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- Glass’s Perfect American

**Rarely Heard:**

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May 5–7, 12–13
A pair of requiems: Andres Orozco-Estrada conducts Jessica Rivera, Andrew Garland, the Houston Symphony Orchestra and Chorus in the world premiere of Gabriela Lena Frank’s Requiem. Also on the May 5–7 program at Jones Hall: Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 5. And Jessica Rivera, Sasha Cooke, Nicholas Phan, and Kelly Markgraf are recorded in concert in John Harbison’s Requiem with Giancarlo Guerrero conducting the Nashville Symphony and Chorus May 12–13 at Schermerhorn Symphony Center. The program opens with Schumann’s Spring Symphony.

May 5–6, 12–13, 26–27
The Twin Cities’ Scandinavian roots are celebrated as violinist Pekka Kuusisto, conductor Eric Jacobsen, and clarinetist Martin Frost conduct the St Paul Chamber Orchestra in three sets of concerts with music by Sibelius, Grieg, Marcus Lindberg, Victoria Borisova-Ollas, and others, plus a variety of Swedish, Finnish, and American folk songs at St Paul’s Ordway Concert Hall.

May 12, 26, and 26–27
May brings Elgar oratorios: Leon Botstein leads the American Symphony, Bard Festival Chorus, and soloists in The Apostles at Carnegie Hall May 12. Michael Francis conducts the Cincinnati Symphony, May Festival Chorus, and soloists in The Dream of Gerontius at Cincinnati’s Taft Theatre on May 26. And Jaap van Zweden leads soloists, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and Chorus in Gerontius at Dallas’s Meyerson Symphony Center May 26–27.

May 13–21, June 8–10 and 15–17
Three directors leave their posts this spring: Michigan Opera Theatre celebrates the retirement of General Director David DiChiera, who founded the company in 1971, with a May 13-21 production of his Cyrano [J/F 2008; J/A 2011] at the Detroit Opera House. Guest artists emphasize international issues, global community, and common humanity as Alan Gilbert departs in style as New York Philharmonic music director at Geffen Hall June 8-10. And Music Director Christoph Eschenbach leaves the National Symphony with his own unique programming: Bright Sheng’s Zodiac Tales and Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 at the Kennedy Center June 15-17.

May 20–June 25
Carolyn Kuan conducts the Opera Theatre of St Louis’s US premiere of The Trial by Philip Glass June 4-23, and Christopher Allen conducts the newly revised version (“a total reconfiguration” according to composer Ricky Ian Gordon) of Grapes of Wrath (2007) May 27 to June 25. Also at the Loretto-Hilton Center, Mozart’s Clemenza di Tito and Puccini’s Madame Butterfly.

May 25–June 10
The 15th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition takes place at Fort Worth’s Bass Hall with 20 quarter-finalists May 29-30, 12 semi-finalists June 1-5, and six finalists June 7-10.

May 26–28, June 1–2 and 3–4
Piano Yuja Wang performs Bartok’s three piano concertos in order, one per concert pair, with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic at Disney Hall. Also, on the first program: Stravinsky’s Requiem Canticles and Janacek’s Glagolitic Mass. On the other two programs: Stravinsky’s Symphonies of Wind Instruments and Janacek’s Sinfonietta.

June 11–18
Boston Early Music Festival performances take place in a number of places. Highlights include the North American premiere of Andre Campra’s Carnival of Venice, a double-bill of Pergolesi’s Serva Padrona and Livietta e Tracollo, Handel’s Resurrezione, and a concert of Mozart sonatas with fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout and violinist Rachel Podger.

June 10–16
New York City Opera concludes its season with Peter Eotvos’s Angels in America at Lincoln Center’s Rose Theater.

June 17–25, June 23–July 8
June brings two productions of Robert Xavier Rodriguez’s Frida (1991): Andreas Mitisek is stage director and production designer for the Long Beach Opera’s production at the city’s Museum of Latin American Art June 17-25. And Andres Cladera conducts Catalina Guervo and Ricardo Herrera in Cincinnati Opera’s production at the Jarson-Kaplan Theater June 23-July 8.
Americans Make Their Mark
Gil French

A person traveling with the Chicago Symphony for the opening of the Elbphilharmonie Hall in January asked me, “How do you think the people of Hamburg are reacting to a hall that cost $844 million and took 10 years to build?”

I replied, “Coming over here this afternoon on the U-bahn (subway), as it pulled in to the elevated Baumwall station, an 8-year-old boy pointed toward the window and exclaimed to his mother, ‘Elb-phil-har-MONIEEEEE!’ The free panoramic outside terrace that surrounds the building’s entire eighth floor, where they were probably headed, had over half a million visitors in just the first three months. And the 500,000 concert tickets for this first season (January to June) were sold out weeks before the gala opening on January 11—quite an act of faith, I’d say.” I’ll get around to the hall itself, cost overruns, etc later; but first things first: the acoustics.

Opening Concert
The immediate question among the scores of music critics was, “Where did you sit? What did it sound like?” The building (nicknamed the Elbie), which also contains a Westin Hotel and 45 apartments, is 21 stories tall. The 2100-seat main concert hall, an irregular circular honeycomb-shaped “column”, is based on the 12th floor; its uppermost seats are on the 17th. Strings were arranged first violins, viola, cellos with string basses behind them, and second violins. My seat was flat on the main floor, fourth row, 12 feet from the stage, about 3 feet below stage level, far right, in line with the basses. First violins were on the far side at about a 150 degree angle. I expected the worst but wound up with the best seat in the house.

The ingenious opening program was chosen by Thomas Hengelbrock, principal conductor of the renamed NDR Elbphilharmonie, the hall’s resident orchestra. (It had been just NDR—Northwest German Radio, the orchestra that Gunter Wand led in many legendary RCA recordings.) Indianapolis Symphony Music Director Krzysztof Urbanski is the principal guest conductor. The concert opened startlingly with Britten’s Pan for solo oboe from the 16th floor, far right of the first violins. The sound was warm and enveloping, fully present. It was followed immediately (no applause, not even a moment’s pause) by Dutilleux’s Mystere de l’Instant for full orchestra. The first violins were as fully present, warm, and rich as the lower strings in front of me. Balances were so ideal that a light cimbalom colored the textures perfectly. An early baroque song with countertenor Philippe Jaroussky and period harpist Margret Koll followed, again instantaneously, from the 15th floor behind and to the left. I had to turn to see them, but they were as
Bernd Alois Zimmermann’s *Photoptosis* for large orchestra was mostly sound effects, pedal points, piles of cluster tones, screaming piccolos, organ, etc—not my cup of tea but superb for showing off the hall’s detailed, balanced, rich acoustics. Ensemble Praetorius followed with *Quam Pulchra Es* Es (to my right on the 14th floor). A Caccini piece with a mellower-voiced Jaroussky was sandwiched between Rolf Lieberman’s jazzy orchestral Furioso with clearly whispered tremolos and piano coloring and the *Final* from Messiaen’s buoyant (and superbly rehearsed) Turangalila, without applause or pause. Even an ancient lute made me aware of the hall’s full frequencies.

To me the program lacked any continuity. Then a fellow critic set me straight: continuity wasn’t the point. By eliminating all applause or pauses between pieces, Hengelbrock forced us to really listen as each work served as a shocking ear cleanser for the opposite kind of music that came next. Indeed, the hall itself and its versatile acoustics were the main star.

After intermission Hengelbrock lost some steam in Wagner’s Prelude to Parsifal, though the waves of string arpeggios undulated evocatively under the opening brass. It was followed by the world premiere of Wolfgang Rihm’s Reminiscenzen, a Berg-like work that showed that there is no need to force the sound in this hall. Light tenor Pavol Breslik and the faintest percussion were easily audible against full orchestra with organ. Textures, textures, textures. In fact, I’ll bet it was Hengelbrock’s extensive work with period-instrument ensembles that made even the more rugged modern works transparent.

In the grand finale, Beethoven’s ‘Ode to Joy’, the strings were hot and the string basses perfectly tuned. Even the furious 16th notes under the melody were clear for a change! A healthy-looking Bryn Terfel, right in front of me, cast all formality aside as he spat out his introductory recitative, enunciating “und freudenvollere” (and full of joy) with tavern-like assertiveness. The orchestral fugue was crystal clear, with infectious rhythms. The perfectly balanced vocal quartet really shone in “Tochter aus Elysium”. The chorus was superb, though it sounded somewhat recessed, and its presence reduced the orchestra’s resonance slightly. A minimum of eight curtain calls followed (I lost count).

A fellow music critic, who sat directly opposite me on the first violin side, had an opposite experience. The cellos and string basses were hard to hear (audible but without presence in their opening Beethoven declamation), the soprano sounded brazen and grating, and the quartet not balanced—equivalent seats on a diagram, but radically different results because the hall is not built symmetrically. Even outside on ground level, the building itself is not symmetrical because of the shape of the mini-peninsula it’s at the end of.

**Kent Nagano and Jörg Widmann’s Arche**

January 13 was the world premiere of Jörg Widmann’s oratorio *Arche* with more than 300 performers. The 100-minute oratorio has the breadth of Britten’s *War Requiem* (but on a more massive scale) and brings its theme up to date.

From a seat parallel to the first violins in the second row on the 15th floor, my peripheral vision was always conscious of the people sitting in seats strung honeycomb-like 360 degrees around the walls, but never too clustered together (photos make it look denser). As a result the hall felt rather intimate—a collaborative event with neighbors. Nonetheless, my concentration inevitably fell on the stage below. Indeed, with American Kent Nagano conducting the Hamburg Philharmonic (the second of the city’s three orchestras), Hamburg Opera Choir, two other choirs, soprano Marlis Petersen, baritone Thomas E Bauer, breathtaking soprano Gabriel Böer, two youth speakers, and organist Latvian Iveta Apkalna, the acoustics concentrated my attention on the performers. Once again I had “the best seat in the hall” with warm, rich, embracing ambience and balances so exquisite I could hear the slightest percussion stroke, yet viscerally feel the power of tutti moments. Textures had clarity and ambience. Apkalna’s eloquent musicality made the 4,765-pipe Klais organ sound perfectly blended. (She’ll be playing with the Los Angeles Philharmonic May 26-28.)

Only one reservation from three floors above: in the two or three fleeting moments when the whole orchestra played alone, it sounded “down there” rather than embracing. The next night a colleague who heard the Chicago Symphony from the same level confirmed this.

*American Record Guide*
Arche is the Greek word for “beginning” (creation). The same word in German means “ark,” as in Noah’s ark—the subject of the second moment: the Great Flood, the first destruction of the world. The fifth and final movement asks if we are bringing about the second, so the work forms an arch. Its texts are from 15 sources in German, Latin, and English, ranging from Claudius and Francis of Assisi to Heine, Nietzsche, the Bible, and the Mass. I don’t read German, but the texts were clear enough.

The oratorio opens with the sound of wind. I looked for wind machines but found none; trombones and tuba were the source. Once past the orchestral burps, gurgles, scrapes, creaks, and sound effects depicting the primal ooze of creation, the music becomes far-ranging as the texts—brazenly loud, threatening, comforting, lyrical, tonal and atonal, drawing on many different styles (including an extensive reference to Beethoven’s Choral Fantasy). Yet I never questioned the work’s integrity. It has a continuous arch from start to finish.

Part II was ‘The Flood’, IV ‘Dies Irae’ (Good versus Destruction), and V ‘Dona Nobis Pacem’. Part V on paper looks like dragging the cat in by the tail to be “contemporary”, but as a lively chorus of eager teenagers dressed in everyday clothes ran onto a 16th floor balcony and went through the alphabet from A to Z, including everything from bookmark, giga, and joystick to CNN, G-20 (held in Hamburg in April with both Trump and Putin attending), Pentagon, and ending with “IN GOD WE TRUST”, the text might as well have concluded with the great final line from JFK’s inaugural speech, “With history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but know that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.” I think the impending Trump inauguration was on everyone’s mind.

Marlis Petersen’s gorgeous, natural voice ranged from lyrical to creature-like as she climbed through the hall’s seats, making bird and animal sounds, at one point climbing over knees in the row in front of me. Thomas E Bauer served somewhat like a prophet with his glorious Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau-like baritone, and the choruses were unimpeachable. But it was Nagano who was the star of the evening, earning a minimum of nine curtain calls (I lost count). The audience conveyed an electric charge delivered over 600-volt lines. It was more than mere appreciation. Civic pride? Ownership? Renewal of city spirit? If anyone says that classical music is dead or dying, my response is, “Honey, you should get around more.”

Since 2015 Nagano has been general music director of the Hamburg Opera and the Philharmonic, which plays for the opera and is the city’s second orchestra. The third is the Hamburg Symphony, whose principal conductor is Jeffrey Tate.

**Riccardo Muti and the Chicago Symphony**

What decompression I went through when these two extraordinary nights were followed by two traditional mostly-warhorse programs with Riccardo Muti and the Chicago Symphony. How could they compete? They tried, charging into the Elbphilharmonie like a Mack truck, with unsmiling faces, little recognition of one another as they played (what a contrast to the Berlin Philharmonic—see my article in March/April), lots of muscle, and an authoritative, business-like music director.

The first concert opened with Hindemith’s Concert Music for Brass and Strings, a tightly written work that not even the best recordings can make transparent. Here I could actually parse out the inner strings as Muti conveyed a definite point of view. What immediately became apparent, though, was Muti’s style: heavy on legato, especially holding out phrases to their full value, allowing little to no space between phrases, and creating a homophonic versus polyphonic texture, precision versus exhilaration. (I suspect he has absorbed little from the period-instrument movement.) Nor does he make music dance: the second movement’s syncopation didn’t move him, and he was metronomic in Elgar’s In the South that followed, sapping it of rhythm. He also chopped Elgar’s structure into pieces by invariably slowing the tempos in the quiet sections. This purple-patch performance seemed six or seven minutes longer than Solti’s quintessential 20-minute recording. After intermission two Moussorgsky works fared better: Rimsky’s orchestration of Night on Bald Mountain and especially Ravel’s of Pictures at an Exhibi-
tion with its loose multi-scenic structure. Muti was better when he was looser.

For the first CSO concert I sat on the 13th floor far left on the first violin side, at the end of a row with a wall (above which was another tier of seats) on my left side. Even in the row’s second-last seat, the wall made it sound as if I were hearing only with my right ear. Bless the young couple who were separated by my seat; I gladly agreed to swap, and the sound just one seat to the right was completely normal. Also, sitting on this side of the hall, the violins and cellos had a diminished presence.

From this seat the three trombones faced me directly. Blame the acoustic that they drowned the orchestra and projected right into my face, but blame the players for their coarse tone and style, which was evident the next night as I sat 12th (main) floor center in a small section of stadium seating with my back against a partition, blocking any surround sound (the music sounded only in front of me). In this seat the tuba ricocheted off the 16th floor balcony directly into my ear, dominating any forte passage. If I leaned forward, it lessened the phenomenon but not by much. As the orchestra warmed up, I was amazed at the coarse, unblended sound the CSO’s trombones and tuba have. Also, the percussion projected no personality or style at all (and where did they get those trashy cymbals?).

My God! The Chicago Symphony was loud in the Elbie! They didn’t realize that in this hall there is no need to force the sound. The second concert began with Alfredo Catalani’s Contemplazione, played terribly loudly for its title. I suspect it was Muti’s favoring the violins (together to my left) that made the lower strings seem to project less. I like my music loud (I like to feel it), but Muti made Richard Strauss’s Don Juan that followed sound earth-bound (no rhythmic lift) and oppressive, amplified by that barrier behind my back.

But why then didn’t Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4 after intermission feel that way, or the encore, Verdi’s raucous Overture to Nabucco? Because in the Strauss Muti seemed in his Napoleonic mode—authoritative, metronomic, precise (I kept saying to myself, “Let go! Trust the players! Make music, will you!”), whereas Muti has long “owned” the Tchaikovsky and let it flow with structure, poignancy, and unforced radiance. And did he let ‘er rip in the encore—loudest of all but not at all oppressive. I wish the CSO had had time for a short rehearsal the day they arrived, as they had at the Philharmonie de Paris the day before; they might have made appropriate adjustments.

Muti started the second half of both concerts as people continued pouring in; I broke out laughing during a brief pause in Bald Mountain as a woman with highly audible horse-clop heels made her way to her seat. Served him right for his bad manners! What a contrast to the audience’s splendid manners! They exploded into such a hail of barking coughs and hacks after Tchaikovsky’s second movement that Muti turned, gestured, and laughed, making the audience laugh with him—but during the music you could hear a pin drop. As Georg Solti once admonished a Chicago audience, “Don’t cough in the piano.”
Indeed, the audience here was unique. They knew how to evaluate performances: calling for encores, but reserved for ample, even generous, but not unanimous for the CSO. Despite the hoopla, the Elbphilharmonie remains "the people’s hall" in a city that prides itself on never having had royalty (no kings, no castles, etc). In fact, the grand opening was advertised as not black-tie. City fathers went out of their way to assure the public that everyone is welcome here. When told that some women still show up at the first concerts wearing sumptuous gowns, State Council Wolfgang Schmitt quipped, “Some people just can’t help themselves.”

The Hall Itself

Getting into the auditorium is a different matter, beginning with a single 2-1/2-minute escalator ride up seven stories, followed by another one-story escalator. Good luck finding the few elevators up to 12; the alternative is 88 wide, curved, treacherous stairs of varying depth with little to hold on to. Even the steps in the hall are tricky; a light under each shines from a center space about two inches high—it often caught the heel of my shoe. The plain hallways are beige, white, and sterile with the curved angles of a surreal psychiatric hospital and no seating in most areas. One huge advantage: if you enter via the wrong door, you can get to your seat from anywhere inside the hall without having to go out into the hallway. The all-cloth seats are quite firm but comfortable.

Except for the flooring, there is no wood in the all-white hall. Instead acoustician Yasuhiro Toyota covered the walls with about 10,000 white gypsum fiber panels that are honeycombed, as if each were dug out with a giant ice cream scoop. These are the reflectors that disperse the sound, and they do a far-from-even job. Toyota’s masterpiece remains Walt Disney Hall in Los Angeles. In the Elbie each person must find his own acoustical sweet spot. But, on the whole, it is a marvelous place for soloists to ensembles of over 300.

The Elbie’s annual budget is about $6 million. The city is responsible for the building’s upkeep for 20 years. There is no marquee and practically no signage on the building. There are two other halls, a small one with 150 seats and a Chamber Music Hall where 550 tiered seats rise up behind a two-foot-high stage. The walls are oak with fist-sized pockets for reflection, the ceiling is black scaffolding, and the stage and seats can be reconfigured into a completely flat space. Ensemble Resonanz, which has a 10-year contract as the resident ensemble, is a democratic chamber orchestra without a permanent conductor. Its solo-quality players range from the 20s to middle-age and perform works from early baroque to ones written for them.

Because my seat was second row center five feet from the stage, I can’t vouch for the chamber hall’s acoustics, but it was an ideal spot for Bartok’s *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* with its divided orchestra; the playing was superb, but the musicians deserved a better conductor than Spaniard Emilio Pomarico, though he did justice by...
transcendent soprano Sandrine Piau in Berg’s *Seven Early Songs*. As I entered, psychedelic noise like killer bees played from loudspeakers—part of the world premiere of Georg Friederick Haas’s *Release* with the Cologne String Quartet producing amplified nails-on-blackboard scrapes and microtones, as a harp and piano added interjections. As the British critic next to me said about the smiling composer, “When I interviewed him, he said he writes about death.”

**The Building**

Who said that Germans are master organizers! Original cost projections in 2007 were lies; only base costs were revealed but additional costs were kept hidden. Also, like the new airport in Berlin that never gets completed, the Elbphilharmonie was originally cursed with numerous construction companies controlling its many aspects. The bureaucratic mess made decisions impossible. In late 2012, the Social Democratic Party, now an absolute majority in Hamburg, took control of the mess, reduced the many companies to one, and made the tough decision to finish the building. Costs be damned. But then costs were not prohibitive in Hamburg, one of Europe’s four top economically flourishing cities owing to its huge port. The next time you see those ubiquitous Hamburg Süd shipping containers stacked atop freight train, semis, and lining the world’s ports, you’re looking at much of the city’s vast income.

The Elbphilharmonie’s six-story brick foundation was built in the mid-1960s on the Elbe River as a warehouse for cocoa, tea, and tobacco; it closed in the 1990s. The foundation was completely gutted, leaving only the exterior wall. Atop sits the 15 stories of the new structure that holds the orchestra hall, the chamber hall, studio hall, Westin Hotel with 244 rooms facing the port, 45 apartments on the other end facing the downtown, plus the eighth-floor viewing platform, restaurants (one serving “lukewarm Atlantic salmon” and “braised cheek of ox”), bars, souvenir shops, and 520 indoor parking places—a mini-city, in other words, and part of Hamburg’s flourishing urban renewal plan called HafenCity (Harbor City). The area is part of the Speicherstadt warehouse district that was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015. That’s no small matter in Hamburg, one of Europe’s few cities without an “old town”; the 1943 British and American bombing and firestorm (far bigger and more deadly than Dresden’s two year later) obliterated 80 percent of the city.

The building’s glass windows are shaped to let in fresh air through small reachable panels that from the outside look somewhat like eyes and reflect the surroundings, the river, and the ever-shifting sky. The roof’s curved lines are reminiscent of sails. As positioned at the end of a peninsula on Hamburg’s famed port (bigger in area than the entire city-state of Singapore—and unlike Singapore or Shanghai, Hamburg’s port is entirely in the city), it could have served as inspiration to Wagner for *The Flying Dutchman*. Along with Sydney’s Opera House, Singapore’s Esplanade Concert Hall, Los Angeles’s Disney Hall, and Beijing’s Egg, this is one of the few in the world that is now an icon. Apparently the over 500,000 visitors to the viewing platform that opened only three months earlier agree.

Wherever I went in Hamburg, the people were friendly and happy, the opposite of the clouds, rain, wind, and 30-degree January temperatures. But then, in this Hanseatic city, water, extremely high tides, the wind, and shipping are part of everyone’s DNA. Next to the Westin Hotel is a dock for ferries heading to the city’s major tourist attraction just across the river, the landing for numerous harbor tours. That plus “world heritage site” plus “urban renewal site” assures landmark status for the seemingly irresistible Elbphilharmonie.

Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic were sold out on April 3 (except for the awful US$39 bird-loft seats, the tickets cost $120 to $238). Ticket availability should begin to loosen up next season. But then there are the other two orchestras, the opera, and the older concert hall (Laeiszhalle) in this birthplace of Brahms, Mendelssohn, CPE Bach, and Telemann. It’s not just shipping that’s part of Hamburgers’ DNA.
John Adams’s 70th Birthday
California Style

[Two critics reflect the same historical perspective of composer John Adams, as he celebrated his 70th birthday. -Editor]

San Francisco Symphony
The Gospel According to the Other Mary
Jeff Dunn

Settling in for unsettling music—2 hours and 20 minutes of it, eventually—has proved impossible for some listeners to John Adams’s Gospel According to the Other Mary. At the break between acts about 20% of the audience left the semi-staged concert with Joana Carneiro conducting the San Francisco Symphony at Davies Hall on February 17. San Francisco Chronicle critic Joshua Kosman reported the night before that “the attrition after intermission was as striking as any I’ve witnessed”. So what’s going on?

The work had its premiere with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in May 2012, where it won mixed reviews. Since then it has been tightened up and has had several concert, semi-staged, and fully staged performances in Europe and the US. Reviews have remained mixed, from “an unconvincing mix of snarky putdowns of Jesus” (Chicago Classical Review) to “an immensely potent work, one that may prove pivotal in the composer’s output” (The New Yorker). (David Robertson brought it to Carnegie Hall with the St Louis Symphony and Chorus.)

Praise and blame have been put both on the music and the libretto, with blame weighing more on the latter. To me, despite some wonderful inventions here and there, it’s the music that is the larger problem, one that exacerbates the libretto’s infelicities. The work is a “pivot” in the composer’s output, an about-face return to his post-minimalism of the late 1980s, with a patina of orchestral mastery but less initial melodic interest.

The libretto is an olio of six biblical and seven modern texts put together by Adams’s long-time collaborator Peter Sellars. These excerpts are placed variously in the mouths of Mary Magdalene (the “other” Mary) and her siblings Martha and Lazarus. Narration and the words of Jesus are sung by a trinity of countertenors. That this is no ordinary Bachian passion blisters the audience from the outset. No “Come ye daughters, help me lament” (Bach), but “The next day in the city jail we were searched for drugs. We were stripped naked” (the autobiography of Dorothy Day). The music churns, the rhythmic-melodic cells repeat, vary, and slash dissonantly. We are in liberation theology mode. This alternates mostly with the Gospel of John. The ethereally weird countertenor trinity supply variety, but too much time is spent repeating phrases such as “whose cheeks are the gouged blue of science” 30 and more times to motifs of dubious memorability. (The seemingly obscure line is from a poem by Louise Erdrich, referring to the color of Jesus’ cheeks in a mural.)

While there were many fascinating sonorities—particularly the use of the cimbalom and the interventions of an huge array of tuned gongs—the high point for me was Lazarus singing a setting of Primo Levi’s poem “Passover”, which closed Act I. Act II, which could have had some stirring resurrection music, instead ends with a somewhat limp countertenor phrase, “Jesus saith unto her, Mary.” Her resulting recognition is left to the audience to imagine. A dramatic opportunity is missed.

All the performers were magnificent, especially Tamara Mumford as Martha in her gorgeous low range, Kelley O’Connor as Mary, and lead countertenor Daniel Bubeck. Jay Hunter Morris was a fine Lazarus to close Act I, but seemed strained other times. The San Francisco Chorus and conductor Grant Gershon engaged the work’s difficulties like troopers. Staging director Elkhanah Pulitzer coordinated some interesting lighting effects by Seth Reiser, but the white-backed stage behind the orchestra was not easy to see, partly blocked by the gong array. The production would have gained from video projections showing close-ups of the emoting singer-actors.

All in all, I cannot see that this work can supply much succor to people living in our current unsettling times. It will not bring advocates of the red or blue strands of religious thought any closer together but will only generate antagonisms.
St Lawrence Quartet and Wild Up
Quartet No. 1, Shaker Loops, Hallelujah Junction
Richard S Ginell

The Valley Performing Arts Center (VPAC) on the campus of Cal State University Northridge in the San Fernando Valley has been slowly feeling its way into the cultural life of Los Angeles since it opened in 2011. It has an acoustically excellent 1700-seat hall and is in the middle of a huge population base of 1.8 million that had been long underserved by musical events. It also has the unique virtue of having Vin Scully, the recently retired sports-caster who is probably the most popular person in Los Angeles, delivering the recorded turn-off-your-cellphones announcement.

The main issue for VPAC has been luring enough significant events into the hall to get people to keep coming. They hit on one idea in February—new music in unusual spaces—that might work, especially on a college campus.

VPAC put together a three-concert series around the 70th birthday of onetime renegade, now establishment cornerstone John Adams, each with a different group or organization doing the programming. A scheduling conflict prevented me from attending the concert staged by Jacaranda on January 14, but I did make it to the February 3 performance of the St Lawrence String Quartet (the composer’s chamber group of choice these days) and the climactic February 16 program with conductor-sparkplug Christopher Rountree and his raucous young new music band, Wild Up [spelled with a lower case “w” by the group].

The unusual aspect of both concerts was that the audience was on risers on the stage instead of in the usual seats in the hall. The performers faced us, with their backs to the hall. The sound from this setup was gratifyingly clear and airy, interacting with the hall’s resonance yet also intimate and close-up. I felt privileged to be on the stage looking out at the same view that performers usually get (even though the hall was empty), getting the same sonic perspective as the musicians. Also, my attention was more concentrated, being so close to the performers.

These days John Adams can be seen as a receptacle for many currents running through both high and popular American culture. He found his voice through minimalism but left the movement in the dust as his voice grew more complex, ambitious, and ambiguous. Both programs seemed to function more as an illustration of the streams that have flowed into Adams than as a survey of his work.

The St Lawrence Quartet’s program consisted of only two big works, Adams’s Quartet No. 1 (2008) and Beethoven’s Quartet No. 15. The latter, as played long ago by the St Lawrence one evening, was the piece that inspired Adams to go into the string quartet business, and he has been obsessively constructing homages to Beethoven ever since (Absolute Jest, Roll Over Beethoven, Quartet No. 2).

Although the giant first movement of Quartet No. 1 (more than 20 minutes long) begins with high-energy minimalist patterns, it quickly becomes convoluted and complex,
going through many mood swings until the engines start up again in the final movement, culminating in a brutal tarantella that then vanishes. The St Lawrence still play the quartet they inspired with the raw energy of first discovery, with their showboating first violinist Geoff Nuttall whirling and bouncing to the phrases and the beat.

The Beethoven had plenty of rhythmic emphasis and wide dynamic extremes, if not the warmest ensemble sound or most consistent intonation. But the great sustained climax of the lengthy slow movement had the right kind tension, and the foursome maintained the virtue of simplicity in the Haydn encore, the slow movement of Op. 20:1.

For the Wild Up concert the audience was seated on stage surround-style around the performers and a pair of nine-foot Steinways. Without warning (they didn’t bother listing their program) Rountree began leading a beautiful performance of The Unanswered Question by Charles Ives, Adams’s foremost influence from his New England upbringing. A solo oboe asked the question instead of a trumpet, and the ghost wind ensemble resonated clearly from the hall’s balcony.

‘The Poltergeist’, from William Bolcom’s Three Ghost Rags, does some strange things amid graceful looks back at a vanished age; it indirectly represents the influence jazz had on Adams. Richard Valitutto was the smooth pianist. He was joined by Wild Up violinist Andrew Tholl in the angry, manic, machine music of George Antheil’s rarely heard Violin Sonata No. 1—one “bad boy of music” preceding another.

Then at last, everyone got down to playing some actual Adams. Pianists Gloria Cheng (a longtime Adams devotee and friend) and Valitutto performed Hallelujah Junction, named after a real hamlet on US 395 in the Sierra Nevada near Adams’s composing cabin. After an initial blurring of instruments, the textures became clearer as the performance locked in, and one could detect a straight line from the aggression of Antheil to the blunt-force chordal hammering in Part 1.

Shaker Loops, the composer’s breakthrough piece, played here in its original string septet version, derives a lot of its motor-driven momentum from Sibelius’s symphonies—Nos. 4 and 5 in particular. Wild Up more than made up in spunk what it may have lacked in finesse. Rountree is a very physical conductor, pumping and gesturing like a yell leader at a football game. Sitting practically in the string players’ laps allowed me to feel the tremendous visceral force in the piece’s two big crescendos.

Before we took our leave, Wild Up informed us that they have one collective foot in the rock camp and don’t care who knows about it. With a drummer going full throttle and the whole group simulating a fuzz-tone electric guitar at first, they pushed through a pair of manic punk-rock transcriptions, Deerhoof’s ‘Hark the Umpire’ and Dog Faced Hermann’s ‘Blessed Are the Follies’, the latter ending with a series of riffs that in another era could have been played by Woody Herman’s First Herd. And yes, Adams was influenced by both punk-rock and big bands. So there!
Carnegie Hall
Leslie Kandell

A composer’s dream: in Carnegie Hall on his 80th birthday, January 31, he bows to the cheering crowd from a spotlighted box seat, and a symphony orchestra performs two of his works new to New York, plus the world premiere of his Symphony No. 11. Philip Glass, Pulitzer prizewinner and Carnegie Hall’s next resident composer, had all that. Those who love his music (not everyone, but too bad for them) thought the Bruckner Orchestra Linz, led by Glass’s longtime champion Dennis Russell Davies, was amazing.

The pieces, from the past 20 years, indicate that minimalism has come a long way, or that Glass has. First of all, nothing scored for 130 players can be called minimalist. Also, while his operas, dance, theater, chamber music, and film scores bear trademark rolled chords, piano passages, and luminous harmonies, the sizes and swells here were more like “maxi”.

Glass’s music calls out for visuals: Koyaanisqatsi, for instance, is a full-length film of scenery, and the repeated title name in the bass is blended into the instrumentation. But by now his fans supply their own visuals mentally.

In fact, listening to recent Glass is like looking at fine art. Stand in front of a painting, contemplate it as long as you wish, move on, but perhaps choose to move back for another look. That’s not possible in music, but the 23-minute Days and Nights in Rocinha (a large favela outside Rio de Janeiro) comes close. It is dedicated to the Toledo-born Davies, 73, who first put the St Paul Chamber Orchestra on the map (1972 to 1980) and has collaborated with Glass since he was music director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic from 1991 to 1996.

At this concert Davies turned score pages back as freely as he turns them forward. Days and Nights has two short simple phrases in major key—a child could learn it—over ominously rumbling low instruments in a 14/8 calypso-rock percussion pattern. It could be an arrangement of an Island song (ear worm alert). There are tons of chances to hum motives, which Glass prefers to call “repetitive structures”. Not unlike other Glass music, it builds slowly and sinuously, like Bolero without the fight or final modulation. Snare drum and low brass hint at an exploded version of the ‘Drummer Boy’ carol, and there is even a snatch of (heaven help us) ‘Don’t Cry for Me Argentina’. As if standing in front of that painting as long as you feel like, you hear the music’s tune and pattern as often as you need.

The renowned African vocalist Angelique Kidjo performed Three Yoruba Songs, composed for her in 2014. They trace a version of the creation myth in Yoruba, the language of Kidjo’s native Benin. Straightforward and with even beats, these are definitely songs rather than free-form art. They are named for Oludumare, creator of the world; Yemandja, mother...
of the River; and Oshumare, the Rainbow Serpent. The texts have as much to do with drinking as with praise or creation. Kidjo, amplified, was a compelling stage presence in full dark-hued African dress and headdress, shouting “AAHHH” at the top of her lungs over an orchestra spiked with castanets.

Symphony No. 11 has three large movements. Compared to the other two pieces, strings played in a higher range, and winds were more assertive. One chord, which, like most of the composer’s chords, stays around for extended contemplation, is a big low major one with a major seventh stuck in. The percussion section has big licks, especially in the third movement, where it starts out Cuban style. In come the horns with the melody, and the cellos move up and away from their roiling bass line.

Glass is no shrinking Bob Dylan. In suit and tie, he came down to the stage to accept accolades. The evening was a celebratory event, and he couldn’t have dreamt up a better one.

Bing Concert Hall, Stanford
Paul Hertelendy

Philip Glass has achieved the distant dream of composers: developing an instantly recognizable musical style, identified in each new concert work.

In time for his 80th birthday, he created his Symphony No. 11, a 36-minute opus that kept him busy for much of 2016. It’s a heavy commitment for the back-bench players, from the robust brass to the eight percussionists (plus two keyboardists). And it’s thoroughly Glass. There is a strong nonstop pulse, consonant chords that slowly shift, triadic broken chords whirling up and down in the strings, and a big opening movement with five beats to the measure hinting of syncopation. Glass also likes a strong bass presence in his music, as voiced by eight string basses, low trombones, effusive timpani and drums, and even a contrabass clarinet.

The ever more exuberant third (final) movement leads to crescendos that brought down the sold-out house at the Bing Concert Hall on February 12. It was visceral, consonant, effusively hypnotic, and comforting balm for people uncomfortable with the harmonic deviations of so much other contemporary music.

Music Director Dennis Russell Davies, who was born in Ohio but has lived in Europe for the past 37 years, led the Bruckner Orchestra Linz’s tour as they wended their way westward, with plans for recording the Glass back at their home base in Austria in June. While it was astonishing to hear an Austrian ensemble from the not-always-blue Danube shores play an all-American concert, this sounded idiomatic.

There are some parallels between Glass and Bruckner. Both show pronounced rapid shifts in the music, as if changing registration at a mammoth pipe organ (which Bruckner played at St Florian’s near Linz). And both are capable of huge sonic effects.

The Linz players also took on Barber’s Violin Concerto (1939), which had been reviled as both too easy (first two movements) and too hard (the finale, which Barber eventually revised). Robert MacDuffie managed the soulful reveries of the slow movement as he did the wild fiddle-faddle of the finale, a solo with more than a thousand notes squeezed into a four-minute perpetual motion. The dreamy oboe solo of the Andante was rendered by the Bol’s Franz Scherzer. The first movement displays the so-called “Scottish snap”, derived from Scottish music, perhaps inspired by Barber’s mother’s Scottish lineage.

The concert opened with Maurice Peress’s orchestral-suite adaptation of Duke Ellington’s Black, Brown, and Beige, which calls for a big sound with four trumpets, a melismatic sax, and a trombone playing with plunger “wah-wah” mute, first developed in the Duke’s band. It was jazzy, brassy, and in-your-face, with sections impelling you to jump up and dance.

The Austrian orchestra injected expression with a capital X. And the string sections, though hardly prominent in this repertory, were moving. As they say in Austria, Grossartig (magnificent)!
"I don’t really like Bruckner, but..." I heard this repeatedly from press colleagues at Daniel Barenboim’s historic Bruckner festival with the Staatskapelle Berlin, where all nine Bruckner symphonies were played for the first time together at Carnegie Hall. After the “but”, these critics voiced approval of the performance.

Despite the recent Bruckner boom that made the Staatskapelle series possible, this uncompromisingly mystical composer still inspires a stubborn resistance. If Bruckner was “the best hated composer of the 19th Century”, as Lawrence Gilman puts it, he is now the most ambivalently accepted. For a long period he had a rough time being accepted at all. Eduard Hanslick denounced even the relatively popular Symphony No. 7 as “sickly” and “unnatural”. Bruckner had the unique misfortune of being the scourge not only of the Hanslick Wagner-hating crowd but also of class-obsessed Viennese concertgoers who scoffed at his peasant roots and “boorish” appearance.

The 20th Century didn’t treat Bruckner much kinder, though the insults became couched in the euphemisms of academia. Rather than being “perverted” and “diseased”, Bruckner became, as the Cambridge Music Handbook series on Bruckner put it, merely a “lesser composer” who was “unsuited to the genre of the symphony” because of “illogical” methods, a composer American music theorists all but ignored. Orchestras were put off by Bruckner’s daunting length and technical demands.

Maestros from Karajan and Kubelik to Haitink and even Boulez gradually took up Bruckner’s cause in a re-evaluation similar to the earlier Mahler revival. Yet many of the epithets once applied to Mahler—overblown, too long, illogical, sprawling, banal—are still attached to Bruckner. The irony is that we are beginning to grasp Bruckner in large part because we have become habituated to Mahler, who championed what he called Bruckner’s “glorious art” when he conducted the symphonies in New York, even as his own symphonies were still reviled.

Mahler’s symphonies had an advantage. They were mystical but ostentatiously theatrical, caustic but sentimental, aided by choruses, soloists, exotic instruments, and off-stage effects—all of which made his path to acceptance, though long and difficult, smoother than Bruckner’s. Bruckner’s grandeur is served straight up. As Donald Francis Tovey put it, “This art has no tricks.” It exists entirely in its own spiritual realm, eschewing the entanglement with the real world so important to Mahler: in the words of Wilhelm Furtwangler, Bruckner’s most fervid early champion, it soars “broadly and freely in a state of bliss, released from earthly cares, fulfillment without sentimentality, without calculation”.

This sense of freedom and release was present in all four concerts I attended. My first encounter with Bruckner was when I happened onto a Chicago Symphony recording of Symphony No. 4 some 40 years ago, conducted by a young Daniel Barenboim. The thrill of
those soaring brass in that go-for-broke performance was in my head when I struggled with the later, more complex symphonies. The Fourth was actually the first work I was scheduled to hear in the Carnegie cycle and my first of Barenboim conducting Bruckner in concert.

I was not disappointed. This performance was as passionate as the one from the early 70s, but more nuanced, organic, and full of subtle dynamic contrasts—the work of an older maestro who has lived with this music for decades and has its idiosyncrasies in his blood. Barenboim’s gift, for better and worse, is an irrepressible impulsivity. His performances are colorful and unpredictable, but sometimes frustrating and wayward. In this cycle, however, he maintained a dignity and regal authority, both in his music-making and podium manner. Bruckner clearly means something special to him. Indeed, in an interview published in Carnegie Hall Playbill, he states that his decision to become a conductor came largely because Rafael Kubelik took him to a rehearsal of Bruckner’s Symphony No. 9 when he was touring with Kubelik as a 15-year-old pianist. He was fascinated by “the complexity and ferocious nature of the music’s character” and “vowed to conduct Bruckner someday.”

In the four symphonies I heard, it was clear Barenboim has mastered Bruckner’s quirky architecture, where again and again an approaching climax suddenly disperses, then builds again toward a larger spasm, a continuing coitus interruptus that thrills some listeners, makes others crazy. Under Barenboim’s baton, the final outburst was always cathartic, always an inevitable outcome of everything that came before. Start-ups, interruptions, and set-backs were a dramatic struggle, moving urgently forward and ending with hard-earned triumph. This “illogical” composer has his own logic, and Barenboim clearly gets it. Symphony No. 7, for example, the most lyrical one, concluded with a burst of glory that was a perfect culmination rather than a final fanfare.

The Staatskapelle Berlin, like its maestro, seemed born to play this music. In massive passages they were powerful and steelly, yet the sonority could suddenly turn warm and sensuous, almost as if a different ensemble had entered. In No. 7 the rounded horn sonorities in the Adagio were worlds apart from the gruff outbursts projected by the same players in the finale. In No. 9 the heavy, hammering blasts in the scherzo were a startling contrast to the sighs from the transparent strings in the first and last movements. From start to finish the brass blended seamlessly with the strings rather than stood out, yet maintained plenty of heft. The woodwinds were colorful and vivid, especially in Nos. 7 and 8. The smallest details were telling: when the rarely-used harp entered during the modal string chords in the Adagio of No. 8, it seemed to beam down from above rather than ripple from the right side of the stage.

The last time I’d heard the Staatskapelle Berlin was in another Carnegie Hall extravaganza, a Mahler cycle where Barenboim and Boulez alternated in dramatically contrasting performances of those nine symphonies [S/O 2009]. At a rehearsal for Mahler’s gargantuan No. 8, Boulez told me how impressed he was by the virtuosity, flexibility, and sheer endurance of the orchestra: “They can play anything,” he said, “under any circumstances.”

They can certainly play Mozart. A special feature of this cycle was the pairing of a Mozart piano concerto or concertante with the Bruckner symphony of the evening. It was startling to see the huge Bruckner orchestra drastically shrunk, and gratifying to hear the refinement and intimacy of a reduced ensemble. I heard Piano Concertos Nos. 23 and 24 as well as the Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat. In the latter, First Concertmaster Wolfram Brandl played fluently, but the real treat was Principal Violist Yulia Deyneka, who performed exquisitely and in timacy of a reduced ensemble. I heard Piano Concertos Nos. 23 and 24 as well as the Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat. In the latter, First Concertmaster Wolfram Brandl played fluently, but the real treat was Principal Violist Yulia Deyneka, who performed exquisitely and enacted the music’s emotions with her face and body language. Barenboim himself was soloist in the piano concertos, displaying the improvisatory freedom and spontaneity he brings to Mozart. He dashed off No. 26 with blurry casualness but made No. 23 sing with soul and vitality.

The high point of the concerts I heard was Bruckner’s No. 8 (premiered in 1892), which was played without a Mozart sweetener and without intermission—an intense experience I still have not forgotten. An otherworldly Bruckner atmosphere was established immediately and sustained for an hour and 15 minutes. No one coughed or crinkled paper. (The night before, Barenboim turned around from the podium and blew his nose at a cougher, silencing him for the rest of the evening.) No. 8 is rightly regarded by Bruckner’s admirers as the symphony where he most completely

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May/June 2017
IL POMO D’ORO

The young baroque ensemble Il Pomo d’Oro alighted at Carnegie Hall for a pair of concerts on February 13 and 14, part of a two-and-a-half week festival devoted to music and arts from “La Serenissima”, as the Venetian Republic was known. Though formed to present baroque opera, the group was more effective in their instrumental program, communicating the exuberance and color of Venetian baroque music.

Founded in 2012, Il Pomo d’Oro is named after a long and lavish allegorical opera from 1666. Membership consists of 26 young European musicians superbly schooled in the performance of baroque music. The young Russian harpsichordist Maxim Emelyanychev assumed direction of the group a year ago, but occasional programs are directed by others. The ensemble was first heard at Carnegie just two months earlier, backing Joyce DiDonato’s “In War and Peace” concert [Mar/Apr2017, reviewed in Rochester NY]. They have made several recordings of baroque opera.

The first concert was devoted to the instrumental music of Antonio Vivaldi, known as the “Red Priest” for his hair color and his clerical status. In 1703 he was hired to teach violin at the Ospedale della Pieta, a girls’ orphanage famed for its musical training. A year later he became music master and served there intermittently for the rest of his career. The level of musicianship in the Pieta must have been very high, as his concertos require a skilled, disciplined ensemble in addition to a compelling soloist. After reading about the Ospedale’s role in Venice’s musical life, it’s easy to imagine the appeal of the Red Priest leading the talented young female orchestra, a frisson of social taboo enhancing strong music making.

In the intimate, resonant Weill Recital Hall, smaller than many a Venetian ballroom, the eight players sounded more like an orchestra than a chamber ensemble. Violinist Dmitry Sinkovsky, who also served as soloist, led the ensemble as it careened through four mood-shifting Vivaldi sonatas. The works, in three movements (fast-slow-fast), showed the astonishing range both of Vivaldi and of the soloist. What Sinkovsky may have lacked in tonal beauty he made up in fiery bravura and improvisational freedom. Conducting the group, he emphasized contrasts in volume, attack, and texture. No one would ever call this “sewing machine” music. Later, more galant-style concertos by Brescianello and Galuppi were sandwiched between the Vivaldi works, allowing the ensemble to enjoy the spotlight while Sinkovsky took a break. The continuo team

Carnegie Hall’s Celebration
of La Serenissima

[Susan Brodie and James Paulk cover 3 of the festival’s 13 events. —Editor]
(cello, lute, harpsichord) was particularly solid and expressive, and everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves both nights.

For the first encore Sinkovsky put down his violin to sing, in a very creditable countertenor, a plaintive aria from Vivaldi’s *Farnace*. Taking up his fiddle again for a second encore, he made sparks fly in the stormy Presto from ‘Summer’ in *The Four Seasons*. A breathtaking evening!

The next night’s concert of duets from early baroque operas, “Lovers’ Passions: Agony and Ecstasy”, given in Carnegie’s larger Zankel Hall, made slightly less of an impression for a couple of reasons. Even with the same number of instrumentalists (one fewer violin and an enlarged continuo section), volume and brilliance were diminished in the dryer acoustic. More frustrating was the casual, even negligent, presentation of the texts. The program assembled ten duets between pairs of lovers—Euridice and Orpheus and Venus and Adonis among them—in works by seven opera composers, interspersed with early sonatas. But a listener trying to follow the sense of the words was left high and dry by translations that omitted the recitative portions that were essential for understanding the context of the emotions expressed in the more tuneful duets. The omission seemed particularly egregious for the early baroque, an era that sought new musical means specifically to enhance declamation of the words. The singers sang their hearts out, but it all seemed a bit remote.

Yet there was much sheer beauty of sound. The Hungarian soprano Enőke Barath, appearing at Carnegie for the first time, has a fresh warm tone with glints of silver. Her voice blended beautifully with the duskier sound of the expressive Italian mezzo-soprano Giuseppina Bridelli. And the orchestra sparkled in sonatas by lesser-known composers from Albinoni to Ziani, displaying the combination of matter-of-fact virtuosity and *sprezzatura* (noble negligence, or spontaneous subtle rubato) that kept listeners on the edge of their seats. Dario Castello’s *Sonata a 3* in particular gave a sense of the freeform, fanciful writing; I could almost see gold curlicues emerging from the harpsichord as Emelyanychev conducted from the keyboard.

The two encores were by Monteverdi—a heart-stopping ‘Pur Ti Miro’ (from *The Coronation of Poppea*) with soprano Enőke Barath and mezzo Giuseppina Bridelli, followed by the joyously lilting ‘Damigella Tutta Bella’ from the third book of madrigals.

**Monteverdi: The Coronation of Poppea**

Concerto Italiano

James L. Paulk

On February 21 noted Baroque specialist Rinaldo Alessandrini brought his ensemble, Concerto Italiano, to Carnegie Hall for a concert reading of Monteverdi’s *Incoronazione di Poppea* as the grand finale of “La Serenissima”, a festival spearheaded by Alessandrini. Few operas present such a smorgasbord of musical choices, and Alessandrini’s choices ranged from staunchly conservative to daring.

*Poppea*, first performed in 1643, is among the earliest surviving operas. Its delightfully trashy libretto is a convoluted soap opera plot loosely contrived from Roman history. Nerone (Nero) has fallen madly for Poppea, but there is the matter of his wife, Ottavia, not to mention Poppea’s lover, Ottone. And then there’s Drusilla, who loves Ottone and helps him plot the (foiled) murder of Poppea. It’s all quite Shakespearean, filled with a mix of unsavory characters, droll wit, and earthy wisdom.

The ever-inventive Monteverdi sur-
rounds the text with a satisfying blend of sung recitative and set pieces, and surrounds his characters with psychological portraits in music.

Within a decade or so, Poppea fell into a period of neglect that was to last two centuries. The original score was lost. Instead, there are two competing versions of the opera from the 1650s that differ significantly both in music and text. There are lively disputes about how much of either version was actually written by Monteverdi. Alessandrini chose to mix elements from each version, making some significant cuts along the way, and adding in some of his own composition, primarily for the orchestral interludes (Monteverdi’s, if he wrote them, do not survive). One scholar I spoke with was especially baffled by the deletion of some of the work’s most famous instrumental music from the prologue.

This opera is always a bit inconsonant, and Alessandrini’s choices probably made the flow of things even more jarring than usual. But his approach served the text well, and the important set pieces were all there. More important, there was a visceral excitement and a spontaneity to his version, aided immensely by his sensitive and highly vernacular conducting approach.

We can only guess at the composition of the continuo in Monteverdi’s time, and modern choices have run the gamut, right up to Carl Orff’s overblown Nazi-era arrangement. Conducting from a harpsichord, Alessandrini limited his forces to two theorboes, a harp, five strings, and a second harpsichord. This worked well in Carnegie’s main hall, and the spare sound from the players helped frame the wondrously clear diction from the vibrant young cast. The ensemble played with admirable finesse.

Alessandrini is highly regarded in “historically informed” circles, which makes his choices in terms of voice types a bit confusing. For example, the role of Nero, written for a soprano castrato, was here transposed and performed by Leonardo Cortallazzi, a tenor. Cortallazzi sang with power and displayed the right heroic bearing. Still, with the army of talented counter-tenors now available there’s really no need for this sort of substitution. The few surviving records suggest there were five castratos in baroque era productions of Poppea; but this performance used only one counter-tenor, Aurelio Schiavoni, a contralto, who stole the show as Arnalta, Poppea’s nurse, a wise plain-spoken comic figure.

Swedish soprano Miah Persson was eloquent and charismatic in the title role. As Ottone, contralto Sara Mingardo sang with great force and artistry. Bass Salvo Vitale was a powerful, resonant Seneca. His death soliloquy was one of the high points of the first act. But the opera’s finest moment came in the final act, with ‘Pur Ti Mio’, the great love duet between Nerone and Poppea as she approaches her coronation as empress. It was a triumph—a word that also sums up this extraordinary evening.

[Editor’s Note: Susan Brodie, who also attended Concerto Italiano’s Coronation of Poppea but had heard ‘Pur Ti Mio’ earlier as an encore with Il Pomo d’Oro, wrote to me, “Do you know the Poppea final duet, ‘Pur ti miro’?—soprano and mezzo intertwined in closely overlapping lines, no attention-grabbing money notes or passagework. So sensual that by the end you’re hot and bothered. With soprano and tenor? It’s pretty but not nearly as erotic. The soprano and mezzo who sang it as an encore with Pomo d’Oro put it across much more effectively.”]
Jeffrey Kahane’s Weill Festival

Unexpected Relevance
Richard S Ginell

In the invaluable book "Kurt Weill: A Life of Pictures and Documents," there is a delicious 1949 letter by Weill to his sometime librettist Alan Jay Lerner where he describes an evening at "Oscar’s" (presumably Hammerstein). Richard Rodgers arrived late, and the gathering’s atmosphere froze. Weill thought that Rodgers had an inferiority complex, and, when Weill went to the piano and played music from his in-progress musical *Lost in the Stars* (based on the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton), he noticed that Rodgers was getting more nervous and uncomfortable the more he heard it. And this was three days after Rodgers’s out-of-the-box hit *South Pacific* opened!

Well, if fame, money, and longevity are yardsticks, Rodgers got the better of this rivalry, scoring several more hits over three more decades, while Weill was dead less than a year later, his standing slowly in eclipse after a series of middling successes on Broadway. Weill’s stock has since risen as his Berlin works were revived and became better known. Yet his American musicals, which often seem like the work of a different composer, are still not revived very often. Even though several of his songs have become pop or jazz standards, Weill only occasionally is listed among the contributors to the Great American Songbook.

Enter Jeffrey Kahane, the departing music director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (after 20 years), who wanted to strike blows for protest and reconciliation as well as giving his distant relative (Weill was a cousin of Kahane’s grandmother) some intense exposure. Kahane called his festival "Lift Every Voice", a two-week (January 14-29) series of concerts and symposiums investigating the legacies of Weill, Martin Luther King Jr, and Rabbi Joachim Prinz—civil rights advocates all.

The timing couldn’t have been more serendipitous, for the festival ran during the contentious first week of the Trump administration. January 21’s worldwide protest marches occurred just before the first LACO Weill concert that night, and Trump’s onerous ban on Muslims from seven countries took effect the day before a performance of *Lost in the Stars* on January 28. The speakers at these concerts, including Kahane from the podium, did not let the moment go by; their allusive ripostes to the new administration drew tumultuous cheers from these blue-state audiences.

Kahane’s January 21 concert in Glendale’s Alex Theatre opened with the US premiere of *Song-Suite* for violin and orchestra, a 19-minute Boston Pops-like potpourri of Weill’s greatest hits fashioned into a violin concerto by Paul Bateman for Daniel Hope. Then came some more challenging topical fare, Bruce Adolphe’s *Violin Concerto* (*I Will Not Remain Silent*), a portrait of Prinz where the solo violinist is the rabbi as he passionately knocks heads with an often-dissonant orchestra that signifies first the Nazis and then American white supremacists. Hope might have wielded a fiercer bow, but one can’t deny that his playing was quite beautiful against an effectively slashing orchestral foil.

Having fled Germany for Paris just hours ahead of the Gestapo, Weill picked up pretty much where he left off in his inspired ballet-cantata *The Seven Deadly Sins*, whose Bertolt Brecht text is a sarcastic tract about stifling temptations and principles in order to get rich. Quickly forgotten during Weill’s lifetime, *Sins* has since established a place at the edge of the repertoire for ambitious chanteuses, divas, and pop stars. A member of the latter species, the tall, blond, clarion-voiced Storm Large (using what sounded like the WH Auden-Chester Kallman English translation) obliterated all hints of Lotte Lenya with an overpoweringly sexy, all-American performance that was riveting. Kahane and the LACO supplied a deft, bouncy account; and there was a fine male vocal quartet that calls itself Hudson Shad.

Zip ahead one week to UCLA’s Royce Hall, and the gap between the Berlin-Paris Weill of *The Seven Deadly Sins* and the American Weill of *Lost in the Stars* (his last completed musical) was made startlingly clear. Although there is a distinct American Weill sound that cannot be mistaken for anyone else active on Broadway in the 1940s, the sarcasm and toughness of Berlin vanished as his penchant for sentimentality grew (often expressed in sixth chords). His love for his new country softened.
his musical language but not his concern for social justice. The subject of Lost in the Stars is South African apartheid, with a subtext of American segregation that couldn’t be addressed directly in the commercial theatre in 1949. Maxwell Anderson’s sometimes long-winded book and lyrics dig in to a degree that was both ahead of—and in light of later advances in civil rights, behind—its time. The first three numbers, based on pentatonic scales, contain the finest, most genuinely spiritual and emotional music in the whole score. Also, there is some zesty Broadway strutting in the nightclub scene’s ‘Who’ll Buy’. In the end, though, it’s an example of a late Weill show (Street Scene is another) with its heart in the right place, striving to say something important but not quite getting there.

Working with UCLA, actors from director Anne Bogart’s SITI Company, and a collection of costumed singers from the Albert McNeil Singers and Los Robles Master Chorale, Kahane and the LACO gave Lost in the Stars its first professional production in L.A. since the original Broadway road show in 1950. It was also the first time that the LACO had produced a fully-staged production of anything. Kahane made the most persuasive, splendidly played case for Weill’s score, using 21 players instead of Weill’s 12, and performing the entire score, which neither of the two major recordings do (Decca’s original cast album and Julius Rudel’s on Nimbus).

Bogart’s staging was not lavish; sometimes the “set” consisted of just the bare, grubby brick back wall of Royce, though it was draped in white for the nightclub scene. The singers, particularly bass-baritone Justin Hopkins as Stephen Kumalo (a part Weill hoped in vain that Paul Robeson would play) and the choruses, did a stirring job of putting the music over. They gave the Kurt Weill Marching and Chowder Society some hope that Lost in the Stars might have new relevance in an ominous time when issues once thought to be settled are being re-fought.

| Bruckner—from page 16 |

attained the sublimity he was always searching for. It was Bruckner’s favorite as well, though he struggled even more than usual with revisions, rejections, and self-doubts.

In works like the Te Deum and Symphonies No. 4 and 7, Bruckner contrived ways to make his large gestures comprehensible in traditional symphonic patterns. In No. 8 he leaves the bare bones of sonata and scherzo forms intact, but stretches them so far that the audience is forced to listen with new ears. For a long time it was difficult to listen at all: No. 8 was only played twice after its premiere during Bruckner’s lifetime and was not performed in America until 1909 (by the Boston Symphony).

Bruckner’s signatures are here in their most uncompromising forms: dense brass sonorities, Gothic spires of sound, rapturous pedal points, chromatic complexities alternating with primitive unisons. The orchestra handled all of it superbly, unleashing blasts of cosmic force from passages of spectral stillness. The formidable opening movement ended with remarkably delicate timpani taps; the rich blend achieved in the second movement was a refreshing change from the usual raucousness—it was also ideal for a scherzo less folk-like and more abstract than Bruckner’s usual dance movement. The coda fulfilled what Derek Scott calls Bruckner’s lifelong attempt to create a “musical form of apocalyptic vision”, an overwhelming build-up and release that was perfectly gauged by Barenboim and his orchestra, beginning with brass and trembling strings floating from key to key, with themes from all four movements finally blazing together in C major—a glimpse of the infinite.

Here and during the concerts I heard, one could see the sense of urgency and commitment in the players’ faces as they projected the sound like a giant organ through the resonant space of Carnegie Hall. With his cathedral-like sense of space, Bruckner is one composer who needs to be heard in a good concert hall; hearing one symphony after another this way had a cumulative effect over several days that was both exhausting and satisfying.

In the last concert, after the long fade-out in No. 9, an incomplete work that feels sublimely complete, the cheering audience would not let Barenboim and the orchestra leave. After some 15 minutes of curtain calls, he finally had to grab the concertmaster and head for the door. Out on the street after the concert, I saw a bus full of suitcases, a visual cue that this terrific orchestra, after a grueling and epic series, was about to fly away, and that the real world Bruckner transports us from would be crashing back, a bit easier to bear after this magnificent festival.
Seattle’s Shostakovich Festival

Young Artists
Melinda Bargreen

It was Inauguration Day, January 20, with lots of police presence and an uneasy populace in Seattle, where most citizens were displeased by the outcome of the presidential election. But inside Benaroya Hall, the big question was not politics but virtuosity: would lightning strike twice in the same place? Would the three young stars of the Seattle Symphony’s two-night Shostakovich Festival dazzle the audience as resoundingly as they had on the previous evening?

The concept was a fascinating one. Three international masters with strikingly different backgrounds each played a Shostakovich concerto on two successive evenings with the Seattle Symphony, under the baton of another young master, the orchestra’s Associate Conductor Pablo Rus Broseta. The soloists were violinist Aleksey Semenenko (born in 1988 in Ukraine), pianist Kevin Ahfat (born in 1994 in Canada), and cellist Edgar Moreau (1994 in France). Broseta, the elder statesman of the group, was born in Spain in 1983.

You might think it was a fairly big risk for the Seattle Symphony to program two nights of solid Shostakovich, who can be bleak and sardonic, without upping the populist ante by signing any big stars. Of the three soloists, only Ahfat (who won the Seattle Symphony’s only International Piano Competition in 2015) was a known commodity. Furthermore, the two nights of the festival were both “work nights” (Thursday and Friday). But Seattle is a city that loves its festivals. An all-Rachmaninoff one in 2013 went over very well. Shostakovich was a tougher sell, but the January 19 concert drew a respectable crowd, and January 20 was nearly sold out.

What was immediately clear in the first performance was that Seattle audiences knew they had struck gold in cellist Edgar Moreau. The reception for his reading of the Cello Concerto No. 1 was explosive, not because Moreau had overplayed his hand or indulged in theatrics. There was no rasping and scraping, none of the intentionally harsh gestures often employed in this killer of a piece by cellists who mistake aggression for excellence. Instead, there was phenomenal accuracy and an interpretive depth that drew the listener into this thorny score and its moments of rhapsodic anguish. Traversing the score with half-closed eyes, speedy fingers, and an incredibly colorful array of bowstrokes, Moreau looked like a teenager and played like a young Yo-Yo Ma.

You could practically hear the programs rustle as audiences flipped to the bio section: who was this guy? The short version: started cello at age 4, currently studying with Philippe Mueller in Paris, First Prize in the 2014 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, Newcomer Prize in the 2016 Echo Klassik Awards. He also has two first-rate CDs on the Erato label, both of which I immediately bought. Watch for him in a concert hall near you.

But Moreau was far from the only star of the festival. Ahfat was first out of the gate with the Piano Concerto No. 1 (with the orchestra’s David Gordon as trumpet soloist), giving a performance that played down the concerto’s jokey ebullience with some suave phrasing.
The opening of the second movement was blissfully serene, with a final fadeout into a gentle reverie. Ahfat also summoned plenty of thunder power in the big moments, but he clearly valued musicianship over mere showmanship. He is continuing his studies at Juilliard with Joseph Kalichstein and Stephen Hough, but he already plays like a young pro who is ready for a bigger, post-conservatory arena.

The violin soloist, Alexey Semenenko, silver medalist of the 2015 Queen Elisabeth Competition, undertook Concerto No. 2 with a huge, pliant tone and a technique that quickly recovered from a couple of questionable intervals early in the performance. He gave a strongly characterized performance, riding easily over the orchestral accompaniment. But for all his passion and involvement in the music, Semenenko wasn't playing to the audience, just to the score, with tremendous intensity. He attacked the cadenza with its forest of double-stops with a technique that sounded unforced and easy.

On the following evening the three soloists returned to Benaroya Hall, this time with a larger and even more demonstrative audience. They were even better and more assured the second night. Upon their successive arrivals on the stage, all of them were greeted like returning heroes.

Moreau went first, in the dark and more mysterious Cello Concerto No. 2. Listening to this gifted player gradually unspooling the strange, gorgeous score brought the ambient noise level in the hall down to near-zero. Elsewhere, the soloist had some fun with the jaunty Scherzo movement, but he was most effective at conveying the deep seriousness of the concerto’s opening and closing statements. The audience lost no time in leaping up for a fervent ovation; it was already clear that lightning was indeed striking twice in the hall.

Ahfat undertook Piano Concerto No. 2 with a remarkable variety of touch, rambunctious in the pseudo-military opening Allegro, but alternating the fireworks with a silky touch that countered the bombast. He made much of the lyrical opening of the Andante, as lovely as anything Shostakovich ever wrote; and with the drama of the final Allegro he brought the audience again to its feet.

Undertaking the massive Violin Concerto No. 1, Semenenko produced a remarkable variety of sound: eerily thin, then lusciously large. His intensity and involvement in the music were evident, drawing the audience in with no attempt at showiness. This is a true classicist with a spectacular technique, ready for any challenge.

In many respects, however, the most difficult role in the festival was played by the conductor, Pablo Rus Broseta, the Seattle Symphony’s associate conductor, who has already amassed podium credits from Germany to Brazil. Accompanying three young players in six tough concertos was a formidable task. The clarity of his baton technique and cueing, and the equal clarity of his understanding of Shostakovich, made all this look easy, despite the metric and interpretive challenges that faced him.

It was clear that this quartet of young musicians is not just ready to tackle the big time: they are already there.

Ukraine National Symphony Tours US
Kuchar and Sirenko Share the Podium

Gil French

The Ukraine National Symphony has made some excellent recordings for Naxos with its Conductor Laureate Theodore Kuchar, who turns 54 on May 31. The acoustics are sometimes too resonant, but the performances can be so splendid and the principals so good that I wonder if the players scout for jobs with American orchestras during their US tours. When they had yet another tour (44 concerts from January 18 to March 26, including one in Toronto) it was time not just to hear them but to get a double-dose: February 15 at Binghamton (NY) University’s Anderson Center with Kuchar conducting, and the next night in Troy NY with an entirely different program at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall with Artistic Director and Chief Conductor Volodymyr Sirenko, 56, on the podium.

The recordings I know are from the 1990s. How time has a way of changing things. Each concert I heard had remarkable inconsisten-
cies. The principal players were not nearly as good, and touring can wear down even the best orchestras.

The Binghamton concert opened with a suite from the ballet, The Night Before Christmas (1990) by Ukrainian Yevhan [Eugene] Stan-kovych, 74. It opens with tick-tock percussion as the theme from ‘Carol of the Bells’ becomes its basis. Between movements a large piece of percussion hit the floor; Kuchar wished the audience a sly “Merry Christmas” and continued with the second movement as its lyricism penetrated his tightly disciplined, forward-leaning rhythms. The finale conveyed the strings’ richness even in the midst of unseasonal cacophony. What was striking was Kuchar’s linearity, both lyrically and rhythmically.

And did he need it in Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto! The less said about soloist Dima Tkachenko (who must be in his mid- to late-30s) the better. Worse than his sour intonation and numerous wrong notes (even in the opening phrase) were his radically unsteady tempos. I stopped listening to this amateur showoff as best I could and concentrated instead on the orchestra. (He was actually a jurist at the 2015 Singapore Violin Competition!) Kuchar deserves a large monetary award not only for following perfectly the soloist’s frequent and erratic tempo changes but for simultaneously eliciting from the orchestra superb harmonic movement and remarkable tone colors. The clarity of details made me appreciate anew how Tchaikovsky’s orchestra really functions in this remarkable concerto. How Kuchar made all that happen while bending to the whims of this soloist was a testament to his innate sense of linearity.

The acoustics in the 1,200-seat Anderson Center certainly helped. The sound was projected evenly and clearly with sufficient resonance, and Kuchar said that the acoustical feedback to the musicians was excellent.

After intermission I was surprised that Kuchar’s grasp of form and direction didn’t make Rachmaninoff’s Symphony No. 3 sound integrated. In the first movement it took considerable time for the unblended woodwinds to tune to the strings. The second movement wasn’t subtle or creamy enough; playing was accurate, but mood evaded the orchestra. And in the finale articulation was poor, especially in the fugue. Kuchar seems to not yet have this work in his blood. As he said afterwards, it’s a tough work to bring off. When Lorin Maazel (who memorized everything) was music director of the Cleveland Orchestra, Kuchar asked him why this was the only romantic work where he needed a score; Maazel replied that the music just didn’t stick to him. As Kuchar added, it’s a symphony that belongs in the first half of a concert, not at the end. But the tour’s concert presenters chose from among five programs and selected the order of works.

Puzzling as the inconsistencies in the first concert were, they were simply ruinous to the first half of the concert in Troy. At the Troy Savings Bank, built in 1870, the music hall on the third floor seats 1,253, has a high ceiling, and is not good for orchestras because it disperses the sound into a highly resonant acoustic. The soloist in Prokofieff’s Piano Concerto No. 3 was another Ukrainian, Alexei Grynyuk (he must be in his 40s if he won the Diaghilev All-Sovi et-Union Piano Competition when he was 13), whose number of missed notes and constant accelerandos were drowned by the sheer loudness of his playing. The orchestra’s strings from violins to basses seemed to evaporate into the ether. Principal Conductor Volodymyr Sirenko didn’t even attempt to accommodate this speed demon. Wind intonation and ensemble were bad, and overall tuning was shabby. As in Binghamton, the audience applauded lustily after the first movement, apparently not realizing there was more. The second movement depends on a motor-like tempo, but Grynyuk’s rubatos were grossly exaggerated; even simple scales were flawed. In the finale he went for cheap effects. I realize that foreign orchestras tour with native soloists, but there have to be better national

Volodymyr Sirenko
representatives than the likes of Grynyuk and Tkachenko!

After the piano was moved to the rear for Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 5 to be played after intermission, Sirenko turned to the 1919 suite from Stravinsky’s Firebird with the violins playing behind the beat and the French horns out of sync with the rest of the brass. The trombones were as brazen and overbearing here as in Binghamton. There was little nuance or expression in the ‘Round Dance’ and ‘Lullaby’—no mood, no tension to the lines. Whether soft or loud, Sirenko came across as a kapellmeister, and not a very good one at that. He had me grinding my teeth in anticipation of the Shostakovich.

And then, quelle surprise! Despite an initial lack of tension in the opening, and a flute and horn duet that didn’t quite become a poignant sigh in the coda, Sirenko built the first movement into an intense and thrilling development section. By the second movement the violins, string basses, and woodwinds became really assertive, as Sirenko wrapped a steady tempo and strong accents around the sarcastic waltz beat. It was in the third movement that I most appreciated the strings being arranged with the second violins and violas on the right side, where they conversed poignantly with the rest of the strings on the left, waxing and waning with intense expression. It was here too that I came to appreciate Sirenko’s non-manipulative approach to this symphony; he held the slow movement’s tempo steady, relying for expression on degrees of intensity and tone color, maintaining tension even in the quietest passages. That approach carried over in spades to the final movement: one tempo start to finish by cutting the beat exactly in half after the gigantic triumphant climax that leads to the long coda. No acceleration like Bernstein; no morose largo like Rostropovich; here Sirenko let triumph dissolve into despair by linearly connecting the first half of the movement with its conclusion, as the orchestra rose to its very finest playing and ensemble. I was deeply moved.

The encore at both concerts was the Taras Bulba Overture by Mykola Lysenko (1842-1912), the first Ukrainian composer to make his mark in western orchestral music. And, yes, part of the overture echoes the symphonies of Vasily Kalinnikov (Kuchar recorded them with this orchestra). After Kuchar’s fully integrated, classy performance in Binghamton, I didn’t even recognize the overture the next night as Sirenko gave a raucous, no-hold-barred performance that made some Ukrainians in the crowd cry out (in Ukrainian), “Glory to Ukraine”; as orchestra members shouted back, “Glory to the Heros”, referring to those who have died since 2014 in the country’s conflicts with Russia. I’m sure they related perfectly to what Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 5 was all about.

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Music in Concert 25

Theodore Kuchar
Italian violinist Elisa Citterio, who turns 42 this year, will become music director of Toronto's Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and Chamber Choir in July, succeeding Jeanne Lamon. Known as a baroque violinist, Citterio has been concertmaster of the Accademia della Scala since 2000 and a member of the La Scala Orchestra since 2004. She and her family will move to Toronto this summer. A double Boston Symphony appointment in February for British-born James Burton, who turns 43 this year: as of February he is the new conductor of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, following the retirement of founder John Oliver. He is also Boston Symphony choral director, a new position to enhance the orchestra's choral activities. Burton has been music director of the Schola Cantorum of Oxford since 2002 and was choral director of the Hallé Orchestra and music director of the Hallé Choir from 2002 to 2009. He holds a master's degree in orchestral conducting from the Peabody Conservatory.

Dutchman Otto Tausk, 46, will become music director of Canada's Vancouver Symphony on July 1, 2018, succeeding Bramwell Tovey, 63, who decided to leave after 18 years, handing over the baton in time for the orchestra's 100th anniversary. Tausk has been music director of Switzerland's St Gallen Symphony and Opera Theatre since 2012.

Timothy Myers, artistic and music director of North Carolina Opera, resigned effective the end of September to pursue opportunities in the US and abroad as his career expands. With conductors lined up for next season, the company has time to search for his replacement.

Louis Langrée, music director of the Cincinnati Symphony since 2013, extended his contract in February for an additional two years to 2022.

Stephane Deneve, principal guest conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra since 2014, extended his contract an additional three years to 2020.

Mexican conductor Enrique Arturo Díemcke, 61, became artistic and production managing director of the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires in February. He has been music director of the Buenos Aires Philharmonic since 2007 and of the Flint (MI) Symphony since 1988. He was music director of the Long Beach (CA) Symphony from 2001 to 2014.

Singaporean Kah Chun Wong, 30, winner of the 2016 Gustav Mahler Conducting Competition in Bamberg, will become chief conductor of Germany’s Nuremberg Symphony in 2018, succeeding Alexander Shelley.

Englishman Ben Gernon, 27, will become principal guest conductor of the BBC Philharmonic in the autumn. After the former tuba player won the 2013 Young Conductor Award at the Salzburg Festival, he became a Dudamel conducting fellow at the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Two executives left the New York Philharmonic: President Matthew VanBesien announced in January that he would leave to become president of the University of Michigan’s Uni-
versity Musical Society, an arts presenter. His decision to leave before his contract expired in 2018 leaves both the orchestra and Lincoln Center itself without presidents as fundraising continues for the massive renovation (rebuilding?) of David Geffen Hall, the orchestra’s home. Also, Vice President for Artistic Planning Edward Yim left to become president of the American Composers Orchestra on February 21, succeeding Michael Geller, who resigned after 20 years.

Darren Woods was dismissed in February as general director of the Fort Worth Opera by the board of directors. Because of the company’s financial losses, the board chairman said they are looking for a director with business and management background with an emphasis on fundraising and development. Woods premiered new operas, chamber operas, and “Frontiers” that presented 20-minute segments from works-in-progress by eight composers annually. Woods, who turns 59 this year, remains as artistic director and new music specialist at the Seagle Music Colony in New York.

Andreas Mitisek, 54, artistic director of Chicago Opera Theater since 2012, will leave when his contract expires in September to concentrate, he said, “on a couple of dream projects that are important to me and that I want to develop with several opera companies.” He will be succeeded by Executive Director Douglas Clayton. Mitisek remains artistic and general director of Long Beach Opera, where he has been since 2003.

Zarin Mehta, 80, will step down at co-executive director of the Green Music Center at California’s Sonoma State University as soon as a replacement is hired. He came out of retirement in 2013 to help direct the new music center, where 80% of his $300,000 a year salary was paid by Sanford Weill, who had contributed $12 million to complete the center’s Weill Hall. Mehta was president and executive director of the New York Philharmonic from 2000 to 2012 and is the brother of conductor Zubin Mehta.

Pianist Gloria Chien joined her husband, violinist and Artistic Director Soovin Kim, as co-artistic director of the Lake Champlain Chamber Music Festival as of January 1. She has directed the Music at Menlo Chamber Music Institute in California since 2010.

Alexander Van Ingen was appointed chief executive of the Cambridge-based Academy of Ancient Music. He was previously executive producer of artists and repertoire for Decca.

American mezzo Jamie Barton, 35, is the winner of the 12th annual Beverly Sills Artist Award for young singers at the Metropolitan Opera. The $50,000 award, the largest of its kind in the United States, is given to extraordinarily gifted singers between the ages of 25 and 40 who have already appeared in important solo roles at the Met.

Stephen Sondheim was recipient of the 2017 PEN/Allan Foundation Literary Service Award in April, an award given to a “critically acclaimed writer whose body of work helps us understand and interpret the human condition, engendering empathy and imagination in even the darkest hours”. Author Andrew Solomon, president of PEN America, said, “Stephen Sondheim’s oeuvre is profoundly literary in its elegiac reaching for the truth of who we are, how we love, and how we strive to find meaning in our work. He will be the first composer-lyricist to be given this award, which recognizes his nuanced insight into human character. His support for a new generation of writers makes him a literary citizen of the first order.”
French pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard, 59, will be awarded the 2017 Siemens Music Prize of 250,000 euros on June 2. The prize is given for an outstanding contribution to music, which for Aimard has meant devotion to music from Bach to the most contemporary.

