostropovich conducting, and that man knew Shostakovich as few others have.

So I will not tell you that this is a weak recording; it is not. I can only say that if you can get one of the others you will be closer to the emotional tone of the music.

SHOSTAKOVICH: Cello Concerto I;
see Collections

SIBELIUS: Trios (3); SCHISSI: Nene; LEFKOWITZ: Ruminations; SAARIAHO: Je Sens Un Deuxieme Couer; WENNASKOSKI: Paarme

Sibelius’s piano trios date from the 1880s, early in his career. He wrote them to play with his siblings, and put enough virtuosity in the violin part to suggest his own mastery of the instrument. They are fresh, youthful works of great charm and considerable skill, though they remain for the most part fairly conventional in manner—not so far from, say, Dvorak in language—and don’t adumbrate the mature symphonies to come later on: no doubt why the composer apparently didn’t want them published. The scores were only released by the Sibelius family in the 1980s, though they were then taken up by performers fairly quickly, some of them appearing on Finlandia and On-dine CDs as early as 1990 (see our index). The first (and as far as I can tell, still the only) complete collection of Sibelius’s music for piano trio was issued on BIS in two volumes in 2003 and 2004 (BIS 1282 and 1292). Elaine Fine reviewed Volume 2 (N/D 2004) and was quite taken with both the music and the performances.

This new two-disc release by the Sibelius Piano Trio includes three of his more substantial works for piano trio. Coming in at 26 minutes, the Korppoo Trio is the most ambitious and expansive here, with a fluent, melodic opening allegro interrupted on occasion by stabbing, rather Beethovenian assertions and even a clean-lined fugato at one point, though the overall form is clearly outlined by classic patterns. II unfolds elaborate episodes that delve into romantic pathos and fantasy, with striking use of high bird calls and glassy harmonics in the violin. A vivace rondo finale dances gaily along, bringing the trio to an exhilarating conclusion.

The HaltraskTrio, in four movements that total 20 minutes, is warmer, more relaxed, and closer to Grieg. The concise Lovisa Trio, just 13 minutes long, puts two light-hearted and celebratory allegros around a more emotive andante. (The trios’ names are taken from the vacation spots where Sibelius wrote them.) All three works, especially as played con amore as here, are pleasing, nicely made, and full of dandy tunes, inventive but always clear,
idiomatic instrumental textures, and a high-spirited delight in music-making.

The program is filled out with four new works by currently active composers, three of them first recordings of commissions by the group. Each is roughly a quarter-hour long, though they vary widely in idiom and mood. Diego Schissi’s clever and engaging Nene uses soothing harmonies, delicate instrumental interplay, and intricate rhythms that bounce merrily along to create an air of insouciant activity; slower sections offset the predominant busily repeating figurations with meditative calm. David Lefkowitz’s Ruminations is a rhapsody that explores exotic melisma and nasal, sometimes acrid timbres (with the strings mimicking Middle Eastern winds and ouds, the piano strummed like a plucked lyre) to convey characteristic Semitic effusions both ecstatic and lamenting. More intense still, and more violent, is Kaija Saariaho’s Je Sense Un Deuxième Couer (I Feel a Second Heart), a programmatic depiction of the inner turmoil of a pregnant woman who survives a vicious attack and discovers, to her relief, that her unborn child’s heart is still beating. Finally, there’s Lotta Wenphile-oriented label) an ideal balance of ambience and emotional spectrum.

Yarlung’s sonics offer (as usual with this audiophile-oriented label) an ideal balance of ambience and emotional spectrum. The Sibelius Trios, though I’d caution that it requires a pretty open-minded listener to enjoy both extremes of such a wide stylistic and emotional spectrum.

The Sibelius Trio plays both their namesake and his later discourses with impressive aplomb and lustrous tonal polish, and Yarlung’s sonics offer (as usual with this audiophile-oriented label) an ideal balance of ambience, immediacy, and full-throated warmth.

LEHMANN

SIBELIUS: Violin Concerto; see TCHAIKOVSKY
SIEFERT: Organ Pieces; see PRAETORIUS

SMIRNOV: Chaconne; Dowson Songs
Martin Bakari, t; Adrian Daurov, vc; Konstantine Valianatos, p—Naxos 579006—61 minutes

This well designed program presents works of Russian-born Grigory Smirnov. As far as I can tell, this is the first and only recording of his music.

The program begins with a hauntingly lovely Chaconne for cello and piano in this ingenious use of an ancient form. It begins with an engaging 12-note descending subject harmonized from the outset in the piano. The cello enters softly in the third sounding of the subject, weaving an obbligato line into its fabric. The liner notes offer a clear and concise description of the way the work develops as “the borders between melody and harmony start to vanish, as if the melody becomes a ‘co-creator’ of the surrounding harmony”.

There is a nice arc to this 11-minute work as it reaches a denser climax at the half-way point and gradually dematerializes until it settles into silence. I’ve listened over and over to this piece and hear something new and delightful each time. Daurov and Valianatos weave a magical spell in this solid and engaging performance that is surely everything the composer would want it to be.

Smirnov completed Dowson Songs in 2013 and the cycle was first performed by Bakari in 2014. These 10 settings of texts by English romantic poet Ernest Christopher Dowson

SMIRNOV: Dowson Songs

A marvelos release with everything right: good music, good playing, and good production. Ustvolskaya’s one-movement concerto is an early work, written in 1946 and not published until 1993—listeners familiar with her music may be surprised by its more tonal leanings but will not be surprised by the complex and paradoxical network of musical gestures.

The Silvestrov works—Four Postludes (2004) and Hymn (2001)—are deceptive in their simplicity and scope: like all of his best music, it reminds me of music that I know very well but that I have never heard before. How this composer manages to create new-sounding works that rely on classic gestures of 18th and 19th Century music is a secret I wish he could share with me.

The 1998 Kancheli work involves strings, piano, and percussion; like the Silvestrov, the piano writing isn’t conventionally virtuosic or even soloistic, and much of the work’s life depends on delicate and deft writing for all the orchestra. The performances are superb and the sound a noteworthy example of what a recorded piano should sound like.

HASKINS
express lost love and the sadness of separation that seemed to define the poet's brief life.

Much of this expressive music is sweet and gentle and is sung expressively by a tenor with a sweet and gentle voice. In hearing Bakari's very light and high voice I was reminded of the late Russell Oberlin, who was called a countertenor but who was really a tenor with a very light and extended high range. Bakari sings with great expressiveness and sounds effortless above the staff; in the concluding ‘Land of Silence’ he hovers around high C. Texts are supplied, but Bakari’s diction is so clear that they are hardly needed.

Much of the emotion of the songs is heard in the accompaniment. Its generally soft tone becomes agitated in the middle songs, as in reflecting on "When this, our rose, is faded", and gradually gives way to serenity in the final songs. Valianatos captures the mood of the music all the time.

After hearing this excellent release, I look forward to hearing more of Smirnov's works.

R MOORE

SOLER: 6 Concertos for 2 Keyboards
L’entretien des Clavecins
Brilliant 95327—57 minutes

L’entretien des Clavecins is Agustín Alvarez and Eusebio Fernandez-Villacanas, both from Spain. Alvarez is older by 15 years. The two harpsichords are both by Andrea Restelli of Milan, copying instruments by Taskin and Donzelague. These French-styled harpsichords have beautiful tone, but they don’t fit Soler’s music as well as the Italian-style ones played by LeRoy and Vinikour (Delos, J/F 2017). It’s like the difference between singing mostly with long-sustained vowels versus the percussive effects of strongly-articulated consonants. Alvarez and Fernandez make the music sound noble and even sometimes somber, while LeRoy and Vinikour make it more playful and include all the repeats. Both teams ornament the music in convincing style.

I’d be happy enough with this Brilliant disc as my only recording of these concertos, but with that said, I like LeRoy-Vinikour better: more vivid sound, faster tempos, and more joy.

B LEHMAN

The purpose of art is not the release of a momentary ejection of adrenalin but rather the gradual, lifelong construction of a state of wonder and serenity.

Glenn Gould

SPOHR: Mass, op 54; Psalms, op 85
Stuttgart Chamber Choir/ Frieder Bernius
Carus 83291—52 minutes

Louis Spohr’s a cappella choral music is not heard in this country very often, so this release fills a gap for collectors who may not be familiar with it. Spohr (1784-1859) wrote his mass between the beginning of April and the end of June 1821, a few months before he began his appointment as court Kapellmeister of the Elector of Hesse and immediately after returning from a concert tour to Paris. The scoring of the mass demands three ensembles (a quintet of soloists, the Coro minore and the Coro maggiore); these represent degrees of vocal difficulty. This is reflected not only in the tessitura, agility, and complexity of rhythms, but also in the very complicated harmonies that pose a challenge particularly to the quintet of soloists.

In April and May 1832 the eight-part double choir settings of Psalms 8, 23, and 130 were composed for the Cacilienverein Choir that the composer founded in Kassel in 1822. Spohr could not have known the works of Heinrich Schütz, yet his Op. 85 seems to build a bridge between Schütz and Brahms’s Fest und Gedenk-spruche. Among this younger generation, Brahms—like Bruckner, Tchaikovsky, Dvorak, and Richard Strauss—was a great admirer of Spohr. Sometimes Spohr’s music sounds like bel canto choral music: a little florid and very melodic.

I have yet to hear a mediocre German choir, and the Stuttgart Chamber Choir is no exception. Every section holds its own and yet blends exquisitely with the others. Frieder Bernius has already recorded the oratorios and sacred choral music of Mendelssohn and other works by Spohr and Nicolai with great distinction. He continues his superb work here. The sound is also excellent, allowing all of the choral parts to be clearly heard without ever sounding congested or cramped. Carus offers first-rate notes with full texts and translations.

REYNOLDS

STANFORD: Quartets 5+8;
JOACHIM: Romance 2
Mark Bebbington, p; Dante Quartet
Somm 160—68 minutes

Anyone who values the beefy solidity of Stanford’s symphonies will be right at home here. Quartet 5 (1908) he composed as a memorial to Joseph Joachim, a lifelong friend. Despite its eulogistic purpose, most of the piece is upbeat
in character. Stanford said Joachim “was not the sort of man whose memory could be associated with sadness”. Certainly in I the first theme is vigorous and the second has a near-Wagnerian expansiveness. The whole movement has a buoyant mood. Typical of Stanford’s workmanship, a brief background figure eventually attains significance and wraps up the whole movement.

What Romain Rolland said of d’Indy—”he hardly eliminates anything; he organizes”—fits well as for Stanford. It is a brief intermezzo with a melody of Brahmsian warmth and pages of superb harmonies. III, the adagio, was specifically meant to honor Joachim’s passing. It obliquely quotes from Mozart’s Hunt Quartet, a work Joachim’s quartet had in their repertoire. Its closing bars have a reference to Brahms’s Symphony 3. With the finale, the mood again becomes lively, with some of the whimsy of Robert Schumann. It incorporates a motto theme that reappears in the tender conclusion. The inclusion of a movement from Joachim’s Romance is lagniappe; the opening movement of Quartet 5 quotes from that work.

Quartet 8 dates from 1919, but the premiere wasn’t till 1968. If you’re a musical evolutionist, it shows no “progress” over Quartet 5, but it doesn’t need to. Both are accomplished works. It begins with an agitated theme over syncopated triplets, at first suggesting uneasiness. There’s also a motto figure in the form of a I-IV-I cadence. II is a genial allegretto with gruff cello punctuation and also some caprice. Stanford titled III ‘Canzona’ (song). The music has emotional depth and some eloquent viola writing. IV begins with a rapid passage over an Irish drone—Stanford was an Irish composer at heart as well as by birth. In several passages the string writing has the flavor of an Irish fiddler. The close of the piece is more reflective.

The performances here are fit for the music: energetic, with well-paced transitions and devotion to the spirit of the works. Listening to this sturdy music, I couldn’t help recalling how great a teacher Stanford’s students, including Holst and Vaughan Williams considered him. (Given his jovially rugged style, I’m sure he’d have to give many a trigger warning to the hot house blossoms he’d be stuck with now in college.) You listen to the integrity of craftsmanship and clean beauty of these quartets and realize just what a wealth of knowledge he had to impart.

O’CONNOR

STANFORD: Viola Sonata; see Collections

STENHAMMAR: Feast at Solhaug

Swedish composer Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871-1927) is best known for his two symphonies and some orchestra works from his mature years. Far less known are two operas from his younger days. Stenhammar began as a follower of other Scandinavians and Brahms, but the influence of his Wagnerian soprano aunt and the quasi-Wagnerian opera, Harald der Wiking, by Andreas Hallén (with whom Stenhammar had taken a few composition lessons) helped turn the young man to Wagner. After writing the pastoral Florez and Blanzeflor and the stirring, more Wagnerian Snofrid, Stenhammar took on opera.

Gillet pa Solhaug (The Feast at Solhaug) is based on a revision of Henrik Ibsen’s play, Gildet paa Solaug (the Norwegian spelling). Stenhammar completed the work in 1893 at the age of 22, around the time he was exulting over Wagner performances in Berlin. Because he worked from the play, the libretto is in Norwegian. The first performance was in Stuttgart in 1899, but the opera was not staged in Sweden until 1902 in a Swedish translation. Stenhammar’s next and far more Wagnerian opera, Tirfing, fared better, but both were met with hostile reviews by Wilhelm Peterson-Berger (a far inferior composer). As it turned out, Stenhammar had his own doubts about Tirfing. He never wrote another opera, though he did continue his interest in Wagner.

Gillet pa Solhaug is a through-composed music drama, influenced far more by Swedish folk materials than Wagner, though we do “hear” some Meistersinger in turns of phrasing and lively rhythms, particularly in the writing for the tenors. The unending flow of melody is produced by conversations, soliloquies, and duets accompanied by an orchestra that always has something to say that is stimulating and interesting in terms of line, scoring, and color. The music includes folk dances and choruses, passages of darkness, and moments of powerful drama and noble brass playing. Peterson-Berger thought the conversation passages should have been treated as melodrama, but he vastly underrated Stenhammar’s gift for
melody and his ability to sustain an interesting line. Stenhammar’s harmonies are not as chromatically lush as Wagner’s, nor is his orchestration as thick or heavy, but the writing is well colored in a cleanly Scandinavian way. The composer was courting his future wife at the time, and his ecstasy comes through along with the freshness of the music. This is an opera you can enjoy for the music alone, without knowing a thing about the story—it is a delightful “tone poem with voices”.

Gillet is written for a young, fresh cast, and it sounds like we are getting that here. It is dominated by female voices in the light choruses. Matilda Paulssen’s mezzo and Karolina Andersson’s soprano sound alike. Paulssen has a bit of a wobble when pushed, and that sometimes distinguishes her in their duets. In Act III there are brief moments where the orchestra drowns her out, but none of that is terribly serious, and Paulssen handles her complex role well. Andersson’s lighter soprano is delightfully effective in portraying the young, naive Signe.

The men are all good. Per-Hakan Precht’s lyric tenor might do well as David in Meistersinger. Mathias Zachariassen’s darker voice fits Knut well, and Fredrik Zetterstrom’s Bengt is cleanly sung and suitably pompous. The orchestra is alert, which is important in this opera, and conductor Schaefer keeps things moving along.

The setting is the castle of Bengt and Margit Gaukeson at Solhaug in 14th Century Norway.

Act I is the lightest in terms of music. Bengt, Margit, and the sheriff, Knut, are in their banquet hall where the couple will celebrate their third wedding anniversary. Kurt is pursuing Gudmund, who is accused of trying to poison the king, but he is at the castle to demand the hand of Margit’s sister, Signe. Knut’s wild reputation disturbs Margit, but he swears to reform and not to cause any problems at the celebration that night. After he and Bengt leave, Gudmund arrives. He and Margit were potential lovers a few years earlier before he left to serve the king. He swears he did not conspire to poison the king. Rather, he had discovered the poison intended for the deed and fled with it. He asks Margit for protection. Margit’s marriage to Bengt is an unhappy one, and she is drawn to her old friend.

Act II. The music darkens in this act, which takes place at the party. Kurt has decided not to arrest Gudmund so as not to hurt his chances with Signe. After an ethereal interlude that recalls the prelude to Lohengrin Gudmund and Signe declare their love in a rapturous, sweeping duet. Later, Margit meets with Gudmund and asks for the bottle of poison. She pretends to throw it into the sea, but keeps it should she get the nerve to poison Bengt and perhaps marry Gudmund. She pours her heart out, all but confessing her love. Knut arrives and tells Gudmund that he has called off his pursuit. Margit retreats with Signe, and the two overhear both men declare their love for Signe, making them rivals. Kurt later vows to Margit that he will not cause trouble at the celebration, but in the morning, he will leave with Signe as his wife or Gudmund as his prisoner. More guests arrive. Gudmund sings a song (shades of Meistersinger’s ‘Prize Song’). Margit adds a dark, impassioned tale that disguises her feelings of love and loss. At the end, she collapses and appears dead.

Act III. The most powerful and dramatic music of the opera is here. Margit and her husband are alone. She breaks away from his attentions and pours the poison into a glass of beer. Bengt is about to drink it when he is warned that Knut and his men are on the way to capture Gudmund. Bengt resents the invasion of his castle and leaves to organize resistance. Signe and Gudmund enter and prepare to escape together. They want a beer to celebrate, but Gudmund recognizes the bottle that held the poison and throws the beer out the window. Margit enters, sees him holding the glass, and assumes he drank the poison, but Gudmund assures her otherwise. Meanwhile, Knut has killed Bengt and is captured. Knut claims he acted in self-defense and offers to pay tribute to Margit to make up for his crime. Margit instead demands that he gives up Signe. Knut reluctantly agrees. The king’s envoy enters and informs Gudmund that the real plotter has been discovered, and Gudmund is pardoned. Gudmund and Signe leave the castle, and Margit is left alone with her fate. In the play she goes to a convent.

The sound is excellent. The notes about Stenhammar and the opera are good, though the English translation is awkward sometimes, particularly in the plot summary. A complete libretto is supplied with English and German translations. The notes do not say what language the performance is in, but it appears to be Norwegian.

This issue is labeled The Romantic Opera in Sweden, Volume 7. I could not find much on the rest of the series. If Tirfing is not part of that series, it should be, judging from the
This is Volume I of a survey of Scottish composer Ronald Stevenson’s music. Stevenson, who died last year, was a traditionalist who lived just long enough to see his vision vindicated. He renounced (or ignored) the nontonal sounds and discontinuities of Birtwistle, Maxwell Davies, and their imitators. His models were Liszt, Busoni, Grainger, Chopin, and other great composer-pianists from the past. Once reviled as reactionary (though his politics were aggressively leftist), he is now seen as a forerunner of post-modernism, neo-romanticism, and much else. Whatever one makes of his ideology, his music is fascinating and enjoyable, as demonstrated by this gorgeous recording and excellent performance by one of his best pupils and executants.

This first disc in what we can hope will be a continuing series contains a selection of Stevenson’s miniature and medium-sized piano works. The Peter Grimes Fantasy is ideal for people who love Britten’s opera, full of quotations from that powerful work but also plenty of original invention. It is thoroughly pianistic, with sonorities produced from the keys and from inside the piano. The quiet ending is magical and very Brittenesque. This big piece is exactly the kind of virtuosic arrangement that Liszt made famous. Like all skillful transcriptions and reinventions, it makes us aware again of the greatness of the original.

The Three Scottish Ballads remind me of Granger in their noble simplicity spiked with original flourishes and harmonies. There are plenty of original compositions as well, notably Beltane Bonfire, a virtuoso tour de force. It too has inside-the-piano effects. ‘Heroic Song for Hugh MacDiarmid’ is an homage to the Scottish poet (a friend of the composer), also ambitious and orchestral. The ’Symphonic Elegy for Liszt’, written in 1986 for the Liszt Centenary, is dark and introverted, a celebration of Liszt’s lugubrious late pieces rather than the flashier early ones. ‘Chorale and Fugue in Reverse on Themes of Robert and Clara Schumann’ is compact and atmospherically delicate at the end. The album includes early pieces such as the delightful Three Elizabethan Pieces after John Bull; they are politically incorrect by today’s early music standards, but true to an earlier model of romantic transcription made famous by Busoni and Rachmaninoff.

As for the latter composer, ‘Lilacs’ is included as a way to show the influence of the Russian composer in Stevenson’s ’We’ll Gather Lilacs’, surely the most delectable piece on the album, a combination of simplicity and layered nuance.

Kenneth Hamilton’s ravishing tone (on a superior Stainway), sumptuously recorded, is part of the treat. His sensitivity of phrasing, here and elsewhere, is deeply satisfying. These two selections plus ’My Heart and I’ make us think the 19th Century never ended. Can we have more of this marvelous music, please?

In his notes, conductor Honeck noted that Richard Strauss had written most of his operas after completing his tone poems. He goes on to say that he believed that in many ways the most important character in Strauss operas is the orchestra. It is partly for that reason that Honeck endorses ”symphonic adaptations” like these for at least some of the operas. Each suite is in one track, but both are organized in separate sections played continuously like tone poems, with vocal lines given to instruments. The order of the sections does not necessarily reflect the order of the opera’s action.

We know that we are in a different world when the suite for Elektra opens with the grand motif for Agamemnon played twice. (In the opera it is once.) The arrangement is Honeck’s own in collaboration with Tomas Ille and is in 12 sections. The orchestra is the size of the one Strauss used for his tone poems, which is to say that it is smaller than the one for the opera. The result captures the spirit and effect of the opera and is one thrilling Strauss “tone poem”.

The suite for Der Rosenkavalier was created by Artur Rodzinski in the 1940s. Rodzinski’s arrangement works along the same lines as Honeck’s for Elektra and is in seven sections. The only music composed by Rodzinski is the very end. The suite captures the wistful sentiment of the Marschallin, the regal sound of the
'Consecration of the Rose', and the Viennese push and pull of the waltzes.

The Pittsburgh Symphony is one of America’s more Germanic orchestras and is well suited to Strauss. The brass are terrific, and the strings play with a powerful Teutonic sound. Reference Recordings is known as an audiophile label, and it earns that distinction here, particularly in Elektra, whose extreme demands it meets especially well.

Even opera purists should enjoy this program. Honeck’s booklet notes include detailed time indications of what is going on in the operas as the music proceeds, as well as summaries of the opera plots. There are many recordings of the Rosenkavalier Suite reviewed in ARG. Most are the Rodzinski arrangement. If you are a Straussian, you probably have one. No matter. The reason to get this newcomer is the Elektra Suite. I would not be without it.

HECHT

S
TRAUSS: Ein Heldenleben; Macbeth
Frankfurt Radio/ Andres Orozco-Estrada
Pentatone 5186382 [SACD] 66 minutes

Ein Heldenleben is one of the most wonderful pieces of music ever written. It is both rhapsodic and ecstatic. The rhapsody almost lifts you out of your chair, and the ecstasy is almost painful in its intensity. (Without Strauss there could be no Mahler!)

It seems to take a true romantic to put it across. This conductor is not. Is anybody among the young and active? We never stop recommending recordings from the 1960s and 70s: Beecham, Karajan, Kempe, even Barbirolli—all conductors born in Europe in the late 19th Century. They had a certain sweep and majesty; they knew how to stretch a phrase without distorting it; they knew how to build the ecstasy and rhapsody until it was almost unbearable. They stormed the heavens.

This one has a few moments. About 27 minutes in when the opening music returns it is almost ecstatic here. But the piece has 18 minutes to go, and it seems downhill from there.

There is always someone who will insist that sound has improved so much that a new recording like this has to enter the top group. I do hear some top-notch sound here—and some odd balances. There are moments when the strings sound as if they are miles away and the winds are too dominant. The engineers seem to play around with balances, and that spoils the sound for me, even if there are glorious moments. I had much the same criticism of the last Heldenleben to come out of Frankfurt (Weigle on Oehms, M/A 2014), but that one was brassier. The two recent recordings that I rather liked were by Barenboim (M/A 2015) and—of all people—Jansons (M/J 2015). I even suggested that the Jansons might work well for people who are sure they don’t want to go back to the 60s and 70s (for the truly great recordings). I have no idea what got into Jansons, who is one of the most consistently insensitive conductors around.

The other Frankfurt recording (Weigle) also couples Heldenleben with Macbeth. I don’t know why I’ve never taken to Macbeth. As I’m listening to it it is quite impressive, but it is also aggressive—not at all what Heldenleben is like. It’s a disturbing change of mood and effect. Even the Shakespeare play is disturbing, so I can hardly blame Strauss for writing the music as he did; but it’s a real come-down after Ein Heldenleben.

The Columbian-born conductor is music director in Houston as well as Frankfurt. He is never cold; he even sounds hot-blooded quite often. But in Hero’s Life he has to rein that in a bit. Passion is more aggressive than rhapsody and ecstasy, and passion is not what Strauss is all about. So some moments don’t seem quite right, even in Macbeth, though that is a better piece to show us what this conductor can do. The sound seems better, too, but the strings are still too recessed.

VROON

S
TRAUSS: Violin Sonata; see Collections
STRAVINSKY: Divertimento; see TCHAIKOVSKY

T
AYLOR: 3 Century Suite
Moravian Philharmonic/ Petr Vronsky
Navona 6066—16 minutes

The American composer Deems Taylor (1885-1966) is all but forgotten today, but at one time he was known as the “Dean of American Music.” Born in New York, he started out to be an architect but turned to composing even though he had little musical training. Two early works, The Chambered Nautilus and Through the Looking Glass (1916 & 1918), brought him to positive attention. His Kings Henchmen was the first American opera commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera, and his Peter Ibbetson was also popular there. Taylor went on to write two more operas and several orchestral works, among other pieces.

In addition to composing, he was president
of ASCAP, well known as a music critic, editor of Musical America, annotator for several Mercury LP recordings, and the author of Of Men And Music. As a commentator, he served the New York Philharmonic and several radio programs. He was Master Of Ceremonies for the Disney film Fantasia and helped choose the music for that film. Taylor was such a ubiquitous figure that William Schuman called him “a man for all reasons.”

Deems Taylor composed in a neo-romantic, non-adventurous style (some would call it bland) that was popular early in the last century but could not stand up under the onslaught of modernism. Until now, the only recording I knew of his music was a Mercury LP of Through The Looking Glass. This new disc is Volume 2 of “The Lost Music of Deems Taylor”. If Volume 1 is as short as this one, it seems odd that the two were not combined.

Three Century Suite is a five-movement collection of dances played without pause, though given separate tracks. It is an appealing work but in no way a masterpiece.

The stately ‘Pavan’ covers several moods. ‘Saraband’ begins with a ruminative oboe solo, then proceeds to a dancing midsection and a climax. ‘Jig’ presents swirling winds, a strong Irish accent, and a touch of Vaughan Williams. ‘Rigadoon’ is a lively rhythmic dance. The most impressive movement is ‘Bartholomew Fair’, a grand waltz suggestive of the Broadway of Rogers and Hammerstein, particularly Carousel and King and I.

Petr Vronsky offers decent orchestral leadership, but the Moravian Philharmonic sounds like a second or third line Czechoslovakian orchestra of decades past. A better and more refined ensemble might help these pieces. As it is, they are enjoyable, with ‘Bartholomew Fair’ better than that. The recorded sound is good. The notes tell us what we need to know about Taylor, though the coverage of the music is dryly analytical. This is not a “must”, but it might interest the curious. It has made me wonder about those two Taylor operas commissioned by the Met.

Tchaikovsky: The Nutcracker
with Symphony-4
Mariinsky Orchestra/ Gergiev
Mariinsky 593 [2SACD] 129 minutes

with Stravinsky: Divertimento
Gurzenich Orchestra/ Dmitri Kitaenko
Oehms 448 [2CD] 123 minutes

These are completely opposite performances with a huge variance in time and speed. Kitaenko takes almost 97 minutes for the Tchaikovsky ballet, and Gergiev takes only 83 minutes. Act I: Kitaenko 51 minutes; Gergiev 43. Act II: Kitaenko 46, Gergiev 41 (rounding off). That is a huge difference, and regular readers know that I am immediately inclined to favor Kitaenko. But I cannot dismiss the Gergiev. It is always faster (except the flower Waltz), and the orchestra never seems to sink into the music; but it is beautifully played—especially Act I, where the music is less familiar (the suite is mostly Act II). I was surprised.

But Gergiev knows ballet (has conducted it all his life), and he never loses the sense of dance, even in faster moments. Also, the sound on his recording is every bit as beautiful as on Kitaenko’s—and it’s SACD, which adds some depth to an orchestra that is inclined to sound glassy. The German strings are richer, the Russian ones brighter. Both orchestras are wonderful. No boychoir is identified in the Mariinsky recording—maybe they are women, but they sound fine in the ‘Waltz of the Snowflakes’ that ends Act I. Kitaenko has Cologne Cathedral boys.

The ‘Waltz of the Flowers’ is identical in time and tempos in the two recordings, but Gergiev has more “swing”—that is, it sounds more dance-like. In general, Kitaenko treats the whole Nutcracker as a concert piece; his orchestra is richer, and they are giving a concert. To Gergiev it’s a ballet—no question about it. He is accompanying dancers. It has to be lively and pointed and dashing. Of course, sitting in your living room you can have it either way.

I have to admit that these are both terrific recordings of this gorgeous music. Feel free to choose the faster or the slower one based on your own preferences. The faster one does not harm the music, and the slower one never seems sluggish. On the other hand, if you already have the complete ballet, you have something closer to Gergiev than Kitaenko, because no one has taken much over 85 minutes for the ballet before. It works! If you really like Tchaikovsky it is nice to hear him taken so seriously.

Every act of conscious learning requires the willingness to suffer an injury to one’s self-esteem. That is why young children (before self-importance comes upon them) learn so easily—and why older people, especially if vain or important, cannot learn a thing.

Thomas Szasz (slightly edited)
Both add more Tchaikovsky. The Stravinsky is from *Baiser de la Fee*, and all the melodies are by Tchaikovsky (Stravinsky did not have a gift of melody). I have had for at least 50 years the Reiner recording of this made in Chicago in 1958. The Cologne orchestra sounds much better—strings and wind soloists especially. And the old RCA sound was a bit stark, as was Orchestra Hall. This new recording is much better all around.

Gergiev’s Tchaikovsky Fourth isn’t new, though this recording is. When Mr Hansen reviewed his Philips recording (July/Aug 2005) he used the word “aggressive” a lot. I would use the word “exaggerated” for this new recording. He really whips up the excitement in the fast movements (I and IV), but he takes the slow movement slower than almost anyone else (II). It hangs around way too long and doesn’t have any ardor—sounds depressed (nice bassoon solo, though). He is in general very good at breathless excitement, and he phrases the fast movements very well; but sometimes they simply sound overdone. IV is very noisy. True, Tchaikovsky labeled it Allegro con fuoco—with fire. But the contrast is just too much, especially after the very slow middle section, where I see no reason in the score to slow it so much. But that is this conductor’s exaggerated way with so much music.

This is not a Tchaikovsky Fourth that appeals to me. I don’t like music to sound frantic and overwrought. But Gergiev’s style seems to appeal to today’s concert audiences.

VROON

**Tchaikovsky: Ballet Suites**
Mari & Momo Kodama, Pentatone 5186 579 [SACD] 63 minutes

This is the first recording by the Kodama sisters as a duo. Both have extensive solo credits and I have been very impressed with Mari’s Beethoven sonata cycle on Pentatone. The obvious comparison here is the Labeque sisters, whose 1995 *Tchaikovsky Fantasy* (Philips 442778, not reviewed) contains the same *Sleeping Beauty Suite* arrangement by Rachmaninoff and *Swan Lake* arrangement by Debussy. The Labeques seem to have always been a duo and only moved into some solo work later on in their careers. I do not expect to see the Kodamas as a touring and recording duo more than occasionally. These wonderful performances should encourage them to play more together.

We all know this music well. Of all of Tchaikovsky’s great works, few would argue that his ballet music is at the top of the list. Since ballets are not choreographed or rehearsed with a full orchestra, an arrangement for piano (2 or 4 hands) has to be created. Orchestration can proceed simultaneously with rehearsals. What separates the current program from others, besides the greatness of the music and, that is the arrangers are all notable pianists and, except Eduard Langer, excellent composers as well. Professor Langer, of the Moscow Conservatory and teacher of Taneyev, transcribed for piano 4-hands the suite Tchaikovsky put together from his first ballet, *Swan Lake*. Debussy was a teenager when he made a piano duet transcription of three of the dances from Act III (Russe, Espagnole, Napolitaine). 18-year-old Sergei Rachmaninoff was given the job of transcribing the entire *Sleeping Beauty* for piano 4-hands. He was not entirely successful and both Tchaikovsky and Alexander Siloti fixed up some of his work, the extent of which is still debated today. Publication by Jurgenson of both the entire ballet and the suite listed only Rachmaninoff as responsible for the transcription. This piano duet score is the single piece of Rachmaninoff’s music that I have failed to find a copy of anywhere in the world. I have been looking for at least 40 years. The Suite is readily available. Finally we have Anton Arensky’s 2-piano transcription of the *Nutcracker Suite*.

Right from the very quick and energetic start of *Sleeping Beauty* you know that this performance will be very special. As the music unfolds, you hear their great attention to detail, and their supreme virtuosity is always at the service of the music. There are many more quiet places here than in the Labeques’ performance, which seems to always emphasize the brilliant aspects. When reducing a full orchestra down to 20 fingers on 4 hands, the arranger always has to make decisions. The Kodamas approach the arrangements with a reverence for the original orchestral works.

Pentatone’s superb SACD sound, booklet, and production are excellent.

HARRINGTON

**Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto 1; Nutcracker Suite**
Alexandra Dariescu; Royal Philharmonic/ Darrell Ang—Signum 441—53 minutes

When’s the last time you heard a performance of Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto 1 free from hysteries, posturing, and thought-up drama? Here’s one that has complete integrity—noth-
ing read into the score that isn’t there—utterly musical. In the first two movements the flow is superb and the playing always intelligent; they never force the music, and their phrasing is remarkable. That goes not only for Romanian Alexandra Dariescu, who’s about 30 and whose upper education was in England, but also for Singaporean Darrell Ang, 37, who draws usually ignored details from the orchestra, making them function so naturally that I wonder why other conductors don’t hear them. Both artists have a remarkable grasp of form.

Two criticisms in the concerto: the engineers haven’t balanced the mix well. They give the piano an edge that often makes the orchestra hard to hear—such a pity when there is so much to hear. Also, III lacks excitement. It wasn’t until I listened to Dariescu perform Mikhail Pletnev’s virtuoso suite for piano solo from *The Nutcracker* that I found the right words: Dariescu lacks flair, panache. She just doesn’t have the stylistic or rhythmic breadth to bring a tarantella or Russian, Chinese, or other dances to life, let alone the exhilarating folk style of the concerto’s final movement.

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**FRENCH**

**Tchaikovsky:** Quartet 1; **Brahms:** Quartet 1

Atrium Quartet

Profil 16070—57:35

This is for people who like a lot of “bite” in the attacks and rather brisk tempos. Since I prefer a smooth sound and approach, this is not for me. I don’t think violins sound good when they are played with brisk attacks—they are too metallic. I think they should blend better and sound richer.

The quartet is Russian.

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**Tchaikovsky:** Symphony 1; **Tempest**

St Luke’s Orchestra/ Pablo Heras-Casado

HM 902220—68:21

To sum it up in a few words, this is too hot-blooded. Tchaikovsky was a very romantic Russian, very sentimental and moved by majesty. There is absolutely no sentiment or majesty here—not even in the section labelled “maestoso”. The last movement is certainly too fast to be a culmination of what went before. The atmosphere in I is almost non-existent. The orchestra is too small and efficient.

Michael Tilson Thomas (DG) got it right in Boston so many years ago—as did Ormandy, Rozhdestvensky, and Rostropovich. Nothing recent has been any good; we are losing the romantic way of making music, and recordings like this miss the point entirely.

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**Tchaikovsky:** Symphony 6 with *1812 Overture*  
Academy SMF/ Neville Marriner  
Capriccio 8005—60 minutes

with *Romeo and Juliet*  
Czech Philharmonic/ Semyon Bychkov  
Decca 4830656—64 minutes

The Marriner is a reissue. Lawrence Hansen described it as “G rated”: an excellent all-round account with no extremes (N/D 1992). The orchestra (beefed up) sounds good, tempos are moderate, there’s some drama but it’s controlled. It’s neat, clean, well-paced, and straightforward. Mr Hansen compared it to Monteux and Ormandy—both from the 1950s, but they sound just as good as this one. Both are moderate, but the orchestras are wonderful. I listened to this before I read the 1992 review, but I came to the same conclusions. If you know the great old recordings—which still sound terrific—the Marriner reading can’t replace them. It’s very good, but not that good. And you may want something more emotional in the first place.

The Bychkov is more emotional and very expressive. I noticed right away the similar timings to Ormandy, whose Columbia recording (Sony) is still the best ever. The main difference is that Bychkov takes the last movement faster—in fact, faster than almost anyone else.

I have long admired Semyon Bychkov as one of the great conductors of our time. He was born in 1952 in Leningrad, but became an American citizen in the 1980s, when I was first exposed to him in Buffalo. He has loved Tchaikovsky all his life, as I have. He has gone deeply into his music, and he has insisted that for this new Tchaikovsky project the recording company and the musicians should too. This was not a typical rush job, as classical recordings have come to be. It took many rehearsals, many concerts, many recording sessions over 15 days. If his tempo seems faster than anyone else in the final movement, it is because he does not read it as resignation and acceptance of death, but as a protest. No one else sees it that way, but Bychkov truly loves and understands Tchaikovsky and refers to him as a beautiful and good man, a sincere and joyful man who loved life. I agree. I am not happy to read from other conductors that Tchaikovsky was miserable and depressed. He was very lov-
ing and easily hurt, but he was not miserable!
He took delight in other people. The last
movement is full of longing, but it need not be
understood as depression. Life and love are
beautiful—achingly so. In spite of all its
tragedy and cruelty it is a beautiful world.
Listen to III here: it is joyful, not clipped and
brusque as in so many other recordings. Why
should IV follow it with misery?

This is very different from Bychkov’s earlier
Philips recording (Nov/Dec 1988, with the Con-
certgebouw). Every movement is faster except
III, which I think many conductors take too fast.
III here sounds like Ormandy; in 1988 it sound-
ed like Solti. The last movement is more than
two minutes faster than the earlier recording,
which was actually one of the slowest.

Everything in the symphony is beautiful—
and the orchestra enters into it fully. This is
not sight-reading! And the orchestra is Slavic—
that may help! They are moody people. And
the Czech Philharmonic is not typical of mod-
ern orchestras (and sports teams); they don’t
hire musicians from all over the world. They
are Czech and maintain that identity. Their
sound is unique, almost (there are other Czech
orchestras, but none so great). Their playing
places them among the best orchestras in the
world today.