With Andris Nelsons becoming music director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra this year and extending his contract as Boston Symphony music director through 2022, the BSO and LGO formed a five-year alliance starting this coming season that involves co-commissions, shared and complementary programs, educational goals, residencies by each orchestra in the other’s city, and exchanges of musicians between the two orchestras.

Good news at the Detroit Symphony: following a devastating shutdown in 2010-2011, Music Director Leonard Slatkin extended his contract through 2020, the orchestras had four balanced budgets in a row, and musicians ratified a new three-year contract in January, eight months ahead of schedule. Base pay will increase 4% over three years from $91,259 to $96,096. The contract extends the season from 36 to 38 weeks and gives four weeks of vacation. It also keeps the number of players at 87, down from 96 in 2011. This is the DSO’s second early three-year contract in a row.

St Louis Symphony musicians agreed to a new five-year contract in January, seven months ahead of schedule. With a pay increase of 2.8% annually, the minimum scale increases from $86,053 to $98,304 in 2022. Music Director David Robertson announced earlier that he will step down in 2019.

The Orlando Philharmonic and Opera Orlando (which was formed in 2009 as Florida Opera Theatre and changed its name in 2016) have a new partnership. The OPO has handed over all of its opera productions to Opera Orlando and will serve as the resident orchestra for the company, while maintaining its symphonic concert season.

Obituaries

Conductor and composer Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, 93, died on February 21 after suffering a second stroke in just a few months. He died in Minneapolis, where he lived since moving from Poland to the US in 1960 and became a US citizen. He was music director of the Minnesota Orchestra from 1960 to 1979 and returned every year since for a concert as conductor laureate. His last performance with the orchestra was in October [J/F 2017, p. 15]. His most permanent legacy is the building of Minneapolis’s Orchestra Hall, one of the nation’s best, which opened in 1974.

Swedish tenor Nicolai Gedda, 91, died on January 8 at his home in Tolochenaz, Switzerland, near Lausanne. His career was given an early boost from EMI recording impresario Walter Legge. In 1957 Rudolf Bing snapped him up for the Metropolitan Opera. Over 50 years Gedda sang more than 100 opera roles and didn’t begin winding down his career until 1990.

Henry-Louis de la Grange, 92, the legendary biographer of Gustav Mahler, died on January 17 in Lonay, Switzerland. Volume I appeared in 1973. The final Volume IV will appear this May.

Max Wilcox, 88, famed RCA recording producer starting in 1958, who produced pianist Arthur Rubinstein’s recordings among many others, died on January 20 of a hemorrhagic stroke and advanced Alzheimer’s in Seattle. Wilcox won 17 Grammy awards.
Tafelmusik: “Visions & Voyages”

Toronto

In 1967, as a 15-year-old budding clarinetist, my prospect of participating in Canada’s centennial year seemed like a dream come true. With Bobby Gimby’s somewhat cheesy but catchy ‘Canada’ filling the airwaves, my several-weeks stint as a service scout during Montreal’s spectacular Expo 67 expanded my view of the world considerably. In my hometown, Ottawa, the National Arts Centre was coming steadily out of the ground, while the original Trudeaumania was about to galvanize the nation. For a wide-eyed teen, here were three distinct visions giving credence to Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier’s prophecy that “the 20th Century belongs to Canada”.

50 years later—and having learned more about Canadian history than was ever taught in school—the “True North Strong and Free’s” sesquicentennial is cause for celebration (we’re still here, including Quebec), consternation (how did we lose our seat on the UN Security Council and reputation as peacekeepers?), and shame (a litany of governments trampling on the civil rights of its citizens and most especially those who were here long before Canada was a glimmer in sovereigns’ eyes, none worse than the systemic cruelty of “purifying” residential schools for those “Indians who would never amount to anything if left to themselves”).

With all of that as my personal backdrop, it was with the dual senses of excitement and apprehension that I set foot in the Jeanne Lamon Hall at Toronto’s Trinity St Paul’s Centre for the premiere of “Visions and Voyages: Canada 1663-1763”. At first blush, it seemed as if this event had little to do with Canada, given that confederation came far after that time. But before long it became clear—thanks to Alison Mackay’s visionary conception, painstaking research, and scripting—that this multi-disciplinary production would be a cautionary table setter as to how Canada found its way to nationhood.

Reflecting on the whole the most courageous decision (more or less using French composers in the first half to paint the broad strokes of emerging Quebec, and then a healthy dose of British composers for part two, literally underscoring the rise of the Hudson’s Bay Company, supported by the apparently sympathetic King George III) was to use the music as a secondary element to the words, images, and movements swirling around it. The notable exception was a wonderfully thoughtful, engagingly spirited performance of Telemann’s La Bourse Overture, far and away the musical high point.

Weaving everything together was a fur-sporting narrator who declaimed the historical circumstances and events, along with timely quotes from the long-dead principals of the era. Ryan Cunningham did a commendable job with a well-paced delivery and just a few stumbles that will vanish in future performances. To be completely at one with “music as
background”, he would have been wise to let the final cadences fully clear before launching into the next speech. Those who do savor the instrumental contributions from the country's finest chamber orchestra would have appreciated a reflective breath before moving on.

The visual components came from the watchful, inventive eye of projection designer Raha Javanfar and were shown on a beautifully framed screen above the musicians. Whether in the starry sky above, on the high seas as the “King’s Daughters” made their way to the New World, or adding portraits of European monarchs (and four of our own!), the images filled in many blanks as history unfolded. The video segments—especially the nearly obsessive study of Canadian beavers and their fate in becoming valued hats for the privileged (at one point accompanied by the naughtily titled ‘Johnny, Cock Thy Beaver’)—felt like a documentary being edited, or (when everything flowed marvelously together) an episode of CBC TV’s beloved Land and Sea program.

Overall, the contributions from Tafelmusik (no conductor for this program) were crisp, clean, and only a little untidy. The switching of leaders after the break and the move to antiphonal seating ever so slightly changed the mix; most welcome were the duelling solo violins and the conversational oboes. Lucas Harris (lute and guitar) was superb, whether supporting the continuo or setting the musical scene (Robert de Visée’s Prelude in G for solo lute), as the final ingredient took stage.

Saving best for last, dancer-choreographer Brian Soloman brilliantly supplied the indigenous point of view as (to the music of Rameau); he artfully floated about the stage employing the musicians’ standard tools to make telling points. Whether being blinded by printed parts (a marvelous metaphor), playfully “working” a violin bow or thrusting it forward rapier-like (adding still more texture), turning the music stands into a pitiless stockade burned deep, or relieving that ugly image as it magically transformed into a paddle, his performance couldn’t help but move travelers on both sides of the footlights forward.

Alison Mackey’s creation certainly was a voyage that ought to be embarked on. One can only hope that framing the discussion about any country and its collective peoples by using every artistic means available will produce greater knowledge and understanding for all.

S JAMES WEGG

Beamish: Piano Concerto No. 1 (world premiere)

St Paul Chamber Orchestra

More than other artists, composers today are obliged to deal with the past. They can’t really ignore the fact that the music of dead composers dominates concert programs, leaving contemporary composers, if they’re lucky, a little time at the start of the program to write a bouncy five-minute curtain raizer that will get the audience ready for “real” music, something, let’s say, by Schubert.

The “response piece” (if we can call it that) is a recent trend that tries to deal with this problem or at least acknowledge it. Two conductors, Mariss Jansons and Riccardo Chailly, have asked composers to write works in response to Beethoven’s symphonies and have conducted the results in Munich and Leipzig. Violinist Jennifer Koh and the pianist Shai Wosner commissioned three composers to write pieces in response to Beethoven’s violin sonatas. The Australian composer Brett Dean is writing “new” Brandenburg concertos for the Swedish Chamber Orchestra.

The most extensive of these efforts is “Beethoven-5”, a collaboration of the St Paul Chamber Orchestra, pianist Jonathan Biss, and five very different composers. Over the course of five seasons, the composers (one each season) will write a response—or rumination or commentary—on one of Beethoven’s piano concertos. Biss will play the new work as well as the one it is based on in the same program.

The series got off to a lively start last season with The Blind Banister, a response to Beethoven’s Concerto No. 2 by the young American composer-pianist Timo Andres. The result was a 20-minute series of variations on the two descending scales that begin the first-movement cadenza that Beethoven added to the work some years later. The two scales, just a whole tone apart, interact and collide, taking on shifting character and color as the music progresses. It was fascinating—fascinating enough, as it turned out, to be a finalist for the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Music.
Beethoven isn’t all that noticeable in The Blind Banister, but imitating Beethoven isn’t what this series is about anyway. On the other hand, we do hear an occasional quote from the gruff old Viennese master in this year’s entry in the series, City Stanzas, a take-off on Concerto No. 1 by the English composer Sally Beamish, which was premiered on January 20 at the Ordway Concert Hall in downtown St Paul.

Beamish’s middle movement, subtitled ‘Requiem’ (a lament for two departed friends, Beamish told the audience, one of them being the composer Peter Maxwell Davies), quotes from Beethoven’s slow movement; and her quite boisterous finale alludes briefly to the main theme of Beethoven’s finale. And, somewhat in the manner of Beethoven, she uses octaves and scales in her first movement.

For the rest, City Stanzas is all Beamish, a deft, well thought out and effective mix of high spirits in the toccata-like rhythms in the first movement, with a deep vein of melancholy that infuses both the middle movement and the final pages that have the piano going it alone in a tone of lonely despair.

Biss, as is his custom, played with rapt concentration and impressive authority, while sustaining an air of spontaneity. The Beethoven concerto, which took up the second half and which Biss conducted from the piano, achieved a nice balance between robust energy and classical decorum.

Mischa Santora was the attentive conductor in the Beamish piece. His curtain-raiser, Ravel’s Tombeau de Couperin, was paced too fast to retain much of its inherent charm. Nonetheless, Principal Oboe Kathryn Greenbank played with her customary grace.

MICHAEL ANTHONY

Alan Gilbert made a smart choice to step down as music director of the New York Philharmonic this year. He freed himself to plan a final season of what he does best: creative—sometimes antic—programs, styling his podium presence as he wishes, untrammeled by the specter of an endless contract or the critical carping that has dogged other long-term Philharmonic directors.

He’s done some pretty good conducting lately, which enhanced the concerts January 5-7. The program, a Gilbert special, had Kurt Weill’s plucky Threepenny Opera Suite for wind ensemble and Schubert’s alluring, seldom-heard Symphony No. 2. Linking them was the world premiere of HK Gruber’s cabaret-infused Piano Concerto, performed with care and heart by Emanuel Ax, for whom it was composed.

The Weill suite was crisp and balanced, inner voices emerging to reveal Bach and Wagner references. It would have benefited from less-organized sound, like the wheedling nasal scruffiness of between-the-wars cabaret, which is what a wind band with sax and brass can do. It also could have used more rubato. The finale was sharp and sassy, but its clean sonorities announced that the piece was being honored by the great musicians of the (ahem) Philharmonic.

The Weill players were rehearsing on stage until the moment the concert began—but they weren’t rehearsing Weill. They were intently at the Gruber, which would submerge them into its huge orchestra. The concerto was co-commissioned from the eccentric 74-year-old Aus-
trian by the Philharmonic, Stockholm and Berlin Philharmonics, and the Tonhalle Orchestra of Zurich.

The episodic single movement contained moments linking it to the nightclubby Weill without losing its Gruberness. Parts were like neo-Threepenny.

Emanuel Ax was once loath to tackle even the Schumann concerto, let alone contemporary repertory. (Christopher Rouse even wrote a concerto for Ax, teasing him with musical references to Schumann.) In this century, Ax has not only dipped into the Schumann, but branched out, forming productive relationships with composers who write concertos for him.

Gruber was respectful of Ax’s quietly huge technique and experience—maybe even cowed. The piece is less cheeky and self-referential than Gruber’s other work, even though the composer says it starts with shimmying in a nightclub. Transparent orchestration allows deferential separation of piano and orchestra. Long-breathed phrases at the beginning have a dreamy French impressionist quality, and eventual dissonances remain conservative, with pungent interjections of Weill.

Playing from a score, Ax conveyed both the percussive and the dreamy French style. As the piece progresses, vibraphone tones extend piano tones, and flute extends violins. The first three-quarters of the 25-minute movement was fascinating and appealing, but it lost its way in variations and entwining themes, becoming a big loud swamp. Red pencil time, or maybe scissors near the end. The concerto has enough substance to invite more hearings, which it will have—perhaps revised—in its co-commissioners’ future performances.

The Schubert symphony, from the composer’s teens, was elegant and charming, with Mozartean suspense. It could have been less clunky and more flexible, but Schubert mastered symphony writing beginning with No. 5 (written when he was about 20—that’s eons later, in his short life).

Gilbert clearly likes this piece, and good for us that he does. More music and events were planned for the conductor’s 50th birthday in February. Things seem to be coming together for him.

LESLIE KANDELL

Tuur: Symphony No. 6
(US premiere)
Sarasota Orchestra

It’s about an hour and a half drive from my home in Pasco County, Florida, to the Van Wezel Hall in Sarasota. Most of it is through pleasant and heavily forested country. The Sunday afternoon concert reunited me with the acoustically impressive hall after an absence of some 12 years. It is called by many “the Grape” after the purple color of this giant scallop shell on the bay. My only disappointment was the absence of the original lavender music stands and stage chairs mandated by the Taliesin architects. Purple and lavender was the choice of Frank Lloyd Wright’s widow Olgivanna.

Anu Tali, who turns 45 on June 18, welcomed composer Erkki-Sven Tuur, who made a few gracious comments but said little about his symphony. Tali began the program with Tchaikovsky’s brief Melodie from *Souvenir d’un Lieu Cher* with Concertmaster Daniel Jordan as soloist. It was played in an orchestration by Alexander Glazounov, and a lovelier start could not be imagined. Both soloist and orchestral strings had a silken sheen, making me regret that so little of Glazounov’s work is taken up these days.

Tuur’s Symphony No. 6 was written in 2007 and dedicated to fellow Estonian Tali. I understand she has performed it several times abroad, but this is its first hearing in the United States. The composer began his career as a rock musician, but turned to serious music in the 1980s. There is little one could define as rock in the work, though it certainly offers a feast for the four percussionists. There is also little if any reliance on traditional forms. Here a single movement attempts to sustain itself for 32 minutes and succeeds in at least not being boring.

If I describe it as a stasis piece of music, I mean that things move along while in stasis with drone bass and minimal counterpoint,
mostly sustained monolithic slowness, and bursts of energy and speed occurring on top of dense harmonic clusters. It is not uninteresting, but much of the work is very insistent and loud. I did not love it, but I doubt that love was Tuur’s intention. At least I did not hate it, as I do so many of the empty proclamations being unleashed on audiences these days.

In a way, the music reminds me of the improvisational stalagmites of such composers as the Finn Leif Segerstam and Georgian Giya Kancheli, without Kancheli’s sudden violent outbursts. Many will be fascinated with Tuur’s reliance on color, at least of the salt and pepper variety. There is dissonance aplenty, but there’s little beyond the carefully crafted desire to create something new at every turn. Give him credit for notating all of his dynamic splash, but search in vain for emotion that can move the soul.

Full praise for Tali and her ability to control and hold together music of this complexity. Full praise also to the Sarasota Orchestra for performing the music with such technical expertise.

After much bang closing in a whimper, I was ready for a return to a traditional warhorse like Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto 1 with Macedonian power performer Simon Trpceski. Having sat through hundreds of readings seemingly on autopilot, I was hardly prepared for such an inspired outing for this old friend. From the authoritative opening to the concluding flourishes, this was a fresh and exciting reading. The timpanist remained alert and contributed substantially.

To accent his interpretation of the opening movement, Trpceski used several luftpausen while respecting the meter. This was done without distorting the music and made me wonder why players had not used them before. I was also taken with the audience’s refusal to applaud between movements. Subtracting some wheezing and coughing, here was a sophisticated mass of listeners well trained in concert decorum. Woodwind solos, particularly in the two remaining movements, were phrased and executed with much beauty, and the brass were confident and refined.

The well-endowed Sarasota Orchestra enjoys a status rarely accorded cities the size of Sarasota. As the cultural beacon of Florida, this town continues to reign supreme.

ALAN BECKER

American Record Guide

Prokofieff:

Ivan the Terrible

Chicago Symphony and Chorus

February 23 brought a red-letter event to Chicago’s Orchestra Hall: the Chicago Symphony premiere, under Music Director Riccardo Muti, of the oratorio Abram Stasevich compiled from the music Sergei Prokofieff composed for Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein’s unfinished historical epic, Ivan the Terrible (1942-46). It was a grand night for czars past and present.

With the full Chicago Symphony and Chorus, children’s chorus, soloists, and the eminent French actor Gerard Depardieu (portraying the fearsome Czar Ivan IV) all operating at full throttle under Muti’s command, the performance carried the audience along irresistibly with its neo-primitive power and taut rhythmic drive. This once-in-a-lifetime experience capped off the CSO’s season-long celebration of Prokofieff’s 125th anniversary.

The 90-minute oratorio Stasevich assembled (nine years after the composer’s death in 1953) from portions of the score Eisenstein used in his two-part portrait of the ruthless medieval Russian ruler is one among several attempts to present one of Prokofieff’s last large-scale works in concert form. Linking the musical cues is a narration largely drawn from the film script by Stasevich and Vladimir Lugovskoy, who had collaborated with Prokofieff on the cantata Alexander Nevsky, also based on music the composer contributed to an Eisenstein film. (Stasevich conducted the soundtrack recording for Ivan the Terrible.) The narrative sections of the oratorio are interspersed with, and occasionally superimposed

Narrator Gerard Depardieu as Ivan Grozny

Music in Concert
on, a good deal of varied, colorful, and atmospheric music that is unfamiliar to most concertgoers.

For the Muti performances two narrators were employed. Depardieu, a longtime friend and collaborator of Muti’s, brought towering histrionic presence to his portrayal of the ruthless if insecure Ivan Grozny. The actor had learned the Russian text for Muti’s performances at the Salzburg Festival in 2010. This burly bear of an actor was especially mesmerizing in the scenes where the czar, obsessed with unifying the sprawling Russian lands under his iron rule, exhorted his followers to vanquish the treasonous boyars and other enemies of the state.

Just when all that hectoring began to wear one down, Depardieu pulled back and brought out a more pathetic and touching side of Ivan, notably for the scene where the czar, believing himself to be dying, desperately begs the boyars to honor his infant son as the legitimate heir to the throne. The narration was taken with great idiomatic authority by Yassen Peyankov, a member of Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre ensemble, whose job it was to set the scenes and describe the action.

The Ivan the Terrible oratorio is essentially a big brawny choral work—all but 4 of the 20 sections employ chorus. Director Duain Wolfe’s exactly prepared Chicago Symphony Chorus rose to its most impressive singing of the season. Although one missed the deep-piled low bass voices of a Russian chorus, Muti’s 125 massed voices sang strongly and expressively, whether as bellicose warriors, rebellious boyars, rowdy peasants, or pious congregants. The Children’s Chorus made the most of its brief contribution.

Luxury casting brought the rich-toned Russian bass Mikhail Petrenko for the choral-orchestral song ‘Fyodor Basmanov and the Oprichnik!’ A pity the management did not engage a Russian contralto soloist. Sasha Cooke sang musically, but her mezzo-soprano proved rather light for the evil aunt Efrosiniya’s lullaby, and she brought out none of the verbal nuance. Michael Brown did well with the cameo part of the Holy Fool.

The Chicago Symphony musicians pitched in splendidly, not just for the big, noisy battle sections but the quieter, more atmospheric portions that represent Prokofieff at his most inspired. For example, the musical portrait of the devoted Czarina Anastasia and the murderous Efrosiniya came off as a choice little tone poem amid the epic sweep of the whole.

The audience gave Muti and his cast of thousands an acclaim worthy of a little-known discovery that had just been given royal treatment. One audience member, later identified as Depardieu’s agent-manager, flung an arm-load of long-stemmed white roses on stage, a few of which the actor gathered and distributed to female performers. The CSO administration should ban such tacky provincial cliquishness.

JOHN VON RHEIN

Stravinsky and Riley
Nashville Symphony

Over the years the Nashville Symphony has played Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring many times, but its most recent performance was special. That’s because in February the NSO presented the work for the first time in its acoustically marvelous Schermerhorn Symphony Center.

The performance was both much anticipated and long delayed. The Rite of Spring was initially scheduled to make its debut in the hall, named for the NSO’s late, great music director Kenneth Schermerhorn, in the fall of 2010. But a devastating flood, which caused nearly $40 million in damage to the new center, forced the orchestra to seek higher ground. The relocated concert wound up in the acoustical dead zone of the city’s War Memorial Auditorium. Talk about a disappointment.
Music Director Giancarlo Guerrero and the NSO finally got around to playing Stravinsky’s savage score at the Schermerhorn. For listeners familiar with this orchestra there were few surprises. As is his custom, Guerrero led a performance that emphasized clarity and structure over energy and raw emotion. One couldn’t help but admire the precision of his baton work. The score’s notorious syncopations, meter changes, and asymmetrical phrase groupings unfolded with a naturalness that seemed organic. No wonder aficionados who arrived at the concert armed with their handy pocket scores (they don’t call this town Music City for nothing) were often seen nodding their heads in approval.

Yet this was far from a perfect performance. Indeed, aside from the sheer volume in the ‘Glorification of the Chosen One’ and the virtuosity of the ‘Sacrificial Dance’, it lacked visceral excitement for the most part. Of course, that didn’t bother the Schermerhorn’s audience, which responded in the end with a frenzied ovation.

The rest of the concert was devoted, either directly or indirectly, to the pipe organ. Guerrero opened the program with an orchestral arrangement of Buxtehude’s Chaconne in E minor. There was much to admire in Mexican composer Carlos Chavez’s transcription. Clearly an expert in orchestral fancywork, Chavez created a score that had all the brilliance of one of Leopold Stokowski’s organ transcriptions but without Stokowski’s pomposity. My only quibble was that this Chaconne didn’t sound like it had ever been an organ piece. Somewhere along the way, either Chavez or Guerrero (or most likely both) had lost the spirit of the original.

Composer Terry Riley’s At the Royal Majestic for organ and orchestra rounded out the program. This is the second major Riley concerto that the Nashville Symphony has performed in recent years. In 2012 the orchestra commissioned and premiered his Palmian Chord Rythde for electric violin and orchestra. (Both concertos are scheduled for release on Naxos.)

It’s worth noting that Riley’s electric violin concerto suffered from a meandering quality (the New York Times found it insufferably long and completely lacking in tension). The same flaws were heard in the organ concerto, along with a few new ones, including a lack of idiomatic scoring for solo instrument and orchestra. Arranged in three movements, the concerto is supposed to evoke the “mighty Wurlitzers” of early 20th-Century movie palaces. In his program note, Riley writes that his concerto juxtaposes the old movie house organ sound with “fragments of calliope, baroque chorales, the occasional craggy dissonance of clashing pipes, and boogie”. The work actually comes across as an indulgent melange of disjointed motifs that lasts too long and has little to say.

The organist who premiered this concerto in Los Angeles in 2014, the flamboyant Cameron Carpenter, was unavailable to play in Nashville. Todd Wilson, head of the Cleveland Institute of Music’s organ department, took Carpenter’s place and played with genuine flair. His efforts, however, elicited only polite applause from the audience. For that, blame Riley.

JOHN PITCHER

Mahler: Das Klagende Lied
San Francisco Symphony

The young Gustav Mahler painted a huge canvas in his cantata Das Klagende Lied (what some call his Opus One), a rich hour-long piece undertaken even though he’d never heard a note of his own orchestration. This weighty opus unfurls a somber German fairy tale (not Grimm, but at least grim) that was given a San Francisco Symphony production January 13-15 that added sets and costumes in a lavish, near-operatic but stillborn staging. This flickering creation is an obsession of Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas, who has performed it here repeatedly over the decades.

The tale is straightforward. The brother finding the red flower in the forest will win the young queen’s hand. The Good Brother finds it but dozes off, whereupon the Bad Brother steals it, kills the good one, and proceeds to the queen for marriage. Masked minstrel symbols pop up—theatrically, the one element that truly worked—along with a truth-telling magic flute revealing all, prompting the queen’s collapse in despair. And like a leitmotif, voices repeatedly wail “Oh, sorrow!”

If the resultant and rarely heard work is more noteworthy than effective, the young Viennese composer had great talent but little
sense of theater or conciseness. Here his unique lyrical gift shines through as he slowly develops his unique voice, while retaining a lot of Wagnerian touches in the textures. That his orchestral balances and nuances work so effectively is remarkable in a work flawed by his titanic ambition.

The piece differs from the Mahler symphonies, which have many sudden shifts of mood and style. Here Mahler shows great continuity running through the three-part fairy tale. Even in this elaborate semi-staging, this “song of complaint” (or lament) sputtered along, as though beautiful singing were enough to bring it off. Here were the SFS Chorus, four solo singers, four self-conscious dancers—mimes who seemed lost most of the night, plus video projections, set, supertitles, even several offstage instrumentalists supplementing the orchestra to supply spatial and mobile effects.

Mahler parcelled out the solo vocal lines rather randomly, sometimes with the “wrong” gender singing. The singers included Michael Koenig and Brian Mulligan along with Joelle Harvey and Sasha Cooke. Four designers supplemented the efforts of Director James Darrah. The SFS instrumentalists caught 101 nuances of the score, just so.

At the end, the audience filed out quite coolly, without the ovations common for Thomas concerts.

Preceding the long Klagende Lied was Mahler’s precious ‘Blumine’ movement (originally part of Symphony No. 1) with trumpet solo by Mark Inouye, and the four Songs of a Wayfarer done quite beautifully by the delicate mezzo Cooke.

Just wait a few seasons, and the MTT-SFS team might find another goat this Gordian knot of a Germanic cantata irresistible.

PAUL HERTELENDY

St Petersburg Philharmonic
Rochester NY

For a year it was advertised that Music Director Yuri Temirkanov would conduct the St Petersburg Philharmonic at Rochester’s Eastman Theater on February 28. Indeed, he had conducted the night before at the Kennedy Center and had done workshops in the past at the Eastman School of Music and led its Eastman Philharmonia. Then, a few weeks before the concert, bizarre posters appeared listing no conductor. Who finally appeared? Nikolay Alexeev, listed variously as deputy artistic director or permanent conductor. I gather that’s the American equivalent of resident conductor, a post given to potential up-and-comers in their 20s or 30s. Except this “up-and-comer” turns 60 this year, and, judging from this concert, isn’t going anywhere.

The one moment of light was the stunning soloist in Brahms’s Concerto No. 1, Nikolai Lugansky, whose shaded phrasing was enhanced by the natural rubato that reflected his flowing sense of direction. His soft bell-like melodies in the second movement projected just as transparently as his left-hand chords, octaves, and arpeggios. If elegance describes what he brought to the first two movements, drama characterized the third. All is yellow to the jaundiced eye, but it was in the finale that he confirmed to me that he had been pushing Alexeev all evening to “get with the tempo”, as his whole body delivered urgency to the keyboard. In an article in this issue on the Ukraine Symphony, I said that that orchestra deserved better soloists; in this case the pianist deserved a competent conductor.

How incompetent was Alexeev? The very opening notes of Brahms’s first and second movements were scrappy, with wretched ensemble. Poor ensemble continued all evening; different choirs of the orchestra were together, but they weren’t synchronized with one another—not even the first violins (left) with the seconds (right)! And no, it wasn’t a matter of the musicians not being able to hear themselves on stage; that was one of the main problems fixed when the Eastman Theater was renovated from 2004 to 2009. A year ago, when the Toronto Symphony played here for the first time with Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 8, they had no ensemble problems whatsoever.

How incompetent was Alexeev? So incompetent that it was easier to hear the second violins than the first; in the first movement of the Brahms, even the concertmaster’s brief solo bordered on inaudible. Nor did he get the orchestra to articulate the dramatic triplets leading to the movement’s recapitulation, or to play the main energetic theme of the last movement together! In the Shostakovich Alexeev was even worse. Again the very opening unison note was splayed; nor did he get the

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first violins to articulate together in the first movement’s main theme.

Alexeev’s worst sin was failing to keep steady tempos. Shostakovich’s Fifth depends on tension to hold its long lines together over a steady beat; when there is an accelerando, that too must be a steady accelerando. Alexeev sped up here, slowed down there, threw in occasional ritards, all without any inner tension in the lines. His source of drama was “louder” and “faster” instead of tension. He made the second movement sound like a waltz instead of a menacing march. During the Largo I kept saying to myself, “What’s the rush!”—it was completely void of angst. And the final movement was especially awful as the players searched for a clear tempo from the conductor. Even the crucial percussion in the coda leading up to the final measures couldn’t find the beat.

As I’ve always said, “An orchestra is only as good as the person on the podium.” Alexeev is proof that that applies to the world’s greatest orchestras as well. He made this magnificent ensemble sound as third-rate as he is. Volodymyr Sirenko and the Ukraine Symphony were far superior when I heard them in this work just two weeks earlier. (For what the St Petersburg Philharmonic can truly sound like, see Sept/Oct 2012, page 21.)

GIL FRENCH

Dmitry Masleev, piano

New York

Dmitry Masleev, who turns 29 on May 4, was the First Prize Winner of the 15th quadrennial Tchaikovsky Competition in 2015. He spent much of the past year and a half touring the world in both recital and concerto performances. The main stage at Carnegie Hall gave us his New York debut in January, and a nearly full house was treated to an astounding performance.

The diminutive pianist, who looks younger than he is, controls a technique that can unleash torrents of octaves with blinding speed or spin a long, beautifully shaped legato melody. His stamina and endurance made for very short breaks between pieces and groups of pieces. Were it not for a broken string during a Prokofieff sonata, and later replacement during intermission, I suspect Masleev could have skipped it and just continued playing. He seemed to genuinely enjoy performing and was very appreciative of the response.

Right from the start, with a group of Scarlatti sonatas, Masleev displayed an extraordinary variety of colors and technique. In K 27 there was much crossing of hands and inner voice movement. K 466 was quite lyrical, using the widest range of the keyboard employed by the composer. K 1 was quite brilliant with leaps of over two octaves in the left hand, and K 141 is known for its exceptionally fast repeated notes. Argerich came to mind immediately; she matches Masleev’s speed and accuracy. Of course, he has to keep this up for another five decades or so to be in her legendary category.

Beethoven’s Les Adieux Sonata is justly popular and proved fully satisfying here. Masleev had a solid feel for the classical style. From the simple opening “Le-be-wohl” motive that pervades the movement, through sadness of the absence, to the exhilaration of the return, tempos were quick, chords well voiced, and both the melodies and passagework smooth.

Prokofieff’s Sonata No. 2 is a large four-movement work. Masleev’s aggressive approach to the opening movement set his interpretation apart from many others. He did scale back the lyrical episodes, but the rest was very exciting, and the propulsion never slackened off. The bell-like pings called for by Prokofieff, usually accented and sometimes in the top octave of the piano, resulted in a broken string that was only noticeable when it happened and a little in the final movement. The Scherzo was also aggressive, but more in keeping with the best performances I know. The hand over hand activity so common in Prokofieff was managed with perfection in the opening and closing sections of this movement. The Andante requires a legato singing
melody over constantly moving inner voices, where Prokofieff took much care marking dynamic changes. Masleev paid good attention to those inner voices, but not at the expense of the beautiful melody. The final Vivace was off to the races at a speed not for the faint of heart, freely mixing 6/8, 2/4, and 3/4 time signatures. Only the brief Moderato section allows the listener a rest from the driving rhythm. Even Lazar Berman did not play this with as much energy or dynamism.

With the broken string replaced, the Steinway was ready for Rachmaninoff and Liszt in the second half. The group of six Rachmaninoff pieces was unusual. Starting with two early pieces from Op. 3: ‘Elegie’ and the Prelude (in C-sharp minor), Masleev continued with late ones. The odd, short, posthumous ‘Fragments’ was followed by a group of three Etudes-Tableaux (Op. 33: E-flat; Op.39: B minor & D). He was totally in his element here; even the most difficult of these posed no problems for him. Each piece except ‘Fragments’ brought applause. A little more time on the circuit and he’ll learn how to control his audience to allow a group to be played without interruption—if that is what he wants.

Liszt’s Totentanz is best known in its original form for piano and orchestra (1849). When Liszt produced a piano solo score in 1865 dedicated to Hans von Bulow, there were few pianists who could play it. Nowadays it gets an occasional recording, but this is the first time I have seen it in concert. Masleev took the challenges head on; and, after 15 minutes of ‘Dies Irae’ in many virtuosic variations, the audience rose to a standing ovation. This was the very essence of Liszt, the showman who revolutionized piano playing for ever. That evening, a slighty young Russian—with thunderous octaves, alternating chords so fast that his hands blurred, glissandos up and down and occasionally in both hands simultaneously, and uncanny accuracy in leaps over the entire keyboard—gave me a little glimpse into what it might have been like to see Liszt himself in his heyday.

After only a few curtain calls, Masleev was seated back at the piano. Two encores by Tchaikovsky (‘Lullaby’ and ‘Dance Scene’ from his Op. 72) were followed by more Rachmaninoff. The most difficult of his piano transcriptions, Mendelssohn’s Scherzo from A Midsummer Night’s Dream, was tossed off with ease and a mischievous elan. Masleev was all smiles, two and a half hours since his Scarlatti began the evening. With his bow tie a little crooked, he took us back to the baroque era and played a final encore, the Sarabande from Bach’s Partita No. 1. In nearly 50 years of attending piano recitals—including ones by five Tchaikovsky first place winners, plus Horowitz, Rubinstein, Pollini, Schiff, and Wild, to name a few—I cannot remember any one that I enjoyed more than Dmitry Masleev.

JAMES HARRINGTON

Benjamin Grosvenor, piano
St Paul

Some child prodigies burn out and end up as aluminum siding salesmen who hate music. Others keep playing but never develop much beyond a facile technique. A small number, of which the English pianist Benjamin Grosvenor is a good example, go beyond technique and evolve into thoughtful, mature artists.

Grosvenor was just 13 in 2006 when he made his US recital debut in St Paul under the aegis of the enterprising Chopin Society of Minnesota. (A few months earlier at Carnegie Hall he played Ravel’s Piano Concerto in G with the New York Youth Symphony.) The Chopin Society presented him again in 2010 and brought him back for a recital last February at Mairs Concert Hall at Macalester College, an attractive, resonant facility that opened in 2012.

Grosvenor, by now a slight of build, all grown-up, poised 24-year-old, played a widely varied program of daunting works by Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Scriabin, Granados, and Liszt, the last of these a dazzling account

JAMES HARRINGTON
Grosvenor’s technique seems limitless, and he’s not afraid to show it off, but it became clear early in the program that he also has a firm grasp of period style. Schumann’s Arabesque, which served as his curtain-raiser, was delivered with flexible tempos and long arching phrases. On the other hand, Mozart’s Sonata No. 13, which followed, though bristling with energy, was more tightly structured, more patrician in temperament and form, the phrases more classically balanced. The Andante—an anticipation, many think, of The Magic Flute—sang with ample expression and little or no sentimentality.

Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata was a refreshing choice. It’s one of those pieces that’s seldom played because people think it’s played too often. Grosvenor’s eminently satisfying performance started off with a relatively brisk, unfussy, evenly paced Adagio. The extra weight in the left-hand octaves gave the music extra mystery. The middle movement was both genial and delicate; and the finale, taken at a furious pace, sustained a coiled, hypertensive momentum.

The only problem during the first half of the recital was a lack of dynamic variety. Everything was at mid-range or louder. This may have been owing to the pianist’s unfamiliarity with an especially bright hall, and it seemed Grosvenor sensed this because there was a wider range of sound in the second half: Scriabin’s Sonata No. 2 (Fantasy), excerpts from Granados’s Goyescas, and Liszt’s Rhapsody.

Grosvenor’s Granados resembled Alicia De Larrocha’s in its precision and rich color, while lacking her subtle use of rubato and idiomatic flair. Grosvenor delivered the dark sensuous tones of the Scriabin and generated impressive heat in the perpetual-motion finale. (How does a pianist memorize the big Scriabin pieces with their melodic fragments and odd transitions from one unrelated episode to another? Perhaps some voodoo is involved.)

We can only hope that the Chopin Society keeps engaging Grosvenor every few years during what surely will be a long and brilliant career.

MICHAEL ANTHONY

Igor Levit, piano

New York

I would be surprised to find another pianist with his first three widely acclaimed recordings of Bach, Beethoven, and Rzewski, made while still in his 20s, pre-dating his first Carnegie Hall recital. On February 10 Igor Levit, now 30, made his much anticipated debut in a nearly sold out Zankel Hall. Frederic Rzewski was there for the US premiere of his Dreams, Part II. I saw Jerome Lowenthal (head of the piano department at Juilliard) and Ursula Oppens (dedicatee of Rzewski’s People United Will Never Be Defeated) in the middle of a large group of people at intermission. Levit was born in Moscow but has lived in Germany since he was 8. He has impeccable technique, intelligence, and intensity of expression without a drop of showmanship or overt virtuosity. He greatly admires Andras Schiff, and he reminds me of Alfred Brendel as well.

Shostakovich’s Preludes and Fugues, Op. 87: 4, 10, and 12, began the program. I was a little surprised to see Levit use music and a page turner. The 20-minute group was played to perfection, each contrapuntal note given its appropriate role. At least one piece with less weight and more quick running passages would have helped; in Levit’s group only the final, difficult Fugue in G-sharp minor contrasted with the measured pattern of the other two. He played its marcattissimo writing with accented phrasing, generating much excitement. The fugue resolves quietly; Levit held the audience without applause for 10 or 15 seconds, then began the Rzewski.

Dreams is a huge eight-movement work composed from 2012 to 2014, based on the 1990 film of the same name by Akira Kurosawa. Part II is the final four movements. Dynamic range was at the forefront of Levit’s playing here. Many quiet passages were so soft that distant subway trains and even the pages of music being turned were slightly audible. The big moments were few, but the program notes’ description of them as having apocalyptic intensity was apt. ‘Bells’ opened the 40-minute work, not with the expected clangor but with a glacial flow of musical information. ‘Fireflies’ has more rhythmic regularity, trills, tremolos, and groups of very fast repeated notes (more than once, Ravel’s ‘Scarbo’ came to mind). ‘Ruins’ is melancholy—a common feeling for me when viewing something that

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was once grand. The closing movement, ’Wake Up’, takes its name from a Woody Guthrie children’s song. It begins in a simple, very accessible manner, but grows into some rather dark variations, which evolve into a quite athletic hand-crossing section. As it wound down, I actually thought the piece was at its end, when a new familiar melody was heard in the high reaches of the piano: Guthrie’s ’This Land Is Your Land’ with a little variation. Then the dreams were over. The 78-year-old Rzewski, clad in jeans, a red checked shirt, and sport coat, was obviously very pleased with the performance and joined Levit on stage.

Beethoven’s Diabelli Variations made up the second half of the recital. Now alone on stage with no score, Levit proved that his concert abilities could match his studio recording. It begins with the trite but quick and energetic Diabelli waltz, and this was immediately invigorating. The following 33 variations begin with a march and end with a minuet; in between lies the universe of Beethoven. One can find brilliance, lyricism, and a compendium of his compositional and piano techniques. From the classical roots in the first piano sonatas to the variations in the last sonata, this one-hour work could easily be the basis for a course on Beethoven’s piano music. Levit had the brains to conquer it, but he also had the musical soul. There were a few slips in variation 27. Variation 22 is subtitled alla ‘Notte e Giorno Faticar’ di Mozart (“working day and night”, an allusion to Leporello’s aria at the start of Don Giovanni), and Levit did not miss the humor. Most memorable was the transition from the large, penultimate variation, an extended four-voice fugue, to the final minuet variation. The fugue culminates in arpeggios covering the range of the piano, but what follows is magical: a series of chords from very loud to very soft that Levit played in a way that had us holding our breath. Variation 33 may come back to the simplicity of the original theme, but it evolves into writing reminiscent of the final pages of Sonata No. 32.

Levit is already a pianist’s pianist. Right now, his concentration on Bach and Beethoven places his musical values at the highest level. Jumping forward to Shostakovich and Rzewski, he shows that he can make musical sense of complex and very challenging modern repertoire. Whether or not he ever embraces the romantics, he’s an artist to follow—and is still at the beginning of his career.

**Lang Lang, piano**

*West Palm Beach*

Following his US debut with the Chicago Symphony in 2000, Lang Lang came in for a hail of critical brickbats (some of which I lobbed myself) on account of his flashy shallowness, crassness, mannerisms, etc. I once heard him in Brahms’s Concerto No. 1 in Carnegie Hall with conductor James Levine, each of whom eagerly sought to be more mannered than the other. It was awful. I remember that at the end it felt like being let out of jail.

As Lang Lang approaches his 35th birthday on June 14, he has matured, on the basis of this February 21 recital in Dreyfoos Concert Hall in West Palm Beach’s Kravis Center. Before a discussion of what was right and what was not so much, one must applaud the pianist’s beautiful pearly tone, which enriched almost everything on his program.

He opened with Debussy’s Ballade, originally published as ‘Ballade Slave’ in 1891 and then revised in 1903. It inhabits an earlier tone world, closer to Fauré than the composer’s later innovative piano works. Its lush essence was fully communicated.

With Debussy concluded, Lang Lang, who remained seated at the piano during a pause to admit latecomers, launched the low Gs that usher in Liszt’s Sonata in B minor. In one of the most challenging works for the piano he displayed a firm grasp of its lineaments and played with technical brilliance and rhetorical flourish. Hardly a cough or any other extraneous noise interrupted the cascade of sound from. Such attention is not often won from South Florida audiences. It was a satisfying exposition of the score, though perhaps not as profound as one might have hoped. My only cavil was that the andante sostenuto near the end, following the final thunderous chords, was somewhat over-inflected and pulled out of shape in thrall to a bogus expressivity.

After intermission the program was all-Spanish. Lang Lang first played six of the eight dances in Albeniz’s *Suite Española*, Op. 47 (Nos. 6 and 7 were omitted), followed by two of the six Goyescas by Enrique Granados. Albeniz’s character pieces have lots of local color cast in a post-Lisztian style, with interjections of flamenco gestures, and all were engagingly performed.

He was not as good in the Granados, which is far more than colorful. “While playing it”, wrote the English critic Ernest Newman, “one
has the voluptuous sense of passing the fingers through masses of richly colored jewels.” If Albeniz captured the Spanish soul, then Granados may be said to have captured the Castillian soul. There is an austerity and fatalism in *Goyescas* that is found nowhere in the Albeniz. Lang Lang played ‘The Maiden and the Nightingale’ and ‘Fandango by Candlelight.’ In the suite they are third and fourth, but I suspect he reversed their order because the fandango has a flashy ending—he really likes flashy endings. In both, the rhythmic rigor was relaxed and the mood sentimentalized. But the nightingale trilled attractively, and its final departure in a flurry of trills was suggested quite beautifully.

Manuel de Falla’s ‘Ritual Fire Dance’ is another piece with a flashy ending. It was long a staple of Arthur Rubinstein, who embellished the composer’s own piano version. Lang Lang played the original (more or less) and did so noisily and rather unmusically, but he knew his audience and they loved it. Then he played Chopin’s posthumous Nocturne in C-sharp minor; a little swooningly but respectably.

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**A Tribute to Cellist Jules Eskin**

*Boston Symphony Chamber Players*

The Boston Symphony’s extraordinary Principal Cellist Jules Eskin had planned to play a program of French music with his colleagues in the Boston Symphony Chamber Players at the New England Conservatory’s Jordan Hall on January 22, but he died of cancer on November 15. Instead, he was sent gently to his rest with the Andante from Mozart’s Duo, K 423, soulfully played by two other BSO principals, violinist Malcolm Lowe and violist Steven Ansell.

Janos Starker, Gregor Piatigorsky, and Leonard Rose were Eskin’s teachers. He led the Cleveland Orchestra’s cellos for three years under George Szell until he left that position in 1964 at Erich Leinsdorf’s invitation to lead BSO’s cello section. There he stayed for a remarkable 53 years, always performing with panache and beautiful tone. Eskin was also a founding member of the Chamber Players; this concert was played in his memory.

It opened with a perky and zestful performance of Paul Taffanel’s Woodwind Quintet. Taffanel was a pioneer in the development of the French school of flute playing, an approach that favored expressivity and lyricism and usually employed the newly invented Boehm flute. Being so steeped in woodwind playing styles, Taffanel understood each instrument’s unique timbre and was thus an ideal purveyor of music for an ensemble comprising horn, flute, oboe, clarinet, and bassoon. Principal Flute Elizabeth Rowe demonstrated why that choice was so apt. Her gorgeous tone pervaded every earthly cascade of fluid notation. Three other BSO principals—oboist John Ferillo, clarinetist William R. Huddins, and bassoonist Richard Svoboda—all contributed. What a luxury to hear these world-class players, freed from their orchestral bonds to play in such perfect small ensemble synchronicity!

Next up was Saint-Saens’s unusual Septet in E-flat for piano, trumpet, and strings. Its composition was spurred by La Trompette, a Paris semi-amateur chamber music organization founded by mathematician Emile Lemoine, who had asked Saint-Saens to write a piece for trumpet with strings and piano, reflecting the organization’s name. Saint-Saens resisted, as he felt the instrumentation somewhat frivolous. But around 1880 he finally agreed; and the premiere, with the composer at the keyboard, was a popular success. The work is modeled on a baroque suite. The trumpet was very well played by BSO Principal Thomas Rolf. Guest pianist Randall Hodgkinson matched virtuosity with panache.

Following intermission, Rowe and Hodgkinson played Eric Tanguy’s *Afterwards* (2012), mesmerizing music that hovered stasis-like above the stage, recalling an ancient world of mosaics and floating incense with its inventive exploitation of the two instruments’ many colors and expressive nuances. While both players were in
complete control of their musical challenges, the composition would have benefited from some judicious editing, having made a convincing case for itself well before its conclusion.

Jean Françaix (1912-97) wrote his Octet for winds and strings in 1948, having been commissioned by Willi Boskovsky, concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic, for his Vienna Octet. The music’s instrumentation is the same as Schubert’s Octet—string quartet, string bass, clarinet, bassoon, and horn—and is dedicated “to the memory of Franz Schubert”. Françaix’s rapid changes from light to dark reflect the quickly changing moods one hears in Schubert’s later music. Closing with a waltz that is surely meant to reflect a grand Viennese tradition, it’s a work that easily pleases and charms. Edward Barker, principal bass, and cellist Mihail Jojatu reappeared after their appearances in the earlier Saint-Saens, both adding strong bass sonority.

Jules Eskin would have relished this bracing program.

JOHN EHRLICH

Berlin Philharmonic Woodwind Quintet
Rochester NY

The Berlin Philharmonic Woodwind Quintet was founded in 1988 when Herbert von Karajan was still the orchestra’s music director. All players are founding members of the quintet except bassoonist Marion Reinhard, who joined the BPO in 1999 and the quintet in 2010 (she is no longer a member of the orchestra).

Franz Danzi’s Quintet, Opus 56:3, is usually quite forgettable. This group used it to open their concert at the Eastman School of Music’s Kilbourn Hall on February 6, and several things quickly became clear. First, each player had his or her own definition, yet they blended together into an essentially mellow sound, though it took Reinhard most of the first half of the concert to temper her volume. Second, they unmistakably still possess the Karajan sound (especially flutist Michael Hasel and oboist Andreas Wittmann): their intonation is smooth and blended—the opening notes of phrases appear as if on a cushion, and phrases are always shaped—even ostinato stretches are never drone-like. Third, they instinctively gravitate toward long, all-embracing arches that give a movement shape and direction. Fourth, I never noticed vibrato; it was so subtle that it never called attention to itself. And last, the players are attuned to one another both as friends and as musicians, constantly shifting their attention from one colleague to another, reacting, matching one another rhythmically and tonally. I especially enjoyed watching clarinetist Walter Seyfarth (the driving force behind the group’s original formation) as his gestures, turns, and accents made an otherwise boring inner line of music into something vital and toe-tapping—yes, Danzi actually became toe-tapping! In brief, I was reminded of what I witnessed at two BPO concerts in Toronto in November (Mar/Apr): players at the peak of their profession for whom the orchestra is heart-and-soul to their very being—not merely collecting paychecks here!

The concert ended with another full-blown woodwind quintet, Carl Nielsen’s. In a way, the performance was a reflection of the Danzi in that these were the two works on the program that had multi-movement formal symphonic structure. Nielsen is a taste that I’m still acquiring, but these players advanced it.
They tied the opening movement’s 16th note runs, grace notes, little fanfares, and lyricism into one smooth organic whole with shades of tone color and expressive nuances that were as smooth as the Danzi, yet alive with the folk music drive that seems always present with Nielsen. The Minuet flowed briskly but lightly with ease. The Præludium, a rapturously played liquid recitative for English horn rather than oboe, was the introduction to the concluding smooth-as-silk chorale, the theme for a broadly arrayed set of variations that summarized all the virtues of this group: facetious turns, soulful lyricism, consummate duos (the one between clarinet and bassoon was like one person breathing), stunning solos for both bassoon and French horn (Scotsman Fergus McWilliam), and liquid rubatos, all concluding with a repeat of the tranquil chorale.

In between the Danzi and Nielsen, Wittmann played English horn in Anton Reicha’s short *Andante Arioso*. It’s a strange work, the equivalent of listening to a string quartet with two violas instead of two violins, because the English horn, an octave lower than the oboe, is used as a hard-to-hear subsidiary voice; not until a cadenza near the end does it become a solo voice. Also, the work sounded here a bit more mechanical than *arioso*. This happened too in Hindemith’s *Kleine Kammermusik*, Opus 24:2, that followed. They had the notes but not the style: the Waltz didn’t quite come across, the third movement wasn’t free and embracing enough to be truly lovely, the ‘Kleine Potpourri’ wasn’t down-and-dirty enough, and the Finale lacked the lift needed to make the shifts between 2/2 and 3/2 really swing.

The surprise for me was how musical these players made Milhaud’s *Chemineé du Roi René*, 7 movements in 11 minutes that have always struck me as a put-on. How they made music out of it! Exquisite balances, seamless dovetailing in the frequent exchanges between instruments, terraced textures, and their impeccable way of making precise, steady rhythms toe-tapping yet flexible—all really helped. So did their gift for playfulness in the midst of finding glorious long arches in what otherwise to me sounds like triviality.

Their encore, a tribute to their 16th US tour, was Gunther Schuller’s ‘Blues’, which they made sound as elegant as soft shoe.

Hallman: *Short Stories*

New York

Clarinet, cello, and piano: this combination of instruments has a far more limited repertoire than the traditional piano trio with violin. On January 24 Inon Barnatan, Anthony McGill, and Alisa Weilerstein played a program of clarinet trios to a full house at Alice Tully Hall. These musicians have been friends as well as musical colleagues for many years and began their professional relationship as members of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center Two. They returned to the Chamber Music Society’s home base at Lincoln Center to perform the two greatest works for their ensemble, sandwiched around the NY premiere of a work written for them.

Philadelphia-based composer Joseph Hallman’s *Short Stories* was commissioned by Music Accord, a consortium of top music presenting organizations in the US that includes CMS. It was written in 2016 for Barnatan, McGill, and Weilerstein, and they played its world premiere in Princeton the week before this concert. Hallman does not use any capital letters in his work’s title or the titles of most of the five movements: ‘The Breakup’, ‘Familial Memories at a Funeral,’ ‘Black-and-white Noir: Hardboiled with a Heart of Gold,’ ‘Regret is for the Weak,’ and ‘The Path of the Curve’.

The composer wrote, “Each member of the trio is a storyteller, equal in voice and perspective. Using diverse emotive colors, each movement flits to and from myriad musical styles. Simple lyricism, dissonant disorder, a rhythmic propulsion based on uni-
The evening began with Beethoven’s sparkling Trio, Op.11, an early (1797) work solidly in the classical mold. There are plenty of opportunities for all three parts, but the piano is the glue that holds everything together, and Barnatan was rock solid. He made the most of both the lyric and brilliant sections. McGill, currently principal clarinet with the NY Philharmonic, had the most beautiful and even sounds across every register. Weilerstein, spinning a long legato melody, got to shine at the beginning of the Adagio. The Theme and Variations, based on a popular tune of the time, was infectious. Even after the Hallman, I heard several people humming the theme during intermission.

Brahms’s late clarinet trio (1891) occupied the second half of the program. I hope that this group records this trio, because their performance was hands-down the best I have ever heard. The ensemble could not have been more perfect, and each player’s musicianship supported an exceptional collaboration.

JAMES HARRINGTON
mixture of agitation and levity in the finale’s waning moments, when violinist Joel Link soared above the quivering strings—representing the composer’s impending deafness— resonated with just the right balance.

The Dover brought a similar fresh exuberance to Mozart’s final quartet, No. 23. It was a hearty, mannerism-free rendition that no doubt generated some extra sales at the merchandise table. Their first CD release (reviewed in M/A) has Mozart’s last two quartets and the Quintet, K 406, with guest violinist Michael Tree from the Guarneri Quartet.

CHARLES MCCARDELL

Danish String Quartet
Rochester NY

After performing the world premiere of Swans Kissing by Rolf Wallin [Wall-EEN] at the Edinburgh Festival last August, the Danish Quartet took it on tour across the US in the autumn and winter. It was the opening work at the Eastman School of Music on February 5.

The group’s reputation preceded them; the concert was sold out. The four blonds, appearing in black casual shirts, dark grey jeans, three with beards, with different colored shoes and wind-swept hair, were immediately engaging as violinist Frederik Oland gave a brief spoken introduction to the Wallin. It opened with barely a rustle that sounded like a nature recording of early morning wind, leaves, and birds stirring; in fact, it was the four players brushing across their strings before waxing and waning with a firm vibrato-less chord, using glissandos to change their pitches by microtones.

Swans Kissing is only 11 minutes long but covers a wide spectrum of techniques as it depicts a painting by Swede Hilma af Klint where a white swan against a black background flies down to kiss a rising black swan against a white background, “combining fractal mathematics and geometry with a playful, sensual attitude” to quote the composer. As played here, the work was constantly intense, even when quiet, with subtle relief so that it didn’t become wearing. So integral was it that my attention never wandered.

For something completely different, the quartet turned to “Folk Music from Nordic Countries”, four selections introduced by violinist Rune Tonsgaard Sorensen (first violinist before intermission); each came in two parts. A minuet was followed by a heel-bouncing Sorensen fiddling over a legato chorale-like accompaniment—easy versus virtuosic, relaxed tone but really tight rhythm. In a Danish melody the players’ tuning was so bright and pitch-perfect that the music “rang” through the hall. Next, ‘Water Lily’ grew in intensity as voices were added; the players kept a firm beat, yet the music never felt metronomic. The concluding jig began as a chain dance but ended in a fabulous, almost hypnotic fury. The four Danes looked like woodsmen freshly emerged from the wilder-
ness but played with the souls of those who make no distinction between life and their art.

Two of the Danish Quartet’s qualities were quickly striking. One was the huge volume of sound they produced, whether playing pianissimo or fortissimo, easily filling Kilbourn Hall’s 444 seats. It was as if they had voiced their instruments specifically for the room. The other was the perfect matching of tone, especially evident between the two violins and between the viola and cello—that’s in addition to the player’s seamlessness ensemble as melodies dovetailed one another seamlessly and they played with unanimity of pulse and rhythm.

After intermission when Sorensen and Oland changed places for Beethoven’s Quartet No. 8, it became clear that Sorensen is the player who projects his technique more clearly. In the opening movement the main theme holds three beats across the bar for an additional 16th note; it’s the second 16th note that Oland inevitably rushed; in fact, the whole movement felt impetuous, pushed, rushed, as if it was in sore need of air. The same happened in the tricky rhythms of the third movement. Although they took the fourth, a Presto with a gallop rhythm, at a more relaxed pace, it still had that edge of feeling rushed. Part of that overall effect was owing to the second violin and viola playing chords with no vibrato, making them feel like a wall of sound. Only the Adagio movement was really effective. If taken too slowly, its moments of poor writing (empty spaces and naive harmonic movement) are evident. Here it was truly lovely with a relaxed lyrical flow and a gently rocking gait, as its textures were illuminated with rhythms, harmonies, and tone colors, completely absorbing my attention.

The encore was a short Danish chorale, soothingly and sweetly played.

GIL FRENCH

Pacifica Quartet with Jörg Widmann
New York
The excellent Pacifica Quartet came to New York’s 92nd Street Y on January 24 with a program built around German composer and clarinetist Jörg Widmann, performing one of his best-known works before presenting him as a performer.

Widmann’s Quartet No. 3 (Hunt Quartet) was written in 2003 as the Scherzo of a five-movement cycle that looks back to the classical era. In a brief introduction, the composer suggested that the scherzo progressed from a sort of minuet under Haydn to something much grimmer with Beethoven, and that with Mahler it became “almost suicidal.” As if to echo this history lesson, Widmann’s Hunt begins cheerfully, working a folk tune often used by Robert Schumann into a rhythmic pattern from Beethoven’s Symphony No. 7. But the sound quickly becomes a dark and violent deconstruction of the era’s “hunting music.”

This challenging experimental work is also something of a theater piece, with the players shouting and growling from time to time, waving their bows around as weapons, attacking their instruments, and using unorthodox techniques (exaggerated pizzicato and glissandos, for example) in a parody of the sadistic violence implicit in hunting. It sounds fiendishly difficult. Only 12 minutes long, the piece has, as Widmann helpfully pointed out, more notes than a typical symphony, though many of those notes are somewhere in that space between music and noise.
The Schumann theme resurfaces amidst the chaos, wickedly “skeletized” (Widmann’s term). At the end, the other players figuratively attack and kill the cellist.

This is a work that proceeds at a maniacal pace with maximum dissonance. But the Pacifica players managed to pull it off in a jokey, winking manner.

To restore equilibrium and guard against nightmares, the Hunt was followed by Brahms’s Clarinet Quintet, a far more delicate work, pensive and lugubrious. Here, all attention was on Widmann’s virtuoso playing. From the phantom-like scales in the first movement to the elegiac Adagio, his haunting tone, dexterity, and flawless phrasing were apparent; and the exchanges with string players were handled with aplomb.

The concert opened with a lively rendition of Haydn’s Quartet, Opus 76:1. The Pacifica players raced through the opening movement, zeroed in on the driving dance rhythms in the Minuet, and finally settled down in the Finale. They took a fluid approach to intonation, the first violin sometimes wandering alarmingly on the darker side—a sin that can be forgiven in view of the fresh, exciting playing.

The Play of Daniel
Boston Camerata

Sunday, January 29, a beautiful winter afternoon in Boston, was notable for two events, one long-planned, one almost spontaneous. The almost spontaneous: thousands of people gathered in front of Henry Hobson Richardson’s landmark Trinity Episcopal Church in Copley Square to protest the government’s immigrant ban. The planned: Boston Camerata, the city’s venerable early music ensemble, presented its latest version of the medieval Play of Daniel in Trinity Church.

Boston Camerata Music Director Anne Azema welcomed the audience with a particularly pertinent speech, suggesting that the unrest outside was possibly comparable to the general unrest in the streets of Beauvais, France, in 1200, whence came the musical substance of The Play of Daniel, the central thesis of which was the ultimate failure of tyrants in the face of people who have firm faith in God.

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The Camerata’s initial involvement with this work dates from the mid-1980s. In that production, Andrea von Ramm sang the role of Daniel and created the staging; Music Director Emeritus Joel Cohen (Azema’s husband) supplied the musical edition and direction. Azema’s current production, first created to celebrate Camerata’s 60th Anniversary (1954-2014), is newly edited from the original medieval source. Her staging and musical direction, custom-tailored to Boston’s magnificent Trinity Church, create a new context and perspective for this masterpiece. Camerata is scheduling further performances in North America and Europe.

The Camerata troupe was joined by 8 youthful performers from the Boston City Singers, 5 Trinity choristers, and 10 performers from the Longy School of Music. These singers, with lighting effects, costumes, props, and the music and stage direction by Azema, plus spectacular dancer Indrany Datta-Barua, made an impressive ensemble.

The entire presentation poignantly evoked a very different time and place, and its many musical and dramatic components were quite transporting. Tenor Jason McStoots was riveting both dramatically and vocally as King Belshazzar of Babylon, who orders a feast served on sacred vessels stolen by his father’s armies from the temple of Jerusalem. A spectral hand writes three words on his palace walls. None of Belshazzar’s entourage is able to discern the meaning. His Queen appears, elegantly sung by soprano Camila Parias, and suggests that among Belshazzar’s prisoners a Jew named Daniel might be able to help. Daniel is brought forth, and the King offers him countless gifts if
he can interpret the writing. Daniel, brilliantly sung by tenor Jordan Weatherston Pitts, recounts the desecration of the temple by Belshazzar’s father. That displeased God. The kingdom will be destroyed and given to another. The King, nonplussed, keeps his promise, gives Daniel royal vestments, and returns the sacred vessels to his care.

Part 2 begins as the Persian King Darius overthrows Belshazzar, fulfilling Daniel’s prophecy. Bass Joel Fredericksen’s rich voice was an apt match to his role. Jealous courtiers conspire to have Daniel thrown to the lions because he refuses to worship Darius. Though consigned to the pit, Daniel is protected by an angel (soprano Stephanie Hollenberg), who shields him from the lions. Another angel appears, sung by a superb but unnamed treble soprano, who orders the holy man Habakkuk to bring food to Daniel. As Habakkuk, baritone Donald Wilkinson’s elegant voice and clearly enunciated language were a luxury to hear. When Darius realizes that once again God has protected Daniel, he orders Daniel restored and commands that all the kingdom must henceforth worship Daniel’s God. Daniel then prophesies the coming of the Messiah, and another angel appears garbed in bright white robes, compellingly sung from the rear balcony by soprano Camila Parias, who announces the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. A rejoicing recessional of all the participants closes the play.

Shira Kammen played both vielle and harp, Karim Nagi played an assortment of percussion instruments, and Azema narrated. She added helpful explanatory information.

This was a first-class exposition of music and drama. The lack of translated text was disappointing; only summaries of the action and a few translated phrases for each scene were printed in the program. The few occasional rough edges will undoubtedly be smoothed out for further performances.

JOHN EHRlich

Roomful of Teeth
Rochester NY

In the program notes for Roomful of Teeth’s February 27 concert at the Eastman School of Music’s Kilbourn Hall, several composers reflected on writing a work for the group. William Brittle said, “I decided to use words as ‘sound’ instead of ‘lyrics’ in order to concentrate] on texture and harmony (rather than getting caught up in an external narrative).” And Judd Greenstein said his “Montmartre” is an exploration of sound and color. He added that Paris is “where the concepts of sound and timbre were finally elevated to their rightful place alongside harmony, counterpoint, and voice leading in the Western classical tradition in the early 20th Century.” Just as French composers of that era expanded the notion of what was acceptable (I consider Ravel’s Daphnis and Chloe as revolutionary as Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring), so Roomful of Teeth are pioneers in expanding the kind of vocal sounds acceptable.

Only their encore, the brief ‘Fall in to Me’, was text-oriented.

Now, I hate amplified music (which is why I avoid Broadway shows). If I had known that Roomful of Teeth uses amplification, I wouldn’t have gone. But because I stayed, I was forced to wonder whether what they did could have been accomplished without amplification, even in a small, acoustically splendid 444-seat hall where sounds never have to be forced. The volume of the amplification was just right—never too loud and not manipulated, until the last number, ‘Quizassa’ (2011) by Merrill Garbus inspired by Bulgarian nasal resonance, clever folk meters, and (to my ears) African breathing techniques, when the sound engineer cranked things up, made the resonance sound artificial, and upped the bass till it started hurting my ears. I concluded that some of the performers’ “effects” could not have been “created” (extended? tailored? modified? changed?) without amplification. I learned something.

In the first half of the short concert, the group performed Caroline Shaw’s Pulitzer Prize-winning Partita for Eight Voices (2011). Textures in the Allemande were layered on top of one another and pitches were stretched, turning texts into crowd sounds. The final effect was almost orchestral. During the boring Sarabande I observed the group’s clothes: all black below the waist, with one dress over tights; sweaters, blouses, tee-shirts, and suit jackets above, in muted colors. The Courante, imitating Inuit throat-singing, sounded like the last gasps of a bad orgasm. The Passacaglia proved that the “sound effects”, many of them imitations of what one can find on world music recordings, here were loosely grounded on four basic structures.
Soler:

Diana’s Garden

St Paul

For a while it was the hottest ticket in town, the town being Vienna in 1787. It had everything—a saucy libretto by Mozart’s most esteemed collaborator, Lorenzo da Ponte, that told of a bunch of horny nymphs and swains doing some heavy breathing on a secluded island. The music, a carriage load of sweet and graceful tunes, was the work of the prolific Spanish composer Vicente Martin y Soler.

Diana’s Garden, as it was titled, could have run forever. But after a couple of seasons it disappeared and spent the next two centuries sitting on the shelf gathering dust. The work has been staged in a few cities in recent years, and in January the intrepid Minnesota Opera put on its own production at the Ordway Music Theater.

The production was lively but probably didn’t convince anyone that Diana’s Garden is a great piece. The characters aren’t interesting enough to give the opera any real stature. The opera was meant simply to titillate and charm—never all that simple a goal, actually—and it exudes charm even today, though director Peter Rothstein and his team gave the story a contemporary slant, aiming to make it more provocative and certainly racier.

Da Ponte’s libretto, liberally (and fortunately) trimmed for this production, draws on pastoral tales and Greek mythology. It’s basically a battle between Amore (Cupid) and Diana, goddess of the hunt and virtue. Attended by her three Nymphs, Diana rules the island and guards the magic tree, a symbol of chastity and an enemy of all things sexual. (In an amusing touch, designer Paul Whitaker has the tree looking pathetically barren and emaciated. Nobody, I guess, likes a prudish tree.) To restore the natural order of things, Amore brings three youths to the island to woo the maidens, and he engages a shepherd to make Diana fall in love.

Rothstein drew from several periods but placed the action in urban America in the 1950s—a time, he said in a program note, “of clearly defined gender roles and expectations”, which means (at least for women) sexual repression and chastity before marriage. With this idea in mind, Diana, wonderfully portrayed and sung by Leah Partridge, was made up to look like Pat Nixon with touches of Phyllis Schlafly and June Cleaver. When we first encountered the Nymphs, they are sneaking cigarettes, as if they were Christian co-eds lighting up in the dorm at Bob Jones University.

Rothstein made the connection between sexual re-
pression and violence explicit—Diana aims her rifle at anyone who thwarts her—but surely, in having her use the rifle as a sex tool, he took the idea at least an inch too far.

Whitaker’s set, the interior of a run-down monastery, its walls covered with cracked plaster, effectively conveyed the idea of an old, corrupt, patriarchal moral and social order, the repressed 50s giving way at the end of the opera to the sexual revolution of the 60s and the restoration of a more natural way of life. Costume designer Alice Fredrickson supplied a pungent image of fecundity: flowers bursting out of the costumes of Diana and the shepherd Endemione.

The cast was uniformly strong. Partridge stopped the show on opening night after her fervently sung first-act “rage” aria, and she nicely conveyed Diana’s vulnerability and confusion in the final scenes. Adriana Zabala was a smart, fetching Amore, and the three men were in top form as singers and actors: Craig Colclough (Doristo), Alek Shrader (Endimione) and David Walton (Silvio). The three Nymphs were portrayed at the same high level by Alexandra Razskazoff, Gina Perregrino, and Nadia Fayad.

Presiding in the pit, Music Director Michael Christie propelled the graceful music with a shrewd sense of pace; and Jonathan Brandani deftly played the continuo part on piano.

MICHAEL ANTHONY

Leah Hawkins as I-Will-Sell-My-Children Mom, Timothy J. Bruno as Death Row Dad, Allegra De Vita as the First Lady, Rexford Tester as Give-Me-Cheap-Petrol Protestor, Hunter Enoch as Aide-de-camp (ADC), and Ariana Wehr as Ms. Holy in Mohammed Fairouz’s The Dictator’s Wife.

Fairouz: The Dictator’s Wife (world premiere)
Washington National Opera

Call it karma or a golden opportunity, but the world premiere of The Dictator’s Wife arrived at the Kennedy Center on January 13, exactly one week before the so-called peaceful transfer of power from President Obama to President-elect Trump. No one at the Washington National Opera claimed that this new work by composer Mohammed Fairouz and librettist Mohammed Hanif is a thinly-veiled satire of a real head of state, past or present. Why spoil the fun? Let the audience decide for themselves if the man in charge is a composite figure or a specific person.

The Dictator’s Wife first appeared as a dramatic monolog written by Hanif in 2008 for his actress wife, with the leader likely inspired by Pakistani dictator General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq. This hour-long “pocket opera”, sung in English, has six characters: the First Lady, an aide-de-camp, three protestors, and a do-gooder. The dictator of this unidentified country never appears; he’s hiding in the bathroom while the world outside collapses. When his wife enters her boudoir holding a knife, we know his fate and understand why he has been represented on stage by just his clothing.
Mezzo-soprano Allegra De Vita proved to be a commanding physical presence as the First Lady, whether lamenting the nation’s problems created by her husband’s atrocities, or expressing the painful joy she felt over the 5,000 roses he sent her. This First Lady was a little bit Eva Peron, with a touch of Imelda Marcos and maybe Hillary Clinton (c 1998) thrown in. Placard-carrying protester I-Will-Sell-My-Children Mom, played by soprano Leah Hawkins, and Death Row Dad bass Timothy J. Bruno were mildly effective foils, and Bruno’s aria about his son’s plight stood out as the high point of the evening.

With space at a premium in the compact not-ready-for-primetime-major-operas Family Theater, the WNO Orchestra, reduced to a chamber-sized group of 13 musicians, was positioned behind the stage set. Conductor Nicole Paiement supplied steady guidance through a score that is a pastiche. The introduction brought to mind Milhaud’s Creation du Monde in tone and in its use of alto sax. At the Q&A that followed the performance, Fairouz spoke rather dismissively of the music, calling some of it “b.s.” and describing a certain melody he devised as “Russian” when it looked like Trump might have a shot at winning the election. Fairouz also said he was “obsessed with text”, a fact proved by his past collaborations with established writers and poets.

But the libretto undermines The Dictator’s Wife. This isn’t a biting satire but a drama laced with comic relief that is awkwardly placed and occasionally funny. The bathroom (referred to as the “loo”) humor is tired. The Give-Me-Cheap-Petrol Protestor had a thankless task grousing about keeping his Toyota’s tank filled, while the perky Ms Holy caricature, embraced by soprano Ariana Wehr, grew more annoying with each chirpy new utterance. That was the point. In US government parlance, this role would fall in to the category of non-essential personnel.

While Friday the 13th was not an ideal debut date, there were no obvious glitches in the production. Despite its flaws, this opera is entertaining and could be altered slightly to make it stronger. Two words often heard on the 2016 presidential campaign trail might apply here. The Dictator’s Wife is far from a “disaster”, but in its current state, it will never be “yuge”.

CHARLES MCCARDELL

In Rinde Eckert’s ‘Cesca’s View’ (2009) for two sopranos and two altos, I found the three-part harmony (inspired by pastoral views in the Pyrenees) comforting; but soprano Esteli Gomez’s repeated ya-doe-hoo yodeling (with a throaty yell on “a” and the rest falsetto-high) became boring, then irritating—but she got a spontaneous rise out of the interesting audience, mostly gray hairs and students.

The most interesting work was ‘Beneath’ (2010) by Caleb Burhans, an Eastman grad (2010) and husband of soprano Martha Cluver (Eastman 2002). At first I thought the humming, harmonies, and “electronic” whistles were mere other-worldly sci-fi stuff, whirling around a two-measure 3/4 ostinato that seemed to go on forever, till I realized that the swirling textures, moving at a minimalist pace (think Reich, Glass, a Bruckner slow movement) were evolving into the ostinato, and the ostinato material had slyly evolved into the embracing swirls.

After intermission some of the works felt distinctly “pops”, like Brittle’s panting-dog ‘High Done No Why To’ (2010), based on the simplistic harmonic progressions and short timings of popular songs. In the world of serious music “sound effects” without an interesting structural basis can carry one just so far. The one major weakness at this concert was rhythmic: despite all the rhythms on display, I found them no more interesting than listening to a Swingle Singers recording.

I’m really too much of an old-fashioned classical music square to say I appreciated the concert. I enjoyed it the same way my relatives enjoy an opera or a symphony I occasionally take them to: they’re amazed, occasionally caught up, had a good time, but it’s really not their thing. (For a decidedly different opinion, see Leslie Kandell’s review of Roomful of Teeth in May/June 2015, page 22; but note that there have been a number of personnel changes and none of the works performed in Rochester were written by the singers I heard.)

GIL FRENCH
Guest Editorial: Recording or Performance?

Editing brings perfection closer, but it’s still nice to hear a “real” performance.

The ubiquitous extreme editing in pursuit of perfection on studio recordings has made recordings of pieces played straight through from beginning to end relatively rare. Although the recordings created through extreme editing are often remarkable, like paintings or other non-time-based art pieces that are revised and fine-tuned over and over, they aren’t performances in the strict sense. And once in a while I find myself wanting something more “real”.

Editing isn’t new. But until sometime in the early 80s, recordings usually had fewer edits since it was a tedious process of tape splicing, and sometimes a recorded piece was simply the best out of several (unedited) “takes”. However, with digital music editing software, it’s so easy to change anything that isn’t judged to be just right—a note too loud here, a note too soft there, a phrase not shaped conspicuously enough here, a couple of notes not articulated crisply enough there. For any given phrase, bar, or even single note, a desirable rendition can probably be found in at least one of the numerous takes and then readily dropped in—or the notes can be directly manipulated through the software. Weeks are spent cobbbling together a patchwork of snippets that finally result in the “perfect” performance (if such a thing really exists). And, given enough takes, it must sometimes be difficult to make the final choice for a given fragment of the music from a wealth of excellent options. Which of the 50 takes should I use for the first half of measure 19? In theory, the process could be practically endless.

I had heard somewhere that the number of edits on a typical CD-length recording is around 400. But a classical music producer once told me that, in his experience, that estimate is low; and the actual number is closer to 800. It would be interesting if the number were stated along with the other technical information published with a recording, but the producer laughed and said that would never happen.

Fixing the occasional outright error for a commercial recording makes sense so the listener won’t cringe every time that sour note comes around. (But I have a recording of a Beethoven violin sonata with a distinctly out of tune note that can’t be missed, and it doesn’t bother me.) Still, some of the subtleties instrumental to the bigger picture may be compromised with hundreds of edits. Yes, the same artist played all the snippets, but she didn’t walk in and play the whole piece that way. Every performance of a given piece is a slightly different journey, with variations in the playing of one part affecting the playing of other parts. As perfection is sought through mixing and matching of many run-throughs, the holistic aspect could be affected.

It’s surprising that more musicians don’t choose to ”keep it real” with at least some of their releases. After all, these are first-rate players who can deliver superior results from start to finish—as evidenced in their concerts. Yet I can understand that, given that flawlessness through extreme editing is everywhere, they might feel they would be putting themselves at a disadvantage, even though their straight-through performances could sometimes be more inspiring.

Among non-professionals, concerns over being disadvantaged without editing can even lead to cheating. A high school senior in my area who was required to submit an unedited recording of her playing for a college application was too afraid not to edit, and decided the rules didn’t apply to her. So she hired a professional sound engineer to produce an edited recording that would seem as if it were a recording of an actual concert, complete with applause.

Far from eschewing studio technology, I listen to and marvel at countless excellent recordings that might have been produced with the assistance of 400 to 800 edits. But to find recordings of “real” straight-through performances (studio or concert, and undoctored after the fact) is not so easy, and, when I do, I often think, “This is magnificent and exciting. What’s to improve?”

MADELINE SALOCKS

You may have noticed that we have raised our subscription rates slightly. We do not want to get into the classic spiral of capitalism: when you have fewer customers you have to raise the prices to meet your budget (minimal as ours
is), and then when you raise prices you lose customers, which again requires raising prices.