Romeo and Juliet is certainly about falling
in love and sexual ecstasy. Tchaikovsky knew
what that felt like! He tended to fall in love all
too easily! This performance is less ecstatic
and rhapsodic than many, but the music does
carry itself to some extent.

Semyon Bychkov says that his love for
Tchaikovsky’s music, like all first loves, has
never died. I feel the same way. I want to listen
to this Pathetique again and again.

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**Word Police: informal, idiomatic, slang**

The latest AHD calls “a tad” “informal,” which
means it’s not to be used in writing. So we
don’t use it in ARG. The same applies to “fun”
as an adjective. We would never call a piece of
music “a fun piece.” The same dictionary calls
“a mite” “idiomatic,” which is obviously a little
more respectable, but we don’t use it often.
“Awesome” is described as “slang,” so we never
use that at all.

When you think about it, people in general
are very sloppy about these things in the age of
TV news. (TV newscasters are very bad ex-
amples of the use of language.)

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**Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto**

with Serenade Melancolique; Waltz-Scherzo;
Souvenir d’un lieu cher
Jennifer Koh; Odense Symphony/ Alexander
Vedernikov

Cedille 166—74 minutes

Julie Fischer; Russian National Orchestra/ Yakov
Kreizberg

Pentatone 5186 610 [SACD] 68 minutes

with Sibelius: Concerto

Lisa Batiashvili; Staatskapelle Berlin/ Daniel
Barenboim

DG 479 6038—70 minutes

Ms Fischer and Ms Koh take on Tchaikovsky’s
complete concerto violin works, though
Koh includes Glazounov’s orchestration of
Souvenir. (Fischer is accompanied by
Kreizberg on the piano as Tchaikovsky actually
wrote it.) Koh and Vedernikov play everything
in published order, Opus 26 through 42, a good
sequence. As you can see by the timings, Koh
is in no hurry, taking six minutes longer in the
same music, her style relaxed, warm, and
calm, ably and sympathetically accompanied by
Mr Vedernikov. I could listen to her restrained
and mellow tone all day long.

Fischer’s recording is from 2006 (it’s been
reissued along with much else she recorded
for Pentatone a decade or more ago) and her
performances are conventionally brilliant and
exciting, masterly, eloquent, and pleasing.
[Lawrence Hansen (May/June 2007) called it a
competent but unexceptional run-through.—
Ed] Maestro and pianist Kreizberg, who died
in 2011, is well matched with Fischer at both
the baton and the keyboard, though I prefer
Glazounov’s very Tchaikovskian orchestra-
mentation—you’d never know it was by other hands.
I’ve enjoyed this SACD for years, but doubt I’ve
ever listened straight through because mix of
concerto and chamber music is jarring.
Cedille’s all-orchestral presentation is more
satisfying at one sitting.

Ms Batiashvili plays a sultry and expressive
fiddle, and I enjoy her sound a lot, but she’s
mismatched with Barenboim. Where she
cares a phrase, he bludgeons it. Where she
wrings every ounce of blood from a double
stop, he’s happy to beat time. The orchestra,
especially in the Tchaikovsky, sounds bored,
cruising along on autopilot. The Sibelius goes
better, Barenboim coaxing some fervent
accelerandos out of the Berliners. I’ve long
admired the meticulous perfection of Baren-
boim’s pianism, but also found it cold. His
conducting impresses me not at all.

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March/April 2017
Pentatone’s SACD still sounds great even a decade on, but Cedille has given Ms Koh very flattering, warm, balanced sound that's just as good in its own way. The Berliners sound distant, there's a lack of detail, it's bland, but Batashvili’s violin is sweet and well caught—she deserves a more enthusiastic partner.

**Wright**

**Telemann: Flute Fantasias**
Maria Fedotova
Gramola 99114—55 minutes

Maria Fedotova is principal flutist of the Mariinsky Theater Orchestra of St Petersburg and teaches at the St Petersburg Conservatory. Her father was flutist Vladimir Fedotov and her mother violinist Lia Melik-Muradjan. She has given the first Russian performances of many works, including pieces by Toru Takemitsu, Ned Rorem, Leonard Bernstein, and Christopher Rouse.

The boomy and resonant sound is the kind you get from recording in a church (it was). Most listeners will find her very Russian approach to these pieces a bit harsh. Listen to this to hear how Russian flute playing still differs from the established international style.

**Gorman**

**Telemann: 6 Oboe Concertos**
Andrius Puskunigis; St Christopher Chamber Orchestra/Donatas Katkus
Brilliant 95379—67 minutes

Of Telemann’s 100 or so concertos, a dozen are for the oboe or oboe d’amore. Half of them are included here. There is so much to like in this recording. The concertos, written from 1715 to 1724, are uniformly good. Lithuanian oboist Andrius Puskunigis plays with elegance, impeccable articulation, flawless intonation, and fluid technique. His clear sound is even through the entire range of both oboe and d’amore. The chamber orchestra supports the soloist with keen understanding and balance.

Only two things are lacking: a greater range of both dynamics and emotional intensity. Both are a bit too restrained. Louder forte playing and more fiery expression would balance out the charm and delicacy of this music perfectly. But this is still an excellent, enjoyable program. Maybe Puskunigis will also record the other 6 Telemann concertos. The sound quality is very good, and the liner notes, in English and French, are informative.

**Pfeil**

**Telemann: Suites (3), Concerto**
Ensemble Masques/ Olivier Fortin
Alpha 256—66:49

This release follows common practice of late in combining one or more of Telemann’s Overture-Suites with one or more of his concertos. Here we have a Suite in A, with three items more familiar in recordings: the *Concerto Polonais* in G, a Suite in B-flat, and the famous *Burlesque de Quixotte* Suite in G.

Part of the interest in this program is that it is presented not by an “orchestral” ensemble, as we are used to hearing, but rather by a chamber group of (mostly) one instrument per part: two violins, one each viola, cello, and double bass, with harpsichord. This is the “minimalist” scale on which such works as these must regularly have been played in the composer’s time.

These six players are not unduly doctrinaire about their period style, and they offer expert renditions that are also relaxed and graceful, but a strong contrast with conventional “orchestral” character. On the other hand, when they come to the *Quixotte*, they dig in to the humor. The portrayal of Sancho tossed in a blanket is particularly vivid. But this performance is bettered considerably by the lusty minimalist chamber group Les Esprits Animaux (Ambronay 302: J/A 2012).

**Barker**

**Telemann: Overtures, Trios, Sonatas for Chalumeaux & Salterio**
Salzburg Hofmusik/ Wolfgang Brunner
CPO 555031—76 minutes

Perhaps it was because Telemann dabbled with so many instruments in his youth that he so readily experimented with instrumental timbres later in life. For example, he played the chalumeau and would later compose for the instrument. The program includes two authentic chalumeau pieces: the Overture in F for alto and tenor chalumeau; and the Trio Sonata for 2 discant chalumeaux. But Telemann himself notes that parts he wrote for other instruments could also be arranged for the chalumeau. The musicians of Salzburger Hofmusik have done just that, arranging several of his sonatas that were originally for violins, trumpets, and flute. Taking the process a step further, Wolfgang Brunner argues that while none of Telemann’s music calls for a hampered dulcimer (*hackbrett* or salterio), circumstantial evidence in Telemann’s autobiography of 1740 suggests that he had a keen
appreciation for the instrument. So these musicians adapted violin parts to the hammered instrument.

The program opens with a trumpet sonata where two chalumeaux replace the trumpets. The F-major Violin Sonata becomes a sonata for salterio, clarinets, and bassoon. The combination of salterio and clarinets may sound a bit rustic to modern ears (perhaps also to 18th-Century ears?), but there are some really lovely moments here. The Adagio from the Sonatine in G for hackbrett and continuo is expressive and nuanced. The Salterio Fantasy No. 5 in G is particularly lovely. The Overture and Trio Sonata for chalumeaux are exciting for their virtuoso demands. It is lovely music played by talented young musicians.

LOEWEN

TELEMANN: Double Concertos with Recorder
Erik Bosgraaf & Friends; Ensemble Cordevento
Brilliant 95249—63 minutes

This is an excellent program, and as much for the solo playing as it is for Telemann’s genius. The music is several double concertos involving the recorder. Telemann’s style combines French and Italian influences. Early concertos tend toward French with their overtures and dance movements, on view here in the concertos in A minor and B-flat for two alto recorders, Concerto in A minor for alto recorder and viola da gamba. Italian influences are perceptible in the four-movement (slow-fast-slow-fast) concertos—the Concerto in E minor for alto recorder and traverso and the Concerto in F for alto recorder and bassoon.

Polish folk music is another prominent influence. For example, the Presto movement of the E minor Concerto includes a delightful Polonaise en rondeau. It incorporates a leaping melody with exciting rhythms over a drone. The robust rhythms in the Allegro movement of the A minor Concerto for recorder and gamba also evoke a folk-like charm. The B-flat Concerto that closes the program leaves one savoring the excitement of driving rhythms once more in the continuo parts of the Gayment movement.

The bassoon plays an essential part in the concertante textures in a number of these concertos—especially the one in F. The close harmonies and sighing figures in the Largo are gorgeous, and the busy passagework in the following Vivace show the demands Telemann placed on the instrument. David Lasocki notes that Telemann may have composed these parts for the Darmstadt court bassoonist Johann Ludwig Brauer, who was a widely acclaimed virtuoso.

LOEWEN

TELEMANN: Trios; see GRAUPNER

THIRION: Trio; Quartet
Laurent Wagschal, p; Solenne Paidassi, v; Sebastien van Kuijk, vc; Stanislas Quartet
Timpani 1237—52 minutes

After two-plus decades, Timpani has not yet exhausted its bevy of unknown early 20th-Century French composers. Its latest discovery is Louis Thirion (1879-1966), pupil of Guy Ropartz, his muse akin to his teacher’s, with the harmonic sensibility of Fauré and just a patina of Debussy’s post-romantic exoticism. Both works hail from 1905 to 1910 and are in four movements: sonata, scherzo, adagio, and anime finale.

The trio is the later and stronger work. It is united by a recurring angry, surly unison motif, and in between is smooth and lyrical but brooding and unsettled counterpoint. II is impish, packed with shifting meters and ungainly, grotesque ornaments that keep spilling over into the next bar, a literal scherzo. The slow movement is a long arch, a duet for violin and cello, slowly floating to the heavens and back into the abyss over seven minutes, the accompaniment first chordal, then swirling (like Fauré), and ending with bardic sweeps of the keyboard. The finale is jaunty and carefree, but not cyclic as I’d expect from a pupil of Ropartz.

The earlier quartet isn’t cyclic either. II and IV owe much to Debussy’s quartet, but I and III are more in thrall to Franck and Ropartz, full of thick counterpoint and tension. The adagio III is a French-sauteed ‘Greensleeves’, the famous tune prominent for all its nine minutes.

The trio is an ad hoc assembly not related to the Stanislas Quartet and a very fine group, well recorded. I’m familiar with the Stanislas from their Ropartz quartets (Timpani 1099, 1115, 1121), and their shortcomings are the same as ever: gauzy tone, approximate tuning in chromatic passages, miserly bass. They’re serviceable, as is their Ropartz, and a better recording of this rarity is unlikely.

I’ve been collecting Timpani’s series for a decade-plus, I never tire of it, and if you’re like
me and have an insatiable appetite for conservative French composers like Ropartz, Cras, Pierne, and their ilk, you need to hear this.

**TihoreSEN**: Sea of Names plus
Maiken Mathisen Schau, fl; Trond Schau, p
2L 127 [SACD] 71 minutes

Lasse Thoresen (b 1949) has been a professor of composition at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo since 1988. These selections span the years 1976 (With an Open Hand or a Clenched Fist?) to 2012-13 (Sea of Names). They are for piano, solo flute, or the two together. Sometimes there is extra percussion when the flutist stomps her foot and extra timbre when she adds her voice, or reduces the air from normal playing to whistle tones. The richly sonorous recording presents all this range and variety.

Some of these pieces have been inspired by water or sunlight, but Sea of Names for flute and piano is based on the final cadenza in the violin concerto by fellow Norwegian Faroel Valen (BIS 1522, Sept/Oct 2008). The overall concept is often not all that far from the nature-based piano pieces of Edvard Grieg or the contemporary equivalent as offered by Rasmussen (Da Capo 8226567, Nov/Dec 2011). An actual “aquatic fugue” depicts flowing water as a genuine fugue for the piano. People who like the enigmatic piano pieces of Malipiero or the spectral music of Tristan Murail may find these selections contemplative and spectacular. They’re certainly played to the hilt by the couple here, and the long title work is worth hearing, if only once, just for its dazzling assortment of sounds.

**Tian**: Concerto for Orchestra; see Collections

**Trachsel**: Symphony 3
Illinois State University Wind Symphony/ Martin Seggelke; ISU Belle Voix/ Leslie Manfredo
Klavier 11214—69 minutes

If his three symphonies are any indication, Swiss composer Thomas Trachsel (b 1972) has a dark outlook on the state of the world. Symphony 1 in C minor (2006) is subtitled Melancholy. Symphony 2 in D minor (2008) is About the Fear of Our Time. This one, Symphony 3 (2011), is Apocalyptic. The key? Gloomier than gloomy: D-flat minor. The key signature? Seven flats, including B double flat. It must have been quite an exercise for this university band.

The 66-minute work has five movements, plus a 3-minute recited Prologue (‘Kinder’) that is “a collection of indicting questions about the mental and moral situation of man, posed by children to the former generation.”

The 17-minute I opens with unison trumpets playing a serious, lyrical melody that has some sharp, syncopated edges. As the instrumentation expands, a grim, relentless sort of Morse-code rhythm begins driving things. It is a portentous introduction to a very dramatic movement that ebbs and flows, a series of events where quiet tension leads to big climaxes. II, a 15-minute Scherzo, begins at high speed. It quiets, becomes a dream-like waltz, and then resumes the high-energy chase in the last several minutes.

In III (Adagio), female members of the choir ISU Belle Voix sing. The German text is very gloomy, but we can’t hear it—we simply hear voices in long, sustained lines. As are the previous movements, it is dramatic, serious music. IV seems like a continuation of III: slow and dark, with the women singing despairing words. After all that, what could happen in the 21-minute Finale? About 14 minutes of anguish that ends, at last, with a cadence to a major chord. The last 5 minutes are hopeful.

Having read the notes and texts before listening to the piece, I was not expecting to enjoy it. But I did, very much. Yes, it is almost constantly grim, but it is not depressing—it is beautiful and dramatic. It is a little long, but it is never boring, and the ending is transcendent.

Very impressive playing by these young musicians. Much praise is due their conductor for meticulous preparation, dramatic conception both large- and small-scale, and ability to sustain intensity.

**Tsintsadze**: Quartet 10; Miniatures;
**Gabunia**: Quartet 2
Georgian Quartet
Cugato 22—61 minutes

This release, titled “Caucasian Impressions”, contains two works for string quartet by two important Georgian composers, almost unknown in this country, though Tsintsadze has appeared on a couple of releases (M/A 1996). Georgia is an independent republic formerly and perpetually annexed by its neighbor Russia, currently on its own (but Putin threat-
ens to drag it back under the Russian yoke). It is right now a proud, thriving country, which our “President-elect” called one of the great up-and-coming “destinations” (he wanted to build a golf course there, but, to that country’s eternal credit, they threw him out).

Sulkhan Tsintsadze (1925-91) is probably Georgia’s most prolific and renowned composer. He was an artist of spirit and technique, and should be a considerable presence in our repertoire. His Quartet 10 (Polyphonal, 1984—one of 11), is an interesting four-movement work filled with inventive Eastern European-Russian modalities. The music is tonal with modern flavor, its structures classical. Prokofieff and Shostakovich might be lurking in the background, but the style is Tsintsadze’s own. The slower sections are extremely expressive, the contrasting humor irresistible. There is dance, elegy, a few well-placed effects, touches of mystery, some spirituality: in other words, this is firmly in the 20th Century Russian mold. If you’re a fan of this style, I wouldn’t miss this, if you didn’t catch the original A&E release over 20 years ago (S/O 1991).

The much earlier Miniatures (1945) is a set of delightful dances and songs reminiscent in their way of Smetana and Dvorak.

Nodar Gabunia (1933-2000) is known as a composer and pianist. A student of Khachaturian, his music follows the same path as Tsintsadze, but with a few more avant-garde effects tossed in for a modernist nod now and then. His Quartet 2 (1982) follows this path, but is effective nonetheless.

These are all worthwhile. This group is excellent. Notes could be better.

KANG

TYBERG: Mass; Easy Mass
Christopher Jacobson, org; South Dakota Chorale/ Brian A Schmidt
Pentatone 51586584 [SACD] 65 minutes

Our inimitable Herm Trotter recounted Marcel Tyberg’s story (Nov/Dec 2010 & Jan/Feb 2014), but it bears retelling here. Tyberg (pronounced Tee-berg) was born in Vienna into a distinguished musical family. In their social circle was the Kubelik family, and young Marcel and Rafael Kubelik became musical colleagues as well as friends. Tyberg became a conductor, an organist, and a composer of symphonies, chamber works, sonatas, a Scherzo and Finale crafted to complete Schubert’s Unfinished, and these Masses from 1934 (Mass in G) and 1941 (the Messe de Fascile).

With his mother, Tyberg took up residence in what is now Croatia and was an active musician in that region when the Nazis moved in to lay waste to Jewish life in Southeastern Europe. Frau Tyberg, it turned out, had a maternal grandmother who was Jewish, which meant that her son was 1/16 of a Jew and—by policy of the Third Reich—not fit to live. Just three days before the Gestapo arrested Tyberg for transport to Auschwitz where he was murdered in 1944, the composer invited his friends to a local church where he shared his music and some final hours of freedom. “It seemed as if he had to fulfill some final task—to play for his friends”, wrote one participant in the extraordinary event—“and then to part and never return. There was a childlike joy and tenderness in him that is only seen in great souls shortly before their return home.”

Before being sent off to die, Tyberg gave all his compositions and personal papers to a friend, Dr Mihich, whose family left Tito’s Yugoslavia for Milan after the war. Dr Mihich’s son was a physician who wound up in Buffalo, NY with the complete Tyberg oeuvre in his possession. In recent years, the Mihichs, the Foundation for Jewish Philanthropies, and JoAnn Falletta’s Buffalo Philharmonic have joined forces to sponsor performances and recordings of the music that survives. The Buffalo Philharmonic and associates have record-
ed two Tyberg programs, both of which were admired by Mr Trotter in his ARG reviews.

I’m not sure how the two Tyberg Masses—the only two of his sacred works that made it out of Europe—wound up in South Dakota, but we can be glad they did. The choir sings the music as though moved by its past and inspired by its present. You can’t ask for more. Maestro Schmidt tells us that the Masses echo the sounds and structures of Mahler and Bruckner, and he’s right. But I also hear many tips of the cap in Schubert’s direction; especially in the ‘Et incarnatus est’ of the G major Mass and in the fresh, lyrical Kyrie of the other one.

Tyberg composed both works as if the 20th century had never happened; he was a 19th Century guy all the way. His music is unfailingly tuneful and rock-solid in its sincerity. Melody, attractive harmony, and rich tone painting are the composer’s stocks in trade. There’s some decent fugal writing near the end of the Credo of the First Mass, but that isn’t what you come away remembering. That honor goes to the 10-minute Agnus Dei, which the conductor accurately describes as “painfully beautiful.” I’m also affected by the ‘Hosanna in excelsis’ in Messe Fascile, which is very uplifting. If choral excerpts were sung that night at Marcel Tyberg’s valedictory concert, I hope it was those two.

GREENFIELD

ULLMANN: Songs;
SCHUMANN: Songs
Christina Landshamer, s; Gerold Huber, p
Oehms 1848—65 minutes

Christina Landshamer explains in the notes how she and Gerold Huber prepared this program of songs by Robert Schumann and Victor Ullmann. The idea began with Ullmann’s cycle, Six Sonnets of Louise Labé, “about the passion of a female ego for a faraway lover”—a work that had been “accompanying” Landshamer since she was a student of Konrad Richter, who is “a great Ullmann fan”. That cycle and Ullmann’s Three Sonnets from the Portuguese alternate in this program with songs of Schumann.

“The main characters in these lieder are women who have been spurned, are pining away, longingly waiting, or jealous. It was an exciting and modern discovery for me that Victor Ullmann allowed two poetesses to speak his settings, whereas with the romantic Schumann this female view of love is naturally vicariously felt by such men as Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Friedrich Rückert, and others. Quite a contrast.” Their styles do, indeed, contrast vividly, but the pairing of their songs makes for a stimulating program.

The songs are ordered deliberately, beginning with five “greeting” songs by Schumann: (‘Aufträge’, ‘Röselein, Röselein!’; Suleika Song, ‘Aus den östlichen Rosen’, and ‘Liebeslied’, Op. 51.5). “Taken altogether they are the perfect entrée and hint, in a nutshell, at the feelings later articulated by all the others.” Four of the Wilhelm Meister Songs are heard in the middle and Six Poems of Nikolaus Lenau and Requiem conclude the program. The romantic ideal of death as transcendence and redemption revealed in these songs is presented by Schumann in gorgeous writing. Landshamer comments wryly, “I sometimes have the feeling they are all gladly lying in their graves.”

Landshamer’s light lyric voice is perfect for Sophie in Der Rosenkavalier and Pamina in The Magic Flute, roles where she has excelled. Here she establishes herself as a superb lieder artist. The purity, clarity, and beauty of her voice are exceptional. These are revelatory readings worthy of high praise. Huber is one of the finest lieder collaborators at work these days. His finely honed playing is an ideal complement to Landshamer’s readings.

It is bothersome that no English translations of texts are supplied, particularly in the case of Ullmann. I have enough recordings of the Schumann songs to find translations, but having to do so is still annoying.

R MOORE

USTVOLSKAYA: Piano Concerto;
see SILVESTROV

VAINBERG: Symphony 17;
Suite for Orchestra
Siberian State Symphony/ Vladimir Lande
Naxos 573565—65 minutes

Moise Vainberg’s 17th Symphony (Memory, 1984) is the first of a symphonic trilogy titled On the Threshold of War that reflects on the experiences of the Soviet Union and Vainberg’s native Poland in the Second World War. (Symphonies 18 and 19 complete the trilogy.) 17 begins in the strings with a polyphonic passage reminiscent of the first movements of Shostakovich’s Fifth and Eighth Symphonies. Twice the music works up tension with strings working against each other, often with the motif of downward intervals. Each time clarr
inets interrupt and peer about over the strings that carry on with the opening ideas. After the second time, the string material builds slowly to a moderate climax. The high strings become more active, tension increases, and the motifs are quicker. Soon things darken as we return to the low strings until the movement fades quietly.

II begins with a piccolo wandering high over a piano ostinato. More winds enter. Strings make a theme out of the ostinato and pit it against horn chords. In time, the ostinato turns out to be a dominant element, providing a wall of varied sound against figures arrayed against it. In the next episode, the tuba roars against screeching winds and strings. Howling horns follow then join with the strings. After a short midsection of quiet woodwinds, conflict returns when strings pound away at a long progression of long brass notes. Shostakovich did this sort of thing but with more control and less random throwing about of ideas.

The short III begins with a rapidly striding line that gives way to more conflict and rage. A lilting section offers a short respite. The finale begins with two clarinets wandering through parallel harmonies, perhaps a reflection from the Shostakovich Tenth Symphony. After high strings supply counterpoint, a horn solo (which turns into a duet) appears out of nowhere. This section has a reaching out feeling until the grinding returns. Strings supply a sad little dance accompanied by winds and cellos until nervous anger returns with howling horns, screeching strings, and pounding timpani. After some wind noodling, the music marches to a defiant finish.

The first movement of this symphony promises a great deal, but it does not come close to its counterparts in the Shostakovich Fifth and Eighth. Even so, it is the best movement of the symphony. From there on, the pedestrian material and lack of variety quickly wear out their welcome. In such a linear work, textures are too lean, the lack of bass foundation is wearing, and the lack of compelling harmony and sonority does not help. Nor does the music really go anywhere. The whole thing is like bad memories synthesized to dots making up an image, perhaps of someone madly throwing everything in his room against the wall. The problem is that the listener is aware of the dots. Perhaps the idea was to depict the vast wasteland of war, which the work more or less does, but as music it makes for a long and dull 45 minutes. The 18th and 19th symphonies that complete On the Threshold of War are far more inspired.

As a performance, this is decent, but the one with the Vienna Symphony led by Vladimir Fedoseyev has a fuller, darker sound and makes a slightly better case for one of Vainberg’s weakest symphonies.

Vainberg wrote Suite for Orchestra in 1950, a time of uncertainty for Soviet composers, particularly ones with a mixed reputation for loyalty like Vainberg. Several of his works from that time are lost. The Suite survived but was never played. It is in five short movements. ‘Romance’ is a sad, lugubrious (in a good way) ballad with the orchestra sometimes acting like a big guitar. ‘Humoresque’ is jaunty and bitingly good-natured, with a sweeping mid-section in the strings ending in a brass climax before returning to the opening material. ‘Waltz’ begins with a long solo in the horn that the orchestra picks up with a rush and considerable energy. Things turn more spiky until the opening material comes back at full throttle. ‘Polka’ for a while is lighter and more deft, as Vainberg returns for a good-natured visit to his native land, but the orchestra soon bursts forth, as if reminding the dancers that there may be police outside. The original good nature returns, but cautiously. ‘Galop’ is raucous and sometimes muscular.

The sound is fine, as are the notes by Richard Whitehouse. I don’t think the rustic and entertaining 19-minute Suite makes up for the finally boring 45-minute Symphony.

HECHT

VAINBERG: Violin Sonatas 1, 2, 3, 6; Sonatina; 2-Violin Sonata; Rhapsody
Stefan & Gundula Kirpal, v; Andreas Kirpal, p
CPO 777457 [2CD] 130 minutes

Solo Violin Sonatas (3); SHOSTAKOVICH: 3 Fantasie Dances
Linus Roth, v; Jose Gallardo, p
Challenge 72688—74 minutes

Polish-born Moishe Vainberg (or Mieczyslaw Weinberg, as his name is now often transliterated) fled to Russia from his homeland to escape the Nazis in the 1939 only to become a victim of Stalinist persecution. But he survived and, with help from his friend Shostakovich, eventually flourished, producing a large body of music including 22 symphonies, 17 string quartets, 9 violin sonatas, and much more. His stature has continued to rise since he died in 1996, as an ever-increasing flow of new record-
With the appearance of CPO’s new release of a second volume of Vainberg’s violin pieces performed by the Kirpal siblings, his music for this combination is now pretty much completely represented on recordings, with competing releases of several items. Volume 1 (CPO 777456; Mar/Apr 2010) includes Sonatas 4 and 5 along with Three Pieces for violin and piano. The violin-piano duo range in date from 1943 until 1982, and show Vainberg’s wide range of texture, mood, and form, as well as his seemingly endless power of invention and renewal, all in a tonal harmonic language that gradually incorporated a widening array of musical resources without abandoning traditional ones. So recognizable and personal are Vainberg’s melodies that, despite his readily perceptible kinship with Shostakovich, people who know his other chamber music would have little trouble guessing the composer of these sonatas. It’s harder, though, to describe the particular way Vainberg interpenetrates his now-singing, now capricious and twittering violin with his now plangent, now piercing, now flowing piano while also maintaining perfect transparency that allows every note to “speak”. All this, I should add, is in the service of a humane expressiveness that conveys emotions from bittersweet sadness and stoic defiance to life-affirming joy and vitality—yet, despite the many hardships Vainberg endured, seldom darkens into despair or caustic cynicism, as Shostakovich’s music does.

CPO’s second volume of Vainberg’s violin music has seven works, several of them in first recordings or with no easily available alternatives. Included are Sonatas 1, 2, 3, and 6, his 1949 Sonatina, his Two-Violin Sonata (without piano), and Moldavian Rhapsody (for violin and piano). This last item is a ten-minute potboiler on “ethnic folk tunes” of the Fiddler on the Roof type, a showy and distinctly minor effort that, though popular, did nothing for me. Sonata 6 is essentially a violin and piano arrangement of an orchestral work that doesn’t quite come off in this reduced version. But Sonatas 1, 2, and 3 as well as the Sonatina are substantial and persuasive compositions that will engage and reward anyone drawn to modern but in-the-tradition violin music. The two-violin sonata is somewhat harder edged and will probably take more effort to absorb, though it’s certainly worth the effort. Performances are judicious and polished, and very nicely recorded too, making this two-disc set all the more valuable.

Though Vainberg’s first three violin-and-piano sonatas and the sonatina are very much worth seeking out, I’d recommend that listeners tempted (as I hope many are) to explore this music begin with Sonatas 4 and 5. As expressive and well-made as the earlier sonatas are, these later ones are better still, without doubt his two (very different) masterpieces in the genre. 4 is dark and stormy, 5 more fluid and lyrical, in its own way a Schubertian chiaroscuro of light and shadow. The Kirpals’ renditions of 4 and 5 on CPO’s Volume 1 are elegant and airy, but rivaled by the richer and more passionate performance of those two, along with the Sonatina, by Maria Slawek and Piotr Rozanski (Accord 217; M/A 2016). Another recent release that I haven’t yet heard, Toccata 26, gathers Sonatas 2, 3, and 5 and earned high praise from Joseph Magil (J/A 2014). And considering the exalted quality of Vainberg’s Fourth and Fifth Violin Sonatas, I wouldn’t be surprised to see more recordings of them soon. Anyone who admires the great violin sonatas of Janacek, Ravel, Prokofiev, Walton, Hindemith, Piston, Poulenc, and Vaughan Williams should hear Vainberg’s commensurate contribution to this repertoire.

In addition to his violin-and-piano and two-violin works, Vainberg also wrote three sonatas for unaccompanied violin, and for the first time (at least as I’ve seen) there’s a recording of all three on one disc. It’s on the Challenge label, with violinist Linus Roth tackling these highly-demanding compositions; pianist Jose Gallardo accompanies him for three beguiling fillers—Shostakovich’s brief, pungent, and catchy-as-velcro Three Fantastic Dances, here arranged for violin and piano from the solo piano originals.

Much as I admire Vainberg’s skillful and imaginative writing for the violin, I can’t say I found it easy to enjoy his solo sonatas. Indeed listening to them reminds me how difficult writing large-scale, sustained music for violin alone is and always has been. Less ambitious efforts from Prokofiev and Hindemith and a fair number of others have appeared, and we’ve all heard some highly effective etudes epitomized by Paganini’s. But genuine full-sized sonatas? Bach, absolutely; Bartok, yes indeed; Ysaye, maybe. There are many other contenders, from Bacevicz to Boykan, Hartmann to Henze, Reger to Rozsa, Schnabel to Sessions to Stevens, but none that have fully succeeded.

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Vainberg’s solo sonatas, all three dating from the 1960s and 70s and all full-scale compositions around 20 minutes long, are among his more rebarbative productions. Allegros are prickly nests of penetrating jabs and astringent double-stops, andantes austere, inward-looking monologs. Occasional lighter, more delicate and playful scherzetos offer welcome relief—and are the most engaging music in these otherwise tense, tightly-stretched, acerbic creations. Structurally they are as various as their uncompromising idiom is consistent; Sonata 1 is cast in five middling-length movements, Sonata 2 in seven short movements, Sonata 3 (the toughest of all to absorb) a single 27-minute span that ends with the spare, forlorn, attenuated chirping of a single bird above a battlefield or concentration camp or besieged city heavily strewn with the dead for as far as the eye can see. “Do not forget”, Vainberg’s heart-breaking music admonishes, even as the murders never stop.

Votaries of modern-era unaccompanied violin solos will certainly want to hear these powerful, granitic, deeply-felt sonatas, especially in Roth’s flat-out superlative performances and Channel’s highly detailed (if somewhat “hot”) sonics, but less motivated listeners should hear Vainberg’s more inviting violin-and-piano duos first.

LEHMAN

VALENTINI: Madrigals, Book 2
Les Canards Chantants; Acronym
Old Focus 908—68 minutes

This collection of madrigals, published in 1616 when Valenti worked in Graz, Austria in the court of Archduke Ferdinand, who became Holy Roman Emperor in 1619, “was the first published collection of madrigals [by anyone] to combine voices and instruments other than continuo”. Contemporary Austrian taste leaned towards “large scorings including both voices and instruments”, and the chromaticism in some of the pieces is likely also connected to the court at Graz where there were some enharmonic keyboard instruments.

As you listen to this program, close your eyes and think of a famous opera quartet by Mozart or Verdi. Such scenes are among the most gripping and poignant scenes in the opera, peopled by individual characters with individual voices. They require singers who can hold their own yet also blend with others, especially when singing opposing texts.

Here the madrigal singers don’t sing different texts, but they all tell the same story in different ways. As for a quartet in an opera, don’t expect homogeneous colorless blend, as that would drain both meaning and interest from the interpretations. The low and high parts are sometimes very far apart and exposed. Especially because Les Canards Chantants is a one-voice-per-part ensemble and each singer’s voice is clearly distinctive, this is very demanding to sing.

All the singers and players—the latter from the Acronym ensemble—are very fine. There’s a courtly elegance as well as very effective text depictions such as for pairs and redoubling in ‘Chi Nudrisse Two Speme’, for laughing acceleration in ‘Ridete Pur, Ridete’; and for fluid flight in ‘Gioir, Gioir Fugace’.

For more Valenti, please note that Acronym’s recording of Valenti’s instrumental music (Old Focus 904, S/O 2015) was one of my “Best of 2015” picks. Notes, bios, texts, translations.

C MOORE

VAN DIENER: Chinese Symphony; Prelude to Discourse of the Drinkers; Elegy
Rebecca Evans, s; Catherine Wyn Rogers, a; Nathan Vale, t; Morgan Pearse, bar; David Soar, b; Raphael Wallfisch, vc; National Chorus & Orchestra of Wales/William Boughton
Lyrita 357—70 minutes

The mystique of the unperformed—and maybe unperformable—masterpiece is an enduring one. Think of Brian’s Gothic Symphony, Ives’s Symphony 4, or Nicode’s two-hour plus Gloria Symphony. Eventually such works have a way of getting played; even the Nicode can be heard in a computerized reconstruction by Steffen Fahl. The Chinese Symphony by the Dutch-English composer Bernard van Dieren (1887-1936) has long had that mystique and is rarely done. It’s had even fewer performances than Brian’s colossal Gothic. The work is a 1914 setting in eight continuous sections of poems by Chinese poets.

Lyrita’s notes include texts and translations. Like Das Lied von der Erde, the poems are from Hans Bethge’s translations titled The Chinese Flute. Mahler chose poems by Li Po; Van Dieren uses the work of several poets besides. The musical language most resembles Alban Berg; it’s chromatic to the verge of atonality. Even though the premiere didn’t come till 1935, it still must have seemed radical to an English audience. The vocal parts are glutinous and mostly seem like strings of random pitches. There are sometimes catchy
details, such as some beautiful part-writing in the duet of IV and an expressive drooping glissando in VII for the line “(drink) all the live long day!”. The orchestra, though not unusually large, is colorful. The work generally moves at a moderate pace, and it’s mostly restrained in dynamics. What most listeners will probably take away is the feeling of formlessness. It confirms composer Kyle Gann’s observation that non-tonal music is simply damn hard to remember except as a succession of unspecific gestures. I so wanted to like this symphony, but can only conclude that there’s a valid reason for its neglect.

The Prelude to the *Discourse of the Drinkers*, inspired by Rabelais, is the sort of piece Virgil Thomson would describe as “whimsy for 100 players”. It’s a largely diatonic work, beginning with a flourish for the violins, continuing with short phrases in rapidly changing tempos. The central portion includes a waltz. The orchestration is often colorful, but overall the piece noodles along with no apparent formal goal. As there’s little forward harmonic motion, it doesn’t end; it just stops.

The Elegie (1910) has a demanding solo cello part, and formally holds together quite well. It’s the most enjoyable work on the program, mostly because of Wallfisch’s excellent reading. In general, the performances and recorded sound are very good. Conductor Boughton (grandson of the engaging composer Rutland Boughton) does all he can for a less than grateful assignment.

**O’CONNOR**

**VAN GILSE:** *Eine Lebensmesse*

Heidi Melton, Gerhild Romberger, Roman Sadnik, Vladimir Baykov; National Women’s Youth Choir, Radio Philharmonic/ Markus Stenz

CPO 777924—55 minutes

Born in Rotterdam, Jan van Gilse (1881-1944) studied composition at the Cologne Conservatory and returned home to The Netherlands to assume command of the Utrecht City Orchestra and run the Dutch Composer’s Union. His 1904 *Lebensmesse*—which isn’t really a Mass at all—was composed at the tender age of 23. The text of the cantata—a sort of Nietzschean plea for a universal embrace of simplicity and childlike passion—was crafted by the anarchist poet, Richard Dehmel, whose maidens, mothers, fathers, “greybeards”, orphans, and grand hero populate the pages of the libretto. Van Gilse starts the piece off with a 12-minute instrumental *Vorspiel* designed to get the post-romantic juices flowing, and for me that’s where things started to go bad. That overture never came close to getting off the ground.

As the piece began to unfold, I started to find the libretto rather silly, the in-concert recording (May, 2013) colorless and muffled, the multi-lingual booklet difficult to follow, the notes pretentious and not very helpful, and the music short on inspiration. I then watched these exact same folks perform the *Lebensmesse* on youtube for a while and found things just as grim and gray when I could engage them visually.

Regular readers know how excited I tend to get when a piece that’s been lost or ignored gets the royal treatment from its performers and jumps out of the speakers with new-found authority. I also rather like Maestro Stenz, whom I’ve heard a couple of times up the road from me in Baltimore where he guest-conducts these days. Despite all that, I found the release a non-starter in every way.

**GREENFIELD**

**VASKS:** *Piano Quartet*;  
**BRAHMS:** *Piano Quartet 1*  
Et Arsis  
Solo Musica 248—80 minutes

Peteris Vasks’s Piano Quartet begins quietly with minor-key, folk-influenced strings and piano chords. It builds and then ends with a churning dance. II, actually called ‘Dance’, sounds distressed and heavy-footed. The writing is so tonal that the dissonances at the end ring false. In the whole piece, Vasks strives for drama with grim, modal lines and thick bursts of repetition, and all the posturing, banging, and proud snarling come across as vapid.

And maybe I’ve changed. Two decades ago I was bowled over by the raw power of Gorecki’s *Lerchenmusik*, which is even angrier and more repetitious but still close to this quartet in spirit. Now I wonder if I would find that piece empty. Only the ‘Canto Principale’ with its yearning string lines, seems free of artificial, ineffective constraints. It’s the only movement with a soul. Part of the problem is that Et Arsis doesn’t play with enough holy terror.