When I moved to Cincinnati in 1985 there were 39 busses a day to downtown on my route, and they cost 50 cents (35 on weekends). Today there are 13 buses a day (fewer on weekends) and they cost $1.75. Every time they raised the fare, they lost riders, which led to reduced service, which led to fewer riders, etc.

It is hard to find food that's good for you for the same reason. That is, only a few people know (or care) what's good for them, so the sales on high quality food are very low, which keeps the prices high, which in turn keeps the sales low. It is almost impossible to break this spiral, as you can see in any supermarket, where there are acres and acres of "food" that is not good for you. Sometimes I even gasp in amazement at what the people in front of me and behind me are buying (the most common item is gallons of soda, liters of "coke").

On the other hand, as something widely sold becomes rare—think of overfishing (or failed harvests—we have some of those many years) there is greater demand and less supply so the price goes up and up, and the incentive to further overfish goes up as well, assuring the destruction of the species. (And I'll admit I pay a premium for grapes from Peru and Chile in the winter.)

That is capitalism. If the market is allowed to function normally you would have no busses at all, no food that is good for you, lots of very expensive Chilean Sea Bass, and no ARG. When something matters to you but not to most other people, you will pay a lot more for it than you expected. When every company we deal with, including the Postal Service, favors the big publishers with huge quantity discounts and lower rates—and when those publishers can afford extra mailings and are allowed them when we are not—then we can't even serve our customers as well, though we care a lot more about the few customers we have.

If the Market rules, quantity rules—never quality. Masses of people have no idea of quality, wouldn't know it if they fell over it. In fact, they prove their ignorance in almost every election. (I have never supported the idea that everyone should vote. If they know nothing and care less, they should have the grace to refrain from voting so that people who do know and care can elect better candidates.)

You might be interested to know that for almost a year I have been listening to (or at least sampling) "contemporary" music—that is, new music, music written since 1960—often since 2000—"avant-garde" composers and labels. I listen to about 50 of them for every issue, and I never cease to be amazed how BAD all this new music is. As I write this I am listening to utter garbage by Katja Saariaho—a big name! Sometimes a composer is simply bland, but most composers of "new" music love to shock the listener and "challenge" the players with noises and extremes. In fact, the number one rule for a young composer is to be outrageous—to get our attention by shocking us and hold it while we wonder what other crazy "music" he is about to inflict on us. Maybe we will consider his crudeness "original".

I admit that about 10 out of every 50 discs I listen to get sent to specialists on our staff who I hope will find them interesting—maybe even "creative". But most of the time they don't—and they never have to listen to the worst stuff, because I screened it out ahead of time.

I think critics are generally afraid to say how bad almost all this new music is. In some cases they don't understand it and therefore don't feel qualified to judge it. But I am quite sure that the age of music is over—that noise is taking over—and that almost nothing has been written since 1975 that you need to bother with, that will reward you in any way, that can be considered at all beautiful. And even in 1975 there were only a few composers producing great music; most of it was no good. A composer I knew at the time said to me quietly one day, "99 percent of everything is crap", and music from earlier times that we treasure and still perform a lot is that 1 percent.

There are around 100 discs of new music to deal with for every issue of ARG, which means about 600 a year. It's a big industry, mostly built on grant money and rich donors. Again, I suspect the donors and foundations have no taste, no judgement, and are afraid to dismiss garbage as garbage. The record labels that specialize in this also must think that just getting new music heard—or at least recorded—is a valid end in itself. But I cannot imagine any other sane human being excitedly playing these discs for me or for anyone he might consider a friend. We would all feel insulted that we were thought so lacking in taste.

As I was saying, new music is a big industry and a powerful lobby; people who resist them are bound to face some trouble. But it is obvious to me that almost anyone who loves the great music of history—the classics—will find almost all the "new music" ugly and intoler-
ble—and when it is tolerable it is boring (as is also a lot of music from the past).

The academic world is heavily invested in this. They have hundreds of composition students who have no talent for it whatsoever and no inspiration, but who are willing to pay a lot of money to be taught how to do it. Who is going to tell these paying customers to go away because they have nothing to say? That’s not the way the Market works. On the other hand, the Market would reduce all of them to poverty in no time if there were no grants and benefactors. So we have an artificial situation: no one is writing decent music and no one wants to play, record, or buy what they are writing. But it is too depressing to admit that there are no more great composers—the great American optimism won’t let us do that. So we create an artificial market: their garbage will be played, recorded, reviewed, and treated as if it’s worthwhile—sometimes even hyped as if it’s the latest Exciting New Thing. Publicity is mostly hype anyway, and I guess the young composer just considers it part of how to play the game. He must realize, down deep inside, that his music is essentially worthless, no matter how much hard work he put into it. But only nasty people like me will tell him so. Everyone else will show polite interest and protect his ego. Ego-protection is a big force in America. It starts with primary school teachers (unless the parents were already brainwashed into it). For adults, you protect my ego and I’ll protect yours. Facing the truth about ourselves is very difficult, and no one presses the matter. It is sort of sad, I guess, that some of the most worthless composers I have listened to have been writing dreadful music for their whole lives—and very likely think of themselves as brilliant creators of art. Such a waste! But the world is full of wasted lives.

Come to think of it, trying to write music is much more laudable than trying to make lots of money. And musical training at least equips these people to be a good audience. Unfortunately, if they don’t make a lot of money they won’t be able to afford to go to many concerts. This is also typical of our culture: the people who would enjoy our music the most, who would be most enriched by it, often can’t afford it. It is also one of the quirks of capitalism that if something is readily affordable it is considered less valuable. That’s complete nonsense, of course. And it has always been true that some of the best things in life are actually free! And many more don’t cost a great deal. After all, the symphony costs a lot less than Lady Gaga.

A reader in Boston tells me that a ticket to hear “Lady Gaga” (whoever that is) at Fenway Park costs $190. Says he: “And you thought symphony tickets were expensive.” Well, yes. I can see that one singer and a small backup band will probably sell at least 20,000 tickets in a huge stadium—maybe 40,000. And they are making out like bandits. An orchestra sells 2000 seats for $25-100 each, and with 100 musicians to pay and a big office staff they are losing money on every concert. The orchestra is more intelligent, better trained, and works harder than any pop singer; but sheer demographics is against them. That is, most people are stupid and ignorant and have no taste. Appeal to those people and you make money (and win elections). Appeal to thoughtful, educated, intelligent people and you lose money—there simply aren’t enough of us. Our whole culture is a mass culture: only quantity counts. Quality was left behind long ago—in music as in food (and everything else).

But I still think symphony tickets are expensive, and so do most of the symphony’s potential audience. None of us would be caught dead at a “Lady Gaga” concert, and most of us are pretty frugal. I wouldn’t pay $190 a seat for the Metropolitan Opera—and there our ticket is supporting a huge cast of musicians, dancers, and scenery carpenters. We have a sense of values, and we can’t imagine indulging ourselves in such an expensive evening ($190 per person for 3 hours). Most of us grew up in the days of very reasonable tickets. The musicians earned a bit less in those days (but they had students), and the opera or symphony had some wealthy donors who made it all possible and affordable for the rest of us.

The main expense that has increased outrageously is “marketing”, which is mostly a waste of money, but has to be done for various reasons, among them the second huge and increasing expense—the musicians’ salaries. The musicians rightly think that they are worth more than “Lady Gaga” types. But in a mass market they are simply not. Americans get rich on junk—almost never on anything worthwhile. It’s a sick and degenerate culture.

And by my standards, the full-time musicians in our top 10 or 15 orchestras are all “rich”, and I am sure that many people who love their music are too poor to afford tickets. But great art should not be a money-maker, and it’s embarrassing when orchestra management and unions wish they could rob people the way pop musicians do routinely.

VROON

May/June 2017
William Alwyn wrote more than 200 film scores from the 1930s to the 1970s, in addition to symphonies, concertos, and other concert works. Most of the film scores were written for British productions that had limited releases in the US. The US films he wrote scores for, including Disney’s *Swiss Family Robinson* and the two films mentioned below were produced by US controlled British Studios and had wider distribution. Chandos has been recording selections from Alwyn’s film scores and has issued three previous discs with some of the better known scores. None of the music is complete; it is mostly short selections from many different films, like Charles Gerhardt’s RCA film music recordings. Except for a few instances, most of the music in the 10 films in Volume 4 is reconstructions and arrangements by Philip Lane. All of the films are fairly obscure; and the music, like the films, is not very memorable.  

Many of Alwyn’s film scores sound similar to ones by Malcolm Arnold from the same period. Alwyn created scores that emphasized the film’s plotline and personalities. His signature style emphasized the brass section for a plot point or a character’s nobility. Strings added connective music.  

The best known film in this collection is *The Master of Ballantrae*, a 1953 swashbuckler starring Errol Flynn. This was part of a two-picture contract with Warner Brothers British studios that included the much better known pirate comedy *The Crimson Pirate*, starring Burt Lancaster. *The Crimson Pirate* score is delightful (Chandos 9959) and the *The Master of Ballantrae*, although more serious, has a similar, lively score that enhances the romantic and action elements of the film.  

*The Black Tent* (1950) involves some Arabian intrigue, and the score sounds middle-eastern as filtered through British sensibilities. *On Approval* (1944) is a film version of a drawing room comedy by Frederic Lonsdale whose cast included Beatrice Lillie. The selections include four tracks of dance music comprising some lively waltzes and polkas. The Prelude to *Fortune Is a Woman* has a romantic, sweeping theme. The ‘Mermaid’s Song’ written for the comedy fantasy *Miranda* was not used in the film. It’s a wordless song performed by soprano Charlotte Trepass that evokes a mermaid’s call.  

*Shake Hands with the Devil* (1959) starred James Cagney as a leader of the Irish rebellion. The music is action oriented, with folk melodies and grim funereal music that add to the film’s downbeat mood.  

The other music is forgettable from forgettable films, including the rarely shown RKO film *Saturday’s Island* (1952) mostly known for casting Linda Darnell and Tab Hunter as unlikely lost-islanders. *The Ship That Died of Shame* (1957) sounds nautical, and *They Flew Alone* (1941) sounds aerial. Both scores were useful in the films, but are not memorable.  

The most impressive music is the selections from the documentary *A City Sleeps*. The music was written before filming and sounds like a concert piece that was grafted onto the film.  

To add to your collection of Alwyn’s film music you might want to invest in this. The orchestra plays well, and conductor Gamba makes the music sound grander than it really is, mostly owing to Chandos’s reverberant soundstage.

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**ARMENGOL: Danzas Cubanas**  
Martin Camacho, p  
Urtext 268—61 minutes

Not only are Americans confused about what happens south of the border (think of the Brazilian Carmen Miranda if you’d “like to spend the weekend in Havana?”), but many of the regional genres were exported in Latin America itself. The music of Mario Ruiz Armengol is a case in point. He was born into a musical family in the important coastal city of Veracruz, Mexico, which has a very distinct musical tradition of its own. Like other coastal cities on the Gulf of Mexico, it took in influences from the Caribbean, and especially Cuba. Armengol is one of the Latin American composers whose works sits on the cusp between the classical (he studied at the National Conservatory) and the popular (work in radio)—he is in the Grove Dictionary.  

Martin Camacho is only the second to have recorded an entire disc of piano works by Ar-
mengol, in this case all 22 of the numbered Cuban Dances. These are more little character pieces, often with French harmonies, than simply dances; indeed, almost all of them have atmospheric titles (‘Old Memories, In the Cafe, Creole Lament, Melancholy Serenade’). Camacho chose to begin the program with the peppy ‘La Siete’, which harks back to ragtime. Most of the pieces are much more modern, and the final three are atonal. The combination of Armenti’s compositional lyricism and Camacho’s compelling interpretations may surprise you (these works were the subject of his doctoral study at the University of Miami). Take a listen, and see if it doesn’t become a familiar friend.

T MOORE

ARUTUINIAN: Piano Pieces
Armenian Dance; Pastoral; Theme & Variations; 3 Preludes; Prelude Poem; Polyphonic Sonata; Humoresque; 3 Pictures; Sonatina; 6 Moods; Album for Children
Hayk Milkyan—Grand Piano 718—63 minutes

Arutianian’s music is rather simple in harmony, and all pieces are very short and infused with folk elements. The most substantial work here is the Polyphonic Sonata, full of note clusters; it is intense and dramatic, reminiscent of Hindemith. The Album for Children is charming, though stern. It has an edge, but would be appropriate for intermediate pianists, like many pieces by Bartok.

Though the work is well crafted, Milkyan’s playing does not show much range in color. The craftsmanship of the works speaks for itself. The piano hints at a brassy quality—it may be the engineering, but it is distracting.

KANG

BABIN: 2-Piano Concerto; see BARTOK
BACH, CPE: Cantatas; see TELEMANN

BACH: Cantatas 12, 106, 131, 150
Vox Luminis/ Lionel Meunier
Alpha 258—85 minutes

The four works on this recording—Gottes Zeit is die Allerbeste Zeit (106), Nach dir, Herr, Verlanget Mich (150), Aus der Tiefen (131), and Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen (12)—are among the earliest of JS Bach’s cantatas. The first three most likely date from his years at Mühlhausen (1707–8), and the fourth was written in 1714 at Weimar. Bach’s classic Leipzig cantatas reflect the structural format promoted by poet and theologian Erdmann Neumeister (1671-1756), with alternating recitatives and arias in the manner of an Italian chamber cantata or operatic scene, often opening with a substantial chorus and concluding with a four-part chorale. The present works, in contrast, owe more to the formal model of the 17th-Century sacred concerto as developed from Schütz to Buxtehude. The Mühlhausen cantatas unfold as a tapestry of short sections rather than extended and developed movements. Where chorale melodies occur, as in 106 and 131, they appear as a strand of the texture, though as pre-existing musical material they must of necessity determine the structure of the music where they occur. They suggest an almost improvisational fluidity as the music so readily reflects the shifting expressive properties of the text; and of course, Bach’s technical mastery, even as a young man, is everywhere in evidence.

The small-scale instrumentation gives these works the intimate flavor of chamber music—a quality conveyed by these recorded performances. In Weinen, Klagen from Weimar, Bach comes closer to the Leipzig model with more extensive arias; but even here they are not linked by recitatives, and the one movement so designated could better be described as an accompanied recitative with arioso. Bach must have retained a high regard for this cantata, as many years later he reworked its first chorus as the ‘Crucifixus’ of the B minor Mass.

The young singers and players of Vox Luminis give very attractive performances, though perhaps not quite as seasoned or polished as the most celebrated exponents of this repertory. Director Lionel Meunier plays the recorder in 106 and sings in the other three cantatas. One voice per part is listed for 106. The other cantatas are sung by a double quartet. The recorded sound is generally excellent, but there are times when the balance seems to favor the instruments over the voices, and I think that a mistake.

Readers with a special interest in this early Bach cantata repertory will find much to admire in these performances.

GATENS

Enigma

The theme of Elgar’s Enigma Variations has been a subject of speculation. In the notes to its first performance Elgar said "The theme never appears." That is a play on words. The theme appears in every variation, because the theme is "never", from 'Rule Britannia'. Denis Stevens mentions this in his Autobiographical Fragments (reviewed N/D 2001).

May/June 2017
**Bach: Cantatas 58, 32, 57; Oboe d’Amore Concerto**
Hana Blazikova, s; Dominik Wörner, b; Kirchheim Bach Consort/Alfredo Bernardini
CPO 555 068—71 minutes

Among JS Bach’s church cantatas is a subset of works he designated “Concerto in Dialogo”. They include devotional conversations between the soul (soprano) and Jesus (bass). They could be described as mystical love duets. The three cantatas on this recording date from 1725 to 1727 and were intended for the season following Christmas. *Ach Gott, wie Manches Herzeleid* (58) is for the Sunday after New Year’s Day (1727). Some years do not have a Sunday between New Year’s Day and the Epiphany (January 6). That was the case in 1725, and it is likely that Bach wrote 58 to fill that gap for a later year. *Liebster Jesu, Mein Verlangen* (32) was written for January 13, 1726, the first Sunday after the Epiphany. The text alludes to the finding of the boy Jesus in the temple and forms a devotional parallel to the soul’s search for Jesus. *Selig ist der Mann* (57) was written for the Second Day of Christmas (December 26) of 1725. That is also the feast of St Stephen, who is mentioned briefly in the cantata’s text. Two of these three cantatas have voice parts for soprano and bass only. There are alto and tenor parts for the concluding chorale of 57, but not elsewhere in that work.

The Concerto in A for oboe d’amore and strings was probably written in 1721 for a performance at Schleiz. The score is lost, but around 1738 Bach adapted it as the Harpsichord Concerto in A (S 1055) for his own use with the Leipzig Collegium Musicum. The highly effective reconstruction heard here is by Wilfried Fischer. Alfredo Bernardini is the oboe d’amore soloist as well as director of this performance. It is probably not coincidental that all three of the cantatas include conspicuous obbligato parts for the oboe.

Apart from some raucous attacks by the strings, these performances are technically above reproach. Hana Blazikova and Dominik Wörner are model early music vocal soloists. Bernardini directs performances that are elegantly paced with great coherence and poise.

Readers interested in Bach’s dialog cantatas may wish to take note of a recording I reviewed a few years ago of 57, 152, and 49 sung by Dorothea Röschmann and Thomas Quasthoff (DG 10052; Mar/Apr 2008). Again, the performances are superb, and there is only one duplication of repertory between the two recordings.

**American Record Guide**
would take the Davies as the new benchmark recording of the alto version.

Choice between the two releases might also come down to their accompanying material. For Hyperion, the three cantatas are interlaced with the sinfonias to two other ones. These are orchestral introductions that Bach cobbled up from movements in his Brandenburg Concertos: an expansion of the first movement from Concerto No. 3 for Cantata 52 (Falsche Welt, dir Trau ich Nicht!), and an early form of the first movement of Concerto No. 1 for Cantata 174 (Ich Liebe den Hochsten von Ganzen Gemute).

Jaroussky’s two Bach cantatas are interspersed with two cantata rarities by Telemann. One depicts the agonies of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and then at the moment of his expiration on the cross. Their mix of moods is surprising, and Telemann’s responses to the words are carefully designed. It should be noted, however, that these two were originally written for bass and are here sung an octave up, to fit the alto voice.

Both releases are blessed with expert accompaniment in the cantatas. Numbers are almost identical: 23 (including the director) for Arcangelo, 24 for the Freiburgers. Both groups give fine period-instrument support in the cantatas, but Cohen’s group has a brighter, more spontaneous sound, vivaciously animating the two sinfonias.

In both cases, the sound is exemplary, in Hyperion’s case so much so that one is not even prompted to think about it. Both releases have splendid booklet notes, along with full texts and translations.

Bach: Lute Pieces
Johannes Monno, g
Hanssler 16085 [2CD] 100 minutes

Johannes Monno is a professor at the Stuttgart College of Music. I did not know him before hearing this release, but he is the real thing—an artist rather than a star.

This is a collection of all the works Bach wrote or arranged for lute—the four suites, a prelude, the fugue from the first violin sonata, and the Prelude, Fugue, and Allegro, originally for the Lautenwerk, a harpsichord-like instrument with gut strings and a resonating chamber to imitate the sound of a lute. Sets of all these are rather rare—most just record the suites (see M/A 2017 for a really excellent such recording by four students of Sefano Gron-
BACH: St Matthew Passion; 
BRUCKNER: Te Deum
Ernst Haefliger, narr; Walter Berry, Jesus; Agnes Giebel, s; Marga Häffgen, a; John van Kesteren, t; Franz Crass & Leo Ketelaars, b; Netherlands Radio Chorus; Boys' Choir of St Willibrord's Church, Amsterdam; Concertgebouw Orchestra/ Eugen Jochum

Annelies Kupper, Lucretia West, Lorenz Fehenberger, Kim Borg; Bavarian Radio/ Jochum Urania 121.320 [3CD] 3:43

Eugen Jochum (1902-87) was an outstanding conductor of the 20th Century and particularly noted as an interpreter of the works of Anton Bruckner. In the 1930s and 40s he established career-long artistic relationships with the Berlin Philharmonic and the Concertgebouw orchestra. He was also a notable operatic conductor. In 1934 he was appointed director of the Hamburg Opera and principal conductor of the Hamburg Philharmonic, where he flew under the Nazi radar, so to speak, and performed works by Bartok, Hindemith, and Stravinsky that were banned elsewhere in Germany. After the war he founded and trained the Bavarian Radio Symphony. Later in his career he served as principal conductor of the Bamberg Symphony and Conductor Laureate of the London Symphony.

Jochum’s discography includes two sets of the Bruckner symphonies, three sets each of the Beethoven and Brahms symphonies, the later Mozart symphonies, the London symphonies of Haydn, and the major choral works of Bach. Noel Goodwin, writing in New Grove, observes that Jochum’s Bach recordings, “while taking relatively little account of authentic performing practice, are marked by their intense spiritual conviction.” This recording of the St Matthew Passion (1965) illustrates that point.

Jochum brings to Bach’s masterpiece an air of romantic subjectivity, but not to the point of making it grotesque. The two choirs and orchestras are audibly large (the printed material with the recordings does not give numbers). The fully scored choruses are almost overwhelming in their massiveness, and recording levels seem uncomfortably high, almost to the point of distortion. I cannot describe the sound as clear, and the large numbers tend to produce a jumble of sound rather than a fine delineation of Bach’s part writing.

At its best, it can be very impressive. The ‘Sind Blitze’ chorus from near the end of Part I is almost frighteningly effective. Jochum comes close to making it sound more like Bruckner than Bach. Of course, the large chorus and orchestra magnify the difference in weight between the choruses and solo vocal movements that are more like chamber music. That difference is not as great in the case of period performances with small choirs or one voice to a part. Where the occasion calls for it, Jochum can elicit an impressively quiet choral sound, especially in certain chorales. Overall, tempos are on the slow side—especially the chorales. They are taken at the glacial tempos that were still customary in the mid 20th Century.

Jochum artificially imposes dynamics for expressive purposes. One of the more extreme examples is the chorale ‘Bin Gleich von dir Gewichen’ from Part II. It starts very quietly but has a massive crescendo and diminuendo. The “earthquake” recitative is another of the over-the-top moments with raucous double basses adding gravity to the sound and a distant-sounding organ playing the continuo harmonies with a full principal chorus. The following choral movement gets a loud and declamatory treatment. The string “halos” that accompany the words of Jesus sound extraordinarily ethereal.

It is instructive to compare this recording with two I reviewed a few years ago. A 1968 St Matthew Passion directed by Wolfgang Gön nenwein (EMI 941; Mar/Apr 2008) was dismissed by John Barker in his Bach Overview (Nov/Dec 1997) as “in the Kapellmeister tradition”. It is a sluggish, perfunctory, and unsubtle performance, but it does include some remarkable solo singing by Nicolai Gedda and Hermann Prey. An abridged St Matthew Passion from 1962 directed by Karl Böhm (Andromeda 9117; Sept/Oct 2014), while still “old school” in performance practice, is miles beyond Gön nenwein in artistry. Its soloists include Fritz Wunderlich (Evangelist and arias) and Christa Ludwig. Jochum’s soloists are all solid German and Dutch oratorio artists, but not of the standing of the luminaries just named. Ernst Haefliger sounds uncomfortable in the high tessitura of the Evangelist, where Wunderlich for Böhm makes that demanding part sound effortless.

The final disc of the present set is filled out with a 1954 performance of Bruckner’s Te Deum. Jochum is clearly on his home turf here. The performance has a remarkable drive and coherence. It is evidently a concert
Peter Watchorn’s affectionate biography (2007) of Isolde Ahlgrimm (1914-95) is about Ahlgrimm’s influence on the early-music revival in Vienna and beyond. Watchorn includes a critical survey of her recordings, going especially closely through her 1950s project to record all of Bach’s solo harpsichord music for Philips. He brings his experience as a harpsichord builder to assess the techniques and tone in her results. This book has just been reissued (2016) in a German translation, with more than 200 additional pages of supplementary material compiled by another Ahlgrimm pupil, Regula Winkelman. It reprints more of Ahlgrimm’s essays about historical performance practices and interpretation, plus some score examples transcribing her manner of improvisation in style. Watchorn as a record producer is also preparing a CD issue of Ahlgrimm’s Bach recordings, remastering them for Universal’s “Eloquence” series. That will be a must-have set when it appears. All of this is a fascinating background to Watchorn’s recordings as harpsichordist, grounded in his research and Baroque-styled improvisation.

I have heard most of Ahlgrimm’s recorded Bach, and all of Watchorn’s, over many years. His interpretations are obviously inspired by his study with her in Vienna and by her recordings. There is intense concentration, plus a grand rhetorical freedom to make the phrases speak in long lines. The tempos give the listener time to get everything. The articulation of fast runs is usually legato. Contrasts come from careful modifications of tempo. In the G minor Toccata (S 915) Watchorn decorates the final cadence in a manner similar to his teacher’s approach. I can’t think of any other current harpsichordists who play with this specific interpretive profile. It’s compelling.

He has recorded the toccatas before, for Hanssler (1999). Hearing that set again now for comparison, I concur with Rob Haskins (Nov/Dec 2000): “Watchorn’s playing has expressive depth, a certain seriousness that never turns pedantic; that’s the kind of playing that stands up to repeated listenings very well”. The new recording for his own Musica Omnia label has brighter tone and more powerful bass. He has relearned the pieces with an independent pedalboard harpsichord, though the pieces are all playable without feet. He also used pedal in some of the Well-Tempered Clavier. Ahlgrimm played pedal harpsichord in her mid-1950s recording of the toccatas, but Watchorn has much better instruments—no false-toned notes. The tuning is Bach’s nearly-equal but colorful temperament, from my own 2004 research.

There is much more. Interspersed among the toccatas, Watchorn plays Bach’s big preludes and fugues and fantasias, including the Chromatic Fantasy (S 903). He improvised the elaborations of chordal sections at the recording sessions, so it sounds fresh and immediate. Too many players treat this piece as a superficial vehicle to show off their fast fingers and synapses. Watchorn makes even the fastest parts sound poignant and noble, like seriously monumental music.

The 11-minute Prelude and Fugue in A minor (S 894) is the one that Bach reworked as the Triple Concerto. It’s irresistibly exciting here. The Pastoral (S 590) is usually played on organ. Its sorrowful third movement is a delicate treat on harpsichord. There are shorter preludes and fugues here as well. Watchorn gave us the G major Prelude (S 902) before, as an appendix to his WTC2 set (recorded 2009). The new take in the present set is a minute faster, and has an easier flow.

For the Fantasy and Fugue in A minor (S 944) Watchorn includes a second improvised take of the fantasia, putting it as an appendix at the end of Disc 3. The booklet says he practices improvisation daily. Except for the harmonic structure (Bach wrote down merely ten bars of thick chords), his two performances don’t sound like the same piece. Another improvisatory example for this piece is Ahlgrimm’s arrangement as printed in the Watchorn-Winkelman book. This range of interpretation is as it ought to be: the art of fresh music, fantasy.

Watchorn’s series of Bach’s harpsichord music is scheduled to be finished this year. His production values are of consistently high quality in sound and program notes. The present set is budget-priced for the amount of

**BACH: Toccatas, Fantasias, Preludes, Fugues, Pastoral**

Peter Watchorn, hpsi
Musica Omnia 512 [3CD] 165 minutes

Printed material with this recording is skimpy: just a two-panel inlay giving artists and track list.

**GATENS**

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May/June 2017
music that you get. Grab this—and any previous volumes you have been missing.

B LEHMAN

**BACH: Solo Violin Sonatas & Partitas**

Leos Cepicky
Nimbus 6331 [2CD] 135 minutes

Movses Pogossian
New Focus 178 [3CD] 172 minutes

Partita 2; **PENDERECKI: La Follia; PROKOFIEFF: Solo Sonata; YSAYE: Solo Sonata 5**

Alekksandra Kuls
Dux 1145—65 minutes

Sonata 3; **BARTOK: Solo Sonata; BOULEZ: Anthemes I•II**

Michael Barenboim
Accentus 30405—79 minutes

Bach’s music for unaccompanied violin is a remarkable achievement. It is remarkable because it advanced the harmonic and polyphonic capabilities of the instrument far beyond anything that anyone had imagined before, and it is just as remarkable that this music that is nearly as demanding on the listener as it is on the player has become and remains so popular. The list of recordings of these works, both as complete sets and as individual works, is dauntingly long and includes many of the most distinguished violinists of the last three centuries (Joseph Joachim recorded three movements in 1903). So, these sets come up against some stiff competition.

Leos Cepicky takes a middle-of-the-road approach to the sonatas. He avoids extremes of emotions but does not shirk on a little drama where needed. Still, I can think of other violinists who have taken a similar approach and done much better (Nathan Milstein on EMI: May/June 1959, July/Aug 2001; Henryk Szeryng on DG). Cepicky plays a violin made by Jan Baptista Spidlen in 1990.

Movses Pogossian believes that slowness equals profundity. Although slower tempos can accommodate more nuances than faster ones, merely slowing down does not add expression. His slow movements are exquisitely and his playing is monochromatic and inexpressive.

The other violinists just chose to record single works. Aleksandra Kuls won first prize at the Joseph Szigeti Violin and Viola Competition in 2012 and won awards at the Henryk Wieniawski Competition in 2011. She graduated with distinction from the Music Academy in Crakow in 2015, where she had studied with Kaja Danzczowska. Kuls plays the Partita 2, which closes with the famous Chaconne. Like Cepicky, she takes a middle-of-the-road approach to the piece. The most unusual work here is Krysztof Penderecki’s *La Follia*, which was written in 2013. The work supposedly is a tribute to the great violinist composers of the baroque. It has an improvisatory character and gives the soloist plenty of opportunities to show off. It is written in a modernist style, but not the avant-garde style the composer was famous for in the 1960s. It is full of empty gestures. The other two works are by two of the most significant composers for solo violin in the 20th Century. Kuls selects Sonata 5 from Eugene Ysaye’s set of six solo sonatas. Each of the sonatas is dedicated to a violinist friend of the composer, and each friend is of a different nationality. Sonata 5 is dedicated to Ysaye’s former pupil, quartet partner, and fellow Belgian Mathieu Crickboom. This performance is very fine and technically immaculate but not exceptional. She plays Prokofieff’s lovely but lightweight solo sonata with the occasional stylish touch. The piece was written originally for violin section, not a single violin. I finally was able to find a performance of the original by the London Musici directed by Mark Stephenson, and that is more effective. The melodic lines unsupported by double stopping or chords to supply harmony have more heft when played by an ensemble. Kuls plays a violin attributed to Peter Guarnerius of Venice (c 1750).

Michael Barenboim is the son of Daniel Barenboim and pianist Elena Bashkirova. He is a very talented violinist whose playing is immaculate and who gives no hint of strain playing this difficult music. He is a thoughtful programmer too. Bartok’s solo sonata and Bach’s Solo Sonata 3 are here because Bartok heard Yehudi Menuhin play that very Bach sonata before he wrote his own solo sonata for Menuhin. I am also happy to report that he plays the original quarter tones in the finale of the Bartok. His playing is very clear and analytical, which is perfect for all of the works he plays here. Aside from that, a little more fire and passion would be welcome.
BARTOK: 2 Piano Concerto; BABBIN: Concerto
Aglia Genova & Liuben Dimitrov; Dobri Paliev & Plamen Todorov; perc
Bulgarian Radio/ Yordan Kamdzhalov
CPO 555001—52 minutes

Bartok’s sonata for two pianos and percussion is an acknowledged 20th Century chamber masterpiece, written in 1937 and premiered by Bartok and his wife Dita Pasztory in January 1938. He made the concerto version in 1940. The very large orchestra is composed of 2 flutes (1 doubles piccolo), 2 oboes (1 doubles English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons (1 doubles contra bassoon), 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, celeste, and strings. Bartok was a master of orchestration; and with only a few slight modifications of the piano parts he is able to balance the two grand pianos and two percussionists (no modifications to their parts) with a large array of instruments. He adds a wealth of new colors to the original material, while retaining all that makes it such a masterpiece.

Victor Babin’s Concerto for two pianos gets its world premiere recording here, though it is noted to be in the Contiguglia Brothers repertoire. It was written, like Bartok’s, for the composer and his wife. Vita Vronsky (1909-92) and Babin (1908-72) were considered among the best in the world in their heyday. They had a friend and mentor in Sergei Rachmaninoff, and their recordings of his music, though hard to find, are well worth searching out. Babin’s concerto has many Russian overtones (as it should) and also some similarities to Bartok. There are some American elements as well—Gershwin came to mind a few times. Brilliant and tuneful, this is a very easy work to enjoy.

Genova and Dimitrov have been active for over 20 years; they are one of the best duos in the world today. Their 13 CDs on CPO encompass a huge range of styles and composers. They have searched out many items beyond the standard repertoire, and I have made a number of discoveries listening to their records. Their booklet notes are always both informative and interesting, and CPO’s recording is always top drawer. Kamdzhalov is an able accompanist and elicits the appropriate wide range of orchestral colors and sounds. The balance and positions of pianos, percussion, and orchestra here creates a wonderful sound stage that will bring me back to this again and again.

HARRINGTON

BARTOK: Piano Quartet; DOHNANYI: Piano Quartet; KODALY: Intermezzo
Notos Quartet
RCA 41188—63 minutes

Hungarian chamber music. The composers were friends, and these pieces are rare. This is the first recording of the Bartok and maybe the second of the Dohnanyi (Nov/Dec 2004).

Dohnanyi wrote it when he was 14 (finished when he was 16), but it was never published. It had a private performance in 1894 but seems to have been forgotten since. We know Dohnanyi’s two piano quintets quite well, but the piano quartet (in F-sharp minor) is never heard. It is very Brahmsian and quite pleasant but not really great. Still, pleasant Brahmsian chamber music is always welcome in my house!

The Kodaly serves here as an intermezzo between the two big pieces. It’s only 5 minutes, and it can’t really aspire to greater heights.

The Bartok (C minor, Op. 20) was played here from the original manuscript. It really sounds about the same as the Dohnanyi—Bartok had not yet developed his special sound. It sounds Brahmsian, like the others; but Bartok didn’t have the Brahms warmth and melody and tends to make the musicians scramble. Again, I can only say that this music is pleasant and appealing and welcome wherever people like the Brahmsian influence.

The Notos Quartet (two men and two women, all young) has been praised to the skies by Schlomo Mintz and Zubin Mehta, among others. They are German and based in Berlin, though they have spent a lot of time in England. They are really good communicators and make this music sound more important than I suspect it really is. Their sound is strong but warm—very German. It suits these composers well.

I was surprised to see the RCA label here. Apparently Sony is using it for German groups (at least), partly because BMG was a German company and although taken over by Sony is identified with the RCA label.

VROON

BEETHOVEN: Diabelli Variations
John O’Conor, p
Steinway 30054—53 minutes

It seems a bold statement these days to issue a recording of these variations with no coupling, especially when many competitors offer substantial bonuses. Of course, if the performance
is truly fantastic such a transgression is instantly forgiven.

John O’Conor is a veteran pianist with impressive Beethoven credentials, having recorded a fine series for Telarc several years back. That did not include the Diabelli, and it seems logical that we be given that now, with the advantage of the pianist’s mature thoughts on the challenging masterpiece.

Steinway has supplied a recording of resplendent sound for their instrument. O’Conor is apparently not interested in contributing just another recording to the many now available. From the very start he shows mastery with his subtle handling of subito piano and as much color as possible from his instrument. Every variation is given a character of its own, yet the structure builds without any self-conscious interpretive impositions. In addition, he brings great expressivity to the more lyrical variations and makes spare use of the pedal.

The Diabelli Variations is not an easy work to tackle, either as a pianist or as a listener. It has none of the instantly recognizable thematic material that grabs the heartstrings and rarely elicits more than academic appreciation from audiences. As with most of the composer’s later works, the head is well served, but the heart only sporadically so. O’Conor’s attempts to rectify this do not always work, but the effort is there and the accomplishment better than most.

If you require that your Diabelli disc be filled completely, this may not do the job. If you want an excellent traversal of the piece, it definitely finds a position near the top. Can one have too many? Probably not, so make sure you give this one a try.

BECKER

BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonatas 4, 8, 30, 31, 32
Paavali Jumppanen
Ondine 1298 [2CD] 119 minutes

This outstanding recording is the final installment in Finnish pianist Paavali Jumppanen’s Beethoven cycle. I have not heard the previous ones, but two have inspired enthusiastic reviews from Sang Woo Kang in ARG (July/Aug 2014, Sept/Oct 2015). I fully agree with Mr Kang and would go further to say that, on the basis of this evidence, Jumppanen may well be one of the finest Beethoven interpreters alive.

All these performances are full of character and deeply felt. Jumppanen has a strong touch and can produce some powerful sounds. Yet he also commands a wide range of dynamics that he employs with telling effect. His management of timing is masterly, especially in slow movements, as in Sonata 4 (Op. 7), where he is very free with tempo, rests, and note values, but never in an arbitrary way. He truly lives the music, and all pianistic and musicological considerations are subordinated to his expressive goals. He has been recorded in excellent, almost lush sound. Occasionally he can be heard breathing.

Two minor curiosities deserve comment. In III and IV of Sonata No. 4 Jumppanen adds notes (ornaments or bridge passages) in a few places. I was quite shocked, as I had never before heard anyone do such a thing in a Beethoven sonata. Jumppanen has studied musicology at Harvard, and I trust his practice can be justified on historical grounds, though he does not do so in his engaging liner notes.

Mr Kang mentioned with approval similar improvisations in the pianist’s recording of the first three sonatas (Op. 2). Yet I wonder whether they really contribute anything worthwhile. These were the only moments in these engrossing performances where I temporarily forgot about the music and felt reminded that there was a clever and historically informed pianist playing.

Also, the biblical quotation “Es ist vollbracht!” on the cover, while probably intended as a reference to the passion-like recitative in III of Sonata 31, could be understood as a sly self-congratulation on completing this Beethoven cycle. The rose on the cover could be intended for Jesus, Beethoven, or Jumppanen—or perhaps nobody in particular. But forget about the rose. This recording demands to be heard.

REPP

BEETHOVEN: Quartets 5+13
Cremona Quartet
Audite 92.685 [SACD] 71 minutes

This is Volume VI of the quartets from the Cremona. I reviewed Volumes II & III (M/J 2014, N/D 2014), and others have been covered by Greg Pagel. I feel I have a good sense of this group. Their playing is generally bracing and clean, with fairly fast tempos. While they are not what anyone would call “inexpressive”, their approach tends to be straightforward, one might say youthful. Their performances of the early quartets (Op. 18) seem quite fine, and here in No. 5 (the A major) the crisp, off-the-string articulation in I is wonderfully light and
Haydn-esque. The finale is taken at a tempo that shows the Cremona's technical expertise. The music doesn't gain much from the blinding speed, so when I asked myself why they played at such a pace, I came up with this answer: because they could!

I’m less happy with Quartet 13 (B-flat, Op. 130). For me the short introduction to I should include an element of pain, of regret, of sadness, but here it seems too straight. The opening theme (repeated notes, then a leap up a fourth) certainly is on the positive side, but we find (mainly in the development) that the optimism is tinged with lots of questions and uncertainty. This emotional complexity, so important in late Beethoven, seems in short supply here. The middle movements go better. The presto is flown through, taking just over two minutes, but the scherzo (poco scherzoso) and German dance are lovely. The cavatina is plagued with poor balances; accompanying voices often overshadow the melody. The finale (not the *Grosse Fuge*) is also lightweight and nicely done.

The publicity for the Cremona likes to compare them to the Quartetto Italiano. They’re not there yet, but the earliest recordings of the Italiano were faster and more aggressive than the later ones we so much admire. Perhaps the same thing will happen with this group.

**ALTHOUSE**

**BEETHOVEN: Quartet 13; Grosse Fuge; Piano Quintet**
Edding Quartet; Northernlight
Phi 23—76 minutes

The unusual pairing of Beethoven’s Op. 130 quartet with the very early piano and wind quintet, written nearly 30 years before, sets the compositional development of Beethoven in high relief.

The Edding Quartet performs the quartet as originally composed, with the Grosse Fuge as the final movement, further contrasting the weight and depth of Beethoven’s late period with the lightness and simplicity of the three-movement quintet. They perform on period instruments and have made a name for themselves in the classical and early romantic repertory. Their performance here is quite good. They capture the many extremes of style, sound, and emotion with an impressive unity of musical vision.

The Quintet for piano, oboe, clarinet, horn, and bassoon was inspired by Mozart’s brilliant quintet but never achieved its popularity, either in concert hall or recording studio. To hear this piece played on historical instruments is unusual indeed. The Northernlight ensemble does a splendid job, with facile virtuosity, convincing musical style, and an easy camaraderie. The wind players are quite remarkable (period wind playing often suffers in both sound and intonation). Nicolas Chesmail’s horn playing is especially fine. It’s easy to forget that he’s playing hand-horn until the solo in the slow movement—and even then, he uses the shortcomings of the instrument to enhance the phrasing of the melody. Bassoonist Julien Deborde’s warm sound and excellent intonation are an unexpected treat. This recording is worth a listen, especially for fans of period instruments.

**PFEIL**

**BEETHOVEN: Symphonies 1+7**
Vienna Philharmonic/ Nicholas Harnoncourt
Orfeo 924161—68 minutes

One can usually expect well-characterized performances from Nicholas Harnoncourt. Not all of them work, but when they do, they usually bring out interesting and unexpected qualities. In the case at hand, we have performances from the 2003 Salzburg Festival, Harnoncourt’s first Beethoven concert there since the 1990s, when he appeared with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and recorded a complete cycle of Beethoven symphonies. One reviewer described those readings as “shot through with exemplary subjectivity, dark embers, passion, and an often frightening bitterness.”

Most of that applies to these readings of the First and Seventh with the Vienna Philharmonic, though I would substitute rustic for frightening bitterness. Both are examples of Harnoncourt at his most interesting. They are linear in structure, with the weight and texture one expects from the Vienna Philharmonic, but not the usual lushness (possibly because of reduced strings?). Beethoven’s early symphonies tend to look backward and forward at the same time. This performance of the First is definitely looking ahead, and each movement has its own character. The opening of I is slow, deliberate, and somewhat drawn out. The music after the introduction is moderately slow in tempo, and in some ways gentle in mien. It has energy, but one would never call it zippy. II combines a dance character with an attractive lift off the
downbeats and nice swaying to the triplets. III is quick and in its way catchy. Its trios are deliberate and contemplative, but not too slow, and Harmoncourt nicely brings out the violins behind the oboes’ hynalike melody. The opening to IV is commanding, yet it gives the impression of sneaking into the fast section, which is fast, spirited, and lighthearted, with strong accents.

The Seventh leans to the rustic and carries a good deal of weight without sounding heavy. The slow opening sounds tired at first, then muscular, followed by a big downbeat before the flute solo. The prominent trumpets are well supported by the horns. Toward the end, the menacing passage in the low strings darkens the mood slightly. The Allegretto opens quietly with the theme in the cello mysterious and some interesting tonal colors in the linear orchestral textures. Like much of the performance, even a straightforward movement like this is a little quirky. The touch of “period” string tone is unusual for the Vienna Philharmonic, especially in an intimate section with separate violin notes playing the theme against a busy counterpoint. The Presto is quick and darting, a little heavier than usual, and again includes some interesting sounds. The trios are not too slow or as indulgent as some I’ve heard recently. Note the swells in the clarinets and the louder than usual trumpets. In the finale, the string lines break down in a way that sounds almost like a threshing machine in spots. The downbeats are strong and the texture is less cohesive, producing some interesting colors and effects. I have always found Beethoven’s Seventh too overt and somewhat repetitious, but Harmoncourt makes it interesting to me. His ideas may or may not appeal to people who like the symphony more than I do.

The sound is good for a concert recording. The booklet notes discuss Harmoncourt and the history of Beethoven performances at the Salzburg Festival, but not the music.

The performance itself is competent but not revelatory. I takes 15 minutes, a promising length, not breathless and madcap like the HIPsters and not ponderous or soggy; but there’s a lack of tension or struggle—it’s just too slick and toothless. II is great, and almost every orchestra gets it right. III is a bit hasty at 15 minutes, but is sweetly tranquil and reverent. The tricky string pizzicatos at the hushed heart of III are well coordinated, just off the beat—perfect. IV takes 24 minutes and is also excellent, and again almost every conductor gets this right, so long as they avoid any preening originality for its own sake.

The dynamic range is limited and climaxes are more implied than felt or heard, no matter the volume setting. These concert recordings are otherwise clean and free of audience noise and applause. The balance of soloists, choir, and orchestra is realistic, with slight spotlighting of soloists.

The producer, Wolfgang Fraissinet, extols the audiophile quality of this disc and the “highest dynamics from all sound sources”. Dynamic is an empty fad word as most people use it, but if he means a great difference between soft and loud, then he heard something other than this disc because it has a surprising lack of dynamic range for a modern recording. By their effort and timbre, I can tell when the musicians are laboring mightily, but it’s scarcely louder than the quiet passages. The transition to the finale demonstrates this most vividly: the brass “horror” fanfare usually startles me, but here there’s little difference in volume between the fade out of III and the abrupt launch of IV. Unless you must have every 9th out there, this is strictly a souvenir for the hometown fans.

BEETHOVEN: Violin Sonatas 2, 4, 6
Zanta Hofmeyr; Ilia Radoslavov, p
Blue Griffin 415—58 minutes

Here are one early and two middle-period violin sonatas by Beethoven. These are fine performances, a bit more laid-back and less incisive than I like, but still very good. South African violinist Zanta Hofmeyr and Bulgarian pianist Ilia Radoslavov make a fine team. They have obviously integrated their parts intelligently. On top of this, they are beautifully recorded by Blue Griffin at its Lansing, Michigan studio; and their piano sounds wonderful.
BERG: Wozzeck
Roman Trekel (Wozzeck), Anne Schwanewilms (Marie), Marc Molomot (Captain), Nathan Berg (Doctor), Gordon Gietz (Drum-major), Robert McPherson (Andres), Katherine Ciesinski (Margot); Houston Symphony/ Hans Graf
Naxos 660390—98 minutes

Though it had its world premiere back in 1925, many people still consider Wozzeck contemporary music. The crushing brass chords, the non-melodic *sprechstimme* vocal lines, the inventiveness of the orchestration—not to mention the use of atonality—all combine to thrill a listener or drive him near the abyss of sanity.

There are a lot of Wozzecks and Maries today: people who are on the outer edge of existence, striving to survive any way they can against outrageous odds. The events of the plot could have taken place yesterday. When we first meet Wozzeck, it’s clear he’s on the brink of insanity. What kinds of experiments has the sinister doctor been subjecting him to? It’s never made clear either in Berg’s libretto or Georg Buchner’s original play. Surely Wozzeck didn’t act this way when he and Marie first met. Marie is close to the breaking point herself. She has a son by Wozzeck that she can barely raise, and then there is the boredom of her existence with little education and few means of bettering herself.

Wozzeck has been very fortunate in its recorded history; each recording seems to get closer to realizing Berg’s musical demands. I was actually frightened by the music when I first heard Karl Bohm’s studio reading (with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Evelyn Lear) on DG. At the tender age of 10, the weird creepiness of Wozzeck’s drowning scene was too much for me. All the same I was fascinated by the score and the plot (which my parents would not have approved of) and I found myself drawn to other recordings and performances.

Naxos’s concert recording of the Houston Grand Opera production from 2013 is musically and dramatically superb, especially so since this is not a studio performance. Roman Trekel’s career has been mostly based in Europe, but he has made a number of lieder records for various labels and has appeared in any number of DVD opera productions. He is a fine vocal actor. He sings Berg’s tortured vocal lines as accurately as anyone I’ve heard without ranting or screaming (an easy temptation in this part). The fact that he is a native German speaker helps him tremendously in this very declamatory role. Anne Schwanewilms not only acts Marie well, but sings her music beautifully—rare in a role that sometimes is cast with a soprano well past her vocal prime. Her Bible-reading scene at the beginning of Act III is piercing in its intensity. Schwanewilms easily nails the high C here and elsewhere. Marc Molomot and Nathan Berg make the Captain and Doctor’s music sound musical without losing the stinging parody that colors so much of their scenes together and with Wozzeck. The other singers are all excellent and make more of their parts than many another recording I’ve heard.

Hans Graf leads his forces brilliantly. He finds the sweep of the piece from the first scene and doesn’t let go until the final chilling measures. The orchestral interlude after Wozzeck’s drowning scene (the only requiem Wozzeck and Marie and, by extension, their child will ever have) builds to a shattering climax. The sound is very warm, without the tininess of many studio performances. No libretto is supplied, but we are directed to a Naxos site for one. Even if one is a fluent German speaker, one should have a libretto for this: the words are that important.

Wozzeck is not an easy opera. In its exploration of the madness and victimization of the central characters it can be heartbreaking and crushing. It is here. I wouldn’t place this above the Bohm, Dohnanyi, or Abbado, but certainly at that level.

REYNOLDS

BERG: 3 Pieces; see Collections

BERNSTEIN: Symphonies 1+2
Jennifer Johnson Cano, mz; Jean-Yves Thibaudet, p; Baltimore Symphony/ Marin Alsop
Naxos 559790—60 minutes

After I finished listening to this album, I said to someone, “Why is it difficult for me to take Leonard Bernstein’s serious music seriously?” In this instance, once I reviewed my notes taken over two days, the answer was clear: because Alsop’s interpretation is so mediocre.

Listened to casually, the album sounds pretty good. Mellow Jennifer Johnson Cano is nicely balanced against the orchestra; Jean-Yves Thibaudet is terrific—plenty of expression and so rhythmically on. The sound is rich and clear in 1 (*Jeremiah*). In 2 (*Age of Anxiety*) the richness masks articulation; here the engineers place the orchestra at a bit more of a dis-
No. 1 (1942) is one of the most underrated American symphonies. Annotator Frank DeWald’s excellent notes quote Bernstein as saying in 1977, “The work is about the struggle that is born of the crisis of our century, a crisis of faith.” Much of this deeply felt and dramatic work is based on Hebraic chants. ‘Prophecy’ is a portentous movement of dire warning. The fierce scherzo, ‘Profanation’, portrays devastation and bedlam. ‘Lamentation’ for mezzo and orchestra mourns the destruction of the Jewish temple with texts from Lamentations.

No. 2 (1949/65) is set to Auden’s eponymous poem of conversations between four people in a bar. With its prominent piano part, it is as close to a piano concerto as Bernstein came. Shortly after a quiet prologue for clarinets come two sets of variations: ‘Seven Ages’ and ‘Seven Stages’. ‘Dirge’ begins with a tone row in the piano and is the most romantic part of the work. ‘Masque’ is a jazz piece for piano, bass, and percussion. The orchestra returns for a declamatory ‘Epilogue’ that anticipates Bernstein’s score to On the Waterfront. Age of Anxiety is more crafted and cerebral than inspired—not an uncommon criticism of ‘theme and variation’ works. The pretentious use of jazz and self-indulgent piano noodling falls flat for me, and I could do without ‘Masque’ entirely. There are good and powerful ideas here that anticipate Bernstein’s theater pieces, but none of the greatness of Jeremiah.

No recording of these works that I know touches Bernstein’s 1960s readings with the New York Philharmonic (Sony, hereon B1). When inspired, as it often was under Bernstein, that orchestra’s brass section had a broad, muscular sound I have heard nowhere else. Combine that with the strings’ expansive tone and the woodwinds’ swagger, and you have the perfect vehicle for American composers like Bernstein, William Schuman, Roy Harris, Aaron Copland, and Samuel Barber. (If only someone would release a tape of the Bernstein-NY performance of the Harris Seventh.) B1 of Jeremiah is a classic, and Jennie Tourel owned the mezzo role. The drive, urgency, and weight lent to Age of Anxiety almost sells that work. I like the way pianist Philippe Entremont’s free-wheeling and imaginative playing parallels much of Bernstein’s approach, though his apparent lack of affinity for jazz will bother many listeners.

Marin Alsop’s performances of these works are excellent and brilliantly played and recorded. They dig in less than B1 and are more straightforward and lighter in attack and weight. Where the older recordings are imposing and vibrant, Alsop is decorous, precise, clean, and polite. Sometimes she stirs up quite a brew but never quite the magic. The excellent Baltimore Symphony can be forgiven if its lighter strings and crisper brass do not match that unique New York sound—no one else does either.

‘Prophecy’ in Jeremiah is a little faster and more flowing than B1. It passes over things a bit, but it delivers an angry, powerful climax. ‘Lamentation’ fares about as well. Alsop’s faster tempos in the outer movements keep things moving, but B1’s slower tempos work better in such profound music. Mezzo Jennifer Johnson’s vibrato at the outset is not quite right but gets better as the music goes on. Alsop’s ‘Profanation’ is slower, more deliberate, and far less exciting than the wild, gripping one in B1, though the sleekness of the lyrical string tune near the end makes some amends.

Alsop’s Age of Anxiety is disciplined, clean, neat, and straightforward. The jazz inflections are treated up-front without any particular
attempt to overstate or put any kind of “coolness” or charge into them. Jean-Yves Thibaudet’s exceptional accuracy and clarity are on the same page as Alsop, and he seems even more at home with the jazz elements of the piece. It’s a very good performance, but only B1 works for me in this symphony.

Bernstein’s New York recordings (July/Aug 1992, July/Aug 1999) are not replaced by his second traversal, with the Israel Philharmonic—an orchestra that seems less at home with these works. His second Jeremiah is more lyrical but less powerful and imposing. The slow movements are faster to their detriment, and the slower tempo of ‘Profanation’ robs it of its energy and flair. Christa Ludwig is more operatic but less powerful and imposing. The slow serious and literal, as well as less charged, and the slower tempo of ‘Profanation’ robs it of its

The Hebraic text. The Israel atic than Tourel, but seems less at home with the Hebraic text. The Israel Anxiety is more serious and literal, as well as less charged, and I find Lukas Foss’s pianism rather square.

James Judd’s readings seem modeled on B1: Jeremiah (Nov/Dec 2004) better than an Anxiety plagued by poor sound, less adept playing, and stilled pianism (Nov/Dec 2003). Sitkovetsky’s Anxiety is somewhat similar to B1, but the BBC brass are not as “right” as on B1. Mr O’Connor told me privately that Sitkovetsky’s upfront Anxiety is his favorite (Nov/Dec 1993 & Jan/Feb 2002). Sitkovetsky’s Anxiety is dull (Jan/Feb 2001). Litton’s is well played but nothing special (Jan/Feb 1992). I do not know the recordings by Shapirra (Nov/Dec 1990) and Jacoby (Nov/Dec 2010, Nov/Dec 1998).

BOLCOM: Piano Rags
Spencer Myer
Steinway 30041—72 minutes

This is one gorgeously played and engineered album, and the music is sophisticated and charming. William Bolcom has done for rags what Chopin did for polonaises, staying true to the rhythms of a popular dance while adding to it the touch of a skilled composer and harmonist.

‘Raggin’ Rudi’ starts with an atonal flourish that quickly gives way to a traditional, very diatonic, and very catchy theme. ‘Fields of Flowers’ opens with a melody in thirds reminiscent of a Scarlatti sonata before the main theme comes in with its swung eighth notes and Hawaiian feel. Then there’s ‘Epithalamium,’ which yanks apart and reassembles those classic rhythms into something like a Picasso painting where the viewer looks at a person from several angles at once.

The Garden of Eden is a quartet of rags. ‘Old Adam’ is a swaggering number with a few tender phrases for contrast; Myer does an amazing job at making the big-footed left-hand lines sound weighty but not ponderous. ‘The Eternal Feminine’ has both the beautiful blush of innocence and a marvelous strength of heart. Jittery repeated notes and a sense of chromatic drama mark man’s reaction to ‘The Serpent’s Kiss’, while slithering—and then steely—thirds depict the serpent itself. ‘Through Eden’s Gates’ is melancholy and tender.

‘Poltergeist’, the second of the famous Ghost Rags, often requires the listener to provide ragtime’s steady pulse with his imagination, much like a radio play that leaves the appearance of the characters and settings to the audience. ‘Knockout’ has some deliciously off-kilter rhythms and requires the pianist to rap on various parts of the piano; its gungently harmonized center section, relatively free rhythmically, acts as a nice palate cleanser. While we’re on the subject, the only warning I might give about this program is that, for those of us who enjoy ragtime on occasion but aren’t all-out enthusiasts, it might work best in smaller portions or as intelligent background music.

‘Dream Shadows’, another of the Ghost Rags, is as shifting and surreal as its name implies, but the ragtime style keeps it grounded. ‘Estela: Rag Latino’ uses some fascinating mixed meters and sharp dissonances to make one spicy dish. The lighthearted ‘Brooklyn Dodge (A James P. Johnson Stride)’ ends the recital with a touch of stride piano—tenths in the left hand instead of octaves, thicker chords, tremolos, and jazzier harmonies.

Spencer Myer’s playing is truly outstanding; his dynamics, phrasing, and use of rubato are all well considered, and he’s sensitive to every compositional and structural detail. His tone is gloriously warm and burnished, and the acoustics flatter him with their evenness and clarity; the piano is represented perfectly. Get this one!

BORODIN: Piano Quintet; Cello Sonata;
Quartet 2
Goldner Quartet; Piers Lane, p
Hyperion 68166—78 minutes

The wonderful and familiar quartet has been reviewed 20 times in ARG (at least), and this reading of it is not the best and will not cause you to turn away from the one you already have—though it is not bad.

May/June 2017
The cello sonata is very rare, partly because Borodin never finished it and partly because it is early (1860—before he found his “voice”). The recording here is of a reconstruction by Michael Goldstein (who died in 1989). The recording David Moore reviewed (Koch, Jan/Feb 1989) was based on the same reconstruction but with further changes by the cellist, Dorothy Lawson. It is based on a Bach solo violin sonata—not the kind of thing we often hear from a Russian composer. It’s pleasant but not compelling.

That brings us to the piano quintet. Borodin studied in Germany, and the influence of composers like Schubert and Mendelssohn is hard to miss, especially in early works (this is 1862; the quartet is from 1881). It’s a good piece, and this is a good recording. Still, I prefer the Pihtipudas Quintet cause Borodin never finished it and partly because it is early (1860—before he found his voice). The recording David Moore reviewed (Koch, Jan/Feb 1992). That was recorded in 1990, but the sound is fuller and richer, as is the German-style playing. The new recording is slower but less inflected, too smoothed out.

The Goldner Quartet is from Australia, as is the pianist originally (he lives in England). There is something neat, clean, and English about all this—which means it is somewhat lacking in emotion and warmth. But if you can’t find other recordings, try this so you won’t miss Borodin’s early chamber music. It’s better than early chamber music by most other Russian composers, though it only sounds slightly Russian. (See also Mar/Apr 2011.)

Axel Borup-Jorgensen (1924-2012) was born in Denmark but grew up in Sweden, where the literature and landscape had a strong influence on his music. He wrote more than 150 orchestral, chamber, and vocal works, making a speciality of pieces for percussion and guitar. He was the first Danish composer to study at Darmstadt, but never embraced serial or electroacoustic music. His style is very refined and subtle—a lyric modernism with a fondness for broken chord textures involving upward moving arpeggios. There is also a certain static quality apparent in many of these pieces, said to be a result of his love of the Swedish countryside, where “he used to walk, cycle, and row on long trips during the summer holidays and lose himself in the special stillness that characterizes the open expanses of deserted countryside.”

Winter Music, for organ and percussion, is a dramatic depiction of the darkness and violence of a Swedish winter. Strophen and Triologi have poems by Rilke and Nietzsche for solo voice and organ; Für Cembalo and Organ uses the unusual combination of harpsichord and organ; the dance-like sound of the harpsichord makes for a fascinating contrast with the sustained organ sound, and it works.

This is gentle, atmospheric avant-garde music, well-played and recorded. Notes on the composer and music, but no organ specifications.

BRAHMS: Horn Trio; Violin Sonatas
Bojidara Kouzmanova-Vladar, v; Wolfgang Vladar, hn; Magda Amara, p
Paladino 78—72 minutes

When an album cover shows a horn player in front, other musicians behind, and when the Brahms Horn Trio is listed as the first piece, my first impression is that it is a horn recording. Despite the fact that the other works on this album are the first two Brahms violin sonatas, it took a while to realize that this is Bulgarian violinist Bojidara Kouzmanova-Vladar’s recording—not her Viennese horn-player husband Wolfgang Vladar’s.

The Horn Trio (1865) is, of course, one of the great works of Western classical music. I have a few favorite accounts, perhaps especially the one by dark-toned horn player Wolfgang Tomboeck, his violinist son Johannes, and pianist Madoka Inui (July/Aug 2005: 237); but also ones by Brain-Saltzpeeter-Preedy (Mar/Apr 2001: 243), Barnewitz-Almond-Wolfram (July-Aug 2001: 244), and Ruske-Frautschi-Pruzman (May/June 2011: 211). They all seem to relish dark sounds, take their time with slow passages, treat the instruments as equal partners in a conversation, and never become noisy when passionate.

How do these players fare? Well, they take the opening Andante a little faster than the others do, and their balance slightly favors the violinist; Ms Kouzmanova-Vladar is closest to us, horn and piano seem a few feet farther away. This actually might be what we would hear from the stage: violin and horn in front of piano, the horn’s bell directing its sound away from us. But if I were in the audience, I would move a little closer to the horn.
But it is a beautiful reading. The conversation is quite meaningful in I, the sudden contrasts and interaction between driving rhythms and deep lyricism quite strong in II. The Adagio Mesto (III) is very dark, the moment where violin is marked ppp “quasi niente” quite ghostly, the ending sepulchral. The Finale is the desired opposite: a scamper, an affirmation of the joy of living. This account compares quite favorably with the best.

When I hear the opening of Violin Sonata I in G (1879), I am awakening in soft sunshine on a summer morning, basking in the warmth. Then I am feeling wistful—about a summer passing too quickly, about the steady advance of years. But soon I am engaged in the activities of the day. Brahms wove with magical thread here. The wistfulness returns and stays in II, set in the key of E-flat. In III Brahms opens in G minor but masks it by hovering in D major. After a revisit to the melody and key from II (E-flat), the music finally reaches its destination and starting-point (G major) near the end. Of the stormy Sonata 2 in D minor (1888) I especially enjoy the autumnal II and passionate IV.

Both violin sonatas are played beautifully by these fine musicians. Vibrant sound.

KILPATRICK

BRAHMS: Quartets; String Quintets
Walter Trampler, va; Budapest Quartet
Praga 250 348 [2CD] 148 minutes

The original Budapest Quartet was founded in 1886 by violinist Jenő Hubay (a pupil of Joachim) and cellist David Popper. Brahms thought this the best quartet of his time, and in fact he played with the group. The quartet, though, suffered several changes of personnel and ceased performing in 1913. The group we know as the Budapest began four years later (exactly a century ago!) with three Hungarians and a Dutchman. It too had several changes of players, and when the group disbanded in 1967, it consisted of four Russians (Joseph Roisman, Alexander (Sasha) Schneider, Boris Kroyt, and Mischa Schneider). The first two decades of the new quartet were rocky to say the least, but when the final group was set, their technical level improved greatly and their fortunes soared. When they played in New York in 1936, the critics compared them to Toscanini and Schnabel. More personnel changes took place when Sasha Schneider left the group, but years later he was persuaded to rejoin. After the war the Budapest Quartet was widely thought to be the gold standard, and they made numerous recordings for Columbia. Around the 60s, their technical skill began to fail, owing mainly to Roisman’s intonation problems. (The history of this group is fascinating. For a short synopsis look up their entry in Wikipedia.)

These recordings, made in 1958 (quintets) and 1963 (quartets), show the Budapest toward the end of their career. The quartets are played with the deep understanding that comes from long acquaintance, and they can play with lots of passion, e.g. in I:IV. The general feeling, though, is very much old-world. Tempos tend to be comfortable, not pushed, and virtuosity takes a back seat. Ensemble and intonation are certainly acceptable, but not as spot-on as numerous current groups who play with a clarity and precision that the Budapest does not achieve. The quintets, recorded earlier, are somewhat better in these areas. These are rich, ripe performances that stand up very well after nearly 60 years.

I don’t think I would recommend these to anyone approaching these works afresh. They are more for collectors who remember the Budapest and want to relive their style. The remastering and editing have been done very nicely by Alexandra Evrard, and, considering the age of the recordings, everything sounds terrific.

ALTHOUSE

BRAHMS: Sextets
Barry Shiffman, va; Zuill Bailey, vc; Cypress Quartet—Avie 2294—77 minutes

The Cypress Quartet, based in San Francisco, was founded in 1996; and their final concert was in June 2016. This recording, made in April 2016 concerts, was their last. It was done both in digital format (the source of this disc) and analog, presumably for release on LP. It seems a little odd that their last recording would include extra players instead of just the quartet. They do point out that the Brahms sextets, “with their warmth and reflective qualities, are perfectly suited to saying farewell”.

I have happily encountered the Cypress in the past, most recently in their recording of the Beethoven middle quartets. There I found their playing first rate and rather direct, more American than Old World in approach. Here for some reason—a more romantic composer? the warmth of these particular pieces? the valedictory sentiment of the final recording?—they sound more European. Tempos are
relaxed, and nothing seems pushed or rushed. Their sound is rich and warm, and expression is assisted with more slides than we normally hear. The playing, in short, is very musical with nicely rounded phrasing and careful attention to balances. This, then, will be a required purchase for fans of the Cypress and a strong recommendation to others. As I’ve said before, the sextets (particularly the B-flat) are a great introduction to Brahms’s chamber music.

Congratulations, then, to the Cypress players for 20 wonderful years!

ALTHOUSE

BRAHMS: Serious Songs; Clarinet Sonata 1; GLANERT: Distant Country
Michael Nagy, b; Kari Kriikku, cl; Helsinki Philharmonic/Olari Elts
Ondine 1263—59 minutes

Like Brahms, German composer Detlev Glanert (b. 1960) is a Hamburg native. Unlike Brahms, Glanert has made most of his living in the theater with his 14 operas, though he feels a link through “a specific North German tradition where I believe myself to be connected with Brahms, to do with a melancholy in his pieces, a certain severity”.

In 2004, Glanert completed an expansion and orchestration of the older composer’s last work, the Four Serious Songs (1896), written on the news of Clara Schumann’s death—texts from the Bible. Glanert adds a symphonic prelude to each song and scores the new creation with the careful romantic orchestration favored by Brahms: double woodwind with piccolo and contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, harp, and strings.

In 2013 Glanert fulfilled a commission by the Oldenburg State Orchestra of northern Germany with Distant Country, a 12-minute symphonic movement inspired by the first eight notes of the Brahms Fourth Symphony. The piece has the subtitle “Music with Brahms for Orchestra” and the orchestration matches the Four Serious Songs, though it adds a third trumpet and omits the harp.

Yet Glanert is not the only contemporary composer to revisit the autumnal Brahms. In 1986, the Los Angeles Philharmonic commissioned Italian modernist Luciano Berio to arrange the first Brahms clarinet sonata for clarinet and orchestra. Berio put aside his sometimes strange and prickly sound world and like Glanert handled the piano parts in strict 19th Century tradition: double woodwind plus contrabassoon, three horns, two trumpets, trombone, timpani, and strings. L.A. Philharmonic clarinetist Michelle Zukovsky premiered the Berio version in November 1986.

Estonian maestro Olari Elts leads the Helsinki Philharmonic in this unusual program with two distinguished guest soloists: Hungarian baritone Michael Nagy and Finnish clarinetist Kari Kriikku. The performances are very good and very moving. Elts and the Helsinki Philharmonic are fully professional, giving each work the skill, insight, and brilliance associated with the world’s great orchestras. Nagy is magnificent in the Four Serious Songs, filling them with beautiful clarity, excellent diction, and a natural, heartfelt phrasing that flows alongside the weight of the music. The orchestration, too, is logical and organic; Glanert scores them so faithfully that one could easily think Brahms scored them himself. And while the preludes are fully Teutonic, seamlessly blending into and out of each song, they chart an introspective and troubling neo-modernist path that comments on the songs a full hundred years later.

Likewise, in Distant Country Glanert calls on Brahms as a point of departure. Any reference to the Fourth Symphony is deep in the notes; the listener immediately falls into a wry and disturbing landscape that feels like a psychedelic Freischutz. The liner notes on the piece discuss only the compositional process, but the listener may feel that Glanert’s music stares down the violence and tragedy into which Germany plunged after the passing of the composer who brought the rich tradition of German music to the door of the 20th Century.

Is this what a Brahms Clarinet Concerto may have sounded like? Kriikku gives a poised and expressive rendition, though his tone is somewhat thin and his legato is occasionally clumsy.

HANUDELM

BRUCH: Violin Concerto 2; Konzertstück; Adagio Appassionato; In Memoriam
Jack Liebeck; BBC Scottish Symphony/ Martyn Brabbins
Hyperion 68055—68 minutes

This is No. 21 in Hyperion’s series of romantic violin concertos, and it contains some of Bruch’s lesser-known music for violin and orchestra. His first concerto (in G minor) is ubiquitous and recorded by dozens of violin-
ists, but the second, with its odd opening movement (adagio rather than fast) and recitative-like II, has lapsed in popularity ever since its dedicatee (Sarasate) died in 1908. Nonetheless, the second concerto has some attractive moments, with lots of virtuosity in the finale; it deserves a better reputation. The Konzertstück might have become Bruch’s fourth concerto, but he completed only two movements; this work, by the way, had its first public performance with American violinist Maud Powell at the Norfolk Music Festival (Connecticut) in 1911. The Adagio Appassionato in F minor is a short, single-movement work written for Joachim in 1890. Bruch’s In Memoriam in C-sharp minor is a more substantial piece, which the composer described as an instrumental elegy; he considered it his finest piece for violin, according to Tully Potter’s informative liner notes. Indeed, In Memoriam is a lovely piece, beautifully scored. In the other short pieces the music comes across as well crafted and thoroughly competent, but lacking in memorable thematic material.

The performances place the music in a nearly ideal light. Jack Liebeck, a professor at the Royal Academy, plays with beautiful tone and fine sensitivity; and Bruch’s technical challenges are easily met. His excellent playing is matched by Brabbins and the BBC Scottish players. This, then, is a perfect way to get to know several violin works by Bruch, other than the first concerto and the Scottish Fantasy. Hyperion’s sound is first rate.

ALTHOUSE

BRUCKNER: Te Deum; see BACH

BUSCH: Piano Pieces, all
Jakob Fichert
Toccata 245—87 minutes

Do you like Reger? Then you might like this release. Or do you think Reger is turgid and tiresome? Then again this release may be for you, for you might appreciate Reger’s music more after having heard Busch’s.

Adolf Busch (1891-1952) is primarily known as a stellar violinist and chamber musician, leader of the Busch Quartet, one of the founders of the Marlboro Festival, and Rudolf Serkin’s father-in-law. He is less well known as a composer, though occasionally some of his chamber music is performed at Marlboro. His piano music is quite obscure and consists mostly of short, unpublished pieces. The major exception is the Sonata in C minor, Op. 25, written for the young Serkin but dedicated to Busch’s father-in-law. The only other work with an opus number is a brief Suite, Op. 60b.

This is the first recording of all of Busch’s solo piano works, arranged in roughly chronological order on a remarkably full disc. (I had no problems with playback.) They form two or perhaps three groups: A dozen early pieces (1908-1916) and the sonata (1922) composed in Germany, and 7 pieces (including the 3-piece suite) composed much later in the USA (1941-1952). Despite a gap of two decades, there is little change in style.

So, what is the music like? The excellent liner notes (English only) by the performer, Jakob Fichert, point out Busch’s indebtedness to Reger, whom he knew and was friends with. (Reger died in 1916.) Certainly he absorbed the complex harmonies and thick textures that are often (but by no means always) found in the older composer’s music. Whatever you may think of Reger’s piano music, Busch’s seems far less accomplished and varied. It makes for rather tedious listening.

There are three main ingredients to any composition: melody, harmony, and rhythm. Busch falls short on all three counts. His melodic themes are meandering and unmemorable. The harmony is in constant flux and does not seem to go anywhere. The rhythms are unbearably dull. The earlier compositions in particular are in constant motion, usually at a moderate tempo. Often a steady stream of shorter notes accompanies a slower melody, reminiscent of a chorale prelude. Textures often get very heavy. There are no rests, no really fast or slow passages, and no rhythms involving a variety of note values or articulations. The music is ponderous, dour, and flows like molasses.

Wedged between heavyweight movements, the sonata has a long central variation movement that necessarily is more varied but still not very appealing. Rachmaninoff (who must have seen the score) supposedly said to Serkin when the latter told him that he was going to play the Busch sonata, “If you want to crucify yourself, go right ahead” (cited in Rudolf Serkin: A Life by Stephen Lehmann and Marion Faber, 2003, p. 132).

The later compositions tend to be lighter in texture and are somewhat more engaging. The piece called ‘Allegro vehemente’ and the Scherzo of the three-part Suite are perhaps the most effective, each having a contrasting slow middle section. Still, they are not comparable.

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to Reger’s better piano pieces, which are often quite charming and brilliantly written for the instrument.

This is a thankless project. The music offers little opportunity for subtlety, reflection, or gracefulness. Or, to the extent that it does, the opportunities have not been taken. The pianist’s hands and fingers march heavily in step with the music, with little variation in timing or dynamics. The bass-heavy sound of his Yamaha makes matters worse, and key-bed noises can be heard in the few pieces that have sparse notes. In summary, there are two calamities here: the crucifixion of Mr Fichert and the resurrection of Busch’s indigestible piano music.

**BUSONI: Schubert Transcriptions**

Marco Vincenzi, p
Dynamic 7712—71 minutes

Last year marked Busoni’s 150th birthday, which stimulated this first recording of his piano transcriptions of 9 orchestral works by Schubert. Included are 7 overtures, arranged on the disc in inverse chronological order (why?), a set of 5 minuets with trios, and a set of 5 German dances with trios and coda. The last four works are compositions from Schubert’s teenage years, whereas the first five date from his early 20s and are roughly contemporaneous with his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Violin Sonata (Duo) in A, and the Piano Sonata in E-flat. Compared to these early masterpieces, the overtures are rather insignificant and rarely performed.

As Mr Vincenzi points out in his excellent liner notes (in Italian and English), it is not known what led Busoni to prepare piano transcriptions of these works. Presumably they were commissioned, and he needed the money. At the time, of course, such transcriptions (more often done for piano four hands) enabled amateur pianists to acquaint themselves with works they might rarely or never hear in the concert hall. Nowadays, what is the point of recording these transcriptions?

There would be a point if they were as imaginative as, say, Liszt’s *Soirées de Vienne* and Schubert song transcriptions or Busoni’s own of Bach’s great Chaconne. They are not. Mr Vincenzi finds that “the keyboard’s resources are carefully explored”, but to my ears these transcriptions seem like hackwork. They are certainly not suitable as concert pieces. Moreover, the performances are dutiful at best. This is a rather useless release.

**CAETANI: Quartets, opp 1:1; 12**

Alauda Quartet
Brilliant 95198—61 minutes

Roffredo Caetani (1871-1961) is a late-romantic Italian composer whom Brilliant is making available to us. They have given us a disc of his piano music, and now we have a string quartet that he wrote at 17 in one movement taking over half an hour, and another from 1907 in three lasting just under half an hour.

The musical effect of these works is unvaried, though beautiful in sound. It is all rich arpeggios and sad melodies that sweep about but seldom lead to a new mood. I enjoyed it but I can sense why he didn’t write very much music—he didn’t have a great deal to say. Of course, the big work is technically all in one movement and written early in his life, but the later quartet doesn’t show us much more than the first. It is all well played and recorded, but I don’t expect to listen to it often.

**CASELLA: Harp Sonata; PERRACCHIO: Sonata 1; 3 Pieces**

Alessandra Ziveri
Tactus 880001—58 minutes

The only attractive thing about this album is the painting on the cover, an art deco work called “Harpist” painted in 2015 by Jie Zhong Hipken.