The Brahms is tasteful and pleasant, but too restrained and smoothed-over. The booklet has nary a word about the music, but it is filled with pictures of the musicians and a laughable lower-case paragraph of incoherent artistic strutting: “read for yourself think for yourself look for yourself play for yourself. no noway. no tempting compromises towards myself. and
least of all in the quartet...no damn compromises. and no noswearinghere." Sic. 

VASKS: Quartets 1, 3, 4
Spikeru Quartet
Wergo 7330—77 minutes

This completes the Spikeru’s traversal of the five Vasks quartets, presented stupidly again in random order (4, 1, 3 this time).

1 was written in 1977, considerably before the liberation of Latvia in 1987 (perestroika); it was then revised in 1997. The first movement opens with aleatoric chaos and pronounced weirdness followed by an energetic, often violent toccata with anguished interruptions. The slow movement is a meditative prayer, and the distressed conclusion ends with fading bird song.

No. 3 (1995) appeared after Latvia’s independence. Christmas generates I, which transcends its intensity with a Latvian dance. The slow movement is still filled with mourning, but Vasks’s trademark birds give birth to a religious chorale. Back to earth, another Latvian dance ends with hysterics before the birds return with a heavenly vision.

4, written for his mother’s 90th birthday in 1999, begins with more birds, thankfulness, and elegiac sorrow. The intense toccata leads to quiet chromatic angst and subdued grief, before the violent toccata reemerges. The final movement is a lengthy cantilena of great beauty.

This set will belong in every serious collection of late century chamber music. This is an outstanding group, but the production decisions are unfortunate.

GIMBEL

VASQUEZ: Songs
Vandalia—Brilliant 95316—48 minutes

Juan Vasquez belonged to the first generation of Spain’s musical Golden Age in the 16th Century. Information on his life is patchy, and we can only estimate his dates as c.1500 to c.1560. But his music circulated widely and he was widely admired in his day. He was unusually fortunate in accomplishing three publications of his music, one sacred, the other two secular.

The secular collections are devoted primarily to the traditional Spanish poetic and vocal form of the villancico, but with some French influence evident, and a considerable absorption of the emerging Italian madrigal’s style. The first of the two secular publications was the Coleccion de Villancicos i Canciones for three or four voices, issued in 1551. It was followed by the Recopilacion de Sonnets y Villancicos for four or five voices, published in 1560. Music from these collections has been sampled on records very sparingly, and I think this Brilliant release is the first one fully devoted to it.

From those two publications, our performers have taken 22 selections. One of them is performed instrumentally, presumably in one of the composer’s own tabulations included in the 1560 volume. Also, without any mention or explanation whatsoever, a final piece, a four-voice one by Vasquez’s younger contemporary, Guerrero, is appended.

The texts, all in Spanish, predominantly deal with the traditional themes of romantic love, mostly unhappy. As a result, the prevailing tone of this program is slow and sombre—and perhaps invites sampling.

The music is very beautiful and definitely worth hearing. It is performed by a group of four singers, plus a harpist, all individually excellent but blended beautifully. My only complaint is that there is plenty of music by Vasquez that could have extend the program. This time Brilliant has done its duty and supplied the texts, with English translations.

In sum, a very worthwhile addition to the discography of Renaissance Spanish music.

BARKER

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: The Solent; Piano Fantasia; 6 Piano Pieces; Lark Ascending
Sina Kloke, p; Jennifer Pike, v; Chamber Orchestra of New York/ Salvatore di Vittorio
Naxos 573 530—63 minutes

Early Vaughan Williams; the program will for most collectors have only one duplication—The Lark Ascending. The Solent is an arm of the English Channel between the island of England itself and the Isle of Wight. The tone picture (1903) centers on a theme he later reused in his Symphonies 1 and 9. First heard on a clarinet, the piece then hands it around to other instruments as it progresses to a climax. After this, it tapers down to silence. It’s a brief, but engaging work, where the composer’s style is already apparent.

The Fantasia (1904) opens on a forthright piano theme, varied till the entry of a strophic hymn tune. Vaughan Williams’s handling of the latter is not at all hymnal, later evolving into a vigorous fugato.
The Six Short Piano Pieces (1920) combine educational intent with creative content. Vaughan Williams’s characteristic writing includes modal themes and harmonies, as well as clear contrapuntal passages. Musical value aside—and it’s entirely pleasing music—it’s a fine primer on composition techniques.

The familiar Lark Ascending uses the composer’s scoring for chamber ensemble. The performances are generally good, though The Solent has balance problems. A good normal ratio of strings to winds is at least two to one. Here, it’s about eight to nine, so the winds are too dominant. Both soloists are good. Sina Kloke in the Fantasia has an authoritative presence that really drives the music, and discriminating finger work. In The Lark, violinist Pike soars above the accompaniment. As the string-wind ratio here favors the strings, the performance is charming. I’m sure many readers have this little masterpiece already. But with the budget price, take a look at the worthy couplers.

O’CONNOR

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Songs & Duets
Mary Bevan, s: Jennifer Johnston, mz; Nicky Spence, t; Johnny Herford, bar; Thomas Gould, v; William Vann, p
Albion 29—67 minutes

Bridal Day: Epithalamion
John Hopkins, narr; Philip Smith, bar; Joyful Company of Singers/ Peter Broadbent; Britten Sinfonia/ Alan Tongue
Albion 25 [2CD] 85 minutes

Albion Records, the label of The Ralph Vaughan Williams Society, has been issuing archival and new recordings of his music. These two releases present solo vocal and choral works.

The single CD ("Purer than Pearl") presents 22 songs and duets, dating from 1891 to 1935 and performed in order of composition. They were recorded in January 2016 by a stellar group of singers, accompanied by piano and, in some cases, also by violin. One delight follows another. Six of the songs are recorded here for the first time.

To begin the program Spence shines brightly in 'Summum Bonum,' a Robert Browning setting and VW’s oldest surviving song, probably from 1891 when the composer was still a teenager and a student at the Royal College of Music in London. It’s in the style of an Edwardian parlor song, and Spence sings it in appropriately enthusiastic style.

His earliest songs will come as a surprise to anyone expecting to hear his more familiar sound. What a hoot to hear Three Rumplestiltskin Songs, which could be mistaken for Gilbert and Sullivan pieces. The most unexpected item is a setting of 'Linden Lea' arranged in 1929 by Sumner Salter for SATB and piano.

Four duets are included. VW turned to Walt Whitman in Two Vocal Duets (1904) and composed vividly different settings, one piece sounding Wagnerian and the other impressionist. They are sung by Bevan and Herford accompanied by piano and violin. Bevan, Gould, and Vann give a gorgeous performance of ‘How the Cold Wind Doth Blow’ (1912), the longest song of the program. Bevan and Johnson are warm and tender in 'Dirge for Fidele.' Spence and Herford join effectively in an inventive setting of ‘It Was a Lover and His Lass’ with its countermelodies, part-crossing, and rhythmic playfulness. Spence and Gould perform two folk songs expressively.

The program concludes with Eight Songs from The Poisoned Kiss, newly arranged for this recording by Adrian Williams. The performances of this rich treasury of vocal gems are consistently excellent.

The 2CD release titled "Fair Child of Beauty" presents two incarnations of a composition. VW composed The Bridal Day: A Masque by Ursula Wood (1939) and nearly 20 years later revised it as Epithalamion: A Cantata (1957). (An epithalamion is a poem composed to celebrate a marriage, specifically for the bride on her way to her marital chamber.) The two works are closely related but significantly different. This is a wonderful opportunity to hear how the composer reworked his composition.

The young poet, Ursula Wood, who was to become the composer’s wife in 1953, wrote the text of the masque based on Edmund Spencer’s ode Epithalamion written for his own marriage in 1594. After an inauspicious first performance in 1953, VW concluded that the masque should be reworked as a choral piece with all 11 scenes to include chorus rather than only six choral scenes.

As a masque The Bridal Day includes parts for dancers, mimes, baritone soloist, chorus, and a speaker. It is scored for two violins, viola, cello, double bass, flute, piccolo, and piano. Instrumental music accompanies stage action, and some of the text is spoken. Epithalamion is written for baritone soloist, larger chorus, and a full complement of strings; it is about 15...
minutes shorter but retains the most dramatic music.

Both works are full of the emotional intensity that characterize VW’s music. On the one hand, the masque is a more engaging work with its greater variety—spoken text, purely instrumental sections, and chamber music scoring. On the other hand, the more sumptuous cantata is an almost continuous surge of lush and rhapsodic sound that washes over you in a torrent.

The performances are excellent. Philip Smith is a warm and winsome soloist. Alan Tongue leads both the reduced and fuller choral and instrumental forces admirably. John Hopkins offers sensitive and graceful narration.

This music is less well known, especially The Bridal Day, which has been rescued from obscurity with this recording, which appears to be the only one available. What a wonderful opportunity to hear both versions. The total time of the two is just a little too long for one disc. (The 2-disc set sells for the price of one. Shop around and you can find a good price.)

With these two releases Albion is again performing a great service to lovers of VW’s music. The excellent notes for both releases add significantly to a fuller understanding of VW’s vocal compositions. Texts are included.

R MOORE

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Tallis Fantasy; see BRITTEN

VILLA-LOBOS: Prole do Bebe I-II; BARBER: Piano Sonata
Katrina Krimsky
NorthSouth 1062—64 minutes

I invite scholars of Terry Riley’s In C to help me solve a mystery about the pianist Katrina Krimsky, who performs beautifully in this badly engineered program of Villa-Lobos’s Prole do Bebe (The Baby’s Family) and Barber’s only piano sonata. The bio in the liner notes reports that, after studying at Eastman, she joined the faculty of SUNY Buffalo, where she earned acclaim as “The Pulse” in Riley’s In C at Carnegie Hall and in the later CBS recording. But I have that recording; Margaret Hassell is credited for the part.

Krimsky has had a long and distinguished career spanning both classical and jazz idioms. The two recordings here date from 1975 (Barber) and 1982 (Villa-Lobos). In both, the piano (a Steinway D) sounds slightly out of tune and appears to have been recorded (by recording engineers Dane Butcher and Bob Shumaker) by placing the microphones inside the instrument and about a half-inch above the strings near middle C. As a result, the piano sounds like a vintage Yamaha baby grand with a few very sour-sounding bass notes recorded in a very small practice room.

What a pity! The playing is technically assured and the interpretations very fine. I particularly like the first movement of the Barber, which captures the music’s angularity and cruelty better than almost any performance I know.

HASKINS

VIVALDI: 6 Cello Sonatas
L’Arte dell’Arco
Brilliant 95346 — 73 minutes

Here is an original approach to these well-known sonatas. Whether you like it or not depends on your sense of taste and smell. I will attempt to describe what you will hear.

Sonata 1 in B-flat, R47 begins with a couple of bars of basso continuo that are not in the music as published. All of these sonatas are made up of four movements, each of which consists of two repeated sections. Cellist Francesco Galligioni and his cohorts, Paolo Zuccheri on violone, Ivano Zanenghi, lute, Roberto Lorteggian, harpsichord or chamber organ and organist Francesco Baroni have a style that ranges from early music purity to 21st Century drama, which shows up particularly on the repeats, the second of which is omitted in the first movement of Sonata 1 and 5. They take any excuse to come to a halt for dramatic purposes; that gets to be rather predictable as we proceed.

The famous A minor sonata is given another improvised introduction. Sonata 4, R45, revises the bass line in III so the soloist doesn’t have to play the downbeats all by himself as Vivaldi intended. There is also a bit of deliberately scratchy playing on Galligioni’s part. Sonata 5 in E minor, R40, raises the bass line by an octave sometimes in the first movement. Sonata 6, R46, has no repeats written in the opening slow movement, and III is made up of a single repeated section that these players don’t take.

As you see, these readings are full of oddities, but they are also full of drama and warmth. I still enjoy the two discs made by Christophe Coin with Christopher Hogwood (Oiseau-Lyre 421060 & 433052) and it might
further interest you to look at the Cello Overview in March/April 2009. I wouldn’t want the present reading as my only example of these sonatas, though it has individuality.

**D MOORE**

**Vivaldi: Recorder Concertos**

Lucie Horsch; Amsterdam Vivaldi Players

Decca 4830896—53 minutes

The gentle sound of modern instruments (with gut strings) presents this music with none of the rough edges cultivated by the period instrument groups. There is harpsichord and *chitarrone* here, but not enough to sting or smart. Instead, it’s the beauty created by 17-year-old Lucie Horsch that we see in the booklet and hear. The pitch is A=440, which apparently was the standard in Vivaldi’s Venice.

Two concertos from the Op. 10 set and a couple of transcriptions make for a varied program that differs enough from other recordings of recorder works not to duplicate them. Check recent back issues for other companions to add this to (particularly M/A & J/A 2016).

I’m pleased to add that our soloist is not an orphan with no known parents who hopes to enter respectable society, but the daughter of two cellists, one of whom plays here. Aside from violin prodigies there are relatively few opportunities to hear Vivaldi performed by girls of about the same age as his works were written for.

**GORMAN**

**Wagner: Die Walkure Act I**

Rene Kollo (Sieg mund); Eve-Maria Bundschuh (Sieglinde); John Tomlinson (Hunding); London Philharmonic/ Klaus Tennstedt

LPO 92—70 minutes

Tennstedt was not a regular opera conductor, which is a pity since he certainly knows his way around this music. The opening storm is brutally powerful. The melodic lines as Siegmund and Sieglinde size each other up are sweet and longing. The tension when Siegmund waits alone to be slaughtered and thinks of the promised sword is beautifully built. The love music shimmers, glows, and blazes. He gets committed and rich-sounding playing from the LPO.

The best of the singers is Tomlinson. His voice is dark and menacing and there’s little doubt that he is looking forward to chopping Siegmund to pieces. Kollo sounds light-voiced as Siegmund. He was a pro and knew exactly how far he could go with his voice, but there isn’t the power and energy of the best Siegmunds. The lyric parts of the role suit him more. Bundschuh is a pretty ordinary Sieglinde.

The sound is acceptable.

If you want a glimpse of Tennstedt in opera, this is for you. If you want major voices at their best in this music, look elsewhere: Karajan’s *Walkure* has Vickers, Janowitz, and Talvela; Solti’s has King, Crespin, and Frick; the historic Bruno Walter has Melchior, Lehmann, and List.

**CHAKWIN**

**Weber: Overtures (7)**

Dresden Staatskapelle/ Gustav Kuhn

Capriccio 8009—53 minutes

Just a few months ago I was reviewing all but one of the Weber overtures (N/D 2016); the missing score was *Waldmädchen*, which is being "withheld" by the Mariinsky Theater in St Petersburg. Nonetheless Howard Griffiths and the Cologne WDR Symphony did an exciting job with Weber—exuberant and crisp.

On this disc we have only seven overtures, skipping Peter Schmoll, Silvana and *Turandot*, the last a Schiller play for which Weber wrote incidental music. The short playing time of 53 minutes should suggest that this program was planned for LP, and indeed the recording date is 1985. Compared to the Griffiths disc, where I said everything felt fast and perhaps a little unkempt, Kuhn lets the music unfold at what feels like the right tempo. In fact every single piece is slower under Kuhn than with Griffiths, and so the music has more majesty. This quality is perhaps most apparent in the big three (*Freischütz*, *Euryanthe* and *Oberon*), which are all nicely done. Both of these recordings are very fine, but I would take Griffiths for the added pieces, the added excitement, and the very extensive notes, which go on for several pages and give a fine summary of Weber’s stage works.

**ALTHOUSE**

Of all modern phenomena, the most monstrous and ominous, the most manifestly rotting with disease, the most grimly prophetic of destruction, the most clearly and unmistakably inspired by evil spirits, the most instantly and awfully overshadowed by the wrath of heaven, the most near to madness and moral chaos, the most vivid with devilry and despair, is the practice of having to listen to loud music while eating a meal in a restaurant.

G. K. Chesterton
WEILL: The Road of Promise
Anthony Dean Griffey (Rabbi), Eli Tokash (Boy), Ron Rifkin (The Adversary), Mark Delavan (Abraham, Moses), AJ Glueckert (Jacob, Boaz, David, Isaiah, Hananiah), Lauren Michelle (Rachel, Soul of Moses, Naomi), Megan Marino (Miriam, Ruth); St Luke's/ Ted Sperling
Navona 6059 [2CD] 111 minutes

The Road of Promise is a re-construction and conflation of Kurt Weill's and Franz Werfel's ambitious stage production of The Eternal Road. The show is a re-telling of Old Testament stories by a Rabbi to a group of Jews gathered in a synagogue on a night of fearful waiting during the "timeless night of Israel's persecution". As the Rabbi tells the stories, they are commented on by The Adversary and The 13-Year-Old Boy, who questions the Rabbi stories. The Adversary challenges the unquestioning faith posed by the troublesome moments in the Bible stories. The Boy is the innocent "Dreamer" of what the future will bring. As the stories are told, various Bible characters are played by other cast members.

Originally written in 1934 as a response to growing Nazi antisemitism, it was planned as a gigantic stage production that involved direction by Max Reinhard and a libretto by Franz Werfel, of The Song of Bernadette fame. Reinhard selected Kurt Weill for the music, as he was well known for his scores for The Threepenny Opera and The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny. The resulting show, titled Der Weg der Verheissung, was never produced in Germany, and most of the creators fled to the United States. An abridged version, The Eternal Road, premiered in 1937 in New York with more limited resources and was not a success. It was almost forgotten until the original German version was revived in Chemnitz, Germany in 1999.

The Road of Promise is a new concert version, abridged by Ed Harsh (who wrote the booklet notes), which premiered at Carnegie Hall where this performance was recorded on May 6 and 7, 2015. It was reported by many music critics, who had varying opinions of the reduced concert staging. In abridging the work, Harsh changed some of the emphasis of the Bible stories to reduce Werfel's inflammatory comments on the causes for the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. After listening to this recording, I found the results pretentious and the music, narrative, and performances exasperating.

The show is part opera, musical drama, straight drama, and spoken narration. Well’s music in the late 1930s was moving from his abstract German theater works to his lyrical Broadway style. This is an uncomfortable mix of styles. Some of the music has Hebraic and other folk sounds, but most of it sounds like an experimental version of Well's 1947 Broadway show Street Scene. One beautiful song titled 'Ruth the Moabite' sounds very similar to Mrs Murrantt's doleful song. 'Sometimes I never could believe' from Act 1 of Street Scene. Werfel's (and Harsh's) play is full of modern language interspersed with Biblical quotes spoken with Great Importance. These may have been well-intentioned, but the heavy-handed delivery is stilted.

The most troubling aspect of the show is the performance. The orchestra makes some entry errors and flubs some notes. The chorus is very good, but has similar problems. The male singers are a bigger problem. Anthony Dean Griffey, Mark Delavan, and AJ Glueckert have annoying wobbles in their voices that are difficult to listen to. The women are better, but also have some vocal problems. Ron Rifkin as The Adversary is a speaking part, and he is convincing as the naysayer to the Rabbi's stories. Eli Tokash as Boy (another speaking part) is wholly unconvincing. He speaks his lines too forcefully, over-emphasizing what he is saying.

It is a noble venture to resurrect a show that was a problem from its beginnings. The problems remain, and this concert version is disappointing. As this was a limited run, some errors could be forgiven as insufficient rehearsal. Unfortunately, the selection of singers and performance direction hamper the results.

The English-only booklet has a good explanation of the show's history along with performer biographies, but there is no libretto. The sound is good, but some of the English lyrics are difficult to understand. If you're interested in Well's transitional period you might find this interesting. I would listen to Street Scene, a more fully developed work, anytime. I would be hard-pressed to listen to The Road of Promise again.

Experience isn't everything. Intelligence is far more useful in almost any area. Intelligence prepares you for the new and the unknown, but experience alone cannot see beyond the old and the known. Experience often makes people timid.
WILDE: Cry, Bosnia-Herzegovina; Quartet 1; Trio
Red Note Ensemble
Delphian 34179 [2CD] 84 minutes

David Wilde is a composer and (widely record-
ed and much praised) pianist born in England
in 1935 who now makes his home in Scotland.
In the 1990s he went to besieged Sarajevo to
show his solidarity with the city and its cultur-
al life, making many friends there in the musi-
cal community. Two of the three chamber
pieces on this new Delphian release, both of
them written in 1993—the First String Quartet
and Cry, Bosnia-Herzegovina for cello and
piano—draw on his traumatic experience in
Bosnia as an appalled witness to the horrors of
the Balkan Wars. Cry and the Quartet’s final
movement carry an intense and sometimes
raw emotional charge as a result.

Wilde’s 1988 Piano Trio preceded the
Bosnia tragedy but also has its share of drama
and turmoil, especially in the climactic final
movement, suggesting that the composer’s
affinity for expressing intense (often an-
guished) emotion is an important element of
his musical sensibility.

All three works are full-length structures in
a modern (but not modernist) idiom that
adopts a free version of extended tonality and,
for the most part, avoids reliance on avant-
gearde fragmentation or special effects. Little if
anything here would trouble Shostakovich or
Karl Amadeus Hartmann or Allan Pettersson—
or such contemporary “post-romantics” as
Henryk Gorecki, Peteris Vasks, or Lera Auer-
bach. All these would approve of and indeed
share Wilde’s need to pour out defiant protest
against and grief for the terrible crimes against
the innocent victims of social upheaval and
war that, alas, never seem to end.

Wilde builds his pieces from sharply con-
trasted movements with vivid descriptors that
suggest their emotional character. His piano
trio is a big, powerful, widely varied and
impressive work in four movements marked
allegro tempestuoso, lento nocturne, vivace
scherzo with “trio fantastico”, and allegro
vivace in waltz tempo. It’s packed with arrest-
ing and imaginative ideas from beginning to
end, and its dramatic urgency pulls the listen-
er through as the intensity increases from the
opening two movements to the skittery bril-
liance of the scherzo and the elaborate strug-
gles of the finale.

Quartet 1 is also four movements that last
even longer. Its expansive I (nearly a quarter-
hour) opens with a slow, soaring first theme
that positively radiates an ardent longing for
release from torment. Faster but more relaxed
sections offer some relief, but the emotional
temperature remains high for most of this
remarkably sustained structure. II, a haunting-
ly beautiful andante, now tormented and
protesting, now sere and spectral, is only five
minutes long but carries much more force
than that suggests. III is a rhythmically off-beat
and quicksilver scherzo that explores cunning,
delicate, intricate interplay among the
four strings, sometimes veering off into half-
sinister grotesquerie. The ten-minute final
‘Threnody for the unknown civilian victims of
war and oppression’ is a dark, somber, deeply-
felt memorial that attains a searing urgency as
it sends out pleading melodic phrases that rise
up in the heavens. “Why?” and “How Long?”
they seem to ask in their desperation and
agony. The only answer comes at the quartet’s
closing moments: softly dissonant murmurs
that register the faint light of long-dead
stars. This is, in sum, a majestic and unfor-
gettable creation that grows in stature and power
each time I’ve listened to it, and now looms as
a newly-discovered masterpiece.

Cry, Bosnia-Herzegovina, for cello and
piano, is quite different in that the entire work
is an extended sequence of mourning and
deeply fixated on its burden of sorrows. It
begins with a barrage of brutal stabs in cello
and piano and then crude renderings of the
Dies Irae. All is despair and lament in this 20-
minute protest against the murder of inno-
cents, with sections titled ‘Dance of Death’,
‘Death Knell’, ‘Notturno Desolato’, and
‘Lament—The Cellist of Sarajevo’, this last for
unaccompanied cello. Though any decent
human being will be sympathetic to Wilde’s
intentions, some may wonder if Cry isn’t too
obsessive and extended. Does it need to be
this explicit, this prolonged, this punishing? I
won’t try to answer this except to say that for
me, at least, it’s Wilde’s piano trio and espe-
cially his magnificent quartet that will bring
me back with grateful admiration to this
release.

The Red Note Ensemble players render
Wilde’s music (as they do also with Eddie
McGuire’s music, reviewed in this issue too),
with exemplary tonal beauty, fierce concentra-
tion, and perfectly judged expressive purpose,
and are recorded in Delphian’s vivid, pristine,
full-throated sound.

LEHMAN

American Record Guide 183
Joseph Woelfl (1773-1812) was born in Salzburg and well acquainted with Mozart's family. He made his career as pianist, teacher, and composer in Poland and Germany and eventually settled in London, where he was highly regarded and under contract with Salomon, the promoter of Haydn's late symphonies. He left over 600 compositions.

The informative biographical essay in this release's booklet is by Margit Haider-Dechant, President of the International Woelfl Society. In a second essay the pianist, Mr Riva, relates how he discovered Woelfl’s music and how much he esteems it. He finds the first work on the program, a Sonata in C minor preceded by an Introduction and Fugue, "outstanding, in terms of both its craftsmanship and the quality of the invention". He points out Clementi’s general influence and believes the slow movements "foreshadow those of Schubert and Mendelssohn". He praises Woelfl’s style as "original and individual".

Alas, I hear nothing of that sort. This disc has little that strikes me as inventive or original. The thematic material is trite, the harmonies are conventional, the rhythms are not interesting, and the overall impression is unrelieved dullness. This music is inferior to such contemporaries as Clementi, Hummel, and Weber, not to mention the great masters, and if it foreshadows anything it is the next generation of justly forgotten composers.

Sometimes music of little merit is infused with life by thrilling performances. That is not the case here. Mr Riva’s playing is as boring as the music. The only expressive device he seems to have at his disposal is the delaying of selected melody notes, which soon sounds mannered and often leads to rhythmic unsteadiness.

And this is only Volume 1? There is more to come? I shudder. This is strictly for members of the International Woelfl Society.

**WOELFL: Piano Pieces 1**

Adalberto Maria Riva
Toccata 383—73 minutes

Although considered Wolf-Ferrari’s masterpiece, *I Gioielli* is an opera more talked about than heard. This is its first studio recording. At its 1911 premiere in Berlin *I Gioielli* was a singular success, the greatest in the composer’s lengthy career. A whirlwind tour through Europe lasted only three years. Then the opera dropped out of sight until its Italian premiere in 1953 with only a handful of performances until its May 2015 revival by the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava. That’s according to the program notes. But in 1927 Cincinnati Opera staged three performances.

*I Gioielli* is often referred to as verismo. It’s not the typical verismo opera (like *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci*) but more an extension and embellishment of verismo. To Italian lyricism Wolf-Ferrari added Italian folk percussion instruments (the *triccheballacche* and *putipu* made especially for this recording using pictures), the richness of German orchestration and complexity. The extensive chaos of a Neapolitan festival opening Act 1 is actually a carefully crafted series of miniscenes. Three lovely orchestral excerpts (two intermezzos and the ‘Dance of the Camoristi’) have long hovered around the edges of the classical pops repertory. The length and high tessitura of the two leading roles (Maliella and Raffele) are enough to discourage any singer.

With no less than 42 roles, many of them quite minor, casting is a daunting task. With Italian singers unwilling or unable to take on the opera, Slovak Radio has cast mainly Slovaks. Ckopovic charges madly through Raffele’s music and histrionics. He rages and weeps, he screams (on pitch, of course) and laughs with energy and strength. Ushakova has the voice, stamina, and instinct for Maliella, but she is hard pressed in extended and-highly notes, and her screamed laughter takes a lot to get past. Kim sings with genuine Italianate ego and drama. The immense cast is very good, soloists and chorus. The orchestra plays better than most Italian opera orchestras.

There is no libretto with the recording, and Naxos does not indicate that one is available on their website.

**WOLF-FERRARI: Jewels of the Madonna**

Kyungho Kim (Gennaro), Natalia Ushakova (Maliella), Susanne Bernhard (Carmela), Daniel Ckopovic (Raffele); Slovak Radio/ Friedrich Haider

Naxos 660 386 [2CD] 122 minutes

Liberalism...means a generosity of spirit, a tolerance of others, a high ideal of the worth and dignity of man, a repugnance for authoritarianism, and a love of freedom.

New York Times

March/April 2017
WUORINEN: Symphony 8; Piano Concerto 4  
Peter Serkin; Boston Symphony/ James Levine  
Bridge 9474——60 minutes

Two recent works by 75-year-old modernist Charles Wuorinen, a designation it’s hard for me to fathom, being an old fuddy-duddy myself (I can barely believe that either). Levine commissioned a number of American modernists at the close of the century (Babbitt, Carter, et al.) and Wuorinen, the naddest of bad boys in the 60s, was (is) among them.

Nowadays, this style has pretty much run its course, as we know, so this will serve as a reminder of where we’ve come from. Peter Serkin was a prominent champion of Modern Music (as was, to a lesser extent, his father). Wuorinen’s Piano Concerto 4 (2003) is in the traditional three-movement design (extended dramatic first movement, scherzo, initially jocular finale) but masking its classicism in modernist intent of these pieces, which appear to be a stream of consciousness. The work opens jovially, but is interrupted by blasts, the last one really huge. It ends in resignation.

The Requiem is a veritable feast of classical style. With its heavy emphasis on solo singing and playing, the work as a whole bears a concertante texture. Tomas Slavicky notes that each stanza of the ‘Dies Irae’ bears a distinct style characteristic of the classical period: recitative and aria, sturm-und-drang-style tremolos, duet, fugue, etc. Zach also shows a flair for the dramatic, using the solo horn to accompany the bass (Jaromir Nosek) who sings ‘Tuba mirum spargens sonum per sepulcrum’, much as Mozart uses trombone. Beautiful suspensions in the ‘Agnus Dei’ seem to evoke the anguish of Christ’s sacrifice.

The Vespers in D, recorded here for the first time, bears a similar style, though the work as a whole seems more striking for the many coloratura passages. For example, the tenor Cenek Svoboda’s passage work in ‘Laeta-crus’ is awe-inspiring. Texts and notes are in English.

ZACH: Solemn Requiem; Vespers  
Musica Florea/ Marek Stryncl  
Supraphon 4209——58 minutes

Jan Zach (1713-73) was one of the many “Czech music exiles” who fled unrest in Prague for better opportunities in Western Europe. Zach had worked in Prague as an organist and composer until the early 1740s. He took up the post of Kapellmeister at the court of the Prince-Elector of Mainz in 1745. The Requiem Solemne and Vesperae de Beata Virgine were composed during his time in Prague. His style seems rather progressive for its time. In fact, Zach’s taste for dissonant harmonies and chromatic melodies bears striking resemblance to Mozart’s writing.

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ZADOR: Biblical Triptych; Rhapsody; Fugue Fantasy; Christmas Overture  
Budapest Symphony/ Mariusz Smolij  
Naxos 573529——67 minutes

Eugene Zador was a Hungarian composer who lived from 1894 to 1977. He was an orchestrator for Miklós Rosza and wrote a few film scores of his own. We’ve covered two volumes of his music in recent years (Naxos 572548, Sept/Oct 2012, & 572549, July/Aug 2013). Roger Hecht recommended the 2012 release to “anyone interested in American music with a foreign touch,” but I couldn’t recommend the 2013 album. The pieces were attractive but had no staying power. They were so forgettable that Zador’s name didn’t even ring a bell when this release landed in my lap.
This album is even less interesting. The half-hour triptych—portraits of Joseph, David, and Paul—is somber enough, but Zador falls far short of conveying majesty or spiritual depth. The Rhapsody has hints of Bartok, but it spends too much time on unimportant themes and undramatic poses, and it becomes tedious before it’s half finished. About 16 minutes in, there’s a passage stolen from Holst’s ‘Jupiter’ with one or two note values changed. The Fugue Fantasia is also dull.

ZEMLINSKY: Quartet; KREISLER: Quartet; SCHULHOF: Quartet

Artis Quartet—Nimbus 5942—64 minutes

In a world torn by one refugee crisis and one racist regime after another, this album of unfamiliar quartets by Viennese masters torn from their homeland is well timed. Zemlinsky and Kreisler made it to America, where they continued their careers (Kreisler with great success), but Schulhoff died in a concentration camp. The Zemlinsky piece, an early work from 1893, is redolent of Old Vienna. The Kreisler, from 1919, looks backward to a lost world. Schulhoff’s quirkiest, spikier piece looks bravely forward.

There is thus both unity and variety in this program. The Zemlinsky is the composer’s early style, with hints of Brahms and Dvorak complicated by Wagnerian harmonies and capped by a rousing, sunny finale. Kreisler’s work, one of his most ambitious, is nostalgic and full of yearning, similar in sensibility to the first quartet of his émigré colleague, Eric Korngold. A complex but tender love song to a lost Vienna, it deserves more performances. Three of the four movements present memorable chromatic ideas in classical structures, then vanish in a quiet shower of pizzicato notes. The Artis Quartet brings out the wistful colors in the more lyrical moments and goes for broke in the skittery scherzo.

My favorite is the Schulhoff, which inhabits a different, more modern world. Boldly original, it is international in its references, with motifs from Austria, Czechoslovakia, America, and Italy. It is tight, witty, and concise, unlike the velvet contours of Zemlinsky and Kreisler. It also has a sense of fun that makes its harmonic and melodic experiments easy to absorb. I’ve covered a number of Schulhoff’s works for ARG, and once again I find myself charmed by his zany creativity and unpredictability.

The first movement is a distorted Viennese waltz, II a grotesque serenade, III a wild syncopated dance, IV a seductive tango with all sorts of subtle slides and bluesy gestures, ending with a haunting jazz chord. The finale is an Italian tarantella, brilliant and exciting, which the Artis players push to the edge of chaos.

The sound from Nimbus is clear, close-up, and intimate; one can hear the quietest rumbles and pluckings. This release shows that there was more to early 20th Century Viennese music than the atonal experiments of the New Viennese School. These composers (Krenek is another) were too idiosyncratic to be part of any “school”; each had an individual stamp and wrote music that survived fads and political oppression. Fortunately (see Krenek in this issue) their lesser-known works are getting a second hearing on CD.

SULLIVAN

ZEMLINSKY: Quintet; see BRUCKNER Songs; see KRENEK

Meet the Critic: Robert Delcamp

was born and grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, where his classical music education was nurtured by attending Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra concerts every Saturday night during the years of Max Rudolph’s reign. As a high school student he was an avid bassoonist but, eventually took-up the organ as he realized he would never be able to make a functional bassoon reed. He earned his Bachelor and Master of Music degrees in organ performance at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, studying with the legendary Wayne Fisher, and a DMus from Northwestern University. He taught for 38 years as Professor of Music and University Organist and Choirmaster at The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. Under his direction the University Choir made ten recordings and undertook 12 tours of England, singing the service of Choral Evensong in over 25 cathedrals and abbey churches. He has played organ recitals throughout the US and Europe, and made six solo CDs for Naxos (all reviewed in ARG!). He and his wife Susan are avid bibliophiles and enjoy living with their cats.
I Solisti Aquilani is a 4-4-3-2-1 string ensemble founded in 1968 in Aquila, the capital of Abruzzo in Italy. Daniele Orlando is its concertmaster. The conductor, who's probably in his 50s, works mainly with second-tier ensembles, judging from his resume and this album.

The damning element here is tempo in all four works. Scogna invariably takes movements from 7 to 38 beats a minute slower than marked. Bartok’s II is marked 88 (he takes it at 50), and in III he actually slows down for the fugue, despite the tempo marking. (Bartok asks that his Divertimento be played with a minimum of 6-6-4-4-2.) The Hindemith usually takes 7 minutes; his is an in terminable 10+

Two rarely recorded works are the only interest here. The 19-minute three-movement Violin Concerto (1947) by Giorgio Federico Ghedini (1892-1965) is subtitled Il Belprato (Beautiful Meadow). The liner notes say I is 12-tone—really, Uncle Bugs? The entire work is easy listening, always with a rhythm or melody line as an anchor, though the engineering that masks the soloist in I and III and the orchestra's slight sour tone don't make it pleasant listening. Rota's 17-minute four-movement Concerto for Strings is definitely “light classics”—not contrapuntal at all. But it needs more zip than it gets here. Scogna apparently thinks that sostenuto means ritard.

In the Bartok Georg Solti and the Chicago Symphony on Decca offer superb Hungarian style and high energy (a bit too much in I and II). In the Hindemith violist Antoine Tamesit, Paavo Jarvi, and the Frankfurt Radio Symphony on Naive can’t be beat.

An aside: I recently listened to Bernard Herrmann’s complete music for Psycho, and both the Bartok and Rota have sections that sound like precursors.
modernism or serialism. It would take a more acute ear than mine to pin each work to its country just by listening.

We need much more of this kind of thing to help us to get to know the (Latin) American music of the last hundred years. Thank you, Harmonia Mundi.

T MOORE

Concertos for Orchestra
CURRIER: Flex; ESCAICH: Psalmos; TIAN: Concerto for Orchestra
Cincinnati Symphony/ Louis Langree
Fanfare 10 [2CD] 96 minutes

In 2015, French maestro Louis Langree, Music Director of the Cincinnati Symphony, proposed a commission of three symphonic showpieces by three present-day composers to place a spotlight on the CSO and to expand a 20th Century genre explored by Bela Bartok and Witold Lutoslawski, among others: the concerto for orchestra. The outcome was a set of vibrant and highly ambitious works that make substantial contributions to the contemporary repertoire, each one requiring a large wind and percussion section and each one a satisfying half to an orchestral program.

Princeton composer Sebastian Currier (b. 1959) contributes his postmodernist Flex (35 minutes) in six movements; French composer and organist Thierry Escaich (b. 1965) offers Psalmos (27 minutes), a “Sinfonia Concertante for Orchestra” that recasts chorales from the German Lutheran tradition in a modern Gallic orchestral palette; and Chinese composer Zhou Tian (b. 1981), a faculty member at Michigan State University, writes “a love letter to the symphony” in his neo-romantic Concerto for Orchestra (34 minutes). Each work appears in concert, the Currier from November 2015 and the Escaich and the Tian from May 2016.

The release is a landmark project, a trio of intense, stirring, and powerful performances at the highest professional level, and a compelling argument that the orchestra is still a crucial part of modern culture, even in an age where art music faces an uncertain future. Each “concerto” uses the full potential of the ensemble and takes the listener on a riveting journey full of alluring color and strong emotions, ranging from quiet, affecting chamber-like passages to sudden and rousing symphonic climaxes.

The Tian has immediate appeal with its beautiful themes, opulent scoring, lush harmonies, expressive dissonances, majestic statements, symphonic fireworks, individual adaptation of traditional structure, and skillful integration of Asian elements. The Currier dives right away into an eccentric neo-classical soundscape, but keen listeners will be engrossed in the composer’s tight motivic economy, deep meditative passages, creative solo writing, and relentless surprises, especially in the frantic and sassy finish. The Escaich is an imaginative fusion of the old and the new, a thrilling kaleidoscope of European music over three centuries presented in alternating tableaux that are consonant, dissonant, emotional, atmospheric, quirky, and even violent.

Meanwhile, the Cincinnati Symphony continues its reputation as one of the best music organizations in the United States. The playing, recording production, liner notes, and presentation are all top-notch.

HANIJDEL

American Piano Quartets
Tsontakis, Schoenfield, Hoiby, Piston
Amara Quartet
Fleur De Son 58035—66 minutes

These piano quartets from the 20th and 21st centuries are played with striking intensity by the Amara Piano Quartet, the successor to the Ames Piano Quartet. They are all world-premiere recordings, so this is a double debut.

The oldest piece, Walter Piston’s 1944 quartet, is well made but brittle, dour, and a bit alienating, until the Vivo finale brings a welcome burst of vitality. Paul Schoenfield’s dense, Ivesian exercise in polytonal folklore begins with a dark version of an old tune, increasingly lively and swingy as the song becomes more recognizable, with a decisive major-key ending. Hoiby’s quartet from 2000 is a more straightforward setting of a folk song. His longest single-movement work, it is nonetheless an exercise in monothematic invention. It opens with dusky cello colors, continues with a melancholy lyricism that is a Hoiby trademark, and becomes increasingly turbulent, rising to a passionate climax before settling into silence.

My favorite piece is the most recent, the 2005 Third Quartet by George Tsontakis, composer-in-residence at Bard. It begins with an eloquent choral movement with yearning string lines and rolling figures from the piano. II, a scintillating bit of neo-impressionism called ‘Legato-Liquid,’ sounds like chimes. The trio, called ‘improvisation,’ puts each instrument slightly out of sync with the other, an effect used in jazz. The lively finale begins with

March/April 2017
Bartokian folk dance elements before bringing back the pensive opening of the quartet—a haunting and satisfying way to end, though there is little sense of closure. Here the piano crunches and disrupts rather than caresses. If Tsontakis’s quartet doesn’t break new ground, it nonetheless presents strong ideas and accomplishes exactly what it intends to in each movement, succinctly and expressively. I wish more contemporary pieces did.

**SULLIVAN**

**Simple Gifts**

**COPLAND:** Appalachian Spring; **GOTTSHALK:** The Union; **DVORAK:** Sonatina; **BARBER:** Souvenirs; **O’CONNOR:** FC’s Jig; **FOSTER:** The Social Orchestra

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

CMS—77 minutes (800-531-4727 or 212-875-5788)

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center’s concert at Shaker Village in Pleasant Hill, Kentucky was recorded in May 2015. It is the first performance of Copland’s ballet score, which so prominently includes the Shaker melody ‘Simple Gifts,’ in the heart of a Shaker village. It was broadcast on PBS in September 2016 (also available on DVD). 14 musicians and a crew of 15 set up a makeshift stage in a converted tobacco barn and played to an overflowing audience in the heart of rural America. The program is 100% American, Dvorak’s Sonatina having been written in New York.

Much of the recent success of CMS is due to the efforts and musical abilities of co-artistic directors David Finckel and Wu Han. Cellist and pianist, husband and wife, they are involved in every aspect of this venerable organization, now approaching its 50th anniversary. CMS performs more than 80 concerts outside of New York each year. The Shaker Village concert is a perfect example of the kind of innovation this couple has brought to CMS, and they are also performers here.

Gilles Vonsattel starts things off with a bang-up bravura performance of ‘The Union’ by Gottschalk (1862). Here is America’s equivalent of Liszt putting together ‘Hail Columbia,’ ‘Yankee Doodle,’ and ‘The Star-Spangled Banner,’ dressed in appropriate pianistic fireworks. Even though it is called a Sonatina, Dvorak’s work is 20 minutes long in four movements. Arnoud Sussmann and Wu Han collaborate in a very engaging performance. The two pianists perform together in Samuel Barber’s ever popular Souvenirs. Sussmann and violist Paul Neubauer let their hair down in Mark O’Con-

**American Record Guide**

nor’s ‘FC’s Jig,’ good old American fiddle playing.

The original Appalachian Spring ballet (1944) was for 13 musicians (double string quartet, bass, flute, clarinet, bassoon, and piano). It was followed the next year by a Suite for full orchestra. In 1954, the entire ballet was done for full orchestra, and finally the 1945 Suite was arranged for the original chamber ensemble in 1972. The ensemble here (without a conductor, and in a work with complicated rhythms) is truly extraordinary.

Flutist Tara Helen O’Connor arranged three selections from Stephen Foster’s Social Orchestra—two quadrilles and a schottisch—for the Appalachian Spring ensemble plus a second pianist. These lightweight, charming yet energetic numbers finish off an excellent program.

Recorded sound is unquestionably the best that has ever been done in a converted tobacco barn and better than many in concert recordings. The audience noise is virtually non-existent, and the enthusiastic applause is kept to a minimum. Booklet notes are also significantly above average. I recommend this with absolutely no reservations.

**HARRINGTON**

**Quartetto Italiano**

**MOZART:** Quartet 15; **DVORAK:** Quartet 12; **RAVEL** La Quarte

Ermitage 1017—77 minutes

If you don’t know this quartet, get this and be amazed. Unlike most quartets, they never make an ugly sound—everything is beautiful. And they never skim their way thru the music, as almost everyone else does (especially in Mozart). Always they are thoughtful, in overall shape as well as in details. Listen to this and you will agree with me, I’m sure, that this is silky, refined playing of a sort that is seldom heard these days.

I have five or six other recordings of the Dvorak, and I like each one for something: but I like this for everything. You know by now that slow movements matter a lot to me. In this slow movement only the Janacek Quartet comes close (Decca).

I had no other recordings of the Ravel quartet; it is not a work I ever cared for. But it sounds better here than I remember it. These people add a charm to any music that improves it. Still, I wish they had reissued something else!

These are reissues, and one wishes they had reissued whole groups—for example, all
their Mozart, which is in a class by itself. (Most of their Beethoven is, too.) But the sound—some of it dating back to 1968—is excellent, and if you don’t know this group you will likely be sold right away—and determined to find more of their gorgeous, lyrical recordings.

VROON

American Moments
Korngold, Foote, Bernstein
Neave Trio
Chandos 10924—68:34

The Korngold was written when he was 12 years old (1909). It’s a super-romantic piece and quite amazing for a mere child. We have reviewed a number of recordings of it, and I owned one on Delos. There was nothing wrong with that one, but this is even grander, and the Delos coupled the Korngold with the Ives Trio, which I really dislike (except when it quotes ‘Rock of Ages’ in the last two minutes). So I will put this excellent performance in its place. It takes 30 minutes.

Trio 2 by the American composer Arthur Foote is an ideal companion piece, and it has not been recorded much. There is a Naxos, reviewed glowingly by Gil French (559039, Nov/Dec 2000). The music is better than the Korngold—he was a more mature composer—but it is of the same genre and was written at the same time. It takes 21 minutes.

The Bernstein trio (16 minutes) is from his student days at Harvard (1937). It is not memorable, but he was 19 years old and just starting to compose music. It does not seem out of place here, but it will hardly be anyone’s favorite piece on the record.

Chandos is English, of course, and this was recorded in England; but the musicians are American and don’t play this music as if they were English. The playing is idiomatic and attractive.

Furia y Silencio
Onix Ensemble; Alejandro Escuer
Utext 257—75 minutes

If things have been difficult in the USA for the land between the coasts over the last few years, one can imagine that things have been even worse south of the border. Director (and flutist) Alejandro Escuer writes of this project, “Mexico has found itself trapped in a terrible dilemma, immobilized by the criminal pillaging and looting of our wealth, life, and hope.” People paying attention to what was going on near the border with El Paso knew that in Ciudad Juarez the murder rate was one of the highest in the world, and affected young women above all (femicide).

One of the two large-scale works here, Silencio en Juarez, refers to this, and especially to the murder of 15 teenagers at a birthday party in November 2010. Its composer is Juan Pablo Contreras (b. 1987), and on the evidence of this work Contreras is an important voice and a huge talent. The Onix Ensemble is a “Pierrot” ensemble (violin, flute, clarinet, cello and piano). Contreras writes for the same quartet employed by Messiaen for the Quartet for the End of time, and aspects of his use of the quartet (unisons between the solo voices, floating harmonies in the piano, and most of all the high seriousness of his rhetoric) reflect the earlier work. The structure of the composition reflects in some ways the traditional four-movement sonata, with the outer movements framing a scherzo (a corrido, based on the norteño style of the borderlands) and an adagio (liturgia, drawing on chant, heard in the cello). This work has already been recorded earlier. I won’t be surprised if this becomes one of the major works in the chamber repertoire.

Even larger in scale, though not in ambition, is Static, for the full quintet, in six extended movements, by American composer Sebastian Currier (1959-), which won the 2007 Grawemeyer award. Currier is adept at creating sustained soundscapes, which seem to propel many of his scores. Completing the program are two one-movement works, ‘Por la Fuerza las Tierras’, by American Charles Halka, full of a frantic and almost cartoonish energy; and ‘Y los oros la luz’ by Ana Lara (1959-), perhaps the most fragmented and modern, with multiphonics and extended techniques.

T MOORE

Spannungen Festival
KLUGHARDT: Schilflieder; KREIN: Hebraic Sketches; SAINT-SAENS: Caprice; WEBER: Flute Trio
Avi 855 3359—63 minutes

These are concert performances from the Spannungen (Tensions) chamber music festival. It’s been held since 1998 at the Heimbach Power Plant—a curious example of industrial Art Nouveau.

Poems by Lenau inspired Klughardt’s Schilflieder (Reed Songs). The installments contrast reflective and agitated music. IV is a well-depicted thunderstorm. Alexander Abramovich Krein (1883-1951) in the 1920s
was a prominent member of the Russian Jewish School of musicians. He died before Stalin’s anti-Semitic purge began. In his younger days he naturally had to chip in his share of Proletkult boilerplate like USSR: Shock Brigade of the World Proletariat. As the son of a well-known klezmer violinist, much of Krein’s work celebrated Jewish culture. The Hebraic Sketches are for clarinet and string quartet. The music has ample folk ingredients, including the charm. Occasional use of microtonal slides and Kalinka-like accelerations add further spice.

Saint-Saens’s Caprice on Danish and Russian Airs was commissioned for the merger—at that political level weddings are a myth—of Tsar Alexander III and the Danish Princess Dagmar. The music uses a clarinet, flute, oboe, and piano. The tunes seem mostly Danish. Even in the Russian ones, Saint-Saens’s harmonies are less modal than we’re used to. His excellent instrumental writing gives everyone a chance to star.

The Weber Trio (1819) for cello, flute, and piano, is in an early romantic idiom. I is thoughtful, II athletic. III, ‘The Shepherd’s Lament,’ was inspired by a Goethe poem. The finale is more classical, not only in its themes, but in its development.

The performances are all highly skilled. Except for appropriate applause at the end of each work, there’s no audience noise.

O’CONNOR

Violin-Clarinet Concertos
Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr, cl; Walter Verdehr, v; Taipei Symphony/ Richard Mills; Las Cruces Symphony/ Lonnie Klein; Slovak Radio/ Kirk Trevor

Crystal 973—71 minutes

Since this is Volume 23 of their series “The Making of a Medium,” the Verdehrs are by now known very well to all chamber music enthusiasts—or ought to be. There is only one short chamber piece, however, on this program of double concertos with orchestra. Although 2014-15 was their final season, the next few years should bring more that they’ve recorded or transcribed and been too busy to put out. Lucky us!

The Duo Concertante by Australian Richard Mills (b 1949) is a substantial three-movement work with a lush slow introduction. The term neoromantic fits this writing best, and “marriage” would certainly describe the seamlessness and dedication found in this performance. Canadian Stephen Chatman’s four-movement Concerto (2007) was inspired by poetry of Walt Whitman, and a few brief phrases became titles for the movements. “Gorgeous” describes one of them, and the finale may leave you exhilarated but exhausted. American Paul Chihara (b 1938) reworked a song from his Broadway musical Shogun to create the central slow movement of Love Music (1997-2000), which to him straddles the worlds of film and concert music better than anything else he’s written. It often does so with thinly-veiled borrowings from the classics that you may recognize, plus other moments that might seem familiar but you may not be able to place. For instance, the repeated-rhythm basis for III could resemble a rondo from one of Mozart’s horn concertos, but it may come from many other possibilities as well: the tarantella of Barber’s Violin Concerto, perhaps?

The Second Duo Sonata by Thomas Christian David (1925-2006) is in two brief movements: a Prelude and a March with Variations. Written in 1980 and recorded in 1984, it fills out a worthwhile and accessible program with a commitment to traditional craftsmanship that had become so uncommon by 1980 as to hardly exist.

Both members of the duo are so technically accomplished as to leave little to be desired. Their intonation matches even when they play an octave or two or three apart. Walter’s sound comes across as thin sometimes, but this deficiency may arise from the recording process as much as from his actual playing, particularly in the Mills. On the other hand, their dovetailed murmurings in the variation movement of the David sonata are truly dazzling.

The cover art is a line drawing of the two performers by Al Hirschfeld that you might love just as much as the playing. Since it’s a theme of love all around the program, then, this writer can only thank the Verdehrs, the composers, and their collaborators for using their talents to give our world more of what it needs.

GORMAN

Pro Contra

FRANCAIX: Divertissement; SCHULHOFF: Bass Nightingale; MOZART: Bassoon & Cello Sonata; KROMMER: Bassoon Quartet; OLTHUIS: Contrabassoon Concertino

Simon Van Holen, bn; Concertgebouw Orchestra Turtle 72733—69 minutes

This grouping of bassoon and contrabassoon solo and chamber pieces has a nice mix of styles and textures. Simon Van Holen demon-
strates impressive fluency with both instruments, particularly the unwieldy contra.

The Francaix Divertissement is a standard chamber piece in the bassoon repertory. The balance between the members of the group is spot-on, and they capture the playful and vivacious style of the piece very well. In the slow movement Van Holen draws out the clear textures and serene lines with lovely pianissimo playing and liquid tone. The final movement is effervescent and whimsical, handled with impressive technique and a light touch.

The Schulhoff piece, *Bass Nightingale* was the first composition ever published for solo contrabassoon. Schulhoff was a Dadaist who wrote this piece in defiance of conventional musical tastes, emphasizing sarcasm and grotesqueness. Van Holen plays with remarkably agile technique and articulation and marries the grotesque with charm.

The Mozart Bassoon and Cello Sonata is generally quite good, again showing impressive balance and virtuosity. Cellist Honorine Schaeffer is particularly strong here. Aside from some flat mid-range notes in II and III, this is a fine reading.

The Krommer quartet often sounds like a miniature bassoon concerto. The scoring for darker instruments (bassoon, two violas, cello, and contrabass) would seem to be murky and muddy, but in fact works well. The ensemble plays with graceful musical lines and easy technical fluidity. The Minuet movement, with light-handed, tuneful playing and nice interplay between the bassoon and cello, is especially enjoyable.

The program ends with a new piece, Kees Olthuis’s Concertino, scored for contrabassoon and string quintet. It was written for Simon Van Holen in 2014. Olthuis himself was a bassoonist with the Concertgebouw Orchestra. His musical language hints of Shostakovich and Ravel. Van Holen plays contra with singing lines and excellent intonation, showing off both surprising subtlety and strong dynamic contrasts in all ranges of the instrument.

The instrument these nine trumpeters are playing is the “baroque trumpet”, a modern version of the valveless “natural trumpet”. The baroque one is half as long as the natural, allowing today’s trumpeters to play the old music on lower harmonics. And they have tone holes that correct the quirky intonation of several harmonics. It might not be a true historic instrument, but it is a good approximation.

I am quite taken by the opening work, a lively, varied, four-movement sonata by Christian Friedrich Witt (1660-1716). The sound of strings and organ is rich and resonant, and there is splendor when trumpets and timpani enter. There are some frayed edges: ten seconds of rhythmic disunity at the beginning of II, blatty low-register trumpet notes, tempos that sometimes fluctuate when trumpets are playing.

Friedemann Immer, long a world-renowned baroque trumpeter, is heard in several solos and duos. Guest artist John Foster plays beautifully in a five-movement solo sonata by Giovanni Bonaventura Viviani (1638-93). Organist Steven Plank, director of musicology at Oberlin Conservatory, plays a supporting role in almost everything and is soloist in three passacaglias by Giovanni Battista Ferrini (1601-74).

The biggest single work is Sonata 332 by Cesare Bendenelli (c 1542-1617). For almost five minutes, the trumpets and timpani do fanfare-ish things with a C major triad. The album ends in festive style with a five-movement, 10-voice sonata by Anton Thomas Albertini (1660-1734).

The supporting cast of string, organ, and percussion is excellent. Oberlin College’s Fairfield Chapel has natural and resonant acoustics, and the engineers deserve praise for superb recorded sound.

The recording was made in 2013, and it became a memorial when two ensemble members passed away. Longtime University of Louisville trumpet professor Michael Tunnell died in 2014, and ensemble leader Don Johnson departed just as the album was released in October 2016.

Kentucky Baroque Trumpets
Witt, Bendinelli, Vejvanovsky, Ferrini, Viviani, Lully, Albertini
Centaur 3492—57 minutes

I did a double take when I saw the name Kentucky Baroque Trumpets. Those words didn’t seem to fit together, but I’m a believer now. This Lexington-based group is good.

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PFEIL

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Centaur 3492—57 minutes

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European Tour
Nordic Brass Ensemble
2L 128 [SACD, Blu-Ray] 76 minutes

These are some of Scandinavia’s best brass players—four trumpeters, a horn player, four trombonists, a tuba player, and a percussion-
ist—from orchestras in Oslo, Bergen, Stockholm, Trondheim, and Gothenburg. The ensemble formed in 1993, and it assembles twice a year.

The program offers 32 little pieces from the 16th Century. Some are dances in suites, such as a set of seven from Michael Praetorius’s Terpsichore. A few are new to me: ‘Battalia de Morales’ by Francisco Correa de Arauxo, the deeply beautiful ‘Circumde me runt’ by Cristobal de Morales, ‘Jerigonza’ by Mateo Flecha, three works by Andre Danican Phili- dor, a couple by Anthony Holborne.

People who know brass ensemble literature will recognize most of the pieces by Susato, Holborne, and Le Jeune, but they will notice that all are newly arranged (by two of the group’s members). Things are enlivened with skillfully played ornaments and timbres that are by turns cylindrical and conical, open and muted. The percussion work is outstanding.

I enjoy this album very much, but I suspect I might enjoy some of the pieces more if there were a conductor to rein things in a bit. It’s not that they need a stick to stay together; they don’t. But these orchestral musicians obviously relish the chance to play with no one to stifle their enthusiasm. Many of the energetic works end too spectacularly. I realize that might seem like an odd statement, but the showing off is excessive.

And I continue to wait for a brass group that will play Gesualdo madrigals in a flexible way. There are two here, and the playing is warm and expressive, but there are also unwavering tempos. Gesualdo’s astonishing pieces need some freedom.

KILPATRICK

**Double Bass**

GLIERE: *Intermezzo, Tarantella, op 9; Prelude, Scherzo, op 32; BOTTESSINI: Reverie, Introduction & Bolero; JONGEN: Prelude, Habanera & Allegro, op 106; HAUTA-AHO: Kadenza; PIAZZOLLA: Kicho*

Wies de Boeve, db; Tomoko Takahashi, p
Genuin 16433 — 54 minutes

This young double-bass player makes all of these pieces come across the footlights, perhaps because he prefers to play without shoes on. These works have all been previously recorded, except perhaps the one by Joseph Jongen. The Glieré pieces are enjoyable. So is the more virtuosic Bottesini. Jongen’s 10-minute suite is also up-beat in nature. Teppo Hauta-Aho is from Finland and his double-bass Kadenza turns up in bass competitions. His is a mysterious-sounding and also amusing piece, leading us towards another combination of the same elements by Astor Piazzolla that seems also to eliminate the piano until suddenly it is dance time and it takes over.

The liner notes begin by describing the German Music Competition that brought on this recording. The rest of them consist of a biography of De Bouve and an interview with him. There is nothing about the music at all. I rather resent that, but the recording itself is well worth hearing.

D MOORE

**Celebration of Cellos**

CERETTO: *Trio, op 1:2; AESCHBACHER: 4 Cello Suite; MAINARDI: Notturno; RODRIGO: Madrigal; Danza de Cortesia; DARE: 6 Pieces; DON: Quartet, op 7; HEWITT-JONES: Serenade; NORRIS: Rumba*

Cello Spice—Divine Art 5002—68 minutes

When this recording was made back in 1995, Cello Spice included, among others, the four players on this disc: Mark Bailey, Gillian Copp, John Davidson, and Allison Lawrence. They are fine players, and the program is attractive to the ears.

It begins with the classic Giacobbe Cervetto (c. 1682-1783) and from then on we are in the 20th Century, though we stay on the romantic side of it.

I reviewed this program in more detail in 2001 (July/Aug, p 229). The sound of the recording has not been noticeably altered, though there may be slightly more resonance here. The booklet is unchanged. If you wish to hear music for three or four cellos, this is an enjoyable place to get it.

D MOORE

**Cello Program**

FRANCK, DEBUSSY: *Sonatas; BRAHMS: Sonata I* Victor Julien-Laferriere; Adam Laloum, p
Mirare 310—63 minutes

**French Cello**

FRANCK, DEBUSSY: *Sonatas; FAURE: Après un Reve; Sicilienne; Elegy; SAINT-SAENS: Allegro Appassionato; Swan* Bryan Cheng; Sylvie Cheng, p
Audite 97.698—61 minutes

The first program is excellently played by both musicians. It consists of Brahms’s E minor Sonata and Debussy’s in D minor and the Cesar Franck Violin Sonata transcribed for cello and piano with the composer’s approval.

The emotional impression of these read-
ings is very positive for the Brahms and the Franck, a bit less so for the Debussy. The playing is grand and tender by turns, with effective contrasts and lyricism. The Debussy is more virtuosic and slithery in technique than I like in this music. It tends to go so fast that the subtlety of the music goes by the board, particularly in the Finale. But the rest of the program is very satisfying, and these players deserve to be heard. The sound and balances are excellent.

In the second program we start off with the Debussy Sonata. At first I thought this was going to be a more sensitive reading, but it turned out to be as silky as the other one and less subtle. The three lovely Fauré pieces that follow are beautifully played, and so is the massive Franck Sonata and the contrasting Saint-Saëns Allegro Appassionato and 'The Swan.' It’s a well-arranged and nicely contrasted program of French masterpieces, and only the Debussy is less than satisfying.

Casals Homage

**BACH:** Solo Cello Suite 3; Aria from Pastorella;
**BEETHOVEN:** Bei Mannern Variations; **FAURE:** Elegie; Sicilienne; Papillon; **HANDEL:** Sonata in G minor; **SAINT-SAENS:** Allegro Appassionato; **CASALS:** Song of the Birds

Amit Peled; Noreen Polera, p
Centaur 3535—65 minutes

This is a recording of a recital that took place in Clemson University, South Carolina last January. The point of the program is that it is played on the Goehriller cello that once belonged to Casals and reproduces a program played on it by Casals at Peabody Institute in Baltimore back in 1915.

Peled is a good player, and the sound of the cello is beautifully captured here. His interpretation of the Bach suite shares Casals’s romantic touch, but the phrasing does not achieve the clarity and taste that Casals did. One doesn’t notice this as much when the pianist joins him, but the Bach is rather a loss. The three Fauré pieces are each applauded, apparently to the players’ annoyance, since they start up on the next piece before the audience has stopped clapping.

**Janos Starker**

**SHOSTAKOVICH; HAYDN:** Cello Concerto 1;
**COUPERIN:** Pieces en Concert; **BACH:** Sarabande in D minor
Italian Swiss Radio/ Marc Andreae; Lucerne Festival Strings/ Rudolf Baumgartner
Ermitage 1047—73 minutes

This was first released in 1994. It is concert performances by the great cellist. It begins with the intense Shostakovich concerto, which had me weeping from beginning to end, as did the Bach Sarabande that follows it. The Haydn concerto is technically excellent, and so are the five Couperin pieces, though neither turns me on as much as the Shostakovich and Bach did. Starker is up there with the best cellists ever and the fact that he could play a concert program with such polish is still amazing and wonderful. The orchestras match his enthusiasm beautifully. If you don’t already have this recording as it was originally released, this is one to get. You should be warned that the Haydn concerto is accompanied by strings and harpsichord, omitting the horns from the original score, but I can’t say that I missed them much. I reviewed the earlier release (March/April 1995, p. 234) and loved it then as now. The sound balance has been smoothed down a little, urging me to stick to the old one since sonic clarity is important to me, but the change is small and in a way it makes it easier to concentrate on the music.

Reveriscences

**FRANCK:** Cello Sonata; **YSAYE:** Solo Sonata, op 28; **FAURE:** Après un Reve; Elegie; Sicilienne; Les Berceaux; **SAINT-SAENS:** Swan; Serenade; **DUPARC:** L’invitation au Voyage
Camille Thomas; Julien Libeer, p
LDV 29—71 minutes

“*A World in Itself*” is a subtitle for this release. As you can see, it is another French program. This time we begin with Fauré, then Saint-Saëns and then the Franck Sonata, played to the hilt by both musicians. The Solo Sonata by Eugene Ysaye is not well known, though I have six recordings of it, most of them fairly recent. This performance is excellent. The program concludes with more Fauré, Saint-Saëns, and a thoughtful piece by Henri Duparc (1848-1933).

These are players who take their music seriously, not only for effect, but with a deeper sense of its emotional purpose. Keep an ear open for them. They have something important to convey to the listener.

As long as we regard elitism as a dirty word, and the superego as unadulterated repression, we cannot maintain a civilization; we can only watch it come apart.

Morris Berman

_The Twilight of American Culture_
Vanishing Point
Bedard, Bozza, Hemke, Lioncourt, Thomas, Verhiel
Allen Harrington, sax; Lottie Enns-Braun, org
Ravello 7948—55 minutes

Since 2005 University of Manitoba saxophone professor Allen Harrington and faculty organist Lottie Enns-Braun have performed as a duo, advocating a little known yet fascinating medium. While they often look to the Baroque period for repertoire ideas, the music here takes a more contemporary path.

Quebec composer Denis Bedard blends Baroque and jazz in his Sonate I; American composer Augusta Read Thomas offers raw emotion in Angel Tears and Earth’s Prayers; Dutch saxophonist Ton Verhiel contributes his neo-classical Partita Breve, written for the 1992 World Saxophone Congress in Pesaro, Italy; and Canadian composer and choral director Leonard Enns is responsible for the title work, Vanishing Point, written expressly for the duo. The program also includes miniatures by early 20th Century French composers Eugene Bozza and Guy de Lioncourt, as well as two Norwegian folk songs arranged by longtime Northwestern University saxophone professor Frederick Hemke, one of Harrington’s teachers.

The recital is accessible and enjoyable, spanning the gamut from fast, virtuosic passages to slow, contemplative movements; and even the most hair-raising dissonances have expressive purpose. Harrington boasts excellent technique and presence, and Enns-Braun is a skilled keyboardist, managing a staggering variety of colors on the organ. Together, they flip the switch very well between joyous energy and brooding atmosphere, especially when time seems to stand still.

Even so, the music-making could be at a higher level. Harrington’s tone is somewhat diffuse, reducing his color palette, and he easily loses sonic control at loud volumes and in his high register, leading to wobbly intonation and unpleasant timbres. His phrasing, too, is somewhat restrained—nice enough, but never realizing the full potential of the music. Nevertheless, the album has much to like, and saxophonists looking for new literature should find it worthwhile.

Rhapsody
Bartok, Bernstein, Debussy, D’Rivera, Finzi, Kovacs, Larsen, Ravel
Todd Levy, cl; Rene Izquierdo, g; Jeannie Yu, Elena Abend, p
Avie 2367—70 minutes

Milwaukee Symphony Principal Clarinet Todd Levy performs a set of 20th Century clarinet recital favorites, a combination of original works and popular transcriptions, all recorded from 2009 to 2016. Milwaukee-based pianist and Steinway artist Jeannie Yu is the keyboardist, though University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee piano professor Elena Abend plays the Debussy. Wisconsin State University classical guitar professor and Cuba native Rene Izquierdo appears in the Larsen.

The program begins with the poignant and pastoral Finzi Five Bagatelles, but quickly departs for the exotic and otherworldly: the Debussy Premiere Rhapsodie; the Ravel Pie en forme de Habanera; the Bartok Romanian Folk Dances; the Bernstein Sonata; the Larsen Blue Third Pieces for clarinet and guitar; the Kovacs ‘Homage to Manuel de Falla’ and ‘Sholem-alekhem, rov Feidman!’; and the D’Rivera ‘Tribute to Leuonu, ‘Vals Venezolano, and ‘Contradanza’.

Levy offers a nice sound, creamy legato, and effortless fingers. His soft playing is remarkably sensitive, and his ventures into Latin and Klezmer music are easy and natural, punctuated by perfectly executed growls, glissandoes, and accents. His overall renditions, though, are rather conservative—general phrasing and ideas stay in certain boundaries—and his timbre regularly shifts between a wonderfully clear high register and a somewhat reedy middle and lower register. His collaborators are excellent: Izquierdo is a pleasure to hear in the Larsen, and Yu and Abend play with superb touch, clarity, technique, and respect for the soloist.

Stark Quartet
Bucchi, Cappetti, Cavallini, Gervasio, Gherardeschi, Guadì, Lanzi, Scarlatti
Tactus 890001—62 minutes

Italian clarinetists Vinibaldo Baccari, Sauro Berti, Sergio Brusca, Antonio Fraioli make up the versatile Stark Quartet, probably named after the 19th Century German clarinetist, composer, and pedagogue Robert Stark (1847-1922), though the liner notes do not say. The program is a collection of original and tran-
the saxophone quartet turns aggressive and her chamber music tour-de-force and a ceding of the stage to a mournful defensive, culminating in defeat and resigna-
ton and a single movement and takes half an hour to perform. The trombone is a clown figure with a split personality whose playful chatting with the saxophone quartet turns aggressive and defensive, culminating in defeat and resignation and a ceding of the stage to a mournful string duo.

Sonic Art contrasts and complements Gubaidulina with three of her Russian compatriots past and present. Alexander Glazounov begins the program with his landmark Saxophone Quartet (1932); Elena Firsova (b. 1950) contributes her early work Night (1978) for voice and saxophone quartet, based on a poem by 20th Century Russian novelist and poet Boris Pasternak; and Dmitri Shostakovich concludes the program with Two Pieces for String Quartet (1931), a quick pair of arrangements that the young composer furnished for the Villaume Quartet, whose performance had captivated him. The first movement is Katerina’s aria from the opera Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District, and II is the cheeky Polka from the ballet The Golden Age. Sonic Art baritone saxophonist Annegret Schmiedl completed the transcriptions.

The concert is thoroughly professional and artistically convincing. Lindberg is sensational in the Gubaidulina, filling the score with his wonderfully pure timbre and jaw-dropping technique, warping it all at the request of the composer, and transcending the musical syntax of the piece with the experience of a seasoned actor. His clown character is by turns hilarious, charming, and frightening; and his playing, vocalizations, and physical movements are all compelling. Zamastil and Molina are first-rate as well, painting the picture of the spurned and hurt clown with intensity, elegance, and sympathy. Dobraceva is the treat in the second half, lending her gorgeous voice, phrasing, and diction to the Firsova and the Shostakovich. She makes the music beautiful, dark, and haunting.

Sonic Art is excellent all through, rendering each selection with superb polish, clarity, nuance, and teamwork. Technical passages are easy and effortless, and emotional moments are heartfelt.

Knowledgeable saxophonists will hear the influence of Sigurd Rascher in the group’s timbral philosophy, but Sonic Art emphasizes the Rascher strengths and keeps the sound palette clean, and the upshot is a Teutonic dialect that is satisfying to hear and serves the music.

HANUDEL

Transformation
Firsova, Glazounov, Gubaidulina, Shostakovich
Evelina Dobraceva, s; Christian Lindberg, trb; Wolfgang Zamastil, vc; Beltane Ruiz Molina, db; Sonic Art
Genuin 16431—69 minutes

Russian composer Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931) has left a marked influence on many 20th Century and contemporary musicians, and here her chamber music tour-de-force Transformation (2004) serves as the title work for the latest release by the German saxophone quartet Sonic Art.

Dedicated to Swedish trombonist Christian Lindberg, Transformation is a septet for trombone, cello, double bass, and saxophone quartet that unfolds in a theatrical style over a single movement and takes half an hour to perform. The trombone is a clown figure with a split personality whose playful chatting with the saxophone quartet turns aggressive and defensive, culminating in defeat and resignation and a ceding of the stage to a mournful string duo.

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HANUDEL

American Album
COPLAND: Duo; DORFF: Sonata; FOSS: 3 American Pieces; SCHWANTNER: Black Anemones; WELCH: Antiques of a Mechanical Nature
Patricia Surman, fl; Kostas Chardas, p
Centaur 3525—58 minutes

There are many fine recordings of these flute works by Copland, Foss, and Schwantner, and here is yet another. Welch’s 5-minute piece, written for Surman in 2010, uses extended techniques in a traditional context that comes...
across as very imaginative and expressive, then seems to wear out its welcome. The 2014 Flute Sonata by Daniel Dorff (b 1954) includes a movement that commemorates his parents; his father died while the piece was being composed. He writes in an accessible and tonal style that communicates with genuine emotion. Had there been pauses between the tracks, his statements could have been more effective. Yet I’m left with the same impression as the music of Stephen Paulus—that it’s written well and sincerely, but not memorable enough to endure. The weak ending doesn’t help.

So we have a program of about half new music that you might want to hear and about half music that’s familiar and you might not need to hear again. Having high-quality discrimates can help you determine whether you actually like the new pieces or whether they just don’t work for you.

Yamaha performing artist Patricia Surman has a full-bodied, rich sound, ably supported by Kostas Chardas’s accomplished playing. The recording places them very well: not too close, not too far.

GORMAN

American FluteScape

GRIFFES: Poem; HIGDON: Flute Poetic; HINDEMITH: 8 Pieces; HOOVER: Medieval Suite; VINCI: Crow’s Nest; TINGsha Bom t-Bom t-Bom

Jan Vinci, fl; Reiko Uchida, p; New York Dream Orchestra/ Mark Vinci

Albany 1649—73 minutes

Three of the works are new; they’re combined with more traditional fare. Overall, it’s a program well worth hearing, especially when played as well as it is here. Higdon’s three-movement piece involves colorful effects in the form of dampened notes from the piano, but although there are dull sounds, there are no dull moments. Chock with marvelous writing for the flute, beautiful harmonies, and varied textures, this new piece shows once again that Higdon knows how to work a narrative.

The pieces by Mark Vinci, the flutist’s husband, involve singing and playing together and other sound effects that can be very difficult to produce. Jan Vinci rises above all the challenges, playing with a freedom and splendor that is a delight to hear while approaching the difficulties with zest and considerable authority.

It’s a pity Charles Griffes’s 1918 Poem is heard with piano because it certainly could have been done very well with this ensemble.

The only work with orchestra is the three-movement piece by Mark Vinci (b 1960), titled TINGsha Bom t-Bom t-Bom. The chamber-size New York Dream Orchestra offers clarity and transparency for the evocative, nocturnal writing in the slow middle movement and precision in the difficult introduction. III is variations built on four descending notes, like a tango, with jazzy bassoon and considerable interchange between the flute and snare drum. Although I missed the orchestra much of the time, the sparse textures are intentional, and all the writing for soloist and ensemble is very effective. Reiko Uchida, too, is very effective in her role supporting the works by Griffes, Hoover, and Higdon with poetry and power.

GORMAN

Aspects

YORK: Quiccan; ROSSINI: Italiana in Algeri Overture; HENSHALL: Welsh Dance 2; GINASTERA: Danzas Argentinas; RIVERA: Cumba-quin; PRITCHARD: Stairs; HOUGHTON: Opals; MARIN, PUNCH BROTHERS: Flippen; Soon or Never; BRUNNING: Elegy

Aquarelle Guitar Quartet

Chandos 10928—57 minutes

What a purely beautiful performance! This will be my fifth review of the Aquarelle Quartet (J/A 2009, N/D 2010, N/D 2012, M J 2014), and it again confirms their quality, in the same league as the LAGQ. Their range of expression, beauty of phrasing, and pure virtuosity are a pure delight.

The second plus here is the program, which is varied and immensely satisfying. I had only heard the York before (well, also the Rossini, but not as a guitar quartet), and I’ve got another list of new material to perform with my quartet. York’s ‘Quiccan’ (no mention of the title—a play on Wiccan?) bursts with energy—you need outstanding ensemble coordination for this work, but that’s no problem here. I’ve encountered several transcriptions for guitar ensemble of Rossini (and Mozart) overtures, many from the 19th Century. This one works quite well—I never missed the orchestra. And the transcription of Ginastera’s dances sounds like it was conceived for guitar originally rather than piano.

My greatest enjoyment came from their slow works—Dalwyn Henshall’s ‘Welsh Dance 2’, John Brunning’s ‘Elegy’, and the slow movement of Philip Houghton’s Opals. These all went straight to the heart—so lovely.

And for sheer fun, you can’t help but enjoy the Celtic-inspired medley of ‘Flippen’ and
'Soon or Never', taken from a pair of bluegrass ensembles. One was led by mandolinist Chris Thile (he’s just taken over for public radio’s Garrison Keillor on *A Prairie Home Companion*). So get this!

**KEATON**

**Local Objects**

**DUPLESSY:** Nocturne; **GISMONTI:** Celebracao de Nupcias; **DOMENICONI:** Koyunbaba; **CARDOSO:** Milonga; **DI MEOLA:** Vertigo Shadow; **ALI-ZADEH:** Fantasy; **GAROTO:** Inspiracao; **PINTER:** Gotenburg

Zsófia Boros, g
ECM 25728—42 minutes


Ms Boros’s release has no notes, only several pictures of a slender woman attired in black holding her guitar. Nothing on the music either, but there is a Wallace Stevens poem (himself something of a difficult nut to crack) that supplied the title.

Of the music, only Koyunbaba and the Cardoso Milonga are particularly well known—the latter on every undergraduate recital of late. The Domeniconi is given a supremely mystical performance—or at least very freely performed without any clarity—again, all is misty; even the fireworks of the last movement are heard from afar. Of the rest, only the Ali-Zadeh ‘Fantasy’ has much substance.

Between 2001 and 2008, Boros placed in a number of competitions, presumably not with performances like this. She plays the material well—she has a lovely sound, never overplays, and the repertory lends itself to this contemplative, lost in thought sort of approach. But even after the short 42 minutes of this release, I felt that I’d rather wait for the movie.