Alessandra Ziveri is a young Italian harpist who graduated from a conservatory in 2007 and attained a “second level degree” (whatever that means) in 2014. Now she needs two more things: a decent instrument and instructions to take her damn foot off the pedal. Even following with a score, I could make no sense out of the Harp Sonata (1943), Op. 68, by Alfredo Casella (1883-1947). Not only is Ziveri’s instrument so dull that even the melody line is muted most of the time, but she creates so much resonance by holding down the pedal that arpeggios, long runs of triplets, and batches of eighth-note chords are just unarticulated smears. She usually doesn’t even create a leading voice. I defy anyone in II, a Sarabande, to figure out what the leading voice is for the first 20 or so measures. So bad are things that it’s impossible to evaluate the music itself, which is written in a traditional enough manner.
Harp Sonata 1 (1936) by Luigi Perrachio (1883-1966) is based on three popular Italian tunes. (The composer’s name is misspelled as Perracchio on the back cover.) The middle Larghetto movement is the closest Ziveri comes to getting excited on this muted pastel album. She leaves the sonata’s mostly low midrange melodies smothered by the pedal. As my high school drama director used to yell, “PROJECT!”

Three Pieces for harp are three dances. The Galliard is a melody over chords, a rather orchestral piece with genuine folk flavor, if Ziveri would get her foot off the pedal. She plays the ‘Romanesca’s’ chords with parallel octaves more assertively, though she doesn’t project the bass accompaniment enough. The ‘Passemezzo’ finale here lacks definition—more poorly projected pastel stuff.

FRENCH

Cavalli: Requiem; Grandi: Motets
Ensemble Polyharmonique/ Alexander Schneider—Raumklang 3601—56 minutes

Pier Francesco Cavalli (1602-76) was one of the most celebrated Venetian opera composers of the 17th Century, but his career began and ended primarily with music for the church. In 1616 he entered the choir of St Mark’s, then under the direction of Monteverdi, who was a powerful influence on him, as was Monteverdi’s assistant, Alessandro Grandi (1577-1630), whose music is also heard on this recording.

Cavalli’s first opera was produced in 1639, and soon his fame spread through most of Europe. Perhaps the climax of his career came in 1660, when he was invited to France to take part in the festivities surrounding the marriage of Louis XIV. Cavalli produced two operas for that occasion, but their success was hampered by the dreadful acoustics of the newly built theater and by anti-Italian machinations in the French court following the death in 1661 of Cardinal Mazarin. Cavalli remained in France until 1662, then returned to Venice, where he resumed his musical responsibilities as organist of St Mark’s. The remainder of his career was devoted mainly to church music. In 1668 he was named Maestro di Cappella at St Mark’s. He published collections of his church compositions in 1656 and 1675.

Cavalli composed the Requiem heard on this recording for his own funeral. It is scored for eight voice parts and continuo, though many sections of it are for fewer voices. In some respects the work is retrospective, drawing on the traditions of vocal polyphony; but there are also sections of bold homophonic writing, perhaps consciously invoking the Venetian polychoral style, with many instances of baroque word painting. Many critics have regarded it as a sublime masterpiece. In his notes to this recording, Alexander Schneider points out that Cavalli specified the musical forces: the full choir of St Mark’s, 2 violins, 4 violas, 2 cornettos, 2 theorboes, trombones, a dulzian, a violone, and three organs. Presumably the instruments would have doubled the voices, as there is no independent material for them. The composer also directed that the Requiem should be performed twice a year in his memory.

In contrast with the imposing opulence Cavalli envisioned for the performance of this music, Alexander Schneider and Ensemble Polyharmonique give it a bare bones presentation with one voice per part and a continuo ensemble consisting of a viola da gamba, harp, and a cabinet organ with only an eight-foot flute register. The performance is very beautiful, but does it adequately reflect the composer’s intentions? Much of the music has an air of statuesque formality that would benefit from the imposing forces the composer had in mind.

Inserted between the sections of the Requiem are six penitential motets by Alessandro Grandi. Three are for five voices and continuo, and three are designated Concerto a 2. They are scored for two singers with continuo and might be heard as a vocal counterpart to the instrumental trio sonata. In contrast with the formality of Cavalli’s Requiem, Grandi’s motets project a deeply personal warmth of expression, and I believe they are better suited to the intimate performance style employed here.

Ensemble Polyharmonique brings together singers and instrumentalists from Germany, Belgium, and other parts of Europe, under the direction of countertenor Alexander Schneider. They also enjoy distinguished reputations as soloists. The singing here is highly disciplined and beautifully blended. The readings are persuasively coherent.

Composers should write music that can uplift the spirits. Music that does not nourish you spiritually is not music, only aural sensation.

David Diamond

May/June 2017
CESARINI: Cantatas (6)
Stephanie Varnerin, s; L'Astree/ Giorgio Tabacco
Aparte 136—69:15

Carlo Francesco Cesarini (1665-1741) spent most of his career in Rome, where he was active as a composer of sacred music and a much admired producer of solo cantatas. A good 70 of his survive (others we know about are lost), and he stands with Alessandro Scarlatti—five years his senior—among the most important masters of this vocal form.

Much of his career was spent under the wing of Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili. That name might ring a bell, for that prelate, a culture-loving patron, a poet, and librettist himself, was also an enthusiastic supporter of the young Handel during the later's stay in Rome. Cesarini was thus an immediate member of the circle where Handel worked, and the Italian's cantatas give us the kind of models that Handel followed.

Followed and outstripped. The six cantatas presented here are fine examples of their type: five to eight movements, mostly in recitative-aria sequences, some with instrumental introductions, some with only continuo accompaniment but others with two violins added. They are challenging exercises for the vocalist, but also are full of nice tunes. Yet they cannot help but make clear how much greater a composer Handel was and why his hosts made such a fuss over him.

The soloist, Varnerin, has a bright, strong soprano voice, full of spirit, though often slipping into edginess. She is totally in command of her music, with its frequent virtuoscopic demands. Still, there seems to be a general quality of objectivity in her approach to the words, missing the constant emotions of unhappy love they present. The five instrumentalists (Tabacco at the harpsichord) are first-rate.

The sound is fine, and the booklet includes texts and translations.

BARKER

CHERUBINI: Coronation Mass; Anthem on the Death of Haydn
Marilyn Schmiege, s; Martyn Hill & Paolo Barbacini, t; Cologne Radio Chorus; Cappella Coloniensis/ Gabriele Ferro
Capriccio 8013—70 minutes

This is a reissue (Capriccio “Encore” series) of recordings made in 1981-2 and first released in 1992 (Carl Bauman; Sept/Oct 1993).

The Mass in A by Luigi Cherubini (1760-1842) was written for the coronation of Charles X at Reims Cathedral in May of 1825. Oddly enough, the work is for a three-part chorus (STB) with large orchestra, and while some of the quieter movements may be sung by solo voices, the composer’s apparent intention was that the work should be sung by the full chorus from start to finish, as it is on this recording.

It is an imposing work, fitting for such an occasion. It may not induce us to forget Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis, but it helps us to understand why Beethoven, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Wagner, and many others regarded Cherubini as possibly the greatest composer of his time. In addition to the customary five sections of the Mass Ordinary, Cherubini includes an Offertory (‘Propter Veritatem’) and a setting of the Eucharistic hymn ‘O Salutaris Hostia’. The text of the Offertory is one of the several Graduals for Commons of the Blessed Virgin. The Eucharistic hymn comes before the Agnus Dei, and judging from that placement was probably intended to be sung during the Silent Canon of the Mass.

Cherubini wrote the Anthem on the Death of Joseph Haydn in January of 1805 in response to the erroneous news that the composer had died at the age of 97(!). By the time this misinformation was corrected, the parts had been printed, and Cherubini felt obliged to destroy them. The work had its first performance in February of 1810. It is for three solo voices—soprano and two tenors—with orchestra. It opens with an extended somber introductory orchestral movement. Each of the three soloists has a brief accompanied recitative, and the work concludes with them joining in a solemn but joyful hymn of tribute. It may be a piece of occasional music, but it is very good of its time and well worth hearing today.

The performances are highly respectable, though one may find fault here and there with aspects of choral and orchestral discipline. In 1993 Mr Bauman declared the recording “well played and sung,” but surpassed in emotional effect by one directed by Riccardo Muti (EMI 49302).

GATENS

CHOPIN: Piano Concerto 1; Ballades
Seong-Jin Cho, London Symphony/ Gianandrea Noseda
DG 26046—79 minutes

This pianist won first prize at the 2015 Chopin Competition, and the winner usually does record some Chopin.

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This fellow is a 21-year old Korean who loves Chopin and whose hero of the piano is Radu Lupu (one of my heroes too). But Radu Lupu is a fully mature artist, and this young man is not on that level. Sometimes he sounds like he is trying to imitate Lupu, but I’m sure that is impossible.

Still, this is sensitive playing, and he is not at all interested in making a big splash or a loud noise. It is delicate, even perfumed. He is obviously enjoying the sheer beauty of the music. The concerto is lovely, but there are better recordings—and the same is really true of the ballades. There is no shortage of wonderful piano recordings out there—even of Chopin, who is often butchered mercilessly. The orchestra is very good, as you would expect (good bassoon!) but so are many others. I don’t think the conductor and pianist had a lot of time to compare notes.

**CHOPIN: Piano & Orchestra**

La Ci Darem La Mano; Krakowiak; Andante Spianato & Polonaise; Polish Fantasy

Jan Lisiecki, NDR Elbphilharmonic/ Krzysztof Urbanski

DG 4796824—65 minutes

Arthur Rubinstein was never a beautiful guy, and Gina Bachauer was never a beautiful woman. But most of our readers consider them great pianists—and why should appearances matter? It’s what they did with the music and their special tone that mattered to us—still matters. Even in those days there were sexy album covers, but the sexiness of the pianist or singer mattered very little.

Times have changed, and increasingly we get covers with lascivious poses on the part of women artists (mostly violinists) and pouty but cute boys (mostly pianists). When a label has signed a very attractive person, you can be sure they will exploit that for all it’s worth. So here is a beautiful young boy—blond, cute, and compact, with a sweet smile—and in ten years he may have lost that bloom of youth, so for now DG sells his albums with pictures of him on every other page (really!). There is no question that he is a very fine pianist, but there are many other very fine pianists that record companies don’t bother with because they are not “marketable”.

I should admit that I had a student 30 or 40 years ago who looked almost exactly like Mr Lisiecki—he too was of Polish stock and born in North America—and so I was drawn to this pianist for non-musical reasons. I have also heard this conductor a few times in Indianapolis, and I have to admit that he is very good, though it is tempting to deny that because he, too, is “cute”. Well, the world is changing. It always helped to be good looking, but now a career is becoming impossible if you are not—at least a recording career, but increasingly also a concert career. And the emphasis seems to be on youth. When I was in college I assumed that any conductor with dark hair was probably too inexperienced to do our music well. I thought it took years of living with great music to put it across.

This pianist plays in a “glittery” way. It’s appealing, and it’s showy but not brash. And he knows the music and puts it across—no doubt about it. The Fantasy on Polish Airs is pure delight! You have to compare carefully to see that sometimes he misses things. And you make allowances, because his playing is very nice. But friends of mine who care less about this music than I do noticed some missed opportunities and some failures of depth (though this is generally not “deep” music, and the glitter is part of its attraction).

For example, the polacca at the end of the Mozart variations is nowhere near as moving and rhythmically satisfying as it is with Arrau or Marshev. Mr Lisiecki (pronounced Liz-ee-ests-kee) was 21 when he recorded this, and will have a birthday before you read this review; but it can certainly be said that his playing is terrific and he has a great future. It can also be said that probably his readings of these pieces will be better in 20 years. Let’s not make heroes out of youth! Maturity usually helps, though in some cases experience can also mean glintness or caution or exhaustion.

There are a lot of boring mature pianists. How often over how many years can a pianist play the same music? And instincts really do matter, and this fellow has the right instincts. He plays Chopin as if the music is in his blood. It’s never heavy-handed, and it never sounds as if he is only out to make a big impression and career—many young artists do sound that way.

His Mozart was also remarkably good—recorded when he was only 16 (N/D 2012).

The orchestra is simply wonderful—no skimping there! So is the sound.

I don’t sit around looking at covers and photos, so I will probably continue to listen to Marshev or Arrau in this music. But I don’t feel any serious disappointment in Jan Lisiecki’s playing.

VROON
It gives one pause for reflection when I gaze at this cover photo of a now aging Pollini. I can recall his photo as a teenager who took the music world by storm when his Chopin Concerto I was first issued. Time not only passes quickly, but now seems to be racing wildly about at supersonic velocity.

Pollini, as stated on the album, is still in love with Chopin, as can readily be heard in this new recording. The Barcarolle speaks with power and forward motion. There is little to distract as Pollini presses ever onward. He does make a thing of beauty of the central section but resumes with greater determination towards the work’s conclusion. It is definitely one of the finest interpretations of this great work, and one to contrast with his slightly less intense 1991 recording.

Mazurkas (Opp. 59, 63, 68-4) are far more than mere dances. Although the dance element is never lost sight of, they are passionately emotional utterances from one who feels this music deeply. Some may feel they are over wrought, and I would definitely not want them as my only performances, but the soul is laid bare as never before and it is arresting if emotionally draining. They are scattered through the program, leaving one to recover between.

The great Polonaise-Fantasy is the longest and most puzzling piece here. While it has never gained the favor of most audiences, it continues to be rightfully praised by critics, musicologists, and pianophiles. Pollini ties its strands together as well as anyone. His playing is a little faster than others, but is never indulgent or lacking in forward motion. I would probably head for this one were I selecting a performance to listen to, though several others would certainly vie for my attention.

The two Op. 62 Nocturnes are the last ones from the composer’s pen and strike out in new directions in form, harmony, and pianistic audacity. No. 18 in E is especially akin to a tone poem rather than the gentleness of a night piece. It has a turbulent central section, but the clouds pass quickly.

The three Op. 64 Waltzes are more intense than usual, from the so-called ‘Minute Waltz’ (never really taking a minute), to the others. There is little that is light or superfluous here. Sound and notes are decent enough. As with most of Pollini’s recordings, I wanted more—lots more.

BECKER

CHOPIN: Late Pieces
Maurizio Pollini, p—DG 4796127—55 minutes

Francesco Cilea (1866-1950) is best known, and mostly only known for his opera Adriana Lecouvreur. There are a few early recordings of him as an accompanist to Caruso among others. His piano music was composed all through his life and is a lot of pleasant, short character pieces. None of the 52 pieces on these discs are very substantial and only a few are of any detailed interest. Seven pieces are for piano 4-hands where Vincenzi is ably joined by Gaggini. They seem to be having a great time and play with all the panache required in this kind of music. Vincenzi gives every little phrase its due, while keeping a relaxed Italian spirit all through. He invests more in these pieces than they deserve, and I cannot imagine a more dedicated performance. These are all good as background music, and the playing will regularly bring a piece to the fore. But when closely listened to it gets fairly quickly put into the background again.

HARRINGTON

CILEA: Piano Pieces
Pier Paolo Vincenzi, Marco Gaggini
Brilliant 95318 [2CD] 142 minutes

Erik Simmons, org
Divine Art 25147—66 minutes

The latest volume in Simmons’s survey of organ music by the prolific American composer Carson Cooman (J/A 2015; S/O 2016). These short, pleasant, well-crafted pieces are written in memory of various people, with “something about the musical content that is connected to the individual being memorialized.” For example, Prelude in Copper is dedicated to a metalurgist, one of the world’s leading experts on copper. Simmons delivers his usual fine performance, this time on a 1787 Holzhey organ in the church of St Peter and Paul in Weissembau, Germany. Notes on the music by the composer and specification.

DELCAMP

Great music is enunciatory, telling us that there are places, things, regions beyond us... Music gives us glimpses of the immeasurable, and that is why it has to be beautiful.

George Rochberg
CUI: Songs & Piano Pieces
Jean Bermes, bar; Denis Ivanov, p
Klanglogo 1411—56 minutes

Russian composer and feared critic Cesar Cui (1835-1918) was one of “The Five” or “The Mighty Handful”—a group that included Balakirev, Borodin, Moussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov. A few of his songs occasionally appear on recordings, but this seems to be the first release dedicated to them. Three piano pieces—the best thing about this program—separate four groups of songs, but Bermes’s coarse and howling voice may turn you away. Notes but no texts.

R. MOORE

CULLEN: Preludes; Chorale; Tuis, Hataitai; Accompaniment to a Film Scene+
Jeremy Cullen, p; Maria Grigoryeva, va; Lyudmila Kadyrbaeva, vc
Notornis 1—42 minutes (800-529-1696)

The packaging and press release didn’t prepare me for the music, a series of exquisite miniatures: interesting, expressive, and surprising melodies, coupled with traditional-sounding harmonies that often lead the ear to other places than expected. Prelude No. 3 in D and ‘Gymnopedie’ (from The World of Eugène Atget) are both pieces I could listen to again and again and would love to perform—and they are not the only ones. Other works, like the Theme and Variations, tend toward greater abstraction (though the pitch materials used are still spare) and employ electronic sound processing in a noninvasive and interesting way.

All this forms for me a pleasing irony when I compare it with the two Max Richter releases (below). Like the much better known Richter, Cullen has created a number of works for film, and both men take advantage of technology in their work. Unlike Richter, Cullen has originality and a powerful, singular compositional voice: proof, if any were needed, that fine composers can be found everywhere in the music business and aren’t always the ones whose names are constantly forced on us by the PR people. Cullen’s a fine and sensitive pianist as well.

I hope that his concert work continues to develop. On the evidence of the works here, he has much to say.

HASKINS

DALL’AQUILA: Lute Pieces 2
Sandro Volta & Fabio Refrigeri
Brilliant 95261—48 minutes

The program consists of 20 ricercars, fantasias, and intabulations of French and Italian songs by the Renaissance lute virtuoso Marco Dall’Aquila (c. 1480-after 1538). Around the turn of the century, he went to Venice, and in 1505 he applied to the Doge for license to print music using his own method of tablature. This would have been around the time Petrucci produced his groundbreaking publications of Spinacino’s and Dalza’s lute tablatures using movable type. For examples of their music, listen to Paul Cerici’s 2001 recording (Symphonia 99173; May/June 2001).

Dall’Aquila’s ambitions appear to have come to naught. No printed editions of his tabulatures have survived, and so the music on this release derives from manuscript copies now in the Bavarian State Library.

Dall’Aquila’s music makes considerable demands on the player. As Volta explains in his notes, lute technique was developing quickly at the turn of the 16th Century, requiring the player to sometimes use a plectrum, sometimes his fingers, and sometimes both! Sandro Volta’s playing is expressive, and he shows clear mastery of these technical demands—so much so, in fact, that I find it curious that he runs into trouble with his intonation in the ‘Fantasia Casteliono,’ ‘Fantasia No. 23,’ and ‘Fantasia on Vous Usurpes.’ Otherwise it is a lovely recording of a repertory that has only recently come to light. Notes are in English.

LOEWEN

DAUBIGNON: Arcanes Symphoniques; Triptyque; Songe Salinas
Nora Gubisch, mz; Thomas Dolie, bar; French National Orchestra
Naxos 573687—63 minutes

Swiss Richard Daubignon (b. 1968) teaches at the Royal Academy in London. That odd professional combination might explain the blank quasi-Impressionist modernity on display on this poorly conceived release.

Arcanes Symphoniques (2001-2) is a set of three pieces built on colors and structures on tarot cards. Language is proto-impressionist, with whole-tone flavor and colorful orchestration. Rhythms are deduced from numerical relations embedded in the cards, and ambiguously float. The music is generally evocative, sometimes expressive and dramatic, sometimes playful. There are a couple of descrip-
tions by the composer on YouTube, one in English, one in French with subtitles, the latter with pictures of a card with explanation.

As for the bulk of the program, Naxos continues to act like the budget label it is by refusing to realize that its American audience is not bilingual. These are vocal works in French; there is no translation. Since the music is nothing to write home about, this is almost automatically a waste of time for non-Europeans.

Triptyque (1999) is three poems in French, text by one Stephane Heaume, apparently intended for bits of avant-garde cinema. The texts deal with one Christian parable and one by Oscar Wilde. Settings are dramatic and amorphous.

The largest work is Le Songe Salinas (2003), a “short opera” with libretto by Mr Heaume again. It seems to deal with a story vaguely related to the stories of Scheherazade and Salome. As with this entire misguided release, the text is in French only. The result is turgescently incoherent in non-tonal NMC style, only vaguely Francophile (i.e. modern quasi-Impressionist with plenty of whole-tone smoke instead of British neo-Schonbergian academicism). African percussion instruments float in quietly in the middle.

I wasted 45 minutes of my life on this thanks to this label’s apparent disregard for its audience, if there really is one for this. The New York Times loves it, according to the jacket.

GIMBEL

D AVIES: Violin Sonata; Piano Sonata; Dances for the 2 Fiddlers; Trio
Duccio Ceccanti, v; Matteo Fossi, Bruno Canino, p; Vittorio Cacanti, vc
Naxos 573599—63 minutes

With one exception, these are late works. The harmonies are typically severe and dissonant, though the mood is often plaintive and contemplative. The ideas are shapely, relatively easy to follow, and well written for the instruments.

The Violin Sonata is based on an imaginary walk through Rome, apparently a rather edgy one, given the grim and frenetic nature of much of the music. A dour lyricism informs the Piano Trio, A Voyage to Fair Isle. Based on plainsong, this exercise in program music is austere and craggy, like the landscape. It has an eloquent folkloric moment for Vittorio Cacanti’s cello and feathery figurations for Duccio Ceccanti’s violin. The latter soars and sighs through the solo violin sonata, one of the composer’s final pieces and the most eloquent one on this program, full of long, leaping lines moving in a steady, unwavering tempo toward a ghostly wind-down. A bracing contrast is supplied with the earlier Dances for Two Fiddlers from Davies’s children’s opera, arranged for violin and piano. Here Duccio Ceccanti and pianist Matteo Fossi get to break out of nontonal abstraction and strut their stuff.

SULLIVAN

D EBUSSE: Preludes; Etudes (selections); SCIARRINO: Piano Sonatas
Jean-Pierre Collot
Winter & Winter 910237—61 minutes

I’m sneakily placing this review under “Debussy” rather than “Sciarrino” because I think listeners who enjoy Debussy should purchase this—for the Sciarrino. His three sonatas explore timbral possibilities for the piano in ways that distinctly recall the French master. They’re not for the faint of heart but offer surprise and invention in spades. I particularly like 2, which explores at great length a series of descending and ascending, rapid, sparkling, and dissonant tremolos. Others include imaginative uses of the pedal. The gestures can be violent and abrupt, as in 1.

Collot’s Debussy performances make for a mixed bag, with an excellent reading of ‘The Sunken Cathedral’ and a run-of-the-mill ‘Footsteps in the Snow’ (made more annoying because Collot decided to voice the right hand of the final chord to favor the inner tonic note rather than the highest third, which runs counter to Debussy’s conception of motivic ideas in the work). But I imagine Sciarrino’s sonatas will never be performed better than they are here.

HASKINS

D EL TREDICI: Magyar Madness; see HERRMANN

D ISTLER: Totentanz; 2 Motets
Christian Steyer, narr; Christine Rothe, fl; Josquin des Prez Chamber Choir/ Ludwig Bohme
Carus 83474—52 minutes

For most of us, I would imagine, a Totentanz would conjure up knuckle-busting pianistic explosion, as in Franz Liszt’s work of the same name. But in Hugo Distler’s hands, the title lends itself to an “aphorism motet” with texts extracted from the mystical writings of

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Johannes Scheffler, a Silesian poet and theologian of the 17th Century. By the time Scheffler and Distler are through with us, Death and his victims have confronted each other 14 times through songs, recitations, and brief utterances from the antique flute.

Sometimes Distler’s choral communicants deliver the poet’s didactic messages strenuously (“Your body, your best friend, it is your worst enemy!”); sometimes more serenely (“God’s spirit is your navigator.”) Whatever the intensity level, it is advice worth hearing, musically and spiritually. Just know that the mariner, hermit, farmer, merchant, physician, churchman, and others who’ll be sharing their encounters with eternity will be doing so in German. So if you aren’t keen on extended narrations in another language, this isn’t for you.

‘Das ist je gewisslich wahr’ and ‘Furwahr, er trug unsere Krankheit’, a pair of motets from Distler’s op 12 Geistlichen Chormusik, round out the program. They’re wonderful. The notes speak about the dense textures of the music and of the sense of yearning Distler was able to express as he crafted them. Bravo to the annotator; the analysis is spot-on. The choir, flutist, and speaker bring everything off handsomely, and Carus offers excellent engineering and engaging notes.

DOPPLER: Flute Pieces 1
Claudia Arimany, Symphony of Elche/ Leonardo Martinez
Capriccio 5295—71 minutes
This release presents the first installment in a set of ten devoted to the flute-playing Doppler brothers, Carl (1826-1900) and Franz (1821-83). After hearing one of these selections, the notorious Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick wrote in 1855, “All that can be drawn from this tube, so poor as a solo instrument, all these effects known or ill-known, all this art of the double staccato, series of trills, and interval leaps, these two brothers play them with such purity, serenity, and steadiness that the greatest sworn enemy of the flute would be unable to deny his keenest interest.” Although the brothers themselves are long gone, a host of contemporary flute players contribute to this series, anchored by Claudia Arimany, all of them excellent. Coordination, blend, and balance are well considered, and for an example of the gorgeous sound, turn to the American duet for flute and violin on track 3.

Although the compositions themselves are salon music, they are always effective, enjoyable, and entertaining. Seven of the selections here are recorded for the first time, one in its first presentation with orchestra. A 15-page booklet in English includes a list of all the flute works and which volume they’re on plus an abundance of photographs and background. This series belongs in every music library, and enthusiasts of the flute, the 19th Century, or salon music should seriously consider having the entire set as long as the other releases are as satisfying as this one.

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May/June 2017
DUNI: Les Deux Chasseurs et La Laitriere
Agnieszka Budzinska-Bennett, s; Maciej Straburynski, bar; Lukasz Wilda, t; Accademia Dell’Arcadia/ Roberto Balconi
Brilliant 95422—53 minutes
This lively one-act comedy was composed by Italian Egidio Romualdo Duni (1708-75) in Paris. He moved there from Naples in 1757 and in 1761 became music director of the Comedie-Italienne.

The Two Hunters and the Milkmaid is based on two La Fontaine fables that would have been well known to his audience. There’s plenty of unrequited flirting, spilt milk, inept bear-hunting, and career ambitions gone awry; but it all comes together at the end as all three characters concur on the moral of the story. This is cheerful, lively entertainment in a mix of French and Italian styles; and Maria Antoinette herself is said to have played the role of the milkmaid Perrette in 1783 at the Versailles theater 20 years after the work was first performed.

The piece is scored for strings with one flute and pairs of oboes, bassoons, and horns. Coupled with very fine vocal acting and characterizations by the three singers, there is plenty of vocal and instrumental color to draw on and animate the comic spirit.

As a companion piece, this Polish ensemble has chosen a 17-minute sinfonia by the 18th-Century Polish composer Michal Orlowski, scored for the same forces as in Duni’s one-act comedy. The piece, played very well here, is in early classical style and has solo melodies for oboe and bassoon, as well as some idiomatic Polish rhythms and harmonies.

Notes. Texts in French. English synopsis on label website.

C.MOORE

DVORAK: Legends;
RAVEL: Rapsodie Espagnole
Sulkhanishvili Piano Duo
Oehms 1852—55 minutes
This release only confirms my belief that piano duets—four hands at one piano—have three towering composers in terms of quality and quantity: Schubert, Brahms, and Dvorak. Recently I reviewed an exceptionally good recording of Dvorak’s Slavonic Dances (Connoisseur Society 4272, Jan/Feb 2017). One of last year’s best was From A Bohemian Forest and Dumky (Odradek 323, May/June 2016). Now these Legends join this elite company.

There are 10 Legends (1881) and none have titles beyond their tempo marking. Like their predecessors, they were later orchestrated. Each has an individual folk character captured with plenty of color by the Sulkhanishvili duo.

Ravel’s early orchestral masterpiece Rapsodie Espagnole (1908) was preceded by a version (1907) published for piano four hands. The ‘Habanera’ movement was written several years earlier (1895) for two pianos. As with much Ravel, the piano writing is quite difficult, and the choreography required on one keyboard is daunting. I enjoy many recordings of this wonderful evocative work, and no other duo is better.

Ani and Nia Sulkhanishvili (b. 1988) are twin sisters from Tbilisi, Georgia. They have been playing together and studying as a duo since the age of 13. This appears to be their first commercial release, made on the occasion of their prize-winning performances at a competition in Munich. This pair has all of the musicality, technique, and perfection of ensemble to make a very good career.

Oehms offers excellent recorded sound, great booklet notes, and an attractive package.

HARRINGTON

DVORAK: Symphony 7; Heirs of the White Mountain; Wood Dove; Water Goblin; Noon-day Witch; Golden Spinning Wheel; Hero’s Song
Czech Orchestras/ Chalabala, Kosler, Klima
Praga 250369 [2CD] 159 minutes
These have been gloriously remastered, and there’s a lot of music on these two discs. The recordings are from 1961, 1964, and 1972. The rarest thing here is Heirs of the White Mountain, which I think I have heard before but cannot find in ARG’s index (or in my own collection). It’s a 19-minute choir-and-orchestra piece that is pleasant but not in a lasting way. (What does that mean? I think it’s nice to hear once, but it wears out its welcome by the end, and you don’t feel drawn back to it.) Zdenek Kosler is the conductor with the Prague Symphony and Czech Philharmonic chorus, who sing beautifully.

That is preceded by a rather brisk rendition of Symphony 7, again led by Kosler, but the orchestra is the Czech Philharmonic. That is not a great performance.

Zdenek Chalabala conducts four symphonic poems, and those recordings we have reviewed before. Steven Haller (Jan/Feb 1997) called them marvelously idiomatic, and I

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agree. In that review and in an earlier one in 1990 Mr Haller seemed less than happy with the sound. I am pleased to report that the Praga engineers have worked wonders with the sound, and it would now be impossible to tell that these were not recorded last week. They sound terrific, and as Mr Haller commented, they have always been better readings than the later Neumanns with the same orchestra. Chalabala was an opera conductor who led the Prague National Theatre. He died in 1962.

I think there are cuts in The Golden Spinning Wheel. I suspect the conductor thought it helped, and he may be right. It has always seemed a bit long-winded to me. Here it’s over in 20 minutes. On most recordings it is 27 minutes.

The Hero’s Song is the only piece conducted by Alois Klima, and it is not as good a recording as the Jarvi, whose Chandos release will bring you the greatest performance of it ever recorded. Jarvi’s Noon Witch is also outstanding, but his Wood Dove can’t come near this one. When it comes to the tone poems you have to shop around, but the four led here by Chalabala are really excellent.

VROON

ENESCO: Violin Sonatas 2+3; Impressions of Childhood
Daniel Rowland; Natacha Kudritskaya, p
Champs Hill 120—74 minutes

George Enesco (1881-1955) was Romania’s greatest musician. He was introduced to the violin by a folk fiddler, possible a Gypsy, when he was 4. When he was 7 he was admitted to the Vienna Conservatory, only the second student (after Fritz Kreisler) allowed to study at the school at that tender age. He graduated when he was 12 and had the good judgement to continue his studies at the Paris Conservatory, where a more modern violin technique was taught and where Kreisler also went to continue his studies. In Paris he came in contact with more progressive influences, which are evident in these compositions.

Violin Sonata 2 was Enesco’s first mature work. Written in 1898 when he was 17, it sounds thoroughly Western in form and harmony. It is still the work of a commanding personality. He would not write for the violin again until 1926, when he produced Violin Sonata 3, subtitled In the Popular Romanian Character. With the work’s opening notes, the listener is immediately aware that it inhabits a different world. Enesco has abandoned the cosmopolitan style he heard in Paris and has returned to the music he first heard in Romania. The sonata doesn’t quote any actual folk tunes, but it is unmistakably in the style of the music of southeastern Europe.

14 years later he composed his Impressions of Childhood. This makes an advance over the sonata in folk style. It is a suite of 10 continuous impressions, apparently occurring in the course of a day of a young child. The record company made the poor decision to put the Impressions on a single track. They also did not give the titles of the sections, so I give them here: 1. Fiddler 2. Old Beggar 3. At the Far End of the Garden 4. The Bird in the Cage and the Cuckoo on the Wall 5. Lullaby 6. Cricket 7. The Moon Across the Windowpane 8. Wind in the Chimney 9. Tempest Outside at Night 10. Sunrise. Readers can download the score of this work for no charge from imslp.org and follow it to find where each section begins.

London native Daniel Rowland has been the first violinist of the Brodsky Quartet since 2007. He is a very stylish and charismatic player, and he understands this music perfectly. His partner, Russian-born pianist Natacha Kudritskaya, is just as well attuned to Enesco’s idiom and draws bewitching sounds from her instrument. These are among the very finest performances of all three works that I have heard, and they are good enough to be the only ones in your record library.

Rowland plays a violin made by the Cremonese master Lorenzo Storioni in 1776.

FIBICH: Bride of Messina
Lucia Cervoni (Isabella), Noa Danon (Beatrice), Richard Samek (Cesar), Thomas Florio (Manuel), Martin-Jan Nijhof (Kajetan), Manfred Wulfert (Bohemund); Magdeburg Philharmonic & Opera Chorus/ Kimbo Ishii
CPO 777981 [2CD] 120 minutes

Zdenek Fibich was born in Bohemia in 1850 and lived most of his life in Prague until he died in 1900. Home schooled by his Viennese mother, he was bilingual (German and Czech). His first formal school was a German one in Vienna. He did not attend a Czech school until he was 11. At age 15 he moved to Leipzig to continue his music studies, later to Paris, and from there to Mannheim before returning to Prague.

As a composer, Fibich was first influenced by Smetana, but he wrote three early and...
unfinished operas to German librettos and over 200 songs to German texts. His early affinity for German coupled with his studying abroad infused him with the influence of early German romantics like Schubert and Schumann. After attending a performance of *Die Meistersinger* in Mannheim, he evolved into a Czech Wagnerian whose music displayed the influences of Wagner’s harmony, orchestral textures, *leitmotifs*, and treatment of texts. There was also a Czech component, but the German and Wagnerian qualities and the worldliness he acquired from travel made him an outlier in a country where the musical nationalism of Smetana and Dvorak ruled. After attending a performance of *Mephisto* in Mannheim, he evolved into a demarcation as Wagnerian by the critics drove his reputation further. Unbeknownst to them is that she is their long-lost sister, whom Isabella sent away when the King was told the child would be the end of their family. Cesar finds Beatrice and reconciles her two long-feuding sons, Manuel and Cesar. Manuel has been courting Beatrice, who is living at a convent; and Cesar has fallen in love with a woman he spotted at his father’s funeral. Also unbeknownst to them is that she is their long-lost sister, whom Isabella sent away when the King was told the child would be the end of their family. Cesar finds Beatrice and Manuel together and murders his brother. Isabella, unaware of that fact, orders Cesar to avenge Manuel’s murder, and he does so—by killing himself.

The classic recording of *Bride of Messina* is Supraphon’s 1975 performance with Frantisek Jilek leading a cast of first-rate Czech singers and an inspired Prague National Theater Chorus and Orchestra. The young Gabriela Benackova’s Beatrice is gorgeous, silky, and smooth. Libuse Marova’s lyric and warm Isabella is almost as good. The smooth tenor of Ivo Zidek and Vaclav Zitek’s rich, resonant baritone are outstanding. The secondary roles are all well taken. The excellent chorus has power, presence, and weight; and the orchestra’s rich strings and commanding brasses are terrific. In his enthusiastic review, Carl Baumann did not like the engineering (Sept/Oct 1994), but it sounds terrific on my system.

The new Magdeburg Theater *Bride of Messina* is no match on any level and hard to listen to over time. Noa Danon’s Beatrice is rich in the low register, but thin and strained to a shriek as she goes higher. Lucia Corvoni’s Isabella is better, but her vibrato becomes annoying in her long monologs. Corvoni’s initial monolog is the first singing we hear, and it bodes ill for what follows. Tenor Richard Samek and baritone Thomas Florio fare better, but neither has the manly and noble qualities required. Samek sounds a little forced, and Florio’s voice is too light. The chorus sounds ragged. In fact, all the singing feels a little fre-
thetic, as if pushed by the conductor, and the Magdeburg performance does not really flow. The orchestra plays well but lacks definition and presence. The funeral march, the most famous excerpt from this opera, is shortened for some reason. What is left of it lacks gravity—does not sound like a funeral march. Jilek and the Prague orchestra demonstrate thrillingly how it is done. CPO’s rather odd sound does not help the Magdeburg performance at all. It is a little too close for the singers and rather amorphous.

Both performances are in Czech. CPO’s booklet is better than Supraphon’s, though the latter has interesting portraits of some fine Czech singers. Both performances come with librettos and English translations.

I love the CPO label and hate to be so critical, but this will not do. Not when (I hope) you can still buy the Jilek. There was a pretty good excerpt recording of a Prague National Theater production conducted by Zdenek Kosler, maybe never on CD and never complete.

Field: Nocturnes, all
Roberte Mamou, p
Pavane 7555 [2CD] 85 minutes

Irish-born John Field (1782-1837) is said to have invented the nocturne and had a major influence on Chopin. His pianistic abilities were legendary, and his life is the stuff of which romanticism is defined. Field was wrecked by alcoholism and cancer. He died of pneumonia and was buried in Russia.

Many pianists have tackled these 18 nocturnes, and all of them have enjoyed decent reviews. While Chopin, Fauré, and others were to develop the form further, Field’s pieces fall graciously, intelligently, and emotionally on the ear—and gentler as well.

Tunisian-born Pianist Mamou recorded most of these in 1986, and they are now remastered. The three nocturnes missing from that earlier recording have been added to this new package so that we now have a complete set. Why Pavane chose to saddle us with an extra disc just because the timing slightly exceeds the usual 80 minute limit is beyond my comprehension. Decca’s recent recording with Elizabeth Joy Roe gets them all on one 87-minute disc and has been favorably reviewed in these pages (S/O 2016).

Miceal O’Rourke and John O’Conor are but two excellent rivals, but Mamou does bring a natural flow to her performances without sac-
nauseum. Both concertos have two movements, Allegro and Rondo, and the Rondo in Opus 10 sounds even more naive—like a child’s tune—than the one in Opus 9. The chamber “orchestra” has no bass; its combination of instruments sounds so unusual that it can’t be called a chamber “orchestra” is the usual sense.

On the whole, this Belgian-produced album is of interest only for people really desperate for the unknown.

**FRENCH**

**FRANCAIX:** Clarinet Concerto; Clarinet Trio; Variations

Dmitri Ashkenazy, cl; Ada Meinich, va; Bernd Glemser, Yvonne Lang, p; Cincinnati Philharmonia/ Christoph-Mathais Mueller

Paladino 74—56 minutes

Icelandic Switzerland-based clarinetist Dmitri Ashkenazy pays tribute to one of his favorite composers through a pairing of two archival recordings with a new one. The program consists of a September 1992 reading of the Solo de Concours Theme and Variations (1974) with Swiss pianist Yvonne Lang; a May 1995 performance of the virtuosic Clarinet Concerto (1968) with Swiss conductor Christoph-Mathias Mueller and the Cincinnati Philharmonia (CCM); and an April 2016 rendition of the Trio for clarinet, viola, and piano (1992) with Oslo-born violist Ada Meinich and noted German pianist Bernd Glemser.

This compilation may interest serious listeners who follow Ashkenazy and his prolific recording career. While he boasts the fingers and stage presence of most globe-trotting soloists, his playing can also be sloppy and careless, falling short in the details that define good and great players. The period between the recordings is notable. How much does the playing of an instrumentalist change over two decades? The best musicians grow for the better over time, but the reverse is also common.

Yet this release is one of Ashkenazy’s finest efforts. His playing is clean and nicely shaped, with good phrasing and his usual superb technique. He still has a somewhat earthy sound that can cloud his high register and restrict his color palette, but he seems to respect the limits of his sonic philosophy, and in the composer’s more solitary passages he employs it to great effect.

His collaborators are solid. Lang plays the variations with polish and awareness; and Mueller and the Cincinnati Philharmonia accompany the delicate yet difficult concerto with excellent skill and precision, allowing the composer’s vivid sound world to come alive and interact with the soloist.

The autumnal Trio, though, is the most affecting piece. While Francaix still has his trademark Gallic humor, the themes and harmonies often travel in unexpected directions, and the slow movements are strikingly dark. Meinich and Glemser bring a lightness and grace to the Trio that work well in both the wildly cheerful and the startlingly ghostly parts, and together with Ashkenazy they make one of the composer’s last works a profound statement.

**HANUDEL**

**FRANZONI:** Santa Barbara Vespers

Accademia Degli Invaghiti, Concerto Palatino/ Francesco Moi

Brilliant 95344—63 minutes

To borrow a phrase I’ve heard used to give the highest praise to a gospel singer, this “took me to church”. It means that the singing is so powerful, skillful, meaningful, and impassioned that listeners—of any faith or no faith—can’t help but be swept along. This is like that.

Amante Franzoni (c 1575-c 1630) wrote these Vespers to honor the feast day of his employer’s patron saint. In 1612 he was appointed maestro di cappella at the Gonzaga court in Mantua and—though not made explicit in the booklet—this recording seems to have been made in the Gonzaga court basilica, dedicated to Santa Barbara, the city’s patron saint.

Fittingly for such an important saint, the music is lush with layers and dimensions. Some settings, such as ‘Laudate Pueri’, are intimate chamber pieces; others are grand and spectacular. The resulting liturgical occasion is vividly memorable: a mix of the devotional, celebratory, ecstatic, and enveloping.

Under the direction of Francesco Moi, the performances of chant, chamber vocal pieces, full polyphonic settings, and instrumental works are all first-rate. Everyone masters the building’s cavernous acoustic extremely well, and that’s no small feat.

Notes, bios, Latin texts. For more information about the 1565 Antegnati organ in the Santa Barbara Basilica, see my recent review of an excellent program of Cavazzoni organ music (M/A 2017).

C MOORE

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FURSTENTHAL: Spatlese; 16 Songs & Ballads+
Rafael Fingerlos, bar; Sascha El Mouissi, p
Toccata 354—75 minutes

As a Jewish teenager in 1939, Robert Fürstenthal was scarred by the terrible tragedy of World War II and Hitler's "final solution"; though he and his mother escaped to the United States, his father did not. Robert worked as an accountant, largely abandoning his early efforts in composition. All that changed when he became reacquainted with his childhood sweetheart, who also had left Germany to settle in Boston. Thanks to her inspiration, he began composing again; they were married in 1974. He produced some 40 instrumental compositions along with nearly 160 songs and other vocal works.

The songs here are tonal and cast in a style that would fit very nicely in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Each setting—including poets like Hans Bethge (who translated the Chinese poetry used in Mahler's Lied von der Erde), Rilke, Eichendorff, and Hofmannsthal—is very well conceived for the voice, and many have sizable challenges for the pianist. The performances are beautiful, the sound excellent. I hope that Toccata releases some of Fürstenthal’s instrumental work.

HASKINS

GARRIDO-LECCA: Andean Folk Dances; Symphonic Tableaux; Suite Peruana; Laudes II
Norwegian Radio; Fort Worth Symphony/ Miguel Harth-Bedoya—Naxos 573759—54:14

This seems to be the first release of works by Peruvian composer Celso Garrido-Lecca (b. 1926) outside Latin America, including three works from the 80s (1980, 1983, 1986) and one from the 90s (Laudes II, 1994). The earlier works are, to my ear at least, unremarkingly tonal and provincial, drawing on folk tunes and genres, without a hint of any sort of modernism, whether atonality, serialism, brutalism. They give the impression of someone who never got out of Peru (the one external influence seems to have been study with Copland in New York).

Worse, I don’t hear a distinctive voice in these works. Laudes II is a bit more forward-looking (though I could imagine a more dynamic and highly inflected reading), though again, rather retrograde for 1994. All in all, a postcard from Peru that is not likely to lead an American conductor to widen his repertoire.

T MOORE

GAWLICK: Xeyali: Imagined Memories;
SCHUBERT: Quartet 13
Hugo Wolf Quartet
Musica Omnia 704 [2CD] 84 minutes

This program combines an unusual new work with something very familiar. Ralf Yusuf Gawlick was born in Germany of Turkish-Kurdish descent. His latest piece, Imagined Memories, is paired here with one of several quartets quoted in its introduction, Schubert’s Rosamunde Quartet. Imagined Memories is a musical homage to the biological mother the composer never knew, depicting the intersection of memories real and imagined. Gawlick juxtaposes haunting harmonics and other delicate sounds—tremolos, tiny chorales, wisps of melody—with more dissonant, rhythmic episodes. Some of this material is pastiche—quotations from Schubert, Kurtag, and others—which is itself a form of memory. The harmonies are mainly modal or adventurously tonal. The music itself is contemplative and imaginative, played with quiet poetry by the Hugo Wolf Quartet.

Most will not buy this album for the Schubert, but I should note that the performance of this heartbreakingly beautiful quartet is sensitive and warmly recorded. Nothing is overdone; everything is intimate and soft-textured.

SULLIVAN

GEMINIANI: Keyboard Music
Francesco Baroni, hpsi, org
Stradivarius 37051 [2CD] 107 minutes

This is a compilation of Francesco Geminiani’s odds and ends, his “Second Collection” pulled together into a 1762 book and printed by a “Mrs Johnson” in London—the widow of John Johnson, who had printed many of Geminiani’s earlier books. It was his last published work. The First Collection was from London 1743, reprinted in Paris in 1748.

As far as I can find, the 1762 book of harpsichord music has not been recorded before. I have Roberto Loreggian’s satisfying 1996 recording of the first book (not reviewed), played on an unspecified harpsichord that sounds Italianate. There was a 2002 recording of that book by Fabio Bonizzi (reviewed enthusiastically by Mr Haskins, Sept/Oct 2002), deleted now, and one by Hank Knox (July/Aug 2011). There is also a shorter disc of selections by Francesca Lanfranco (July/Aug 2012). I haven’t heard any of those after Loreggian’s.
Here’s what ARG colleagues had to say about the musical style of the first book. “His transcriptions are totally idiomatic and great fun to play. Geminiani usually scores the music in transparent, two-voice textures, often emphasizing virtuosic elaboration and ornamentation in the faster pieces.” “This music is a veritable encyclopedia for what is possible ornament-wise in Italian 18th-Century harpsichord repertoire. There are many ways to enjoy this. Listen to the harpsichord-specific richness of texture. Observe the asymmetrical, unpredictable structures embedded in the music.” From playing and listening to that 1743-48 book, I concur.

Most of the pieces in this Second Collection are arranged from Geminiani’s sonatas for violin and continuo, or from his “Art of Playing the Guitar”. The few others in the book could be from lost sources, or original compositions for keyboard. It’s galant entertainment.

Baroni’s harpsichord is a modern copy of a 1769 Taskin, giving the music a French accent. The organ is a new one in Cremona. When he switches back and forth from harpsichord to organ, the pitch level doesn’t quite match. It doesn’t matter much, because only three pieces in this set are played on organ. Baroni makes the music sound appropriately lively and pleasant. His interpretation adheres to current norms of subtle time-bending for emphasis. His registration most of the time is uncoupled 8-foot stops, with manual changes on repeats. I did notice one piece where he added a 4-foot stop that was not quite in tune. That’s just a small blemish in this well-prepared and fluent performance of music not otherwise available.

“Raising and soothing the Passions of rational beings”—that’s what music is all about, for Geminiani in the 1740s. His 1749 treatise on musical taste urges performers to fill up his music with improvised non-harmonic tones in passing, mixing harmonies together in artful ways to make the delivery more intense, along with rolling some chords downwards. As he points out, it makes the music sound more emotionally direct. He says that the techniques have already been in use for more than a hundred years, a “delicate and admirable Secret”. In his 1743-48 harpsichord book, he wrote out some of those effects in the left-hand parts, like his corroborating illustrations in the treatise. His 1751 treatise for violin is about inflaming the emotions, too. These manuals of style were reissued in several editions in English, French, and German, continuing after Geminiani’s death in 1762 until at least 1800.

I don’t hear similar left-hand harmonic effects in Baroni’s performance of the 1762 harpsichord book (not available to me to read through in time for this review), and perhaps they are not notated there. Would Geminiani’s colleagues or customers have added them automatically, from knowledge of his first book and his treatises? Or does their omission by the composer indicate a gradual change in his own taste, toward simplicity? Did he really arrange these harpsichord pieces himself in his last year, or is this a case of a ghost-arranger for Mrs Johnson capitalizing on his name and fame?

There is a 2016 paper by Rudolf Rasch sorting out extant sources. It is freely available from his web site. Along with that research, the present well-produced recording by Baroni is timely and important, filling a gap. I just wish it would inflame my emotions more than it does. The music seems square, in need of more interpretive risks. On the other hand, there is nothing really “wrong” with this performance, and I might be expecting too much.

B. LEHMAN

GERSHWIN: Rhapsody 2; see SAINT-SAENS

GESUALDO: Madrigals, Book 6
Collegium Vocale Ghent/ Philippe Herreweghe
Phi 24—65 minutes

Using solo singers drawn from the vocal ensemble Collegium Vocale Gent, judiciously and effectively in partnership with one lute, Philippe Herreweghe leads this fine interpretation of Carlo Gesualdo’s final book of madrigals (1611). Apart from the sheer beauty of the sound, the blend, nuance of pulse, and technical mastery allow for fluid expression of the texts. On the “how-much-should-we-emphasize-every-text-depiction” scale, the choice here is to linger rarely.

For instance, in ‘Tu Piangi O Fili Mia’ the attention is on the blazing flames of love rather than the tears and weeping; and in ‘Belta, Poi Che T’Assenti’ words like sorrow (dolore) and tormented (tormentato) evoke the pleasure-in-pain effect rather than the pain-in-pleasure. What this means is that when some of the more sinuous and biting chromatic figures are emphasized (as in ‘Io Parto, E Non Piu Dissi’), it’s all the more heartfelt.

Other madrigals in the collection are more unequivocally happy: the melodic cascades
depicting cavorting cupids in ‘Quando Ridente E Bella’ is just one example.

Notes, bios, texts, translations. After you get this disc, another fine version of Book 6 to further explore Gesualdo’s mastery of the Mannerist madrigal is by La Compagnia Del Madrigale (Glossa 922801, J/A 2013).

C. Moore

Gibson: Relative Calm; Q-Music; Extensions RC; Return
Jon Gibson, sax; Joseph Kubera, keyboards; David Van Tieghem, perc.
New World 80783—69 minutes

Jon Gibson (b. 1948) was a clarinetist with the Steve Reich ensemble back in the 60s and then was a founding member of Philip Glass’s group. This series of pieces is a ballet for Lucinda Childs written in 1981, in four 16-minute parts.

Gibson’s stylish minimalism is built around ringing permutations over tonal ostinato patterns in glowing major keys. *Relative Calm (Rise)* is inspired by chime patterns heard in English churches (with ordering of the bell entrances 1-2-3-4, 2-3-4-1, etc.) with endlessly repeating ostinato patterns over a constant drone, all in a joyfully glowing major. *Q-Music (Race)* is the same, with broken octaves, with keyboards. *Extensions RC (Reach)* is slightly different, in that it is for solo soprano saxophone with echoing canon-like overlaps. The slightly jazzier *Return* closes out. Like so much of this music, the presence of hallucinogens is strongly suggested. Without them, besides its use as hip background music, this can be pretty boring.

Gimbels

Giuliani: 2-Guitar Pieces
Rossini Overtures; Variazioni Concertantes, Polonaises
Jeffrey McFadden & Michael Kolk
Naxos 572445—71 minutes

I’m at that point in my career when I’m teaching the students (and sometimes children) of former students. Jeffrey McFadden is a student of Norbert Kraft, the producer of the Naxos guitar series. Michael Kolk is McFadden’s student. Kraft (and McFadden) have clearly established a tradition of excellence. This performance is a delight from start to finish.

Now, do we really want to hear Rossini overtures on two guitars? Yes, we do—the performances won’t ever replace the colors and sparkle of the orchestral originals, but they can, and do, duplicate the delight. Remember—in the age before sound recording, most music was only available to listeners in arrangements for home enjoyment like these. Also, remember that Giuliani had a special affinity for Rossini—when he took the operatic master’s melodies and applied his guitar genius to them, the result was magic.

Compare the overture arrangements to the two sets of Variaziones Concertantes. The themes aren’t terribly distinguished, though what Giuliani makes of them is really delightful. Likewise, the three polonaises won’t ever replace Chopin’s, but McFadden and Kolk perform them with a beautiful and stately energy.

And further good news—this is just Volume 1. There’s more to come!

Keaton

Glass: Etudes+
Vikingur Olafsson, p
DG 4796918—81 minutes

Mr Olafsson is a technically brilliant and accomplished pianist. He plays the punishing Etude 6 more cleanly than I’ve ever heard it. (His program includes Etudes 2-3, 5, 9, 13-15, 18, and 20.) He could take more time, and be more expressive, in the lovely 2 and elsewhere. He introduces a variety of changing voicings in 5 that, like the virtuosic display in 6, shows that he is a pianist who has considerable gifts. Strangely, he leaves out an internal repeat and also reverses the order of one of the right-hand patterns in ‘Opening’ (apparently they’re mislearned, since he repeats the same errors twice more). Where are the producers and other professionals who ensure that this kind of thing doesn’t happen, especially at a major label like DG?

The program also includes so-called reworkings (by Christian Badzura) of ‘Opening’ and Etude 2 combining piano and string quartet. These uninteresting arrangements—with-a-couple-of-tweaks are pretentious; they add nothing to the program, and omitting them would have allowed for additional solo pieces. In any case I prefer the interpretively richer performances of Paul Barnes (July/Aug 2016) and Maki Namekawa (Mar/Apr 2015). Perhaps as he grows older Mr Olafsson will develop a musical depth to match his considerable technique. The sound is superb.

Haskins

May/June 2017
GLAZOUNOV: Novelettes; TCHAIKOVSKY: Quartet I; TITZ: Quartet
Casal Quartet
Solo Musica 241—75 minutes

This is titled, perhaps ironically, "Russian Treasures", but of course the composer Anton Ferdinand Titz (1742-1810) isn’t Russian. He was a German import to Russia and in the employ of the royal court. His quartet from 1801 is the third of three dedicated to Tsar Alexander I. It’s about as sophisticated as early Mozart or Schubert, lacking the harmonic and contrapuntal intricacy of Haydn or early Beethoven, and not the least bit Slavic in expression or temperament.

Neither is Glazounov’s Novelettes, his third work for quartet, a pan-national excursion across Spain, the Orient, old Mother Russia, Austria, and Hungary. Glazounov’s impersonations are broad and vague, and a bit hackneyed. Without the movement titles, I couldn’t guess the country. ‘Orientale’ sounds more Italian than Eastern, as does the ‘Spagnuola’. III, an ‘Interludium in modo antico’, evokes Eastern Orthodoxy with slow-moving chant intoned above a swirling garland of flowing counterpoint. Hungary is depicted by gypsy fiddling in gentle Schubertian style, not Liszt’s lusty and voluptuous brilliance. Austria is represented by a tipsy waltz. It’s remarkably assured for a 16-year-old; no wonder people suspected that Rimsky-Korsakoff ghostwrote Glazounov’s early works.

Tchaikovsky’s popular first quartet is also his least Slavic, about halfway between Mendelssohn and Beethoven. The chorale-like parts of I and II are played without vibrato, a choice I like in II but not in I. The finale is joyously carefree, always my favorite movement.

The Casals use almost no vibrato in the Titz quartet or III of Novelettes, so I guess any allusion to older music equals no vibrato by their calculus. I’d prefer musicians let their ears guide their judgement rather than extra-musical associations and concerns.

With vibrato the Casals have a rich, sweet blend; but without it they sound like any other period group scraping away. Beautiful, close sound, interesting and extensive notes.

WRIGHT

Food That is Good for You
It will never catch on until the price comes down, and the price won’t come down until it catches on—another one of the great evils of capitalism.

American Record Guide

GLAZOUNOV: Symphonies 4+5; Seasons Excerpts
Leningrad Philharmonic/ Yevgeny Mravinsky
Praga 350 129 [SACD] 80 minutes

This collection of Glazounov’s best and most popular pieces is a reissue, remastered in SACD sound. The Leningrad Orchestra was a world-class ensemble, so the playing is seriously good. In the symphonies, Mravinsky’s interpretations are spacious and epic in scope. The original of Symphony 4 goes back to 1948; the other pieces are from the late 1960s. If played at high volume, the sound gets a bit coarse, but overall, Praga did a good job at enlivening the sound.

The dilemma for today’s listeners is that, well done as they are, the works are available in both better sound and readings. For Symphony 5, Glazounov’s masterpiece and one that should be standard rep, my favorite is by Fedoseyev. He may have had an unfair advantage; apparently the god Donner was manning the kettledrums in the finale, with results that are overwhelming.

O’CONNOR

GRANDI: Motets; see CAVALLI

GURETZKY: 4 Cello Concertos; Violin Concerto; CERNOHORSKY: Fugue
Kinga Gaborjani, vc; Rodolfo Richter, v; David Wright, hps; Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen
Chandos 816—73 minutes

I am Josef Antonin Guretzky (1700-69). I was born in Pferov, Moravia, played and composed at the court of Schrattenbach, then from 1735 at the court of Rudolf Franz Erwein, Count of Schönborn in Wiesenthalt, Bavaria. The Count was mad about cello music and had me write no fewer than nine concertos for him. Then around 1740 I went to Dresden and wrote my one and only violin concerto, probably for Johann Georg Pisendel.

This is an interesting production not unlike the Vivaldi cello concerto disc also reviewed in this issue. Both groups play the concertos in chamber style with one player to a part. That is highly effective here, since the music is sensitive and soloist and orchestra mingle their sounds for much of the time. The musical style is not as gutsy as Vivaldi, giving it a subtle appeal to the ears, especially as played here. Both cello and violin concertos are quite lovely and played with polish.

This is a composer neither I nor ARG
appear to have met before, presented in a highly enjoyable fashion. The encore to the violin concerto is a Fugue in A minor by a more familiar if less easily spelled name, Bohuslav Matej Cernohorsky, played thoughtfully by Wright.

This is a fine and unfamiliar program played and recorded with beauty.

Halvorsen: Violin Concerto; Nielsen: Violin Concerto; Svendsen: Romance
Henning Kraggerud; Malmo Symphony/ Bjarte Engeset
Naxos 573738—62 minutes

If you are curious about the Halvorsen concerto, this is the only recording. It was thought lost but was discovered in 2015, and this is its first recording. Readers expect me to be blunt, so let me say that it might have stayed lost as far as I’m concerned. It’s rather boring, the normal gestures expected at the time but utterly uninspired. If you want to hear it for yourself, Naxos doesn’t charge outrageous prices.

The Nielsen is not among the better performances I have heard. Certainly it doesn’t come near the Kolya Blacher recording (Sept/Oct 2016). Tempos and sound on that one were ideal, and it drew me in. This one leaves me cold. I think it is partly the conducting and partly the sound. I like the Nielsen concerto very much, but I don’t think this recording would win anyone over.

The Svendsen Romance has been with us a long time, and I know no recording as good as Josef Suk on Supraphon 4000 (J/F 2010, p 279).

Handel: Messiah
Erin Wall, Elizabeth DeShong, Andrew Staples, John Relyea; Toronto Symphony & Mendelssohn Choir/ Andrew Davis
Chandos 5176 [2SACD] 114 minutes

Handel’s orchestration for Messiah was fairly rudimentary: strings, oboes, and continuo with occasional appearances of brass and timpani. This oratorio, though, bears an interesting distinction. It is the oldest work of any size to have been continuously popular since its premiere in 1741. It has never slipped from the top of the heap, and today it is beloved by many whose interest in classical music doesn’t extend beyond a handful of works. As it paraded through the ages, Messiah has been gently updated, particularly in its orchestration. Mozart’s version is known through about half a dozen recordings, but we should also acknowledge the work of men like Ebenezer Prout (1835-1909) and Eugene Goossens (1893-1962). Insofar as Messiah has become a concert piece, performed with symphony orchestras for general audiences, it should come as no surprise that someone might want to make the orchestration grander and more colorful.

That someone in this case is conductor Andrew Davis, who many years ago recorded an excellent Messiah, done on a grand scale (EMI, March/April 1988 & 2009). Now, he says, he has spent ten months on the project or reorchestrating the work to make it more vivid and impressive. (And should I point out that ten months is about 15 times as long as it took Handel to write the piece in the first place?) He has retained Handel’s notes, harmonies, and basic style, but adjusted the accompaniment of virtually every movement. The results are

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quite refreshing: beginning the overture with wind band and repeating with strings, giving the instrumental solo in ‘I Know’ to clarinet, and so on. In the notes Davis goes through all the movements and explains his changes, and in almost every case they are not obtrusive; they sound as though they belong. A few details are jolting, such as the snare drum in ‘Thus sayeth the Lord’ and ‘Thou shalt break them,’ and the tambourine in ‘The Lord gave the Word.’ On the whole, though, the instrumentation reinforces the mood and message of every movement, and I’ll admit to enjoying the recording greatly.

The performance is lightly cut, mainly toward the ends of Parts II and III, and both da capo arias (‘He was despised’ and ‘The trumpet shall sound’) have only the A section. Most of the ornamentation, including simple appoggiaturas, is omitted, as well as most occasions for what I call justified rhythms, where, say, upbeat eighth notes are taken as sixteenths to match other parts. Where choices are available, the common ones prevail, as in the 4/4 ‘Rejoice’ and the duet version of ‘He shall feed his flock.’

Tempos are crisp and modern, and the performers are all very good. The four soloists (with mezzo, not countertenor) are first-rate; and the choir, which must number around 150, sings with the agility of much smaller groups. This is a “big” Messiah with none of the problems we normally associate with such endeavors. I guess we could call it “historically informed” because tempos are brisk and the spirit is not at all romantic. It also struck me as a gentle repudiation of Musicalogical Correctness—and that is no doubt a good thing. I dare say that if you had a contest lining up all the approaches to Messiah and had a review panel consisting of people with no musico logical prejudices, this would be the winner. Davis has dedicated this edition to the memory of his parents. Mom and Dad would be proud.

ALTHOUSE

HANSON,G: Odyssey
5 Nocturnes; Clarinet Concerto; Orpheus; Jubilate Deo; Odyssey; Now Welcom Somer
London Riptieno Society; London Mozart Players; soloists
Cala 77026—74 minutes

Geoffrey Hanson has earned a high reputation among current British composers, and these recent compositions amply show why. His Five Nocturnes for Tenor (2009) is an eclectic mix-

HARBACH: Orchestral Music III
London Philharmonic/ David Angus
MSR 1614—63 minutes

This recording of Symphonies 7, 8, 9, and 10 is the latest volume in a series devoted to the prolific American composer, Barbara Harbach. She is fortunate to have the London Philharmonic in this project; they play splendidly, no matter how thin some of the material is. This is unabashed neo-tonal music, full of good spirits and straightforward melody. Even the darker music such as the Ferguson Symphony is relatively upbeat. These are short symphonies, with concise movements that present a central idea, briefly develop it, then move to a brisk conclusion. Everything is superbly orchestrated, and is aided by a transparent recording. If the music doesn’t cut deep, it does supply an agreeable experience.

The Pioneers Symphony is spacious and lucid, like a film score, building to a jubilant coda. Hester in the Scarlet Letter Symphony is depicted as a sensual, radiant character, brought to life with bright percussion and lively timpani; Chillingworth is appropriately austere, painted mainly with lower brass; Dimmesdale is forceful and charismatic, invested with a driving rhythm and a dark undercurrent. The Celestial Symphony is what the title sounds like: heavenly music with swirling strings and soaring brass. The first movement has a shining fugue; an even
brighter one soars through the finale, showing
off the airy virtuosity of the strings. Ferguson is
more ur- gent, with a striking quotation from
‘Wade in the Water’—one more instance of a
spiritual skillfully used in a symphony. The
finale opens with a fanfare before developing
an imaginative riff on ‘St Louis Blues.’ The
brass are wonderful here. A growling tuba
introduces a New Orleans style brass section
adding an additional drum set and electric
guitar—the splashiest music here.

SULLIVAN

HAYDN: Nelson Mass; Mass in Time of War
Rachel Nicholls, Grace Davidson, s; Anna Harvey,
zm; Mark Wilde, t; Ashley Riches, bar; City of
London Choir; Royal Philharmonic/ Hilary
Davan Wetton
RPO 54—81 minutes

Both Masses sparkle with joyful energy, but
there’s enough gravitas when it’s called for,
especially in the urgent petitions of the Nelson
Mass, which, you’ll recall, is subtitled Mass in
Time of Need. All the soloists sound youthful
and bright, and the engineers are adept
even enough to let us in on all the miraculous
melodic bits and harmonies Haydn bequeathed to the orchestra.

Maestro Wetton’s choir sounds a little pale
compared to the Leipzig Radio Choir that
joined Neville Marriner for his dramatic read-
ing of the Nelson Mass (Nov/Dec 2005 &
Overview), and to the Stuttgart chorus that
sang the Mass in Time of War under Helmut
Rilling (Sept/Oct 2008). Still, this is lovely
Haydn.

GREENFIELD

HAYDN: Piano Sonatas 20, 34, 50, 52;
Variations in F minor
Leon McCawley
Somm 162—79 minutes

This release contains five of Haydn’s best-
known solo keyboard works. I reviewed three
new Haydn sonata discs in the most recent
issue of ARG, but there is always room for
more, especially if the playing is as fine as on
this one. Moreover, only the first two sonatas
are duplicated.

McCawley is an English pianist I have
encountered previously. He always plays with
exemplary clarity and style but sometimes
tends toward blandness. I enjoyed the present
performances, which are lively and engaging.
Only the coda of the Variations is disappoint-
ing because McCawley downplays the (for
Haydn) exceptional drama there. Compar-
isons with other recordings of the sonatas (for
example, Horowitz’s splendid traversal of No.
52 on EMI) suggest that stronger characteriza-
tion is possible in those works, too.

The booklet contains good notes on the
music, a brief biography, and a fine cover pho-
tograph of the artist. The recorded sound is
excellent, but the key-bed noises from the
piano are unusually audible. This may be
owing to close microphone placement or to a
particularly strong touch. After a while I was
able to ignore these wooden percussions, but
initially I found them bothersome.

REPP

HERRMANN: Souvenirs de Voyage;
DEL TREDICI: Magyar Madness
Michel Lethiec, cl; Fine Arts Qt
Naxos 559796—59 minutes

Two neoromantic clarinet quintets from the
20th and 21st centuries.

Bernard Herrmann’s Souvenirs de Voyage
(1967) could have been written by any number
of late 19th century Germans (or Brits). Besid-
es Brahms, of course, Strauss comes to
mind, though passages from Herrmann’s
familiar cinematic scores are unmistakable,
especially in the slow music (which most of
this consists of). “Love music”, yearning, and
not a little mush are both present. As skillful as
this might be, I still feel the composer found
his true calling in the movies, where he was
unparalleled.

David Del Tredici’s more “contemporary”
Magyar Madness (2006) updates the notion of
“hommage” to a different category. This is a
clear, if grotesquely overblown bow to Brahms.
Like the master, structures are classical (sonata
form, song form, rondo), transformed and
expanded. I is a rather forced sonata form,
choking on itself by the time it gets to the end
gasping. II is a song transcription (song by the
composer), and the gargantuan finale is “a
Grand Hungarian Rondo”, ostensibly along the
lines of Schubert, or so he says. The work
opens with a sour introduction and is filled
with warped refrains and episodes and some
sickly transitions and extensions. The more
generous might consider all this “playful”, but
Brahms’s materials are memorable, to say the
least, and Del Tredici’s are eminently forget-
table. Sections seem to be pasted together
rather than organic. A rondo must by defini-
tion have a subject worth repeating, but this
one doesn’t, and after 25 minutes its welcome

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is definitely worn out. Del Tredici has famously made a career of such references (the Alice series), though this more formally extensive one seems more sarcastic and is thus not nearly as diverting. This project might pass as “interesting,” but I wasn’t really convinced. Recorded in concert with less than ideal sonics.

GIMBEL

HERMANN, J: Harp Concertos; see FOIGNET

HINDEMITH: Clarinet Concerto; VAN DER ROOST: Clarinet Concerto; STRAUSS: Romance

Eddy Vanoosthuyse; Central Aichi Symphony/Sergio Rosales

Naxos 579010—58 minutes

Brussels Philharmonic Principal Clarinet Eddy Vanoosthuyse regularly tours as a clarinet soloist. Here he teams up with the young Venezuelan conductor Sergio Rosales and the Central Aichi Symphony (CASO) of Japan. Commissioned by American swing clarinetist Benny Goodman, the Hindemith concerto (1947) is a four-movement modernist work with all the hallmarks of the composer: lean, serious, logical, contrapuntal, playful, expertly scored, and expressive. It is often more of a symphony for clarinet and orchestra; the solo clarinet in A competes against an ensemble of piccolo, pairs of flutes, oboes, horns, trumpets, plus trombones, timpani, percussion, and strings. In 1950 Goodman premiered the work on a Philadelphia Orchestra subscription concert with Eugene Ormandy.

Known in the United States for his hand pieces, Dutch composer Jan Van der Roost wrote his Clarinet Concerto for Vanoosthuyse; and in December 2008, Vanoosthuyse gave the first performance in Salt Lake City under the baton of University of Utah professor Robert Baldwin. Set in two large movements titled ‘Doloroso e contemplativo’ and ‘Giocoso e con bravura’ this concerto, too, is more a symphony for clarinet and orchestra, sometimes casting the clarinet adrift in lonely soliliquy, later integrating the clarinet timbre into the large orchestral soup, replete with generous helpings of winds and percussion. The music is fearlessly eclectic, rising from an abstract neo-expressionist soundscape, absorbing elements of cinematic romanticism, and at one point arriving in a jubilant neo-Baroque cadence. This is its recording debut.

The Richard Strauss Romanze for clarinet and orchestra rounds out the program. A student work from the composer’s high school days at the Ludwigs Gymnasium (1879), the work is a harbinger of his mid-life embrace of neo-classicism after driving late German progressive romanticism to the breaking point. Simple, well-written, and thoughtfully scored, the Romanze looks backward several decades, and casual listeners could easily mistake it for late Mozart.

The performances are professional and compelling. Vanoosthuyse plays with superb clarity, creamy legato, excellent technique, and elegant phrasing; and Rosales and CASO handle each score with ease, skill, and authority. The sound engineering is first-rate as well; the balance between soloist and ensemble is perfect, and each hue and color on stage is clean and vibrant.

HANUDEL

HOLLER: Violin, Cello, & Organ

Fantasy; Victima Paschali Laudes; Schünster Herr Jesus

Barbara Harbach, org; William Preucil, v; Roy Christensen, vc

MSR 1445—71 minutes

Karl Höller (1907-87) grew up in a family of organists; his grandfather was organist of Würzburg cathedral and was succeeded by a daughter, who became one of the first female organists to hold such a position in Germany. His father was organist at the cathedral of Bamberg where Höller was a chorister and, at the ripe age of 8, began to substitute for his father. Following the war in 1949 he began teaching at the Munich Music Academy, becoming president in 1954. He wrote orchestral, chamber, choral, piano, and organ works, as well as two film scores.

These pieces are colorful, polyphonic, and beautifully crafted, employing a tonal idiom redolent of Hindemith and Reger, with a hint of the 20th Century French school. The combination of organ and strings works very well, and the recorded balance is excellent. Preucil and Christiansen are fine players, and Harbach offers excellent accompaniments on a 36-stop 1956 Moeller in the First Church of Christ Scientist, Buffalo. You will have to be familiar with the melodies the Triptychon (for solo organ) and Improvisations are based on, as they never make an unadorned appearance. I didn’t find myself becoming emotionally engaged and so did not desire repeated hear-
Franz Liszt wrote this to Marie Jaëll: “If a male name was printed on your pieces, the music would be played by all pianists.” Brahms wrote a rather backhanded compliment: “How insipid they are, these young women pianists who always play the same pieces by Liszt. But speak to me of La Jaëll! Here is an intelligent, witty woman: she produces her own works for the piano, which are just as bad as Liszt’s.” Unlike Brahms, I am a great admirer of Liszt and his music, and Jaëll’s piano music is original, always interesting, and heavily influenced by Liszt. In over 50 years of listening to and playing classical piano music, how have I never before come across music by Marie Jaëll (1846-1925)?

This is Irsen’s third and final volume of her complete piano music. The first two volumes (Querstand 1508 and 1510) were single discs and not reviewed, but they are very good. In fact, I was so taken with Jaëll’s music on the basis of the current release that I ordered the first two. I also noted the extensive and exceptionally good review by Ralph Locke of the Editions Singulaires 3-disc Portrait of Jaëll (ES 3, Sept/Oct 2016). I was also able to obtain a copy of that superb release, as well an interest- ing biography by Catherine Guichard (Algora Publishing). Printed copies of her music proved hard to track down, but I have a few and am actually learning one for a performance in Women’s History Month. Irsen’s playing and booklet notes set me in motion.

Jaëll was born in Alsace and trained as a pianist in both Germany and France. Her compositional training, in Paris, was from Saint-Saëns and Fauré. She performed across Europe from London to Moscow and eventually made Paris her home. Liszt exerted a strong influence on her compositions and supported their publication. There is evidence that Liszt and Saint-Saëns performed a set of piano duets by Jaëll. She was the first pianist to publicly perform all 32 of Beethoven’s sonatas in Paris. Her music and scientific studies of hand techniques are still worthy of detailed study.

The music on this 2-disc set is quite varied. As with Liszt, there are sets of character pieces and larger 7-10 minute works—and some glimpses into the future, like the remarkable Sphinx, which brings to mind both Ravel and Scriabin. I have no doubt that anyone who has delved into Liszt’s music would find this recording compelling. Irsen handles all of the difficulties with ease.

Here is the great French trumpet player Eric Aubier in works mostly by Serbian composer Ivan Jevtic (b 1947). The 5-movement, 10-minute Que le Jour est Beau! (What a Lovely Day!, 1985) is scored for piccolo trumpet with string orchestra and is meant to depict sunlight yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Much is spiky for the trumpet, strident for the strings, but IV is a shiny Andante that sounds like a chorale tune with whole-tone scale references. Fine playing by the Novi Sad (Serbia) Chamber Orchestra.

The Belgrade Symphony is heard in Jevtic’s two trumpet concertos. The 16-minute Concerto 1 (1973) was Jevtic’s first work for the instrument. I is assertive, contrapuntal, and has a cadenza in the middle, after which it is even more assertive. After a maddening staccato loop by the trumpet, it is a relief when the movement ends. II is furtive and full of suspense for a while, furious in the middle, hushed and portentous toward the end (Jevtic says it is a reflection on World War I). III is lively, often bitonal, and not cheerful.

Jevtic wrote Concerto 2 (1987) for a competition, where it was the compulsory piece. The 17-minute work is scored for C trumpet in I and III, piccolo trumpet in II. I begins aggressively, becomes quiet for a while, then is reawakened by a trumpet fanfare. The ensuing cacophony leads to a dreamy, harp-led passage. The spectacular ending of I proceeds directly into a dreamlike II, where the high-pitched piccolo trumpet sings lyrically over shimmering strings, and where there are a
number of surreal moments. III is lively, buoyant, often sunny, sometimes serious, and has a triumphant ending.

My favorite work is the Theme & Three Variations (1993) for trumpet with two brass quintets. The harmonic language is often quite tonal, for one thing, so there are lots of satisfying and stirring moments. There are passages that remind me of Gabrieli or Praetorius. In Variation 1, when the trumpet part is bouncy, the quintets are lyrical, and vice-versa. A beautiful 2 has everyone muted and ethereal for a while, then open and strident, working as duos or trios. 3 is machinelike at first, eventually noble. The playing by the Vertige and Feeling brass quintets is excellent, and the engineers did a good job with the cavernous acoustic of St Germain des Pres in Paris.