**KEATON**

**Spanish Guitar**

Albeniz, Falla, Granados, Rodrigo, Ruiz-Pipo, Sanz, Sor, Tarrega

Adriano Del Sál, Daiquiri Guitar Duo, Jeremy Jouve, Timo Korrhonen, Goran Krivokapic, Norbert Kraft, Irina Kulikova, David Lorenz, Anabel Montesinos, Jurgen Rost, Monika Rost, Simeon Simov—Naxos 578343—64 minutes

This is a compilation of Naxos guitar releases from its founding in 1987 through 1996. There are no notes, but the music is well known to any guitar lover. And although I think of many on this roster as "young artists", they were all recording for Naxos at least two decades ago. To the best of my knowledge, all are still active, and Kulikova, Montesinos, Jouve, and Korhonen are among my favorite players of this recent generation—to say nothing of the redoubtable Norbert Kraft, of my generation and the producer for Naxos’s remarkable series of recordings that have given voice to the incredible flood of talent that marks today’s guitar world. Kraft is himself a fine artist—even in the obligatory ‘Romance d’amour’ he finds real beauty in just the right proportions for this overplayed (often badly played) chestnut.

With one exception, a dance by Ruiz-Pipo, everything here is common repertory. And I might also say that these artists have done them better, at least in the ensuing decades. The interpretations are all fairly traditional and mostly Segovia-ish. That’s hardly surprising, since this is the Segovia Repertory. I did quite enjoy Krivokapic’s cobweb-free Sor Mozart variations, Jurgen Rost’s Ruiz-Pipo dance, Jouve’s Rodrigo, and Montesinos’s Falla ‘Dance of the Corregidor’, along with the Rost duo’s Granados ‘Spanish Dance 2’.

But this recording isn’t aimed at the connoisseur; it’s an introduction to the guitar, and a damned good one. It’s a magical instrument, and can begin to weave its spell on the new listener here—time enough to discover its depths later.

**KEATON**

**Armen Doneyan, guitar**

**DUBEZ:** Hungarian Fantasy; **LEGNANI:** Fantasy; **TANSMAN:** Passacaille; **TARREGA:** Traviata Fantasy; **TURINA:** Sonata; **BROUWER:** Rito de los Orichas; **VILLA-LOBOS:** Etudes 1+12

Naxos 573591—61 minutes

Though wisdom says nobody remembers who comes in second, that’s no longer applicable to guitar. It hasn’t been for quite a while—the 1975 Toronto competition had four winning places that went to Sharon Isbin, Manuel Barrueco, Eliot Fisk, and David Leisner, each of whom is still among the greats of their generation. Frenchman Armen Doneyan was the second place winner at the 2015 GEA Competition. I can only wonder who came in first, because Doneyan has all that could be asked for—absolute virtuosity with an amazing finish to each and every sound, taste and musicianship of the highest order.

Johann Dubez’s Hungarian Fantasy is a real delight. Apparently, his guitar music is only available in manuscript—and, like Regondi, his heart was later stolen from the
guitar by the accordion, then later the zither. No accounting for taste.

The Legnani was also a delightful discovery. It's the first time I heard a piece by him that didn't elicit the response, “that's a lot of notes, though I'm not sure what their purpose is other than to dazzle another guitarist.” I have heard this piece before, so perhaps Doneyan is just the first to make sense of it. Then we have a passacaglia by Tansman—one of his works more influenced by his hero Bach than by his native Poland or his years of study in Paris—pure counterpoint, beautifully played.

The Fantasy on Themes from La Traviata is a piece I dearly love, though mainly because I love the opera. But the melodies transfer well to the guitar, and Doneyan plays it as if he loves the opera as much as I do. This piece seems to be having a revival—I reviewed two performances ($/O 2016)—an excellent one by Rupert Boyd, and a disappointing one by Luciano Tortorelli. Both, by the way, correctly identified the work as by Julian Arcas, Tarrega's teacher—we have now learned that Tarrega plagiarized the piece. This is my favorite of all of Doneyan's program; it's even finer than Boyd's very fine performance.

Doneyan's only lapse is in Turina's sonata. The first sounds are absolutely amazing, and if tone were the only factor, this would be a great performance—he creates astonishing sounds. But his rhythm is so wayward that he lost me. He plays this quintessential Andalucian piece as if he's French. Now, to be sure, he is French. But I'm referring to a plastic sense of time that becomes fragmentary and episodic. That can work perfectly well in Debussy, but the Spanish tradition—the Spanish language itself—for all its sense of spontaneity, needs a solid backbone of rhythm. This strays too far from that.

But the remaining works are just right. Brouwer's Rito de los Orishas is helpfully translated as Rite of the Orishas. Those are Yoruban deities worshiped by the African slaves in the New World, later syncretized with Catholic Saints for the Santeria religion. I had never noticed how much this work draws on his earlier Elogio de la Danza, though it was composed almost 30 years earlier. And he concludes with two Villa-Lobos etudes, whipping up a major storm in the 12th.

Doneyan is a major talent, and I look forward to his future releases.
Uruguayan Abel Carlevaro is a respected teacher and composer, but his music has never been especially popular—I only knew his Preludios Americanos, and there was only one disc devoted to his music reviewed in this journal. I can think of no reason why, except for lack of a dedicated champion—and perhaps Mr Gregoric can be that champion.

Carlevaro’s music, like many Latin American composers, is mostly nationalistic, mostly tonal (only the sonata, inspired by Ginastera, is significantly dissonant). The works are all suit the guitar and sound like they were composed on the instrument, rather than just in the mind of the composer. Actually, the sonata, for all its ambition, is not especially effective—if one wants a unified multi-movement composition, the Milonga Suite works better.

I found the Microestudios particularly interesting. They are late works, completed in 1998 just a few years before he died. They remind me of Brouwer’s Estudios Sencillos, composed two decades earlier, though they are designed as a summation of Carlevaro’s teaching methods.

We also get a taste of Carlevaro as transcriber, with the Sanz suite. Sanz never conceived of his pieces in any unified suite—I think Yepes first arranged a bunch, called it the Suite Espanol, and guitarists have treated the work as gospel ever since. This performance ends with a passacaglia rather than the showier canarios—not nearly as effective.

We also get a reasonably good performance of La Catedral—the Paraguayan maestro spent a great deal of his career in Montevideo, so it rather fits. We also get a tast of Mr Gregoric’s own compositions. He has a varied style—some of the pieces are quite dissonant, with Bartok pizzicatos if the harmonies themselves were not adequately harsh. Others are more approachable, and his six-movement suite Montevideo Revisited is quite attractive. It’s a remembrance of the years he spent working with Carlevaro.

Both discs close with Carlevaro’s spoken voice, a discussion of the nature of art and the creative figure.

Gregoric is a sympathetic and skilled advocate of his teacher’s music. His approach is sensitive, often bold—I sometimes wanted a bit more sweetness in his playing. If you want a good sampling of Carlevaro’s compositions, you won’t be disappointed, and you’ll often be delighted.
21st Century Spanish Guitar 2

BALADA: Caprichos 11; Abstractions of Granados; TORRES: Interiores; GODOY: Elegia Otonal; GARCIA ABRIL: 2 Cantares; PABLO: Turris Eburnea; SOUTULLO: I've Got You Under my String; DURAN-LORCA: Upon 21; CASABLANCAS: 3 Pieces; RUIZ: Orion

Adam Levin, g

Naxos 573409—71 minutes

Adam Levin’s 21st Century Spanish Guitar project continues with Volume 2, which is as exciting and fascinating as his first release in this series (S/O 2013). I know he is currently recording Volume 3, and I hope that won’t take as long to be released.

The project was inspired by his own curiosity—we’ve all seen the great explosion of guitar music from the 20th Century—masterworks by Moreno Torroba, Turina, Rodrigo, Mompou. Who are the 21st Century equivalents? So, with the support of the Fulbright Foundation, he began to contact composers who had written for guitar, or who were interested in doing so, to discover a new repertory. He also had the support of the Naxos corporation, which has agreed to release four volumes in the project—the guitar world is deeply grateful for the fruits of that project.

Leonardo Balada continues his Caprichos series with a set of what he calls “Abstractions”—this time of Granados (Albeniz was his source for the first set). Each of the five pieces includes recognizable snippets of Spanish Dances, and identifying the sources is only part of the fun.

Jesus Torres’s Interiores is another world entirely—deep and dramatic, with wide contrasts of dynamics and color. Levin describes the work as a soliloquy, and it does feel rather like watching a skilled actor in the most intimate and revealing section of a great play.

Marc Lopez Godoy is Balada’s student. His three-movement Elegia Otonal (Autumn Elegy) is a beautiful and moving depiction of images of Fall, from a sparrow’s flight to a gentle rain. I have praised the work of Anton Garcia Abril in these pages (S/O 2015). His two cantares are worthy of a man whose address when inducted to the Royal Academy of Arts was titled “In Defense of Melody”. Luis de Pablo (b. 1930) uses his Turris Eburnea (Ivory Tower) as something of an exploration of the life of the mind—he is himself a scholar of the highest standards.

Eduardo Soutullo is of a newer generation, born in 1968. His four-movement I’ve Got You Under My String was written for Levin. It’s a puckish work, a bit reminiscent of Brouwer—fun to listen to, and fun to play. Also with an English title (presumably for the same reason), Jacobo Duran-Loriga’s Upon 21 is a set of three Baroque dances: courante, chaconne, and gigue. But beyond form, none of these works attempts a neo-Baroque style, though the set is charming. Benet Casablanca’s takes his inspiration from the Second Viennese School. I can’t tell if his 3 Pieces are strictly serial or just atonal—not that this matters a great deal—yet he manages to sound guitaristic.

The last work is the biggest and most ambitious, Juan Manuel Ruiz’s Orion. It’s a storm, and a violent one—and I’m from Florida, so I know storms. And it contains just about any sound guitar can make—rasgueados, golpe, tambura, harmonics, pizzicato, percussive effects. At first hearing I was a bit put off, but by the end, and after a few more hearings, Levin revealed the architecture so clearly that I began to think of this as my favorite piece. But it’s not possible to pick a favorite here. Nearly every piece is attractive, and each has an excellent chance of entering the repertory.

And we have to thank Adam Levin for this. Every piece except the Abril was dedicated to him, and he gave the world premieres. And his performance cannot be faulted—huge dynamic and timbral range, deeply moving phrasing, committed virtuosity. He can be wildly dramatic, but never overplays. It’s hard to imagine these performances being improved on, but that’s just what I (and he) would love to see as this wonderful music gets discovered.

Rovshan Mamedkuliev

WALTON: 5 Bagatelles; RODRIGO: Junto al Generalife; En los Trigales; BACH: Chaconne; WILLIAMS: Rounds; KOSHKIN: Sonata 2

Naxos 573669—64 minutes

This is my second review of Azeri guitarist Rovshan Mamedkuliev. His earlier Naxos release (S/O 2013) was a result of winning the 2012 GFA competition. This one is for the 2015 Michele Pittaluga Competition in Italy. Can’t keep a good man down.

This release is just as fine as the other, which was very fine indeed. The Walton has been recorded so often that it’s not really possible to pick a top choice, but among those (most recently, Meng Su’s wonderful performance in J/F 2017) Mamedkuliev stands proudly. He also gives a fine reading of John Williams’s (the film composer, not the gui-

American Record Guide
A really convincing performance. If you don’t know this guitarist and his work, you should.

The technique, intellect, and heart to make this sound followed by silences. Mamadkuliev has is particularly inventive, with rapid bursts of sound followed by silences. Mamadkuliev has the technique, intellect, and heart to make this a really convincing performance. If you don’t know this guitarist and his work, you should.

Passages

SOR: Elegiac Fantasy; MOMPOU: Suite Compostelana; MICHAELS: Variations; GERHARD: Fantasy; TURINA: Sonata

Stephen Mattingly, g
Soundset 1067—51 minutes

Stephen Mattingly is the director of guitar studies at the University of Louisville, and this recording was made possible by a grant from that institution’s research office. He is an active performer and has appeared at the GFA annual meeting and various festivals abroad.

This is a very good performance, though he doesn’t quite have the finish and attention to every sound that distinguishes the very best.

I’m glad to see Mumpou’s one work for guitar, the Suite Compostelana, finally getting the attention it deserves. This is the third time I’ve reviewed it in the last year, though this doesn’t quite stand up to the other two. For a truly virtuosic reading, go to Franz Halasz’s Catalan disc (S/O 2016); or, for a Goldilocks performance, where everything is just right, try Georg Gulyas (J/A 2016).

Joseph Michaels refers to set theory in his description of his variations, which makes me think he’s still working with the serial techniques of the Darmstadt composers. Rather than some rather unpleasant dissonances, it leaves little impression. Roberto Gerhard’s hauntingly beautiful ‘Fantasia’ is another matter. Gerhard studied with Schoenberg himself, and this piece has its share of dissonance; but everything makes sense, every sound needs to be there. Mattingly’s performance, again, is quite good, though I could imagine some of the more demanding passages executed with more precision.

My favorite performance here is the Turina sonata, though this doesn’t displace my favorite performance by Pepe Romero on Philips, and still doesn’t have that final finish that the music needs. But it is a coherent and moving performance, devoid of the eccentricities that mar Armen Doneyan’s recording (above).

Marko Topchii, guitar

RODRIGUEZ: Enlos Trigales; BIASI: Improvisazione 6; SOR: Marlborough Variations; BROUWER: 12 Estudios Sencillos; Reinhardt Variations; MOSCARDINI: Suburbio; TORROBA: Sonatina

Fleur de Son 58036—54 minutes

Mr Topchii has been busy. He has placed first in nearly 30 international competitions, including the 2014 JoAnn Falletta International Guitar Concerto Competition. I reviewed a selection of the winners of that competition (S/O 2016), including Topchii in the Villa-Lobos concerto, and included the set on my Best of the Year. I reviewed a solo release in January/February 2017, and here’s another.

I was less enthusiastic about that release, not from the quality of playing, but from the lack of cohesion of the program. This is a distinct improvement. It’s a well balanced mix of traditional and new repertory, from Sor through Brouwer. No notes on the music, which is a pity. I like the Biasi and the Moscardini pieces, both clearly modern but quite approachable; and I’d like to know more about the composers and the works. There are two pages on the Competition, which I don’t begrudge. That’s an increasingly important institution, attracting the best of the best and sending them on to what one hopes will be great careers.

Topchii’s playing is as fine as one would expect. His playing is essentially Apollonian—restrained, without excess, but always expressive and tasteful. Sometimes the music might benefit from a wider range of dynamics and timbre, but I’d always prefer playing like this to
an overwrought interpretation. If the program attracts you, you won’t be disappointed.

KEATON

**Parthenia (1613)**
Byrd, Bull, Gibbons
Catalina Vicens, hpsi; Rebeka Ruso, viol
Carpe Diem 16298—65 minutes
Alina Rotaru, hpsi
Sono Luminus 92208—53 minutes

This book is important to music history as England's first publication of harpsichord music. It was a gift to Princess Elizabeth Stuart (daughter of James VI) as part of her extravagant 1613 wedding to Frederick V of Heidelberg. The engraver, William Hole, brought together eight harpsichord pieces by William Byrd, seven by John Bull, and six by Orlando Gibbons.

The recording by Catalina Vicens is actually from 2013; Alina Rotaru’s is new. I have not heard the earlier recordings of this book by David Ponsford (RiverRun) and Mary Jane Newman (Centaur, JA 2003). Vicens plays six different harpsichords: three antiques and three modern reproductions. Rotaru plays on a bright-toned single-manual harpsichord by Thomas and Barbara Wolf.

John Bull’s pieces in this book give the most opportunities for an athletic sprint, matching one of Rotaru’s strengths. William Byrd tends toward the melancholy, which Vicens projects more intensely than Rotaru. The music by Orlando Gibbons bridges both those characters.

Vicens changes some prominent G-sharps to G-naturals near the end of the first strain in the ‘Salisbury Pavane’ by Gibbons. She also recomposes two of the other pieces by Gibbons: she adds a treble viol to play the soprano part in the ‘Salisbury Galliard’ and adds a bass viol in ‘The Queens Command’. This latter arrangement is extensive and thrilling, as Vicens and colleague Rebeka Ruso make the piece more than twice as long with additional variations. With 15 minutes of blank space here, Vicens could have included the original solo versions of the music, as well—I miss them. The last Praeludium by Gibbons is exceptionally grand, as Vicens plays on a “mother and child” virginal: two separate instruments stacked up and coupled together. She offers a free secondary booklet about this recording on her web site, documenting her thoughts on making this recording.

Vicens’s fingering style in moderately-paced music brings out a clear articulation in pairs of notes. Part of the time, Rotaru uses a more modern-sounding approach that doesn’t bring out pairing, but she does articulate the Gibbons Praeludium with very fast pairs. I miss that articulative subtlety when it’s not there, but this is a very minor complaint.

Rotaru’s tempos are faster in almost every piece in the book, and when she rolls chords, it’s often brusque. She makes the long lines brilliant, and her smoothness of fingering helps to project the music at the level of the big, slower beats. She also tends to play the fastest notes with a basic evenness of time (as seen on the page), with an energetic forward drive. Vicens bends things more freely in the beats, making the ornamental details sound more spontaneous. Rotaru’s delivery of the Gibbons ‘Fantazia’ is relentless and hard-edged, while Vicens finds places for gentler phrasing and softened attacks in the same tempo.

Characterizing the bigger picture: Vicens finds a courtly world of the gentle lute, much of the time, while Rotaru plays as if for a public wedding in a big space. Both these approaches sound convincing. I’m glad to have these two contrasting recordings, both very well played and bringing out such different views of the music.

**Variazioni**
Italian harpsichords from the Smithsonian collection
Webb Wiggins
Friends of Music 10209—65 minutes

This album is a showcase for two Italian harpsichords in the Smithsonian Institute: one by Giusti (Rome, 1693) and the other by DeQuoco (Florence, 1694). Barbara Wolf has kept these instruments in good playing shape and tuned in meantone.

Webb Wiggins plays music by Frescobaldi (24 minutes), Storace (25 minutes), Cabezon, Merula, and Luzzaschi. The music is from much earlier than the instruments. Cabezon’s was published in 1578 (posthumously; he died in 1566). The latest and biggest pieces here are Storace’s, published in 1664. The program is a well-balanced assortment of dances, variation sets, passacaglias, toccatas, and a capriccio.

Wiggins’s performance is superlative, filled with subtleties of timing and variety of mood. He is responsive to the surprising twists and turns in the music, highlighting details. He also conveys an effective dramatic shape for each piece.

The Smithsonian’s web store of recordings
This is a selection of Belgian and Flemish pieces from the 19th and 20th Centuries. Most are in the “Paris Conservatory” style, and the Guide Morceau, composed in 1887, was written for that reason, to judge the oboe students’ proficiency on the English horn. About half of the works are for oboe, the rest for English horn.

Bram Nolf’s playing is expressive and colorful, convincing in emotional range from plaintive melancholy to sparkling vivacity. His intonation is stronger on oboe, though he plays the English horn with a burnished tone at his best in supple, shimmering phrases.

The most interesting pieces are Joseph Jongen’s Meditation and Lecture, with their unexpectedly Straussian melodic and harmonic twists, and Frits Celis’s Kareol. The latter is the only contemporary piece on the program, written in 1997. Sharing its name with Tristan’s castle from Tristan und Isolde, it is dreamlike and doleful. Celis quotes the famous English horn solos from the final act of Tristan, developing that music with a brief original theme.

The liner notes, in Dutch, English, French, and German, are informative, and include Celis’s own words about his piece.

Winds & Pipes

Unusual program of pieces for organ and wind ensemble; four involve the organ, the others are for wind ensemble alone. The Peeters and Trachsel are original works for organ and winds; the Guilmant, Gigout, Gabrieli, and Bach are arrangements. The Guilmant is not particularly interesting, and the Gigout is too fast, which negates the sense of majesty the composer intended. The most interesting piece is the Trachsel, a three-movement work that uses the organ and winds in creative ways. The Gabrieli arrangements are splendid, especially the Sonata 20 for 22 parts in 5 choirs and the motet ‘Omnes Gentes’ for 21 voices in four choirs. Ending with the chorale prelude is a curious bit of programming.

The organ is a 1932 Jehmlich (rebuilt 1998-2007) found in St Mary’s Cathedral, Wurzen, Germany. It is not particularly distinguished, sounding wheezy and squeaky. I find the over-
all recorded sound unsatisfying, lacking presence and clarity. Notes on the music, performers, and specification.

**St Mark’s Seattle**
Sweelinck, Buxtehude, Bach, Soler, Pärt, Alain, Duruflé
Michael Kleinschmidt
Loft 1161—65 minutes

In September of 1965, E Power Biggs played the inaugural recital on the new Flentrop organ at St Mark’s Cathedral in Seattle. In October of 2015, Michael Kleinschmidt, the current music director of the cathedral, marked the 50th anniversary of the instrument with a recital that included some of the pieces played half a century earlier by Biggs. This is that recital. The organ has four manuals and 55 stops. It is unusually large for a mechanical-action organ, and it has influenced many other builders.

The program opens with ‘Ballo del Granduca’, a set of variations by Sweelinck on a dance piece of 1589 by Emilio de Cavalieri. It is one of the pieces Biggs played in 1965. The others are the two Bach works on the program: ‘Schmücke dich, O Liebe Seele’ from the *Leipzig Chorales*, and the Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor. There is another hommage to Biggs in the form of ‘The Emperor’s Fanfare’, a piece that he adapted from a concerto for two keyboard instruments by Antonio Soler and recorded in Spain on the horizontal trumpets of the organ in Toledo Cathedral. The horizontal trumpets heard here were built by Paul Fritts in 2012 to replace the original ones by Flentrop. On the basis of the recording, I cannot say that I find them particularly attractive: more abrasive than majestic.

The remaining piece of early music on the program is Buxtehude’s fantasy on the Epiphany chorale ‘Wie Schön Leuchtet der Morgenstern’. Kleinschmidt treats it to colorfully changing registrations that characterize the work’s distinct sections and the echo effects so common in the North German style.

The rest of the program is from the 20th Century. Arvo Pärt’s *Annum per Annum* was commissioned in 1980 for the 900th anniversary of Speyer Cathedral in Germany. It is an evocation of the five principal sung portions of the Ordinary of the Mass, and is pervaded by a gentle rocking rhythm. Jehan Alain’s *Prelude for the Office of Compline* is a quietly mysterious work whose chordal writing evokes the impression of distant bells as an accompaniment to quotations from the Gregorian Office Hymn for Compline. The recital comes to a dazzling conclusion with Maurice Duruflé’s *Prelude & Fugue on the Name of Alain*.

Kleinschmidt’s playing is always solid and fluent. He puts the Flentrop organ through its paces. He was appointed Canon Musician at St Mark’s Cathedral in 2015, and before that he held positions at Trinity Cathedral, Portland, Oregon, and Trinity Church, Copley Square, Boston. He regards Gerre Hancock as his principal mentor in church music—he served as his assistant at St Thomas Church, New York in the early 1990s.

**Celebration**
Spivey Hall Organ
Bach, Bach, Cabanilles, Mozart, Wesley, Whitlock, Parker, Karg-Elert
Alan Morrison
ACA 20127—67 minutes

This recording is a 25th-anniversary showcase for the Albert Schweitzer Memorial Organ at Spivey Hall on the campus of Clayton State University in Morrow, Georgia. The 400-seat auditorium is a benefaction of Walter and Emilie Spivey, Atlanta area real estate developers, and opened in 1991. The hall is small enough to allow a relatively intimate connection with the artist. An imposing pipe organ was part of the original plan. The three-manual, 79-rank Ruffatti organ was completed in 1992.

Alan Morrison has been head of the organ department at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia since 2002 and has recently been named organist-in-residence at Spivey Hall. He opens his program with the well-known *Toccata & Fugue in D minor* by Bach. He plays this and all of the works on the program in the symphonic-orchestral manner, and in the process demonstrates his consummate mastery of that style of playing. He is not as quirky or eccentric as Virgil Fox, but his performances are marked by frequent changes in registration that are in some ways comparable to orchestral transcriptions. I freely confess that I am not a great fan of this style of playing. There comes a point where the kaleidoscopic registration changes seem contrived and almost distract attention from the music. At worst, one suspects that the player fears the audience will become bored if the tone color does not change every five seconds. At the same time, one must admire an artist who does this sort of thing well, and Morrison does.

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He follows with two lighter pieces of early music. The ‘Ciaccona’ in B-flat by JS Bach’s elder second cousin Johann Bernhard Bach (1676-1749) may have been intended for the harpsichord, but it lends itself to performance at the organ. The ‘Corrente Italiana’ by Juan Cabanilles (1644-1712) is a dance piece. As in the Toccata & Fugue, if not more so, Morrison lavishes his registrational ingenuity on these miniatures. For example, at one point in the Cabanilles he uses bass note clusters to give the effect of a drum. The end result is not so much a performance of early music in the ordinary sense as perhaps an organist’s counterpart to Respighi’s orchestral suites of Ancient Airs and Dances. Mozart’s Fantasy in F minor (K 608) and Samuel Sebastian Wesley’s Choral Song & Fugue in C are played in an imposing manner.

The remaining works on the program—Percy Whitlock’s ‘Folk Tune’, the Allegretto (III) of Horatio Parker’s Sonata in E-flat minor, and Sigfrid Karg-Elert’s ‘Jesu, Meine Freude’—date from a time when the symphonic-orchestral style of playing was the norm. In that sense, these pieces are given the most “authentic” performance. The Karg-Elert work is the most monumental on the program, comparable in scope to the larger chorale fantasias of Max Reger. It also offers a dazzling vehicle for Morrison’s virtuosity.

The recording was made February 27-29, 2016. Each track concludes with audience applause. The booklet also includes the transcript of an interview between Morrison and Phil Muse of the Audio Video Club of Atlanta from May 20, 2016.

The German Muse

BUXTHEUDE: Toccata in D; DISTLER: 7 Pieces;
BOHM: Jesu, du Bist Alz zu Schéén; BACH: Trio Sonata 3; PACHELBEL: Ciacona in F minor;
ZIPOLI: Pastorale; HINDEMITH: Sonata 2;
WALCHA: Chorale Preludes

This recording presents a variety of pieces from the Baroque and modern German repertoire. Olsen is Professor of Organ at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and Associate Professor of Organ at Salem College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He gives excellent performances—engaging and musically interesting. Of note are the delightful pieces by Distler and Walcha, which deserve to be better known. His performance of the Hindemith is particularly good.

I am baffled by why the Zipoli is included on a program of German organ music. The notes give no clue. I could have done without it and the Pachelbel, preferring more Distler and/or Walcha.

The real star of this recording is the wonderful 1965 (rebuilt 2013) Flentrop organ in the Shirley Recital Hall at Salem College. The rich fundamental sound and colorful stops are perfect for this repertoire. The recorded sound is clear and rich. Extensive notes on the music and specification.

DEL Camp

Famous & Infamous

Clarke, Purcell, Bach, Alcock, Stubley, Albright, Franck, Mouret
Fred Sautter, tpt; Roger Sherman, org
Loft 1155—64 minutes
This recording is part of a series to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1965 Flentrop organ (4-55) at St Mark’s Cathedral in Seattle. This recording is of a recital given in November of 1991.

Roger Sherman points out in his notes that, effective as the combination of trumpet and organ is, very little has been written explicitly for that pairing. Indeed, most of the repertory presented here are arrangements and adaptations. The one exception is Jericho: Battle Music (1976) by William Albright (1944-98), a substantial three-movement work commissioned by Fred Sautter (who plays it here) and organist Douglas Butler. It was inspired by the biblical account of Joshua’s conquest of Jericho, which conspicuously involved the blowing of trumpets. Piersely dissonant harmonies and jagged melodic lines convey the violence of the biblical episode, though there are also quieter passages of elegiac character. It is a showpiece for both trumpet and organ.

The program opens with The Prince of Denmark’s March, once commonly attributed to Henry Purcell, but more likely the work of Jeremiah Clarke (1674-1707). This is followed by the Trumpet Tune from Purcell’s music for the drama Bonduca. The Trumpet Voluntary that follows is here attributed to Purcell, but it too is sometimes ascribed to Clarke.

Trumpet voluntaries for the organ were quite common in 18th-Century England, but they were intended to be played with the right hand on the organ’s trumpet stop while the left hand played an unharmonized bass line. Often there would be dialog between the main solo

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trumpet stop and an echo trumpet available on larger organs. That is the case with the voluntaries by John Alcock (1715-1806) and Simon Stubble (1702-48) performed here. Each begins with a slow introductory movement for the organ diapasons followed by the lively trumpet movement. Here Fred Sautter plays the principal trumpet solos, and the organ trumpet supplies the echo. In addition to the pieces for trumpet and organ, Roger Sherman plays three solo organ pieces: Bach’s Little Fugue in G minor, his Toccata & Fugue in D minor, and Franck’s Chorale 1 in E. As an encore following applause, Sautter and Sherman play Jean-Joseph Mouret’s Rondeau of Masterpiece Theatre fame.

The performances themselves are very fine, but I find the recorded sound less than satisfactory. The levels seem to be exceedingly high, almost on the verge of distortion; and turning the playback volume to a comfortable level does not completely alleviate the problem. The levels are so high that room ambience sounds like rain on the roof, and the reverberation is overpowering. This is not the case with the Kleinschmidt recording (above), so it is clearly possible to record in that space to good advantage.

Before his retirement in 2006, Fred Sautter served for 41 years as principal trumpet of the Philharmonia Hungarica, Hamburg Philharmonic, and Oregon Symphony. Since then he has continued to perform as a soloist. Roger Sherman is Associate Organist Emeritus of St Mark’s following 30 years of service to the cathedral.

Klavierabend

HAYDN: Piano Sonata 52
SCHUMANN: Fantasy
SCRIABIN: Sonata 3

Jasmin Arakawa
MSR 1619—68 minutes

Arakawa’s Haydn is solid: fluid, cleanly played, and articulated with precision. Though her approach has the verve necessary for a sharp and witty Haydn, she lacks overall cohesion, as I hear one idea break into another abruptly. Each idea and phrase is presented clearly, but there needs to be more of a narrative. The second movement should be extremely moving, but is taken too fast.

Her strengths are in rich lyricism, as the Schumann Fantasy shows, but it needs more depth of contrast. The Scriabin has finely spun details, and the opening of I feels chillier and more remote compared to Horowitz’s warmer sound. I admire that she shapes the movement like an ice sculpture in its pristine clarity. But the more sprightly II has much of the same restraint and remoteness, and as a result is not an effective contrast (listen to Ashkenazy’s for comparison).

Daniel Barenboim: My New Piano

SCARLATTI: Sonatas; BEETHOVEN: 32 Variations; CHOPIN: Ballade 1; WAGNER, arr. LISZT: March to the Holy Grail; LISZT: Funerailles; Mephisto Waltz I

DG 4796724 — 68 minutes

Barenboim’s “new piano” is based on an “old piano”: inspired by Liszt’s restored piano and designed by Belgian instrument maker Chris Maene, the “sound alternative” piano was created with no crossed strings and repositioning of the soundboard, hammers, and strings. The goal was to achieve the more transparent sound of Liszt’s 200-year-old piano along with the power and touch of a modern instrument.

The transparency of sound is evident in this program. Barenboim displays an expressive melody and great use of rubato. There does seem to be a change in sound character between the bass and the treble, further emphasizing the different voices. The treble has a greater range of sound and color and sounds distinct from the bass. While the transparency works well with Chopin and Scarlatti, the Liszt selections are difficult to hear, though I do like the velvety tone in the Mephisto Waltz. The tempo sometimes is too erratic for me.

The Lost Lady

Donna Coleman, p
OutBach 2—72 minutes (800-BUYMYCD)

Donna Coleman is a wonderful pianist for this music. When Jack Sullivan reviewed her last album (with similar music—Nov/Dec 2006, p 230) he praised her “warm and seductive approach”. Many players, he said, make this music dance, but Donna Coleman “brings out the full range of exotic colors and suave lyricism”. She “makes this music sing rather than swing, and syncopations are subtle rather than flashy”. It’s simply more sophisticated than many recordings of this music. Note that that album also had some Cuban Dances of Ignacio Cervantes (he wrote 37 of them, and there are 8 here).

The biggest piece here is by Chopin: his 4th Ballade. I can find no fault with her playing. Second-longest piece is Bolcom’s ‘Lost Lady
Rag’, which gives the album its title. Another Bolcom rag is here: ‘Last Rag’. There’s one Joplin rag—‘Maple Leaf’. There are 4 Bach choraies, and the program opens with ‘La Comparsa’ by Lecuona, one of his Afro-Cuban Dances.

It amazes me how well this program works, mixing periods and genres. Nothing seems to clash with anything else (not even Chopin and Cuba)! And it’s a very enjoyable program, very well played. Note that the album folder has a different order than the booklet for bands 18 and 19. The booklet is correct: the Bolcom is 19.

VROON

Children’s World
Poulenc, Mompou, Schnittke, Turina+, Mirian Conti, p
Albany 1642—78 minutes

It must be hard to write children’s music that also succeeds as music. If this program is any indication, the only well-known composer to have accomplished it is Schumann. The rest of the program trots out the same cliches again and again—sing-songy and forgettable melodies, blatantly wrong-note harmonies so we know exactly where to laugh...well, at least none of the pieces goes on too long.

And this is not the only problem. Ms Conti plays well, though she is light on interpretation, so the music sounds a bit too flat. But far worse is the sound of the recording, from which much of the mid-range and lower frequencies seem to have been leached away by the engineers or producers. The effect is like trying to hear on a plane after the pressure has closed up your ears. I keep trying to clear them to hear better, but nothing works.

HASKINS

Lucas Debargue

BACH: Toccata in C minor; BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonata 7; MEDTNER: Sonata
Sony 34176—70 minutes

Debargue won fourth place in the Tchaikovsky competition in 2015, after taking first place in the Alieva Competition in 2014. His training is unorthodox. Unlike many pianists, he was self-taught until late into his teenaged years (only becoming “serious” at around the age of 20). A Spectator review of his playing then comments on his odd fingerprints. These comments led me to expect a player who was more idiosyncratic, with surprising, refreshing interpretations of well known works.

Despite his training, this recording sounds text-book, especially in the Beethoven and Bach. This is not a bad thing: he shows clear melodies and a singing tone in both. In III of the Beethoven the buoyant rhythm is there, though the articulations seem to be on the abrupt side. His playing is also deliberate. But in the Bach, it seems that precision overrides any interpretive originality; as a result, it lacks authority and gravitas. The Medtner is also straightforward, though he shows great affection for the work and can command its dense textures and communicate its large scale narrative clearly.

This program is highly impressive for someone whose trajectory is less than traditional. He has undeniable talent, of course, and it’s almost unbelievable that he can play such works with such little formal training. The hubbub around his background and competition winnings made me expect more, so I am left wanting.

KANG

Jamina Gerl: Wanderer
TYX 16082—73 minutes

Yet another young German pianist launches her recorded career and does so in style. Provocatively posed on a tree limb and wearing a white dress, who could resist her sultry charms, many attractive photographs, and her considerable musical talent.

Schubert’s Wanderer Fantasy is the major work here, and Gerl manages to find something fresh and exciting along its well trod pathways. To begin with, there is no problem in getting the keyboard to speak any way she wishes, and she balances virtuosity with expressivity and nuance.

There are two Liszt Concert Etudes: ‘Waldesrascheln’ and ‘Gnomenreigen’. The first flows delectably and with a gentle touch, while the latter has always been a vehicle for displaying a pianist’s virtuosity. Debussy’s ‘Isle Joyeuse’ is an island I certainly wouldn’t mind visiting. Given Gerl’s soft and fragile appearance, her ability to hurl forth a torrent of muscular sound seems amazing. Yet she can be as gentle as one could wish in Mendelssohn’s three ‘Venetian Gondola Songs’ from his Songs Without Words. The Fantasy in F-sharp minor, Op. 28, cannot be faulted either, as its three sections hang together perfectly.

Chabrier’s Bouree Fantasque and the Three Fantastic Dances of Shostakovich complete a most interesting program by this remarkable pianist. May she continue, but leave behind any proclivity to pose as a sex symbol—no matter what her promoters suggest.

BECKER

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As this series illustrates, futurism encompasses everything from Scriabin's delicate *Deux Morceaux*, Op. 57, to Stravinsky's spastic *Piano-Rag Music* to the terse, gray chords of Nikolai Roslavets's 'Prelude in Memory of Arkady Abaza'—and that's just in the first four tracks of the final volume! Roslavets's Deux Compositions are quietly tortured, and his 5 Preludes are moody but not without bemused ruminations or even tenderness. Where Scriabin sought divine mysticism in his harmonies, Roslavets was after a more humanistic kind.

Continuing with Volume 4, Protopopov's Sonata No. 1 is an atmospheric work, but at the same time it is constantly moving forward. Even the filigrees of the Lento are pushed by the light tread of the background line. The finale has big chords, primitivist marching, and colorful tremolos, and it doesn't seem to know what to do with itself other than make an impression racket. Scriabin's 2 Dances, Op. 73, and 5 Preludes, Op. 74, form a long, foggy stretch of playing that clears up briefly for the third and fifth preludes. His *White Mass* Sonata, with its cascades and shimmers, is not my cup of tea, but it is beautifully played. Nikolai Obukhov's icy 'Adorons Christ' ends the disc twice; if you're listening in stereo rather than surround sound, an alternate version of the piece appears on track 24.

Alexander Mosolov gets Volume 3 all to himself with his Sonatas 1, 2, 4, and 5 (No. 3 is lost) and the Two Nocturnes. He’s most famous for his orchestral piece, *Iron Foundry*, and he is the most primitivist and percussive of the futurists. His writing is fantastic, difficult, and it sounds utterly pianistic, but it is unrelentingly dark. His line between passion and pounding is thin, and even when he lightens up, he is still stern.

I reviewed Volume 2 a few years ago (Jan/Feb 2015, p206). It has Arthur Lourie’s *Five Fragile Preludes, Poems, Syntheses, Shapes in the Air*, and *Daily Routine*, all written from when he was 16 (in 1908) to 23. Scriabin's influence is pronounced; the air of melancholy that infuses the early preludes slowly dissipates over the course of all these pieces, and a more outward-looking but fragmented approach becomes apparent. By the time of *Shapes in the Air*, even the staves themselves have been mutilated. According to the booklet, “Similar notation would appear again only four decades later with the likes of Stockhausen and Boulez. The staves are arranged not as a continuum, but rather seemingly at random on the page, in the air. The notation eschews braces, thereby fanning out the ‘registers’ in up to five systems.” Lourie's trajectory gets stranger over time, and then suddenly with the considerably more coherent *Daily Routine*, it takes a more populist approach with even some hints of jazz.

Sergei Protopopov's single-movement Sonata No. 3, from 1924-28, is more mystical, but his ideas are like guests who don't know when to leave. The potent mix of subdued wanderings and explosive outbursts becomes pounding octaves and chords for too much of the third quarter of the piece; and any mystery evaporates when these obsessive figurations take over. Each gesture that tries to restore some purpose falls flat—everything is so loud that there's no room to grow when the texture or thematic material changes. The volume does drop back down after a few minutes, and the piece ends with a suspense-filled whisper, but that middle section is weak.