Jevtic writes that he was strongly influenced, as a student, by the music of Dmitri Shostakovich, so that’s why this program ends with that composer’s familiar and marvelous Piano Concerto 1 (1933). Russian pianist Roustem Saitkoulov gives the work all the energy, flair, precision, and abrupt turns of mood it requires. Aubier is the excellent occasional trumpet soloist who sometimes leads, sometimes is in the background, and mostly waits until his next turn. The Pays de Savoie Orchestra goes at it with vigor.

KILPATRICK

JOHANSEN: Piano Quartet; Violin Sonata; Flute Quintet; The Great Peace
Fragaria Vesca
Simax 1334—73 minutes

The first three works on this program of Norwegian composer David Johansen (1888-1974)—a violin sonata, piano quartet, and incidental music to The Great Peace—sound like they were born the same year he was, though they span 1913 to 1950. Only the last work here, the gently bitonal quintet for flute and string quartet, sounds modernist at all—about as pungent as early Milhaud.

The earliest work, the violin sonata, is wistfully cheerful and lyrical, the counterpoint subtle and restrained. It’s mostly pretty, feminine, a bit turbulent here and there, rather innocuous, but charming. The virtuosity of both parts is high. The later piano quartet (1950) reveals in ceaseless muscular displays of contrapuntal mastery, like early Beethoven though with late 19th-Century harmonies and unnerving technical challenges all through its 26 minutes—there are no easy parts, no easy wins. II, Andante sostenuto, is a variations, theme, and fugue, in that order—the theme is revealed by solo cello only after the variations have run their course—it’s inventive and surprised me the first time I heard it. The melodies of neither sonata nor quartet are memorable, and the fully contrapuntal quartet is more stimulating than the mostly homophonic sonata. I love a good fugue and I like this quartet: it’s my favorite work here.

The incidental music to The Great Peace, for two violins, cello, and piano, evokes the oriental exoticism of Grieg’s Peer Gynt—and it’s the only work here bearing Grieg’s influence. The tunes are supposedly based on American Indian songs, but I don’t hear it—instead I hear the gauzy, generic, stylized perfume of Eastern lands as imagined by a Norwegian.

Johansen is clearly a derivative composer, but one who fully absorbed the influences of romantic classicists and then crafted conservative works with a dollop of his own personality as expressed through the international language of past masters, so he’s one of the better second-rank composers.

The sound is a little rough and pushy, a bit in your face—that clarifies Johansen’s counterpoint as it tires the ears. Very thorough, interesting notes and a compelling composer I wouldn’t mind hearing again.

WRIGHT

JONES: Symphonies 1+10
BBC Welsh Symphony/ Bryden Thomson
Lyrita 358—69 minutes

This adds to the Lyrita catalog of fascinating works by modern British composers. Welsh composer Daniel Jones (1912-93) came from a musical family and started composing at age 9. He began as an English major at Swansea University with a speciality in the Elizabethan poets before switching to music at the Royal Academy of Music, where he studied composition with Harry Farjeon and conducting with Henry Wood. He traveled widely and in the process became interested in Asian art and literature. Most of his music he wrote during and after serving in World War II as a decoder in Bletchley Park.

Jones was best known for orchestral music, and he considered the symphony “a dramatic structure with an emotive intention.” He wrote 12 numbered ones, each based on a different note of the chromatic scale, plus an unnumbered 13th. He composed in the Western tonal
idiom, though he employed serial attitudes in various aspects of his work. He called his approach to rhythm "complex metres"—he wrote long passages that maintained irregular time signatures. "The idea is to have a regularity and at the same time symmetry." His sound is thorny and chromatic, with a number of Welsh musical concepts: "love of structural intricacy and complex patterns, a tendency to clothe the underlying pattern in a disguise of improvisatory effect" (Groves). There are also Welsh and English folk elements. Groves rightly added that Jones had trouble "finding an individual thematic voice in devising material of sufficient quality and interest to justify extended treatment". He considered himself to have been influenced by Purcell, Berlioz, Elgar, and Janacek; but it is difficult to liken him to other composers. Mark Lehman called Symphonies 1 through 5, "big, serious, dramatic compositions, often troubled or gloomy, [more] notable for their sinewy gestures and rigorous working-out of motive materials than for hedonic appeal, inspired melodies, or humane warmth". He likened Jones to Alan Rawsthorne. Haskins hears Jones as "a British Walter Piston with little of Piston's geniality" adding that the "formal argument of his music is logical but not numbingly straightforward". I agree with both characterizations, and I hear other composers: Havergal Brian's cragginess and some of Edmund Rubbra's linear drive. Like most British symphonists, he was a great orchestrator who used the ensemble's resources to its fullest.

Symphony No. 1 (1947) is Jones's longest and is unlike the more concise symphonies that followed, particularly after the Fifth. It is a busy, complex work that sounds modal in its melodic lines. Its opening mysterious motif in the low strings is contrasted by a sweeping melody in the violins, often accompanied by a nervous rhythmic undercurrent. These two ideas range through the movement to produce a creepy, somewhat hopeful atmosphere. A stern, Brianesque march-like figure plays into the texture, along with enough ideas to give the work a kaleidoscopic feel. Other images are the ocean off a craggy coast or a dark forest with changing winds. Unlike most Germanic symphonists, Jones does not really develop his themes so much as repeat them with the same or similar orchestration and accompaniments in a variety of textures, tempos, rhythms, etc. I displays a sensation of a trepidatious wandering, but the themes are attractive, and there is enough going on to maintain interest.

At first, the slow movement sounds like I slowed down, but it is the most profound movement of the symphony. The opening theme is long, brooding, and eloquent, with its orchestration of low strings and brass. Imagine a castle at night on a Welsh coast. Gradually the orchestration moves through the midrange to the higher woodwinds. Much of this suggests Rubbra. After the tempo picks up suddenly, the trumpets play a clanging passage that Brian might like. The music generally becomes more extroverted, leading to a canonic passage in the strings that becomes livelier and suggests Brian and early Rubbra. After an eloquent but clashing climax, the movement returns to the brooding of the opening.

The outer sections of III are mostly in a quintuple meter that skitters along, touching here and there on Beethoven and Schumann. The frequent brass interjections have a pagan feel to them. The trio is mostly in a triple meter remotely suggesting Bruckner, though it has none of the sonority and rustic style of the Austrian composer.

Three notes in the low strings are the basis of IV. The long slow introduction begins with a hymnlike passage in the winds, which is treated solemnly by the strings. The orchestra takes off in a blunt skipping rhythm recalling Beethoven's Grosse Fuge, though it sounds nothing like Beethoven. There ensues a win-some treatment of the opening motive in the winds often accompanied by the skipping rhythm until interrupted by a raucous brass passage. Things turn inward; skipping material returns, occasionally interrupted by sardonic brass. The symphony ends with a full brass fanfare leading to a triumphant major chord.

The much shorter Tenth Symphony is more succinct, but it covers similar emotional territory. I consists of brief orchestral statements, some mildly lyrical, as if looking for a way to settle down. The development is more patient and wistful but remains ill at ease, eventually driving itself to a brief climax. The movement is like a cautious snake, curling, uncurling, and occasionally lashing out before giving in to resignation. The darting, irregularly rhythmic II is marked Minacciando (menacing), somewhat akin to the Scherzo: Presto con Malizia of Walton's First Symphony. For all its quick motion it retains some of the searching character of I. 'Serioso' is a solemn pas-sacaglia. Some of it, particularly the horn writing, suggests Bernard Herrmann and a quiet, eerie night on an English moor. The last pas-
JUON: Symphonic Rhapsodie; Sinfonietta Capricciosa
Bamberg Symphony/ Graeme Jenkins
CPO 777 908—73 minutes

In a review of Juon's Symphony 2 (M/A 2015), I'd noted that his music offered an hour of pleasurable listening. On this release, the music's even better and there's more of it. The Rhapsodic Symphony subdivides into two movements. The first also contains the slow movement. The music is constantly inspired, with fascinating textures the composer varies anew. It's rhapsodic in the best sense, constantly exploring attractive byways. It begins with a march in 5/4 meter, which returns occasionally in the manner of a rondo. Its interludes are endlessly inventive. The melodic content, if emotionally a bit reserved, is always elegant and impressive. Juon was Russian-Swiss, so there are reminiscences of 'Let God Arise', familiar from Rimsky-Korsakoff's Russian Easter. The entire symphony is ravishing in orchestral technique. It's worthy of Respighi, but its colors are somewhat darker. When I first played it I enjoyed it. After following it with the score (in the Petrucci online library) I was bowled over by its assured craft. The symphony teems with beauties; its integrity of technique recalls another Swiss master, Hermann Suter.

The Sinfonietta Capricciosa, as its name implies, is a bit lighter. The outer movements rely on ingenuity, of which there's plenty, to make their effect. The middle movement adds beauty and depth.

Both works demand virtuosic playing from everyone and they get it; the Bambergers can be proud of their achievement. Jenkins conducts what must be unfamiliar music with understanding, excellent pacing, and model discipline. CPO’s sound maintains its normal first-rate level. Another hit over the fence for the Osnabruck team.

KALLIWODA: Violin Concertino; Symphony 1; Clarinet Variations
Daniel Sepec, v; Pierre-Andre Taillard, cl; Stuttgart Hofkapelle/ Frieder Bernius
Carus 83289—58 minutes

Johann Wenzel Kalliwoda (1801-66) was a Czech composer of no small talent. He spent almost 40 years of his life as head of the court orchestra at Donaueschinen and seems to have been a hard-working, amiable person.

The Violin Concertino (1829) is Biedermeier Muzak. It’s pleasant, but the solo part—and this is no reflection on Sepec’s handsome playing—tends to plod along. The orchestral accompaniment is predictably strophic. The music isn’t virtuosic; nor, I imagine, was it meant to be. It’s an equivalent to those early 19th Century sonatinas for beginning piano students—likeable but inconsequential.

Symphony 1 (1825) is a stronger entry altogether. I has a gripping, mysterious slow introduction, followed by a lively triple time allegro. The slow movement is compact, but conveys the impression of a large-scale structure. It’s good enough to compare to the better examples of Mozart. The scherzo will surprise any first-time listener, as Schumann snitched from it note for note the first theme in the scherzo of his Symphony 4, even including the staggered entries. The two composers were friends. No doubt Schumann was having fun at the expense of his older colleague. The finale, after a brief slow introduction, works up a more decisive figure. The second theme, a flowing tune, shows the influence of the choral theme from Beethoven’s Ninth. There’s a cleanly voiced fugal development, but the second theme dominates the ending. The whole symphony leaves the impression of an unforced, natural talent, well able to handle the material.

The Introduction and Variations (1844) has an effective sturm und drang opening that could easily introduce a good overture or even symphony. The soloist enters on a wide-ranging theme with some leaps a Schoenberg theme might have spanned. The variations are consistently inventive and enjoyable. Both soloists play their assignments more than capably, especially Taillard, whose role is a real handful. The orchestra of 55 plays cleanly and stylishly. Conductor Bernius’s direction is both sympathetic and idiomatic. Carus’s recording offers lifelike, uncluttered sound.

O’CONNOR
**Kancheli:** Miniatures
Andrea Cortesi, v; Marco Venturi, p
Brilliant 95267—54 minutes

These are 18+1 little pieces (themes) for violin and piano from various films and plays Kancheli has scored over the years (1965-2002)—mostly sullen, often sappy, with a couple of stabs at forced humor included probably owing to the subjects. These are inconsequential trifles, interesting as a supplement but little else. All of them are dedicated to longtime Kancheli colleague Gidon Kremer. Laudatory notes by the Georgian directors and the present performers, and a grateful note by the composer.

**Karayev:** Organ transcriptions
Jamila Javadova-Spitzberg
Affetto 1701—70 minutes

Kara Karayev was an Azerbaijani composer, at one point a student of Shostakovich’s. This release spells his name “Gara Garayev”; Azerbaijan issued a commemorative stamp that had it “Qara Qarayev”; we use the most common spelling, the one in Grove’s.

I enjoyed his ballet, *The Seven Beauties* (Naxos 537122, May/June 2014), and his piano preludes (Delos 2008, Sept/Oct 2011). Javadova-Spitzberg, also born in Baku, has lived in Dallas, Texas for the better part of two decades; she plays the 85-stop Marcussen and Son organ at Sint-Laurenskerk in Rotterdam. These transcriptions were made by Tahira Yagubova.

There are 15 of Karayev’s 24 Piano Preludes, three selections from *Don Quixote*, two from *The Path of Thunder*, the ‘Waltz’ from *The Seven Beauties*, the *Tsarskoye Selo Statue*, and the *Funeral Ode*. The preludes in transcription come across as a string of melancholy meditations with the occasional interruption from, say, the stormy E minor or the jazzy F major, which sounds like Claude Bolling got drunk and wrote a tribute to Shostakovich. Karayev loved his jazz, and the prelude really is one of the better jazz-classical hybrids I’ve heard. Our organist is expressive and confident, but the preludes don’t have much personality—they tend to sound dour and gray. Whether or not that’s the fault of transcription is hard to say. When I reviewed the Delos release the piano tone was so poor that it was difficult to get a handle on the pieces. I guess I’m still in the same boat.

The vibrant ‘Waltz’ from *The Seven Beauties* and ‘Dance of the Passionate Girl’ from *The Path of Thunder* sound lackluster on the organ; the other, slower transcriptions work a little better. In the end, there’s not much here that I find interesting. Javadova-Spitzberg’s playing is by far the best part. I’m no organ aficionado, but it strikes me as tasteful, appropriately shaded and colored, and intellectually engaging. I’d love to hear her again. The sound is reverberant and clear. Notes are in English, and there’s a welcome paragraph about how Azerbaijan and pipe organs met. Hint: Lutheran immigrants are involved.

**Knüpfer:** Cantatas
Weser-Renaissance Bremen/Manfred Cordes
CPO 777884—71 minutes

In his nearly 20 years as choir master at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, Sebastian Knüpfer (1633-76) became famous for his festive choral music. The selections here, though in Latin, have the familiar sound of Lutheran sacred concertos. These polyphonic works might remind one of Schütz’s *Geistlich Konzerte*, as they, too, consist of alternating forces of chorus, instruments, and continuo-accompanied soloists. Yet, with timpani and trumpets, the timbre of Knüpfer’s music looks forward to the late-Baroque.

Knüpfer has a penchant for writing dense, imitative polyphony, which sometimes leads to somewhat mundane counterpoint. The *Kyrie cum Gloria a 14* concludes with a seemingly endless series of short motives on “Amen”. The same effect obtains in the concluding “Amen” of *Quare Fremerunt Gentes*, though its dance-like meter on “Gloria Patri” gives it an air of excitement. Knüpfer also has a flair for word painting. Witness his setting of “timpanis” in *Surgite, Populi*, where singers imitate the sound of the timpani by alternating tonic and dominant pitches.

The singing of Weser-Renaissance is outstanding, as usual. Manfred Cordes never fails to produce a refined performance. Texts and notes are in English.

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The single greatest crisis of the 20th Century was the loss of faith. Noise—and its acceptance as music—was the product of the resulting spiritual confusion.

Robert Reilly in *Surprised by Beauty*
KODALY: Duo; Serenade; DOHNANYI: Serenade for String Trio
Simon Smith, Clare Hayes, v; Paul Silverthorne, va; Katherine Jenkinson, vc
Resonus 10181—70 minutes

Here is a demanding program for string players. The Zoltan Kodaly Duo of 1914 is a beautiful and virtuosic three-movement work—one of his most attractive compositions. It is the longest piece here, lasting 27 minutes. The Serenade that follows moves us out of the bass line and lasts 22, as does Erno Dohnanyi's five-movement masterpiece. There have been a number of recordings that included works by these two Hungarian composers; both of whom lived through the First World War and lived to tell us of it. The Kodaly Duo was actually written at the beginning of the war and does represent Kodaly's thoughts about it. The Serenade is later (1920) and is still clearly influenced by the way the world felt afterwards.

One might expect the Dohnanyi Serenade of 1902 to be something of a letdown after these works, but it is not here. Yes, he is a less dissonant composer, having been born five years earlier, but the overall effect is powerful and concerned with the fate of mankind and his country. What I am saying is that this is a strong program that leaves the listener thinking.

These performances are powerful in themselves, played with life and vigor. The recorded sound is a hair less resonant than I would like, but it isn’t bad and its clarity makes up for any lack of richness in the sound. These players are excellent as well. All in all, this is a rich reading of moving music.

DMOORE

KORTEKANGAS: Migrations; see SIBELIUS

KRÖMMERMER: Symphonies 1-3
Italian Swiss Orchestra/ Howard Griffiths
CPO 555 099—77 minutes

Franz Krömer (1759-1831) was born only a few years after Mozart and outlived Beethoven and Schubert. He came from Kamenice, a small town in Poland roughly halfway between Prague and Vienna. He held several positions in Hungary and Vienna and reached his high point in 1818, when he was appointed imperial court composer and chapel-master for Emperor Franz I. Krömer, a violinist, wrote almost nothing other than instrumental music, and then hardly anything including piano. He left more than 70 string quartets, 35 string quintets, some 40 quartets and quintets for winds and strings, 40 partitas and some 30 marches for winds, and 18 solo and duo concertos—almost nothing in the fields of choral music, song, or opera.

In addition to all the above we have nine symphonies, of which one is apparently lost. The ones recorded here are his earliest three, but they date from 1797 to 1807, which for Krömer would be mid-career. They are much more in the spirit of Mozart and (particularly) Haydn than of Beethoven, though you wouldn’t mistake Krömer’s music for any of his more renowned contemporaries. He writes agreeably lively music for strings and makes liberal use of brass interjections, so it sounds confident and optimistic. The music finally suffers, though, because the materials seem to come from a barrel of stock parts, where every triadic theme and scalar passage has a permanent home. These unoriginal ideas are then repeated, usually without any variation; and the principle of counterpoint, where more than one idea can appear at one moment, is undiscovered. (In the classical style a great deal of the music is deliberately routine, but it is juxtaposed with inventive, original thematic material. Here, though, it all sounds routine, so the whole thing becomes a cliche.) Nothing wrong with listening to these symphonies, but your time would be better spent investigating some of those Haydn symphonies you don’t know.

Griffiths and his Swiss orchestra do a fine job with Krömer. They play with lots of incisiveness and spirit, and the brass are unrestrained. A nice recording, then, if you know all your Haydn!

ALTHOUSE

LIGETI: Cello Concerto; Piano Concerto; Chamber Concerto; Melodien
Christian Poltera, vc; Joonas Ahonen, p; BIT20 Ensemble/ Baldur Bronnimann
BIS 2209—72 minutes

Gyorgy Ligeti (1923-2006) knew how to be different in sound. His cello concerto of 1966 starts off with two minutes on one note, sometimes plus a harmonic. I hardly noticed a cello solo in the 7-minute movement, and the cello is hardly more evident in the other 9-minute movement until the final 3 minutes. The balances are somewhat to blame, perhaps, but
this is not a cello concerto, though not a bad adventure.

The following Chamber Concerto of 1969-70 is more colorful, and Melodien of 1971 almost sounds like music as we know it, but not really. Then we have the 1985-88 Piano Concerto with plenty of piano in the first of its five movements. It employs rhythms to a great extent and is quite satisfying, in its way. If returns to shock and surprise and gives the piano very little to do until the end. Now he takes over for the rest of the concerto. Actually, it is all rather enjoyable if you can take the sound effects and weird state of mind.

All of this program except the Melodien was previously recorded by cellist Miklos Perenyi, pianist Ueli Wiget, and the Ensemble Modern conducted by Peter Eotvos (Sony 58945, July/Aug 1994). Those performances were also excellent. The addition of Melodien is a plus. If you want to be surprised and sometimes shocked by new music, this is a good place to go.

D MOORE

LISZT: Piano Sonata; Dante Sonata;
SAINT-SAENS: Dance Macabre
Ludmila Berlinskaya & Arthur Ancelle, p
Melodiya 2463—62 minutes

This new Russian release is titled “2 Sonatas for 2 Pianos” and labeled a world premiere recording. It contains some remarkable and unique versions of familiar, standard repertoire. It begins with Saint-Saens’s original version of Danse Macabre for two pianos. Liszt’s Piano Sonata is then heard in the Saint-Saens transcription for two pianos. Pianist Ancelle is responsible for the two-piano transcriptions of the Dante Sonata and the Danse Macabre again, this time based on Liszt’s version as modified by Horowitz. We should be aware that Liszt and Saint-Saens publicly performed together at one and two pianos.

I am impressed by the dead-on ensemble between Berlinskaya and Ancelle. These works have a variety of tempos. If bigger is better (and I’m not sure it is, especially in this case) the sound generated by this duo can’t be beat. There are a few places where four hands reduce the problems, like the notorious octave passages near the end of the sonata. These are some of my favorite works, and I am pleased to have this release. I will return to it, but not as often as the best solo versions in my library.

HARRINGTON

LISZT: Opera & Song for Piano
Gabor Farkas
Steinway 30065—64 minutes

Adorned by a cover painting of a suave devil in red chapeau (unidentified) Farkas, graduate, and now professor, at the Liszt Academy in Budapest, offers a program of Liszt’s sometimes demonic transcriptions.

He does his late mentor, Zoltan Kocsis, proud and can boast of many competition awards. Liszt is not an easy composer to master, and to perform well one must have fully come to terms with all technical aspects of piano playing.

The Paraphrase on a Waltz from Gounod’s Faust opens the program followed by the Paraphrase from Verdi’s Aida. These are wrist-breaking pieces, designed for display. Farkas tries to be as musical as possible and seeks inner subtleties instead of just blasting forth at top speed with powerhouse digital control. Whether it works or not depends on what approach most satisfies the listener. There is a gentleness here and nothing is pushed to extremes.

Song transcriptions of Chopin and Clara Schumann bring sweet and unforced listening pleasure, and Isolde’s Liebestod from Wagner’s Tristan is played with melting lyricism and liberal use of rubato. What it does not do is build relentlessly to its final release of pent-up emotion. It just floats you in a more subtle orgy of gorgeous sound.

Totentanz, the longest piece here, is everything we have been waiting for. Farkas holds nothing back as he explodes wildly in an effort to impart as much color as he can to this solo piano version of what was originally written with orchestra. Macabre and seemingly laughing at an encounter with death, it is an impressive meeting and exploitation of the Dies Irae. For this alone accolades are well deserved. Impressive sound.

BECKER

LISZT: Songs
Benjamin Brecher, t; Robert Koenig, p
MSR 1538—68 minutes

Timothy Fallon, t; Ammiel Bushakevitz, p
BIS 2272 [SACD] 66 minutes

Liszt’s music to me had seemed full of sound and fury signifying nothing of much musical value until I discovered his songs. His songs allowed me then to value more of his music, 100
but it is always his songs that most strongly draw me to him.

These two albums give a good sampling of his songs without much duplication. Both include Liszt's first setting of Three Petrarch Sonnets and 'Angolin dal Biondo Crin', though each tenor sings a different version of that.

One benefit of MSR's program, titled "Forgotten Liszt", is that 6 of the 12 songs are recorded here for the first time. That is perhaps the chief reason to obtain the recording. Notes indicate that they probably have not been performed in the 20th or 21st Centuries, because they exist only as first edition prints dating from the mid-19th Century. Brecher has a lovely light lyric voice with a bright tone but not much vocal variety. His readings are respectable, but he sounds strained much of the time, and his vibrato widens as he sings more forcefully.

BIS's album is the first for Fallon and Bushakevitz, frequent partners in recital and first prize winners in the 2013 Wigmore Hall/Kohn Foundation Song Competition. Fallon has an exceptionally fine lyric voice with more weight, and he sings with far more subtlety; his singing is more nuanced and his skilled use of dynamics serves the music well. In addition to the demanding Petrarch songs their program includes some of Liszt's finest songs: Three Songs of Schiller's William Tell, a virtuosic tour-de-force; 'Go Not, Happy Day', his only English setting; 'Oh! Quand Je Dors', perhaps his more tender and exquisite song; and 'Kling, Leise, Mein Lied'. The program closes with another late song, 'Ihr Glocken von Marling' as Fallon displays beautiful legato singing. BIS offers far more subtlety from both singer and pianist.

Fallon's program and performance are the more engaging of these two. Brecher's singing, though it is not bad by any means, lacks the depth of interpretive skill and tonal beauty offered by Fallon. Just one phrase illustrates the difference. The optional passage in the final measures of 'Pace non Trovo', the first Petrarch song, soars to a high D-flat and is marked ppp. Brecher belts it out, suggesting anger; Fallon sings it tenderly, expressing the anguish of love. Where Brecher's readings are just ordinary, Fallon's are probing and illuminating.

In 'Der Fischerknabe' of the William Tell songs, as the lake claims the life of the boy, Fallon sustains a gorgeous p high B over 5 measures (more than 8 seconds). He not only displays wonderful technique; he also shows deep feeling for the text. When the score is marked dolce sotto voce espressivo assai he delivers the text that way. Fallon's Liszt program is similar to and as nearly as good as Polenzani's excellent one (M/A 2011). The fine SACD sound makes it a top choice for a tenor recording.

Notes, texts, translations for both.

R MOORE

LOCATELLI: Violin Concertos, op 3:1,8,9;
ALBINONI: Adagio; Oboe Concerto, op 9:8
Roberto Michelucci, I Musici
IDIS 6721—69:22

These are from 1960 to 1963. They were always beautiful recordings, especially the Locatelli. Needless to say, these are not "period performances". Instead they represent a pleasant compromise between romantic playing and baroque style. There were many complete recordings of Opus 3 in that style, and the one we liked best is probably the Vox set (July/Aug 1991). Suzanne Lautenbacher in that set is not as good a violinist as Michelucci is here, but orchestra and temps seem warmer and more leisurely.

The Albinoni Adagio has been recorded a great deal, and this one is not so special. But for the Locatelli (also called Art of the Violin) it may not be easy to find other good recordings in the old style. In the bare-bones booklet his name is misspelled “Locateeli”, by the way.

VROON

LOKSHIN: Symphony 5; Clarinet Quintet;
Piano Variations
Yan Kratov, b; Ivan Mazgovenko, cl; Maria Grinberg, p; Avet Ter-Gabrielyan, Rafael Davidian, v; Henryk Talalyan, va; Sergei Aslamazian, vc; Moscow Chamber Orchestra/ Rudolf Barshai
Melodia 2446—63 minutes

In the 1920s, Soviet art boasted two competing groups—the traditionalists, who believed that art must imitate life, and the futurists, who believed that abstract expression best symbolized the Marxist experiment taking place. Vladimir Lenin disliked the futurists but ignored them; his successor Joseph Stalin demanded absolute control of everything and sided with the traditionalists. In the early 1930s Socialist Realism set boundaries for Russian artists, and in the late 1940s Soviet bureaucrat Andrei Zhdanov reprimanded several writers and musicians to keep postwar cultural trends in line with the state.

The February 1948 censure of Russian
musicians included Sergei Prokofiev, Aram Khachaturian, and Dmitri Shostakovich. While they labored under Soviet repression, they were also famous worldwide, and their reputations endured. The censured composers in their shadow faced near certain obscurity. The 27-year-old Alexander Lokshin, an Assistant Lecturer in Instrumentation at the Moscow Conservatory, was fired for promoting the music of Mahler, Berg, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich. Several years later the Soviet secret police (KGB) used Lokshin as a trick to divide dissidents in the academic elite, falsely labeling him an informant to divert attention away from the real spies.

Boxed in at every angle, Lokshin became a film and theater composer to support his family; and he wrote music for people who believed him and in his work. The “symphony with voice” forms the heart of his oeuvre, and 10 of his 11 symphonies borrow texts from all nationalities and periods, from Pushkin to ancient Greece and from Goethe to medieval Japanese poets. Lokshin was also drawn to chamber music, almost always having specific performers in mind. Here Melodiya issues from the archives original recordings of three Lokshin compositions.

In 1969, Lokshin completed his brief two-movement Symphony No. 5, Shakespeare’s Sonnets for baritone, string orchestra, and harp. The two poems set are ‘Tired with all these, for restful death I cry’ and ‘That time of year thou mayst in me behold;’ and they employ the Russian translations of the late Nobel Prize winning poet and novelist Boris Pastermak. Lokshin dedicated the symphony to Rudolf Barshai, who recorded it two years later with baritone soloist Yan Kratov and the Moscow Chamber Orchestra.

In 1955 Lokshin finished his Clarinet Quintet for clarinetist Ivan Mozgovenko and the Komitas Quartet. The pairing is notable: the Quartet, founded in 1924 by four Armenian students in Moscow and named after the fin-de-siecle priest and musicologist who helped develop an Armenian national music, is still active today; and Mozgovenko, a World War II Soviet Army veteran who worked in medical tents at the front lines, is considered the founder of the modern Russian clarinet school. Although the quintet consists of a modest ‘Andante sostenuto’ and ‘Theme and variations’, Lokshin considered the piece among his best. Mozgovenko and the Komitas premiered the work in 1957 and recorded it in 1960.

In 1953 Lokshin wrote his Piano Variations, subtitled Variations a la Shostakovich, for noted Russian pianist Maria Grinberg, who also suffered at the hands of the Soviet state. After studies with the eminent pedagogues Felix Blumenfeld and Konstantin Igumnov, she rose quickly to fame in the mid-1930s as a young star of the Russian piano school. In 1937, her life crumbled; her husband and her father were murdered in Stalin’s purges, and she lost all her teaching posts. After several years as an accompanist, she managed to restore her career as a concert soloist, and following the death of Stalin she embarked on several international tours and recording projects. She recorded the Variations in 1956.

Despite a few stumbles, the release lives up to its historical significance. The symphony is magnificently performed and well recorded. Kratov sings with exceptional power and feeling, and Barshai and the Moscow Chamber Orchestra handle the extremes of the chilling score with precision and sympathy. At the outset the Clarinet Quintet has poor sound quality, sometimes uneven playing, and hokey recording space; but Mozgovenko and the Komitas Quartet are fully invested in the emotional journey, and by the time the peaceful coda arrives, the sensitive listener will brave the flaws to hear it again.

The closing Piano Variations must overcome some tinny and dry keyboard sonics, but Grinberg has breathtaking clarity, phenomenal technique, and astounding color and nuance. She also boasts a natural Russian majesty that informs the stately opening, permeates the violence that follows, and elevates the triumphant ending. All warts aside, this is a worthwhile discovery.

HANUDEL

LOURIE: Piano Pieces
Moritz Ernst; Oskar Ansull, narr
Capriccio 5281 [3CD] 220 minutes

Arthur Lourié (1891-1966) is a rather enigmatic figure whose piano music was written from 1908 to 1938. Born into a prosperous Jewish family in Russia as Naum Izrailevich Luria, he converted to Catholicism at age 21. He played a significant role in the organization of Soviet music in the years after the 1917 Revolution, yet he never returned from an official visit to Berlin in 1922. The years 1924-1941 were spent in France and the remainder of his life in the US. He died in Princeton.

His piano music encompasses all of the
different styles we associate with the 30 year period when it was composed, from unabashed romanticism to impressionistic to atonal. Debussy, Scriabin, Stravinsky, Poulenc, even Messiaen and John Adams will come to mind as you listen to these three hours of music. He used an early form of dodecaphony in 1913 and 14.

Despite the heroic efforts of Ernst with this music of significant difficulty, I did not warm to the composer, even after several times through these discs. There are beautiful moments, and the first disc of the earliest pieces moves from very accessible pieces to ones that would be identified as Scriabin by most listeners. As rhythm and harmony disappear and dissonance increases in the selections on the second disc, I found myself losing interest.

A constant stylistic trait of Lourie’s is short phrases, repeated and developed. As I listened, I kept thinking, please give me an eight-bar melody and not four two-bar phrases. For example, the nearly 10-minute Nocturne (1928) begins and ends with about two minutes based on the opening five notes of Scriabin’s Sonata 9 (Black Mass). Only one small section in the middle would fall into everyone’s idea of a nocturne. There is also a fairly virtuosic section. Many of the pieces from 1913-1917 have little rhythmic regularity and tonality. We find a couple of neo-Baroque works, the ‘Minuet after Gluck’ and the Petite Suite en Fa. These seem quite out of place with the rest, but are nevertheless enjoyable.

Two works here have a narrator, and as poor as my German is, I still could appreciate the dramatic efforts of Ansull. We are not given the text of the five-minute ‘Our March’ (1918). The 35-minute Death’s Mistake (1917) is listed in Lourie’s catalog of works as for piano. It is presented in 11 tracks, 6 of spoken text alternating with 5 of piano. The booklet notes describe the piano part as incidental music to a play by Velemir Chlebnikov, a Russian Futurist. The title is given in Russian, German, and English but only the spoken German of the play and an English translation are given in the booklet. This falls into that odd category of melodrama or recitation with piano. I have only found a few of these on recordings (Liszt’s five and Richard Strauss’s Enoch Arden come to mind immediately). Ernst handles all of the music’s variety with ability and dedication.

I have admiration for his work here, but the music itself will not call me back.

HARRINGTON

LUTOSLAWSKI: Cello Concerto; Symphony 4
SZYMANOWSKI: Concert Overture in E

Here is a Polish program with variety, beginning with Karol Szymanowski’s romantic turn-of-the-last century Concert Overture, an enjoyable and substantial work that introduces this recording in a highly positive manner. Then suddenly there is silence until we realize that the almost inaudible put-putting sound is a cello playing repeated sounds, trying to keep out of earshot. It gets more onto the stage for four minutes or so but then suddenly the orchestra wakes up and shocks us with interrupting trumpets in crude and insistent remarks. This is the way the work continues, with instruments playing games together and apart.

Witold Lutoslawski’s 1970 style is most amusing. This work has been recorded several times before, notably by its dedicatee, Mstislav Rostropovich (EMI 67868, Jan/Feb 2003, see Dutilleux). The present performance does it full justice, if that word can be applied to such a silly piece of gorgeous nonsense.

Lutoslawski’s Symphony 4 is a more recognizably Polish piece in one movement that has been recorded at least six times.

The sound quality of this recording is effective and the performances cover all the bases. The competition is fierce for all three works, but you won’t go wrong with this one.

D MOORE

MANCHICOURT: Reges Terrae Mass &
Motets
St Luke in the Fields/ David Shuler
MSR 1632—65:44

Pierre de Manchicourt (c.1510-64) was among the northern composers who found a sympathetic reception at the Spanish court in the 16th Century and was employed as chaplain to Philip II of Spain—a position he held until he died in 1564. There have been a few earlier recordings of his music by the Huélgas Ensemble (July/Aug 1997), the Church of the Advent Choir (July/Aug 2005—they also released a second recording with Manchicourt’s Requiem, Arsis 406), and, most recently, the Brabant Ensemble (Sept/Oct 2007). As effectively characterized by Stephen Rice, who directs the Brabant Ensemble, Manchicourt’s music “is much more approachable” than many of his contemporaries.

HARRINGTON

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The selections on this new release emphasize expansive polyphonic textures for five to eight separate voice parts (the only exception is the four-voice ‘Ne reminiscaris’). Manchicourt’s style is sometimes very dense, especially in the *Reges Terraee* Mass, where the two soprano parts have relatively narrow ranges and the other four voices are relatively high (alto, two tenor parts that constantly cross each other, and bass). Also included are the six-voice source motet for the Mass, ‘Reges Terraee; the eight-voice ‘Vidi speciosum,’ and the recording concludes with the six voice ‘Regina caeli,’ which incorporates a canon of second soprano part, whose singer is told to ignore the dots on notes and rests in the musical phrases of the first soprano.

The 12 mixed voices of the choir of St Luke in the Fields emulate the sound of English boy choirs to the point where the sopranos sometimes slightly strain to reach their upper register. This recording is very similar in sound to Manchicourt’s *Cuidez Vous Que Dieu* Mass sung by the slightly larger mixed voices of the Brabant Ensemble (Sept/Oct 2007), but without the slight straining. The resonant recording and Manchicourt’s dense polyphony also mean that the texts are sometimes hard to distinguish. The booklet is very informative and includes full texts and translations.

**Marais: Jeux d’Harmonie**  
Alberto Rasi, gamba  
Stradivarius 37061—62 minutes

Marin Marais (1656–1728) was the greatest French composer of his time of works for the viola da gamba. His five books contain 550 pieces for viol and basso continuo. Here are 20 of them.

They are played here without the basso continuo line, though Rasi has added some bass notes to his own line to make up for it. The result is highly listenable and emphasizes the improvisational quality of the music. Rasi is a smooth and thoughtful player. He is using a seven-stringed instrument that makes the bass line convincing in depth. Marais may not have intended them to be played this way, and the bass line is in his manuscript, but it was not published until three years after the violin part.

This is the first recording I know of that plays this music as a solo without basso continuo. Rasi is an effective player who studied with Jordi Savall, among others. He is currently teaching and conducting at the University of Verona and has made a number of recordings. This is a fascinating one that gives us a new look at Marais.

**Marina E. Moore**

**Marieu: Clarinet Quintet; Serenade**  
Mark Lieb; Phoenix Ensemble  
Navona 6076—74 minutes

In 1991, New York freelance clarinetist and recent Juilliard graduate Mark Lieb founded the Phoenix Ensemble, a mixed instrument chamber group that engages New York musicians for programs that emphasize the new, the contemporary, and the forgotten. Here is music by turn-of-the-century French violinist Henri Marieu (1874–1934), a celebrated virtuoso and teacher whose neglected catalog of compositions includes over 50 works, half of them for small ensembles.

The program begins with the buoyant and humorous Serenade (1922), a four-movement nonet for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and bass clarinet, completed in the same year as Marieu’s one-act musical comedy *Meister Schwalbe*. The personnel includes flutists Catherine Gregory and Andrew Rehrig; oboists Arthur Sato and Michelle Farah; and bassoonists Daniel Hane and Edward Burns. Lieb leads the clarinet section, with Moran Katz on second clarinet and Angela Shankar on bass clarinet.

Before he died in 1897, Brahms introduced the young Marieu to noted German clarinetist Richard Muhlfeld, who inspired the late Brahms contributions to the clarinet repertoire. Also inspired, Marieu finished his own Clarinet Quartet (1908) for Muhlfeld, who died before the work could be played. Lieb joins a string quartet that includes violinists Igor Pikayzen and Bryan Hernandez-Luch, violinist and cellist Carrie Bean Stute.

The influence of Brahms also pervades the concluding work, the Trio in D minor (1896) of Alexander Zemlinsky. At the Vienna Conservatory in the mid-1890s, one of Zemlinsky’s student works, the Symphony in D minor, caught the ear of the elder composer who was then serving as the president of the school. Encouraged, the young composer entered a chamber music competition, and while his submission took the Brahms Trio in A minor for clarinet, cello, and piano as a model, the romantic writing was so inventive that Brahms personally recommended the work to his publisher.

May/June 2017
In 1938 Zemlinsky and his family escaped Nazi Germany and settled in New York. His name, though, had little currency in the United States. His preference for the late German romantic language of his youth over the radical developments of the 20th Century made him unknown to American audiences who had exchanged the Teutonic weight of the Second New England School for nationalism, modernism, and jazz. In the 1960s, as famous conductors began to champion Mahler, his works emerged from obscurity, and a handful have justly found a place in the repertoire. Cellist Alice Yoo and pianist Wayne Weng join Lieb for the Trio.

The Phoenix Ensemble makes an excellent case for Marteau. His scores are tackled with enthusiasm and conviction, and though some passages need more polish, he still comes across as a minor master who writes well for winds and strings and whose compositional acumen and ideas easily stand next to his better known contemporaries. Lieb leads his colleagues with an expressive personality, but his thin sound will sometimes spread, and his tuning tends to be on the low side. The Zemlinsky has good teamwork and some fine moments, but some places could use more nuance and fire, and Lieb’s pitch in I sags terribly.

HANUDEL

MARTINU: Legend of the Smoke from Potato Tops; Opening of the Springs; Romance of the Dandelions; Mikes of the Mountains

Pavla Vykopalova, s; Ludmila Kromkova, a; Martin Slavik, t; Jiri Bruckler, Petr Svoboda, bar; Jaromir Meduna, narr; Jakub Fiser, Stepan Jezek, v; Jiri Pinkas, va; Daniel Havel, rec; Jan Parik, cl; Jan Voboril, hn; Josef Hrebik, accordion; Ivo Kahanek, p; Prague Philharmonic Choir/ Lukas Vasilik

Supraphon 4198—68 minutes

This set of four chamber cantatas by Bohuslav Martinu is brought to you by the letter C. That’s C as in colorful, clever, charming, and Czech to the core. The annotator tells us that in the mid-1950s Martinu became attracted to the rich story-telling of the Czech writer, Miloslav Bures (1909-68), who “combined full quotations and his own rhymes, alternating choral scenes with monologs and narrator’s commentaries” into his own brand of ethnically-charged poetry. Moreover, Bures’s stories were set in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands, an area close to Martinu’s heart. The music may be light-hearted, but the sentiments it conveys are sincere and anything but lightweight.

The Legend of the Smoke tells of the Virgin Mary coming down from her altar and partaking of life in the village. (“The good mother of springs and light, without whom, ‘tis said, not even daisies will reach bloom, lives on in our midst, eternal.”) The other texts keep reminding us of the manifold beauties of nature and of love.

I typed the all the instruments into the heading above so you could get a sense of the different colors at work in Martinu’s orchestration. The Legend, for example, is scored for recorder, clarinet, horn, accordion, and piano. (How often do they all get to hang out together?) The composer places his singers with uncommon imagination, pairing them with instruments that can really draw them out. How often, for example, do a solo viola and solo tenor get to come forward together? They sound wonderful when they do!

I admire these performers, especially soprano Paula Vykopalova, who is sweet as sugar in all four works. The engineering is up there with Supraphon’s best.

GREENFIELD

MARTUCCI: Trios; Quintet; Quartet pieces

Noferini Quartet; Maria Semeraro, p
Brilliant 94968 [2CD] 142 minutes

The quartet and two trios of Giuseppe Martucci (1856-1909) are like a long leisurely soak in a swirling hot tub or like slipping into a sweater fresh out of the dryer. If you want tension, release, and catharsis, look elsewhere. This is musical comfort food, creamy and al dente.

Had enough similes? More specifically, Martucci’s language is halfway between Schumann and Brahms, the pianism lush though not especially flashy or virtuosic, the strings mostly lyrical and legato. In Schumann’s terms, he’s mostly Eusebius, with a dash of Florestan. And the trios boast meditative, heavenly lengths like Schubert: Trio 1 weighs in here at 39 minutes and Trio 2 luxuriates over 50 minutes—as long as Tchaikovsky’s but without the angst or profundity. The quintet is runt of the litter at a mere 38 minutes.

Stephen Estep in a review of these trios on Naxos (573438, M/A 2016) called that performance “competent but rather anemic; the music needs flushed cheeks and warmer blood if it is to make an impression”. Excellent metaphor. The Noferinis are flush and warm, but never overheated, and Ms Semeraro caresses the
keys tenderly, her heavy sostenuto pedal wrapping everything in a cozy blanket of resonance.

The quartet pieces are neoclassical make-weights of no significance.

Lovely, comforting music at giveaway prices: this set can be had for the price of one Naxos.

**MEDTNER:** Piano Sonatas: Triad, Skazka, Idyll

Paul Stewart

Grand Piano 618—55 minutes

This is the second volume in Stewart’s series and continues what I called a grand beginning to a cycle (Volume 1: Grand Piano 617, Jan/Feb 2013). Over four years ago I also said that I eagerly await the next volume. It has been a long wait, but well worth it. Canadian pianist Stewart is a professor at the University of Montreal whose abilities at the piano are supported by his scholarship and writing skills. I have enjoyed this release many, many times over the course of a couple months. Getting to know Medtner in great detail with a guide like Stewart is a pleasure.

These three pieces were composed from 1904 to 1937 and represent 5 of Medtner’s 14 piano sonatas. If that doesn’t read quite right, it is because the Sonata-Triad is actually three one-movement sonatas. It has been published as Sonatas 2, 3, and 4 - Op. 11:1, 2, and 3.

Medtner wrote many pieces he called ‘Skazkas’, most often translated as ‘Fairy Tales’. The Sonata-Skazka draws its title from those and is the only sonata of Medtner to be performed by Rachmaninoff. The Sonata-Idyll is Medtner’s last and in Stewart’s words “a deeply satisfying valedictory”.

Even with a measuring stick supplied by fellow Canadian Marc-Andre Hamelin (Hyperion 67221, Jan/Feb 1999), Stewart’s musicality and technical abilities make the first two volumes of his Medtner sonatas well worth investing in. His tempos are always slower than Hamelin’s, but that often allows this very complex music a better chance to be fully appreciated. The recorded sound is worthy of Stewart’s beautiful Fazioli, and his booklet essay is substantial and excellent. Now we await Volume 3.

**MEDTNER:** Piano Concerto 2; see RACHMANINOFF

**MENDELSSOHN:** Organ Pieces

Sonatas; Allegro in B-flat; Allegretto in D minor; Allegro Moderato Maestoso; Fugues in B-flat & F minor; Andante in F; Allegro, Chorale, & Fugue in D; Andante & Variations in D; Nachspiel in D

Anders Eidsten Dahl

LAWO 1108 [2CD] 107 minutes

Depending on how you count, Mendelssohn wrote 29 pieces for the organ. The most important ones are the three Preludes and Fugues of 1837 and the six sonatas published in 1845. In 1844 he was commissioned by the British publishers Coventry and Hollier to write a set of three “voluntaries”, and the flurry of composition that followed resulted in the sonatas. They are not sonatas in the “classical” sense, but are more like suites of varying numbers of movements, forms, and styles, and are a combination of completely new movements and adaptations of 19 earlier compositions. This program includes 9 of those earlier pieces and the notes explain how they were eventually incorporated into the sonatas.

Dahl plays on a 44-stop Hermann Eule instrument in the Sofienberg Kirche in Oslo, Norway, which is modeled on the organs of the 19th Century builder Fredrich Landegast. Dahl is a fine player, but I found the organ, recorded sound, and the playing too aggressive. I wanted slower tempos, a bit of romantic lingering, and less of the in-your-face approach. What’s the hurry?

Other choices for the sonatas include Whitehead (Chandos), Dimmock (Loft), Hell (FH), Tharp (Naxos), and my all-time favorite, Thomas Murray (Raven). Notes on the music and specification. Again, one has to ask why these booklets continue to use combinations of a dark background color and small typefaces, guaranteeing near illegibility?

**MENDELSSOHN:** Violin Concerto; SCHUMANN: Concerto; Fantasy

Philippe Graffin; Padua & Veneto Orchestra/ Tuomas Rousi

Cobra 43—69 minutes

In this recording made in 2013, Philippe Graffin, who turns 53 this year, sounds like he’s lost much of his technique and style compared to a recording made just 10 years earlier. In the Mendelssohn his rhythms are irregular, and he doesn’t “weight” phrases so that they make sense. Nor can he maintain a steady tone or beat. He’s also sloppy with phrasing, often ignoring clear markings in the score. I defy
anyone to figure out where the downbeats are in I without a score. His flow is better in II and very good in III.

Two things are attention-getting in I: Graffin doesn’t use the standard cadenza printed in the score (which, he says, is by Ferdinand David, not Mendelssohn) but chooses instead to follow Mendelssohn’s direction *cadenza ad libitum*, which means “feel free to improvise”, which Graffin does most imaginatively, basing everything on the composer’s harmonies and melodies. Also, Finnish conductor Tuomas Rousi, who turns 50 this year, and the engineers make the orchestral details very audible and let them blend perfectly with the soloist. I hear details, harmonies, parallel lines, and dialog between soloist and orchestra for the first time—elements that show how truly brilliant Mendelssohn’s orchestra is. These details compensate for the second class tone quality of the grinds to a halt. II is tolerable. III (like I) retards, and at one point in I the music almost pauses destroys the flow, and flow is essential orchestra because the orchestra truly requires orchestral details to make it interesting, but the habit of using half-notes as slight pauses destroys the flow, and flow is essential to hold it together. Graffin uses far too many retards, and at one point in I the music almost grinds to a halt. II is tolerable. III (like I) requires orchestral details to make it interesting, but they simply aren’t audible. It’s also a movement with an incredible amount of notes per square inch, making me wonder why any soloist would waste his time on it.

For the Mendelssohn Mutter and Masur on DG are very satisfying. For Schumann’s concerto Bell and Dohnányi on Decca are excellent.

FRENCH

MENDELSSOHN: Violin Sonatas
Abigail Karr; Yi-heng Yang, p
Olde Focus 910—68 minutes

Felix Mendelssohn isn’t known for his violin sonatas. This may be because he completed only three (there is also a fragment from 1825), and two of those were written when he was 11 and 14 years old. The third sonata was written in 1838, when he was 29. The earlier sonatas are remarkable accomplishments for one so young, but the last has marks of maturity that are missing from those. Still, he was not satisfied with it and began a revision of the first movement the following year (1839) that he never completed. The version played today is by Yehudi Menuhin, who completed the revision along the lines that Mendelssohn had already established. Menuhin published the sonata in 1953. Still, it is no gem of the literature and cannot hold a candle to the wonderful violin concerto that Mendelssohn began the same year.

Abigail Karr and Yi-heng Yang take a period performance approach to this music. The main selling point of this disc is the use of a Conrad Graf concert grand fortepiano built in Vienna around 1827. It certainly has a different sound from a modern piano, though it is quite warm and mellow and not as hard and twangy as the sound of some fortepianos. We are not told what kind of violin Karr plays, though we are told that it is “period”. It too has a full, warm, mellow tone that perfectly complements the Graf’s. Yang’s pianism and musicianship are very refined, but what distinguishes these performances is Karr’s adoption of period style. She uses more and slower portamentos than we are accustomed to hearing today, and vibrato is almost nowhere to be found. What vibrato there is is very slow and narrow, almost unnoticeable, as one would expect from the period before the invention of the chinrest. This type of violin sound is an acquired taste today, but Karr’s recreation is very convincing. Of course, there would have been great stylistic variety back then—far more than there is today, so an Italian violinist might have played these works in a completely different manner, and a French violinist in yet another manner. Karr’s manner strikes me as what I might have heard in that era in Central Europe.

Very good sound.

MAGIL

MESSIAEN: 20 Regards sur l’Infant Jesus
Jean-Luc Ayroles, p
Calliope 1633 [2CD] 132 minutes

Messiaen’s monumental piano work has been recorded many, many times. I grew up enjoying John Ogdon’s reading for Argo—though at the time I lacked the discipline to get through
the cycle. Over the years I’ve purchased Loriod (Nov/Dec 1988) and Hill (Nov/Dec 1992), disposing of them when some aspect of the sound or performance bothered me. Most recently I’ve had some pleasure with Aïmard (Nov/Dec 2000), though his is a performance I’ve rarely returned to.

Ayroles is a fine pianist—he is musical and makes the piece sound almost too easy. But as I listen to his performance, I believe I know what Ogdon gave to this work that none of the others—not even Loriod—seem to have in the same measure: feeling. I sense in Loriod, Hill, and Aïmard mastery without soul—and the same problem plagues Ayroles. If I do look for 20 Regards, I think I’ll try my luck with the marvelous Steven Osborne on Hyperion (May/June 2003), warmly praised by Mr Sullivan.

MOMPOU: Piano Pieces
Musica Callada; Cançons & Danses; Cants Magics; Paisajes
Alessandro Deljavan
Piano Classics 115 [2CD] 143 minutes

Mompou’s music is akin to Satie’s—deceptively simple and full of folk elements—but more interesting. Mr Deljavan has a feel for depth and color of sound and is able to map complex harmonies with magic. He navigates through the various perambulations of this music with verve and vivacity and sheds light on this much overlooked composer.

Some of the short, harmonically meandering pieces seem to float. Deljavan plays with great clarity, emphasizing the lines and textures. These works are often sentimental and yearning. Some of the short vignettes are charming—and played to perfection. All of these works tend to be miniatures and are very similar to each other, with few stand-outs, but Paisajes is slightly more substantial than the other works. Its second movement hints at the atonal.

This is a must for Mompou enthusiasts.

KANG

MONTEVERDI: Madrigals 3: Venice
Les Arts Florissants/ Paul Agnew
Harmonia Mundi 8905278—75 minutes

Mission creep: Les Arts Florissants was founded almost 40 years ago by the American William Christie, who has lived in France since 1971 and is now a French citizen. His ensemble was known for historically-informed performances of French repertoire (such as Charpentier) with French singers. Agnew is a Scot, directing a mixed international group of vocalists—none of them Italian—in Italian repertoire.

These performances are entirely acceptable, in the HIP style that has become established; but I don’t hear either any frisson of the new—nothing of the excitement of hearing these works for the first time, hearing the cutting edge (think Nigel Rogers). Everything is very tame, very grey, very Northern. And nothing seems very Italian—this should be the rhetoric of extremes, of oxymorons, cold fire, and hot ice. Too bland. Even the grinding dissonances in the Lamento de la Ninfa are much too sweet. Sometimes music must be ugly to be beautiful; Agnew’s approach is just dull.

Why?

Recording Monteverdi for the nth time is also simple laziness while there is still an immense universe of chromatic and extreme madrigals from the same period waiting to be performed (all the Neapolitan contemporaries of Gesualdo, for a start).

T MOORE

MONTEVERDI: Madrigals 6
Concerto Italiano/ Rinaldo Alessandrini
Arcana 425—73:12

This recording was made in 1992 and released previously as Arcana 66, part of Alessandrini’s traversal of all of Monteverdi’s published madrigal volumes. It was reviewed by Mr Chakwin (S/O 1994), who rightly noted the
“careful attention to the text by Italian singers who know what the words mean and relish the poetry and the opportunity to communicate it”. He did, however discern a “lack of tonal distinction and some doubtful intonation”.

Listening to this release anew, I agree with Mr Chakwin’s positive observations and I am not struck by his negative ones. This is excellent and utterly idiomatic Italian madrigal singing by a group whose entire Monteverdi effort strikes me as foremost among “nativist” interpretations.

Book VI was Monteverdi’s Janus-faced publication, looking back to the earlier madrigal style even as he promotes the new concertato idiom of singers with instruments. The volume is noteworthy for containing two famous madrigal cycles: the Lamento d’Arianna adaptation of an aria from one of the composer’s early operas; and the Sestina, Lagrime d’amante al sepolcro dell’amata (Tears of a Lover at the Tomb of the Beloved).

The booklet has excellent notes by Alessandrini and texts with translations. BARKER

MOUSSORGSKY: Pictures at an Exhibition; TCHAIKOVSKY: Romeo & Juliet; STRAVINSKY: Firebird movements
Philippe Guillon-Herbert, p
Callope 1632—62 minutes

The piano arrangements of Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky here are by Guillon-Herbert and quite effective. I am a little at a loss as to why considerable arrangement efforts were made to wonderful music that often relies on a big, sustained, sweeping string sound. Stravinsky himself made piano arrangements (2 or 4 hands) of his other two major ballets, Petrouchka and The Rite of Spring. They have become staples of the piano repertoire. One might ask why he never attempted to do the same with Firebird. Several others have, with mixed results. It is great and recognizable music; and with a good arrangement and a pianist capable of bringing it off, it can be effective on the piano. But most people like me will miss the big orchestral sound, especially at the end.

Tchaikovsky’s orchestral music has various arrangements published for solo and duo-piano, but these are much more of the 19th Century practical model for rehearsal and for home use. They are not usually considered concert repertoire, and Tchaikovsky did not make a lot of these arrangements himself. Take Sleeping Beauty for example; Siloti did the solo piano version, and a young Rachmaninoff did the piano duet version. Only the six movement suite arranged by Rachmaninoff gets performed or recorded on a regular basis.

Guillon-Herbert presents his arrangements convincingly and doesn’t seem to blink at the mountain of difficulties he wrote for himself. He has a big sound without banging in the orchestral climaxes and the sensitivity to play very softly when the music calls for it.

These are the strengths of his Pictures at an Exhibition as well. This is a great work originally for piano, but it has become well known in Ravel’s orchestration. Most listeners hear a trumpet in those opening lines of the ‘Promenade’, and certainly the bells and grand climax of ‘The Great Gate of Kiev’ call to mind a full orchestra. Guillon-Herbert’s performance has a few individual choices that are new to me; but by and large, his is a solid, enjoyable performance. Perhaps his Ox-Cart gets too loud (but fades out just right), and the Poor Jew’s music is initially too forceful (and then well balanced when combined with the Rich Jew’s music). I liked his use of the pedal all through the opening (trumpet) phrase of the Promenade (and later similar statements). I will listen to this again.

HARRINGTON

MOZART: Arias & Concert Arias
Anett Frisch, s; Munich Radio/ Alessandro De Marchi
Orfeo 903161—61 minutes

The Austrian label Orfeo regularly introduces new singers to a wider market, and this time it’s the turn of Anett Frisch, a young soprano from Plauen (Saxony). She was awarded first prize in the 2001 International Bach Competition in Leipzig and was a prizewinner at the Schloss Rheinsberg Chamber Opera Competition in 2006 and 2007. She sang Despina from Cosi Fan Tutte and Adina in Donizetti’s Elixir of Love. She has sung a number of Mozart roles—sometimes different roles in the same opera. She has portrayed the three leading female roles in Marriage of Figaro and Elvira in Don Giovanni and Pamina in The Magic Flute.

Since the selections here are mainly from the three Da Ponte operas, we don’t get to hear her Pamina. She is a gifted singer. She has a lovely, clear soprano, flexible enough to handle Fiordiligl’s difficult triplets and sweet enough for Susanna’s ‘Deh, vieni non tardar’.

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It’s so refreshing to hear a singer who doesn’t make one worry about whether or not she can make the next run or high note. Her trill is yet a little unformed, but that is something she can surely develop with time and practice. She brings soul to each of the characters here. Her Cherubino is bubbling over with adolescent passion and fervor without overdoing it (both arias). She also tastefully uses appoggiature and ornaments that enhance the music because they are always suggested by the text. When Mozart writes a fermata over a sustained note, Fritsch fills it in with a colorful run (one of the runs in ‘Come scoglio’, for example, is the same one Leontyne Price used years ago on her complete Cosi). We get an aria each from the Countess (‘Porgi amor’) and Susanna, Zerlina’s ‘Batti, batti’ and Elvira’s ‘Ah, fuggi il traditor’ and ‘Mi tradi’, Fiordiligi’s two big arias and Despina’s ‘Una donna’.

Fritsch fills out her recital with two concert arias. I’d love to hear an entire disc of Fritsch in the concert arias; there are a number that would suit her very well.

The Munich Radio Orchestra plays extremely well for Alessandro De Marchi, and that leads me to my one quibble about this. Since the program only runs 61 minutes anyway, why give us the Figaro overture instead of the Countess’s ‘Dove sono’? They could have included another concert aria as well. But this beautiful as it stands.

Texts and translations; notes on Fritsch and some of her thoughts on her roles. The sound is excellent.

REYNOLDS

MOZART: Horn Concertos & Quintet
Radek Baborak, Baborak Ensemble
Supraphon 4207—67 minutes

The clean, close-in recorded sound grabs the ear immediately. The string playing (the concertos are arranged for horn and string quartet, reinforced by a double bass) is lovely; and inner voices that go unnoticed in normal orchestral renditions are nicely audible here.

The soloist is a player of the Czech school—narrowish tone, fast vibrato—with a little German warmth added on. He studied with, among others, Bedrich Tylsar, one of a family (almost a dynasty) of distinguished Czech players, and was one of the solo horns of the Berlin Philharmonic from 2000 to 2011. He’s well recorded here and plays with a singing style, good but not super-clean passagework, and a low register that is a lot less present than his middle and top notes.

Musically, there’s not much to complain about. The quintet is far and away the best of these works and goes like clockwork. The players sound as if they know one another and the work well. I miss Dennis Brain’s personality in the horn part, but his string colleagues were restrained compared with the ones here, and his recorded sound is primitive by comparison. Baborak offers a fine performance and I can’t think of a better one in modern sound.

The concertos are not virtuosic workouts, even compared with ones by the Haydn brothers from around the same time. Baborak spices 4:1 with some chords in the cadenza (I think these will get old after a couple more hearings) but otherwise gives good mainstream readings with that sweet, vocal Czech style that I (no fan of big vibrato in horn playing) find irresistible.

Mozart horn concerto editions are all over the place, with variances in melodic lines popping up here and these to surprise the ear. The ones used here are mostly by Roland Horvath, a Viennese horn player, with the interpolation of Michael Haydn’s arrangement of the Romance of 3 and Baborak’s own arrangement of 4.

This disc doesn’t displace the usual recommendations for Mozart concertos: Brain, Civil with Marriner, Tuckwell with Marriner, David Pyatt with Marriner, and Halstead on natural horn with either Goodman or Hogwood. Instead, it makes a nice companion to a favored “standard” version.

CHAKWIN

MOZART: String Quintets, K 593+594; Fragment
Yuko Inoue, va; Chilingirian Quartet
CRD 3523—61 minutes

It came as a pleasure to realize that the Chilingirian Quartet under leader Levon Chilingirian is still active; the quartet goes back to the early 1970s, though personnel has changed. I have not associated them with Mozart, but it is clear from this recording that the group (and Chilingirian in particular) has a wonderful sense of the composer’s music. This affinity is nowhere more evident than in the opening movement of the D major, where the Larghetto is played with wonderful, unhurried sensitivity. Indeed, it is this sense that nothing needs to be sped up (to make it more exciting?) that makes the fast movements, as well as the slower ones, so satisfying. There is a lightness, a space be-
tween notes in their playing, that gives life to the music without going so fast as to obscure detail.

The program includes two extras. The first is a quintet fragment (roughly an exposition) written at the same time as the famous quintets in G minor and C. Second is an alternative to the finale of K 593. The first edition (Artaria) had altered the initial figure, so some of us may know it from the corrupted version. At any rate both are here.

This is one of the finest Mozart recordings to come my way in several years.

MOZART: Piano Concerto 23; see RACHMANINOFF

NEUKOMM: Requiem a la Memoire de Louis XVI
La Grande Ecurie et la Chambre du Roy/ Jean-Claude Malgoire
Alpha 966—62 minutes

It is surprising that the music of such a clearly talented composer as Sigismund Neukomm (1778-1858) should have been so soon forgotten after he died. Thanks at least to this outstanding performance of his monumental Requiem, we have a better understanding of Neukomm's contribution to the history of music. Sigismund Neukomm was born in Salzburg but spent most of his career employed outside of Austria, first as Kapellmeister of the German Theater in St Petersburg, by the Portuguese court in Brazil, and then in France by the diplomat Charles Maurice de Talleyrand. It was Talleyrand who commissioned the Requiem Mass to be performed at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, in memory of King Louis XVI.

Neukomm's music offers a perfect illustration of the massive choral style that would become normative for early-romantic French composers. The first performance of the Requiem on 21 January 1815 called for 300 singers plus large orchestra. The program opens with a suitably lugubrious Funeral March and Miserere, with voices accompanied by brass choir. Neukomm's genius for drama comes across through his use of chromaticism and diminished triads in expressive combinations of voices and orchestral instruments. In fact, it sounds reminiscent of the massive dramatic effects that Berlioz and Meyerbeer would later conjure in their famous choral and operatic works.

Each movement of Neukomm's Requiem has its distinct charm. The Introit is marked by a striking chorale around the 3-minute mark. The Dies Irae alternates weighty counterpoint with chromatic lyrical passages. The Offertory is, again, densely polyphonic. Texts and notes are in English.

NIXON: Jacta Est Alea Overture; Romance; Palamon & Arcite
Ana Torok, v; Kodaly Philharmonic/ Paul Mann
Toccata 372—72 minutes

Henry Cotter Nixon (1842-1907) is a composer who’s dropped below the horizon. The last mention of him I could find was in a 1948 edition of Pratt’s Encyclopedia. Born in Kensington, South London, the youngest of 13 children, he became an organist, pianist, and violinist as well as a concert organizer.

His Concert Overture 3 (1880) has the subtitle Jacta Est Alea. David Brown’s otherwise excellent notes fail to mention that these were allegedly Caesar’s words as he crossed the Rubicon River. A colloquial translation would be “We’ve rolled the dice”. It has a slow, probing introduction, whose initial phrases in the bass are completed by the woodwinds. The main body, a vigorous allegro, is tonally more stable. A second theme is more graceful and flowing. Its squarish paragraph structure recalls Schumann. The scoring is clear, with its voices well laid out. It’s the sort of work George Bernard Shaw would have described as “shipshape”.

The Romance (1889) is a handsome piece by a composer who played and understood the violin. It’s enough of a showpiece to interest a good player, with sufficient charm to please the listener.

The tone poem Palamon and Arcite is based on Dryden’s retelling of The Knight’s Tale from Chaucer. There are lines from the poem all through the score. King Theseus of Athens imprisons the title figures. From jail, they see and fall in love with his stepdaughter Emilie. Theseus decrees that they joust one another, each accompanied by 100 knights. Palamon wins, but an earthquake throws him fatally from his horse. Dying, he urges Emilie to accept Arcite, lamenting “Nor holds this earth a more deserving knight”. It’s in five movements running 48 minutes. Sometimes Nixon’s descriptions are quite specific—for
example, in I there's "smoke rising from a campfire in the form of meandering counterpoint in the strings". The work is also competently scored, especially for the horns. Absent Nixon's constant programmatic prompting, however, it would be hard to fit most of the music to its elaborate plot. The musical language for 1882 is exceedingly tame and constantly euphonious to the degree that one nearly begs for even some diminished 7th chords to add spice to what is, for its genre, a very long work. As a program piece, its narrative is vassal to dated formal principles, giving it an outmoded aura.

The performances are all well done, Mann adding able conducting in very unfamiliar fare. In the Romance, Torok plays with a beautiful tone, her reading exuding confidence. The composer's grandson, who died in 2000, preserved these scores. Toccata plans to record two more CDs of Nixon's orchestral music.

O'CONNOR

NORDGREN: Left Hand Concerto; Piano Concerto 2; Südergran Cycle

Monica Groop, mz; Henri Sigfridsson, p; Ostrobothian Chamber Orchestra/ Juha Kangas

Alba 399 [SACD] 63 minutes

Pehr Henrik Nordgren (1944–2008) has three piano concertos, the last two of which are recorded here. Concerto 2 (2001—1 was written in 1975) is a stormy, depressive affair in one seemingly endless 21-minute movement. Opening with thunderous ascending half steps harmonized with bloody clusters, the work continues with turgid development of stream of consciousness flailing, with some wishful-thinking mystic interruptions that disintegrate almost immediately. The sometimes expressive but always despondent calm is inevitably dispensed with and replaced by violence, and toward the end there are some quiet chimes, but it eventually drifts away in pain.

The Song Cycle on Poems by Edith Südergran (2003), for mezzo, strings, and harp, has four songs. The first deals with the protagonist's "worn-out heart", the second stating that "we poor humans don't know much about ourselves", causing the gods to laugh. A storm is interrupted by tonal sustained harmony toward the end with raindrops. The transformation seems miserable. No texts, which means no translations, so we poor non-Finnish speaking Americans will never get the gist of these "splendid poems". Monica Groop is as always superb.

The Piano Concerto for the Left Hand (2004) is a tone poem based on a sadistically provocative Japanese ghost story where a cheated man is told by a Chinese Master to hump his dead wife and ride her away from her lust for revenge (the poor husband was just out of town when she died). No, I really don't get it, but Dvorák's tone poem plots are just as bad (similar, anyway). There is plenty of gloom and doom and scary nocturnal horror, a suitably bizarre ride as the guy holds on to her hair while galloping (indeed) until the sun breaks through on a held E string. The nightmare, or maybe just the night, ends in silence.

The work was originally written for a pianist who lost the use of his right hand owing to a cerebral hemorrhage, and the virtuosity required is considerable. I don't think this will replace the Ravel, but it might reward the (insatiably) curious.

GIMBEL

O'BRIEN: Orchestral Works 3

Liepaja Symphony/ Paul Mann

Toccata 299—61 minutes

This is the final disc of O'Brien's orchestral music. I own, but have not reviewed the others. Toccata's commitment to this composer is worthwhile—the music falls gratefully on the ears, and has the energy, style, and technical elements we expect of a professional composer. If it finally lacks true genius, that commodity is relatively rare. Still, there is much to like and admire.

With music tending toward the lighter side of the spectrum, his 1928 Waltz Suite has already appeared on Volume 2 of his piano music. It consists of five contrasting waltz movements and makes little demand on the listener. The tunes are pleasant, but undistinguished, and well orchestrated. Suite Humoristique an earlier work (1904), keeps things light, though with an expanded percussion section. The 'Barcarolle' is the most interesting movement.

Readers seeking a more indigenous Scotch sound will be attracted to the Ellangowan Concert Overture. This is a shorter version of the same work that appeared in the first volume of orchestral music. After trimming about five minutes from the score, some new material is added back, and the size of the orchestra is reduced. Named for a house on the Scottish border in Sir Walter Scott's novel Guy Mannering, the overture uses the Scotch snap, but no
actual folk tunes, and reminds me of O’Brien’s mentor, Hamish McCunn.

Once again Toccata’s notes are exemplary, the sound good, if not spectacular, and the Latvian orchestra plays well.

**BECKER**

**PAGANINI: 24 Caprices**
Maristella Patuzzi, v; Mario Patuzzi, p
Dynamic 7774—79 minutes

Some readers may be puzzled to look at the heading of this review to find a pianist listed for these unaccompanied works, but this is one of the few recordings of the Caprices with the piano accompaniment created by Robert Schumann in 1855. Earlier, he had created piano accompaniments for the other most important collection of music for unaccompanied violin, Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas. Apparently, many musicians desired to perform these, but the public was not accustomed to hearing unaccompanied violin, and the accompaniments by Schumann and others were often heard until recent decades. Even Heifetz only recorded the Caprices (13, 20, and 24) with piano accompaniment.

Swiss violinist Maristella Patuzzi was born into a family of musicians and studied with Mark Kaplan and Sergei Krylov. Her technique is very good, and she seems to have no difficulty playing these difficult works. I was disappointed that she plays Caprice 5 with her bow on the string, ignoring Paganini’s horrifically difficult direction to play ricochet. Also she does not play the usual, nearly as difficult, sautille variant. Schumann’s harmonies are more Germanic than Paganini’s, so the character of the music changes a bit.

The most interesting recording of these arrangements that I know is by Tossy Spi- vakovsky and Lester Taylor (Jan/Feb 2001). They bring a Central European warmth to the music that is unique and that I suspect Schumann may have had in mind.

Patuzzi plays the Bello Mary Law Stradivarius of 1687.

**GREENFIELD**

**PALMERI: Mass, Buenos Aires Misatango; Tango Gloria**
Heidi Maria Taubert, s; Annekatharin Laabs, a; Clemens Heidrich, b; Saxon Vocal Ensemble; Rotterdam Quartet, Dresden Soloists/ Matthias Jung
CPO 555092—69 minutes

If you have a look at the titles, it won’t surprise you that Martin Palmeri (b 1965) hails from Argentina and writes as an heir to the Tango tradition bequeathed him by Astor Piazzolla. Here Palmeri takes the angular rhythms and sultry sounds of the dance and incorporates them into the Christian liturgy. The 38-minute Mass dates from the mid-90s. The Gloria was premiered in 2014. You’ll find things to admire in both: a sensual ‘Qui tollis’ for the alto, small orchestra, and bandoneon in the Mass and some zippy ‘Cum sancto spiritu’ counterpoint in the Tango Gloria for starters. There’s also some affecting tone-painting in the Crucifixus of the Mass, the bandoneon driving the nails in with percussive authority.

The performance is very strong in the instrumental department. The choir, though, sounds small for the job; and the soloists—while colorful—are just OK vocally. So while I enjoyed this—and suspect you would too—it never crosses over into mandatory listening.

**MAGIL**

**PASQUINI: Organ Pieces**
Davide Pozzi
Cremona 23—78 minutes

With confident, idiomatic, and joyous playing, Davide Pozzi not only is a fine advocate for the music of Bernardo Pasquini (1637-1710) but also an expert in drawing the most from the sound palette of early Italian organs. This one, built by Domenico Traeri in 1725 (restored in 2003) in the Chiesa di Cognento in Reggio Emilia (northern Italy), is a very fine match to the music.

From stately grandeur, as in the ‘Toccata Per Spagna’, to the delightful invention in several extended variations on popular themes such as the Bergamasca, to the delicate confection emulating a large flock of happy birds (‘Toccata Con Lo Scherzo Del Cucco’), the full range of the organ is used. The program is very well chosen, sequenced, and registered.

There’s no bio of the organist here, so I did some research. Davide Pozzi studied with
leading teachers such as Lorenzo Ghielmi, has collaborated with top musicians such as La Venexiana and Andreas Scholl, and has recorded more than 40 discs. Notes and organ specifications in English.

C. MOORE

PAUS: Viola Pieces
Yuval Gotlibovich; Raquel Castro, v; Eduardo Fernandez, p; ESMUC Chamber Choir; Catalan Chamber Orchestra; Joan Pàmies
Naxos 573602—53:24

This is the sort of record that a collector would have had a hard time finding two or three decades ago—three new works with viola by a composer from Valencia (Ramon Paus, b. 1956) with no presence in the USA. Perhaps it might have been released in a small run by a label in Barcelona and would have been impossible to get as an import. Now such a project can be distributed worldwide by Naxos.

As you might expect for music with viola, the tone is dark. This does not work so well for the opening work, Madera Ocaso (Wood Sunset), where violist Gotlibovich is accompanied by piano in a single long movement of almost half an hour. Perhaps it’s my defects in perception, but I don’t follow the narrative (or put it another way, the form is not compelling). Cobalt Blue, in Transit is easier going, with effective colors from the orchestral accompaniment.

The most moving work here is an elegy for the young violinist Edith Maretzki, based on a text in her memory written by her widower—Elegia Primera, la Deriva (First elegy, the drift). The tone is set immediately by the sliding between major and major triads and the tolling of a bell. The viola floats over the uncertain tonality, and the guidance of the elegiac poetry offers a shape, a direction, a plot to carry the listener through the emotionally fraught material. I hope that this work might find a place on American concert programs.

T. MOORE

PENDERECKI: La Follia; see BACH
PERRACCHIO: Harp Pieces; see CASELLA

PINTO: Violin Sonatas 1-3
Elizabeth Sellars; Kenji Fujimura, p
Toccata 366—57 minutes

George Frederick Pinto (1785-1806) is one of the great question marks of English music history. Not only a composer, but, like Mozart, a virtuoso on both the violin and the piano, he died young, possibly of tuberculosis. The violin sonatas collected here were published by his mother posthumously. They definitely show promise, and had he lived, Britain might have had an important composer in the classical era aside from the Irishman John Field.

Sonata 1 in G minor shows obvious influences of Beethoven and Mozart, but there are touches of a playful originality here and there. Sonata 2 in A is more lyrical, and Sonata 3 in B-flat is the most lighthearted. These works don’t have the cookie-cutter quality of the music of so many other unknown mediocrities.

The performers are very musical and have obviously prepared these scores with care. The sound of the recording is clear, warm, and well balanced.

Sellars plays a Hornsteiner violin in this recording.

MAGIL

PROKOFIEFF: Piano Sonatas 1, 2, 9
Ilya Yakushev
Nimbus 6336—48 minutes

Mr Harrington reviewed the first installment of this series (Mar/Apr 2011) and was enthusiastic, though he wished the pianist had used more pedal. I listened to a bit of the release as I prepared for this review, and I agree to a point about the pedal, but I was very pleasantly surprised by the less-than-breakneck tempo of 7:III, which is played by almost everyone too quickly (Sokolov is a major exception).

In this release, Mr Yakushev presents what sound to me as thoroughly engaging, musical, and pianistically deft readings of the first two sonatas and the last one. I can only echo Mr Harrington’s remarks. Yakushev beautifully manages both the acerbic and lyrical aspects of Prokofieff’s complex personality as in 9:III). I’m also pleased to say that the sound is better on the new release and that there appears to be more pedal (or at least more overall resonance). Newcomers to this repertoire will probably do well to heed the individual recommendations offered in our overview (July/Aug 2004), particularly Richter’s performances of 2 and 9, but listeners who prefer better sound will not be at all disappointed with Yakushev’s performances.

HASKINS

May/June 2017
PROKOFIEFF: Piano Sonata 8; BEETHOVEN: Sonata 32
Lisa Smirnova
Paladino 77—54 minutes

Recorded in Amsterdam in July 1994, these performances have been sitting in the archives of a Dutch radio station for more than 20 years. Paladino recordings got permission to release these commercially with the title “Live at the Concertgebouw”. It is completely as she performed with no editing whatsoever; there are a few very minor mistakes, but given the complexity and difficulty of the two sonatas, I am impressed.

Neither piece’s performance falls into the top echelons, and if there is to be any general criticism it would be that these are too careful. Tempos are a little slower than most, and rarely is any chance taken. An exception here would be the final movement of the Prokofieff, taken at a very quick pace at the beginning and end, with nice contrast in the middle.

I object to her not taking the first movement repeat in the Beethoven. Given the length and number of repeats taken in II, the balance between I and II is thrown off by making I shorter than Beethoven intended. The greatness of both works means that a respectable performance is still enjoyable, and Smirnova has a velvet touch when it comes to the quieter sections of both—unusual for Russian-trained pianists. She has the technique to handle the many technical challenges. This is well worth hearing, especially if this unusual combination of pieces appeals to you.

HARRINGTON

PUCCINI: Tosca
Regine Crespin (Tosca), Giuseppe di Stefano (Cavaradossi), Otakar Kraus (Scarpia); Royal Opera/Edward Downes
Myto 311 [2CD] 112 minutes

There have to be special reasons to release a monaural performance of a much-recorded opera. Often it can give us the opportunity to hear a singer in a major role that he or she never recorded commercially—or did, but too late, when the voice was no longer fresh. Often a performance catches the dramatic flow better than a studio recording, which may be more perfect technically.

Both of these reasons apply here. We get to hear Regine Crespin singing a role that she never recorded commercially, and at the peak of her vocal voluptuousness and steadiness. She was Mme Lidioine (the new Priorress) in the first recording of Poulenc’s Dialogues of the Carmelites (1958). In the early 1960s she made a still-classic recording of Berlioz’s Nuits d’Eté and Ravel’s Sheherazade and contributed a magnificent Sieglinde to the Solti-Culshaw Ring Cycle.

What we get here is, as we had reason to hope, an immensely artful blending of vocal plenitude, nuanced phrasing and dynamics, and alert moment-to-moment clarity of characterization. Crespin now leaps to the top of recorded Floria Toscas, next to my, and many people's two favorites: Maria Callas (the monaural recording, conducted by De Sabata) and Leontyne Price (two great recordings: with Karajan and with Mehta).

The Cavaradossi, Giuseppe Di Stefano, sounds very involved in certain solo moments but distracted or routine in interaction with other characters. The voice is wonderfully sweet sometimes, but it can become tight—almost like a comical “character tenor” (such as the landlord Benoit in La Bohème)—when it has to contend with a full orchestra.

Much more convincing is the Scarpia of Czech-born Otakar Kraus. The voice is well controlled and used to good dramatic point. Kraus’s burly singing over the chorus and orchestra at the end of Act 1 is stunning and scary, and the singer shows his ability to be manipulatively lyrical in his negotiation with the diva in Act 2. This Kraus (not to be confused with tenor Alfredo) recorded very little. He is not so much as mentioned in the Metropolitan Opera Guide to Recorded Opera. He sang the roles of Nick Shadow in the first production of The Rake’s Progress and of Tarquinius in the first Rape of Lucretia. That first Rake is available on CD, but reportedly the performance as a whole is somewhat helter-skelter and the sound quality pale. Is there more Otakar Kraus in the archives and decently recorded?

The conducting is first-rate: brisk but always ready to bend to make a point. The Covent Garden orchestra is ultra-responsive, with only a few momentary slips in intonation. The clarinet introduction to ‘E lucevan le stelle’ is done in the modern international manner: vibrato-free and eloquent. The conductor, by the way, is not the Edward Downes who used to host the Metropolitan Opera Quiz. This Edward Downes was English-born and renowned as a Verdi conductor; he rose to become Associate Music Director of Covent
Garden and Principal Conductor of the BBC Philharmonic.

The booklet contains only a tracklist and an apology for imperfections in the original tapes. My ears found nothing to complain of, beyond the predictable limitations in a monaural recording of a complex opera. Indeed, offstage sound effects generally register well and in good balance with the singing and the playing. My one complaint: very soft singing is sometimes covered by the orchestra.

LOCKE

PURCELL: Dido & Aeneas
Josephine Veasey (Dido), John Shirley-Quirk (Aeneas), Helen Donath (Belinda), Elizabeth Bainbridge (Sorceress), Thomas Allen (Spirit); Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields/ Colin Davis
Pentatone 5186230—58 minutes

Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas is one of those operas that is easy to collect on CD. There are any number of fine recordings, and because the score has come down to us incomplete no two versions of it are exactly alike in edition, scholarship, or performance.

Colin Davis’s recording was unavailable for a while before Australian Eloquence licensed it and revived it on that label. Now Pentatone has remastered it yet again and it is shinier than ever. The performance is excellent. Josephine Veasey is every inch the noble queen, but does so without the “Woe-is-me” quality than can afflict interpreters of this role. Helen Donath sounds like Life and Love itself as Belinda; and John Shirley-Quirk is a sexy, vibrant Aeneas. Elizabeth Bainbridge sinks her teeth into the Sorceress, really singing it well, expressing her character’s malice without becoming hammy. A young Thomas Allen is heard as the Spirit, and Delia Wallis and Gillian Knight are fit companions for Bainbridge. Davis leads with style and assurance, aware of period style, but not a slave to it.

There are too many fine recordings of Dido and Aeneas to pick just one, but this is one of the top five choices. Text and translation.

REYNOLDS

RACHMANINOFF: Piano Concerto 3;
MOZART: Concerto 23
Grigory Sokolov, Mahler Chamber Orchestra/ Trevor Pinnock (Mozart); BBC Philharmonic/ Yan Pascal Tortelier
DG 4797015—72 minutes

The day after I wrote that review of the Hamelin recording, this arrived in the mail. I tried to compare them, but there is no comparison. Sokolov is the Real Thing; here is the Russian romantic Rachmaninoff. It makes Hamelin sound mechanical, despite his brilliant playing. Everything here is warmer and more emotional, more Russian, more romantic—and certainly no less virtuosic. There’s more phrasing, more rubato, more expression in every phrase. This will stand as one of the great recordings of this concerto.

Grigory Sokolov won the 1966 Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow at the age of 16—the youngest winner ever. It was a big surprise, staunchly defended by the chairman of the jury, Emil Gilels. He went on to a major career, but at some point he decided he hated rehearsing and playing with orchestras and stopped doing it. He also hated recording sessions and stopped that too. So recordings of Sokolov are rare. In 2014 he finally signed a DG recording contract with the provision that only concert recordings would be issued. Since he has not played with orchestra since 2005, that meant going back for concerto...
recordings. (And you can’t eliminate the applause and cheering, either.) The Mozart is from Salzburg in 2005; the Rachmaninoff is from London in July of 1995 (Royal Albert Hall—the Proms). The Mozart is more recent, but the Rachmaninoff sounds much better (and you actually hear more from the audience in the Mozart—how did the BBC get such a great recording in Albert Hall?). Of course, part of it is that Tortelier is a much better conductor than Pinnock, and the orchestra is bigger. The pianist is excellent in Mozart, as in Rachmaninoff, but there are better orchestras. No one would buy this for the Mozart, though his playing is delightfully romantic. The orchestra is simply in a different (colder) world.

Sokolov never gives interviews, and he hates being photographed. But there are some nice photographs here (age 16 on), and there is a DVD where friends of his are interviewed and talk about him. I wrote this review before looking at the DVD.

So I must add this to my collection of Rachmaninoff Thirds. He is in the category of Horowitz and Ashkenazy—and, yes, Moura Castro (S/O 2015). Even the sound measures up.

RACHMANINOFF: Trios
Lise de la Salle, p; Bartłomiej Niziol, v; Claudius Hermann, vc
Philharmonia 107—64 minutes

This is the most beautiful performance I’ve heard of these trios. Strings are polished, meticulous and manicured, very refined, determined to make no ugly sounds, with full tone, minimal scrubbing, and perfectly judged vibrato. The pianist is well balanced with the strings and never pounds.

The first (unpublished) trio lumbers at a grave and morose tread; the musicians take the piece more seriously than is usual.

The big published trio is about as poised and Apollonian as it gets. All repeats are taken in II, the variations; and the mood is subdued, a respite from the turbulent I and III.

The violinist is concertmaster of the Zurich Philharmonia, the cellist is their first cello, and the pianist was in residence with the orchestra for the 2013-2015 seasons. I’d like to hear them take on Tchaikovsky’s trio, a work often hampered by hysterionic strings. Mr Niziol has recorded Scherazade with the Zurich Philharmonia (see below). This isn’t as gripping as the Trio STBY on Genuin I praised recently (J/F 2017), but the strings are gorgeous. Good studio sound.

RADECKE: Trios; 3 Fantasy Pieces
Trio Fontane
CPO 777996—73 minutes

Partly digested Schumann and Schubert—Robert Radecke (1830-1911) wears his influences shamelessly. I hear Schumann’s piano quartet and quintet and Schubert’s Trio 1 in Radecke’s Trio 1.

The three Fantasy Pieces for cello and piano are more Schubert than Schumann, the second cribbing from his Arpeggione Sonata. I had a feeling I’d like these piece the most, and I did. Ms Gruebler’s tone is sweet and tender here (and in the trios).

There are abrupt, unprepared modulations, just like Schubert, in Trio 2, where Radecke has digested more fully the German romantic style. It’s also a more patient and deliberate work employing rhetorical repetition to sometimes compelling effect. II and III lift material from Schumann’s last great works for piano: the Night Pieces and Fantasy Pieces Opus 28. The finale borrows from his Symphonic Variations.

Radecke’s work is solidly constructed, idiomatic, slick, painfully derivative, forgettable, in the same league as skilled tradesmen like Herzogenberg and Reinecke, who too slavishly imitated their heroes. CPO has issued dozens of records of skilled but uninspired composers like these, so I assume somebody enjoys this. If you are CPO’s target audience, at least the sound is good except for a persistent rumble in the background that sounds like a busy highway. This disc isn’t essential at all, but everything is very well performed.

RAKOWSKI: Etudes 4
Amy Briggs, p
Bridge 9477—77 minutes

Volume 4 of David Rakowski’s 100 piano etudes (to date?). They were begun in 1988.

Rakowski is a highly eclectic composer who teaches at Brandeis and counts, among others, Milton Babbitt, Paul Lansky, and Luciano Berio as mentors. Besides Brandeis, he has taught at Harvard, Columbia, and Stanford: his Ivy League credentials and his formidable list of teachers place him firmly in the high echelon of academic modernists, which
he combines with more contemporary post-modern tendencies. His music is what is currently considered “post-tonal,” which means that his materials are not exclusively angular and crushingly dissonant and are derived from extended scales and harmonies found in earlier 20th Century composers, Prokofieff and Stravinsky among them. Structural and conceptual entities are formidably cerebral, as one might expect; but the works are enjoyable and palatable, owing to his clever humor (titles are jovial, a characteristic he must have learned from Babbitt). He is attracted by pop and jazz, like Berio (and Babbitt, for that matter), and some old-fashioned avant-garde stuff sneaks in (Not is a goofy entertainment for speaking pianist influenced by Rzewski’s forays into this realm). Virtuosic expectations are extreme, and he has a brilliant collaborator in Ms Briggs. His defection from the raunchy academic modernist crowd parallels Lansky, but Rakowski turned out to be considerably closer to the fold. None of this music is traditionally tonal or “neoromantic” (though note repetitions are common): Debussy is a literal influence in two of the etudes in this collection. The music is undeniably American and couldn’t have come from anywhere else.

This is an extraordinary project and will certainly be considered, along with Ligeti’s, a seminal contribution to the genre. The fact that the composer is not a pianist himself (he was a trombonist) is scarcely believable. The fact that Ms Briggs would take on such an assignment is amazing. Notes are meticulous and exhaustive. This production is how things like this should go. All pianists should take note, as well as fans of the instrument. I’m not sure why the toy piano Berceuse appears twice and there is no credit for the excellent notes.

**GIMBEL**

**Rakowski: Piano Concerto 2; Stolen Moments**

Amy Briggs; Boston Modern Orchestra Project/Gil Rose

BMOP 1048—70 minutes

David Rakowski (born 1958) is a prolific composer who’s written symphonies, concertos, orchestral fantasies, and many chamber and vocal works in a highly chromatic and complex but not pointillist or ostentatiously avant-garde idiom. His music is charged with energy and excitement derived in part from jazz-influenced rhythms and inflections, and so packed with dazzling textures as to sometimes overwhelm the listener.

Rakowski is particularly intoxicated by the piano and its possibilities. He’s written dozens of virtuosic preludes and etudes, a first and now a second piano concerto, and much more for the instrument. ARG’s reviewers, including yours truly, have been much impressed by his relentless invention and fecundity in this area. See, for instance, our coverage of his solo piano pieces on Bridge 9121 (July/Aug 2003), Albany 681 (Jan/Feb 2005), Bridge 9157 (Mar/Apr 2005), and of his 2006 First Piano Concerto (BMOP 1009, July/Aug 2009) and etudes (above).

Here are two recent and quite substantial works for piano and orchestra. In *Stolen Moments* the piano, despite its extensive role, is by no means always the center of attention—in fact, it is entirely absent from III. And the music, explicitly inspired by jazz and jazz scorings, doesn’t feel like a traditional concerto. Hence Rakowski’s one-off title for the piece. There are four movements: a jumpy, stuttering, highly-caffeinated allegro, a slow and bluesy “spiritual”, a languorous tango, and a fast-moving bebop-style fugue and gigue. Jazzy riffs abound, as do clever instrumental combinations, and there is much to catch the listener’s ear.

But the work has some serious problems. For one thing it’s just too repetitive and over-extended. Too many of its 27 minutes are spent on aimless noodling that doesn’t go much of anywhere (talk about “stolen moments”), violating the crucial axiom that brevity is the soul of wit. Yes, there are many fine things here—for example, the lovely horn solo that crowns II—but these are too often drowned in long patches that feel like running-in-place filler. Another problem is that the orchestral dress, especially the strings, is too sluggish and heavy, lacking the quicksilver transparency this music needs. (An explanation for this flaw is suggested in the liner notes’ mention that the work was originally written as a ten-instrument chamber piece and only later re-scored for piano and orchestra. One can sense that it would be more persuasive in its original incarnation.)

The third movement tango is an especially glaring disappointment; it lacks the rhythmic bite, the melodic and harmonic pungency, and the insolent sensuality required by that form. Somnolent hippos might, I suppose, sway to this music, but no one would dream of dancing to it. (I consider myself something of
Whether it’s all just too much to take in inventive that it seldom feels padded or repetitious will depend on the listener and his mood.

Some sections evoke a lysergically-primed Alban Berg imitating Gershwin, or perhaps vice-versa; others sound like a big-band face-off of Schoenberg versus Messiaen; and everywhere the hyper-active piano dominates, jiggles, skitters, pummels, dodges, darts, and splashes.

In this work the balance of substance versus length is less troubling. The concerto is certainly very long, but it is so consistently inventive that it seldom feels padded or repetitive. Whether it’s all just too much to take in will depend on the listener and his mood.

Rakowski’s Second Piano Concerto, composed in 2011 for the brilliant pianist Amy Briggs (who plays it with spectacular verve on this sonically outstanding recording), is much longer still, its three movements totaling almost three-quarters of an hour, making it one of the longest and most demanding piano concertos I know of. (How many that long have entered the performing repertoire? Brahms’s two, Rachmaninoff’s Third. Any others?) Rakowski’s Second puts two fast movements (each with interpolated slow interludes) around a long-lined, eloquently pensive elegy in memory of his teacher, Milton Babbitt, and stuffs them with springy roulades, elaborate filigree, delicate interlacements of piano and celeste, rambunctious percolations of piano over percussion, momentum-accumulating moto perpetuo ostinatos, post-tonal boogie-woogies, and much, much more. Some sections evoke a lysergically-primed Alban Berg imitating Gershwin, or perhaps vice-versa: others sound like a big-band face-off of Schoenberg versus Messiaen; and everywhere the hyper-active piano dominates, jiggles, skitters, pummels, dodges, darts, and splashes.

In this work the balance of substance versus length is less troubling. The concerto is certainly very long, but it is so consistently inventive that it seldom feels padded or repetitive. Whether it’s all just too much to take in will depend on the listener and his mood. Still — like someone at a really good fireworks display — it’s hard to stop watching all those gorgeous brightly-lit greens and blues and violas and oranges flowering against the dark sky and going “oooh, ooh, look at that, look at that, oooooooooooh.”

**Ratis: CanzonetteSpirituali & Morali**
Capella Intima/ Bud Roach
Musica Omnia 701—67 minutes

While Italian canzonette were generally light-hearted love lyrics, the 1657 collection of CanzonetteSpirituali e Morali attributed to Francesco Ratis (d.1676) includes spiritual adaptations of this secular genre. They were an attempt by the Oratory of San Filippo Neri in Chiavenna to promote a more personal and spiritual engagement by their congregation through the use of Italian texts mixed with the style of popular dances and melodies. The variety of texts can be illustrated by these two samples: from ‘Poverello, che farai?’, “To eternal death, you’ll know all too well if you have sinned, for you’ll burn for ever. What will you do, poor thing?” and from ‘Spera anima, spera mio cuor’, “My heart, my soul, place your hope only in the angels, the saints, the archangels, and only in God let your heart place its hopes” (full texts and translations are available through a web link; short summaries are included in the booklet).

Especially prominent is the use of a strummed guitar as accompaniment, written in an easy tablature notation called alphabeto, adding to the popular sound of these compositions. Roach had previously released a solo recording (as tenor and guitarist) of Giovanni Felice Sances’s 1636 collection of arias also using alphabeto (May/June 2015), and on this release he is joined by three excellent singers (Sheila Dietrich, s; Jennifer Enns Modolo, a; and David Roth, bar). Though the original publication was intended for a vocal trio with guitar, variety is enhanced on this recording by using permutations among the singers, sometimes, solo, duet, or trio.

This is a very enjoyable release, and it would be very easy to imagine other love songs to Ratis’s infectious melodies; but though the style is light, the seriousness of the texts reflects the importance to the Oratorians of personal devotion. I hope Roach will continue to investigate these previously neglected repertoires of Italian song.

**Ravel: Daphnis et Chloe**
Boat on the Ocean
Spirito; Lyon Orchestra/ Leonard Slatkin
Naxos 573545—66 minutes

The engineering alone kills this performance of Daphnis et Chloe. The treble is harsh, the strings border on distortion, and in louder passages the sound is very cluttered — the opposite of transparent. But this is also a very boring performance. Tempos sometimes are metronomic. Atmosphere in this epitome of impressionist works is nil (blame the engineers as well for that). And too often nothing much is happening. The ‘War Dance’ is not integrated. In Part 2 the orchestra sounds very small. In Part 3 (Suite 2) is there actually a chorus in ‘Daybreak’? I could barely hear it. In the extended flute passage the soloists play with a
meaningless vibrato that contributes nothing to the expression of the lines. In brief, there is no poetry in this Daphnis.

‘Une Barque sur l’Ocean’ (Ravel’s transcription of III from Miroirs) is normally a bore. Here it is not only the perfect filler for Daphnis—same key, melodic figures, and instrumentation—but a different engineer makes the orchestra clear, resonant, balanced, and distortion-free, as Slatkin beautifully captures its rolling textures and flow (what Daphnis is supposed to be about). Ravel completed ‘Barque’s’ orchestration in 1906, but negative response to its 1907 debut gave him terrible doubts, and the work wasn’t published until 1950. I can’t help but believe that it served as a precursor to Daphnis, which was completed in 1912. I hope Naxos is able to put this performance on another album in Slatkin’s survey of Ravel’s orchestral works so that it won’t remain buried on this otherwise awful one.

FRENCH

RAVEL: Mother Goose;
VARIOUS: Eventail de Jeanne
Loire Orchestra/John Axelrod
Naxos 573354—62 minutes

In 1927, Jeanne Dubost, a supporter of the arts and owner of a children’s dance school in Paris, commissioned 10 composers to write a movement each of a ballet for her pupils. She supposedly presented each of them with a leaf from her fan, thus the title of the ballet, Jean’s Fan. Ravel’s ‘Fanfare’ opens the ballet; Pierre-Octave Ferroud contributed the March; Ibert the Waltz; and Alexis Roland-Manuel a Canarie, an ‘upbeat, traditional French Renaissance dance similar to a gigue....’ Marcel Delannoy wrote the Bourree, Roussel the Sarabande, and Milhaud the Polka. Milhaud was non-plussed when he learned that, in spite of all the stage music he had previously written, his Polka would be his debut at the Paris Opera. Poulenc wrote a Pastourelle and Georges Auric the Rondeau; Florent Schmitt’s Kermesse-Valse closes the set.

Delannoy’s, Auric’s, and Roussel’s movements have interesting melodies and compositional detail; Milhaud’s and Poulenc’s are charming, and Schmitt’s immediately sounds the most substantial. As a whole, though, the ballet is none of the composers at his best. Naxos touts this release as the first complete recording of L’Eventail de Jeanne by a French orchestra, and I can’t really fault anyone for not getting it done sooner. The Pays de la Loire group plays fairly well if rather bloodlessly in the big moments, especially in the last two movements of Mother Goose. [See also S/O 2005, p. 175—Editor.]

RAVEL: Miroirs; Gaspard de la Nuit; Pavane
Ragna Schirmer, p
Belvedere 8002—60 minutes

The first thing to notice about this release is the cover and the odd image of Ravel—a somewhat lifelike manikin with its head on the pianist’s shoulder. Upon further investigation, there is more behind this recording than a talented pianist playing a great Ravel recital. This is also the soundtrack to a play by Christoph Werner called ‘Concert for a Deaf Soul’. The play is a one hour dramatic musical work for puppets, actors, and Ragna Schirmer that attempts to bring the audience into Ravel’s life. Despite his international renown as a composer, he was a lonely, private individual, torn and restless inside. The play is available on DVD (Belvedere 1150) and nowhere could I imagine you to play the three works on this disc as part of every performance.

But we are dealing with a Ravel recital disc. Miroirs is a 30-minute set of five pieces that practically define impressionism. Schirmer, with impressive performance and competition credentials, handles the significant difficulties with aplomb. Whether night moths, birds, ocean waves, or bells in a valley, she lets the music speak for itself. Gaspard de la Nuit was written to be more difficult than Islamey, and it is. It is probably also the most recorded and performed of Ravel’s oeuvre. Conservatories the world over are filled with young virtuosos who want to test their abilities with a work acknowledged by all to be one of the most difficult. Although he has not yet recorded it, I heard a remarkable performance at Carnegie Hall last year by Marc-Andre Hamelin—something to watch for on CD.

Rounding out the current program is the ever popular Pavane with its beautiful melody encased in ever more complex accompaniments.

Schirmer’s tempos are a little slower than most, about a minute longer in the two most difficult pieces here: ‘Alborada del gracioso’ and ‘Scarbo’. I compared with Vinnitskaya (Naive, July/Aug 2012); Tharaud (Harmonia Mundi, Mar/Apr 2004); Roge (Decca, Mar/Apr 2005)....
Ravel: Sheherazade; L’Heure Espagnole
Stephanie D’Oustrac (Concepcion), Jean-Paul Fouchecourt (Torquemada), Yann Beuron (Gonzalve), Alexandre Duhamel (Ramiro), Paul Gay (Don Inigo Gomez); Stuttgart Radio/Stephane Denève
SWR 19016—66 minutes

A wonderful pairing. First we have Ravel’s sumptuous three-song cycle about the mysteries of love and fantasies of exotic lands. Then we have his one-act opera that takes place in a land that, to French people at the time, was beckoningly exotic, and whose title might be freely translated “The Nutty and Delightful Things That Can Happen in Spain in Just One Hour”. The opera presents some quick-moving events in the lives of a clockmaker’s wife and the four wildly different men with whom she is variously involved (one being her husband).

This is officially Volume 4 of a series covering Ravel’s “orchestral works”—that is, works with orchestra. The Stuttgart orchestra plays very capably, but the star of the disc is mezzo-soprano Stephanie D’Oustrac.

Opera lovers may remember D’Oustrac as the title character in the DVD of Lully’s Armide with William Christie and Les Arts Florissants. Her voice, as befits an experienced singer of early music, is firm and precise; her diction is wonderfully clear. True, it does not bloom as fully as some other singers who have recorded these pieces, such as Regine Crespin in her classic recording of Sheherazade or Suzanne Danco in her two recordings of L’Heure Espagnole. But the compensations are numerous and gratifying. For example, in the first movement of the song cycle, D’Oustrac brings great variety to the list of foreign places and sights that the persona of the poem declares she would love to visit (if only in the imagination). She brings tension and fear into the narration as the images move to include assassins and beheadings, yet without ever breaking the smoothness of the vocal line—quite an achievement!

The mezzo brings this same vocal mastery and keenness of characterization to the role of Concepcion in L’Heure Espagnole. She differentiates wonderfully between moments when Concepcion is addressing one of the other characters and when she is musing quietly to herself. She catches many glints of humor, not least in the frequent word-play. (One end-rhyme is as unlikely in English as in French: “biceps”-“concepts.”) D’Oustrac’s attention to the conversational nature of the words is further emphasized by her clear and natural-sounding pronunciation; the letter R is gutturaled, as one hears it in most of France, rather than rolled or trilled.

The four men sing extraordinarily well and as native French-speakers pronounce the sometimes rapid dialog beautifully. Fouchecourt, a renowned high tenor, limns the character of the clockmaker superbly. Beuron and Gay are careful to avoid caricature in roles that are patently ridiculous: as a result, their performances will hold up well to repeated hearings.

My one slight disappointment was with Duhamel as Ramiro. This mule driver is supposed to sound tongue-tied and a bit naive, until he is alone and suddenly becomes (as the score prescribes) “dreamy” and even somewhat eloquent. Duhamel does sound quite sensitive in the latter passage, like a superb singer of art song. (The role of Ramiro, for high baritone, was originally sung by Jean Perier, Debussy’s first Pelleas.) But up to that point he is merely bland, as if not quite sure how to play a character who seems, to the other characters almost dim-witted. Duhamel’s voice is not very different in sonority from Gay, the Don Inigo, so a listener unfamiliar with the work may need to consult the libretto often.

Deneve and the orchestra follow the singers every step of the way, and sometimes anticipate and guide them. One can sense the players’ enjoyment of numerous passages, such as the galumphing figure that repeatedly accompanies the heavy-footed Ramiro (as he totes grandfather clocks upstairs and down) or the long trombone glissando that comments on the discomfort of overweight Don Inigo, stuck inside a big clock.

The recording was made at two concert performances (without costumes and sets). The audience is extremely quiet until the end, when they erupt in applause, cheers, laughter, and some cries of “Olé!”

With such an intricate and fast-moving score, some passages are bound to be a little differently on other recordings. Critics have longed praised the Ansermet and Cluytens
(both monophonic). Apparently the stereo recordings conducted by Maazel, Previn, Slatkin, and Armin Jordan all have some admirable elements, as does a 1960 monaural recording conducted by Bruno Maderna. The very first recording of all—conducted by Georges Truc in 1929—retains special charms. The properly pompous-sounding Don Inigo in that historic recording is Hector Dufranne, who was the original Golaud in Debussy’s Pelleas et Melisande 27 years earlier! But this new recording can stand proudly next to any of the others. And it comes with D’Oustrac’s captivating recording of Sheherazade.

The booklet contains the texts, in French only, and an informative essay in German and in what is rather Germanic-sounding English. The booklet misspells the name of Jeanne Hatto, who gave the first performance of Sheherazade.

There have been two video recordings of the opera from Glyndebourne. One was released in 1987. The other, from 2012, was praised by Mr Sininger (M/A 2014). D’Oustrac and Gay perform the roles that they sing here, and the video also includes Ravel’s other, and just as imaginative, short opera, L’Enfant et les Sortileges.

RAVEL: Rapsodie Espagnole; see DVORAK Piano Concerto; see SAINT-SAENS

REGER: Men’s Choir Pieces
Ensemble Vocapella Limburg/ Tristan Meiter
Rondeau 6126—80 minutes

24 of the 30 songs on this program came from Max Reger directly. The others are his arrangements of Hugo Wolf lieder for mixed choir inspired by the poetry of Joseph von Eichendorff.

Reger is amazing. One minute he sounds like a contemporary of Schumann and Brahms. The next minute (sometimes in the very next measure) he careens into the 20th Century with criss-crossing dissonances and funky chromaticism that still—somehow—keep reminding us of Schumann and Brahms. Try ‘Verlorenes Lieb’ and ‘Der Tod als Schmitter’ from the first set of Volkslieder as examples of Reger pushing past his forebears while lavishing affection on them at the same time.

The guys from Limberg are excellent, and they’re caught in lush, plush recorded sound. The only negative is the lack of English translations—texts in German alone. Reger’s music is so wedded to poetry, it’s a shame no one cared enough to clue us in on the words.

GREENFIELD

REINA: Armonia Ecclesiastica, op 5
Concentus Vocum/ Michelangelo Gabbielli
Tactus 621801—75 minutes

Composer, priest, organist, and maestro di cappella Sisto Reina (c 1620-64) worked in the north of Italy. His Armonia Ecclesiastica was published in 1653 in Milan and dedicated to a nun in the city’s San Paolo convent, a nun born a princess in the noble Gonzaga family. The collection contains the standard Vespers psalms (some in two or three different settings), along with one Magnificat and the Litany to the Virgin Mary.

Using a modern (2012) edition, the performers—4 soloists, 18-voice mixed choir, organ, harpsichord—animate the smaller-scale settings written for 2 or 3 voices very well. Ecstatic echoing phrases in ‘Confitebor’ (Psalm 111) for soprano and alto and the graceful elegance in ‘Laudate Pueri’ (Psalm 113) for soprano, alto, and bass are two fine examples of this vocal chamber style. In the larger settings a lack of momentum in the ensemble singing tends to pull the music back and make the interpretations sound tentative when they should be fervent and confident.

The disc is marked as a world premiere recording. Notes in English. Bios and information about the keyboard instruments in Italian. Latin texts on the label website. I completely agree with John Barker’s “shout out the window” protesting the bad practice by labels of not including texts and translations (M/A 2017, 222). For this release, there is no excuse for not at least giving the Psalm numbers so that listeners can look up the texts themselves.

C MOORE

REIZENSTEIN: Piano Pieces for Children
Martin Jones
Lyrita 347—26 minutes

I am assuming that this new Lyrita recording is priced according to its content, but have not been able to confirm that. All of the music is intended for young players to learn and perform.

Names such as ‘If I Were King’, ‘First Snowdrop’, ‘Swing Song’, ‘Cunning Fox’, ‘Horns and Trumpets’, ‘Sad Story’, and ‘Exciting Story’ give us hope for something not far afield from

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Schumann’s similar efforts. But they fail to work in terms of interest.

Martin Jones is no youngster, and there is definitely nothing to apologize for in his playing of these pieces. I doubt if he would have undertaken the task if he did not like them. Paul Conway’s notes treat them descriptively and fairly.

While I would describe them as simple not simplistic, if you are game take them a few at a time and be prepared to be less than challenged or enamored. I doubt if the composer intended them for serious listening.

**BECKER**

**RICHTER: La Deposizione dalla Croce**

Katerina Knezikova (Maddalena), Jaroslav Brezina (Giuseppe d’Arimathea), Philipp Mathmann, (Giovanni), Piotr Olech (Simone), Lenka Cafourkova Duricova (Nicodemo); Czech Ensemble Choir & Baroque Orchestra/ Roman Valek

Supraphon 4204 [2CD] 111 minutes

Once again, Maestro Valek and his Czech forces bring us the choral music of Franz Xaver Richter (1709-89) the Moravian composer, violinist, and singer (bass) who held musical posts in Stuttgart and Mannheim before capping his career as Kapellmeister of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Strasbourg. I met Richter for the first time in his jaunty Requiem Mass on Supraphon 4177 (Sept/Oct 2015). This time around, it’s an oratorio based on the events of Good Friday, as Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalen, Nicodemus, Simon of Cyrene, and John the Apostle come together to prepare Jesus’ body for burial.

They loved their Italian opera in Mannheim, the musical city where Richter cut his teeth as a composer. So when La Deposizione was premiered at the city’s Court Chapel on Good Friday 1748, the composer’s penchant for staunch, Germanic counterpoint was leavened by his choice of the mellifluous Italian language, florid writing for his soloists, and a pair of castratos singing the roles of Simone and Giovanni. (Among the leads, Joseph is the only non-treble.) The same way Richter’s bouncy Requiem sounds more like a Haydn Mass than a somber Liturgy for the Dead, his take on the crucifixion is infused with the zesty spirit of baroque opera, Italian style. Yes, there are a few intense moments in the score, but I defy anyone to listen to the bright, breezy aria Joseph sings at the end and tell me it calls to mind the purging of “faith and poison” from a sinful soul!

**GREENFIELD**

**RICHTER, M: Andras; Blue Notebooks; Departure+**

Jeroen van Veen, p

Brilliant 95390—46 minutes

Mrs Dalloway; Orlando; The Waves

Max Richter+

DG 4796952—67 minutes

Around the time that Tomato published the recording for his Einstein on the Beach, Philip Glass remarked that pop musicians were going to make a lot of money from his work. With his characteristic open-hearted diplomacy, he pointed out that the only important difference between pop music and classical music was that pop musicians package a language that has already been invented in the classical domain—but some of such packaged music can be very good.

Hearing Max Richter’s music for the first time, I’m reminded of this statement and disinclined to be as charitable, especially when I read this bit of fluff in his official biography for Deutsche Grammophon (with whom he has signed an exclusive contract): “Composer, pianist, producer, remixer, collaborator extraordinaire: Max Richter defies definition. An enigma he may be; what is beyond argument is that he is one of the most prolific musical artists of his generation.” (Never mind that the blurb writer probably means “active”, not “prolific”—Richter is hardly more prolific than a great many other composers I could name.)
He may defy definition, but his music certainly does not. It is workaday movie music that depends heavily on Glass, Reich, Nyman, Adams, Pärt, and a number of other minimalist composers whose work he has carefully mined for gestures and harmonies. These are served up in highly appealing arrangements, sometimes enhanced by ear-catching electronic processing. Most are short. None has anything even remotely suggesting an original artistic personality or the invention that Glass and others achieved—and which will always matter for the greatest music. In short, our readers shouldn’t feel they’re missing anything by avoiding Mr Richter and his attractive but vapid compositions.

Performances and sound are excellent on both releases; the musicians are thoroughly sympathetic to the music. Of the two, the piano album is slightly more memorable.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF: Scheherazade
Philharmonia Zurich/ Fabio Luisi
Philharmonia 106—47:42
with String Sextet & Wind Quintet
Czech musicians; London Symphony/ Pierre Monteux
Praga 250362—82 minutes

The Luisi is the newest recording by far—July 2016. The sound is smooth and silvery, the overall impression rather sleek and sweet. It never seems rushed at all, and the only other recording of this I know (without looking too hard) that takes 48 minutes is Temirkanov—also rather sleek, with the excellent New York Philharmonic (and Glenn Dicterow) in somewhat distant sound.

The fastest recording here—and the fastest I’ve ever heard—is Monteux from 1957. (The box says it takes 44 minutes, but it’s actually only about 40. An earlier Monteux recording was even faster!—Sept/Oct 1994.) The sound also seems harsh and unyielding, though there were some fine musicians in the London Symphony in the Monteux years there (the bassoon is good!). I’m afraid I can’t recommend this, even to Monteux fans. The sound defeats it, but I also think the music needs to be more seductive. He tends to just plow thru it. Think of Beecham—the same year—and how warm and seductive that EMI recording is (46 minutes—I’m unable to find my copy of it, but I have listened to it often, and the sound is superb).

Fedotov has some pretty crude playing (the bassoon is hard, not mellow) and the somewhat over-bright sound of Russian engineering in 1993. The violinist is very good. The timings are very similar to Stokowski (total around 45 minutes) but with a slower opening movement and faster III (Stokowski has the slowest III I know). It’s a colorful performance.

What do you get with it? Nothing if you buy the Zurich recording. But it’s a superb recording! The Monteux crams in two Czech performances. After the sextet we hear the brief quintet for piano and winds. The 33-minute sextet is boring but has a nice slow movement. After all those strings the 9-minute wind piece sounds terrific (Prague Wind Quintet, 2003—same year as the sextet recording). Both of these pieces were issued before on Praga 250188 (Jan/Feb 2004).

The Russian disc adds in a better 1993 recording (playing and sound) of The Golden Cockerel Suite. Gorkovenko is of the same generation as Fedotov; he was born in 1938 in Baku, Azerbaijan; and he is probably still alive (Fedotov died in 2001). He took over the radio orchestra in Leningrad in 1978, and his work was acclaimed in England and other countries where they toured. This is a great performance that you can’t help but like, with color and beauty to spare and melodies that really sing. Of course, there have been other fine recordings of this suite. Jarvi is certainly atmospheric, but the Scottish strings don’t sing out. Maazel has the great Cleveland Orchestra, but he is rather subdued next to Gorkovenko. Leinsdorf’s Boston Symphony was wonderful, but that recording is hard to find now. The Beecham is a 1956 radio recording in monaural sound that can’t compare to this. I can only say that Gorkovenko made me marvel anew at what glorious music it is. You may have all the Scheherazades you need, but you really should hear this Coq d’Or.

So I’ll give away the Monteux but keep the other two. With the Beecham missing at the moment, Luisi fills that gap reasonably well, though Beecham’s Scheherazade is the most refined of them all. She is made to appeal to a high-class Englishman.
**Romberg: The Student Prince**

Dominik Wortig (Karl Franz), Anja Petersen (Kathie), Frank Bleebs (Dr Engel), Arantza Ezenarro (Gretchen); Cologne Radio/John Mauceri

CPO 550058 [2CD] 93 minutes

*The Student Prince* is a 1924 operetta by Sigmund Romberg and Dorothy Donnelly based on the German play *Alt Heidelberg*. It may be the most famous and enduring American operetta. The American audience loves foreign royalty, and *The Student Prince* seems like a throwback to the European operettas of the 1890s. How this atypical American show became so popular with Broadway audiences in the 1920s (608 performances) when the Gershwin’s were producing such forward-looking shows as *Lady Be Good* (also 1924), has always been a mystery. Conductor John Mauceri posits the same question in the excellent German and English booklet and offers some interesting explanations.

The Hungarian-born Romberg had a long history with Broadway shows by the time *The Student Prince* was written. He was a reliable source when a producer needed to interpolate a song into another composer’s show. Mostly working for the Schubert organization, he supplied single songs and complete scores for many of their shows, including the operetta settings of *Maytime* and the adaptation of Franz Schubert’s music for *Blossom Time*. *Blossom Time* was revived so many times that a Broadway legend developed that there is a lost road show company somewhere still performing it.

After WW I, European operetta composers had to find source material other than royalty. Lehar turned to exotic locales; *The Land of Smiles* and *Giuditta* avoided references to European nobility. In the US, Victor Herbert’s operettas were moving away from European backgrounds, and Jerome Kern used American-based plots. Romberg was known for writing in the classic European operetta style, though he wrote in other genres to fit a production’s requirements. The Student Prince not only regressed to using European royalty, but put the action in the country of a former enemy. The American audience embraced the show for its beautiful and heartfelt music and its fairy-tale plot. Romberg created an American operetta genre in the 1920s that was followed by *The Desert Song* and *New Moon* and that was also used by Rudolph Friml (another European transplant) in *Rose Marie* and *The Vagabond King*.

*American Record Guide*

The plot of *The Student Prince* is basically *Cinderella*, but the heroine doesn’t get to marry the prince. I’ve been to productions of this show where the audience already knew the plot, but left in tears anyway at the unhappy ending. To summarize, Prince Karl Franz is sent by his father the King to Heidelberg to go to school and see how ordinary people live. He falls in love with Kathie, the barmaid at the hostel where he is staying. The King dies and Karl Franz must return home to become the new king. Before leaving he promises Kathie that he will return and marry her. When he finally returns, Kathie tells him that their marriage was an impossible dream and that she will marry someone of her own rank. Heartbroken, Karl Franz goes off to wed another royal.

Critics at the time liked the show and were impressed with Romberg’s beautiful music and the Broadway production. Although popular through the 1960s, the show is now rarely staged: modern audiences find the plot too sentimental and the beautiful score too old-fashioned. The score includes many excellent songs, and two that are justifiably famous, ‘Serenade’ and ‘Deep in my Heart’. Highlights recordings were released by just about every major record label from the 1940s through the 1970s.

This new release of a 2012 German concert performance includes the complete score with only a few short dialog scenes. It includes several musical repeats, dance music, and underscored in Act 2. I expected this would be a German language version of the American show, but it is actually a German production performed in English. The German singers and chorus are all very good, their English excellent. But the fortunately short dialog scenes seem to have been learned phonetically and performed very cautiously. The orchestra plays very well, and Mauceri knows how to bring out the dramatic and comic elements in the music score. The sound is excellent.

A similar English language recording was produced in London by Jay Records in 1989 (1252—also on MHS); it included all the musical sequences and some different, but limited dialog scenes. The cast included David Randall as Karl Franz and Marilyn Hill Smith as Kathie and was based on a revival by the New York City Opera. Their singing is effective, the dialog scenes are much more convincing, and the sound is also excellent. The notes on that recording were by this magazine’s former operetta critic, Richard Traubner.

Fisch
ROSENMULLER: Sonatas & Motets
Jesse Blumberg, bar; Acronym
Olde Focus 909—52 minutes

Johann Rosenmüller (c. 1618-84) was an extraordinarily fine composer—highly regarded by his contemporaries, including Telemann—but he had his share of difficulty. After escaping from prison in Leipzig on charges of sodomy, he found employment in Venice. The motets and sonatas on this release were composed in his period of self-exile, and it is called “Johann Rosenmüller in Exile.”

This is the fourth recording of Rosenmüller’s music I have reviewed since 2011, and I have not been disappointed yet. In fact, I was so taken by Ensemble Masques’s performance of sonatas from his 1682 Nuremberg collection (ATMA 2660; Sept/Oct 2013) that I soon performed some of them with my own ensemble. This release by Acronym includes sonatas in E minor (No. 8), G minor (No. 4), and A minor (No. 6) from yet another of Rosenmüller’s publications—the Sonate da camera (Venice, 1667), and I am happy to report that they are as exquisite as his later sonatas. Like them they are composed in a single, multi-sectional movement. The major difference between them is that this earlier collection consists of a series of dances, as one would expect of chamber sonatas. Their charm, therefore, stems from frequent transitions from one dance-inspired affect to another, to say nothing of the gorgeous harmonies and expressive use of dissonance.

In the capable hands of these excellent musicians, they simply could not sound better. Acronym’s 2016 release of sonatas by Krieger, Bertali and the like was brilliant (Olde Focus 906; Sept/Oct 2016). And their recording of Johann Christoph Pezel’s Alphabet Sonatas was one of my Critics’ Choices for 2014 (Olde Focus 903; July/Aug 2014).

The motets are as beautiful as the sonatas. The program includes Domine Cor Meum Jam Ardet Impatiens, Aude Quid Times Gens Christo Dicata, Salve Mi Jesu, Pater Misericordiae, and Ascendit Invictissimus Salvator. Martha H. Brady explains in her notes that Rosenmüller’s motets usually begin with a sonata; there follows a sequence of arias and recitative alternating with short instrumental ritornellos. Adding the voice to the string ensemble seems to further unleash Rosenmüller’s creative genius, to explore new realms of expression distinguished by sudden shifts of rhythm, harmony, and flights of floritura in both the voice and violins. Jesse Blumberg’s rich baritone makes an ideal partner for the violin playing of Johanna Novom, Edwin Huizinga, Adrian Post, and Beth Wenstrom.

LOEWEN

ROSSINI: Arias & Orchestral Excerpts
Karine Deshayes, mz; Les Forces Majeures/ Raphael Merlin
Aparte 121—73 minutes

John Barker has recently complained in these pages about Baroque vocal recitals that add instrumental works or movements as supposed relief or (as he nicely calls them) “spacers”. I can now join him and complain about the same thing in a Rossini album. Alternating vocal and instrumental pieces makes sense in a long concert, but less so in a CD for one’s library. Here we get two orchestral numbers, and they are ones that don’t stand very well on their own, namely the storm interludes from two Rossini operas: Barber of Seville and La Cenerentola. How often would you want to listen to, say, the storm from Beethoven’s Pastoral out of context? The conductor states, in the booklet essay, that he was trying to give the whole disc a dramatic arc. That was lost on me.

But it’s churlish to complain about such things if the repertoire is interesting and the performances are accomplished and persuasive. That is certainly the case on this recording, which will be many people’s introduction to a wonderful young mezzo-soprano, Karine Deshayes. I first encountered her voice and artistry on the world-premiere recording of Felicien David’s grand opera Herculaneum (Sept/Oct 2016). She can also be heard on two other recent releases.

She is a mezzo of the modern kind, which is to say light and clean, with a quick, tight vibrato, splendid breath control, and marvelously fleet coloratura. She is perfect for the many Rossini roles that were written for mezzo—roles sung by Marilyn Horne and Cecilia Bartoli. Deshayes has her own vocal personality: her low notes do not bloom as Horne’s did, and she rarely bites into the words as Bartoli does. Instead, she etches the vocal line with all the nuances of a great instrumentalist. (Perhaps some of her musicality derives from her early training as a violinist.) We are treated to innumerable subtle shadings in dynamics, including many ear-ravishing instances of a sudden diminuendo.
on a single note, such as one more often encounters in recordings of Baroque music. Deshayes never seems unaware of the emotions behind a given passage, but she tends not to sacrifice vocal beauty in order to drive a verbal message home. Her frequent embellishments are appropriate to the context, gently surprising but never distracting, and performed with keen rhythmic variety.

The tempos set by Raphael Merlin are generally brisk and always apt, with naturally sounding adjustments at major structural junctures. The orchestra is here making its recording debut. It seems to be active mainly in the summers, at festivals. The players are members of quartets or other chamber groups, or play in French orchestras. (Merlin is the cellist in the award-winning Ebene Quartet.) The orchestra’s name is a play on words. Force majeure means a situation that was unavoidable and overturns all plans and promises. Here it is made plural, creating a play on words because the orchestra consists of various performing forces, including string quartets, that combine to form a single ensemble. The musicians presumably play modern instruments. It sounds as if the timpanist is using hard sticks rather than the big spongy ones that would be appropriate to later repertoire.

There is one problem: the acoustics. The recording was made in a converted stone-walled granary in Villefavard (near Limoges), which now serves as a concert hall. A photo of the raked seating that has been installed at one end of the space suggests that no more than 400 listeners can be accommodated. The hall is small and the surfaces non-absorbent. The result is a quick, loud echo, especially on high notes (whether from the singer or from the brass and winds). I sometimes have trouble hearing notes that the singer touches lightly after she has emitted a clarion high note that continues to ring, and I often have trouble hearing what harmonies the strings are playing quietly under the singer or under wind passages. Since the music-making here is on such a high level, I hope that their future recordings sound better.

We get to hear the most famous soprano or mezzo arias from The Barber of Seville, La Cenerentola, Semiramide, and Otello, plus a second, shorter, excerpt from the latter opera and a wonderful multi-movement aria from La Donna del Lago. There are also three Rossini songs, orchestrated by the conductor in a colorful manner. Indeed, sometimes the numerous instrumental intrusions in ‘L’ame delais-sée’ are distracting, even sometimes soupy. The Spanish touches added to ‘Nizza’, though played with great flair, seem excessive. The poet who wrote it is not identified in the booklet: it’s Emile Deschamps. The performance omits his wittily worded second strophe, which Rossini certainly intended to be sung.

I particularly object to the way that Merlin has updated the ‘Canzonetta spagnuola’ to make it seem like a direct model for the Gypsy Song in Bizet’s Carmen. Merlin, clearly following Bizet’s lead, makes the orchestration progressively more elaborate in each of the three strophes and gradually speeds the tempo up. Rossini’s score (for voice and piano) simply gives the music once, with repeat signs and the three sets of words.

More appropriate to the aesthetics and style of Rossini’s music is the orchestration used here for the cantata Giovanna d’Arco (Joan of Arc). It was made in 1989 by the renowned composer Salvatore Sciarrino for a performance by Teresa Berganza. This may be its first recording. Though Sciarrino called it an elaborazione, I found it very persuasive and not—as that word might suggest—over-done.

I will be listening to this many times in the future, if not often to the two storms, and I look forward to the more from this remarkable young mezzo.

LOCKE

RUDERS: Symphony 5
Danish Symphony/ Olari Elts
Bridge 9475—27 minutes

Volume 10 in Bridge’s Poul Ruders series. This release only carries his 27-minute Symphony 5 (2012-13). His language is broadly post-tonal. Not dissonant in the modernist sense, it is nonetheless opaque and provocative in its more or less traditional structure. Harmony is what used to be called “pandiatonic,” meaning that traditional counterpoint and harmony lies underneath the fantastic activities; rhythm is unambiguous. The first movement opens with a fanfare that produces offshoots, often angular but filled with drama. Running 16ths follow and what amounts to a chorale. These elements are juxtaposed intensively, with a goodly amount of screeching and violence, though the overall effect is impressive and towering. It is a sorrowful slow movement, held together with a mystic rising scale motive, eventually leading to lost star-gazing. The finale, which begins without pause, is an energetic affair made from variants of previous
material, and the work ends with a quotation of the symphony’s opening fanfare.

This is an impressive work of its type and repays repeated hearings, though I wonder what Bridge expects to gain from a 27 minute CD.

GIMBEL

SAINT-SAENS: Piano Concerto 2; RAVEL: Concerto in G; GERSHWIN: Rhapsody 2; MASSENET: Meditation
Andrew Von Oeyen; Prague Philharmonia/Emmanuel Villaume
Warner 59084—66 minutes

Saint-Saens turned reactionary conservative near the end of his career, but Ravel and Gershwin both embraced jazz, the popular music all the rage in the 1920s and 30s, so he’s a bit out of place here.

In Saint-Saens’s piano concertos the orchestra is a group of background extras and the pianist hog every scene, but in Ravel’s concerto the piano is leading man with a strong supporting cast that sometimes steals the spotlight.

The tempos here for Saint-Saens’s concerto are middle of the road, not the blistering clip of Stephen Hough’s integrale (Hyperion 67331, J/F 2002). Von Oeyen’s interpretation is magisterial then sparkling, with lots of pedal. It’s a good, solid performance well synchronized with the orchestra. The studio recording is somewhat dry in loud, exposed string passages—true of Hough’s recording, too. I like Malikova’s SACD set (Audite 92509, J/F 2005) for its most beautiful sound, but her performance is cautious, not as electrifying as Hough or even Von Oeyen.

The same is true of the Ravel: the tempos are pretty standard. It takes 9-1/2 minutes, so it flows and is not sluggish. All the felicitous orchestral details are heard clearly in the studio. It’s a satisfying performance.

After many decades, European orchestras can play jazz as well as any American orchestra—much of it can’t be written in the score and must be learned by ear and felt intuitively. The pianist is American, so it’s in his blood. He and the orchestra are stylish and persuasive in Gershwin’s rarely heard Second Rhapsody. Like Ravel’s jazzy concerto, the orchestra and piano are co-stars. Sound is detailed, but climaxes are again a little harsh—the studio giveth and it taketh away. Von Oeyen in his booklet note pleads his case that this rhapsody is better than the first Rhapsody in Blue. It certainly is more sophisticated and complex, but lacks memorable tunes or the first rhapsody’s hair-raising cadenza.

It’s hard to get excited about this, because the performances are all safe and polished, with no original or memorable touches to grab the ears. But everything is expertly played and well recorded.

WRIGHT

SAMPSON: Canterbury Cathedral Fanfare; Tenebrae; Without Warning; Mock Attack; Family Portrait; Evensong; Death of Macbeth; Notes III; Smoky Mountain Fanfare; Changewater; Inamere
Raymond Mase, Donald Batchelder, tpt; Andy Lamy, cl; Scott Mendoker, tu; James Musto, timp; Trent Johnson, org; Steven Beck, p; American Brass Quintet; Quo Vadis Brass Quintet; Philadelphia Brass; One Time Only Trombone Ensemble; Juilliard Trumpets
Summit 681—70 minutes

Here is a varied collection of works by David Sampson (b 1951), whose music I have always enjoyed (March/April 2006). ‘Canterbury Cathedral Fanfare’ is the stirring opener, given a robust reading by the combined American and Quo Vadis brass quintets. Also included is ‘Smoky Mountain Fanfare’, played with energy by the Philadelphia Brass Quintet.

A dusk-hued ‘Tenebrae’ has trumpeter Raymond Mase pondering quietly with organist Trent Johnson. Mase is also heard in the finale of the 5-movement, 14-minute Notes III from Faraway Places, a solo trumpet piece for four movements, a duo in the last. Solo trumpeter Donald Batchelder is tightly muted in I (‘New York City, New York’), open in a lively ‘Crow’s Nest’, warm-voiced in ‘Solo’, high-pitched in much of IV, and virtuosic with Mase in V.

‘Without Warning’ is a minimalism-influenced but dramatic piece, played boldly by pianist Steven Beck. Clarinetist Andy Lamy gives a colorful ‘Mock Attack’ a lively reading. Scott Mendoker is solo tubist in a contemplative ‘Evensong’, where he interacts with electronic drones and drums and other sounds. In ‘The Death of Macbeth’, solo timpanist James Musto is supported with a wide variety of sounds by percussionists Tom Murphy, Nancy Pontius, David Stockton, and Jeff Willet.

In the minimalist ‘Family Portrait’, the Philadelphia Brass Quintet interacts intricately.

The 3-movement, 10-minute Changewater has a trombone octet contrapuntally engaged in ‘Red Mill’, lyrical in ‘Musconetong’, and
chasing each other in ‘Holly Derry Run’. The very fine One Time Only trombone ensemble includes members of American Brass Quintet. The album ends with ‘Inamere’, a spectacular work played by 12 trumpet students from the Juilliard School. The splashy chords at the end are terrific.

KILPATRICK

SANCES: Capricci Poetici
Irene Morelli, s; Beatrice Mercuri, mz; Diego Cantalupi, lute; Giuseppe Schinaia, hp
Tactus 601903—56 minutes

The 10 pieces here are the first part of the 1649 Capricci Poetici, a collection dedicated to the Venetian ambassador to the Hapsburg court. Giovanni Felice Sances (c 1599-1679) was hired in 1636 as a performer and composer in the Imperial Court and composed a large amount of secular and sacred vocal music.

Apart from the final canzona ‘Che Sperasti O Mio Cor’ for two sopranos, these are pieces for solo singer, here accompanied by archlute or harpsichord. There are nice contrasts in and between the pieces, such as the mix of tempos and moods in different sections of ‘Or Che Chiarissime Da L’Alto Ciel’ expressing the various emotions of the lovelorn protagonist.

Often in the sections accompanied by harpsichord there are problems with pitch and tuning between voice and instrument. The difficulty may be in matching the vocal line with unequal temperaments that can be more easily side-stepped or softened by a lute than a harpsichord.

The is called a world premiere recording. Notes. Texts and translations on label website.

C MOORE

SCARLATTI, D: Sonatas
Marco Ruggeri, org
Cremona 22—60 minutes

No, these are not the handful of sonatas (among Domenico Scarlatti’s 555 keyboard sonatas) that were designated for organ. This fine program is a carefully selected group of 24 harpsichord sonatas in order, as organist Marco Ruggeri explains, to do “a sort of ‘instrumentation’ at the organ using organistic effects to highlight even more certain expressive traits of Scarlattian writing. For this reason, characteristic sonatas with strong rhythmic-harmonic contrasts and markedly colorful—almost descriptive—effects were chosen.”

Marco Ruggeri plays with energy, imagination, and confidence. This is virtuosic, showy, sparkling music; and these sonatas work very well on the organ. Some effects, such as staccato low pedal notes, give an appropriate “fairground” feel to K 33 and K 380; reed stops in K 159 (‘La Caccia’—The Hunt) alternate effectively with flue stops; and nice flute timbres and legato phrasing in the opening of K 395 supply a contrasting mood. Recordings of these pieces on harpsichord can become a bit wearing and monotonous, but here there is always something to vary and freshen the sound.

Built in 1784 by Agostino Traeri—a member of the same family of organ builders as in the Pasquini CD reviewed in this issue—and restored in 2006, the instrument is another example of the fine Italian heritage of pipe organs. The organ is in the Collegiata di Guai-tieri in Reggio Emilia (northern Italy).

Notes, bio, organ specifications.

C MOORE

SCHNEIDER: Phoenix; Dark Journey; Niedhart’s Nightmare
Christoph Hartmann, ob; Johannes Fischer, pc; Oliver Triendl, p; Tonkunstler Orchestra/ Kevin John Edusei
Wergo 5115—60 minutes

Enjott Schneider is a German composer best known for his award-winning film music. He has written eight operas and numerous orchestral, chamber, and religious works. In this set of pieces, Schneider effectively combines tonal and non-tonal writing, in one case to signify order coming out of chaos, and in another a composer’s descent into madness. He uses extended techniques sparingly, as a seasoning rather than a main ingredient. This is powerful music, worth investigating.

Phoenix, composed for oboe, percussion, and orchestra, refers to the mythological symbol of rebirth from the ashes of destruction and is dedicated to the memory of Gabriele Weiner. The first movement uses jagged melodic lines and stinging harmonies to symbolize the “land before time”. II is in perpetual motion, with a sense of hope depicted by a fresh, energized oboe melody and racing string passages. The ending of the piece is titled “forever”, and revisits themes from the opening movement transformed into a hymn-like setting and suffused with peaceful introspection.

Dark Journey is based on musical fragments of composer Hans Rott (1858-84), who
died in an insane asylum at the age of 26. Schneider combines the highly romantic music of Rott with chaotic, non-tonal music, cleverly depicting the beauty of the composer’s writing with the insanity that destroyed his life. Neihardt’s Nightmare has been described by the composer as a “courtly love song for piano and orchestra”. Niedhart von Reunthal was a popular minnesinger, who challenged the values of the time with “peasant poetry” meant to appeal to the masses. The dark scoring (without violins) refers to the darkness of the Middle Ages and the “nightmare” vision of infectious humor always on the brink of devolving into ecstatic excess.

Hartmann, Fischer, and Triendl offer up terrific performances, and the Tonkünstler Orchestra plays with verve and an exceptional flair for the work praised by Brian Buerkle in March/April 2010. The other cast of 350 musicians who all demand to be heard. The Chandos engineers give us colorful, red-blooded orchestral sound that keeps its character, even when suppressed a bit to allow the soloists and choir to shine through. From the gentle murmurs of the flutes in Schoenberg’s opening Prelude to the scorching outbursts that dot the score, everything sounds terrific.

While engineering like this could cover a multitude of sins, it doesn’t have to. I confess I don’t pick up the jagged expressionist edges Mr Hecht heard from Michael Gielen, but we do get an extravagantly colorful realization of this post-romantic masterpiece. One criticism I read found Gardner a bit droopy compared to some others, but I don’t think that’s fair. Why? Because for all the turbulent mood swings of Waldemar’s wild and wooly quest, there are interludes of true repose in the score. Schoenberg put them there, not the conductor; and they set up the action in their own languid way. The recording helps those quiet moments along; you can hear everything—even in the car!

Stuart Skelton is powerful and pliable enough for Waldemar to sound like a lover and a fighter. He joins Siegfried Jerusalem (Chailly and Abbado) and James McCracken (Ozawa) on the top-most rung of Gurrelieder heldentenors. There’s a tangy quality to the voice of Alwyn Mellor, who has the heft of a mezzo but can coo like a lyric when she wants to. Her tone and phrasing inspire some of Gardner’s best conducting. Anna Larsson’s Wood Dove is more ethereal than some; and I rather like that, even if the memory of the decidedly non-ethereal Tatiana Troyanos is never far off. The other singers are as good as you’ll hear. Wolfgang Abling-er-Sperrhacke brings a sonorous quality to the biting sarcasm of Klaus the Fool, and there’s no mistaking the energy and wit of Sir Thomas Allen’s Sprecher as Schoenberg’s futuristic monolog adds its absurdist elements to the proceedings. In the end, we’re treated to

SCHOENBERG: Gurre-Lieder
Stuart Skelton (Waldemar), Alwyn Mellor (Tove), Anna Larsson (Wood Dove), James Creswell (Peasant), Wolfgang Abling-er-Sperrhacke (Klaus the Fool), Thomas Allen (narr); Bergen Philharmonic & Choirs / Edward Gardner
Chandos 5172 [2SACD] 103 minutes

23 years into my ARG gig, this is the first time a Gurrelieder has been assigned to me. And while I’ve always admired the piece, I confess that my contact with it has been intermittent at best. I do know the Riccardo Chailly recording that everyone seems to like; and for a lush and passionate encounter with Gurrelieder’s surges of post-romantic energy, it remains one of the good ones (Jan/Feb 1992). Roger Hecht also singled Chailly out for praise while reviewing an account he liked even more—Michael Gielen’s on Hänssler 93198 (Nov/Dec 2007). I haven’t heard that one, but Mr Hecht’s knowledgeable and enthusiastic approval of Gielen’s efforts—the “most modernistic and Expressionist” Gurrelieder around, he says—makes me wish I had. Arved Ashby informed us that Claudio Abbado excelled in matters of balance and pace (Jan/Feb 1998); and you might also seek out Esa-Pekka Salonen on Signum with his superb soloists and overall flair for the work praised by Brian Buerkle in March/April 2010. The other Gurrelieder I can vouch for personally comes from Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony, recorded in concert at Symphony Hall back in 1979. The sound is a bit dim; and Ozawa, as we know, sometimes gives less when more is indicated. But the BSO is remarkable; and with Jessye Norman (Tove), James McCracken (Waldemar) and Tatiana Troyanos (Wood-Dove) delivering benchmark performances we wouldn’t want to be without, this is still worthy of inclusion—though maybe not a first choice.

I suspect that from now on when critics offer quick summaries of their favorite Gurre-lieder, Edward Gardner and his forces will become fixtures on those lists. Let’s start with the recorded sound. As reviewers are fond of pointing out, Gurrelieder requires a performing cast of 350 musicians who all demand to be heard. The Chandos engineers give us colorful, red-blooded orchestral sound that keeps its character, even when suppressed a bit to allow the soloists and choir to shine through. From the gentle murmurs of the flutes in Schoenberg’s opening Prelude to the scorching outbursts that dot the score, everything sounds terrific.

May/June 2017
a *Gurrelieder* that’s as engaging as most and sounds better than any.   

**GREENFIELD**

**SCHOENBERG, A:** *Finding Rothko; American Symphony; Picture Studies*  
Kansas City Symphony/ Michael Stern  
Reference 139 [SACD] 65 minutes

This is Adam Schoenberg (b. 1980), not Arnold (to say the least). He studied at Oberlin, and then Juilliard with Corigliano. We are told that he is “one of the top 10 most performed living classical composers by orchestras in the United States”. I have problems believing that, but I guess his managers do. He certainly has amassed an impressive list of commissions, performances, and reviews.

I’ve heard a great deal of recent American music (in my life), and have commented before in these pages that we are living in a golden age in this country for American contemporary music, but I’m afraid that the young Mr Schoenberg, despite his undeniable success, is not a part of the party (yet?) He’s past the point of being a student, but the contents of this program do not separate him from such a designation. His music is “pretty” and insufficient for audiences who don’t like contemporary music and have little attention span. The longest movement in all of these pieces is six minutes, but most are considerably shorter. This might be because there’s really no development of the feeble materials, all of which are vaguely derived from Copland (his Americanist stage). Mr Schoenberg is an extremely gentle soul, but for all the prettiness, most of his music is milquetoast.

*Finding Rothko* (2007?) was written when he was 25 and still a student. He tries to approximate the painter’s “splattering” with (tiny bits of) graphic notation and improvisation (the composer mentions his interest in visual art), but I’m sure he must know that splattering belongs to Pollock, not Rothko. The bits of graphic notation are thrown in quietly to interrupt the Americana and are completely inconsequential (except for his future tenure process, I imagine).

*American Symphony* (2011) was inspired by Obama’s 2008 election, and is cheerful and hopeful. It made me think of the eventual return to screeching expressionism that is sure to follow soon after the present political catastrophe. He will need to improve his technique to face it, though.

*Picture Studies* (2012) is a “20th Century Pictures at an Exhibition”. There are references to Kandinsky, Calder, Miro, and several others, though he should have thought seriously about what makes the Moussorgsky the masterpiece that it is.

One thing I found most troubling is the composer’s insistence on bragging about his “compositional process”, perhaps in an attempt to be “academically acceptable” (he has entered the groves of academia at Occidental College). He also makes a point of telling us that “[his] music is deceptively difficult”. In this day and age, and with the type of performers running around Juilliard and everywhere else professionally and otherwise, that is not only wishful thinking, but preposterous. The notes are filled with self-congratulation and mushy thanks to all his “supporters”. All of this is unnecessary, and, like the music, juvenile. The movements come across mostly as “songs” (there are plenty of pop music references in his notes), with a distinct lack of counterpoint and modern harmony (the tonality is stultifyingly static and devoid of color). Counterpoint and extended development are absent (maybe he didn’t take those courses).

I dislike writing this sort of review, but I fear that the composer might find this release embarrassing in the future. Time will tell, of course, whether there’s any there there. There isn’t here.

**GIMBEL**

**SCHUBERT: Trios; Nocturne; Movement**  
Thomas Irnberger, v; David Geringa, vc; Michael Korstick, p  
Gramola 99110 [2SACD] 117 minutes

This does not measure up to the best recordings of these trios and trio pieces (see Overview). The violinist is Austrian, the cellist Lithuanian, the pianist German (but teaches in Austria). The cellist also conducts, and the violinist also sings. I have no idea how often or how long they have played as a trio, but there is quite a difference in their ages, since the violinist is just past 30 and the cellist just past 70. They sound like three very good musicians who have not become a unit and perhaps do not see the music in exactly the same light. The blend is not as refined as one might hope.

The interpretations are also somewhat non-committal. A great deal of this music can
be much more moving than it is here. It is not too fast—sometimes it even seems a little slow—but it doesn’t seem inflected enough or personalized. There is something rote about much of the playing and standardized about the interpretation.

The SACD sound is vivid and rather close up, which may add to the impression that they haven’t yet become of one mind. I don’t think the sound is beautiful, but it’s never distant or weak.

**VROON**

**SCHUBERT: Violin Pieces**  
Andres Cardenes; David Deveau, p  
Artek 65—79 minutes

EMI released a double CD set of Schubert’s violin music by Ulf Hoelscher, one of my favorite violinists, especially for this style of music. It includes six pieces. Here we have four of them on one disc. Andres Cardenes is also perfect for this music—laid-back, relaxed, warm. I can’t stand to hear Schubert driven and neurotic, which is how many violinists play. But neither can I choose between these two violinists when I listen to them.

Hoelscher had two pieces not here: the Rondo, D 895, and the Duo, D 574. Cardenes has just the three “sonatinas” and the Fantasy. I don’t think Schubert’s violin music is outstanding or gorgeous. He is best in his slow movements (and trios of minuets), and all the sonatinas have that. Beyond that, I think the Duo is winsome and the First Sonatina catchy and attractive—and its melodies will stay with you for days.

**VROON**

**SCHUBERT: Quartet 13; see GAWLICK**

**SCHULHOF: Violin Suite; Solo Sonata; Sonatas 1+2**  
Bruno Monteiro; Joao Paulo Santos, p  
Brilliant 95324—77 minutes

Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942) was a Czech composer of German-Jewish heritage. He was attracted to the modernist movements of his time and cannot be clearly assigned to any one school, moving restlessly from style to style. His music is interesting, though, and shows a good understanding of how to write for violin and piano. There is a flavor of Central Europe to it all, but he moves from Debussyan charm to fierce expressionism in the course of his career.

These pieces show some of that range and are interesting, but Bruno Monteiro is technically a very weak player. The first movement of the Suite is shocking in its slowness. I can’t understand why they didn’t insist on another take. Although the other cuts are more secure, Monteiro’s technical weakness mars all of these performances.

Even though I haven’t heard it, I would recommend the recording on Hyperion by Tanja Becker Bender that has the same program as this. She is technically far better, based on her Hindemith disc (March/April 2014) and must be able to serve this music better.

**MAGIL**

**SCHUMANN: Symphony 3; Manfred Overture; TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphony 2**  
Philharmonia Orchestra/ Carlo Maria Giulini  
Praga 350135—76 minutes

The Tchaikovsky is from 1956. EMI issued it on CD in a tribute to Giulini in 1996 (Sept/Oct, under Britten). It will never be my favorite—parts of it strike me as too fast—but it was a beautiful recording and interpretation.

Giulini recorded the Schumann in 1958, then recorded it again for DG in Los Angeles in 1982. The sound of the latter is gorgeous, but the conductor had slowed down, and the last movement especially needs to sound more “jaunty”. It does here, and I like this performance, but I am seduced by the sound in Los Angeles.

This conductor’s Manfred Overture (LA or London) is utterly forgettable.

It is odd that the Tchaikovsky, though recorded two years earlier, sounds much better than the Schumann, which is a bit tinny. Could it be the hall—or perhaps the sheer size of the orchestra? Praga has remastered these recordings, I think. They are out of copyright in Europe.

**VROON**

**SCHUMANN: Violin Sonatas 1+2**  
Svetlana Tsintinskaya; Natalia Tokar, p  
Blue Griffin 391—48 minutes  
with 5 Pieces in Folk Style  
Arvid Engegard; Nils Anders Mortensen, p  
LAWO 1110—62 minutes

Robert Schumann wrote his two masterpieces for violin in quick succession. Sonata 1 in A minor was composed in less than a week in September 1851. Not quite satisfied with it, Schumann composed Sonata 2 in D minor from late October to November 2 of the same
year. A major difference between the two works is that Sonata 1 is in the traditional three movements, but Sonata 2 is in four. One thing that I learned from the interesting booklet notes written by Svetana Tsvinvinskaya (which accompany her recording) is that Schumann quotes a Bach cantata at the end of the 2:II. But she is mistaken about which one it is. The correct cantata is Gelobet Seist Du, Jesu Christ (Praise Be to You, Jesus Christ), which Bach wrote for Christmas Day 1724 and which is based on a Lutheran chorale published in 1524 with words by Martin Luther. Actually, what Schumann is quoting is a mutation of the chorale’s melody as it appears at the end of the finale of his friend Mendelssohn’s Trio 2, written six years earlier. The Bach chorale Tsvinskaya mentions, Aus Tiefer Not Schrei Ich zu Dir (From Deep Distress I Cry to You), again based on a hymn by Luther with words that paraphrase Psalm 130 (De Profundis), appears as the theme of the third movement, only the mode is switched from minor to major and a few notes are changed.

Both sets get the tempos and tempo relationships right. I like the brisk tempos of the Norwegians Arvid Engegard and Nils Anders Mortensen, but the Russians Tsvinvinskaya and Natalia Tokarev use their slightly slower tempos to advantage. Their playing is much more expressive and nuanced than the other duo’s. They are also better recorded by Blue Griffin, a label based in Lansing, Michigan. Both sets are good, especially the Russians, though I wouldn’t say either is my first choice. That remains Kremer and Argerich (Nov/Dec 1987).

SCHUMANN: Violin Concerto; see MENDELSSOHN
SCIARRINO: Piano Sonatas; see DEBUSSY

SEARLE: Symphonies 3+5; Zodiac Variations; Labyrinth
BBC Symphony/ John Pritchard (3); Halle/Lawrence Leonard (5); Orchestra Nova of London/ Lawrence Foster (Zodiac); Birmingham Symphony/ Louis Fremaux (Labyrinth)
Lyrita 1130—73 minutes

Humphrey Searle (1915-82) was one of the first English composers to use serialism, if not the first. He’d studied with a broad range of mentors from George Dyson to Anton von Webern. Like nearly every British composer, he wrote movie music; the Brits don’t share our stupid snobism toward that. One of his best was for The Haunting; Robert Wise chose well for that assignment. Plus, we Lisztians all owe Searle a debt for his brief, info-packed study of that composer’s complete output.

Symphony 3 (1960) in three movements bears the subtitle Venetian for some holidays the composer spent there. I recalls “battles of long ago”. The scoring favors the orchestra’s lower registers. Its martial rhythms give the music some direction. II is more dance-like. There’s also a shadowy quote from Liszt’s Piano Concerto 1, as is appropriate from a Liszt maven. Its intricate woodwind writing must be murder for the players. III, an adagio, has a wide-ranged violin theme over dragging, syncopated chords. There’s a too-brief duet for English horn and Heckelphone over bass clarinet arpeggios. The sounds are so arresting, you wish that section were longer. The conclusion works up to a striding bass, followed by a quiet epilogue.

Searle meant Symphony 5 (1962) to be a summary of Webern’s life. I, “12 note and fragmented”, opens with high woodwinds and strings. In II, a march alternates with a more lyric—at least by 12-tone standards—theme on woodwinds and harp. As with Webern, the pitches of a line pass fluidly from one instrument to another. III has “echoes of distant Waltzes and drumbeats”. Searle accents the music with delicious percussion seasoning. IV has reminiscences of a trumpet figure from an earlier episode. The epilogue has very high violin lines with long-held notes over sporadic dissonant clusters.

The Zodiac Variations (1970) uses a small orchestra of two oboes and two horns plus strings. The string players supply faux percussion by sometimes rapping on their soundboards. Searle notes that he uses notes from one variation as a basis for the next. No doubt, but the same problem arises here as in Schoenberg’s Variations for Orchestra, Op. 31. If you can’t remember the theme, what’s the point of any variations?

The Labyrinth (1971) to some extent reflects the Greek myth. A spidery flute line—maze music, Searle calls it—returns sometimes as a vague connector. Innovative tuba solos give the Minotaur some lines. The scoring is pointillistic and often tricky, demanding an orchestra of virtuosity and then some. A pursuit passage with great horn parts gives a thrust to a catastrophic peak, with sustained cluster chords on the organ. The conclusion dies away over the echo of a gong.

Now, let’s address the elephant in the room. For most listeners, all the music here would be a labyrinth, and they wouldn’t have Ariadne’s
thread to help them out of it. Like most 12-ton-ers, Searle urges us not to bother with its processes. But other than expert orchestration, what has this idiom ever had going for it but processes? For all but expert score-readers, it’s too forbidding to embrace. And even they’re more apt to see than hear its structures.

The performances and conducting are excellent. They’re from the collection of Richard Itter, founder of the Lyrita label. The sound is mono, but uniformly commendable in quality. If you are an aficionado of Searle’s work, that shouldn’t in any way hold you back.

SHAWN: 5 Preludes; Piano Sonata 4; 4 Jazz Preludes; 3 Reveries; Recollections

Julia Bartha, p—Coviello 91414—71 minutes

Allen Shawn came to Eastman while I was a student. Not knowing who he was, I said, “You look like Wally Shawn”, eliciting the predictable response: “I’m his brother.” (And I’ve said worse, including a memorable exchange with Kevin Puts.)

This release marks my first acquaintance with Shawn’s music, which maintains and extends the fine pedigree of his studies with Kim, Kirchner, and Boulangier. The compositions maintain a certain connection to tonality, but quite often the chords are dissonant; the style of the harmony, then, is eclectic but never dull and derivative.

The music runs a wide range, from the violent, acerbic finale of his fourth piano sonata to tuneful and pleasant miniatures like ‘Valentine’ and the first of his Four Jazz Preludes. A pianist himself, Shawn writes deftly for the instrument. Bartha’s performances are fine but sometimes seem a little too literal, and the recorded sound makes the piano sound slightly harsh.

SHOSTAKOVICH: Piano Sonata 2; 24 Preludes, op 34; Aphorisms

Irina Chukovskaya, p
Melodiya 2455—73 minutes

Outside of the huge set of Preludes and Fugues, Op. 87, we have the best of Shostakovich’s solo piano music here. Chukovskaya has all of the interpretive and technical skills needed for a disc that jumps into my top group for this music—and it has a lot of competition. There are two very good discs with Sonata 2 and the Aphorisms: Ashkenazy (Decca 1846, S/O 2004) and Chen (Bridge 9238, M/A 2008).