Jack Sullivan liked Volume 1 (S/O 2009, p238). He said, "Everything here is ear-stretching but seductive, uncompromising but pleasurable." And, "(the pieces) have a sound that is unique and poetic. Rather than constructing tone rows, they built a new aesthetic based on chords and colors; rather than abandoning tonality, they extended it." He notes how the composers "took the innovations of Scriabin and extended them into even more exotic territory"; The short pieces by Obukhov “consist of violent splashes of color, hypnotic intervals floating in space, and all manner of spicy chords”. They are meditative, and most are inspired by Orthodox Christianity; some come across as extremely personal prayers and have much in common with Messiaen. Ivan Wyschnegradsky's Two Preludes mark a return to traditional tonality, but their rhythms, scoring, and jabs of color betray their futurism.

Protopopov's Sonata No. 5 is dramatic and expressive, using that chords-and-colors aesthetic to full advantage. Wyschnegradsky's *Etude sur le Carre Magique Sonore* was written in 1957, 40 years after his Two Preludes, and it is much more experimental; I suppose, though, that by the late 1950s, it was actually backward-looking.

Gunther is an exceptional pianist, and he
must be praised for his talent and commitment. The four-disc set will be only for the most dedicated; for listeners interested enough to invest in one disc, I’d recommend Volume 4. I’m no stranger to far-out piano music, but it was difficult to get through an entire album in a single sitting. Each booklet has 40 to 50 pages of notes in German and English. The sound is clear and natural.

Romantic Piano Promenade
HENSEL: 3 Pieces; MENDELSSOHN: 7 Songs Without Words; SCHUBERT: Wanderer Fantasy; Scherzo; Allegretto; SCHUMANN: Forest Scenes
Matthias Kirschnereit
Berlin 785—79 minutes

This long program consists of pieces pulled from three previous Berlin releases, issued in 2010, 2012, and 2015, none of them reviewed in ARG. Evidently the purpose is to give a “portrait” of the pianist, and that title appears in large letters on the front cover. Matthias Kirschnereit (b. 1962) is a well-established German pianist who has made many other recordings, especially of Mozart.

The pieces are arranged thus: 2 by Hensel (Mendelssohn’s sister) are followed by 4 of Mendelssohn, 3 of Schubert (the Wanderer Fantasy flanked by two short pieces), the Schumann suite of 9 short pieces, 3 more by Mendelssohn, and finally another one by Hensel.

Of the 10 Hensel and Mendelssohn pieces, 8 bear fast tempo markings (allegro or presto), which puts a certain strain on the listener. It would have been better to include a few slower pieces. (Of Mendelssohn’s 48 Songs Without Words, less than half have fast tempo markings.) Schubert’s Wanderer Fantasy is also mostly loud and virtuosic, so the main resting point of this unquiet program is Schumann’s Forest Scenes. Here Kirschnereit is also at his best. Elsewhere he is not quite as subtle and occasionally produces some harsh sounds, but all pieces are rendered quite convincingly.

Readers who would like to get to know this pianist or acquire a good recording of the Forest Scenes need look no further. The booklet contains a brief statement by the pianist and a longish biographical sketch in German and English. There are no notes on the music, as is common in such “portrait” releases.

Evgeny Kissin
Complete RCA & Sony Albums
Sony 12720 [25CD]

Another treasurable super box at a giveaway price. It will undoubtedly please collectors, but irk those of us who shelled out their cash for each separate release. Like most other boxes of this nature, there are no notes—just a thin booklet giving contents, plus an alphabetical list of composers indexed to each disc.

Most annoying is the use of the word “complete”, when the 1984 legendary Moscow concert of both Chopin piano concertos with conductor Dmitri Kitaenko has not been included (RCA 68378). The missing disc also contained two Mazurkas and a Waltz. Still, we have much to be thankful for.

While the prodigy has grown up, and some of the astonishment has worn off, there is much to praise here and nothing that causes any severe disappointment. Disc 1 contains an effective, if slightly laid back performance of Rachmaninoff’s popular Concerto 2 with Gergiev and the London Symphony, along with a stirringly played selection of the Etudes-Tableaux. Disc 2 has a sparkling performance of Haydn’s Piano Concerto in D and Shostakovich’s Piano Concerto 1 (Moscow Virtuosi/ Spivakov), along with Prokofieff’s Overture on Hebrew Themes.

Two discs bring us Kissin’s September 30, 1990 Carnegie Hall debut. Crisp execution marks Prokofieff’s Sonata 6 and Schumann’s Symphonic Etudes. The posthumous variations are interspersed with the others. Schumann’s Sonata 1 is powerfully played and makes one aware that Kissin has mastered this composer’s tricky rubato. Carnaval is more of a mixed bag. Perhaps too much deliberation has entered the equation.

Once again with Spivakov, Mozart’s Piano Concertos 12 and 20 sparkle with joy and delight. Rachmaninoff’s challenging Concerto 3 yearns moodily in Kissin’s laid-back approach. Ozawa and the Boston Symphony seem to be of similar mind, though this writer tends to prefer more forward thrust and sinew.

Schumann’s beautiful Piano Concerto is heard in a refined, expressive performance with the Vienna Philharmonic under Giulini. The Arabeske and Schubert song transcriptions also represent the best of Kissin. Beethoven’s Concertos 2 and 5 are also fully sympathetic in the hands of Kissin and conductor James Levine with the Philharmonia Orchestra.
Kassin’s Chopin is always a treat, and the set includes outstanding performances of selected Mazurkas, Waltzes, Polonaises, and Nocturnes, in addition to Sonatas 2 and 3 and the wonderful F minor Fantasy. There is a wonderfully imaginative set of the Op. 28 Preludes plus the Ballades, Scherzos, and Impromptus. Schumann’s C major Fantasy competes favorably with most other recordings, and the Kreisleriana is very impressive. Some of Liszt’s Transcendental Etudes make one lament that the entire set was not recorded. The two Haydn sonatas trip off the pianist’s fingers most delicately.

Both sets of the Brahms Paganini Variations are included, played with virtuosity and subtle grace. Franck’s Prelude, Chorale & Fugue and Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata maintain their magic well in view of the endless recordings available. Pictures at an Exhibition, while very good, does sometimes seem too deliberate and cautious. Also most impressive is Brahms’s early robust Sonata 3—definitely to be compared with the best—along with a selection of the composer’s other piano music.

Schubert’s massive Sonata in B-flat begins at a slow tempo and finds Kissin taking every opportunity to over-emphasize. But there are many good things about the performance, and once you get used to his phrasing it works pretty well. A selection of the composer’s songs arranged by Liszt and the first Mephisto Waltz are among the set’s high points.

 Scriabin’s Sonata 3 and Five Preludes Op. 15 are perfectly complemented by Medtner’s Sonata Reminiscenza and Stravinsky’s Petrouchka movements. The latter is especially stunning, and makes you forget the absence of an orchestra.

Returning to Schubert, this time with James Levine for some of the composer’s four-hand piano music. We have the Grand Duo Sonata, the Fantasy D.940, and Allegro Lebenssturme D.947. These artists together give us a real treat, though some might object to the rather forward recording. Still, there is certainly nothing dull about these performances from May 1, 2005 at Carnegie Hall.

Few pianophiles will want to be without this generous set. While I would not place all the performances in the top rank, they are definitely not far from that rarified realm. I have not mentioned all of the works performed, so there are many more pleasant discoveries to be made.

American Record Guide

American Sonatas

REINAGLE: Piano Sonata 1; MACDOWELL: Sonata 1; GRIFFES: Sonata; SIEGMEISTER: Sonata 1

Cecile Licad, p

Danacord 774—71 minutes

This album from The Anthology of American Piano Music presents first sonatas by four American composers from different eras. In terms of national identity, it’s an odd assemblage. There is nothing remotely American about Reinagle’s sonata from 1786, a Haydnesque romp in two movements, played with wit and fluency here. The same international quality holds for MacDowell’s Tragic Sonata, a work of striking richness and melancholy where Licad shows off her big sound and warm romantic sensibility, especially in the heroic finale. (MacDowell abjured the whole notion of Americaneness.)

As for Griffes, he was too idiosyncratic to easily fit any label or nationality, and this sonata, his only one, is typical. Mysterious, tonally adventurous, and slightly exotic, it is the most striking piece on the program, a work of “shocking originality” in the words of Virgil Thomson. Sometimes it sounds, French, sometimes Russian, never American. Licad brings out its many perfumes and nuances, displaying bold colors and a big dynamic range.

Just when we think Americana is not going to part of the program, Elie Siegmeister’s 1944 Sonata 1, The American, dances in to end the album with an unabashedly nationalist work full of folk song quotations, snappy syncopation, and bluesy sensibility. The exciting finale, marked ‘Lusty and Joyous,’ ends with a spacious wind-down full of the open sounds redolent of 40s Copland and Foss. Why it isn’t performed more is beyond me. Licad plays it with fire and fervor. It is a young man’s work, vigorous, tuneful, highly accessible—and a terrific coda to an appealing album.

SULLIVAN

Amplified Soul

Beethoven, Rachmaninoff, Bates, Visconti, Szymanowski

Gabriela Martinez, p

Delos 3526—55 minutes

I didn’t know Ms Martinez’s name before reviewing this, but she is well worth knowing. She won first prize in the Anton G. Rubinstein Piano Competition and was a semifinalist at the 12th Cliburn competition, has already performed at a number of locations and with a couple of first-class orchestras, and (from the
evidence of this recording and the biography) pays more than mere lip service to new music. The recording is very well made and the sound excellent in every way.

She begins with Beethoven’s Sonata 7. I is playful, light without becoming anemic; she includes excellent control over textures as well as subtle and effective articulation; the overall approach is lighter than necessary, but it works fine. She departs from several of Beethoven’s articulations in the trio of the minuet and the finale, but they make a musical effect, and it sounds like she made a conscious decision rather than a simple error of inattention. The same great control appears in Rachmaninoff’s Moment Musical 1 in B-flat minor, though here I wish the piano sound were a little brighter.

Two contemporary works are a mixed bag: Mason Bates’s White Lies for Lomax (2007), as the composer writes, “dreams up wisps of distant blues fragments—more fiction than fact, since they are hardly honest recreations of the blues”; the heterogeneous sounds are too incoherent, like a student work (though it is not particularly early); and the jazz- or blues-inflected passagework does not sound convincing here.

Dan Visconti’s Amplified Soul (2014) is far more effective. It derives, Visconti writes, from “the primal sound of medieval music”, but the harmonic and melodic world sounds thoroughly new. (I didn’t read the note before I heard the music.) The work is beautifully conceived for the piano and exquisitely performed. The final work, Szymanowski’s Variations in B-flat minor, dates from the composer’s student years; Martínez’s performance, full of color and nuance, makes it sound like a masterpiece.

Kumi Matsuo

BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonatas 13+14; SCHUMANN: Arabeske; RAVEL: Gaspard de la Nuit
Con Brio 21652—57 minutes

Matsuo’s playing is tasteful and straightforward, especially in the Beethoven. Her articulation is solid, and she does not try to be too expressive. There is good balance of the hands, and even though both piano sonatas could be a bit more expressive with more conviction (especially in the last movement of 14), she has firm rhythm.

But sometimes her playing sounds too direct and too vigorous. ‘Gaspard de la Nuit’ and ‘Ondine’ lack a shimmering quality and evenness of articulation, and sound metrical and percussive, though her voicings are good. ‘Scarbo’ has more energy and color and has less of that squareness that I dislike in her ‘Gaspard’. Schumann’s ‘Arabeske’ needs more nuance and sounds aggressive; it should sound more sentimental.

KANG

Herodes Atticus Odeon Recital

BACH: French Suite 4; Ricercar; SCHUMANN: Symphonic Etudes; RAVEL: Oiseaux Tristes; Une Barque sur l’Ocean; SCRIABIN: Prelude & Nocturne; Poeme Tragique; BORODIN: In the Monastery; MOUSSORGSKY: Ballet of Chicks; PROKOFIEFF: Prelude

Tatiana Nikolayeva, p
First Hand 46—79 minutes

Nikolayeva (1924-1993) is a towering figure among Russian pianists who never attained the international reputation that she deserved. She was a teacher for over four decades and Lugansky is one of her most famous pupils. After winning a Bach competition in 1950 where she first met Shostakovich, the composer wrote his 24 Preludes and Fugues for her. I am very familiar with her Shostakovich recordings, but had not heard her playing any of the composers in this recital. What revelations! This is the first release of her open air recital in Athens on September 16, 1989.

The Bach Ricercar and French Suite are as musically played as I have ever heard. All the time she keeps contrapuntal voices clear and beautifully phrased. She has wonderful ideas about the architecture; repeats are taken, very subtle ornamentation is added, and the motivic germs that Bach varies and unifies each movement with are presented with special care. She can easily be grouped with the greatest Bach pianists of the 20th Century, including Gould, Schiff and Hewitt.

Schumann’s Symphonic Etudes here are the 1852 version (second of three) with Posthumous Variation 1 inserted between 6 and 7. Nikolayeva’s ability to sort out Bach shines through in this staple of the romantic repertoire. Despite a secure technique, there is never any over-the-top playing. This is a mature performance where everything has a secure place in the musical fabric.

The Ravel pieces are early and defining music of Impressionism. Nikolayeva plays these with more clarity than almost anyone. These performances lack a little of the wash of sound I expect in this type of music. Still, I hear new things in very familiar pieces.

March/April 2017
The final Scriabin group includes the two early pieces for left hand only and a big Poeme. Perhaps in the last piece I could use a little more of the big flashy Russian style. The little Russian encores are quite engaging. The ‘Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks’ from Pictures at an Exhibition should be carefully studied by anyone learning this work. She offers more color and panache in a minute and a half than some do in the entire work.

This is the first release of this program, which belongs in the record library of every aficionado of great piano performances. HARRINGTON

Allusions and Beyond
BACH: Brandenburg Concerto 5; 3 Chorale Preludes; BRAHMS: Haydn Variations; ZIMMERMANN: Monologs
Takahashi-Lehmann Piano Duo
Audite 97.700—69 minutes
This disc would be worth getting if all it contained were the wonderful performance of Brandenburg Concerto 5 in Reger’s piano duet version. Add the other music in, and you have one of the best discs I’ve heard recently. Though the repertoire is Germanic, it is balanced stylistically and contains a couple of acknowledged masterpieces. Bjorn Lehmann and Norie Takahashi have impressive individual credentials and have been performing together since 2009.

One is not even aware of the tremendous difficulties required to keep all of Bach’s counterpart clear or the interweaving lines smooth and flowing. It is a performance that uses all of the tonal resources of a modern piano in the most musical ways. It was originally written for solo harpsichord, violin, flute, and string ensemble. Bach was showing off both his own keyboard skill and the new two-manual harpsichord he had just acquired. The first movement cadenza is one of those legendary parts that every keyboard player admires. Reger saw fit to divide it among 4 hands, with virtually no extra notes. The challenge so wonderfully met by Takahashi and Lehmann is to make it sound like only two hands.

Bernd Alois Zimmermann (1918-70) wrote his Monologs for 2 pianos in 1964, a significant reworking of his Dialogs for 2 pianos and large orchestra from 1960. I was impressed with this large five-movement work as performed by the Huber-Thomet Duo (Wergo 6809, May/June 2015). Here it is a little faster and performed as well. It will not be to everyone’s liking, but it is a well-written and always interesting work.

The Bach Chorales and Brahms Variations are beautiful music, very well performed. The Brahms lacks a little of the excitement I like in the two Argerich recordings (Teldec, May/June 1995; EMI 58472). Excellent piano sound from Audite and comprehensive booklet notes complete this outstanding release.

HARRINGTON

Bulgarian Musical Evenings
VLADIGEROV: Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar; Violin Sonata; RAICHEV: 3 Fragments from Rebel’s Song; KRUSHEV: Viola Sonata-Elegy
Marian Kraew, v; Maria Hristova, va; Ivajla Jirova, Nadejda Vlaeva, p
Con Brio 21653—52 minutes
The music here is all well constructed and mostly in a flashy, virtuosic style. It is more pops concert classical music, full of predictably brilliant passage work. Each piece with the exception of the Kruschev would make a great program closer. Given these strong performances, everything is well worth hearing. Everything here is new to me, as are the composers. Both the Raichev and Kruschev works are listed as World Premiere recordings.

Pancho Vladigerov (1899-1978) is the senior composer here, and the booklet notes compare his contribution to Bulgarian music to Bartok’s contribution to Hungarian music. The Violin Sonata (written in 1914 when he was 15) reminds me of Franck’s with a strong Slavic vein. Kraew and Kirova deliver a committed, alternately energetic and reflective performance, and both get ample opportunity to display their technical prowess. Ensemble is dead on all through the 25 minute sonata. Vladigerov’s Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar began life in 1922 as a work for violin and piano and has at least five other versions before the two-piano one was written in 1976. It closes this program and is reminiscent of Rachmaninoff’s early Russian Rhapsody occasionally, with more modern harmonies.

Alexander Raichev (1922-2003) was a student of Vladigerov and certainly the most prolific of these three composers. He was also the teacher of Yovcho Krushev (b. 1957) who arranged his teacher’s three ballet fragments for two pianos in 1982. The Sonata-Elegy from 1985 is rooted in the romantic tradition, but is a very engaging and original work. Violists don’t have anywhere near the repertoire violin and cello do, and this mature work would definitely appeal to me were I a violist. I hope the
fine performance by Hristova and Kirova exposes this work to a wider audience. Recorded sound is suitably brilliant and close up. The booklet notes are informative.

**HARRINGTON**

**Recreation**  
24 arrangements  
Thierry Caens, tpt; Normandy Orchestra/ Jean Deroyer  
Indesens 91—66 minutes

It was not long ago that I heard trumpeter Thierry Caens for the first time, and I enjoyed it very much (Nov/Dec 2006: 236). This time? Same. He has a dark tone concept, something I always prefer for trumpet. Caens is close-miked, too, which results in even darker tone.

The program has beautiful melodies, some little known and others familiar, all with lovely orchestral accompaniment. Marin Marais’s sprightly ‘Basque’ is the terrific little opener. Caens plays Mozart’s ‘Rondo alla Turk’ (and other pieces) on a very dark flugelhorn. ‘Greensleeves’ is set in a modern arrangement, with lots of unusual twists of harmony and melody. A set of seven of Bartok’s *Romanian Dances* adds gypsy flavors. Two accounts of ‘Flight of the Bumblebee’ are included: one that is merely fast and ordinary, the other with whimsical electronic accompaniment.

**KILPATRICK**

**Baroque Masterpieces**  
Albinoni, Bach, Fasch, Marcello, Martini, Tartini  
Dominic Derasse, tpt; Kenneth Bown, org  
Roven 10216—66 minutes

Vernon is a small town on Seine River, about halfway between Paris and the English Channel. Our Lady Collegiate Church (Collegiale Notre-Dame de Vernon) dates back to the 11th Century. It suffered in numerous wars and revived and expanded in the periods between them. The big stone church has a 2800-pipe organ that was built in the early 17th Century. Parts of the original organ are still in use.

A town website (vernon-visite.org) offers a remarkable amount of information about the church and its organ, and about Gothic churches in general.

Into this very old stone church stepped trumpet player Dominic Derasse and organist Kenneth Bowen to make this recording in 2005. Sound is a big factor. The trumpet is a small, high-pitched piccolo, and it seems directed straight toward us from about 30 feet away. The organ is both near and distant, a ponderous but not opaque presence in a very large and ambient room. Balance is not a problem, but one senses that church and organ make one very big instrument that has sounded like this for centuries. Superimposed on its cavernous sound is a small trumpet.

None of the works were composed for trumpet and organ. There is the very high-pitched trumpet concerto by Johann Friedrich Fasch, the familiar oboe concerto in C minor by Alessandro Marcello (erroneously attributed here to his brother Benedetto), and a Giuseppe Tartini violin concerto with melodies that make it a trumpet favorite. One of these concertos is purportedly by Albinoni, but I can’t find it in any of that composer’s works.

There are four pieces by JS Bach: the familiar melodies ‘Sheep May Safely Graze’ and ‘Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring’; the two-part Invention 13; and the three-part Sinfonia 8. The artists play both keyboard works in a loud, brilliant staccato style that might not seem so odd if I did not already know the pieces. And there are organist Bowen’s arrangements of four organ pieces by Giambattista Martini. That same loud, brilliant staccato style is quite appropriate for the final piece, Martini’s exciting and familiar Toccata. But it’s still too loud.

As far as these pieces and trumpet playing are concerned, I don’t find much real enjoyment here. But I do enjoy hearing this old organ in this very old church.

**KILPATRICK**

**Made in Kentucky**  
Curnow, Vizzutti, Emerson, Sachse, Mower, Chance, Copland, Rimmer, Fitzgerald, Armstrong, Vincent DiMartino, tpt; Donna Rathke, Eng hn; New Columbian Brass Band/ George Foreman; Lexington Brass Band/ Ron Holz; Saxton’s Cornet Band/ David Goins; Syracuse University Wind Ensemble/ John Laverty; Kentuckiana Brass/ Ben Hawkins; Advocate Brass Band/ George Foreman  
Mark 5197 [2CD] 99 minutes

Trumpeter Vincent DiMartino has been a faculty member at the University of Kentucky and Centre College (Danville KY) since 1972. In addition to his classical credentials, he is a notable jazz musician, which can be heard in the way he attacks virtuosic and high-register passages.

In this double album, DiMartino offers all sorts of pieces with a variety of collaborators, most from Kentucky. I am quite impressed by the two pieces that involve organist Schuyler Robinson: Allen Vizzutti’s spectacular ‘Andante and Capriccio’ and Aaron Copland’s *Quiet
City (with English horn player Donna Rathke). The organ itself sounds magnificent, the sound quality superb. We are not told where these works were recorded.

The opener is James Curnow's flashy Concertpiece, with excellent backing by the Lexington Brass Band. That band is also heard in Curnow's setting of 'Be Thou My Vision' and two movements from Bernard Fitzgerald's Trumpet Concerto (a work I was not aware of until now). The New Columbian Brass Band (which has a full complement of woodwinds) accompanies in Arban's ubiquitous 'Carnival of Venice'. In Ernst Sachse's Concertino, the members of Saxton's Cornet Band play early 19th-Century valved brass instruments. The Advocate Brass Band is heard in William Rimmer's variations on 'My Old Kentucky Home' and Bill Armstrong's hard-driving, big-band setting of 'Aim For the Heart'. The Kentuckiana Brass offer solid backing in Allen Vizzutti's spectacular Five Episodes.

The one non-Kentucky entity here is the Syracuse University Wind Ensemble, which accompanies in the 3-movement, 14-minute Trumpet Concerto by John Barnes Chance. Both I (a Latin-flavored 'Declamato Vivo') and II (a soulful 'Caloroso') seem too slow to me. III ('Scherzando marziale') goes at a pace that seems fitting.

Small-group jazz is the genre in two movements from Mike Mower's Colloboraceo. It is intricate music, quite well played by DiMartino with saxophonist-flutist Miles Osland and pianist Raleigh Dailey.

Volli Subito
Grieg, Paganini, Clarke, Fauré, Arban, Collins, Rachmaninoff, Bellstedt
Alexander Wilson, tpt; Miriam Hickman, p
Summit 682—56 minutes

This album by trumpeter Alex Wilson, a doctoral student at Arizona State University and visiting professor at Grand Valley State University, offers one new work, several old-time cornet solos, and some arrangements. 'Concert Galop' (2011), by Australian composer Brendan Collins, bears the subtitle 'Thunderbolt's Pursuit' and does indeed sound like a chase. It's not a terribly fast one, though. Wilson takes it at the composer's suggested tempo, but a little faster would be more exciting.

The cornet pieces are lesser-known ones. Herbert I Clarke's 'Funiculi, Funicula' has variations on that popular tune. Having often heard Hermann Bellstedt's cornet setting of the same tune ('Napoli'), I am happy to make the acquaintance of this more virtuosic one. I am also happy to make the acquaintance of Bellstedt's 'Carnival of Venice', having heard Clarke's and Jean-Baptiste Arban's umpteen times. Arban's 'Little Swiss Boy' is new to me.

Wilson opens the program with a deftly played arrangement of 'Anitra's Dance' (Grieg, Peer Gyn). Debussy's 'Apres un Reve' sounds appropriately wistful. Rachmaninoff's brooding Elegy in E-flat minor, originally for piano solo, sounds good for two trumpets and piano. Garrett Klein, the second trumpeter, nicely matches Wilson's tone, articulations, and nuances.

The big piece is Wilson's own arrangement of Paganini's Violin Concerto 2. Wilson says he had become fixated on mastering the trumpet arrangement of Saint-Saens's violin showpiece Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso, but because that arrangement is so closely associated with Russian trumpeter Sergei Nakariakov (Nov/Dec 2000: 281), he decided to play the Paganini instead. It is full of technical challenges, of course, and Wilson does quite well.
with them. He does not have Nakariakov’s amazing ability to sound like a violinist on trumpet, but then, no one does.

The fine piano collaborator is Miriam Hickman.

KILPATRICK

Entre Orient & Occident

KOMITAS: The Crane; CHAUSSON: Poem; JANACEK: Violin Sonata; HOSSEIN: Caravan; KAMANGAR: Once There Was and Once There Wasn’t; HERSANT: Songs of the South; BARTOK: Romanian Folk Dances; DEBUSSY: Sonata

Virgil Boutellis-Taft; Guillaume Vincent, p
Evidence 28—75 minutes

Virgil Boutellis-Taft has assembled an interesting program of music showing links between the world of the east and Europe. The program begins with a tune written by the Armenian monk Komitas (1869-1935). It is titled 'The Crane' and is taken to represent Armenian exile and suffering. It is a mournful tune in a minor mode, but here it ends in an affirming major.

Andre Hossein (1905-83) was a French pianist of Persian origin. His tune 'Caravan' is based on a song setting of a poem about a young woman who begs the leader of a caravan to slow its progress because her beloved is in it and she cannot bear for him to get farther and farther away. Tara Kamangar is an American pianist and composer of Iranian heritage. The work presented here was written for Boutellis-Taft, and its title is the Persian equivalent of the English "Once Upon a Time". It has a whirling, yearning character. Philippe Hersant (1948) has written Songs of the South for solo violin, which bear influences of music of most of the Mediterranean region. They have a bit of a folk quality.

The rest of the program is several well-known European works of the late-19th and early-20th Centuries. These are less valuable, since many of us already have recordings of them. Also, the duo’s performances of them are unremarkable.

Boutellis-Taft plays the "Regis Pasquier" violin made by Domenico Montagnana in Venice in 1742.

MAGIL

Augustin Hadelich

PREVIN: Tango, Song, & Dance; SCHUMANN: Violin Sonata 1; KURTAG: 3 Pieces; FRANCK: Sonata

with Joyce Yang, p
Avie 2347—67 minutes

This program is half modern and half romantic. Andre Previn’s Tango, Song, and Dance was written in 1997 for Previn’s future wife, Anne-Sophie Mutter. It is in three movements. The Tango is playful, the Song simple and sincere; and the Dance, in A-B-A form, has very energetic outer sections with a slower, lyrical center section. Augustin Hadelich and Joyce Yang are excellent interpreters for this music.

They adopt perfect tempos for Schumann’s Violin Sonata 1. The passion that this music needs is lacking. Part of the problem is that Yang is too quiet. The piano must not be subservient to the violin in this music, but must propel the music forward.

Gyorgy Kurtag’s Three Pieces were written in 1979. They are brief, with a central pointillist scherzo surrounded by very slow, meditative pieces of a hypnotic character. Webern was obviously Kurtag’s inspiration.

The most famous work here is Franck’s Violin Sonata. It has been recorded by practically everybody. Like their performance of the Schumann, this is underpowered. They don’t play with the hypnotic intensity of the best interpreters of the work. My favorites remain Oistrakh and Richter in concert in Paris and Moscow in 1968 and Thibaud and Cortot in their acoustic recording from 1923.

I get the very strong impression that Hadelich and Yang are more at home with the modern works than the romantic works. I had never heard the Previn or the Kurtag before this, so perhaps that accounts for this impression.

Hadelich plays the “Kiesewetter” Stradivarius of 1723. Very good sound.

The Stanford Legacy

STANFORD: Viola Sonata; CLARKE: Sonata; IRELAND: Sonata

Martin Outram; Julian Rolton, p
Nimbus 6334—68 minutes

The Stanford referred to is Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924). He was born into a musical family in Dublin (his father knew Mendelssohn) and went to study music at Leipzig and Berlin before becoming Professor of Composition at the Royal College of Music in 1883 and Professor of Music at Cambridge.

Art is not an elitist luxury or a game for intellectual coteries. It is a necessary component of human development, both individually and communally. Art educates our emotions and imagination. It awakens, enlarges, and refines our humanity.

Dana Gioia

March/April 2017
in 1888. Stanford was highly esteemed as a teacher, and judging from a partial list of his students, which reads like an honor roll of British musicians of the early and mid 20th Century, he must have been very good. Among his students were Ralph Vaughan Williams, Frank Bridge, Gustav Holst, Arthur Bliss, Leopold Stokowski, Samuel Coleridge Taylor, and the two other composers whose works share this program.

Stanford was a great admirer and friend of Brahms, and his Viola Sonata has a similar structure and history to Brahms's Sonata 2. Like that work, Stanford's sonata was originally written for clarinet and later arranged for the viola, in this instance by Henry Waldo Warner with the composer's approval. Both versions were published in 1919. It has a very Brahmsian sound to it but cannot compare with the Brahms. There are no memorable themes, no sensuous textures, no striking rhythmic patterns.

John Ireland's Viola Sonata is also an arrangement, this time of the Violin Sonata of 1908-9 (revised in 1917 and again in 1944). Martin Outram did the arranging. It has a slightly more modern feel than Stanford's sonata and is a bit less Brahmsian. The only work here that is not an arrangement is the sonata by Rebecca Clarke. That is also the best known work here: and the moment it begins, it declares its distinct character. It is easily the best work here and the most enjoyable.

Martin Outram is Professor of Viola at the Royal Academy of Music and violist of the Maggini Quartet. Outram's playing is not impressive. His passagework often sounds strained, and his tone is not always clear. The jewel on this disc is the Rebecca Clarke piece, and the best recording of that is by Helen Callus (Nov/Dec 2002).

Outram plays a viola made by Henricus Catenar in Turin in 1680.

**Dedications**

KREISLER: Preludium & Allegro; Recitativo & Scherzo-Caprice; FAURE: Romance; CHAUSSON: Poeme; YSAE: Poeme Elegiaque; Caprice; Solo Violin Sonata 4

Rosanne Philippens, v; Julien Quentin, p

I first heard Rosanne Philippens when I reviewed her debut CD titled Rhapsody (Nov/Dec 2013). I was enthusiastic about her performances of works by Ravel, Bartok, and Hubay. Her pianist then was Yuri van Niewkirk, and she played a violin made by Michelangelo Bergonzi around 1750. Now her pianist is Julien Quentin, and she plays the "Barrere" Stradivarius of 1727. The reason I mention these changes is because her playing is now unrecognizable. I don't know if she doesn't like her new violin or her new partner, but the enthusiasm she displayed on her first release is completely gone. I immediately noticed it as the program began with the Kreisler Preludium & Allegro. My favorite recording of that has always been the one Itzhak Perlman made in the early 1970s. Perlman plays as if his life depends on it, and his tone is full-blooded and sumptuous. It is the greatest display of sheer delight in tone production that I have ever heard. Philippens plays like she is afraid that someone will hear her. It is hard for me to believe that someone who has been entrusted with a Stradivarius could avoid drawing a full, sensuous tone from her violin.

It doesn't improve much after that. Her emotional involvement in the music seems practically nil. Her technique frays in some passages, too. Sometimes her octaves are impure. It is sad to witness such a precipitous decline in one so young. When asked if he thought that the young Jacqueline DuPre's expressiveness was excessive, John Barbirolli replied that he was all in favor of youthful excess because if you don't have that, what will you have left once you get old? Every piece in this recital has been played better and with more enthusiasm numerous times on other recordings, sometimes by people old enough to be Philippens's grandparents. I hope she reconsiders the path she has taken.

**Pieces de Concours**

Busser, Gaubert, Rougnon, Sitt, Homnore, Firket, Cools, Enesco, Grovlez, Golestan, Hue, Fleury-Roy, Arends, Marteau, Jullien, Lefebvre

Jutta Puchhammer-Sedillot, va; Elise Desjardins, p

Navona 6065 [2CD] 148 minutes

The title of this collection is French for "Competition Pieces". It is subtitled "Virtuoso Romantic Works by French Composers 1896-1938", but that is not exactly true: several of the composers are not French. Think of the Romanian George Enesco and Prague-born Hans Sitt. What all of these works have in common is that they were used by the Paris Conservatory as examination pieces at the end of each year for the viola class. A new work was commissioned nearly each year from 1896 until 1940.
Jutta Pulchhammer-Sedillot and Elise Desjardins have assembled 18 of these works here. What is remarkable is the consistently high level of the music. Not one work failed to hold my attention. This is a remarkable collection for that reason, and these works are a very valuable contribution to the viola repertoire. Each work is listed on the case cover with each year that it was used. It is not surprising that the better works were used more often. Enesco’s famous Concert Piece is here, and it was used four times. There is a work here that I had never heard before, Heinrich Arends’s Concertino, which was used five times, and I can understand why after listening to it. It is the longest work here, clocking in at 14:30, so it is a test of endurance. His real name was Andrei Fedorovich Arends (1855-1924) and he was born in Moscow. I wouldn’t say that the Concertino is an especially original work; it is an example of the sort of heroic, virtuosic music that was still in vogue when it was written in 1886. It reminds me a little of Wieniawski.

The Arends is the oldest work here, so it is the tail end of heroic romanticism. The other pieces are more harmonically advanced and often musically more interesting. The latest composition is by another Romanian, Stan Golestan (1875-1956). His Arioso & Allegro de Concert was composed in 1932 and first used in 1933. It is clearly music of a different era from the Arends, though it doesn’t even hint at the developments in the avant-garde going back over 20 years before.

Anyone who loves the viola or violinists who are looking for some short pieces to include in their recitals would do well to acquire this recording. Viennese-born Pulchhammer-Sedillot and Montreal native Desjardins are very musical and fully up to the technical demands of the music.

**Cremona in the time of Stradivarius**
Andrea Rognoni, v; Ensemble L’Aura Soave
Cremona 8—75 minutes

This is a broad-ranging survey of chamber music associated in some way with Cremona in the flourishing of the Stradivari family there in the 17th and 18th centuries. Given that the best known figure included is Tarquinio Merula (1595-1665), such a survey tells us how much remains to be known about our musical history. The composers from the three later generations (late 17th Century baroque, the high baroque of the first decades of the 18th Century, and the galant of the mid-18th Century)—Carlo Piazz, Gasparo Visconti, Andrea Zani and Carlo Zuccari—will be known only to the most specialized scholars (or violinists).

The music is of high quality and is sympathetically presented by Rognoni and ensemble. The booklet is frustrating: no date of recording is supplied, and a very similar (but not identical) program by the same performers seems to have been issued in 2000 on the same label. The booklet also lists monographic discs devoted to each of the composers included here (suggesting that this is a compilation of tracks drawn from them). Devotees might want to add them to their collections, if they can find them.

**T Moore**

**Violin Sonatas & Pieces**

**GRIEG:** Sonata 2; **NIELSEN:** Sonata 2; **SIBELIUS:** 4 Pieces; **STENHAMMAR:** Sonata
Baiba Skride; Lauma Skride
Orfeo 913161—72 minutes

Grieg’s sonata is charming and pleasurable. He plumbs no great depths, but he offers plenty of warm sunshine, and there are a few pensive or serious touches for contrast. The texture is airy, and the feel is not romantic but classical, even Haydn-esque. The themes aren’t Grieg’s catchiest, but they serve two masters well—the needs of a classical structure and the sound and atmosphere of folk music.

Nielsen uses chugging Teutonic rhythms and rigorous chromatic lines as his material and somehow summons up romantic yearning, playful quietness, and excited outbursts from them. The first movement especially fascinated me. II is full of little piano sighs and proud violin lines, and III takes a naive melody on a journey of pleasant twists and turns.

Sibelius’s Op. 78 is a restrained, economical set. The outer movements have hints of Scandinavian folk music, and the ‘Romance’ melody is almost sentimental. This is an unusual side of the composer, but it bears the marks of his craftsmanship. The Stenhammar is the Grieg’s melancholy but sweet cousin. The lines soar but the demeanor is gentle, and the finale is graceful and fleet.

The Skride sisters’ interpretation is nuanced and idiomatic. Baiba’s tone is too bright, and her vibrato is fast for my taste, but attenuating the treble on my amplifier helped. I’ve criticized a lot of violinists lately for their tones, and since several releases in this issue had that problem, I pulled a few classic, good-sounding violin albums off the shelf to make...
Mehta made a DG recording with the New York Philharmonic that contains both Saint-Saëns, the Ravel, and Sarasate’s Carmen Fantasy and has all the style and excitement that’s missing here. It’s been re-released. In The Lark Ascending Tasmin Little, Andrew Davis, and the BBC Symphony on Teldec are far superior (I haven’t heard their newer Chandos recording). As for Massenet’s Meditation from Thais, after hearing Steven Staryk for a mere five minutes in the glorious RCA 10-CD box of Jean Martinon’s complete Chicago Symphony recordings, I’ll never be happy hearing it any other way.

FRENCH

Apres un Reve
FAURE: Violin Sonata 1; After a Dream; Sightreading Piece; DEBUSSY: Minstrels; Beau Soir; RAVEL: Piece in the Form of a Habanera; Lullaby on the name of Fauré; Violin Sonata
Christian Svarvfar; Roland Pontinen, p
BIS 2183 [SACD] 61 minutes

Christian Svarvfar and Roland Pontinen have assembled a recital of French music by composers whom I always think of as forming a family. The oldest, Fauré, set the example of a certain Gallic sensuousness and tenderness that the young Debussy followed. Fauré even had an affair with the woman who would become Debussy’s second wife, Emma Bardac. He was also Ravel’s composition teacher at the Paris Conservatory. So these works belong together, though they also show how these composers differed with time.

Svarvfar and Pontinen begin with the first great French violin sonata, No. 1 by Fauré. Their tempos are comparable to Judith Ingolfsson and Vladimir Stoupel’s (Jan/Feb) in that they are significantly slower than Jacques Thibaud and Alfred Cortot in their classic recording from 1927. Also like Ingolfsson, Svarvfar’s playing pales when compared with Thibaud’s constant nuance and tonal shading. The song ‘After a Dream,’ the disc’s namesake, is perhaps an even earlier work than the Violin Sonata 1. It is played beautifully here in the arrangement by Pablo Casals. The brief ‘Sightreading Piece’ was written in 1903 as a test piece for entering the violin class at the Paris Conservatory. It is lovely but ends abruptly; it’s too bad Fauré didn’t extend it.