The sonata and Preludes can be found by Boyadjieva (Artek 48, J/A 2010 or S/O 2009) and Virado (Nonesuch 79234, M/A 1991). Some of these are old and hard to come by, so a new release from Melodiya with very good sound and acceptably translated booklet notes might be a good choice.

The Second Sonata has slowly crept into at least the periphery of regularly performed Russian piano sonatas. Written in 1942 during some of the darkest times of World War II, it is a very private and personal statement—quite the opposite of Shostakovich’s Symphony 7 from the same period. Ashkenazy’s recording is still my favorite, and that should not be surprising: he has conducted all 15 symphonies and performed most of the chamber music and a lot of the piano music. Chukovskaya’s interpretation is just as convincing.

The set of 24 Preludes in all keys—same order as Chopin’s—is just about a perfect companion to the sonata. Chukovskaya’s musicality and attention to melody might convince you that Shostakovich was clearly influenced by Rachmaninoff (I believe he was, whether he would admit it or not). The influence of Chopin through a Prokofiev filter is undeniable as well. These are all short—only 5 are over 2 minutes long, and 14 are under 1 minute. Difficulties are much like Chopin. Some are playable by young pianists and others require a much more advanced technique. The strength of this recording is to make them all equally important.

The Aphorisms are from a different compositional world, which makes them much more intrinsically interesting. An aphorism is a pithy observation that contains a general truth. Shostakovich writes very difficult, but brief pieces with normal titles: ‘Recitative’, ‘Serenade’, ‘Nocturne’, ‘Elegy’, ‘Marche Funèbre’, ‘Etude’, ‘Dance of Death’, ‘Canon’, ‘Legend’, and ‘Lullaby’. These have been described as

Word Police: located

It is hard to believe we never covered this (but we mentioned it in M/J 2012, p 191). People say dumb things like, "Where are you located at?" when what they mean is "Where are you?" Airlines in the USA (nowhere else) tell us that flotation devices are "located under the seat"—again the word is superfluous. We are told a store is located on Main Street—leave out the word!

"Located" is often used when "find" or "found" is meant, but those are short and direct words and should not be allowed to die.
unremittingly modernist, so they make an excellent balance with the Preludes. A reference recording.

**SIBELIUS:** *Kullervo; Finlandia; Migrations*

Lilli Paasikivi, mz; Tommi Hakala, bar; YL Male Voice Choir; Minnesota Orchestra/Osmo Vanska BIS 9048 [2SACD] 114 minutes

*Kullervo* is an early work, written when Sibelius was in his 20s; it made the composer’s reputation as a leading nationalist composer in Finland. Indeed, the work, lasting 80 minutes, has the spaciousness of Bruckner (a composer Sibelius admired), but it almost never sounds Germanic. Laid out in five movements, *Kullervo* is a symphonic poem, though it is often referred to as a symphony.

The main character, Kullervo, is drawn from the *Kalevala*, Finland’s national epic in 50 poems, assembled from Karelian folk originals and published in 1835. The story is a grisly one that I will leave to you, except to mention that Kullervo seduces his long-lost sister and by the end everybody dies. Three of the five movements are for orchestra alone. III (Kullervo and his sister) uses two soloists with the male choir in unison doing the narration; the final movement, Kullervo’s death, uses the choir, now singing occasionally in parts, but no soloists. This is an unusual work in the way singers are used, and it is perhaps too long, but it is a powerful piece that shows the young Sibelius able to maintain tension and interest over long spans.

The well-known *Finlandia*, written from 1899 to 1900, has no vocal parts, but Sibelius reluctantly allowed words to be put to the famous hymn section. In 1940 a text by VA Koskenniemi was put to the hymn, and since then every Finnish choir has had it in their repertory. For this recording the sung hymn is included in the orchestral piece. This is very effective, and I would advise doing *Finlandia* this way whenever you have a Finnish men’s choir nearby.

*Migrations* by Olli Kortekangas (1955–) resulted from a commission from the Minnesota Orchestra in 2014. The work was to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the start of modern Finnish immigration to North America, and it needed to be able to be programmed with *Kullervo*. *Migrations* emerged as a 25-minute, seven-movement work for mezzo, male choir, and orchestra. The singers are used only in I, III, V, and VII; II, IV, and VI are orchestral interludes. The texts by Sheila Packa are in English. The musical idiom is modern, but not particularly difficult, and the conclusion is climactic and glorious.

The performances, recorded in February 2016 concerts, are very fine. Vänskä has excellent credentials as a Sibelius conductor, and his *Kullervo* will stand along established recordings by Davis and Salonen, not to mention his earlier recording of the piece with the Lahti Symphony (S/O 2001). The orchestra and the VL Choir are both splendid, and the soloists are very good, if not of the top rank. *Finlandia* is passionate and committed, and the new piece of Kortekangas makes a fine complement in this celebration of Finland and its music.

**SIBELIUS:** *Songs*

Gerald Finley, bar; Bergen Philharmonic/Edward Gardner Chandos 5178 [SACD] 79 minutes

Sibelius composed about 100 songs, almost all of them with piano accompaniment. This program has orchestrated versions of 14 songs, only three of them by the composer. The most significant offering is a set of seven songs, *In the Stream of Life*, orchestrated by the late Einojuhani Rautavaara. The program also includes three orchestral works.

The close friendship between Rautavaara and Finley led him to select miscellaneous songs that fit well with Finley’s voice. Finley reports that the recording of *In the Stream of Life* “became a very personal project when the sessions took place only a few weeks after his death, in the same week as his funeral ... and I am so thankful that a final addition was made possible when in the last months of his life he agreed to orchestrate ‘Hjärtats Morgon’ and include it in the group”.

Most of the song texts are Swedish, one is in German, and one is in English. It may seem surprising that only one song in this album by the Finnish composer is in Finnish—the long ballad ‘Koskenlaskijan Morsiamet’ (The Rapids-Rider’s Bride) of 1897—until one realizes that Swedish was the composer’s first language.

The program begins with *Pohjola’s Daugh-
ter a multi-section tone poem animated with haunting tonality. Romance for strings only shows the sheen of the Bergen strings. The third instrumental work, The Oceanides, the composer’s most impressionist piece, was commissioned by the Norfolk Music Festival in Connecticut and first performed there in 1914 by Sibelius on his only trip to North America. The orchestral playing is superb, and the balances are nicely engineered.

As for Finley, it seems that anything he sings turns to musical gold. There is no more versatile and multi-talented baritone at work today. His vocal technique is superb, with an evenness of tonal production across his full dynamic spectrum. With brilliant vocal shading, astute textual delivery, and immaculate diction, Finley finds what is at the heart of anything he sings and brings it to life in an ardent, eloquent, and compelling way. Whether it be in capturing the calmness of ‘Die Stille Stadt’ or the forcefulness of ‘Koskenlaskijan Morsiamet’, his shaping of the vocal line and tonal finesse are superb.

Gardner directs engaging performances of the entire program. The forces of nature, particularly the ebb and flow of sea, are beautifully realized.

Notes, texts, translations.

R MOORE

SIBELIUS: Tapiola; see Collections

SKULTE: Choral Pieces
Land of Dreams; The Soldier and His Bonnie Bride; The Golden Star; Dark is the Night; The Threshers; Longing; The Fairy Tale; Night; The Old Sauna Shack; Winterfest; Childhood; Prayer; The Passion of Christ; In God’s House; The Rose of Christmas; In the Garden of God

Ave Sol Chamber Choir; Andris Veismanis; Fortius Chamber Choir, Balta Womens Choir/ Mura Marnauza

Albany 1655—42 minutes

Bruno Skulte (1905-76) was a Latvian composer who immigrated to the US in 1949. Active in New York as an organist and conductor of several choirs, he was instrumental in reviving an old tradition of Latvian song festivals, often involving hundreds of singers. He wrote choral and solo vocal works, an opera, ballets, chamber and symphonic music, and pieces for the Latvian kolk— a plucked string instrument similar to the zither. His music was banned during the Soviet era—considered too patriotic, too Latvian. This program of delightful arrangements of Latvian folk songs for women’s, men’s, and mixed choir is beautifully sung. A truly enjoyable recording. Notes on the composer and translations.

SMETANA: Ma Vlast

Bamberg Symphony/ Jakub Hrusa
Tudor 7196 [SACD] 81 minutes

Ma Vlast is a great work; but it can be difficult to pull off because of its length, similarity of tone among its six tone poems, and the fact that it is in constant motion in terms of flow and ideas. A great performance requires solid structure and a conductor and orchestra who are intuitive about the transitions of mood, style, and content. It also requires reserves of power and stamina. The several dull recordings out there fail in one or more of those areas.

Czech orchestras and conductors have a huge advantage with this work, because they are familiar with its folk elements; but there are several good non-Czech recordings. This new one, with a German orchestra (originally Czech) and Czech conductor, is a glorious one, unerringly structured, warm, dark, and glowing. The patriotic and warlike passages are thrillingly noble and golden in tone. Listening to the “geographic” passages should make you want to book a trip to Prague, and the dances teem with pulse, power, and energy. True, the six movements tend to sound alike in tone, but what a grand tone that is. I hate to call a reading a “great wallow”, but this one fits that description in the best way possible. It pulls you in and should keep you in your listening chair until the last defiant notes of ‘Blanik’.

Bamberg has always had an excellent orchestra, especially for a city of only 70,000 people. The orchestra’s Tudor recordings under Jonathan Nott that I have heard are well played and recorded, but I usually found Nott’s interpretations dull. This time, the orchestra sounds world class and Germanic to the hilt. The performance is anything but dull with its golden sleek string sound, stentorian brass, and colorful winds. The several passages where the brass sing out broadly while strings chug underneath will grab your attention (and probably grabbed Janacek’s). The concert hall-like engineering is as good or better than any I have heard from this source, and that is saying a lot.

A few brief notes.

‘Vysehrad’ begins slowly, deliberately, and hymnlike. The trumpet entry sounds almost
like an abbreviated ‘Taps’, with the grandeur of the first climax a sign of things to come. The tempo increases slightly as the music progresses, but Hrusa is always in control. ‘Vysehrad’ is often slighted, as if Ma Vlast begins with ‘Moldau’, but here it is a majestic work in itself.

In ‘Moldau’ the brass entry is very effective, and I could imagine waves, river or not. The dance portion is more sophisticated than folk-like, but gripping nonetheless. The beginning of the next section is eerie, the stormy, and the big hymn very warm.

‘Sarka’ builds slowly, eventually to stir things up quite a bit, and the climax at the end is massive.

‘From Bohemian Fields and Groves’ is big and flowing with swells that create a panorama. The dances are, as usual in this performance, warm and good-natured, and the storm passages surge. For some breathtaking string playing, listen to the high strings in the canon section.

‘Tabor’ is dark, foreboding, and powerful with a noble brass climax. Balances are very good, and the ending is appropriately ominous.

‘Blaník’s’ structure is sturdy, transitions well-managed; and the finale is one of rousing triumph. The quiet oboe and woodwind passage is unusually intense and something special.

This is Hrusa’s second recording of Ma Vlast. The first one, where he conducted the Prague Philharmonia in a performance for opening night at the Prague Spring Festival (Supraphon), was dismissed out of hand by Carl Bauman (Mar/Apr 2011). That is a small orchestra. Hrusa’s new one is not just a great Germanic Ma Vlast. It is a great Ma Vlast period. It supersedes another Germanic recording, with Paavo Berglund leading the Dresden Staatskapelle—a critically acclaimed recording that never digs into the music the way this one does.

HECHT

SORABJI: Symphonic Nocturne
Lukas Huisman, p
Piano Classics 119 [2CD] 140 minutes

Probably the longest single span solo piano work written. Sorabji fans will want to gobble it up while others should exercise caution unless they have a strong positive response to this composer. Like much of Sorabji, it is complex and improvisatory in sound, and freely dissonative in nature.

The term nocturne cannot be taken literally, since it breaks that bond and explodes all over the place. Apart from the break of changing discs, there are no access points—probably because there are no sections. It simply flows forth in one huge glob.

Sorabji has many admirers and far more detractors. It would be some effort to attempt analysis of the complexities of this work, but great challenges are the substance of our civilization. Just sitting through a performance of this would challenge even his greatest fans, though there is much variety.

Lukas Huisman sounds like he has the work well in hand, though I do not have a score to follow, and am not even certain I could follow if one were to be made available. Huisman’s notes compare listening to this to an “evening walk during which the composer invites us to wander around—as in a painting by Giorgio De Chirico”. Since the dream world of this metaphysical and surrealist painter is the stuff from which nightmares are made, the listener is forewarned; but admirers will flock to it in droves, despite the length of the slog.

BECKER

SORENSEN: Mignon; Serenissima; Sinful Songs; Lady of Shallot; Ständchen; Weeping White Room
John Storgards, v; Katrine Gislinge, p; Lapland Chamber Orchestra/ John Storgards
Dacapo 8226134—76 minutes

Dane Bent Sorenson’s Mignon (2013-14), a concerto for piano and strings, is the third piece of a trilogy (Papillions). Those pieces are all concerned with the same material in different contexts. This one can’t seem to make up its mind between modernism and postmodernism: bits of what sound like warped Schumann are interrupted by avant-garde splatter- ing, microtone glissandos, distorted fuzziness, and sorrowful whining, with some pregnant silences opening up holes. This is not particularly new in European avant-garde music: the 60s were full of it. It ends with the expected sound effects (sandpaper on wood in this case). It all sounds rather dated today.

Serenissima (2014), for solo violin, consists of variations on a sickly tonal motive which repeats in chopped-off chaconne style. It makes for a dizzy encore, weird but oddly effective.

Sinful Songs (1997-98) appeared before the
century turned, and is more traditionally “avant-garde”. In two movements, the piece does without references to earlier music, unless you consider “earlier” to mean the 60s.

The Lady of Shallot (1987), for solo violin, is a brief piece on a Tennyson poem involving reflections in a mirror. Inversion is a natural musical topic. The result is quiet but nondescript.

Back to the present, Ständchen (2006), for string octet (like the Schubert), refers to earlier times (at least of this instrumentation) in a postmodern fashion, but without any semblance of stylistic quotation. There is plenty of sobbing, drips, and silences, but there is a little song of sorts floating in and out and disappearing. The work ends with stabbings and what’s left of that song.

Finally, The Weeping White Room (2002), for piano and orchestra, might be the composer’s first excursion into modernist revisionism. It ends with the ticking of a clock.

All in all, Sorensen’s sour depression might be of minimal value to many listeners, but some might find it “interesting”.

GIMBEL

S. STRAUSS: Alpine Symphony; Death and Transfiguration
Bavarian Radio/ Mariss Jansons
BR 900148—75 minutes

Anyone who has visited the Alps knows those mountains have a personality that can change moods almost instantly, from rocky ridges and cliffs to green meadows and woods, from sunny visatas to dark, threatening storms. The way that Richard Strauss’s Alpine Symphony portrays all those moods and changes makes it one of orchestral music’s great travelogs.

The problem with this concert performance from 2016 is that it misses the qualities that make it such a great work. Listening to it, one might believe the Alps lie entirely above the tree line. It is a massive, dark, and ominous reading that depicts a rugged edifice with little variety and few mood changes. The operative word here is “massive”. Most of the playing is medium to very loud, leaving the slow, soft opening one of the few truly quiet passages. Even the ending, which is usually as soft as the beginning, is loudish. True, the lighter, fresher moments and places are there; but it is the big, granitic ones that make the greatest impression—those powerful passages are really powerful. Jansons’s fastish tempo (51 minutes) exacerbates the impression of a superficial tourist who checks off each interesting item seen and moves on to the next one. The close recording exacerbates all that by creating more of a wall than an expanse or vista. It also favors the bass and the percussion (bass drum especially). For example, at the huge first climax, the percussion nearly drowns out the orchestra. I found this boring after a while.

Death and Transfiguration is more mainstream, deeply felt and thought out, and less superficial. It is a big and rhapsodic interpretation that cries out effectively, leading to a beautifully sensitive closing with some wonderful brass playing. The recording is not as close as in the symphony, and balances are more natural. All that said, there are many good recordings of Death and Transfiguration, so unless you want this particular Alpine Symphony, you can move on.

HECHT

S. STRAUSS: Symphonia Domestica; Metamorphosen
SWR Baden-Baden & Freiburg/ Francois-Xavier Roth
SWR 19021—69 minutes

Last year I reviewed a performance of Symphonia Domestica with Kristjan Jarvi (Jan/Feb 2016) that is the antithesis of most performances, typified by Herbert von Karajan’s large-scale, dark, and powerful EMI recording or Fritz Reiner’s more incisive one. I thought the Jarvi should appeal to someone looking for a reading more classical than usual or someone who has not cared for the piece at all. That makes sense if you accept the theory that Symphonia Domestica is a musical portrait of Strauss’s family (and even if you do not). Despite the reputed abrasiveness of Frau Strauss, theirs was a life-long marriage, and Strauss was devoted to his son and his Jewish daughter-in-law, who played a prominent role in his older years. Such a portrait is not reflected by Karajan, Reiner, et al. Heard after the Jarvi recording, the Karajan, for all its power and luxuriance, sounds ponderous after a while. The Jarvi is a vigorous, intense, and sometimes hyperactive reading about a family that has many happy moments and squabbles. The American-raised conductor even linked his performance with American jazz.

This newcomer led by French conductor Francois-Xavier Roth goes a step further with a portrait that is all smiles and good spirits. Strings play with a sleek tone and lithe execution. Even more remarkable is the presence
and balance of the woodwinds. *Domestica* is a thick and busy score where the large string section and active brass tend to bury the winds. Roth’s woodwinds take center stage and really get to show off their many attractive solos. They do this with crisp tone, in contrast to the broader winds of Karajan’s Berlin Philharmonic and Jarvi’s Leipzig players. Roth almost makes *Symphonia Domestica* sound French.

It begins playfully before yielding to a contemplative English horn solo, then continues in a good-natured manner with excellent interplay between soloists. It sounds conversational, as it should, with excellent interplay. The famous love music in III is warm and affectionate without the heavy passion we often hear in the darker and weightier passages. IV opens with a nice sense of sweep without getting out of hand, as this movement does sometimes. The quieter passages are tender, the climax is well scaled, the fugue is lively and good-natured, and the exuberant ending does sometimes. The quieter passages are tender, the climax is well scaled, the fugue is lively and good-natured, and the exuberant ending gives the horns a field day.

*Metamorphosen* should be another story entirely, given that it is Strauss’s response to the wartime devastation of his beloved Munich and the local opera house where he spent so much of his life. The work is the personification of the tragedy that imbues its every measure, but that does not prevent some conductors from darkening its mood even more. Roth goes the other way and allows the tragedy to speak for itself. His general approach is similar to the one he takes with *Symphonia Domestica*: a quasi-French tone with bright textures, open soundstage, and fluid tempos that move along without indulgence. That may sound like a lighthearted performance, but it is anything but. As things proceed, tension builds to quite a fury. His is not the only way to play this work, but the powerful concentration of conductor and players makes it an excellent reading.

Both performances make Roth’s French approach work. Both pulled me in and kept my attention. Not many readers will get rid of their Karajan, Kempe, Bohm, et al.—nor should they—but anyone who hears this will almost certainly be rewarded. The sound is open and lifelike, and the notes are decent.

This is one of the last recordings by the Baden-Baden and Freiburg orchestra. In my review of their *Alpine Symphony* (Mar/Apr 2016), I wrote that the orchestra would merge with the SWR Stuttgart orchestra starting with the present 2016–2017 season. I presume that means a large number of musicians will lose their jobs, which is sad. The orchestra played well in that earlier recording and spectacularly on this one. If it was their last recording, they went out with all honors.

HECHT

**STRAUSS:** *Clarinet Romance;* see HINDEMITH

**STRAVINSKY:** *Chanson Russe; Danse Russe; Divertimento; Suite Italienne; Berceuse; Tango; Violin Concerto*

Liana Gourdjia, v; Katia Skanavi, p; German Radio Philharmonic/ Zsolt Nagy

Audite 97697—77 minutes

Liana Gourdjia is a Russian violinist born in the early 1980s. Katia Skanavi is a Russian pianist born in 1971. Conductor Zsolt Nagy was born in Hungary in 1957. And the complete name of the orchestra is the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern and was created in 2007 out of the Saarbrücken and Kaiserslautern radio orchestras. None of the performers are well known; nor will they be, judging from this recording.

The first work on the album, the ‘Chanson Russe,’ an arrangement of Parasha’s lament from *Mavra*, offers such promise. Gourdjia has a wide breadth of tone color and expression, from tasteful glissandos to long lines with keen accents. She and Skanavi certainly work together with the same point of view, creating a flexible, highly melancholic mood with a broad range of expression. Even when they are playing at a whisper, the engineers keep their playing audible and present.

But after the first four minutes, all the other works—the ‘Chanson Russe’ from Petrouchka, the Divertimento based on Tchaikovsky, the *Suite Italienne* based on Pulcinella, the Lullaby from *The Firebird*, and the Tango—the problem is their concept of these pieces. Slow sections drag so much that sometimes I had trouble even recognizing the familiar melodies they were playing. I kept wondering whether they had ever actually heard the originals of these pieces. Sometimes Skanavi becomes so aggressive that her sound is almost brutal. Only in the ‘Pas de Deux’ and coda to the Divertimento did both artists actually become playful. Nor does it help that, for all of these works, the piano arrangements by Samuel Dushkin and Stravinsky himself are really so naïve as to be downright amateur.

The Violin Concerto comes last on the
album. The orchestra sounds like the work is new to them. In the first two movements they lack the freedom to let the rhythms swing. In II the tempo begins to slow down bit by bit. In III, as the music lumbers along, I can’t hear what’s going on in the string accompaniment. Enough said.

**FRENCH**

**STUCKY:** *Concerto for Orchestra; Rhapsodies; American Muse*

Sanford Sylvan, bar; Boston Modern Orchestra Project/ Gil Rose

BMOP 1050—57 minutes

Three pieces by Steven Stucky (1949-2016). He was a longtime Cornell faculty member and Pulitzer Prize winner who wrote in a freely atonal style, harmonically inclusive but colorful, with touches of romantic expression. He was also a specialist in the music of Lutoslawski.

*Rhapsodies* (2008) is a typical example of the genre, a very American branch of academic modernism that will surprise no one and likely thrill few. Opening with the standard sound of birds, the piece unfolds a motive that is continuously developed, or setting off apparent but only vaguely related branches. The effect is expressive of the term “rhapsodic”.

*American Muse* (1999) confirms the composer’s Americanism. It is a cycle of four poems by prominent American poets (Berrymen, Cummings, Ammons, and Whitman). Topics are related to the piece’s proximity to the 9-11 attack. Jazz, humor, mystery, and Whitman-esque declamation (on “I Hear America Singing”) are the subjects.

The earlier *Concerto for Orchestra* (1987) is typical of the period. In three movements, fast-slow-fast, the piece is typically through composed. The freedom produces vast amounts of aimlessness, and there’s little to hold the attention over the work’s half hour duration. The bouts of intensity, virtuosity, and drama (and some beauty) all lead to the impression of lack of discipline. Most of us have heard all this before, and despite the composer’s formidable career, I’m not sure there’s much to hold on to over the long run. I doubt there will be performances better than this one, though.

**SWIDER:** *For Wind Instruments*

Maria Grochowska, fl; Piotr Pyć, ob; Roman Widaszek, cl; Marek Baranski, bn; Maritusz Zietek, hn; Eugeniusz Knapik, p; Walda Palacz, g

Accord 228—69 minutes

The late Polish composer Jozef Swider (1930-2014), though represented here by chamber music for winds ranging from the early 50s to 2007, seems to have been active in the provinces (Katowice, in Silesia, and Bydgoszcz, 100 miles inland from Gdansk), and with a speciality in choral music, which helps explain a conservative vocabulary in comparison with others from the generation born around 1930 (Arvo Pärt, 1935; Penderecki, 1933; Lutoslawski, 1913). The collection included here—miniatures and a mini-quintet for wind quintet; movements for flute and guitar, flute and piano, oboe and piano, bassoon and piano, clarinet and piano—remind me of nothing more than Hindemith’s Gebrauchsmusik, not because of the vocabulary, but because they are well-made pieces that work very well for the instruments and don’t fit into a larger artistic school or agenda. In other words, pieces that you would be happy to study, or to hear on a conservatory recital—attractive, but not shaking your foundations or changing your esthetic choices.

**SZYMANOWSKI:** *Piano Sonatas 2+3; Mythes*

Sviatoslav Richter; Oleg Kagan, v

Doremi 8037—80 minutes

To commemorate Szymanowski’s 100th anniversary, Richter and Kagan teamed up to honor him in Warsaw. Richter championed Szymanowski’s works, performing his Mazurkas, Metopes, and Masques in his recitals.

Although Arthur Rubinstein introduced the classical music world to Szymanowski’s second piano sonata, Richter played this powerful and difficult work often. It is technically vigorous, perhaps on par with Liszt’s *Transcendental Etudes* and Beethoven’s *Hammerkliavier*. This two-movement sonata begins with violent energy and dramatic contrasting themes similar to Prokofieff’s early piano sonatas. Then II demonstrates his admiration and respect for Chopin, with its more romantic influence.

While Richter performed the third sonata several times, this is the only interpretation of his on CD with good sound quality. This work sounds much like Scriabin’s, and it is in one
movement. I find this work and Mythes more fascinating than the second sonata owing to the strains of mysticism and knotty harmonies. The rest of the program is a collaboration with the legendary Oleg Kagan on the dissonant, wandering Mythes.

**SZYMANOWSKI: Concert Overture;**
see LUTOSLAWSKI

**TANEYEV: String Trios**
Lubotsky Trio
Melodiya 2456—51 minutes

Sergei Taneyev (1856-1915) was a student of Tchaikovsky. He is perhaps the closest to the European world of composition of any of the late 19th Century Russian composers. That makes him perhaps a mite disappointing to listeners who want the excitement of folk song material from Russia; but on the other hand, he reminds us that sophistication is also possible in that country.

These trios are a fine example of Taneyev's abilities. Op. 31 is a four-movement work completed in 1911; the B minor was not quite finished when the composer died in 1915. Op. 31 was originally written for violin, viola, and tenor viola (whatever that may be). It is usually played with cello, as it is here. The B minor Trio is in two movements, an Allegro and a theme and variations, and is also beautiful.

There is a third Trio in D that is not included here. It was written back in 1880 and has a more classical style, though not inferior in its appeal to these.

These performances are warm in sound, but the violinist has an intonation vagueness that is continually distracting coupled with a tendency to take slow tempos that is just as disturbing. The first movement of Op. 31, for instance, is marked Allegro con brio. It takes 7:45 in the Belcanto MDG recording and 11:58 here. This may account for the fact that the MDG disc includes all three of the trios while this one only gives us two (MDG 634 1003, M/J 2001). The MDG is better balanced between instruments and is altogether a more satisfying reading. This one cannot be recommended.

**TARTINI: 5 Violin Sonatas**
Crtomir Siskovic; Luca Ferrini, lpsi
Dynamic 7775—81 minutes

Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770) was one of the most important violinists of the 18th Century. He was famous for the purity of his tone and intonation and as a teacher. As a composer he is primarily remembered for his Devil’s Trill Sonata and his pedagogical work The Art of Bowing, which comprises 50 variations on a Gavotte by Corelli and is still used.

Tartini wrote many violin concertos and sonatas, and we have five sonatas here. They have the qualities that I usually hear in his sonatas: simple keyboard writing (actually, basso continuo) and simple melodies for the violin. They are in the gallant style, which was transitional between heavily ornamented baroque music and the more homophonic music of the classical era. I have always found them unsatisfactory for this reason. They are too simple for my taste. They would certainly be excellent recital material for intermediate violin students, but give me the ornamented versions of Corelli’s sonatas or and brilliantly counterpoint of Bach's sonatas instead.

Crtomir Siskovic and Luca Ferrini play this music with great style and sympathy and are beautifully recorded.

**TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphonies 4, 5, 6**
Arctic Philharmonic/ Christian Lindberg
BIS 2178 [2CD] 129 minutes

The Arctic Philharmonic—officially, the North Norwegian Opera and Symphony—was founded in 2009 and claims to be the northernmost orchestra in the world. It is in Tromso, Norway, so it probably is. Its music director, Christian Lindberg, is famous as a trombone soloist but now seems to be devoting his energies to conducting.

Lindberg writes that he had long been fascinated by the varying tempos conductors apply to Tchaikovsky's symphonies and was surprised that the scores are full of specific tempo suggestions and metronome markings. “I stay close to [them]...I truly believe that every metronome marking is there for a reason.” Lindberg is not the first conductor to make that observation about metronome markings, and it is not without controversy, given doubts about the accuracy of old metronomes.

The result here is three classical-style per-
performances of works that we usually think of as red-blooded Russian romantic. There is support for that approach. To begin with, Tchaikovsky studied at the newly opened Moscow Conservatory, whose teaching was drawn from the disciplined Germanic school rather than the predominant Russian nativism led by a group of composers known outside Russia as “The Five”. (In time, he would become a bridge between the nativists and those who favored the German influence.) A classical approach to Tchaikovsky’s symphonies can also be justified by the fact that the symphony is the quintessential Germanic musical form.

It may seem a cliche to say that Lindberg’s readings have a “Scandinavian sound” but they do. They are balanced, counterpoint and inner detail are clear, and nothing jumps out of the texture. Everything is neat and expertly turned out, with every note in its place. Gone is the usual heaviness in the low brass. Interpretively, they are lively but even-tempered with no emotional extremes. Excitement is achieved mainly through dazzling fast tempos precisely executed with careful attention to rhythm.

The Arctic Philharmonic plays with dedication and enthusiasm. It has clear-toned woodwinds, a mid-sized or slightly larger string section that never quite digs into the music, and polite, reserved, brass. BIS’s sound is hall-like but slightly amorphous front to back.

The key descriptive words for this Fourth Symphony are spirited and lively. The opening fanfare has a dark quality because of the horn coloring and reticent trumpets. The main section is smooth and flowing, with light textures, punctuated by conversational string chords. Some of the fast parts are almost breezy; others are too fast. This movement can sound repetitive without some variety in tempo, phrasing, or general approach; and it sometimes does here. The Andantino moves along with more urgency than usual, and the Scherzo’s articulations are slightly broad, to good effect. The furious finale is wickedly fast, and the famous Russian tune in duple time in the low brass does not roar and growl as it should.

The main word for this Fifth is flowing, and that works well in I, almost turning it into a ballet. Andante Cantabile is slow at first but picks up near the end. The strings are warmer than usual, though the effect is more introspective than romantic. Valse dances with a winning push-pull effect in the trio. “Flowing” applies to the approach of the finale in terms of the way it keeps the interconnected lines and motifs together. A rare effect for these performances is the long hold in the brass and timpani before the final march.

Lindberg’s Fourth and particularly the Fifth can be enjoyed even by people who are convinced that only full-blooded Russians should conduct these works. The Pathetique is another matter entirely. Tchaikovsky died young, at a time when he was evolving in a way that might have strongly affected 20th Century music had he lived longer. His penultimate opera, Queen of Spades, was an indication of that. To a lesser extent so was Nutcracker, but the Pathetique is perhaps the best example of this theory. It is not hard to believe the composer when he called it his “most sincere” work, something he put his “whole soul” into. He intended to call it Program Symphony (No. 6), but the prospect of being questioned about a program led him to accept his brother’s patetichesky (passionate suffering or emotional). He later wanted to withdraw even that but died before he could do so, leaving his publisher free to use Pathetique, not surprising in a country enamored of French culture.

Some people hear the Pathetique as autobiographical, a symphonic suicide note, or a poem of impending death. None of that comes through in this tempered, controlled, and finally misconceived performance. There are no startling outbursts of emotion or pain, no eruptions of joy, no visceral signs of struggle or resistance. It is gentle, polite, and almost happy. The scherzo is too blended, playful, and literal to catch the swagger in this music. The brass runs, which should be defiant or angry, are just simply there, and sometimes barely that. The finale is too passive, even in that burning climax, as if Tchaikovsky’s protagonist is giving up without a fight; and the too-soft trombone chorale fades more like a whimper than the requiem it almost certainly is.

HECHT

Tchaikovsky: Symphony 6; Romeo & Juliet; Serenade Melancolique; Suite 3; Rococo Variations

Leonid Kogan, v; Daniil Shafran, c; Moscow Philharmonic, Philharmonia/ Kirill Kondrashin

Urania 121312 [2CD] 137 minutes

This is a compilation of recordings from 1949 to 1965. All but the Serenade Melancolique are with the Moscow Philharmonic. The program begins with an exciting performance of the
Sixth Symphony that combines fast tempos, some pathos, and the Moscow Philharmonic in excellent form. It is a movement of contrasts: slow and furiously fast tempos, amazingly precise strings and blaring brasses, some interesting inner voices passing on themes, and moods ranging from sad to angry. II is pretty fast, but always flowing in Tchaikovsky’s balletic manner. The scherzo is fast, light, jaunty, and deft. Sometimes the orchestra seems to be dancing on a pin. Kondrashin is in full tragic and angry mode in the finale. The final climax is furious, and the trombone chorale at the end is almost unending. The 1965 sound is some of the best I have heard in Russian performances from that era, and it does a nice job of capturing hall ambience.

Romeo and Juliet may be a warhorse, but Kondrashin treats it as a major work, and the result is the finest reading of it that I have heard. The Friar Lawrence sections sound like the Russian hymns that they are: rapt, atmospheric with hushed expectancy and beautiful, thought-out phrasing. The fight scenes are fast, brilliant, and thrilling, with amazing string playing; and the chords depicting the lovers’ suicide are crushing. The first appearance of the love music leads to an entirely different world whose hushed and eerie ambience warns of the hatred and conflict outside. Only with the love music’s second appearance does Kondrashin pull out the stops. Not every performance presents that difference. This R&J is stunning.

The Rococo Variations is for fans of Russian cellist Daniil Shafran only. I usually find Shafran’s playing too overt and his sound a little buzzy, and both are on display here. A far more serious matter is that Shafran is miked so closely that he is in your room, while the orchestra is a block away. The effect is disconcerting, and the strange tonal quality of the woodwinds does not help.

The soloist is also emphasized in Serenade Melancolique, but the orchestra is not as distant; and Leonid Kogan’s gorgeous playing helps, with its dark rich, almost Gypsyish tone.

The more classically oriented Third Suite eludes Kondrashin’s romantic sensibilities and fails completely. It is an awkward performance, complete with moments where he seems to flail away for no clear reason. The sound is not good, particularly in the whiny strings.

What we have here at full price for two discs are two great performances, one good one, one with limited appeal poorly recorded, one that does not work at all—and no booklet notes.

**Tchaikovsky:** Violin Concerto; Meditation; Serenade Melancolique
Moonkyung Lee; London Symphony/ Miran Vaupotic
Navona 6079—58 minutes

Both Moonkyung Lee’s and Croatian Miran Vaupotic’s biographies conceal their ages and are quite thin on substance. So is this recording.

For the first 6-1/2 minutes of the concerto, Lee plays without any change of tone color, and almost every note is played between mf and f. She also loves glissandos. I must add that she is recorded very close-up, which can make a soloist sound consistently loud, with little expression. She also makes a number of mistakes, mostly the occasional wrong note in the many chords she must play. Then at 7:46 in III an edit adds an extra note to her 2/4 line. Vaupotic makes big retards in the opening four measures of both the concerto and ‘Meditation’, and the tempos overall are much slower than what is marked in the scores—a prelude to what follows.

In the concerto, I’s tutti section is balanced and articulated but deliberate, metronomic, and stodgy. Vaupotic conveys a point of view, but it isn’t Tchaikovsky’s. Nor is there a steady beat in the opening four measures of II, but you can blame the unsteadiness of movement on both artists—Lee makes far too many retards. I kept saying in all three movements, “Get on with it, will you!”

The ‘Meditation’ (from Souvenir d’un Lieu Cher) also is tedious; the flow is measured and stiff. The same happens with the second theme of the Serenade Melancolique.

For the concerto I highly recommend Philippe Quint, Martin Panteleev, and the Sofia Philharmonic on Avanti, paired with a marvelous recording of Arensky’s Quartet.

**French**

**Tchaikovsky:** Quartet 1; see Glazounov
Romeo & Juliet; see Moussorgsky
Symphony 2; see Schumann
TELEMANN & CPE BACH: Festive Cantatas
Veronika Winter, Margot Oitzinger, Georg Poppitz, Matthias Vieweg, Rheinishe Kantorei, Das Kleine Konzert/ Hermann Max
CPO 777 946—73:41

It is, of course, a fact that Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach did succeed his godfather, Georg Philipp Telemann in his post in Hamburg. That fact alone might justify putting sacred works of the two together in one program.

There is more to it than just that, for the compositions here reflect considerable professional interactions between the two. CPE Bach’s Easter cantata of 1756, Gott hat den Herrn Auferwecket (H.803, W244), may well have been composed on the advice of Telemann, who wanted to make his godson’s music known in Hamburg. And the remaining items here, all by Telemann, were ones Bach was involved with in his own career—as the booklet notes explain in full.

All of the music here, as the album title suggests, is of a “festive” nature, and calls for lively and colorful instrumentations—woodwinds, but notably trumpets and timpani. In Bach’s work we can hear the young forerunner of stylistic change struggling to follow Hamburg traditions, but ending in a somewhat bumpy and muscular manner. (There are suggestions that some of the music in this work may be by other composers.)

All that is in contrast with the two large Telemann cantatas, Trauret, ihr Himmel, composed for Easter (1760), and Er Neigte den Himmel, for the Ascension (1762), both dating after the younger master’s work, and in Telemann’s later years. In these, the composer’s confidently assimilative, cosmopolitan style is mature and demonstrates the continuing validity of late-Baroque sensibilities.

For good measure, we are given two more Telemann pieces, short ones: settings of the Latin and German texts, Veni, Sancte Spiritus & Komm, Heiliger Geist, one from about 1756, the other of 1760. These demonstrate the Lutheran tradition of retaining some Latin liturgical texts even in conjunction with German counterparts. And in all these works, we observe Telemann’s sensitivity to word values and verbal expression. Hermann Max is an old and trusted friend in this literature. His vocal and instrumental forces do full justice to the music. These were all recorded in concert at the Magdeburg Telemann Festival in March of 2014—an event specifically devoted to the relationship between Telemann and his godson.

Fine notes and full texts with translations.

BARKER

TELEMANN: Recorder & Chalumeau Concertos
Giovanni Antonini; Garden of Harmony
Alpha 245—74 minutes

This program consists of the familiar Suite in A minor, a recorder concerto in C, another in G minor, and a concertante sonata for two chalumeaux, violin, and continuo. Although the playing is on period instruments, the sound is plummy, pleasant, and not too percussive. Harpsichord and theorbo offer gentle support from the background. The fast tonguing in the chalumeau sonata-concerto is especially impressive. Giovanni Antonini’s playing is a model of precision, and the ornaments he adds appear to come from joyous spontaneity. Together, he and the ensemble make this music from the time of powdered wigs sound vital and relevant rather than distant and foreign. I would say “more, please”, but since this comes from Telemann you know there is always more.

GORMAN

TELEMANN: Cantatas; see BACH

TISCHENKO: Violin & Piano Concerto; Symphony 8; Tsvetayeva Songs
Mila Shkirtiil, mz; Chingiz Osmanov, v; Nikolai Mazhara, p; St Petersburg Symphony/ Yuri Serov
Naxos 573343—60 minutes

Boris Tishchenko (1939-2010) studied with Ustvolskaya and Shostakovich and dedicated his Symphonies 3 and 5 to the latter. He was apparently in ill health in his last years, and these might be considered Late Works.

His Violin-and-Piano Concerto (2006) is a big, impressive Russian work of great originality. It opens with a sigh and works its dark material deliberately until it finds itself intensely disturbed and overtaken by insanity. The sigh returns and ends in relative normalcy. It is a jocular rondo that Shostakovich might have been proud of, and the following episodes share his teacher’s trenchant sarcasm. Anything amusing is forgotten with III, a slow movement filled with gloom, pain, and tears. The agony of the climax is bloodcurdling. The comparatively gentle finale finds itself with the angels, and a long folk-like tune (a Russian pop song, apparently) unfolds warmly. The close winds its way up to the heavens. Though the piece might not have the incomparable genius of the composer’s mentor, it nevertheless is a substantial addition to the repertoire and should not be ignored. Performance is excellent.

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May/June 2017
Symphony 8 (2008) takes another Eighth Symphony as a model, namely Schubert’s. The opening melody in the minor is stated with pizzicato bass (like the Schubert), there is a dance and a closing song, and the exposition ends in the major. The beautiful II contrasts its noble opening theme with prayer. The middle section has the same accompanying rhythm as I of the first movement of the Schubert, here with oboe solo. The rondo finale opens with a friendly dance, but the first episode is grotesque. The central waltz is positively deformed. The coda is in a slashing victorious major. Like the concerto, this is a work of substance. Though it falls short of immortal masterpiece status, it deserves to be heard.

Three Songs to Poems of Marina Tsetavyeva (1970) were arranged by the composer’s student Leonid Rezetdinov in 2014. They fit in well with the remainder of the program, three short songs dealing with death and paranoia. They are well sung by Ms Shkirill.

Texts and translations. A worthwhile release.

GIMBEL

TITZ: Quartet; see GLAZOUNOV

UGOLETTI: Saxophone & Piano Concerto; Violin Concerto; Bass Trombone Concerto Gianni Alberti, sax; Jozsef Ormeny, p; Marko Komonko, v; Serhiy Katsaval, trb; Lviv Philharmonic Strings/ Ferdinando Nazzaro Brilliant 95406—70 minutes

Here are three recently composed concertos by Italian composer Paolo Ugoletti (b 1956). The 24-minute Double Concerto (2013) for soprano saxophone, piano, and string orchestra opens with an anxious theme, sounded first by violins, then again and again by what I thought was an insistent trumpet—but no, it is the strident saxophone soloist. The mood mellows, but then it becomes frenetic, the pianist simply part of the mass of sound, the saxophonist wailing louder than everyone else. The harmonic language is not atonal, but it is quite dissonant and restless. After a while, Ugoletti seems obsessively fixated on that main motive, on the piercing soprano saxophone sound, and on a sense of high-tension fear. The quiet ending is a relief. There is some calm in II—but it is a wary calm that is sometimes broken by nervous agitation. And so it is no surprise when most of III conveys that same mood of high anxiety. It seems odd that the soprano saxophone is so dominant and that the piano, the other instrument in the Double Concerto, sounds distant all the time. But its final sustained arpeggio is the last sound heard. Gianni Alberti is the saxophonist with the penetrating sound, Jozsef Ormeny the pianist.

The 25-minute Violin Concerto (2009) begins boldly, and when the solo violin enters a few seconds later, the music reminds me of a lively barn dance—but a complicated one. Soloist Marko Komonko plays in a vigorous staccato style much of the time, so the occasional lyrical passage stands out in vivid contrast. II begins with string tone clusters—detached, muted, repeated—under a tentative violin melody. The activity and tension build and subside, those clusters forming a web under the violin’s searching melody. III begins with the same vigorous barn dance feeling as heard in I. A middle section is calmer, the ending vigorous. The final chord is a cluster-clustered major triad, the first such final-sounding sonority of the entire work.

The 20-minute Bass Trombone Concerto (2014) has a sort of nervous melancholy in I, the bass trombone’s restless repeated notes alternating with its higher, lyrical lines. Those nervous repeated notes are the main element. II has pizzicato strings (especially basses), lyrical strings, and gentle bass trombone utterances of just a few notes at a time. III has a syncopated, offbeat melody over active but tender string textures. Ukrainian trombonist Serhiy Katsaval, soloist in this work, has fine tone but sometimes lets slip an unstable note. And the strings of the Lviv Philharmonic, who do quite well in the rest of the recording, sometimes lose cohesion in this movement.

KILPATRICK

VAN DER ROOST: Clarinet Concerto; see HINDEMITH

VASKS: Flute Concerto; Symphony 3
Dita Krenberga; Liepaja Symphony/ Atvars Lustigala—Wergo 7349—74 minutes

Vasks’s Flute Concerto (2007–8) is a more or less standard vehicle in three movements, though with weight given to the composer’s Latvian gloominess (thus the movement layout: slow-fast-slow). The opening movement is insolubly sad, the central allegro active and somewhat disheveled, with its Prokofieff-like passagework interrupted by a fractured waltz provoking fierceness and violence. It’s followed by a 6-minute cadenza with some humming, fluttertongueing, and key slapping for some uncharacteristic modernism. The finale is filled
with endless sad lines ("instrumental cantilena in the natural works of God’s creation", as the notes have it). A funeral march, its climax, peace, and a final fluttering into the heavens close it out. The piece is a backbreaker for the soloist, though decidedly low in spectacle. Ms Krenberga acquits herself proudly.

The somewhat earlier Symphony 3 (2004-5) is essentially an abstract tone poem on the plight of Latvia and its struggles and hopes—a familiar subject for the composer. It breaks down in the end to the standard four movements. I begins in funeral mode, but is overtaken by a military march, with later battle and incoherence. There is plenty of sorrow, anger, a dance-of-death tango, and the emergence of Beethoven’s Fate motive. The following slow movement is bathed in gloom. An explosion opens the fierce battle continuation, which develops its materials to exhaustion. The finale is funereal, its final elegy ending with throbbing heartbeat, until Vasks’s Latvian animals have the last word in the depths of the forest.

Listeners familiar with the composer’s output will find both of these ambitious pieces worthy.

GIMBEL

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Sir John in Love

April Cantelo (Anne Page), Pamela Bowden (Mrs Quickly), James Johnston (Fenton), John Cameron (Ford), Roderick Jones (Falstaff); Sadler’s Wells Chorus, Philharmonia Orchestra/Stanford Robinson

Lyrita 2122 [2CD, mono] 126 minutes

Only one Shakespeare play has resulted in three operas that have some kind of presence in the active repertory. It is not one of his great tragedies but a comedy, and indeed one that is sometimes considered a lesser work: The Merry Wives of Windsor. The three operas have different titles: Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor, by Otto Nicolai; Verdi’s Falstaff, and Ralph Vaughan Williams’s Sir John in Love. Only the Vaughan Williams was composed to an English text. Thus it has the special merit of allowing singers and listeners to relish Shakespeare’s actual words.

Here we have a studio recording made in 1956 by the cast that, I assume, was performing the work at Sadler’s Wells (later renamed the English National Opera). Three of the singers had performed these same roles at Sadler’s Wells in the work’s first run of performances there (1946). One of them—Roderick Jones, the Falstaff—had sung in the opening night of the 1946 production and thus had “created” the role.

The opera’s actual first, “tryout” staging had taken place 17 years earlier at the Royal College of Music. In the years between that student production and the Sadler’s Wells premiere, Vaughan Williams added several notable passages to the score that enrich it greatly.

The recording under review was made in the BBC studios in 1956 and broadcast at the time, apparently with narrative explanations between the scenes. (Only one of those spoken links is included in this release—just enough to give a bit of period flavor.) Fortunately, many important BBC broadcasts of important works and performances were recorded by a devoted listener, Richard Itter, at his home on high-quality equipment. Sir John in Love is one of a number of these that are now being released for the first time—with permission from the BBC and the musicians’ union.

The recording is the third commercial release of Sir John in Love to reach the market. The other two are also studio recordings, in modern stereo sound, on EMI (1975, conducted by Meredith Davies, with Raimund Herincx as Falstaff) and on Chandos (2001, conducted by Richard Hickox, with Donald Maxwell as Falstaff). Lee Milazzo praised the Chandos (Nov/Dec 2001), but regretted that Maxwell showed little heft or personality in the title role. I have listened to excerpts from that recording and find it generally entrancing, mainly because one can hear so much more detail in the orchestra than here. But I see many positive traits to this belatedly released historic recording from 1956 and in some ways prefer it, not least for its vivid sense of interplay between the characters (and between characters and chorus).

Opera lovers familiar with Verdi’s Falstaff will find that this work takes a refreshingly different tack. Vaughan Williams prepared the libretto himself—and skillfully. We get many lively interchanges involving secondary characters who are absent or greatly downsized in Boito’s libretto for Verdi, including Shallow, Slender, Peter Simple, and Dr Caius.

Vaughan Williams also made the libretto more music-friendly by having characters, or sometimes the chorus, sing folk-like numbers using poems and song texts from Shakespeare’s time—by Ben Jonson and Philip Sidney—and sometimes tunes from the time as well. These “song” numbers are extraordinarily well integrated: for example, Mistress Page sings an extended snatch of the ‘Greensleeves’
while awaiting a visit from Falstaff, who then announces his arrival with his usual self-importance by continuing her song. There are, at several points in the opera, witty references in the orchestra to the well known and, for this opera, aptly worded folk song ‘John, Come Kiss Me Now’. The chorus often participates actively, sometimes aligning itself with one or another character.

When a situation in Sir John in Love is closely parallel to one in Verdi’s Falstaff, Vaughan Williams handles it no less expertly, but differently. For example, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford have fun reading Falstaff’s letters in canon.

The sound is extremely well engineered, as one would expect from a BBC radio broadcast. One hardly needs to look at the libretto to follow what people are singing. The singers generally show healthy vocal production and clear enunciation—two traits not always combined in operatic singing. Standouts include a young Owen Brannigan in the small role of the Host of the Garter Inn and a consistently lovely and intelligent-sounding April Cantelo as Ann Page—one understands why several men in the play are attracted to her! James Johnston had played Fenton in the opera’s first season at Sadler’s Wells, and he sings it here with clarity and power, clearly enjoying a tenor role that is more substantial than the idealized teenager that Verdi created as his Fenton. This eager lover is an appropriate match for Ann Page, who is herself more substantial than Verdi’s lighter-than-air Nanetta.

I found myself looking forward to the occasions when contralto Pamela Bowden, as Mistress Quickly, would next enter the scene and take command of the proceedings. John Cameron invests Ford with a splendid, Germont-quality baritone and eloquent acting skills that help one sympathize with this, in some ways, unsavory character. As for Roderick Jones, I kept forgetting that I was hearing a singer at all; each utterance seemed so true to character. How lucky for us that Jones’s reading of the title role got broadcast and “captured”!

Anybody who is seriously interested in Vaughan Williams, or in the challenges of setting a play to music, will be fascinated to listen to this recording and will take pleasure in it. For the less operatically inclined, conductor Martin Yates has put together an orchestral suite from Sir John (apparently based on a two-piano version by the composer); its first recording was much praised here (O’Connor, J/F 2017). Of course the suite leaves out lots of wondrous stuff. A mid-way solution would be to listen to the cantata that Vaughan Williams himself drew from the opera in 1931: In Windsor Forest, available on Albion (under David Willcocks).

Perhaps in time Sir John in Love will become, finally, the first Shakespeare opera in English to command a wide audience. (The closest contender for that at the moment is Britten’s Midsummer Night’s Dream.) I repeat the question raised by Mr Milazzo in 2001: Why is this wonderful opera not more often performed?

LOCKE

VERACINI, A: Solo & Trio Sonatas
El Arte Mysico—Brilliant 95423—68:31

Antonio Veracini (1659-1745) is not to be confused with his more often recorded nephew and student, Francesco Maria Veracini. This selection of solo (Op.2:1, 4, 8; Op.3:4, 7, 8, 9) and trio sonatas (Op.1:1, 2, 4) supply a good overview of his published works. Only one of these sonatas (Op.1:4) has been recorded before this, in a collection of sonatas by both Antonio and Francesco (Oehms 720), which also included Antonio’s Op.2:3 solo violin sonata. Antonio’s style is, like his nephew’s, especially melodic and filled with virtuosic passage work. The booklet essay by Teresa Casanova is very informative about Veracini’s music and his career in Florence.

The performers of El Arte Mysico play on period instruments with an assured sense of baroque style, and the violin solos are shared between Angel Sampedro and Teresa Casanova. The continuo (Isabel Gomez-Serranillos, vc, and Diego Fernandez, hpsi) is sensitive and supportive. The inventiveness of Antonio Veracini and the quality of these performances should help his music to be better known.

BREWER

VERDELOT: Madrigali Diminuiti
Doulce memoire/ Denis Raisin Dadre
Ricercar 371—67:20

This is an unusual collection of early Italian madrigals by Philippe Verdelot, some performed by Clara Coutouly accompanied by a small ensemble consisting of a lute, harp, and harpsichord. But while these are interesting performances of these polyphonic vocal works, the reason for this collection is to display the virtuosity of Denis Raisin Dadre on recorder. He adds extensive ornamentations to Verdelot’s madrigals based on Sylvestro Ganassi’s treatise
on improvisation from 1535, *Opera Intitulata Fontegara*. Sometimes he plays one of the polyphonic voices along with Coutouly, but a number of the madrigals are recorded twice: once with voice, and once with the recorder becoming a soloist by adding ornamental passages based on Ganassi's models. This is much more than just an academic exercise, as Dadre has made Ganassi's patterns as much a part of his technique as any jazz saxophone player, so the original vocal madrigal is truly transformed into an entirely instrumental composition.

In addition to the Verdelot selections, the recording includes a few instrumental pieces and frottolas for contrast. Only two of these selections also appear on the Alamire collection of Verdelot madrigals (S/O 2009): 'Madonna qual certeca' is also turned into a soprano solo, while 'Donna che sete' is performed a cappella.

The booklet includes an informative essay about the improvisation practices of the renaissance and full texts and translations.

**Breuer**

**Vieuxtemps: Cello Concertos 1+2; Capriccio**

*Wen-Sinn Yang, vc; Evergreen Symphony/ Gernot Schmalfuss—CPO 777 922—54 minutes*

We tend to think of Vieuxtemps as a composer for the violin and teacher of Eugene Ysaye. Well, these two cello concertos are both fine, late works, written in 1876 and 1881, the year Vieuxtemps died, as was the Viola Capriccio, Op. 55, subtitled *Homage to Paganini*. They are all beautiful romantic compositions, well worth our time.

Earlier recordings of these concertos have been well received by our critics. Yang and company take a little longer to play them than does Alban Gerhardt (Hyperion 67790, M/J 2015). The recordings are quite comparable in balance and sound. Your choice might be related to the rest of the program. Yang plays that three-minute solo piece originally for viola, but Gerhardt plays two Ysaye pieces, ‘Meditation’, Op. 16 and ‘Serenade’, Op. 22, making his disc last 65 minutes. Both are fine recordings otherwise.

**D Moore**

**Vivaldi: 4 Seasons**

*Shunske Sato, vc; Concerto Koln Berlin 829—51 minutes*

with **PANUFNIK, R: The 4 World Seasons**

*Tasmin Little, vc; BBC Symphony Chandos 5175 [SACD] 63 minutes*

Shunske Sato’s audacious interpretation is a high-wire act full of risks. As a background for comparison, the only period-instrument interpretation I know that is more adventurously pictorial than this one is Fabio Biondi’s second one (2000). Some readers might prefer to call these “outrageous”. The recording by Harnoncourt (1978) was a step in that direction; Il Giardino Armonico’s (1993) was another. The Freiburg Baroque Orchestra (1997) took the pictorializing in an uncommonly slow direction. Nigel Kennedy’s three recordings have been remarkably indulgent, using modern instruments. As exciting and clever as Biondi’s extreme rendition is, teasing out every nuance of Vivaldi’s accompanying sonnets for garish display, it’s just too violent-sounding for me. I want the brilliant and difficult gestures to fit into music that still sounds graceful and civilized. It’s enough to evoke the illustrations of birds, bugs, dogs, drunken peasants, hunting firearms, and inclement weather without making it sound like an attempt to break the instruments.

For all-around balance and subtlety, I like many moderate performances: Lamon/Tafelmusik (1991), Carmignola twice (1992 and 1999), Schroeder (1970), Standage/Pinnock twice (1978 and 1981), and Biondi’s first one (1991). I also like the imaginative performance...
These recordings draw my attention to the depth of Vivaldi’s expressive creativity in the music, rather than to the violinist’s technical skills. The forthright pleasantness of Susanne Lautenbacher’s 1966 stroll never goes away, either. So, how is Sato?

This concert recording from June 2016 has a short track of applause at the end. The audience is silent elsewhere. There is a cover note from the producer that the recording is “made without cuts”, but two dates are printed. Did they shuffle together the best takes from two concerts? The Cologne players’ unanimity of purpose and blend are excellent. There are many sharp intakes of breath by Sato to get the ensemble into the beginnings of phrases. I understand that those breaths are real and in character, but I’d rather not hear them in a recording. They are distracting.

There are phrasing breaks in eccentric places, extremes of tempo (fast and slow), and playing over the bridge for icy effect. In the peasant’s dance part of Autumn, Sato plays far out of tune, presumably deliberately—it’s effective but jarring. The oddities all make sense, at least in retrospect. The harpsichordist and theorist contribute enterprising improvisations that call attention to themselves. Sato’s own improvisations in the melodic line do so even more, including some added rhythmic figures to make it sound like rustic fiddling. It’s vigorous and consistently entertaining. The sound is vivid, as advertised in the self-congratulatory packaging.

There are two other pieces by Vivaldi here to extend the program to an hour, but not mentioned anywhere on the outside of the package. The concert begins with a Concerto in G minor (R 156). The brief and somber Sinfonia al Santo Sepolcro (R 169) is between Summer and Autumn. Both of these get close analysis for expression from the ensemble—there are no violin solos. The Lamon/Tafelmusik program is a close match (it includes the Sinfonia al Santo Sepolcro, but interprets it more simply, making it sound more somber and noble). I also like the four-violin concerto she includes (B minor, R 580, the one Bach arranged for harpsichords) better than R 156, and her more measured tempos for everything. I’ve said plenty here for the reader to go find samples and make a decision about Sato.

Tasmin Little’s program has new music composed for her by Roxanna Panufnik (born 1968), daughter of Andrzej Panufnik. It is a 21-minute violin concerto with string orchestra and a Tibetan singing bowl. It has portamentos that sound far-eastern, and the solo violin spends a lot of time playing very high notes. The music is mellifluous but not tonal, and the hushed moments are enchanting. The movements are titled ‘Autumn in Albania’, ‘Tibetan Winter’, ‘Spring in Japan’, and ‘Indian Summer’. The first three movements are better compositions than the last one, where the journey and ending are not satisfying. This is the premiere recording, and I’d consider it a sufficient reason to get this disc, even without the fine performance of the Vivaldi concertos. I’d like to hear more of Roxanna Panufnik’s music.

In Vivaldi’s concertos, Little’s BBC orchestra plays cleanly without contributing much character, except from harpsichordist David Wright with his busily imaginative elaborations. Wright adds a harpsichord cadenza between the first two movements of the Autumn concerto, like a scene change to set up the hushed sleep of the slow movement. The rest of Little’s interpretation (as both soloist and conductor) is generally outgoing, making the music lively and cheerful. She inserts one little cadenza of her own into the Summer concerto, not adding much improvisation elsewhere. This would be a good purchase for listeners who like their Baroque music in moderation on modern instruments. It reminds me of Lara St John’s beautiful recording (2008), coupled with a more recent piece about the four seasons (Piazzolla’s). St John characterizes the music more than Little, sublimating the musical gestures to fit the poetry, where Little is content to let things sound conventionally brilliant and impressive. St John has the further benefit of a conductor, Marturet, shaping the orchestra’s parts with great sensitivity.

From the overdose of listening to all of the above, and more, my favorites for The Four Seasons are Lamon, Chandler, and Carmignola for period instruments and St John for modern. Catherine Moore and Joseph Magil gave these recordings rave reviews at the time, too—M/J 1993 for Lamon, N/D 2000 for Carmignola’s second one, and J/A 2009 for St John. Chandler’s has not been reviewed. There were ARG reviews of other sets I’ve mentioned here: Harincourt (S/O 1996), Giardino Armonico (N/D 2013), Freiburg Baroque (M/A 1998), and Kennedy (J/F 1998, M/J 2004, and M/A 2016).

B. LEHMAN

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**VIVALDI: Violin Concertos, opp 11+12**

L’Arte dell’Arco/ Federico Guglielmo, v
Brilliant BRP-95048 [2CD] 118:33

This collection is part of Guglielmo’s project of recording all of Vivaldi’s published concertos and sonatas on period instruments. Each of these late publications contains only six concertos, and while a few of these were known in manuscript copies, they have remained less known than Vivaldi’s earlier named collections. While they were included in the I Musici boxed set of Vivaldi concertos (J/A 2011), and Op.12 was recorded by the Solisti Italiani (M/J 1996), they have rarely been recorded on period instruments; I know only of the recordings with the Academy of Ancient Music, Op. 11 with Stanley Richie (M/J 1994) and Op. 12 with Pavlo Beznosiuk (M/A 1998).

In contrast to Guglielmo’s recording of Opus 9 (La Cetra, Jan/Feb 2017), where he took a number of interpretive liberties, he is more straightforward here, but no less interesting. There are two important differences between this and the earlier recordings led by Christopher Hogwood. The first is the difference between Guglielmo’s one-per-part performance and the larger ensemble of the Academy of Ancient Music. While this does create a more pronounced sonic contrast, the second difference is that the earlier recordings sound very sedate compared with Guglielmo’s much more dramatic readings.

**WARD: The Crucible**

Bryan Murray (John Proctor), Rachel Weishoff (Elizabeth), Sylvia D’Eramo (Abigail), Soraya Karkari (Mary Warren), Joshua Benevento (Judge Danforth), Ryan Capozzo (Rev. Parris), Colin Whiteman (Rev. Hale); Purchase Symphony/ Hugh Murphy
Albany 1656—114 minutes

Robert Ward’s operatic setting of Arthur Miller’s famous play won the Pulitzer Prize in 1962 and the New York Music Critic’s Circle Citation. It has been revived a number of times over the last 50 years (just last summer, in fact, at Glimmerglass Opera) and is a frequent staple of university music programs (my alma mater, Western Michigan University, staged it while I was there).

Many critics find the music well written for the voice. Never does Ward write the vocal lines too high or against a heavy orchestration. The libretto by Bernard Stambler is a canny reduction of Miller’s play, though several scenes are left out that I miss: Abigail’s nearly hysterical scene with the other girls in the first act, the grilling of the Proctors on their biblical knowledge by Rev. Hale in the second. I’m glad that Ward didn’t end the opera in an Andrea Chenier-like blaze of drums and high notes, but ends it quietly, with dignity and an uncertainty about how events may work out.

While unobjectionable, I don’t think Ward’s music is actually very memorable. One doesn’t come away humming the tunes, but neither does one find that the music enhances the drama in any significant way. There are some motifs that are memorable, and Ward’s use of metric alterations can keep the listener interested and off-guard. All the same, there are times when I almost wished I were listening to the play.

This is the first recording in 50 years. The performance is excellent. All of the voices are strong and sturdy, and some are truly outstanding. Bryan Murray and Rachel Weishoff have beautiful, colorful voices and use them most effectively. Sylvia D’Eramo and Soraya Karkari produce fiery characterizations without allowing their voices to become shrill or unsteady. Joshua Benevento creates an implacable Judge Danforth with ringing top notes, and Ryan Capozzo sings lyrically in a role that is not very sympathetic. I was also impressed by Colin Whiteman’s Reverend Hale, sung with a mellifluous, powerful bass-baritone. In fact, I have no complaints about the singers, chorus, and orchestra at all. I wish
there were a DVD of this production. In the production photos that come with the booklet, it looks like the director updated the story: John Proctor wears contemporary orange prison garb, and in the lurid cover photo Abigail and the other girls look like they could have walked in from a local high school.

The original recording (Albany, July/Aug 1990) had some fine singers: Chester Ludgin, Frances Bible, Patricia Brooks, all of whom created their roles in the the New York City Opera production. Production values are more than adequate as they always are for Albany. We get background notes on production and music and the entire text of the opera. The sound is also first rate. Albany has also given us Lee Hoiby’s magical opera, The Tempest—also worth acquiring.

WINGER: Conversations with Nijinsky; Ghosts; Parting Grace
San Francisco Ballet Orchestra/ Martin West
VBI 1—55 minutes

Kip Winger was bassist for none other than Alice Cooper in the 80s. He later formed his own band, Winger, a superstar heavy metal outfit which would seem to represent the opposite of the classical music scene. But he always had an interest in classical music composition, and insisted on studying harmony and counterpoint seriously. This is one result (he also wants to write an opera, and not a rock opera). After studies at Vanderbilt, he was further encouraged by Richard Danielpour.

Winger was also a dancer, a soloist with the Colorado State Ballet. He says he “sees all his music as dance,” and that is a key to the doings in this collection. Conversations with Nijinsky (2012) is in four movements, all of them begging for choreography. Winger’s musical language is freely tonal; this could have been written by any number of Americans in the 40s. He has a good sense of lyricism, a secure sense of rhythmic protocol, and a touching romantic bent. Episodes are clearly theatrical. Orchestration is secure, probably thanks to Mr Danielpour. A synopsis would have been helpful, even though he regards the work as abstract. Without a subtext the effect is like hearing a ballet without a plot.

Ghosts (2012) is a four-movement orchestral suite inspired by ghosts he thought he saw in a Nashville hospital. It is an episodic and unrelated set of movements without much of a sense of overall purpose. Taken on its own, it’s attractive, but it lacks symphonic logic.

A Parting Grace could again belong to a variety of wartime Americans working in the ballet genre. Winger himself mentions Barber, Copland, and Honegger as major influences; but I think it’s the minor Americans from that era that this reminds me the most of. It’s unfortunately almost impossible to divorce the classical Winger from his rock-star background, but this is all attractive and professional. He is a remarkable artist in both camps, and I salute him and his ambition. I look forward to his going for larger and deeper forms. Fine performance and fascinating notes.

GIMBEL

ZEMLINSKY: Clarinet Trio; see MARTEAU

ZUPKO: Eclipse; Shades of Grey
San g Mee Lee, v; Wendy Warner, vc; Mischa Zupko, p
Cedille 168—68 minutes

Mischa Zupko (b. 1971) teaches at DePaul University in Chicago. These lovely pieces were written for the composer’s colleagues, with special emphasis on his beloved wife. Cellist Warner’s music tends to be a bit more extroverted than the warm romanticism given to the violin (Ms Lee): a surrogate of his wife (like Alma in Mahler, who also materialized as a violin)?

The composer is at the piano. Mr Zupko writes in a rhapsodic, romantic post-tonal style, always disciplined and winningly musical. Eclipse is a set of 5 separate pieces: 1 and 3 are for solo violin, 2 and 5 for solo cello, 4 a duo for violin and cello. All are expressive and inviting. Shades of Grey is a set of 4 pieces mostly for violin, the final one a quiet duet with cello. The first 3 are both intimate and soulful, 4 more playful. The final piece on the program is Love Obsession, an exciting trio that shows off the group with vigor.

This is an impressive release by a talented and well-schooled composer who should be better known. I look forward to hearing more. Elaborate and fanciful notes by the composer.

GIMBEL

The world has never been so good—and never will become so good—that the majority will desire the truth.

Kierkegaard
Gustavo Dudamel is fallible. The conducting whiz-kid may know how to conduct the bejeesus out of Mahler, Bernstein, and other composers, but he falls flat when it comes to these Viennese confections. I have never heard any of the 21 pieces here played so dispiritingly, with not even the slightest bits of nuance, lightness, or style. I don’t know whether he was not interested in the music or the music and style is something he just doesn’t understand. There are some unusual Strauss pieces on the program and some composers (Waldteufel, Nicolai, and Ziehrer) not often heard in these annual concerts. Unfortunately, it sounds like the Vienna Philharmonic has never played this music. Tempos are sometimes erratic, there are some obvious entry mistakes, and the playing is rather sloppy. This is not what you expect from them. The audience’s lukewarm applause seems to reflect that they know something isn’t right. Maybe there was insufficient rehearsal time (which is what it sounds like), or the orchestra just didn’t warm up to Dudamel’s approach. There are the usual (and very irritating) “oohs and aahs” when the ‘Blue Danube’ begins, and as usual the conductor stops the performance and wishes everyone “happy new year”, before starting over. The sound is good (though not great) and the English only booklet describes the background of each piece. There are so many better recordings (including the “101 Strings”), I can’t recommend this one.

Meet the Critic:
Ralph Locke

Ralph Locke loves to write for the general music-loving public. During his college years, he contributed to several Boston publications, including the Phoenix. He then took a detour into academic musicology, earning his graduate degrees at University of Chicago and, for 40 years, teaching at the University of Rochester’s Eastman School of Music. He has written or edited four books, and six of his scholarly articles have won the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for excellence in writing about music. He continues to write scholarly articles and to edit the book series Eastman Studies in Music (University of Rochester Press). Locke now lives in the Washington DC area and is a Research Affiliate at the University of Maryland. He began sending reviews sporadically to ARG because he wanted the world to know about this or that unusual recording that he had heard. Since 2015 he has been contributing more regularly. His tastes are wide-ranging: artsong, French and Italian opera, 20th-Century American music, and much more.

Meet the Critic:
Hans Rosbaud Tribute

BERG: 3 Pieces for Orchestra; WEBERN: 6 Pieces; SIBELIUS: Valse Triste; Tapiola; BARTOK: Sonata for 2 Pianos & Percussion

A nice collection of early 20th-Century music by a conductor who specialized in that repertoire. The SW Radio (in Berg and Webern) and Berlin Philharmonic (in Sibelius) both sound more than capable, despite some raw brass playing from Baden-Baden. In the Bartok, Rosbaud, a fine pianist, teams up with the extraordinarily capable Maria Bergmann, the SW Radio house pianist, whose solid Haydn sonata recordings I have praised (N/D 2003) and two percussionists from the orchestra for a handsome rendition.

None of these performances is indispensable. Boulez, Karajan, and a host of others have recorded superb renditions of the Berg and Webern. The Sibelius pieces have many recordings. The Bartok has appeared in superb readings by Argerich with Kovacevich, Argerich with Friere, the Labeques, and Bartok and his wife Ditta Pasztor.

This is a good tribute to a brilliant man and serious musician. The sound is good, even in the (remastered?) 1954 Valse.

CHAKWIN

Collections

Collections are in the usual order: orchestral, chamber ensembles, brass ensembles, bassoon, cello & double bass, clarinet & saxophone, flute, guitar, harp, harpsichord, miscellaneous, oboe, organ, piano, trumpet & brass solos, viola, violin, wind ensembles, early, choral, vocal.
Adamas Quartet

KRASA: Quartet, op 2; TANSMAN: Triptyque; KRENEK: Quartet 5
Gramola 99109—80 minutes

If you were collecting CDs in the early 1990s you might have picked up recordings of each of these three quartets on different programs. I mention this because they are presented here as by ostracized composers. Yes, that was their fate sometimes, but they are now well known and appreciated. They make a unified impression when recorded together. Each work has elements of dissonance mixed with tonality, and each is full of life and emotion mixed with amusement.

Hans Krasa (1899-1944) was a Czech from Prague who died in a gas chamber in Auschwitz. His quartet, written in 1921, is full of musical questions that Alexandre Tansman (1897-1986) seems to deliberately ignore with his jazzy first movement, but seems to try to resolve at other moments. Tansman was born in Poland, spent some time here in the US and ended up in Paris. His quartet, Triptyque, was written in 1930 as was the Krenek (1900-91). Ernst Krenek was an Austrian who ended up living here. His quartet is twice as long as the others and is full of thoughtful meditation as well as life and amusement. It is an ear-catching work, as are the other two, more or less tonal but free, with a 20-minute set of variations in the middle and a Phantasie for a finale that moves back all the way to Schubert. I think of Krenek as more or less 12-tone but that is not the case with this quartet.

These performances are beautifully played and do justice to both ends of the wide spectrum represented by these three composers. The previous recordings were well liked by me and our other reviewers but may be hard to find by this time. This is a fine collection, played and recorded with an appealing sound.

VROON

Quartet Choreography—Soundtrack
Stravinsky, Lutoslawski, Ligeti, Finnissy
Kreutzer Quartet
Metier 92105—73 minutes

The recording presents the soundtrack to a DVD that aims to make good on Stravinsky’s remark, from the Norton Lectures, that hearing music is insufficient. It’s a fine performance of four 20th Century and contemporary quartets—some better known than others.

The three Stravinsky pieces, from 1914, are Russian in their stylistic orbit, neoclassic in their instrumentation: one senses, as with several other works from the period, Stravinsky moving toward the cleaner, sparer textures that he would exploit in the 20s.

Finnissy’s exceptional second quartet, written for the Kreutzers, exists only in parts rather than score and parts; the individual instruments, as the liner notes state, “often exist in free relation to each other”. As always, I find his music fascinating and believe it repays repeated hearings.

The remainder—Lutoslawski’s sole quartet and Ligeti’s second—measure fully with other performances of these works that I have heard.

HASKINS

Primrose Piano Quartet
Elgar, Payne, Holbrooke, Bowen
w Ronald Woodley, bcl; Daniel Roberts, v
Meridian 84640—74 minutes

The big new here is the inclusion of a Piano Quartet (2015) by Anthony Payne, the man who elaborated Elgar’s sketches and gave us his third symphony. Here’s an opportunity to see what one of his original compositions sounds like.

While Payne may have effectively assimilated and become one with Elgar, this quartet—commissioned by the Primrose—moves in an altogether different direction. In the composer’s preferred one-movement format, it thrusts forward in a post-tonal manner that reminds me of late Wallingford Riegger and the last quartets by Franck Bridge—perhaps even with a touch of Berg here and there. It is well structured, makes perfect sense once you acclimate yourself to the idiom, and is especially notable for its complete lack of artifice.

American Record Guide
The notes discuss the work with clear explanation as to what is happening in its 17 minutes.

I ended up liking the 2015 work, though it took me a while to get into it. In the unfolding, it eventually takes a more lyrical path not expected from the opening and shows it has plenty of heart to go with its structural expertise.

The largest piece here is the glorious A minor Piano Quintet by Elgar. This has many excellent recordings, and is one of the composer’s finest compositions. Its thematic material, imaginative handling, and structural integrity makes one lament that it is not heard more often on these shores. The Primrose, adding Daniel Roberts as second violin, does as well as any. My favorites are the Aeolian with pianist Leonard Cassini and the Allegri with pianist John Ogdon. Those recordings may be hard to find, but the Chilingirian, the Schubert Ensemble, as well as this newcomer will do very nicely.

York Bowen’s strange Phantasy Quintet for bass clarinet and strings may not be the most inspired of his works, but it is craftily conceived for an instrument that has had little life as soloist. Here it is front and center and viscerally showing off its attributes. If the blend is slightly better on the recording with Timothy Lines and the Archeus Quartet, it’s only a matter of degree.

Holbrooke’s short Ballade for bass clarinet and piano is a pleasant bit of lyricism and a fitting close to a most enjoyable compilation.

BECKER

Consolation
Ukrainian Composers
Natalya Pasichnyk, p; Olga Pasichnyk, s; Luthando Qave, bar; Emil Jonason cl; Christian Svarfvar, v
BIS 2222 [SACD] 76 minutes

This new recording is of music by 11 little known Ukrainian composers. The subtitle of the release is “Forgotten Treasures of the Ukrainian Soul”. The Ukrainian people have lived under many repressive regimes for the last 200 years, and this program demonstrates how Ukrainian composers used music to reflect the drama and emotion of the suffering people. Although many of the composers are known in the Ukraine, few are known outside of the country owing to long-term political restrictions. The music and composers cover over 100 years. Some of it is folk-based and highly dramatic and expressive. The composers were primarily educated in Vienna, Leipzig, and Prague and according to the excellent booklet, created the Kiev and Lviv schools of music. With the installation of the “iron curtain” the only outlet for these composers’ music was Warsaw or Moscow.

All of the pieces were written for the piano or piano with accompanying instruments or voice. Natalya Pasichnyk plays the often dramatic, melancholy, and sad music with great expressiveness and emotion. The accompanying players and singers are all excellent. The booklet includes English translations of the songs, and the SACD sound is impressive.