Debussy’s ‘Minstrels’ is an arrangement by the composer of the last of his Preludes Book 1. The arrangement is effective and is well played here—impish and capricious. ‘Beau Soir’ is the arrangement by Jascha Heifetz, and...
Svarfar’s playing is as elegant as it should be. I learned in the booklet notes that this song, which I had always thought was written by Debussy as a teenager, is now known to have been written around 1891.

Ravel’s ‘Piece in the Form of a Habanera’ is an arrangement by the violinist George Catherine of a work commissioned by a professor of voice at the Paris Conservatory. The ‘Lullaby on the Name Gabriel Fauré’ is not an arrangement and was composed in a single day in September 1922 for inclusion in an issue of *La Revue Musicale* that would be devoted to Ravel’s teacher. It is far more adventurous than the previous work and even ventures into bitonality. The program ends with Ravel’s Violin Sonata, and by the time we reach it, we have traversed quite a bit of musical territory. By the time it was finished, both Fauré and Debussy were dead. II, ‘Blues,’ was based on an African-American style of music that was more authentic than the tunes of the blackface shows that inspired Debussy’s ‘Minstrels’. The finale, the ‘Perpetuum Mobile’, is a celebration of railway speed. Svarfar and Pontinen play the sonata cleanly and idiomatically, but they don’t have fun with the work the way that Gilles Apap and Eric Ferrand-N’Kaoua do (March/April 2000).

Svarfar’s playing is elegant. He has flawless intonation, a very even, attractive vibrato that is always kept under control, and a very even personality. He doesn’t have a strong individual personality, but he is clearly a musician of soloist caliber. He plays an instrument made by Neapolitan violin makers Joseph and Antonio Gagliano of the late-18th and early-19th centuries. Excellent sound.

**Europe 1920**

**Respighi:** Violin Sonata; **Janacek:** Sonata; **Liatoshinsky:** Sonata; **Ravel:** Sonata

Gabriel Tchalik; Dania Tchalik, p
Evidence 24—82 minutes

Gabriel Tchalik was born in France in 1989 to French and Russian parents. He studied violin with Elina Kuperman and Alexandre Brusilovsky. He won first prize at the first Yuri Yankelevich Violin Competition in Omsk in 2009. Aside from solo work, Tchalik also plays first violin in the Tchalik Quartet with his brother Marc and sisters Louise and Sarah. He even earned a master’s degree in philosophy from the Sorbonne.

This music is from the era around 1920. The Respighi Violin Sonata was composed in 1917, and the Ravel was completed in 1927. Everything falls into that 10-year span. The Respighi sounds like the oldest work here. In fact, if you are only familiar with his Roman Trilogy, you would say that it doesn’t even sound like Respighi. The work has a very late-romantic sound, and the Tchalik brothers are very well attuned to this sound world. Dania uses lots of pedal, so his sound contrasts a good deal with the relatively lean sound of the violin by Philippe Mitran that Gabriel plays. The Janacek Violin Sonata is a bit of a pastiche. The outer movements were composed after the middle movement, which has a delicately romantic feel. The Ravel was begun in 1923. It is remarkable because each movement is composed in a different style, yet it still sounds like a whole.

The unusual work here is the Violin Sonata by the Soviet composer Boris Liatoshinsky (1895–1968). He was influenced by Scriabin and Central European composers like the New Viennese School and Bartok. The Violin Sonata was written in 1926 and sounds like much avant-garde music written around that time, before the influence of neoclassicism. It is a very interesting piece, and we owe a debt to the Tchaliks for recording it.

**Evidence** 2284—60 minutes

Elena Urioste; Michael Brown, p

Elena Urioste graduated from the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where she studied with Pamela Frank, Ida Kavafian, and Joseph Silverstein. She has performed with major orchestras in the US and England. She and Michael Brown have been performing together since 2009.

The duo states that the Strauss Sonata is a favorite of theirs, and their reading is very pleasing, with the slow movement especially affecting. Michael Brown’s one-movement *Echoes of Byzantium* was inspired by William Butler Yeats’s poem ‘Sailing to Byzantium.’ It is vaguely modernist yet tonal, free of avant-garde techniques. It is very evocative and impressionist, but doesn’t have the kind of antique, modal sound you might expect for a work inspired by Byzantium.

They play Ravel’s one-movement Posthumous Violin Sonata with the appropriately rapturous character. Whenever I hear it I feel
terrible that Ravel neglected for some reason to compose the remaining movements. Amy Beach’s ‘Romance’ is a fine if conventional late-Victorian work. The piano part pales when compared with the work by Ravel. Urioste and Brown are very committed and play it as well as you could want.

These young people are a fine duo, and Urioste is a polished violinist with very good control of her bowing and vibrato. She plays an instrument made by the Neapolitan violin maker Alessandro Gagliano ca 1706. Very good sound.

**Chimera**

Bermel, Dorff, Earnest, Gross, Schoenfield, Sollberger
Leonard Garrison, fl; Shannon Scott, cl; Rajung Yang, Melissa Loehnig Simons, p
Albany 1652—73 minutes

University of Idaho flute professor Leonard Garrison and Washington State University clarinet professor Shannon Scott perform as the Scott-Garrison Duo and are members of the Flute-Clarinet Duos Consortium, which regularly commissions new works for flute, clarinet, and piano. Some of those works appear here, written between 1998 and 2016. A few of them request auxiliary siblings, notably the piccolo, the alto flute, the bass flute, and the bass clarinet. University of Idaho piano professor Rajung Yang and Central Methodist University (MO) piano professor Melissa Loehnig Simons take turns at the keyboard.


Garrison and Scott play with infectious enthusiasm, reveling in each composer’s unique scoring, metric complexity, extended techniques, and general neo-modernist atmosphere. They navigate technical and rhythmic obstacles well, and they bring the music alive with thoughtful phrasing and character. Their sonic command is somewhat wobbly, sometimes simple and pleasant, sometimes diffuse and spread, especially in high registers and at loud volumes. Most of the time they play with good balance and intonation, but in the most intense moments they lose sonic control. Yang and Simons are excellent all through, each one handling her set of tricky parts with aplomb and professionalism.

**Wind Concertos**

Temple University Wind Symphony/ Emily Threinen
BCMD 0 [2CD] 131 minutes (215-204-8301 or 800-BUYMYCD)

This program presents an array of soloists from the Philadelphia Orchestra and Temple University in these pieces: Concerto 1 for trumpet and large brass ensemble (1988) by Anthony Plog (b 1947), The Shadow of Sirius for flute and wind orchestra (2010) by Joel Puckett (b 1977), the Bass Trombone Concerto (2007) by Jay Krush (b 1953), the Oboe Concerto (2005) by Jennifer Higdon (b 1962), Desert Roads for clarinet and wind ensemble by David Maslanka (b 1943), and Carbon Paper and Nitrogen Ink for marimba and wind ensemble (2013) by Adam Silverman (b 1973). The concertos for bass trombone and oboe were written originally for orchestra.

Plog’s concertino, written for Doc Severinson, follows a four-movement sonata form with the interior movements connected. The brass palette is enlivened with colorful mallet percussion and, for the scherzo, meter in 7. Puckett’s concerto is based on three poems from William Merwin’s collection The Shadow of Sirius, which was awarded the 2009 Pulitzer Prize. The pianissimo high Cs in an exposed location are as unrealistic as the ones at the end of the Taktakishvil Flute Sonata’s first movement, but played here as well as anyone could! Last issue I criticized the Flute Concerto by Einojuhani Rautavaara as too much of a mood piece and lacking drama and contrast.

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But here we have poetry in sound that yet manages not to create that same dull impression.

Krush's bass trombone concerto skillfully uses instrumental color and an unusual solo instrument. The evocative II is truly a song without words because "one of our main goals is to produce beauty." Since the composer succeeds in writing "a fan letter to bass trombonists everywhere," as many audiences as possible ought to hear this.

Jonathan Blumenfeld is wonderfully melllow against clarinets and bassoons in the quiet opening of Higdon’s concerto. This colorful and contemplative work updates the American pastoral tradition that came from graduates of Eastman who studied with Howard Hanson. It's hard on hearing this result to imagine that the work was written originally for orchestra, and this instrumentation was made three years later. It can easily join the concerto written by Christopher Rouse at nearly the same time as one of the best contemporary contributions to the oboe literature.

Check our index for other times Maslanka has been praised in these pages. I’ll add to the chorus of praise after hearing this immediately accessible yet gripping work for clarinet. III is dedicated to the memory of Frederick Fennell, a happy person commemorated here by writing that is beautiful and touching, affirmative and elegiac. To describe the instrumentation I could mention Grainger to give you an idea—and to say that I was dazzled by it!

The energy of the marimba concerto contrasts with the contemplation brought by Maslanka and Higdon to make a satisfying finish to a splendid assortment of contemporary pieces with soloists. Adam Silverman writes in a language similar to Jennifer Higdon’s and Joseph Schwantner’s; check our index for more from him. Like its discmates, this work is about poetry more than display, making it a welcome addition to the percussion repertory.

It is deeply satisfying to hear this medium liberated from its history of stereotyped gestures and military associations in performances that are truly beyond technique. The Temple University Wind Symphony has playing so superb you don’t even notice it because the music just comes across. Conductor Emily Threinen makes magic at the helm, and Temple is unfortunate to have recently lost her to the University of Minnesota. Let’s look here for her future recording projects! Everything here is dead on.

Historia Sancti Olavi
Consortium Vocale Oslo/ Alexander M Schweitzer; Graces & Voices/ Adrijna Cepaite, Antanina Kalechyts
LAWO 1106 [2CD] 95 mins
This release presents a nearly complete recording of the cycle of chants for First Vespers, Matins, and Lauds on the feast of St Olaf, the patron saint of Norway. Although there was an archaic cycle of Olaf chants based on the common chants for a martyr, a new cycle emerged around 1152, possibly the work of Oystein Erlendsson (1161-88), archbishop of Nidaros. St Olaf's Historia eschews his Viking roots, preferring rather to advance themes of his conversion to Christianity and missionary work. The melodies are largely borrowed from 11th- and 12th-Century chants venerating Sts. Augustine, Denis, Victor, and Vincentius, thereby adding prestige to the cult St Olaf. These office chants were propagated widely in numerous manuscript copies, but of these only two sources remain, both from the archbishopric of Uppsala. The performing text for this recording—some 30 chants—is in Stockholm's Royal Library (A96), compiled some time between 1520 and 1530. Readings are taken from the Uppsala Breviary.

It is wonderful to hear the simple liturgical recitative of the readings juxtaposed in proper liturgical order with the musically appealing antiphons and responsories. The male voices of Consortium Vocale Oslo alternate chants with the female choir of Graces & Voices. The chants for First Vespers and the First and Second Nocturne of Matins appear on the first disc. Disc 2 continues with the Third Nocturne, Lauds, and Antiphon and Magnificat of Second Vespers.

The performance practice follows the common tradition of singing with a pure voice, without the inflections suggested by earlier chant notation. The results are rather beautiful, even quite ethereal. The singing is well paced, speeding and slowing to follow the natural cadence of the text and music. The singers are so together that it is impossible to discern individual voices. Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

Straight from the Heart
Chansonnier Cordiforme
Ensemble Leones/ Marc Leon
Naxos 573325—70:15
OK, everybody, stand back. I am leaning out my window and shouting “I can’t stand it! I’m

GORMAN

March/April 2017
not going to take it any more!!” Please join in as you like.

My rant is a protest against what has become a toxic practice with some record companies these days: the issuance of rare and unusual vocal music without the inclusion of TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS.

This has become a particular habit of the Naxos and Brilliant labels, supposed “economy” lines that pretend to save their customers money by not including the texts in the album booklets. Yes, there are often promises of these things as available on the web. But, if you find them and print them out, you end up with a packet of 8-1/2 by 11 sheets that are quite incompatible with the CD album. And that’s if you can find them. Often the contact information gets you absolutely nowhere—as I found out when I tried wrestling with this release.

I have been decrying this failure of responsibility for some time—and I have not been alone among my fellow reviewers. But I now declare open war on it. I’m not going to take it any more! I will call out this failure emphatically each time I encounter it.

So what do we have here? There is a sumptuous and beautiful 15th Century, velvet-bound, musical manuscript known as the Chansonnier Cordiforme, named for the shaping of its covers and pages in the form of a heart. It contains 43 partsongs, of which 30 carry French texts, 12 are Italian, and one is in Castilian-Spanish. The selections represent known composers but also many unidentified ones. Not only is this unique manuscript a ravishing example of late Medieval art, but its contents are of the greatest musical value.

For this program, 19 pieces are offered, two of them from the parallel Segovia Codex of the early 16th Century, the rest from the Cordiforme manuscript (12 in French, 5 in Italian). The performing group here is three singers and three instrumentalists. The singing is particularly tasteful and stylish, and these are very good performances, well recorded. But the booklet contains NO TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS!

Back in 1979 Anthony Rooley’s Consort of Music (including the young Emma Kirkby) recorded for Oiseau-Lyre the complete contents of the manuscript, in its exact order, under the supervision of musicologist David Fallows. (He wrote the booklet notes for Oiseau-Lyre, and he returns here with new notes for Naxos.) Rooley’s team of five singers, plus six instrumentalists perform elegantly, if with perhaps just a touch of British restraint.

That recording was first released as a 3LP set (so far as I can find, never reviewed by us) and it has now been reissued in the Decca Eloquence series (480 1819, 3CD). Also, the original LP booklet has been reproduced (in reduced size) containing FULL TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS.

No more need be said, of course. If you want just a sampling, this new Naxos disc will be fine, as long as you recognize that it is a crippled affair, leaving you WITHOUT TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS to make sense of the contents. If you are a serious collector and do not already have it, seek out the Decca reissue, turning your back in contempt on Naxos.

BARKER

Balli, Battaglie, Canzoni
Guami, Malvezzi, Trabaci, others
Luca Scandali, org; Mauro Occhionero, perc
Brilliant 95384—68 minutes

Choosing music from around 1530 to 1644, these two very fine musicians collaborate in this program to animate the early Italian organ repertoire plus well chosen and well played percussion from around the Mediterranean, including a Renaissance imperial drum, djembe, darbuka, Neapolitan tammorra and various rattles, castanets, and other instruments.

The organ, in the Pieve di Santo Stefano Protomartire in Lucca, was built in 1551 by Onofrio Zefferini da Cortona and restored in 2003 by Glauco Ghilardi. It is in quite low pitch (A=395) and tuned in meantone temperament. Both players use very fine judgment and creativity in deciding when and how to incorporate percussion. For example, in polyphonic pieces such as ricercars and toccatas it’s organ alone, whereas percussion is incorporated in pieces where there are battaglia sections (such as the anonymous ‘La Tedschina’), dances (such as Trabaci’s ‘Gagliarda Quarta a 5 Alla Spagnola’), and the stately processional balli sections, honoring a Queen and a Grand Duke that open the 1540 and 1551 multi-part ricercars.

Notes, bios, organ specifications, photos; registration for each piece is on the label website. Please see my Cavazzoni review in this issue for another recommended Renaissance organ CD and some thank-yous.

C MOORE

We are living in an anti-art age. The world is now a brutal place and obsessed with speed and wealth.

Paul Simon
**Italian Lute Virtuosos**

Jakob Lindberg
BIS 2202 [SACD] 81 minutes

This is a very pleasant collection of Italian lute music by Francesco da Milano, Marco dall’Aquila, and Alberto da Mantova (also known as Alberto da Ripa or de Rippe). Lindberg has chosen contrapuntal fantasias and ricercars, tabulations of chansons and madrigals, and for Dall’Aquila and Da Mantova one dance each.

There are for each of the composers previous recordings with only their compositions: Milan (May/June 2008, Mar/Apr 2009, Sept/Oct 2013, Mar/Apr 2015), Dall’Aquila (July/Aug 1997, July/Aug 2010, Jan/Feb 2015), and one for Rippe (July/Aug 1999). While there are some duplications, Lindberg’s performances are quite sensitive, and as long as the volume is kept down the surround sound creates a very realistic atmosphere. There are a few moments when Lindberg’s fingers do not quite catch both strings of the lute’s courses, but these are minor blemishes on an overall enjoyable recording.

**Voice Eternal**

LAMBE: Stella Caeli; FAYRFAX: I Love, Loved; CORNYSH: Ah Robin, Gentle Robin; HENRY VIII: Helas Madame; Quam Pulchra Es; TALLIS: Salve Intemerata; If Ye Love Me; MUNDY: Vox Patris Caelestis; WEELKES: Sweet Heart Arise; FARMER: Fair Phyllis I Saw

The 13/ Matthew Robertson
Affetti 1605—59 minutes

I reviewed this ensemble’s recording Radiant Dark (Jan/Feb 2015, p 229), a program of vocal polyphonic works mainly from the 16th Century on the subject of death, but not as lugubrious as one might expect from that theme. I was highly impressed then. I am flattered that my review is quoted in the notes to the present recording, which maintains the same high standard of technical polish, choral discipline, and coherent phrasing.

This recording consists of polyphonic works, sacred and secular, by English composers spanning the 16th Century, and in the case of the earliest of them, possibly reaching back to the late 15th Century. It begins with music by composers of the generation of the Eton Choirbook. Walter Lambe’s ‘Stella Caeli’ comes from that source. There are two markedly different pieces by Henry VIII. The song ‘Helas Madame’ adds polyphonic voices to a tenor melody from the continent. ‘Quam Pulchra Es’ is a three-voice motet on verses from chapter 7 of the Song of Songs. The two largest works on the program are elaborate Marian votive antiphons. Thomas Tallis’s ‘Salve Intemerata’ is probably an early work dating from the reign of Henry VIII. William Mundy’s ‘Vox Patris Caelestis’ comes from the time of the Catholic restoration under Mary Tudor, and is specifically concerned with the Assumption. Effectively sandwiched between them here is Tallis’s ‘If Ye Love Me,’ probably from the severely Protestant reign of Edward VI. It is a masterpiece of concision and clarity that is at the opposite pole from the florid votive antiphons. The flowering of the English madrigal in the late 16th Century is represented by ‘Sweet Heart Arise’ by Thomas Weelkes and the well-known ‘Fair Phyllis I Saw’ by John Farmer.

The Thirteen, founded in 2012, is a chamber choir of professional singers mainly from the New York area. Their concert and touring activities include university residencies. They have a mission to educate and inspire young musicians, and so engage in coaching high school and college ensembles in master classes, workshops, and collaborative performances.

**Sentirete una Canzonetta**

Falconieri, Monteverdi, Merula, Frescobaldi, others

Patrizia Durando, s; In Tabernae Musica
Tactus 580002—61 minutes

This program of vocal and instrumental pieces casts these very fine interpreters in many roles. In the opening track, Radesca Di Foggia’s ‘Santi La Bell’Istoria’, they are asked to emphasize the rustic, with Jew’s harp, bagpipes, soprano, and others creating an appropriately earthy atmosphere. Then in Merula’s ‘Folle E Ben Che Si Crede’ languid bewitching is the order of the day; and the singer, harpsichord, and lute do just that with fluid phrasing and a gentle sway in the pulse. Some pieces, such as Mainiero’s ‘Schiarazzola Marazzola’ have a Moorish and Arabic flavor, and the spoken text with elaborate instrumental diminutions in Pace Da Perugia’s ‘Sta Pur Ben Nostro Bel Fusto’ adds yet another texture.

The tightness of the ensemble allows for the flexibility of tempo and pulse—very important in this music—and the pieces are very well chosen and sequenced.

Notes, bios; texts in original languages and courses for the vocal pieces are on the label website.

C. MOORE

March/April 2017
Florence 1616
Belli, Caccini, Saracini
Le Poeme Harmonique/ Vincent Dumestre
Alpha 321—59 minutes

Recorded in 2007 and now reissued in Alpha’s “Essential Baroque Masterpieces” series, the title comes from the year (1616) and city (Florence) of the first performance of Domenico Belli’s opera L’Orfeo Dolente, a 36-minute dramatic work. All the singers and players perform with a high level of virtuosity and the music is very fine. The program begins with three short pieces—two by Giulio Caccini and one by Claudio Saracini—on the theme of lovers’ sighs (Sospiri D’Amanti), followed by Il Rapimento Di Cefalo, a short dramatic piece by Caccini. Dramatic partnerships among players and singers coupled with strong vocal acting bring all the pieces vividly to life.

It’s good to hear all this music, especially to hear that Monteverdi’s Orfeo (first performed 1607) was part of a flourishing Florentine “laboratory of the musical drama” with several composers engaged in creative experimentation. Refer also to May/June 2005 for more of Belli on this same label by this same group.

As with other reissues in this series, the booklet has a new interview with the director, Vincent Dumestre. Notes; no texts. There’s no excuse for not having AT LEAST plot summaries of the Belli and Caccini pieces. There are four completely blank pages in the booklet, plus three additional blank covers.

C.MOORE

Venice 1700
Thibault Noally, v; Les Accents
Aparate 128—68 minutes

This release celebrates the music of Venice, particularly its remarkable violinists and the mass of sonatas they composed to show off the instrument’s potential for virtuosity. The program includes works by some of the familiar suspects: Bonporti’s Op. 10:6 Invenzione in C minor; C minor Sonata (Op. 4:5) by Albinoni; Vivaldi’s Sonata in B-flat (R 759) and La Folia in D minor (Op. 1:12); and Antonio Caldara’s Ciaccona in B-flat (Op. 2:12) and Sonata in G minor (Op. 4:5). Recorded here for the first time are Torelli’s Sonata in E minor and the Sonata in G minor (Op. 4:12) by his student Evaristo Felice Dall’Abaco.

While Noally’s solo playing is very attractive, I must admit that the most exciting pieces on the program are the duets, where Claire Sottovia joins him to play Caldara’s Ciaccona and Vivaldi’s La Folia. They just seem to play off each other’s energy. And the continuo playing is absolutely solid, with Elisa Joglar (cello), Mathieu Dupouy (harpischord), and Romain Falik (theorbo and baroque guitar).

Olivier Fourès notes that while Vivaldi serves as the banner carrier for the Venetian style of the early 18th Century, “his” style of violin writing was shared generally by Venetian composers. Episodic motives played sequentially with rapid string crossings may be found in all of the sonatas on this program. Other Venetian composers also cultivated the wild leaps one associates with Vivaldi’s music. Slow movements are tender, lyrical pieces, reminiscent of the ornamental slow arias one would have heard in the numerous opera theatres in Venice.

LOEWEN

Arias & Scenes for the Spanish Court
Jelena Bankovic, s; Camerata Antonio Soler/ Gustavo Sanchez
Lindoro 3030—58:35

This new release includes arias and dramatic scenes most likely composed not for the stage but the private salons of the Spanish court and nobility. Luigi Boccherini and the lesser-known Gaetano Brunetti (1743-98) were Italians who found employment at the Spanish court and continued to use Italian in their vocal music, just as there was an Italian opera theater in Madrid, Los Canos del Peral. Both were composers of instrumental music, for chamber or orchestra (for Brunetti, see Mar/Apr 1995), but their contributions to vocal music are more limited. Both wrote settings of the Marian sequence, Stabat Mater (Brunetti, Sept/Oct 1995). I particularly enjoy Robert King’s recording of the second version (Mar/Apr 2000), and Boccherini’s arias for academies held by the Spanish nobility have also been recorded (May/June 2001).

The six selections by Brunetti (three scenes, two arias, and a cavatina) are very similar to Gluck or a young Mozart. Boccherini’s Scena dell’Ines di Castro is of a different dramatic order. It was composed in 1798 for the Marquise of Benavente, whose husband was Boccherini’s patron and commissioned the famous guitar quintets. The text is Ines di Castro as she is dying from poison and turns her final thoughts to her children and husband. The scena freely moves between recitative, cavatina, and a final rondo aria where Ines finds peace in her husband’s love, ‘Caro mio
sposo, ah, dove sì? Vieni, ritorna su g'occhi miei, rendi la calma a questo cor’ (My dear husband, ah, where are you? Come, return to my eyes, supply calm to my heart.).

Jelena Bankovic is a very effective interpreter, but her performance, along with the small accompanying ensemble on period instruments, is understated, especially in the Boccherini scene. The only other recording of the Boccherini is by Svetla Krasteva accompanied by modern instruments (Bongiovanni 2178); her repertoire is mostly romantic Italian opera, but the interpretation is not significantly different from this one. This is interesting and little-known repertoire, and the booklet is very informative, but there are only Spanish translations of the Italian texts.

BREWER

Tomas de Iriarte
Gradualia, Regina Iberica
Lindoro 3031—71:17

People outside of the Spanish cultural world will probably not make much sense of this release at first encounter. It certainly has a rather twisted rationale to it.

Tomas de Iriarte (1750-91) was a poet and intellectual who attempted to promote the ideals of the Enlightenment in the rather backward Spain of his day. He had talent, charm, wit, good connections, and a reliable government post. But his impassioned advocacy of Enlightenment thinking got him into trouble with the Inquisition, broke him, and led to a premature death at age 41.

One of his most important writings was a long poem, La Musica where he tried to explain and promote this art as a supreme exemplar of human reason and expression. In one of its sections, Canto II, he made reference to 12 Spanish composers active over the course of three centuries whose art embodied, to his mind, the best aspects of directness and skill in “enlightened” musical creativity—and in the (for him) most important realm of music for human voices. It was the idea of Ines Fernandez Arias to offer a representation of each of these 12 composers, be they well-known or obscure.

It is nowhere stated plainly that I can see, but the 14 selections (two each for two of the composers) are not ones that Iriarte explicitly praises—he spoke only of the composers in general. That fact allows the compilers to offer a good bit of variety. The earliest composers are Cristobal de Morales (c.1500-53), Francisco Guerrero (1528-99), and Tomas Luis de Vic-
toria (1548-1611), whose lovely Latin motets are sampled. Little known, by contrast, are Vicente Garcia Velcaire (1593-1650), Carlos Patino (1600-75), Juan Perez Roldan (1604-72), Matias Juan Veana (1656-1708), Sebastian Duron (1660-1716), Matias Ruiz (1671-1708), Antonio Lliteres (1673-1747), Jose de San Juan (1672-1747), and Jose de Nebra (1702-68). Their contributions vary from songs and cantatas to excerpts from zarzuelas.

There are really two performing groups at work, apparently recording pretty much separately, rather than together, as the requirements of each piece dictate. Gradualia consists of six singers (of whom the baritone, Simon Andueza, is also director), joined here by a harpist. Regina Iberica sports three singers and two instrumentalists (harpist Laura Casanova is director), plus one other singer (Andueza, as it happens) and five instrumentalists. They do their work admirably, with nicely blended vocal ensembles, and some excellent solo singing. I particularly enjoyed the clear and lovely work of Regina Iberica’s soprano, Delia Agundez (who also sings with Gradualia).

The booklet notes on all this are extensive, and full texts are given with translations.

So what does all this add up to? The connections with Iriarte are not likely to mean much to anyone not steeped in Spanish literature. But this is an ample and varied survey of three centuries of Spanish music, and some of the most pleasing and fascinating is from the obscure composers.

BARKER

Cantares
Escolania del Escorial/ Gustavo Sanchez
Lindoro 3029—47:41

This is modern arrangements of traditional songs from Spain and South America, contemporary works by Agustin Lara and Federico Garcia Lorca, with a few early music pieces, such as Adirano Banchieri’s ‘Capricciata e contrappunto bestiale alla mente’ (a song combining strict contrapuntal writing with imitations of animal sounds), an anonymous ‘Tordion,’ and Josquin Desprez’s ‘El grillo.’

The 41-member choir of boys and men has been extremely well trained by Gustavo Sanchez. The sound is balanced and the direction very clear. Unfortunately, the booklet includes neither texts or translations.

BREWER
My Song is Love
John Kitchen, org; Aberdeen Youth Choir/Christopher Bell
Divine Art 25004—54 minutes

The Aberdeen Youth Choir was formed in 1992 with 36 singers ages 16-25. In December 1996 the choir recorded four programs for BBC Scotland; this release draws on those.

These young singers are very good, including some solo voices. Their sound is well balanced and they sing with fine precision. Most of it is performed very well. Of the 12 sacred works almost everything is in the standard Anglican choral repertory with a few lesser heard works.

My disappointment with some pieces rests with decisions their conductor made. Ireland's 'My Song is Love Unknown' is rushed and lacks expressiveness. All five verses are sung in unison and only the final verse uses an alternate harmonization for organ. Also rushed and lacking emotion are Bairstow's magical 'I Sat Down Under His Shadow' and Stainer's 'God So Loved the World' (perhaps in an effort to eschew the maudlin sentimentality so associated with it). The performance of everything else is better than satisfactory. The program concludes with vivid renditions of seven traditional Scottish songs, and here the performances sparkle.

This is a very fine youth choir, but the voices do not have the adult depth needed for Durufle's 'Ubi Caritas' or Tavener's 'Love Bade Me Welcome.'

Notes but no texts.

Femina Moderna

LARSON: Songs of Youth and Pleasure;
KLOCKAR: Speeches; TARRODI: Lume; MONNAKGOT-LA: Apelsinen Har Magnat; FORTE: Libera me; REYNOLDS: English Visionaries

BIS has produced yet another stellar disc devoted to a cappella choral music by contemporary female composers. There are so many fine compositions here that I'm only going to be able to discuss my favorites (though all the selections are first-rate.)

The best known composer to American audiences presented here will probably be Libby Larsen (b.1950), a favorite of mine, who has composed around 500 works in a variety of classical genres. Her Songs of Youth and Pleasure has galloping rhythms and colorful word settings. Set in madrigal form, the music depicts the joy of living with great expressivity.

Anna-Karin Klockar (b.1960) comes from the Swedish province of Dalecarlia. Her Speeches is taken from Olympe de Gouges' Declaration of the Rights of Women. Chief Joseph's Speech of Surrender, and George Vest's final speech to a jury, representing a man who sued another for killing his dog. Her music is by turns dramatic, heartbreaking, and comical. It would be terrific if this piece was heard more often in this country.

Clara Lindsjo (b.1991), a former member of Allmanna Sangen, has one foot in the traditional singer-songwriter genre and the other in the classical choir world. In The Find the voices of the choir are used as a loop machine. The composer sings the solo here—a song of praise to the peculiar and unknown facets that we sometimes discover in ourselves. Andrea Tarrodi (b. 1981) is a Swedish composer who writes principally for voice and for orchestra. In Lume she works with a single word, "lume" (light). The choir forms a sound canvas that is transformed from time to time by means of hand tremolo (produced with the hand and lips) and glissandos. This piece is one of the most haunting here, memorable for its unique soundscape and colors. Executive producer Robert Suff has outdone himself in creating maximum contrasts from one selection to another.

The Allmanna Sangen is superb, producing colors that many choirs can only dream about. They are required in these compositions to sing, whisper, and occasionally shout. Conductor Maria Goundorina guides, challenges, and leads them to thrilling climaxes both loud and soft. The sound is glorious.

REYNOLDS
performances by this fine choir. Only the Vaughan Williams Mass and Lord, Thou hast Been our Refuge are familiar from previous recordings.

Vision of Aeroplanes and Prayer to the Father of Heaven are both post-war works, and they present a quite different Vaughan Williams with their intense, restlessly chromatic style. Vision, a dramatic text from Ezekiel, involves creatures that fly about the heavens and the earth (the title is the composer’s). Prayer, for a cappella choir, is harmonically inventive and symbolic of the composer’s post-war search for Christian faith.

Gustav Holst’s Evening Watch, a 1924 setting of the Song of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis), is treated as a dialog between the body (represented by a mezzo solo voice) and the soul (the chorus). Sing me the Men for unison tenors and basses, in an otherworldly harmonic landscape, symbolizes the “New Jerusalem” envisioned in the text.

Hebert Howells was perhaps more of a visionary than either Holst or Vaughan Williams. He referred to cathedrals as “houses of the mind” but here the view is not outward or upward to heaven but within us; God dwells in the “clean and sober mind,” and in this case, the “mind” is also infused with Howells’s characteristically sensuous harmonic landscape.

The Birmingham choir is 24 auditioned students and delivers superb performances, especially of the Mass. Excellent essay on the music and texts.

Sing Willow: Shakespeare Songs
Vaughan Williams, Willicocks, Chilcott, Rutter, others
Les Sirenes/ Andrew Nunn
Albion 30—68 minutes

I suppose I could just write “Buy this if you enjoy choral settings of Shakespeare’s songs!”, but I wouldn’t have the pleasure of explaining why. Many of these settings have been recorded before (the Vaughan Williams and Rutter certainly), but much of this music has been arranged for female chorus so one gets to hear a number of familiar settings in slightly different musical clothing.

In the ‘Hark, Hark, the Lark’ central section of the disc Bob Chilcott compiled and edited several different composers to create a sort of song cycle that offers humor and contrast to many of the other selections. Settings of Shakespeare are enjoying a revival because of the 400th anniversary of his death in 1616. Ian Bostridge, for example, has recently recorded songs based on Shakespeare texts (Warner). Sarah Walker recorded a program of Shakespeare settings called “Shakespeare’s Kingdom” for Hyperion back in 1984.

All of these arrangements are excellent, and even if one prefers another setting of the same text they’re all interesting and entertaining (Shakespeare would have wanted them to be entertaining).

Les Sirenes is a superb female chamber choir. They sing with great personality, charm, and color. Their director, Andrew Nunn, really knows how to bring out the best in them; and accompanist Fionnuala Ward grounds everything with excellent piano work. Overall one gets the sense that everyone was enjoying themselves tremendously when making this recording. The only criticism I have is that the acoustic (recorded in Sherbrooke St Gilbert’s Church, Glasgow) rather blurs some of the part writing.

REYNOLDS

Music of the Spheres
MURRILL: O Mistress Mine; Come Away, Death;
BRIDGE: Autumn; Music, When Soft Voices Die;
The Bee;
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Full Fathom 5;
The Cloud-Capp’d Towers; ELGAR: There is Sweet Music; Deep in My Soul;
O Wild West Wind;
Owls;
WALKER: Soft Music;
BINGHAM: The Drowned Lovers;
STANFORD: On Time;
The Blue Bird;
HAREY: Song of June;
CHILCOTT: The Runner;
Last Invocation;
One’s-Self I Sing
Tenebrae/ Nigel Short
Bene Arte 904—65 minutes

Everything checks in at the highest level. The singing is amazing, technically and interpretively. If the singers were any more inside this music, they’d be behind it. The librettists are Shakespeare, Tennyson, Whitman, Shelley, Byron, Milton, Wilfred Owen, Mary Coleridge and—in a couple of cases (Elgar and Bingham)—the composers themselves. And while the music is creme de la creme stuff, some of its richness is new and unexpected. For every familiar ’Blue Bird’ and nod to Shakespeare, there are lesser known offerings from the likes of Jonathan Harvey, Bob Chilcott, Herbert Murill, and Frank Bridge. Judith Bingham’s evocation of lovers joined in a watery liedestod offers the most memorable 6 minutes of the program. Heard in tandem with Stanford’s ’Blue Bird,’ the sadness is overwhelming. You might find the occasional soprano line a bit chilly, but why hold on to a minor foible when everything else is so overwhelmingly good? If

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you musical soul harbors so much as a glimmering of Anglophilia, you’ll want to hear this.

GREENFIELD

Ethereal Voices

WOOD: Hail, Gladdening Light; HOWELLS: Take Him, Earth, for Cherishing; AMBROSIAN CHANT: Kyrie; BYRD: Gloria; ZELENKA: Credo; MOZART: Sanctus; BARBER: Agnus Dei; BACH: Lobet den Herrn; HANDEL: Dixit Dominus excerpt; BACH: Magnificat excerpt; CHESNOKOV: Spaseniye Sodelal; LVOV: Hospodi Pomilui; GRETCHANINOFF: Nunc Dimittis; GJEILO: Ubi Caritas; The Ground; Serenity

Texas Boys Choir/ S Bryan Priddy; Ellie Lin; Michael Shih, v; Texas Camerata/ Kristin van Cleve

Mark 51318—63 minutes

I first came across the Texas Boys Choir back in the 60s, when I wore out a Christmas LP they made with the Greg Smith Singers, accompanied by E Power Biggs on the marvelous Flentrop organ in the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard. That recording still sounds fresh today and it is wonderful to see that this choir continues to flourish. For over 70 years the organization has sought to be a world-class boy choir, to develop personal excellence and instill a lifelong passion for choral artistry in its charges. The choir follows the European tradition of not only training the boys at a young age, but continuing training when their voices break, helping them to develop into tenors and basses.

The recording, a compilation of the tour choirs from 2011 to 2015, makes for fascinating listening, as each year has a distinct sound. The choirs number 50 boys, with former sopranos singing alto, tenor, and bass. What is a constant is the overall excellence in the performances of very sophisticated music. This is evident in the masterly handling of the Howells, Barber, and Byrd pieces and the spirited performances of excerpts from the Zelenka, Mozart, Handel, and Bach works, accompanied by a first-rate period ensemble.

This choir can hold its own with many of the celebrated English boy choirs and proves again that, when it comes to musical performance, young people do not need to be patronized. Why give them a diet of trite, inconsequential music, often sung in unison and pitched too low, when they are perfectly capable of learning, performing, and appreciating great music in any idiom. Notes on the choir, recording places, personnel, but not on the music.

DELCPAM

Cantate Domino

Anna-Maria Hefele, singer; I Vocalisti/ Hans-Joachim Lustig
Rondeau 6123—73 minutes

Shiru l’Adonai shir chadash

That call to “sing a new song to the Lord” rings out in at least 3 of the 150 psalms of the psalter. Whether expressed in Hebrew, English, Latin (“Cantate Domino”) or German (“Singet dem Herrn”), the message hasn’t been lost on the many composers who’ve looked to Psalms 96, 98, and 149 for inspiration. And that’s the point of this music from 10 composers—8 of them living—who’ve heeded the psalmist’s call.

The premise winds up working well about half the time, with engaging Cantates and Singets bequeathed us by Ugis Praulins, Josu Elberdin (who delivers the text in both English and the language of his Basque homeland) Vytautas Miskinis, Vic Nees (1936-2013), Hugo Distler (1908-42), and Alwin Michael Schronen.

I’m less excited about the rest of the music, though the choir is excellent and there are exotic sounds from way above the staff emanating from the “overtone singer” engaged by some of the composers. I have no idea how she gets those notes to sound. I doubt you’ll be ascending the spiritual heights with this, but it could make a nice acquisition for the chorally curious.

GREENFIELD

Malena

Sicilian & Neapolitan songs
Roberto Alagna, t; ensembles
DG 4814733—61 minutes

Tenor Roberto Alagna has recorded so many solo discs by now that it’s difficult to keep track of what he hasn’t recorded. This is his second recital of Neapolitan songs he has made for DG (the first is called The Sicilian) and is an intimate affair indeed, beginning with a haunting song that Alagna and his brother Frederico composed to celebrate the birth of his daughter Malena.

The arrangements here are not the overblown kind heard so often. As much as I love Pavarotti’s performances of this repertoire, his technicolor arrangements tend to overwhelm the material. Here one gets a small band or solo guitar that helps create the feeling that Alagna is singing just for you. In the famous ‘O sole mio’, for example, Alagna sounds like he could be standing in the street beneath his beloved’s window serenading her
as tenderly as one could wish rather than belting the music out for an enthusiastic audience.

My appreciation for Alagna waned a bit over the years as he began taking on roles that seemed too heavy or inappropriate for him. Now in his early 50s, he seems to be enjoying a vocal Indian summer. The voice here sounds relaxed, his manner gracious. It’s evident that he and his brothers love this music.

Texts and translations are included (not always the case anymore) along with a note from both Alagna and his brother Frederico about their involvement in the project.

REYNOLDS

Song to Voss Poems

UlF Bastian, bar; Sascha El Mouissi, p
Gramola 99118—82 minutes

Frequently a song recital presents the music of a single composer or of several composers on a theme. Like a previous release by these two performers (Hebbel Lieder, M/J 2015), this program of 36 songs presents settings of texts by a single poet, German lyricist Johann Heinrich Voss, from 16 composers of the 18th and 19th Centuries. Many of them are seldom heard today (Johann Abraham Peter Schulz, Franz Xaver Sterkel, Johann Friedrich Reichardt, Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg, Carl Friedrich Zelter). Most of these songs are not likely to appear on recital programs, and Bästlein is somewhat bland and innocuous, so this is not an exciting release.

Bästlein shows good vocal expression and elucidation of text, but his voice doesn’t have much depth of tone. He is at his best at quiet dynamic levels (e.g. Fanny Hensel’s ‘Rosenkranz’). My assessment of this release is about the same as their previous one: Bästlein has a pleasing voice and offers quiet reflective singing in hushed tones for many of the songs. Mouissi’s adroit collaboration carries the drama of the songs well.

If you’re interested in hearing how various composers have set texts by a particular poet—Voss in this case—then here’s your chance. I found it boring. Notes, texts, translations.

REYNOLDS

Mother of Light

Armenian Hymns & Chants in Praise of Mary
Isabel Bayrakdarian, s; Ani Aznavoorian, vc; Vox Aeterna/ Anna Hamre
Delos 3521—62 minutes

Has Isabel Bayrakdarian ever made a boring disc? The soprano and her producers always seem to create programs with fascinating themes and rarely touch on conventional fare. There have been discs centered around the character of Cleopatra, tangos, Spanish songs, and an earlier disc devoted to sacred music from the Armenian church. This one is also devoted to Armenian hymns, but here all are specifically related to Mary. In her informative notes, Bayrakdarian explains that this disc is the fulfillment of her promise to praise Mary should God heed her pleas to spare her mother. Her research of this repertoire yielded many beautiful discoveries of hymns devoted to Mary. “For this recording, these hymns are arranged for soprano, female choir, and cello accompaniment. It is no coincidence that most of the musical forces are women: what better way to use the collective power to exalt the virtues, sorrows, beauty, and glory of Mary, the most celebrated woman of all time?”

The notes go on to mention the three types of hymns from the Armenian sacred tradition heard here and how they complement each other. In addition, we are given the full texts with translations.

Bayrakdarian’s singing is lovely. None of these hymns tax her considerable vocal resources. She sounds completely at home. Cellist Ani Aznavoorian supplies drama and instrumental beauty in her accompaniments. The Vox Aeterna Chorus, led by Anna Hamre, supports Bayrakdarian’s melismas and chants most effectively. The alto section has an especially rich, sensual tone.

This entire release is presented and performed with class and refinement.

REYNOLDS

In the Voice Labyrinth

Purcell, Berberian, Weill, Lennon & McCartney, Satie+

Cathy Berberian
Ermitage 1036—73 minutes

I’m inclined to think that you either love Cathy Berberian or you hate her, like so many other artists of that generation who were uncompromising. I love her for the breadth of her repertoire and for her willingness to try new things and inspire composers. This disc collects a number of her performances, some of them from concerts. No information on the sources is offered, only a ruminative and boring little essay by Piero Rattalino translated into about half a dozen languages. No texts or translations, either.

For the most part this is a strong recording. Berberian, never afraid to draw on a wide variety of vocal tone and style, runs a wide gamut...
herself, sometimes deliberately and delightfully brusque. My favorite performances are the ones of Berio’s magnificent *Sequenza III* and three Kurt Weill songs (‘Song of Sexual Slavery’, ‘Le Grand Lustucru’, and ‘Surabaya Johnny’). Other performances seem dated now, like the three odd Beatles arrangements (by Berio, if I remember correctly, in these readings reduced for a pianist): ‘Michelle’ is done in a stupid French accent, and ‘Ticket to Ride’ has all sorts of strange Baroque-sounding roulades. I’d rather hear them sung simply and expressively like the great songs they are. (Of course, irony was all the rage when she first did them, but seems—I hope—to be on the wane.) Excerpts from Walton’s *Facade* and Stravinsky songs make Berberian too prominent instead of giving the ensembles that accompany her something resembling a realistic sound. But the Weill and Berio more than compensate for any defects.

**HASKINS**

*Out of the Shadows*

Nordoff, Bowles, Paulus, Garner+
Lisa Delan, s; Kevin Korth, p; Matt Haimovitz, vc
Pentatone 5185672—76 minutes

Philip Glass once quipped that, in these times, there’s no great music, now forgotten, deserving of rediscovery—the programming premise for much of this release. This thought has crossed my mind more than once as I listened to this program. I’m inclined to think that most new poetry cannot be well set to music: the words require too much attention from the reader to be served by music, and most composers writing songs nowadays write music that is too complicated to complement the poetry or—worse—transparent enough in style to do so but too inane to be compelling.

The worst offenders here are David Garner, Gordon Getty, and Jack Perla; according to the liner notes, Getty got the other two to create settings of familiar songs expressly for this disc (‘Auld Lang Syne’, ‘Shenandoah’, and ‘Home, Sweet Home’), and the results are predictably affected in spite of a feigned simplicity. John Duke, represented by four Cummings settings, brings his usual watered-down brand of accessibility to the task, and Norman Dello Joio’s *Three Songs of Adieu* simply don’t measure up to his best work. A group of songs by Paul Nordoff is a mixed bag, but the engaging settings of Aiken’s ‘Music I Heard with You’ and ‘This is the Shape of the Leaf’ are very effective responses to very touching poetry. Three Randall Thompson songs are utterly forgettable, and Paul Bowles’s *Blue Mountain Ballads* suffer because Ms Delan really does not understand—not seems to have much real sympathy for—the vernacular style he attempts to achieve. In general, her fast, fluttory vibrato is often distracting and usually unsuitable for the more somber works. Kevin Korth’s performances are superb.

Only in one song—the final number of Stephen Paulus’s *Songs of Love and Longing*—do I hear what I would call a song worthy of the great tradition of such composers as Schubert, Schumann, Barber, and Rorem: the composer offers a simple but highly personal and arresting accompaniment that responds perfectly to the short text (which ends with the beautiful words “Surely, when you go, like a single drop of dew, I will vanish from this world”), scoops it up and portrays its ephemeral resignation perfectly, completely, and succinctly. That’s the mark of a great song composer, and it’s the only track here that makes me listen a second, third, and fourth time.

**HASKINS**

*Christiane Karg Portrait*

Schumann, Strauss, Gretry, Gluck, Schreker, Mozart, Schubert, Wolf, Mendelssohn
Berlin 788—67 minutes

Christiane Karg has recorded a number of excellent discs for Berlin from which all of these selections were chosen. She has a lovely, fresh tone that sounds, sometimes, like the young Lucia Popp. It’s not surprising that she has won a strong following in the worlds of opera and lied. Her response to the various texts is genuine and sincere, and she always sounds like she is enjoying herself. In her notes to this release she describes how she assembled the program by diligent research and advice from colleagues. Certainly her programs have gone out of the way to record arias and songs not often heard. Her previous four discs all have interesting themes and are very intelligently programmed.

This recital includes lieder by Clara and Robert Schumann, Wolf, and Mendelssohn, all of which are sung expertly. Mention should also be made of her fine accompanists, Malcolm Martineau and Burkhard Kehring. Jonathan Cohen’s group Arcangelo assists Karg in the arias by Gluck, Mozart, and Mendelssohn. If you want a sample of Karg’s work and enjoy some out-of-the-way material, this is recommended—though texts and translations are not supplied (a stumbling block when so much of this material is unfamiliar). If
you already own some or all of Karg’s other discs, you won’t need this.

REYNOLDS

**Jonas Kaufmann: Dolce Vita**
Palermo Orchestra / Asher Fisch
Sony 18363—67 minutes

This collection of Italian songs includes love songs, soulful songs, and popular songs that many performers have sung over the years. The selection is excellent and Mr. Kaufmann’s performances are enjoyable. He never overplays the emotional lyrics written into the songs as many other singers do. He doesn’t force the songs to the point of irritation. Even ‘Volare’ is subdued, a pleasant surprise. Asher Fisch and the orchestra enhance the performances. It’s all very well presented and beautifully sung. Italian and English texts for the 18 songs along with Kaufmann’s thoughts on the music. The sound is excellent.

FISCH

**I Am Wind on Sea**
Contemporary Vocal from Ireland
Aylish Kerrigan, mz; Dearbhla Collins, p
Metier 28558—57 minutes

This very eclectic program presents works in disparate styles by Irish composers written in the past 93 years. Each is recorded here for the first time. The names of the composers are not familiar; I find none of them listed in our index: Ina Boyle (b.1889-1967), Elaine Agnew (b.1967), Seeirse Bodley (b.1933), Anne-Marie O’Farrell (b.1966), Rhona Clarke (b.1958), and John Buckley (b.1951). Many of these pieces are essentially conventional songs for voice and piano with a modern flavor. One track is a piano solo conclusion to Bodley’s cycle *After Great Pain*. Collins offers deft accompaniment for all these songs and displays power in her one solo.

The program concludes with two very odd works. Clarke’s ‘Smiling like that’ is a setting of Molly Bloom’s speech from James Joyce’s *Ulysses* composed for Kerrigan accompanied by pre-recorded spoken and sung fragments of her voice and a driving rock drum beat. Buckley’s ‘Wind on Sea’ is a pointilistic work accompanied by percussion (woodblocks and crotales).

Good and sometimes surprising texts set imaginatively make this a fascinating program, but it is hard for me to give it a fair review, because I found it unpleasant to listen to the singer. The notes give her pedigrees and identify her as “one of the foremost interpreters of traditional Irish vocal music”. She sings with good expression and is clearly attentive to the texts, but her voice is shaky and sounds worn and amateurish. She has been a stalwart supporter of contemporary Irish composers, and for that she deserves praise. The final two experimental works come across best, but the more conventional songs deserve better treatment. Notes and texts.

R MOORE

**Richard Novak: Portrait**
Supraphon 4206—153 minutes

If you’re a collector of Janacek or Dvorak operas or Czech vocal music in general, chances are you’ve heard Richard Novak. He sang the Water Gnome on the *Rusalka* recording with Gabriela Benackova and appeared on several of Charles Mackerras’s Janacek opera sets.

This generous two-disc tribute to him (drawn from both studio and concert recordings) will be a bonus to anyone who has wanted to hear him in non-Czech material. He sings the Mozart and Verdi arias in the original Italian, the Wagner in German, and the French and Russian items in Czech translation. The lieder on the second disc is performed in the original languages.

His honest, forthright interpretations all display his knack for characterization and the ability to adapt his voice to the characters. The voice may not have the beauty of a Kurt Moll or the colors of, say, Hans Hotter. The tone can turn dry, and there is occasional unsteadiness, but he always sings with immense authority and conviction.

The second disc shows what he can do in the more intimate world of lieder—he is even more impressive. In this repertoire he can concentrate on mood and atmosphere. He tells the stories of these songs very clearly. As much as I enjoyed him in the opera excerpts, the second disc reveals why he is so highly revered in Europe.

No texts for the opera selections, but the original texts for the songs and Czech translations are supplied. There is also a detailed retrospective about Novak in the booklet. The sound for both the studio and concert recordings is excellent.

REYNOLDS

In what does barbarism consist, if not in the failure to appreciate what is excellent?

Goethe

March/April 2017
Maximilian Schmitt: German arias
Cologne Radio/ Patrick Lange
Oehms 1836—60 minutes

This tenor was a boy in the Regensburg Cathedral Choir and has sung Schubert and Schumann lieder on CD (S/O 2011 & M/A 2014). Paul Althouse called his a lovely voice, but Robert Moore was less taken with the voice itself and rather let down by the interpretation. He suggested that if you like the German tenor type of voice, no one can beat Wunderlich. Mr Schmitt admits in the notes that Anders and Wunderlich practically owned this repertory, but he thinks much of it has been neglected since the 1960s and wanted to record it.

I know these arias largely from Wunderlich, and this singer isn’t on that level—but who was? Who can do this today the way Anders and Wunderlich did it? Maybe this music has passed its prime and won’t be heard much in the future.

The composers are Flotow, Lortzing, Marschner, Nicolai, Schubert (Fierrabras), Weber, and Wagner (Rienzi, Tannhäuser, Flying Dutchman). The last two Wagner arias will probably be familiar and are heard a lot these days, but not sung by this kind of voice. He is a German tenor, but not heroic in any way. And his voice is a bit lighter than the great ones. He knows the music and doesn’t miss the point, but I can’t tear myself away from Wunderlich.

Fritz Wunderlich: operetta
Munich Radio/ Willy Mattes, Hans Moltkau, Meinhard von Zallinger
BR 900314—58 minutes

Fritz Wunderlich’s unreleased recordings keep appearing almost on a regular basis. In the last issue, Robert Moore reviewed a recording (SWR 19026) of Wunderlich singing sacred music by Bach and Handel. This new disc has Wunderlich singing operetta selections recorded for Munich Radio from 1959 through 1965. The sound, though monaural, is very good. The performances are incomparable.

Is there much more that can be said about this magnificent singer? His exceptional talent was recognized in the mid-1950s and he seems to have recorded continuously until his untimely death in 1966. These radio broadcasts only add to an already stunning recorded legacy. The 16 operetta selections show him at his prime in material he sang easily, perfectly, and with depth and meaning—no stress, no pushing; the notes just flow in a wondrous stream. The composers include Millocker, Lortzing, Nicolai, Johann Strauss, Jr., Fall, Kunneke, Stolz, Spoliansky, and Matteo. If you like operetta or are a Wunderlich collector, this recording is essential. Notes in German and English, but no texts.

Word Police:
Less vs fewer

Almost no one seems to understand which word to use. “Jim has less records in his library than Bill does” is simply stupid. This was something my generation learned in “grammar school” (yes, we learned grammar!). Now no one seems to know it in college.
NEWEST MUSIC

MIKI: Ballades for Koto, Vol 2; Time for Marimba; KoppeL: 9 Peanuts; OVALLE: As She Sleeps, She Dreams; HERSH: Run!; SMADNECK: Fernando’s Waltz; RICE: Fantasy in A
Brian Zator, marimba
Equilibrium 135—63 minutes
YE: Symphony 3; The Last Paradise
Cho-Liang Lin, v; Hila Plitmann, s; Royal Philharmonic/ Jose Serebrier
BIS 2083—54 minutes

Intersections:
Cross-Cultural Collaborations
JACOB, J: Awakening; JACOB, H: Untouched By Morning and Untouched By Noon, BLOCK: Puttin’ It Together, CERETTI: And The Huddled Masses; RUNKA: Dearly Beloved; Dearly Departed
Instrumentalists; Luna Vocal Ensemble/ Sandra Santos Gonzalez; National Symphony of Cuba/ Enrique Perez Mesa
Ansonica 2—63 minutes

THOMPSON, P: Trouble; Separate Self; Nocturnes; Kicow Hit Tamen; Virgil Cantini: The Artist in Public
Marylene Gingras-Roy, va; Ryan Socrates, perc; IonSound Project
Ravello 7936—51 minutes

WALLEN: Cello Concerto; Hunger; Photography; In Earth
Matthew Sharp, vc; Tim Harries, g; Errollyn Wallen, voice; Quartet X; Continuum Ensemble; Ensemble X/ Philip Headlam; Orchestra X/ Nicholas Kok
NMC 221—67 minutes

Currents
SNIDER: The Currents; HERIN: Harpsichords; DANCIGERS: The Bright Motion Ascending; SRINIVASAN: Mercurial Reveries; MAZZOLI: Heartbreaker; BURKE: Missing Piece
New Amsterdam 75—61 minutes

DOCKSTADER: Super Choral; Chinese Morf; Basement Passage; Todt I+II; Anata Loop; First Target; Whisper Smoother; Mystery Creek; Creek Bells; Creek Creek; Odd Bells; Piano Morf; Choral Mix; Big Fig—Starkland 226—66 minutes

As far as I know, there isn’t much space left undiscovered for solo marimba. Aside from a few musicians using the instrument as a controller of digital elements, most programs present the warmth of the instrument and the technical requirements for sound production on it. Brian Zator’s solo marimba program doesn’t find any new ground for the instrument but could certainly be enjoyed by many listeners. II of Minoru Miki’s ‘Ballades for Koto Solo’ arranged for marimba by Zator demonstrates great stick work. Howard Hersh’s ‘Run!’ offers rumbling, multi-stick chords and tries to create tension with various tremolos. Anders KoppeL’s Peanuts are gentle miniatures that revolve around rhythmic patterns. Miki’s Time for Marimba is the only piece to delve into chromatics in any meaningful way but it is also incredibly boring.

I run across few new symphonies for large ensembles. Sometimes it seems that the sheer size and scope must be either too daunting a task or too steeped in the past for new composers to tackle. Most of the programs with symphonies come from Chinese composers. Traditional instruments, lengthy narratives, and forceful percussion are generally present, and Xiaogang Ye’s Symphony 3 is no exception. Each of the seven movements represents important aspects of the culture and history of the Hubei province. Ritual dances, spiritual teachings, technological advances in bronze smelting and silk production, as well as geographical locations such as the Red Cliff all inform the generally tonal, sweeping work. The Last Paradise is a story taking inspiration from Ye’s own life as a child. Growing up at a difficult time in China he remembers villagers celebrating the death of a person because death was a release from a painful life and the beginning of a new journey. The solo violin is the protagonist and often plays erhu-like figures as it dominates the soundscape. The orchestra is always second fiddle, supporting with a mixture of pained tension, gentle pedals, and triumphant fanfares.

Performances from Cuba that are not historically limited or entirely jazz based are more rare than even symphonies for large ensembles. A new, boutique label called Ansonica, under the lead of the folk over at Parma, has now released two programs of music performed by Cuban musicians and recorded in Havana. Reading the blog entries of Bob Lord and Alexander Bourne online left me with the feeling that these were genuine trips based on a desire to bring cultures closer together to both share and learn from each other. Jeffrey Jacob’s Awakening is a sweeping, lush piano solo with orchestra. Brass are particularly active and bright while strings carry the ever-reaching melodic material. Steven Block’s Puttin’ It Together is a hodgepodge of disparate jazz parts hidden in a modern classical
work. It, like many of the pieces, is a nod to US-Cuban relations. Sergio Cervetti’s And The Huddled Masses for string quartet and clarinet is a depiction of immigration from Central and South America to the United States. I is reserved, somewhat hurt, but utterly hopeful before it ends. The drama increases in the quicker, more spastic II, with buzzing strings and pucky clarinet articulations creating an air of confusion and uncertainty. The finale completes the ABA format with a return to an air of determination and desperation.

Philip Thompson’s ‘Trouble’ is a wonderfully conflicted, simply constructed, highly evocative work. The figures are clear and, though the note values are highly specific and small, shared through the small ensemble. The leaps in octaves combine with the chromaticism to create a palpable tension and, while the tension resolves somewhat too smoothly, the journey is well worth it. It is, by far, the best piece on Thompson’s program. The three movements of Separate Self accompany the movements of robotic sculptures holding fabric. Ravello has an excerpt of this on their website as part of the enhanced liner notes. It may be best to just avoid these tracks and the video. The four groups of string quartet Nocturnes all include three short portraits with inspiration from paintings inspired by moon drawings by Galileo. Each movement is delicate, generally quiet, mournful, and uses a large amount of repetition, though the listener hears very few different notes.

The opening phrase of Errollyn Wallen’s Cello Concerto contains more unique pitches than all of Thompson’s Nocturnes. The cello reaches and yearns and gradually tempers both its range and intervals. Repetition is minimal and reserved for important moments. The orchestra enters politely 5 minutes into the 22-minute work. The mood immediately changes as if the singing cello has arrived at a friendly, idyllic locale. Tension grows and resolves, and Wallen’s harmonic language is polite and expressive. Her music gets much darker and lower with ‘In Earth’. The bass guitar rumbles and grumbles, sounding like an impending earthquake. The quiet, melodic strings plod slowly forward, resolutely, while many other sounds flutter and sputter against the grain. Photography unites the moods of both the concerto and ‘In Earth’. The low, suspicious danger of the bass guitar exists as a doubting double bass in III, and the pastoral air of hope runs though the dance-like I.

Like The Moldau, Sarah Kirkland Snider’s ‘Currents’ flows peacefully between moments of turmoil. Kirkland Snider’s river is more serene than Smetana’s and never achieves the power and force of the Moldau. The piano solo is introspective in its repetitive figures and mysterious in its harmonic language, as if the river were keeping a secret. The air of mystery on Michael Mizrahi’s piano program disappears in Troy Herion’s ‘Harpsichords’. It is replaced with extremely nimble, lithe figures and ornamentation. Patrick Burke’s Missing Piece opens with an emotionally stirring chord progression and makes great use of space. The slow, reserved, yet hopeful start gives way to darker tonality but resolves beautifully. This trend repeats, with more chromaticism gradually added, but without the piece turning into a giant cluster.

After studying painting and film, cutting sound for cartoons, and stealing time at a recording studio to experiment, Tod Dockstader became an incredibly influential composer of electronic music. Teaching himself how to manage tape machines and craft musique concrète, Dockstader had four LPs released in the mid 1960s before largely disappearing from the musical landscape. He emerged in 2005 with 59 new tracks and, we know now, continued composing until he could no longer. It’s rare that liner notes impart a true emotional connection between the person writing and the subject, but the connection between Justin Brierley and Dockstader thawed my cold New England heart, even after our first nor’easter. This connection is important, more so because this program consists of the best portions of over 4,200 sound files taken from Dockstader’s computer. Pieces like ‘Anat Loop’ are gentle, involved, but infectious. The crescendo that is ‘Super Choral’ is meticulously crafted and executed. ‘Big Jig’ is one of the most rhythmic and melodic pieces I’ve heard that is also clearly noise. From The Archives is an electronic music album that could be from decades past but has enough freshness to be better than most of the new sound collage or musique concrète programs I hear.

-American Record Guide

LAMPER

Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the peace makers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country.

Hermann Goering
CHAN: My Wounded Head 3
Rob Haskins, p—Mode 294—73 minutes

CZERNOWIN: The Quiet
Stephan Schmidt, g; Kai Wessel, ct; Bavarian Radio/ Brad Lubman; Ensemble Nikel, Bern Symphony/ Mario Venzago; Cottbus Philharmonic/ Evan Christ; SWR Baden-Baden/ Francois-Xavier Roth; West-Eastern Divan Orchestra/ Daniel Barenboim—Wergo 7319—77 minutes

HOLMAN: A Play of Passion
Colin Ainsworth, t; Stephen Ralls, Bruce Ubukata, p—Centrediscs 23016—50 minutes

BARRY: Barry Meets Beethoven
Stephen Richardson, b; Chamber Choir Ireland, Crash Ensemble/ Hillier Orchid 55—71 minutes

DAVIS, O: Dance
Kerenza Peacock, v; Huw Watkins, p; Royal Philharmonic/ Paul Bateman Signum 469—50 minutes

REGAN: Splash of Indigo
Brendan Kinsella, p; Chloe Trevor, v; Trio Xia; Julia Fox, s; Andrea Imhoff, p; Apollo Chamber Players; Moravian Philharmonic/ Petr Vronsky Navona 6064—71 minutes

MATHESON: Times Alone
Baird Dodge, v; Laura Strickling, s; Thomas Sauer, p; Color Field Quartet, Chicago Symphony/ Esa-Pekka Salonen—Yarlung 25670—78 minutes

BRAID: Bow
David Braid, p; Epoque Quartet Steinway 30061—53 minutes

TOGNI: Responsio
Jeff Reilly, bcl; Suzie LeBlanc, s; Andrea Ludwig, mz; Charles Daniels, John Potter, t ATMA 2731—49 minutes

The Preludes Project
Chopin & O’Riordan Holly Roadfeldt, p Ravello 7947 [2CD] 93 minutes

American Masterpieces for Solo Percussion
Wuorinen, Feldman, Shapey, Wolff Tom Kolor—Albany 1578—57 minutes

Marc Chan’s My Wounded Head 3, performed marvelously by the American Record Guide’s own Rob Haskins, is a gorgeous and confounding musical carousel. A few hundred measures and 73 minutes long, the piece progresses slowly and incrementally through polyrhythmic combinations of simple, repeating melodic figures. These combinations yield an ever-changing web of tones that can change gradually or suddenly, depending on which musical voice is added or delicately removed from the sonic web. These shifts are seldom predictable and often alter or cloud the meter, keeping the listener off balance, struggling in vain to find solid ground. Chan deals in familiar affects through familiar means, though everything is always a bit skewed. Some sonorities are eerie while others are sunny. There are stretches of cool, murmuring depth, and there are moments of sudden brightness. A serene beginning is unsettled by a more anxious middle, and the piece ends on an upswing through a bold, drawn-out cadence. The single revolution of this musical mobile moves through melancholy and optimism, ending with peaceful acceptance. Its sheer length and general surface consistency demand reflection and meditation on the sounds and on the personal imperfection and damage suggested by the work’s title. Chan’s piece is among the most brilliant in recent memory.

Israeli composer Chaya Czernowin’s record, The Quiet, is not especially quiet—at least not in a straightforward sense. Her music is stylistically similar to some European modernists who favor sound and noise over the simple coherence of tonal harmony and melody. These pieces for orchestra bring this sort of approach to composition onto a larger stage than usual. Of course, composers who employ extended techniques and unconventional uses of instruments have written for groups as large as an orchestra, but Czernowin seems to be able to harness the character of a large orchestra and channel it through rumbling, scraping, and murmuring. The record’s title piece is for large orchestra divided into three groups and opens with what sounds like the low growl of a powerful wind. This ominous beginning is answered by scratching and creaking and a mass of string players bouncing their bows on the strings (col legno). The sheer numbers of the ensemble lend an impressive gravity and a massiveness to these familiar sonic effects. The emergence of solo instruments—an electric guitar among them—is striking and surprising. As usual in Czernowin, these lead voices do not sing neatly or clearly; rather, their gestures and suggestions are brief and frantic.

The works presented on the record span the last seven years, a period of transition and change for the composer. The emergence of space and gesture as central boundaries shows in listening through each piece in succession. Dynamic level is certainly part of the quietness that pervades the music, but a lack of direction or purpose also makes for a kind of silence. The din of a big ensemble, each member busy with something different, offers a kind of blan-
marketing uniformity that is devoid of naivete and the false expression of so much music. The ever-changing yet static, bustling yet blank musical surface that appears in much of Czernowin's work is well worth hearing.

Derek Holman's *Play of Passion* is a set of song cycles, each of which is a pretty straightforward setting of Shakespeare, Ovid, Joyce, and other English-language poetry. The record's title doesn't promise much in the way of modernist severity, and the music doesn't deliver it. Holman's style is not derivatively neoclassical so much as it is a retreat from more acerbic contemporary music to a familiar, comfortable space where audiences can listen along without much trouble. The music is driven by short, melodic motives that turn and twist their way through various incarnations, though they never seem to get anywhere too special. The instrumental *Variations on a Melody by Doctor Varne* is a bit freer, but most of the vocal music is more structured, directed, and deliberate. Things are largely tonal, with occasional lingering dissonances. There is little difference in compositional approach from one song to the next, even if the mood changes to reflect the text. There isn't anything wrong with this music, but it doesn't do much of anything that's new or unusual.

Irish composer Gerald Barry's record, "Barry Meets Beethoven," is sometimes as silly as its title suggests, but is also able to hold more serious interest. The music can be goofy and there is a theatrical bent to most of it, but the humor often comes from unexpected angles. The *First Sorrow* string quartet, for example, doesn't sound anything like Beethoven in terms of musical texture or in performance practice, but adopts an attitude of bold, defiant expression that feels in line with Beethovenian ideals. This particular piece also dips into an odd setting of 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star,' where the famous children's tune's lyrics and rhythm are intact, but the melody is completely off. While this indirect quotation is the most obvious instance, much of Barry's music has an uncanny simplicity—a seeming clarity that is never quite what it seems. The rest of the music on the record is primarily vocal, drawn from a Beethoven opera and from miscellaneous choral works. Some of the texts are drawn from Beethoven's letters. Similar to the quartet, the musical surface contains repetition of small ideas, but never sounds too repetitious. Barry's craft and invention are evident. The Crash Ensemble is superb, and Hillier's direction brings his exacting detail to this record of bemusing, clever music.

Oliver Davis's music is simple, bare, and bright. Everything is easily accessible and an attractive sense of optimism pervades even the slow, lamenting movements. Churning string figures in *Frontiers* recall both American minimal music and a more rustic, pastoral dance. *Dancing Folk* is spirited and bouncing. *Fiddleslicks* is, as its title suggests, is a display of violinist Kerenza Peacock's technical prowess and energy. Most pieces are largely repetitive, but with constantly evolving motivic play that keeps things from becoming stagnant. Tonality here is alive and well, without so much as a suggestion of complication. I find music like this a bit too willfully ignorant of the darker aspects of contemporary life, too conveniently removed from the present. Yet, for some, *Dance* may supply a welcome respite from trouble and gloom.

Marty Regan's record, *Splash of Indigo*, is full of the kind of music I can't find much use for. As I write in so many of these short reviews, there isn't really anything so wrong or awful about it; the problem is that it doesn't contribute anything new or innovative. It doesn't stand out from the mass of tonal, conservative music already in circulation. *Overdrive* is a perfect example of the kind of big, loud, bright, bombastic, boring orchestral music that's riddled with tired cliches. *Runaway Train* for flute, cello, and piano is the same idea but in trio form. Simple ideas are put to fairly simple use without much nuance. The title work, *Splash of Indigo*, is a string quartet that has a bit more to it than the other pieces. Still, I'm not drawn to its melodrama and sentimentalism.

James Matheson's music sounds typical of the kind of "new music" that is supported by major symphony orchestras. It's safe, moderately neoclassical, and sounds American in the familiar, "post-minimalist" kind of way. Now and then, churning, repetitive, driving rhythms with fleeting, chirping harmonics above extended triads make their appearances as they do in some orchestral works by John Adams. And indeed, among Matheson's main supporters is the LA Philharmonic, the orchestra for which Adams serves as Creative Chair. This is not to say, though, that Matheson is simply an offshoot of Adams. There are some neoclassical idioms and a stylistic flexibility that don't crop up in the work of the more famous American post-minimalist. Still, there isn't a tremendous difference between the String Quartet and the Violin Concerto; and *Times Alone* sounds more or less like the Violin Concerto, but with a soprano singing over
the top. Matheson’s work is perfectly nice, though I doubt I’ll be returning to it.

Juno winner David Braid’s record, “Flow”, is a collection of vibrant original compositions performed alongside the Epoque Quartet (who are known for having played with Pat Metheny and the like). The Joya Variations are groovy, with plenty of complex, meandering melodies that the ensemble often tackles in unison. Their coordination of challenging rhythms and inflection is impressive, and the collective virtuosity of the group is clearly central to Braid’s compositional approach. The other lengthy piece, Chauvet, traces a seven-movement narrative through imaginative titles like ‘Memories of Long Forgotten Dreams’ and ‘The Juggler Dreamt of Lions’. Everything is busy, full, and active. Relative to the scope of much contemporary art music, Braid is harmonically conservative—but this doesn’t mean a dry, tonal palette. Extended triads and creative modal mixture and exploration make for a lively tour through a number of different affective places. There are also scattered moments of extended or inventive technique that add to Braid’s evident penchant for timbral play. In Joya Variations, for example, Braid temporarily acts as a percussionist. I’m not sure what sort of lasting value this music has, but it certainly stands out as a welcome departure from drier contemporary musical offerings.

Responsio by Peter-Anthony Togni is a record of newly composed chant with instrumental accompaniment, modernized in ways one might not expect. The bare chant is dressed with lots of echo and reverberation, clearly recalling the ancient genre in both timbre and melodic structure. The modern clarinet will sneak in beside the voices, adding subtly but effectively to the pure, solemn texture of neo-Gregorian monophony-polyphony. But now and then Togni will introduce something entirely surprising, like dissonances that remain unresolved for a few moments too long and which then grow quickly into unavoidable obstacles in the path of the otherwise untroubled lines of chant. I hear similarities to Stravinsky’s religious music, where the text and the austerity are filtered through a modern sensibility that disenchants the sacred. These eruptions of the new are usually answered, though, by invocations of the antiphonal and the ceremonial, as the older origins of the music come to the fore again. Togni’s record is for me a quintessential post-modern product: music that is capable of the uncomplicated sincerity that true modernism disavows, but that also undermines to an extent the seriousness and faith that chant symbolizes.

The Preludes Project is a collection of piano preludes: one by Kirk O’Riordan and the other by the considerably better known Frederic Chopin. The latter’s set of 24 preludes (one in each key) is among the most cherished piano music of the repertory. I’m no pianist, but Holly Roadfeldt’s performance sounds technically clean and unobjectionable—nothing to write home about. O’Riordan’s 26 preludes have titles: ‘Brooding,’ ‘Deliberately’, ‘With Longing’ and ‘Like Distant Chimes’ are a few. Each prelude conveys its title in a mild, accessible, tonal sound. They vary stylistically, but most seem to echo a free, Debussy-like approach to the piano. Others have the kind of repetitive, driving rhythms of American minimal music. The preludes are a couple of minutes apiece, making them feel and function very much like Chopin’s—brief, unanswered introductions that stand on their own with ease. None of O’Riordan’s short pieces really stands out from the rest, and I doubt his music will find itself next to Chopin’s much.

The collection of “American Masterpieces for Solo Percussion” performed by Tom Kolor includes work by Charles Wuorinen, Morton Feldman, Ralph Shapey, and Christian Wolff, all American composers with varying commitments to percussion. Working from the beginning of the record to the end, Wuorinen’s Marimba Variations are sparse, with sporadic flourishes, and represent the composer’s general adherence to 12-tone structure. Feldman’s King of Denmark is also very much in the composer’s known style. There is much resonance and reverberation, and the music in general is more a matter of economy of material and quality of sound than florid expression. Ralph Shapey is represented here by his Solo for Solo Percussion, a bit of a departure from the quieter, smoother pieces on this record. The timpani are loud but not bombastic; rhythms can be bouncy, but never quite turn into a dance. My favorite in this collection is Wolff’s percussionist songs, which tend settle into mellow grooves but vary quite a bit in their sonic range. Some are built around the clangs of symbols that sound more like trash can lids; but others contain darker, deeper, more ominous tones. They strike a balance between the modern and the light-hearted, allowing for reflection on the nature and the spirit of musical practice and performance. Tom Kolor’s playing is consistently convincing.
Word Police: Atrocities since the last list
(NOTE: We have dozens of Word Police waiting to be published. The language is degenerating so fast that we can't keep up with it.)

The cover of the 2016 season folder of Music@Menlo (the trendy name is bad enough!):
Due to unanticipated impacts of construction taking place at Menlo School...

The Economist thought that Mr Sanders should endorse Mrs Clinton "fulsomely": They don't seem to know that the word means insincerely, excessively.

The same magazine tells us that a report "makes a passionate case". People are calling everything "passionate". That writer simply meant "strong". A publicist recently wrote that a musician was "passionate about all kinds of music". Nonsense; she simply meant that he likes all kinds of music (and if that is so, it's not a virtue; it's simply lack of taste).

The local orchestra's publicity person now sees to it that she uses "curate" in every concert's publicity—"this curated concert experience". And it is invading publicity from all over the country. It has become the latest trendy word—and, like all trendy words, it is fast losing any meaning at all. Of course, so is "experience". It's a concert, not a "concert experience"—not even a "concert event". Another orchestra's publicity tells us that their conductor "leads the experience".

It is not enough to have or be in a crisis; now there are "crisis situations" and "crisis experiences". A crisis is simply a crisis! Where does all this pompous nonsense come from?

Increasingly we read about "musics". The word has no plural; it already implies a wide range of sounds and styles—but it's all just "music".

"This term highlights the awareness of the impact of human activity..." (Science Daily)

"The iconic cheetah is heading toward extinction." (Science News)

A common redundancy: close proximity. "Still remains" is perhaps the most common redundancy; you see it everywhere.

A travel agent on the Web promises to "concierge the hotels". I guess that means help us choose hotels as we travel.

Carnegie Hall publicity mentions "events at prestigious partner organizations throughout New York City" and uses the word "feature" as a verb repeatedly and, of course, "highlights". It promotes events “spanning a multitude of artistic genres”. All this was in the first two paragraphs! The current publicist is an improvement over the last one, too! But publicists have their own language and don’t seem to speak English.

I was reading a 1948 English novel by a good writer and found that even then the English were dropping the subjunctive. One example: "I was going to suggest that we went back to Falmouth for lunch." Well, did we or didn’t we? Or do you want us to GO there soon? New English novels are practically subjunctive-free. Sentences like that one are everywhere and strike a literate reader as dumb.

Publicists "reach out" to us and "share" with us. They even reach out "to whomever is interested" (should be whoever). Economist also gets that one wrong all the time.

"Trial" is now a verb (in publicity), as in "the new approach was trialed". Nuts. Other new verbs include offshore, baseline, foreground, and crescendo. Who needs these? Chefs don’t buy vegetables anymore; they "source" them.

Publicity: (This pianist) "has just released Volume 13 of his ongoing exploration of the music of (composer).’ What a stupid word “ongoing” is!

Spelling of composer names

The Germans dominated music publishing for centuries, so they spelled the names their way (that's how we got Tschaikowsky and Rachmaninov). French record labels (and for a while RCA in the USA) stayed with the French spellings: Prokofieff, Rachmaninoff, Moussorgsky. Educated Russians all knew French and imitated the French; in western script they usually spelled their names the French way. (Prokofieff, for one, consistently used the -ff ending.) Glazounov used the German V ending, and Rimsky-Korsakoff’s autobiography spelled his name Korsakov in English (Knopf). We try to follow the composers' own spellings. Vainberg (not a German composer) should not be "Weinberg". Also, when composers emigrate, the new country will change the spelling of the name. (There is no umlaut in Munch or Jarvi—or in ANY American's name.)
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