The earliest compositions are by Mykola Lysenko, “the father of Ukrainian music”. Lysenko is to the Ukraine what Sibelius is to Finland. His music is very melodic, written in the neo-romantic style. ‘Dumka-Shumka’ from his Second Piano Rhapsody on Ukrainian Folk Themes is a romantic and technically difficult piano piece reminiscent of Franz Liszt. Mykola is also represented by the gloomy Sum (Sorrow), for cello and piano, and Meni Odnakovo (It Makes No Difference to Me), a song about repression and indifference.

Known as the Ukraine’s Chopin, Victor Kosenko is represented by four pieces, including No. 8 from his Etudes Romantiques and ‘Consolation’ from Three Pieces, both for piano and rather gloomy, and two songs—’Vony Stojaly Movchky’ (They Stood in Silence) and ‘Sumnyi Ja’ (I am Sad)—both indicative of the repressive regimes. The Carpathian Rhapsody for clarinet and piano by Myroslav Skoryk is based on native Hutsul and klezmer rhythms and harmonic coloring.

The other Allegro for violin and piano by Yuly Mejitus and Melody for soprano, violin, and piano by Myroslav Skoryk have lovely melodies and are effectively performed. The Three Carpathian Dances by Mykola Kolessa is more abstract, as are some of the more modern pieces by the other composers. The other composers, Boris Liatoshinsky, Kyryro Stetsenko, Vasyl Barvinsky, and Valantyn Sverstrov supply additional gloomy, somewhat dissonant works. The final work, Toccata, by Arkady Filipenko, is a bright and lively piano solo.

But since the program is mostly downbeat and sad, you may not want to listen to it all in one sitting.

FISCH

You cannot reason a man out of a position he was not reasoned into in the first place.

Jonathan Swift

May/June 2017
Perspectives
Paterson, Greenberg, Currier, Ewazen
American Brass Quintet
Summit 692—53 minutes

American Brass Quintet is a truly venerable ensemble, having formed in 1960. It was one of the
ensembles (with New York) that established the quintet as the standard medium of brass chamber music. Unlike New York,
though, its foundation was bass trombone instead of tuba. Although the group’s membership has changed a number of times, it has

Some of the more popular brass quintets emphasize entertainment and showmanship. Not so ABQ; it has always concentrated primarily on bringing serious new works into the world.

Robert Paterson says that his 4-movement, 17-minute *Shine* has its roots in watching his sculptor father work with bronze. The work depicts four kinds of metal. I (‘Ringing Brass Bells’) is a strident fanfare, II (‘Quicksilver’) all fast lines and various mutes—often very much like a movement in Jan Bach’s *Laudes*. Much of ‘Veins of Gold’ is also muted, with melodic lines (the veins) passed around the group. ‘Bright Blue Steel’ is fast and exciting. Paterson’s harmonic language is sort of post-atonal: tonal but free, hardly bland.

Jay Greenberg (b 1991) was already an accomplished composer when he wrote his 14-minute Brass Quintet for ABQ at age 21. At its wildest, it reminds me strongly of brass music by Gunther Schuller; at other, more controlled but spectacular moments, Jan Bach. Individual parts are extremely difficult, with extended solos for each member. The harmonic language is quite abstract. This work will not easily become part of the standard university brass quintet repertory—but I expect it will get there eventually.

Sebastian Currier is quoted (in ABQ’s online notes) as saying his 16-minute *Cadence, Fugue, Fade* (2013) had 17th-Century Venetian brass music as its inspiration. And the writer of those notes goes on to say, “Currier’s sound is indeed reminiscent of golden years of brass music around 1600, but with many striking modernisms.” It’s quite a stretch; without having been told, I would never imagine this piece has roots in the canzona—and even then, I can’t find it. Even having been told how to detect the start of the Fugue, I had a hard time finding it, too. None of this means I don’t like the piece. I do.

No one who knows Eric Ewazen’s music will doubt for a moment that he is the composer of the 6-minute *Canticum Honoris Amicorum*. It bears all of his rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic trademarks. The instrumentation is unusual: a nonet with ABQ augmented by its retiring members Raymond Mase (trumpet) and David Wakefield (horn) plus another tenor trombone (Justin Waller) and bass trombone (JJ Cooper). Once again, the notes say the piece is rooted in brass music from the 1600s, but I just hear Ewazen. It’s great to hear this intricate work played by such fine players. Subtlety, liveliness, beautiful tone and intonation, and group precision do wonders for Ewazen’s music.

It is another outstanding ABQ release.

Sounds of Evolution
Schnyder, Cruixent, Dorpinghaus, Morais, Bourgeois, Geiselhart, Markusson, Luis Salaputia Brass—Audite 97723—67 minutes

First question: where did this terrific German brass ensemble get its name? They aren’t about to tell us, but we can look it up. Salaputia is the plural of salaputium, meaning “little man.” Okay then. At any rate, it is a high-energy group of young brass players who formed the group in 2007 after meeting in a youth orchestra.

To say that Swiss composer Daniel Schnyder’s music is poly stylistic is an understatement; it is always a whirling mass of classical and jazz, western and non western. And it is always enthralling and entertaining, music that makes you laugh from both amusement and amazement. He composed his 5-movement, 15-minute Brass Symphony (2015) for this ensemble. An Entrada is a jazz-flavored show-opener at first, then takes on minimalist perkiness. ‘Roxanne’ is something of a ballad with a melody passed from trombone to horn, then to trumpet. ‘Hymnus’ with sustained high parts over a syncopated rhythm, has a big-band ending. A Scherzo, subtitled ‘Emmanuel’s Dance’, is more Waltz than scherzo. And the Finale is a jigsaw puzzle with several layers of rhythm that somehow fit together.

After that wild piece, it is good to hear the quiet chorale that opens the 8-minute *Brasserie Mediterrania* by Catalan composer Oriol Cruixent. Gradually the contemplative material transforms into something dancelike,
then returns to the quiet of the opening. Peter Dorpinghaus’s Four Bagatelles (2015) begins with rock elements in ‘Die Zeit, Die Zeit’ (Time, Time). The wackily titled '#wo' (an inside joke and no, they won’t tell us what it means) is mysterious, and ‘51688’ (the composer’s zip code) flows like a little stream until it bursts forth majestically. The finale (‘EWAME’—initials of the composer’s siblings) is a rollicking, virtuosic thing with a sparkling ending.


Markus Geiselhart’s ‘Short Story in Brass’ is a colorful and gentle dance in triple meter until a snare drum introduces a virtuosic middle section; a gentle sort of barcarolle ensues, and then all of the previous material is briefly reprised. I enjoyed this piece.

Norwegian composer Peer Markusson spent time in Latin America. ‘Sad Doe Eyes’ alternates Latin and big-band flavors. The album ends with Ingo Luis’s Fantasy on I Got Rhythm.

Salaputia Brass is a fine ensemble, but this program is more big-band than anything else. KILPATRICK

Rostropovich Encores
Alban Gerhardt, vc; Markus Becker, p
Hyperion 68136—70 minutes

Alban Gerhardt played for Rostropovich when he was 11 years old and understandably was inspired by him and his playing. Here he has researched Slava’s many choices of arrangements and compositions, resulting in a highly attractive program of light but difficult music, some of it arranged by Rostropovich and a ‘Humoresque’ and a ‘Moderato’ actually composed by him.

Gerhardt, as we know from his many recordings, is a fine cellist to take on this demanding task. The only thing that occasionally irks my ears is his somewhat unvaried vibrato—a characteristic that also marks his patron’s playing sometimes. But don’t let that stop you; Gerhardt is a highly sensitive musician.

The program contains popular pieces from Russia and Europe, including Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, Sinding, Debussy, Ravel, Chopin, and Popper. You’ll recognize most of them. It is not a boring collection by any means, and the playing is highly impressive. Perhaps the most amazing is the virtuosity of Rostropovich’s ‘Humoresque’ and David Popper’s ‘Elfentanz’, both incredibly fast and accurately played in the top range of the cello. Altogether, this is an enjoyable tribute from one fine cellist to another. D MOORE

Double Bass & Piano

GLIERE: Pieces, opp 9-32
KOUSSEVITZKY: Valse Miniature; Chanson Triste
BRUCH: Kol Nidrei
BRAHMS: Cello Sonata 1
Nabil Shehata, db; Karim Shehata, p
Genuin 17448—64 minutes

It is a shame that there is so little actual music written for double bass. Only 25 minutes of this beautifully-played disc was actually written for that instrument by Reinhold Gliere and his conductor and bassist friend, Serge Koussevitzky. Just as we get happy with their attractive pieces, we have to listen to transcriptions of Bruch and Brahms cello pieces.

Actually, these two cello pieces sound quite convincing on the bass, when played as well as they are here. The Shehata team works together well, and Nabil is a highly musical bassist, playing in the high register with accuracy and enthusiasm and pulling us down into the depths on occasion for our own good.

There are other fine recordings of the Gliere and Koussevitzky pieces, though none are actually better than these. Koussevitzky wrote a bit more for the bass. Nabil starts to sound a bit technically pushed towards the end of the Brahms, but that is quite a lot of high-register playing, most of which he handles with aplomb. This is a fine recording of all this varied material. D MOORE

Word Police: Feedback

This is a technical word that was used about sound (as in PA systems) and scientific experiments. Now it is used by many writers in place of better words such as “response” or “evaluation”. In this meaning it is new and only entered dictionaries recently. But it has become a trendy cliche, so of course it is getting vaguer and vaguer and replacing perfectly good words. Often “response” is the correct word, though some dictionaries accept “feedback” as “evaluative response” (never just a response).

We avoid it, as we avoid all cliches. May/June 2017
Spanish Cello
CASSADO: Sonata Nello Stile Antico Spagnuola; Danse du Diable Vert; Requiebros; GRANADOS: Intermezzo from Goyescas; MONTSALVATGE: 5 Cantones Negras; TURINA: El Jueves Santo a Medianoche; FALLA: Spanish Folk Suite; CASALS: Cant dels Ocells
Andrew Smith; Alfredo Oyaguez Montero, p
Delos 3492—65 minutes

Here is another release that appears to be a collection of encores. Of course, part of that impression is because of the emphasis on Spanish folk influences and transcriptions of songs. In fact, the only piece that doesn’t sound quite like that is Gaspar Cassado’s sonata, based on material more classical than folk.

What is an American cellist doing in this kind of music? He has been influenced by certain festivals he has performed in, but his primary move in the Spanish direction is probably his friend and colleague, Alfredo Montero, a native of Spain who has worked with him since they met in 1999. They play together with verve and sensitivity.

All of this music is effectively arranged, and I can recommend this program to you without reserve.

D MOORE

In Memory of Oleg Vedernikov
SHOSTAKOVICH: Cello Sonata; SCHNITTE: Sonata 1; DESYATNIKOV: Variations; SCHCHERDIN: Quadrille; FAURE: Elegie
Oleg Vedernikov, vc; Alexey Goribol, p
Melodiya 2452—72 minutes

This recording was made back in 1993. It was the first one made by this highly musical pair of players and was never released. It has some curious aspects. The first movement of the Shostakovich sonata is both faster and slower than usual, resulting in a fresh, more intense reading. The balance between instruments gives us slightly more clarity in the piano line than I’m used to—also not a bad thing. I could have used more pizzicato audibility sometimes, but this is a fascinating and dramatic approach to this great sonata, played with a little more rubato than usual.

The following sonata by Alfred Schnittekse is handled with similar attention to dramatic detail. There are numerous recordings of both of these works, but these are well worth hearing for their intensity.

Leonid Desyatnikov is a new name to me. His Variations on Obtaining of a Dwelling for cello and piano of 1990 is an 8-1/2 minute piece of mood painting of considerable beauty that seems to cut off too soon. It is recorded with more echo than the earlier pieces. On the other extreme, Rodion Shchedrin’s Quadrille from his opera Not Love Alone is recorded very close up. It is a good piece that we have heard before. The program ends with Gabriel Fauré’s famous Elegy, Op.24 played with intensity.

Once one has adjusted to the somewhat unusual balance of this recording, it is well worth hearing. Goribol is responsible for finding it and having it released. Vedernikov died in 2015. These musicians worked together with unusual intensity.

D MOORE

Clarinet in English
Horovitz, Reade, Sargon, Templeton, Wilder Gianluca Campagnolo, cl; Francesco Scrofani Cancellieri, p; Flavia La Perna, perc
Vermeer 40011—64 minutes

This Italian clarinet-and-piano duo explores some of the more recent and offbeat contributions to the clarinet repertoire by British and American composers.

The program includes the jazzy Pocket Size Sonatas (1959) of Welsh composer Alec Templeton (1909-63); the third-stream sonata (1963) of American composer Alec Wilder (1907-80); the sonatina (1981) of British composer Joseph Horovitz (b. 1926), always a recital favorite; the lovely Suite from the BBC TV series The Victorian Kitchen Garden (1987) by Paul Reade (1943-97), and the Deep Ellum Nights (1991) by American composer Simon Sargon (b. 1938), who since 1983 has served on the composition faculty of Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Italian percussionist Flavia La Perna appears on the drum set in the first Templeton sonata.

Campagnolo has the traits of an amateur instrumentalist, given more to straightforward readings than profound statements and largely content with a basic technical grasp of the music over the rigorous refinement that distinguishes good and great players. He has a knack for the jazz idiom, and he knows when to savor a good lyrical line or smoky passage; but his poor sonic control and slapdash intonation often undermine his efforts. Cancellieri is steady and reliable at the keyboard, and though he usually allows Campagnolo to have the spotlight, he responds well to the composer’s intensity, most notably in II of the Sargon. La Perna makes the most of her brief appearance, playing with taste and panache.

HANUDEL
University of Mississippi faculty members present a recital for saxophone and piano that concentrates on American composers past and present. Three of the works are acknowledged standards—the Paul Creston sonata (1939), the Lawson Lunde sonata (1959), and the John Anthony Lennon Distances Within Me (1979).

The other two are responses by young up-and-coming composers to group commissions. Washington based composer John Leszczynski (b. 1987) offers Almost Out of the Sky (2011) after a poem of the same name by the Nobel Prize winning Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (1904-73); and University of South Florida professor Baljinder Singh Sekhon contributes the title work, Sonata of Puzzles (2015), a clever manipulation of pitch and rhythm through hocket and developing variation.

Estes and Rodgers play with spirit, feeling, tight rhythm, nice phrasing, and superb fingers and articulation. They also make good cases for the Leszczynski and the Sekhon. The sonics, though, are disappointing: the saxophone is thin and cloudy, sometimes spreading at loud volumes and in the high register; the piano is treble-heavy and sometimes too laid back in the texture; and the space is somewhat dry. Serious listeners will want more clarity and polish.

HANUDEL

Mexican Connection
HD Duo
Cala 77021—72:22

The HD Duo (David Howie and Michael Duke) is based at the Sydney Conservatory in Australia. They have a previous disc on Cala: “Australian Portrait”, works by contemporary Australian composers; and a 2013 disc for Saxophone Classics, “Incandescence”, devoted to music by women. The present disc was the result of a grant that allowed the duo to commission works for a tour through Mexico and Australia. There are seven large works, four of them by women.

Probably the best known among the group is Gabriela Ortiz, based at UNAM in Mexico City, whose Mambo Ninon leads off. Ninon refers to the dancer-singer Ninon Sevilla, a film star in Mexico in the 40s and 50s. The work begins in a romantic haze and eventually drives to a polyrhythmic finale.

Sendero Naciente (Rising Path), in three movements, by Lilia Vazquez Kunze, is more impressionist and atmospheric, with harmonies and effects (trills in both saxophone and piano) that evoke early 20th Century Paris. Catherine Likhuta is originally from Ukraine, with a background in jazz piano; she is completing a doctorate in Queensbourn. This Earthly Round is a musical rendering of the effects of climate change, with a minimalist use of repetition and limited vocabulary of pitches and harmonies.

All at Sevens and Eights (“at sixes and sevens” means to be in confusion, disarray) by Paul Sarcich includes the tenor saxophone, the most common instrument in jazz, rarely heard in classical music as a soloist. Much of the work is slow and dreamlike, with a more athletic conclusion. Spectrax (by Enrico Chapela) is entirely structured around saxophone multiphonics. Finally, Danzon 6 is the most conservative in idiom, based on the popular dance-song from Cuba.

This collection offers an excellent portrait, both of a fine ensemble, and of contemporary compositions in 2017.

T MOORE

American Voices
Bunch, Constantino, Kimber, Larsen, Wilson
Waldland Ensemble
MSR 1541—71 minutes

In 2013, University of Denver clarinet professor Jeremy Reynolds, University of Tennessee viola professor Hillary Herndon, and University of the South piano professor Wei-Chun Bernadette Lo formed the Waldland Ensemble, dedicated to expanding the repertoire of the clarinet-violin-piano medium and promoting conservation efforts. Here, five active American composers contribute their works, all written specifically for the group or commissioned by a consortium that included members of the group.

Portland (OR) native Kenji Bunch (b. 1973) offers Four Flashbacks, an evocative duet for clarinet and viola that recalls the two decades he spent in New York; Anthony Constantino (b. 1995), a recent graduate of the Manhattan
School of Music, presents his boldly dissonant *Ritual Songs*; Ithaca College professor Dana Wilson (b. 1946) turns to Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes for inspiration in *A Thousand Whirling Dreams*, premiered at ClarinetFest 2014 at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge; the former Kronos Quartet violist (b. 1945) contributes *Vanishing Woods*, a haunting duet for clarinet and viola that mourns the rapid disappearance of the Earth's forests through human activity.

Libby Larsen (b. 1950) closes the program with *Ferlinghetti*, a compilation of six movements—or "riffs" as Larsen calls them—that cast into music colorful fragments from the work of San Francisco beat poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti (b. 1919).

The Waldland Ensemble gives intense and thoroughly committed performances, handling well the gamut of compositional ideas, from the immediate to the abstract and from the quiet to the thrilling. Lyrical lines are heartfelt; hushed passages whisper and weep; turbulent episodes are full of vigor and technical bravura; and furious outbursts are edgy and strident. Clarinetists and violists will have fresh ideas for recitals, and chamber music fans will find much to like.

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**HANUDEL**

*Facets*

Bartok, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Damase, Dorff, Granados, Pujol, Rodrigo, Schocker  
Cline-Cuestas Duo  
Cline 0—68 minutes  
(800-529-1696; 800-BUYMYCD)

With an assortment of original works and arrangements, the Cline-Cuestas Duo presents a mixture of familiar and new pieces for flute and guitar. Gary Schocker’s two-movement *Silkworms* is presented for the first time on records. Flutist Jenny Cline plays with a sound that is pure when she wants it, enhanced with a vibrato that can be vocal and velvety. Guitarist Carlos Cuestas is crisp, clear, and expressive enough to enchant any listener sometimes. The two are recorded close enough to convey the energy they put into the performances. This release is worth having especially for the uncommon selections by Daniel Dorff and Jean Damase.

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**GORMAN**

*Poems and Dreams*

Rebecca Jeffreys, fl; Alexander Timofeev, p  
Jeffreys 0—50 minutes (800-529-1696)

*Byzantine Dances* (2016) by Russell Nadel begins with the pianist inside and out of the piano, and later has him drumming on the lid. It’s an assortment of folk-like and modal clichés without the pejorative meaning. If that sounds impossible, you have to hear the accessible result.

*Intermezzo* is ordinarily the title of a work that goes between, but here it’s a suite of three short pieces by Francis Kayali that I hate to insult and misrepresent by calling them tonal and simple. They’re also thoughtful and worth hearing again.

The *Romantic Sonata* by Jeffrey Hoover

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subtitled 'Poems of Light' has a great and interesting piano part and unlike many contemporary pieces isn’t terribly difficult. The three-movement work ends simply and quietly.

Adrienne Albert’s dance-like and touching Acadian Dreams (2016) ends with a musical visit to New Orleans. Kevin Walker’s Suite in D (1997) is a set of five miniatures that opens with a ballad and closes with a romp that has both neo-baroque and impressionist touches. If it’s eclectic, it’s as enjoyable as the rest.

These selections are salon music in the sense that they’re accessible and the kind of music that could be played at home even if you were not paid to do it. I hope high schoolers are introduced to these very enjoyable pieces, which many of them could play.

Rebecca Jeffreys has a sound that is full-bodied and husky. It can whisper or sing like a trumpet. She plays with marvelous phrasing and intelligence. Alexander Timofeev accompanies her superbly with a variety of touch and texture that’s always an apt portrayal of the mood. My gratitude to these artists for introducing me to a program of new works that I enjoyed from beginning to end.

**Piccolo Concertos**

Cavicchi, Galante, Liebermann, Mozart
Nicola Mazzanti, Alessandro Visintini; Haydn Orchestra, Bolzano/ Marco Angius

Brilliant 95436—65 minutes

Only one of these concertos uses one piccolo: the Liebermann. Both the sound of the soloist and the orchestra are lean and transparent. The approach suits the music, and it differs enough from Galway’s recording to make it distinct. Big moments are not gushy. The long slow movement will have you transfixed. Occasional places can seem clipped, but the ends of phrases are treated as the ends of something rather than hung on to. Notes that need to be sustained actually are.

The Nightingales of the Emperor by Carlo Galante (b 1959) refers to the folk tale famously recounted by Hans Christian Andersen. The writing is pictorial and evocative without telling any specific story. Scored for two piccolos, string orchestra, and percussion, the concerto is in two long sections on one track. Although it might be a stretch to call this work tonal, it is quite listenable and creative.

Alessandro Cavicchi’s piece As Night Progresses saunters along in a pop-influenced style that seems a little much for the piccolo, let alone two of them, but the intent is genuine and just may win you over. Cavicchi is clearly a composer and orchestrator of merit. His 12-minute work is in essence a concertino, fast-slow-fast.

The Mozart selection is his Oboe Quartet played on piccolo—an unlikely choice, but charming to hear when played this well. The chipper character of the instrument matches the style of the piece, and its range places it above the strings, lending more transparency and openness than usual.

The booklet has brief descriptions of the pieces, and one of the players tells about the new kind of piccolo used here.

**Recuerdos**

TARREGA: Recuerdos; MOLLER: When Buds Are Breaking; PIAZZOLLA: Tango Suite; BROOKSHIRE: Prism; FALLA: Miller’s Dance; NORDGREN: Portrait of Country Fiddlers

Athens Guitar Duo

Claudio 6037—60 minutes

The Athens Duo—Dusty Woodruff and Matthew Anderson—are from Athens, Georgia, not Greece (or Ohio). And the Georgia above Florida, not next to Russia (Geography is hard). None of this is especially relevant, though the theme of this release is geographical, with composers representing Spain, Sweden, Argentina, the US, and Finland.

This is also the second release this issue titled Recuerdos (see below). This recording of Tarrega’s most famous piece is the version for two guitars with the second part added by Julio Sagreras. I’ve never enjoyed it that way—it’s like too much makeup on a beautiful woman—though it’s played well.

My favorite piece here is Johannes Moller’s ‘When Buds are Breaking’—also the longest work here by a factor of two. I hosted Mr Moller and his partner, Laura Fratticelli, at my university for a concert and master class last Fall, and was deeply impressed by his composition in addition to his playing. The notes say this work was inspired by the glassworks of Dale Chihuly—a permanent exhibit of his works in Florida is in a tropical garden, and they look very much like plants growing in an imaginary universe. Moller is also influenced by nature—the source for this title—and has made several visits to India. I can hear that in this work as well. It builds to a tremendous climax, though I could wish for more clarity in the playing.

Cody Daniel Brookshire’s Prism was...
inspired by the eponymous NSA spying program revealed by Edward Snowden and takes its pitch sets from assigning pitches to the letters of the words of the Fourth Amendment in the Bill of Rights. The work has a touch of minimalism and lacks the waywardness I’ve found in pieces that used similar extramusical effects to establish musical content. Still, I found it hard to warm to.

The Piazzolla is a bit cool—compare it to Duo Pace Poli Cappelli (not reviewed) to see what real fire can be heard in this music. Pehr Nordgren’s Portrait of Country Fiddlers was written for string orchestra, and two of the four movements were arranged by Woodruff. It’s charming music, but not especially memorable.

It’s an interesting program, but the performances aren’t especially compelling—compare this to Duo Melis, reviewed below, to see what a world-class guitar duo can sound like.

KEATON

Mappa Mundi

VIVALDI: Concerto in G minor; COTE-GIGUERE: Fille de Cuivre; ROUX: Concierto Tradicionuevo; BRUDERL: Octopus; DONKIN: Mappa Mundi

Canadian Guitar Quartet; Rachel Mercer, vc
ATMA 2750—60 minutes

The Canadian Guitar Quartet—Julien Bisaillon, Renaud Cote-Giguere, Bruno Rousssel, and Louis Trepanier—have been performing since 1999. As you can tell from their names, they are French Canadian; and this was recorded in a church in Quebec. Their career at this point is mostly in Canada and the US. They present a fascinating program, beautifully played.

The Vivaldi concerto was originally for two cellos, and their arrangement is interesting and effective—the concertino parts are given to guitarists 1 and 2 in I, to 2 and 3 in II, and split among the four for the finale. Fille de Cuivre (Copper Girl, named for a sculpture by Quebec native Jean-Louis Emond) was written by quartet member Cote-Giguere. It’s a snappy, neo-classical work in three movements, with the last movement particularly beautiful—beginning slow but ending with a whirl-wind of energy.

The real discovery here is Patrick Roux’s Concierto Tradicionuevo. Roux was the teacher of most of the members, and he has a history of exciting, demanding works for guitar ensemble. This work is in two movements, ‘Café Gardel,’ and ‘En los Calles de Buenos Aires.’ If you like tango but find Piazzolla too sappy (as I do), you will love this work. It has a wide range of expression, from brooding melancholy to wild excitement—a deeply sensual piece. The demands are intense, but the CGQ makes it all seem easy.

Hans Bruderl’s Octopus was originally for a double guitar quartet. The title is an obvious play on words: Octopus, work for eight. I’ve never heard that version, but the arrangement for just four guitars is quite effective. Like the Roux, it makes intense technical demands, but the Canadians are well up to the challenges. The first three-quarters of the one-movement work are quite energetic, but the work closes with an almost-chorale-like passage leading to an exciting coda.

The title of the release is from a quirky piece by Christine Donkin, which is scored for guitar quartet and cello, the latter played ably by Rachel Mercer. The four movements are named for imaginary places on a 14th Century map of the world (Mappa Mundi), which includes locations for the troglodytes (cave dwellers), the Tower of Babel, Hyperborea, and Hippopodes—the latter a land where people with horse’s hooves dwell. It’s delightful music, highly imaginative—I can’t name a piece quite like this.

The CGQ may not be in the lofty position inhabited by the LAGQ, the Aquarelle, or the Brazilian Quartet, but they’re a really fine ensemble. They champion worthy new works, and that alone is reason to hear this recording.

KEATON

Royal

DOWLAND: 3 Fantasies; 3 Dances; BRITTEN: Nocturnal; HENZE: Royal Winter Music 2
Stefan Koim, g
Musicaphon 56975—59 minutes

Please, Musicaphon, don’t put out a recording as wonderful as this without a word about the performer other than his name—even if the notes are otherwise some of the best I’ve ever encountered.

And so is the playing! Koim is German and finished his Master’s degree at the Salzburg Mozarteum under Eliot Fisk in 2012. He previously studied with Hubert Kappell, another magnificent German guitarist who never made much of a mark in the US. His website mentions that he also plays electric guitar, banjo, charango, Baroque guitar, and arch lute.

I have no idea how his playing is on electric guitar, but on classical he is among the finest of his generation. He has technical virtu-
osity, inventiveness, a gorgeous tone, deeply expressive phrasing, and a broad dynamic range without ever overplaying (unless it’s required—see the last movement of the Henze, ‘Mad Lady MacBeth’). He has that rare ability to make you feel that you’re hearing the music for the first time, and you really love it.

This is also some of the most brilliant programming I’ve encountered. The unifying thread is the royalty of Elizabethan England—as he writes, “a noble sound in a courtly context”. First he plays three of Dowland’s Fancies—his most complex works, including one based on a descending chromatic line (not the ‘Forlorne Hope Fancy’), where the harmonies are as wildly inventive as Gesualdo, but more coherent. This, with the dances that follow, is the finest Dowland I’ve ever heard on guitar from someone not named Julian Bream (whose Dowland was all played on lute). It sparkles, it broods, it dances, it laments—it explores all the depth of the Elizabethan master’s works.

The next piece is Benjamin Britten’s Nocturnal, perhaps the greatest work of the 20th Century for guitar. It is variations, and the theme, Dowland’s ‘Come Heavy Sleep, Come Sweet Death,’ is quoted in full at the end, not the beginning. There have been many great performances of this masterwork, but none left me with the excitement, and the depth, of this one.

Next, more Dowland—three dances, each dedicated to an aristocrat, as was his custom. We have ‘Sir John Langdon’s Pavan,’ ‘Sir John Smith’s Almain,’ and what we always identified as ‘The King of Denmark’s Galliard,’ but whose full title is ‘The Most High and Mighty Christianus the Fourth, King of Denmark, his Galliard.’ I have long known that Christian IV hired Dowland when he could find no favor in his home, but only recently learned that he is perhaps the most important figure in Danish history—imagine George Washington if he were also hard drinking, hard loving, with a ribald sense of humor. As my guide said, if you are asked anything about Danish history, just answer Christian IV, and you’ll most likely be correct.

The recital closes with Hans Werner Henze’s Royal Winter Music: Second Sonata on Shakespeare’s Characters. Here the inspiration is Dowland’s contemporary, Shakespeare. The music, as in the first sonata, is a mix of harsh dissonance and neoclassical elegance. The first two movements are quite beautiful, stately and noble, with elements of humor. Then we get the last—‘Mad Lady MacBeth.’ The inspiration is from the end of the play, when she has been driven quite insane with both guilt and foiled plans. She wanders the castle, crazed but regal, inspiring fear, but no pity.

Magnificent playing, brilliant programming, excellent notes—this is a treasure. Like Meng Su, Stefan Koim stands out as the best of the best. I look forward to hearing more from this gifted artist.

KEATON

Duo Melis
FALLA: Miller’s Dance; Neighbors’s Dance; Danza 2; CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO: Sonatina Canonica; KAPUSTIN: Toccatina; GRANADOS: Poetic Waltzes; GINASTERA: Danzas Argentinas

Susana Prieto, Alexis Muzurakis, g
QBK 6361—48 minutes (800-buymycd)

Duo Melis has been performing since 1999, but this is the first time I’ve encountered them—this disc was made in 2013, and there is one other from 2005. They are an impressive ensemble, with sparkling virtuosity, inventive and expressive interpretations, perfect ensemble, and a lovely range of timbre and dynamics. This is a performance where every note counts—the players are fully engaged, and they sound wonderfully spontaneous.

The Falla transcriptions are not the usual ones that guitarists play, but they will be familiar if you know the orchestral versions of 3-Cornered Hat and La Vida Breve. The Castelnuovo-Tedesco is unusually fast. It’s exciting at this tempo, but they have chosen some odd rubatos for passages in the first and last movements that ruined the impression. I’ve played this for years, and my own way is pretty much burned into my ear. If you don’t know the piece well, you’ll find it terrifyingly bracing.

The one new piece to me is Nikolai Kapustin’s ‘Toccatina’. The composer is Ukrainian, but the work is purely Latin in its inspiration. Granados’s Poetic Waltzes are usually played on one guitar, but the duo arrangement allows more of the original piano score to be incorporated. They take a restrained dynamic to the introduction that is startlingly beautiful, and their whole interpretation emphasizes subtlety rather than bombast. The music is better for that. The closing Ginastera works well for two guitars—the Argentine dances imitate guitar music, after all.

An exciting discovery—Duo Melis is out-
standing, and I hope to hear more from them soon.

**Easy Studies**

GARRIDO: 8 Short Studies; KOSHKIN: 24 Easy Studies; SMITH-BRINDLE: 8 Simple Preludes; TANSMAN: 12 Easy Pieces

Cristiano Porqueddu, g—Brilliant 95402 [2CD] 76 minutes

Cristiano Porqueddu is one of the most impressive virtuosos of his generation. He brought us the complete set of 60 Transcendental Studies by his teacher, Angelo Gilardino (N/D 2009) and massive sets of 20th Century preludes (M/J 2013) and sonatas (J/F 2015). So what will this powerhouse do with four sets of easy studies?

Mr Porqueddu has the taste of a fine artist, along with his transcendental technique. And three of these are quite memorable. The exception, Smith-Brindle, is just dull music that even Porqueddu’s playing can’t salvage.

Eduardo Garrido was born and studied in Spain, but has spent most of his life in Mexico City. The full title of his set translates as Alebrijes of Mexico City—8 short studies for guitar. An alebrije is a large, brilliantly colored papier mache sculpture, usually of some fantastic creature from Mexican folklore. The works are indeed simple, but colorful and tuneful. Even more tuneful—and the most interesting set here—is Nikita Koskin’s Da Capo: 24 Easy Studies for Guitar. The language is clearly Koskin, and the works are simple, brief and direct—yet it’s amazing how much music he can pack into these miniatures.

The Tansman is from the third of 4 sets of 12 pieces he wrote for young guitarists (he did similar sets of works for piano). They are easy, but they are also filled with Tansman’s charm—the combination of Polish music and impressionism that isn’t quite like anyone else. They are a treasure to discover. And, given this information, it would seem that Cristiano Poli Cappelli’s recent (S/O 2016) set of all of Tansman’s works was not complete—none of these works are on that otherwise excellent set.

So, guitar teachers who are a bit jaded with Carcassi, Aguado, and Sor, you can spice up your lives—and your students—with these discoveries. Further good news—this is just the first volume. Any guitar lover who enjoys the charm of simple, well crafted, and beautifully performed music will enjoy this release as well.

**Recuerdos**

VILLA LOBOS: Etude 11; SOR: Mozart Variations; CHOPIN: 2 Waltzes; BARRIOS: La Catedral; DYENS: Saudade 3; TARREGA: Capricho Arabe; Recuerdos; YOCHO: Sakura Variations; BROUWER: Un Dia de Noviembre; TURINA: Sonata

Alison Smith, g—AS 1—76 minutes

**Incandescent**

ALBENIZ: Asturias; COTTAM: Caprice for Masa; GIULIANI: Handel Variations; BACH: Andante, Allegro; TARREGA: Traviata Fantasy; RYAN: Lough Caragh; LOVELADY: 4 Incantations; MERTZ: Hungarian Fantasy

Alison Smith, g—AS 2—65 minutes

Ms Smith is an English guitarist, a graduate of Trinity College, where she studied with Gil Biberian and Nicola Hall. Her career seems to be primarily in the UK. These two discs were released separately—Recuerdos first, with some critical blurbs included on the notes for Incandescent.

I would describe her performance as very good, but not great. She is an expressive player with a nice range of timbre and dynamics. Her phrasing is always natural and musical, never exaggerated. There are several spots where she does something unexpected and beautiful, like a drop to pianissimo at the da capo of ‘Recuerdos.’ She plays a couple of works that were new to me—Garry Ryan’s ‘Lough Caragh’ is really lovely, and Smith plays with tenderness and sensitivity.

But most of the pieces here are part of the Segovia repertory, and there is a great deal of competition. Smith’s playing is hardly sloppy, but she too often doesn’t meet the technical demands of the works. Galloping triplets plague the Sor, the Turina, and the Albeniz. There are too many notes that get clipped off early or swallowed completely.

There are better performances of nearly everything here except the new pieces, but you will find these enjoyable, just not overwhelming.

**Omaggio**

VILLA LOBOS: Preludes 1-3; FALLA: Homenance; TURINA: Homenaje a Tarrega; TARRÉGA: Prelude; ADOLPHE; MARIETA; CAPIRCHIO ARABE; MOMPÔU: Suite Compostelana; WALLACE: Dreams on a Lullaby

Frank Wallace, g—Gyre 10212—56 minutes

I’ve reviewed Mr Wallace twice before (J/A 2014 & M/A 2016), both times warmly. The more recent recording used four guitars from his collection, and I remarked that his sound...
was quite consistent across the instruments. Here he uses a 1931 Hauser made for Segovia—and again he sounds nothing like Segovia; he sounds like Frank Wallace.

That is to be expected. I recall when I was in high school working for my father’s television repair shop, and a customer remarked to me “Why, you’re your father’s son!” to which I could only reply “Why, yes, ma’am!” Any artist with his own sound will maintain that on different instruments, and Wallace does have a distinct sound. It’s strong, bright, almost metallic, with a wide range of shading. In particular, he has a very personal approach to rubato. Sometimes he uses far too much for my taste—he simply re-writes the rhythm to Tarraga’s ‘Preludio 5’ (sometimes called ‘Torre Diavolo’, the Devil’s Tower), and he stops and starts Turina’s ‘Garrotín’ from the Homenaje a Tarrega so often it ceases to be a garrotin. But even when I disagree, I notice that his rubato is never routine and indulgent, the sort of thing beginning guitarists mistake for “playing musically”. More often, his rubato surprises and delights me, particularly in the three Villa-Lobos preludes.

The best thing here is Mompou’s Suite Compostelana. I love this music, and it’s finally getting recognized. This is the fourth recording I’ve reviewed of it in less than a year—Stephan Mattingly (M/A 2017), Franz Halasz (S/O 2016), and Georg Gulyas (J/A 2016). Wallace, like Halasz, takes a virtuosic approach, and I prefer Halasz, if only by a bit. Gulyas I describe as a Goldilocks performance—everything just right, not too fast, slow, indulgent, or straightforward. I recommend this as a fresh look at some well-worn material.

KEATON

Fitzwilliam Virginal Book 5
Pieter-Jan Belder, hpsi
Brilliant 95308 [2CD] 124 minutes

In July/August 2016 I greeted volume 4 enthusiastically, praising the project, the programming (sequencing the pieces for variety), and his playing—both overall and in details.

Volume 5 has 68 pieces by Munday, Tomkins, Tallis, Morley, Richardson, Hooper, and Anonymous. They are mostly simple and short. The only long pieces are the two ‘Felix Namque’ settings by Tallis—variations over a cantus firmus. Brilliant’s boxed set of the complete Tallis works has these pieces played on organ, virginal, and lute. Belder makes them sound more perky on harpsichord.

All five of John Munday’s pieces from the book are here. One of his fantasias is programmatic, illustrating 13 changes in the weather—rumbly bass scales for thunder, a snappy rhythmic figure for lightning, and so on. All of Ferdinando Richardson’s music is here as well. In the many anonymous songs and dances under 90 seconds, I wished that Belder would repeat and elaborate them. The tunes are delightful.

As before, he uses three harpsichords by Bom, Boogard, and Crijnen. The booklet notes by Belder and Greg Holt are excellent. B LEHMAN

Time Stands Still
Byrd, Dowland, Johnson, Farinay, Purcell, Tomkins
Friederike Chylek, hpsi
Oehms 1864—56 minutes

In the 16th Century English composers developed a distinct style of keyboard composition that continued into the Jacobean period and powerfully influenced composers like Sweelinck in the Netherlands, and through him the North German school of the 17th Century. The present recording gives us a selection of works from that style period with a concentration on ground bass pieces and arrangements of songs and dances. Absent from the selection are the larger-scale sets of variations and keyboard fantasias that were prominent at the time.

At the center of the program are two dance suites and a variety of shorter keyboard works by Henry Purcell. His later (17th Century) baroque idiom, exhibiting French and Italian influences, is quite different from the earlier works on the program, but there are links in Purcell’s cultivation of keyboard dances and pieces based on popular tunes, including his own arrangement of the ground bass aria ‘Here the Deities Approve’ from his 1683 St Cecilia’s Day ode, Welcome to All the Pleasures.

The earliest piece here, an anonymous galiard, comes from the Mulliner Book, a collection compiled in Oxford by organist Thomas Mulliner from 1545 to 1570. Six of the remaining eight pre-Purcell pieces come from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, the most important single source for English keyboard music of this period, though in all but one case the track list cites only the volumes of Musica Britannica containing the pieces in question.

The performances by harpsichordist Friederike Chylek are delightfully elegant and sensitive. Her mastery of tempo flexibility and agogic nuance allows the music to breathe

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without compromising steadiness of meter. The more virtuosic pieces often present lengthy stretches of 16th-note figuration that can easily sound mechanical. That never happens here. Indeed, Chylek makes the formidable writing in ground bass pieces by Byrd and Tomkins sound almost effortless. She concludes the program with her own arrangement of the song by Dowland that gives the recording its title.

The harpsichord is a copy by Matthias Griewisch of a 1624 instrument by Ioannes Ruckers. The sound of the instrument is every bit as refined and elegant as Chylek’s playing. I believe that instruments of the Flemish school are particularly well suited to this repertory. Ruckers. The sound of the instrument is excellent. The recorded sound is clear and has excellent presence, but is not overbearing. Listeners who admire this repertory will not go wrong with this recording.

GATENS

Orpheus Descending
Mark Edwards, hpsi
Early 7778—67 minutes

It is rare for a mixed-recital harpsichord album to supply an overwhelming emotional experience. This is one that does. Canadian harpsichordist Mark Edwards has pulled together one composition from each of eight composers, building a gripping program of extraordinary intensity. His theme is the Orpheus legend, and the booklet explains all of this in several essays. Some of the connections to Orpheus are tenuous—I’m not convinced, but I don’t care. It’s a convenient frame, and the results are much better than a grab bag of hits in roughly chronological sequence. As both performer and producer, Edwards makes every phrase fit into the 67-minute sweep.

The composers are Sweelinck, Reincken, Kerll, Froberger, Fischer, Pachelbel, Kuhnau, and Bach.

Froberger’s introspective meditation on his own future death is near the middle of the program, flanked on both sides by spectacular passacaglias by Kerll and Fischer. Pachelbel’s ‘Aria Sebaldina’ and eight variations establishes a mood of despair.

Studying Kuhnau’s and Reincken’s keyboard music elsewhere, I had never got the sense that they were much more than competent provincial craftsmen. These performances make them sound like important composers, largely through carefully-graded changes of tempo to provoke emotional responses. He treats a middle section of the Reincken toccata as a long accelerando. The Kuhnau piece is the second Biblical Sonata, the one about David curing King Saul with music. The opening gesture is startling.

Bach’s piece is the mighty Chaconne for solo violin, transposed from D minor to A minor and thoroughly elaborated by Edwards. He even brings in some ideas from Liszt and Busoni. This is the most turbulent performance of the piece that I have ever heard, on any instrument, and the middle section’s switch to A major is beyond words. The previous hour of music has built inexorably to that point.

Edwards was 27 or 28 at the time of the sessions. This is his first solo recording. From the way he shapes everything, I’d guess he was much older, with a lifetime of concerts and awards already behind him. He has won several competitions, obviously well-deserved. He is a PhD student now. His harpsichord is by Keith Hill, 2010. The tuning scheme changes from meantone to a smoothly circulating temperament halfway through the program. The artwork is about descending dark staircases. I’ll leave some surprises for discovery by the reader who buys this must-hear disc. Anything can happen in a performance this great, and it does.

B LEHMAN

Ancestral Touch
Volans, Glass, Fargion, Klausmeyer, Funaro Elaine Funaro, hpsi
Alienor 1208—47 minutes

This album is from 2001, distributed with the title “Music of Africa for Harpsichord” on Arabesque. Its notes say that Funaro chose ‘composers inspired by Africa in some way or other—be it the dances, landscape, or animals’. She gives us 30 minutes of ensemble music by Kevin Volans from the mid-1980s, around a group of short solo harpsichord pieces by others. Volans’s ‘Walking Song’ is for flute, two handclappers, and mostly single notes on harpsichord. It’s delightful music for a stroll. The bigger Volans piece is White Man Sleeps—more about that below. Funaro’s colleagues for these pieces are Randall Love, John Hanks, Rebecca Troxler, and Brent Wissick.

Giles Swayne’s Zebra Music is built on clever patterns across the black and white keys of a keyboard. These piano pieces for intermediate students remind me of the middle books of Bartok’s Mikrokosmos. Funaro plays 7 of the 12 movements and doesn’t say why the other 5 are omitted. My guess is that they simply don’t work as well on harpsichord. Peter Klausmey-
er’s Ancestral Touch and Donna a Cavallo by Matteo Fargion are both attractively spiky. Philip Glass’s ‘Night on the Balcony’ is a short night at two minutes, noodling in the style of “Glassworks”.

I have the older recording of Volans’s White Man Sleeps in this two-harpsichord arrangement, played by the composer and Robert Hill (United, 1994). It’s more incisive and mesmerizing than the performance here, but it’s deleted and the few copies in captivity are offered for ludicrously high prices. There ought to be a reissue of that, since it’s such a powerful piece and a manic rendition. The piece is in a very odd tuning and is scored for two harpsichords, viola da gamba, and percussion. It sounds like a cross between gamelan and mbira music. It’s better known in the later arrangement for string quartet. Funaro and her ensemble sound more cautious and don’t build up the steam across these five dance movements. Still, it is well worth hearing, as is this whole program.

The Glass Effect
Glass, Dessner, Arnalds, Frahm, Ludwig-Leone, Muhly
Lavinia Meijer, harp
Sony 35143 [2CD] 116 minutes

Some time ago, a harpist asked me to write a solo work for her after she heard my marimba piece One. I studied some of the harp repertoire and concluded that the music I write is not well suited to what the harp can do, so I never fulfilled her request. That’s more or less how I feel when I hear harpists attempt to perform transcriptions of Glass’s music. Ms Meijer performs Glass’s piano études 1-2, 5, 8-9, 12, 16-18, and 20. Though she is a great harpist and does better with the music than others I have heard, I reluctantly remain unconvinced by her performances.

Fortunately her program includes a second disc with works by Bryce Dessner, Nico Muhly, Olafur Arnalds, Nils Frahm, and Ellis Ludwig-Leone. These works, having been written for her instrument, fare better. I like best Dessner’s incisive but lyrical Suite for Harp, the plaintive and near-motionless Quiet Music of Muhly, and the earnest, sturdy harmonies of Frahm’s In the Sky and On the Ground.

Arabesque
Hasselmans, Eberl, Mozart, Chopin, Corri-Dussek, Salzedo, Thomas, Parish-Alvars, Respighi, Debussy, Chinese
Isabelle Perrin, harp
Cala 77025—72 minutes

Isabelle Perrin was harpist with the San Francisco Symphony before becoming co-principal harpist of the French National Orchestra for 25 years. In 2016 she returned to the concert stage after nearly three year off (recovering from a hand operation). It was during her FNO years that she recorded this album in 2002, originally released on First Impressions.

What a pleasure to hear her performing on a gorgeous instrument (her Camac Atlantide Prestige harp) after having reviewed two other harp albums (for this issue) with plainly inferior ones. Her instrument not only projects clearly but has three distinct timbres: a bright, ringing treble, a mellow midrange, and a rich bass. Bravo to the recording engineer for capturing such perfect ambience. And Bravo as well to Cala for liner notes that include Perrin’s thoughts about the album, a solid paragraph on each of the 11 works, and a biography of the soloist (which needs a bit of updating—it says she has been with the FNO “for over 20 years”).

The most effective works here start with ‘La Source’ by Alphonse Hasselmans, teacher of Carlos Salzedo. The title refers to a river’s flow of water. Perrin’s arpeggios flow forward and are never just boring ostinatos, while she playfully pings out the melody. Salzedo’s ‘Chanson de la Nuit’ is only four minutes long but is replete with a glorious array of sounds, including glissandos that sound like they’re played off-stage and hot Spanish rhythms where Perrin taps on the soundboard and plucks with her nails.

Two works are by John Thomas. In his nine-minute Minstrel’s Adieu to His Native Land, a theme and variations, Perrin captures his Welsh melancholy. Thomas was also responsible for ‘Aria and Rondo Pastorale’, where the aria was composed by Anton Eberl and the rondo pastorale by Mozart (arranged from a string trio). Mozart and Eberl (a student and friend) sometimes annotated each other’s works. And Perrin takes full advantage of Thomas’s superb arrangement. She also meets Parish-Alvars’s difficult Serenade head-on. And she seems to make ‘Flowing Stream,’ a Yunnan Province folk song, sound non-pentatonic with her almost recitative approach.

In the midst of these character pieces,
Sophia Corri-Dussek’s Sonata in C minor stands out, a seven-minute formal work in three movements. Perrin gives I’s form a steady forward flow, infuses II with melancholy rubato, and makes the familiar tune in III ring with joy.

The works that I don’t find effective are Respighi’s ‘Siciliana’ (Ancient Airs and Dances), here sounding somewhat slow, thick, and tedious. Chopin’s ‘Raindrop Prelude’ (15), despite the terraced levels of tone colors, becomes almost irritating because the harp simply doesn’t have the breadth of relief that the piano offers. The same is true in Debussy’s Arabesque 1, though there are also too many tempo changes, killing the flow. Least effective is Debussy’s Danses Sacrée et Profane with the adequate but prosaic Northwest Sinfonia conducted by Christophe Chagnard. It lacks atmosphere and feels poorly integrated, as if the engineers dropped the harp into the previously recorded strings.

The Testaments Old & New
BERLINSKI: The Burning Bush; The 3 Festivals; PAULUS: King David’s Dance; RICHARDS: Praise; BRANSON: Transformation of Jeremiah; Meditation; PINKHAM: Prophecy; MARTINSON: Incarnation Suite; BINGHAM: Annunciation; SIIFLER: 7 Words of Christ; KING: Resurrection; MONTAGUE: Behold a Pale Horse
Laura Ellis, org
Raven 995 [2CD] 143 minutes

This is an interesting program of pieces inspired by passages from scripture. Most of these composers will be familiar to organists, but much of their music has disappeared from the repertoire.

I was particularly pleased to hear pieces by Herman Berlinski, whose numerous works for the organ were inspired by Jewish sacred traditions, and by Paul Sifler, another composer who used to appear quite often on organ recitals. His Contemplations on the Seven Words of Christ from the Cross is a powerful and emotional work that deserves a wider hearing. Larry King’s wonderful Resurrection is given a fine performance, and I also enjoyed the pieces by Keith Branson and Stephen Montague, which were completely unfamiliar to me. Montague’s Behold a Pale Horse, after Revelation 6: 7-8, is a stunning minimalist toccata, which employs the tritone (the Diabolus in musica) and the Dies Irae as thematic material to great effect.

The organ was originally built in 1924 by EM Skinner and is found in the Auditorium on the University of Florida Campus, Historic District. It has been rebuilt several times: 1965-80 by Aeolian Skinner; 1980 by Moeller; and finally in 2015 by Reuter, who undertook a comprehensive tonal revision which resulted in 99 ranks on 5 manuals. Unfortunately the room is very dry. The organ sounds harsh in the loud passages, and the upper work sounds out of tune in some instances. It is unfortunate that it is not in a more resonant and sympathetic acoustic. Ellis plays this challenging repertoire with aplomb and technical assurance and should be commended for her creative programming. Notes on the composers, the organ, and the music.

Nordic Journey 6
VIITALA: Toccata; MAASALO: Variations; Canon, Partita & Fugue on The Sweetness of that Summer; In Memoriam Eino Leino; ISACSSON: Fantasy-Sonata; RIHIVAAARA: Prelude & Fugue; SUNDBERG: Passacaglia; SIIMES: Rhapsody; HAKANPAA: Trumpet Tune; In the Alps VIITANEN: Gigue Fugue on the Theme of the Ice Cream Truck; SIBELIUS: Bells of Berghall Church; GUSTAFSSON: Chorale Prelude on Arise, ye Valleys; MATTSSON: Chorale; Dialogue; Joy; Thoughts

James D. Hicks, org
Pro Organo 7279 [2CD] 116 minutes

I have reviewed two volumes from this series (M/A & M/J 2015) and found them quite enjoyable, but this latest volume knocked my socks off—not only because the playing and recorded sound maintain the same high standard of previous volumes, but because of the stunning organs and marvelous music. Volumes 1-5 were Sweden; this program moves to Finland, presenting standard, newly commissioned, and unpublished pieces. I like every piece on the program from the large-scale and powerful works by Maasalo, Isacsson, Sundberg, and Simons, to the delightful ‘Ice Cream Truck Fugue a la Bach’ and the toe-tapping Sousa-like-march through the Alps.

Hicks plays on two organs in Turku, Finland—the 82-stop Veikko Virtanen in the cathedral and the 52-stop Grönlunds in St Michael’s Church. Both are powerful, rich, colorful instruments of a distinct French personality. Notes on the music (including publishers), the organs, and specifications. I love this recording and want to learn some of this music.
Jean-Pierre Lecaudey
LULLY: Marche pour la Ceremonie des Turcs;
DE GRIGNY: Cromorne en Taille; Veni Creator;
BACH: Prelude & Fugue in E minor; Lento;
BEETHOVEN: Mechanical Organ Suite; CPE BACH: Sonata 5
Pavane 7580—61 minutes
This is one of two volumes meant to display the 62-stop organ in the church of Saint-Remy in Provence. The program covers the 17th and 18th centuries, and Volume 2 has the 19th and 20th. The notes are confusing as to the history of this organ, simply stating that it was rebuilt by Pascal Quorin between 1977 and 1983—did the rebuild incorporate an older organ? It is a wonderful instrument with plenty of power and color, which Lecaudy, a fine player, demonstrates admirably. I would have preferred more substantial pieces—Buxtehude, Handel, Mozart—rather than the Beethoven and CPE Bach, which aren’t “real” organ music—no pedal. Notes on the music and specification.

Stephen Tharp, organ
DURUFLE: Toccata; SIMONDS: Prelude on Iam Sol Recedit Igneus; NEWMAN: Toccata & Fuga Sinfonia on BACH; WAGNER: Wotan’s Farewell & Magic Fire Music; BAKER: Danse Diabolique; BOSSI: Scherzo in G minor; RAVEL: La Valse
Acis 31995—65 minutes
This is a recording of the 2008-9 Schoenstein organ in St James Church, New York. The 77-stop organ is the company’s first comprehensive symphonic style organ and is meant to allow the organist, in the words of Charles Munch, “the joy of feeling yourself music’s master, sovereign of all the gamut of sounds and sonorities.” That it does admirably, providing a seemingly endless variety of color, expressive control, power, and an expansion of the normal pp-ff dynamic range to ppp-fff.

Tharp, an active concert organist who has given over 1400 concerts world-wide, handles the the music and the instrument superbly. His eclectic program shows off all the capabilities of this wonderful organ and is played with telling virtuosity. I was particularly gratified to hear him exploit the softer colors on this instrument in the Simonds Iam Sol Recedit Igneus, a piece that should be better known. Also notable are the two transcriptions, which allow Tharp to further demonstrate the kaleidoscopic range of color and dynamics available.

One wouldn’t think that the Ravel would be effective on the organ, but in the arrangement by Eugenio Fagiani it really works. Tharp manages to use every stop, the entire ppp-fff dynamic range and lightning-fast changes of registration. He maintains the underlying waltz rhythm. The final “collapse” is wonderful.

The organ, player, and recorded sound are excellent. Informative notes on the music by the performer and on the organ by the builder.

Natalia Andreeva, piano
Preludes & Fugues by Bach, Liszt, Franck, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich
Divine Art 25139—57 minutes
Andreeva’s textbook playing marks her compendium of preludes from different composers. Though a straightforward approach is often appropriate for Baroque-infused works such as these, her interpretations often suffer from lack of verve. The Bach Prelude and Fugue is on the slow side. The Prelude is too affected for my taste, and the Fugue feels a little too labored. Though rests and rhythms are followed impeccably in her playing of the Franck, his rich harmonies and dense textures deserve more luxurious, expansive treatment, and I want to hear a better sense of the musical lines. The Rachmaninoff also misses a sweeping sound—I hear details I’d rather not, such as every single subdivision in the left hand.

Her sound is spacious and atmospheric, which does work well for these works, especially the Franck.

Word Police: rock star
Why would any classical music lover be impressed when a favorite cellist or pianist is described as “rock-star famous” or having “rock star charisma”? What charisma? We hate rock stars and consider them louts and idiots. They don’t have anything that we would admire or call “charisma”. They are not gifted. Nor do great things “rock”.

But publicists seem to be gullible women (mostly) who think there’s nothing greater in our culture than rock stars. They earn obscene amounts of money, they can have any woman they want, and they don’t need to deny themselves anything. That seems to appeal to spoiled Americans: total self-indulgence. But of course it’s utterly savage and destructive of civilization.
Natalia Andreeva

BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonata 27; SCRIABIN: Sonata 10; PROKOFIEFF: Sonata 2; DEBUSSY: Estampes

Divine Art 25140—63 minutes

While her straightforward approach is better in the Prelude and Fugue collection (above), this recording might be useful to students learning these works. While I find the lack of excitement disappointing, students learning Scriabin's Piano Sonata 10, for instance, will find the clarity of her playing welcome. Andreeva illuminates voices and complex themes through careful pedalling and an academic approach.

The second movement of the Beethoven is missing charm. It sounds too stiff and automatic, missing the expansive nature of the piece. Compared to the many excellent recordings of Prokofieff’s Sonatas I have heard, her rendering is quite slow.

I’m not entirely sure what the rationale is behind this particular collection of works.

Melencolie

POULENC: Melancolie; 3 Novelettes; Soirées de Nazalles; SATIE: 3 Gymnopédies; MILHAUD: Caramel Mou; HONEGGER: Souvenir de Chopin; LES SIX: Album de Six

Miki Aoki, p

Profil 15023—66 minutes

Founded in 1920 by Jean Cocteau and Erik Satie, Les Six was a group of French composers who worked in Montparnasse. Their music is generally viewed as a response to both Wagner and the Impressionism of Debussy and Ravel. In 1920, George Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, and Germaine Tailleferre all contributed a piece to an album of piano music—their only collaborative work, included in this program. Poulenc’s music occupies over half of this program, but Satie’s most popular set of pieces and a couple of individual pieces by members of Les Six complete a most interesting and unusual program.

With a release title and first piece called ‘Melancolie’ you might anticipate what is to follow. Fortunately, there is a nice balance of rambunctious and melancholy pieces here, and ones that do not fit under the title by Poulenc. His large set Les Soirées de Nazalles basically alternates fast and slow works, and the second Novelette is a wonderful example of Poulenc’s jaunty style. I was very pleased to make a number of discoveries here, including the last piece on the album, Honegger’s Souvenir de Chopin. This returns us to the same beautiful, melancholy style of the opening Poulenc work.

Aoki’s playing matches her superb programming. With degrees from Yale and Indiana Universities, along with one from the College for Music and Drama in Hamburg, she brings intellect as well as musical sensibility to her playing. ‘Melancolie’ is one of the most beautifully played works in my entire CD collection. She is currently teaching at Graz and has a busy international schedule. I would go out of my way to hear her perform.

Martha Argerich, Vols 1-4

MOZART: Piano Concerto 21; Sonatas 8, 13, 17
Cologne Radio/ Peter Maag
Doremi 8024—74 minutes

LISZT: Concert Etude 2; PROKOFIEFF: Piano Sonatas 3+7; Toccata; RAVEL: Gaspard de la Nuit; Sonatine
Doremi 8029—59 minutes

PROKOFIEFF: Concerto 3; SCHUMANN: Kinderszenen; Toccata; LISZT: Hungarian Rhapsody 6; BEETHOVEN: Sonata 7
Cologne Radio/ Carl Melles
Doremi 8030—79 minutes

CHOPIN: Sonata 3; Nocturnes; Etudes; Barcarolle; Polonaise; Ballade 4
Doremi 8036—80 minutes

These are previously unreleased radio and concert recordings. Recordings of these works played by Argerich already exist in various forms, but fans of Argerich will enjoy learning about her early work.

Volume 1 has 1960 Mozart performances of Concerto 21 (never recorded commercially) and three sonatas, five years before she won the Chopin Piano Competition at age 24 and became famous. Even at 19, her skill is astounding. Her playing of Mozart is crisp, sensitive, and precise. She draws effective and subtle contrasts in the sonatas.

The earlier recordings sound much faster, and the speed and energy seem youthful. The Concert Etude is as fluid as ever. She tosses back the piece as though it were nothing, technically. Compare her 1987 Sonatine to the one performed in the 1960s (Volume 2): it’s a combination of maturity and better sound engineering (the sound quality of these early recordings, of course, leaves much to be desired, and does not give the listener a good sense of Argerich’s range even at that age), but
one gets a better sense of the textures and transitions. Her range deepened over time.

Volume 3 has repertoire from concerts in Cologne and Geneva from 1957 to 1965. Hungarian Rhapsody 6 was performed in 1957 when she was 16. It is resolute and controlled, full of power, even with some wrong notes and sudden tempo fluctuations. Her rapid-fire Schumann Toccata has never been released before. It is full of passion, with clean lines, even if not polished. Listeners may be interested in comparing her playing of Kinderszenen with the 1984 recording on DG: the more recent recording is more deliberate, with more sensitive shadings, and sounds more poignant in comparison to the exuberant, energetic 1960 one. The 1984 ‘From Foreign Lands and People’ comes across as much more subdued and slower, with a more careful attention to the harmonies.

Volume 4 is all Chopin, mostly from the Warsaw Chopin Competition that propelled her to fame. We start with Stage 3 and move backwards. The final Chopin works here were recorded in 1960 and 1955 (at 14 years of age!). Her Ballade 4 is sensitive, with tasteful rubato, though it does not have the depth of sound she reached later in her career. The faster sections of the work feel a little muddled.

It feels strange to close the fourth volume on 14-year-old Argerich playing the C major Prelude—I would have preferred to start the program with that and end with Piano Sonata 3. Though her playing is excellent, the sound quality is messy and there are uncomfortable buzzing noises, some noticeable mistakes, and muddy playing. Her playing sounds quite brash in comparison to her playing 10 years later at the competition, or even compared to her 1960 playing of Ballade 4. Is that really a note one wants to end on?

I encourage young pianists to listen to these recordings, especially if they feel as though they have nothing more to learn.

KANG

Tchaikovsky Competition 1986

PROKOFIEFF: Piano Sonata 6; TCHAIKOVSKY: Dumka; January;SCRIABIN: Etude; CHOPIN: Etude; BEETHOVEN: Sonata 30

Anton Batagov
Melodiya 2464—63 minutes

Ever since the inaugural event in 1958, when Van Cliburn’s first place victory made international headlines, the quadrennial Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow has attracted the world’s best young talent. I can only imagine the superlative performances sitting in its archives, most unreleased to the general public. All contestants selected from a large number of applications start with a one hour recital and the group is then progressively thinned down. Anton Batagov (b.1965) did not get into the final rounds in 1986 (Barry Douglas was the gold medal winner); but his records, performances, and post-minimalist compositions have kept him before the public (at least in Russia) to this day.

The current disc has many very persuasive performances, relatively poor sound quality, and too much applause (up to 45 seconds) at the end of almost every piece. It has a superb Prokofieff Sonata 6 and jaw-dropping virtuosity in the two short etudes. Beethoven’s sonata, good as it is, only has the final movement; and the Tchaikovsky pieces are perfectly acceptable but not memorable.

Today Batakov is highly regarded in the field of contemporary music, and has recorded Messiaen, Ravel, and Bach as well. He also seems to have a touch of Glenn Gould’s outra-geousness. A recent performance of the opening Toccata movement Bach’s Partita 6 has him taking a full 15 minutes to play a piece that I perform in about 6 minutes. Nothing of this sort was apparent in his performances back in 1986. Booklet notes are good English translations of the original Russian. It is an odd collection of works, and I am still at a loss as to why it was selected for release, unless he has a signifi-cant following in Russia that Melodiya felt would appreciate hearing him way back when.

HARRINGTON

Around Bach
Bach, Reger, Liszt, Franck
Massimo Giuseppe Bianchi, p
Decca 4814521—79 minutes

Mr Bianchi is an excellent and thoughtful pianist who offers a well-played but conceptually puzzling program of Bach (Busoni’s arrangement of the Toccata and Fugue in D minor and the Capriccio on the Departure of the Beloved Brother), Reger’s variations on a Bach theme, Franck’s Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue, and Liszt’s Weinen, Klagen. Like most works of Reger, this one holds little appeal for me; the Franck is magnificent. And while the Bach performances are satisfying, there are many other performances of this repertoire. Bianchi might have been better served concentrating on Franck, for whom he seems to have a genuine affinity.

HASKINS

May/June 2017
**American Record Guide**

**Virtuosic Dance**

**RACHMANINOFF:** Suite 2; **RAVEL:** La Valse; **INFANTE:** Danses Andalouses; **LUTOSLAVSKI:** Paganini Variations; **MILHAUD:** Scaramouche

Ehlen-Tai Duo
Azica 71312—63 minutes

A brave program—not so much for the technical difficulties, which are significant, but for the competition. Four of the five works on the program sit at the heart of the 2-Piano repertoire and have been performed and recorded many, many times. Duo Ehlen-Tai has selected 20th Century works that have actual or implied dance-like characteristics. The new work for me is Manuel Infante’s Danses Andalouses (1921). At 15 minutes, these three contrasting Spanish dances should be far better known. I cannot imagine a more convincing performance.

The other dance pieces make for a very international program: Russian, French, Italian-Polish, and even Brazilian (last movement of *Scaramouche*). The Rachmaninoff, Ravel, and Lutoslawski are to be found on one of the best 2-Piano recordings ever made: Argerich and Freire (Philips 4758520, Jan/Feb 2008). My sole criticism of that disc was its 37-minute length. Timothy Ehlen and Yu-Chi Tai play the same three works in 38 minutes, but they add two additional works (25 minutes). I won’t ever give up the Philips recording, but this one competes nicely and gives you more music for your dollar.

HARRINGTON

**Alfred Grünfeld**

Welte-Mignon Recordings (1905)
Tacet 220—74 minutes

The pianist Alfred Grünfeld (1852-1924) was born in Prague but lived in Vienna as an adult. He was extremely popular, especially as an elegant player of salon pieces with a Viennese flavor. He traveled widely, even to the USA, and is considered “the first pianist of note to make genuine commercial recordings” (Wikipedia). In addition to making acoustic recordings, he was also one of the first to make piano rolls using the Welte-Mignon system, which was introduced in 1904.

The present release is Volume XXI in the “Welte Mignon Mystery” series produced by the German label Tacet. The booklet describes briefly how its engineers replayed old piano rolls on a modern piano, and additional information can be found on the Tacet web site. It is interesting to note that the Welte-Mignon recording mechanism is not precisely known because it was kept a secret, and the equipment was later destroyed in air raids. The Tacet people claim to have done their best to calibrate the reproducing machinery; they attribute any possible faults to the recordings themselves and to a style of performance we are no longer accustomed to.

There are 15 pieces here, all recorded in 1905. They include Beethoven’s Andante in F, Schubert’s Impromptu in A-flat (D 935) and a brief transcription of his ballet music from *Rosamunde*, Schumann’s Novelette I, ‘Des Abends’, and ‘Träumerei’, Chopin’s Nocturnes in B and C minor, Liszt’s Paraphrase on Isolde’s Liebestod, a waltz by Robert Volkmann, four pieces by Grünfeld himself, and his own adaptation of Johann Strauss’s *Voices of Spring*.

A selection of Grünfeld’s acoustic recordings, mostly from 1913, can be found on Pearl 9850, reviewed in ARG by Donald Manildi (Sept/Oct 1993) who praised Grünfeld’s “unpretentious sincerity” and “rhythmic elegance”. That was also my impression. He has a light touch, fleet tempos, plenty of charm, and no mannerisms except for consistent rolling of left-hand chords and occasional asynchronies between the hands. Two of the pieces (‘Träumerei’ and *Voices of Spring*) are also on the present disc. Thus the later acoustic recordings may be taken as references for what the Welte-Mignon reproductions ought to sound like.

This is important because they do not sound alike. Both Schumann and Strauss are markedly slower on the Tacet disc (2’54” versus 2’36” for Schumann, 5’40” versus 3’53” for Strauss). While it is likely that the Strauss paraphrase has been shortened for the acoustic recording, this is not the case with ‘Träumerei’. It could be argued that Grünfeld played deliberately fast for the acoustic recordings to meet some time constraints, but that is not my impression; the Tacet tempos are sluggish. As a result the Tacet performances sound clumsy, and this impression is further enhanced by the increased prominence of chord arpeggios and hand asynchronies, which is a natural result of slowing a recording down.

Moreover, there is on You Tube a different reproduction of Grünfeld’s piano roll of Chopin’s Nocturne in C minor (the first piece on the Tacet disc), played on an original Steinway-Welte piano in Bologna. Here, too, there is a difference in tempo: 6’37” (Tacet) versus 5’55” (Bologna). The Bologna performance...
sounds better to me. The ratio of the longer to the shorter—1.12—is the same for Schumann’s ‘Träumer’ and the Chopin nocturne. This scanty evidence leads me to suspect that the Tacet reproductions are too slow by about 12%, and that may be true for all pieces on this disc.

All the performances are lumbering, and while occasionally a pleasing rubato comes through there are also some jarring tempo changes that perhaps would be less offensive in the context of a faster tempo. Moreover, the heavy texture of the reproductions is a far cry from the charming lightness of Grünfeld’s acoustic recordings. While that lightness may be owing in part to the lack of a bass response in the acoustic recordings, the heaviness of the Tacet reproductions suggests poorly rendered dynamics (the left hand generally too loud) and perhaps also that a modern Steinway was not the best instrument for this purpose.

I cannot recommend this release. It is not pleasant to listen to, and it misrepresents the artistry of Alfred Grünfeld.

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**Masks**

**DEBUSSY:** *La Boîte à Joujoux*; *Masques*;  
**MUCZYNSKI:** *Masks*;  
**MARTINU:** *Puppets*;  
**VILLA-LOBOS:** *Baby’s Family*  
Mirna Lekic, p  
Centaur 3519—53 minutes

This program contains playful works that are seldom heard, inspired by dolls and puppets. Lekic plays with much grace and color. One gets the sense that she is especially adept at conveying character.

*La Boîte à Joujoux* is a late work of Debussy’s—a ballet for children or marionettes. While it sounds simple and sparse in comparison to some of his other works, such as the *Preludes* or even *Afternoon of a Faun*, Lekic offers a very witty reading of life in a toy-box. Her supple tempo manipulations and changes in color communicate its spontaneity and draw attention. It is a droll work, but Lekic captures an undercurrent of unease, especially in the disquieting harmonies of ‘Fields of Battle.’ This is no *Toy Story*.

The short ‘Masques’, another of Debussy’s more underrated works, is played beautifully here. Villa Lobos’s *Baby’s Family* is also rather unfamiliar, but has a lot of flash and drive. It is meant to portray the personality of each doll, and Lekic does the character changes very well. Though Martinu’s *Loutky* sounds more didactic than the other works, Lekic musters a lot of charm.

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**Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli**

Scarlatti, Galuppi, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Brahms, Debussy  
NDR/Cord Garben; Vienna Symphony/ Giulini;  
Orchestre de Paris/ Barenboim  
DG 4796277 [10CD] 669 minutes

Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli (1920-95) is one of the legendary pianists of the 20th Century, remembered primarily for two things: the perfection of his playing and his frequent cancellations. (I suffered one!) Most or all of the recordings in this new set have been continuously available since they were issued and have been reviewed in ARG, as have other versions (often recorded in concert) issued on other labels. A previous 8-CD set, “The Art of Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli” (DG 460820), is identical with the present one, except for the last two discs. Jack Sullivan reviewed it enthusiastically and called it “one of the great monuments of piano art” (Sept/Oct 2003).

Therefore, I will only summarize briefly my own impressions from listening to most of these recordings. Having never been a great fan of Michelangeli, I was unfamiliar with many of them, though I was certainly aware that he was held in great esteem.

The first two discs contain Mozart’s Piano Concertos 13, 15, 20, and 25, recorded in concert. The first two, from 1990, are disappointing. Michelangeli sounds like an old man. His touch is hard and loud (especially the gruff chords), the passagework is stiff, and tempos are lumbering. I have an earlier studio recording by him of No. 15 (EMI) that is vastly superior to this late effort, despite poor sound. No. 20 and 25 are better, even though they were recorded only 6 months earlier with the same orchestra and conductor. Michelangeli is more fluid here, if still rather severe; the piano is less up-front, and the tempos seem right. Only III of No. 25 seems unduly restrained. The Beethoven cadenza in III of No. 20 is rendered very freely. In I of No. 25 Michelangeli plays a cadenza by Camillo Togni (1922–93), a Schoenberg-influenced composer who probably wrote it for him. It is in reasonably Mozartean style, and this may well be its only recording.

The next two discs accommodate Beethoven’s Concertos 1, 3, and 5 (concert recordings from 1979) followed by Sonata 4, a 1971 studio recording. In No. 1 the piano is
again rather up-front, and Michelangeli’s touch seems hard, especially in chords and isolated bass notes. The interpretation has great authority and clarity. This is also true for Nos. 3 and 5, though the piano is not so prominent. By comparison, Emil Gilels’s 1976 concert performances (Brilliant 92132) are less precise but livelier, even impetuous. Michelangeli keeps the music at arm’s length and treats it with calculated objectivity, also in the sonata.

The fifth disc is dedicated to Schubert and Chopin. The Sonata in A minor, D 537, is Michelangeli’s only Schubert recording, made in 1981 on a piano more than 60 years old, as the booklet is at pains to point out. I do not hear anything special in the sound, but Michelangeli’s touch is again rather hard. There is little charm or tenderness, but excellent tempos, timing, and articulation add up to a trenchant rendition of one of Schubert’s more rarely heard sonatas.

The 10 Chopin Mazurkas that follow were recorded in 1971, and suddenly we hear a more intimate side of the artist. The playing is dynamically differentiated and quite delicate, though there are occasional fortissimo outbursts. Michelangeli does not bring out the Polish character of the Mazurka rhythm as strongly as do some other pianists, but he clearly cares about these pieces and performs them with pristine clarity and fine rubato. Five of the Mazurkas are from late (posthumous) opus numbers. Prelude in C-sharp minor, Ballade No. 1, and Scherzo No. 2 conclude the program. I was particularly looking forward to hearing the Ballade because his performance of this piece had deeply impressed me when I heard him in concert (Chicago, 1970). Now it left me curiously cold, despite its technical perfection, and I felt the same with the Prelude and the Scherzo. I happen to have in my collection a disc (Ermitage 122) where Michelangeli plays the same Ballade and Scherzo, and also three of the same Mazurkas, all recorded in 1962. These earlier renditions are truly amazing, and I am afraid the whole Chopin group on the present disc pales by comparison, seeming less flexible, heavier, and more calculated. The 1962 performances are the ones to seek out!

The next disc contains Schumann’s Carnaval and Faschingsschwank aus Wien as well as the Ballades, Op. 10, by Brahms. Both Schumann performances are superb. Michelangeli is remarkably outgoing here and plays with elegance and great virtuosity. He is less well known as a Brahms interpreter, but his Ballades are appropriately inward and restrained.

Two further discs are filled with Debussy: both sets of Preludes (recorded in 1978 and 1988), both sets of Images (1971), and Children’s Corner (1971). The 1971 recordings are justly famous and represent a pinnacle of pianistic perfection. (See Mr Sullivan’s review, Sept/Oct 2003.)

The last two discs are new to the DG set but also reissues. There is less music on them than on the others. The first one was issued previously in 2009 and reviewed enthusiastically by Mr Sullivan (Mar/Apr 2010). It holds a 1984 concert recording of the Schumann Piano Concerto and 4 of the 6 Debussy Images (1982). Was it necessary to include alternate performances of these Debussy pieces? Perhaps. They show the same technical perfection as the earlier studio recordings and are similar in interpretation but somewhat more expansive and in mellow sound. While the earlier performances are simply awe-inspiring, the later ones are somewhat more engaging and have a more impressionist aura. The Schumann is on the slow and heavy side, and the piano sound is woolly. It is a good performance but not outstanding in any way, notwithstanding the wild applause and shouts of “Bravo!” that follow it. Mr Sullivan mentions that the artist did not approve this recording for release. There are many other, perhaps preferable Michelangeli recordings of this concerto.

The recordings on the second added disc originally came out on Decca. They are the earliest in this set, dating from 1964. Beethoven’s last sonata is played with the pianist’s customary technical perfection, but I was not much moved by it. In particular, the beginning and the end—two crucial moments in any performance—are rather prosaic. There follow three rarely heard Scarlatti sonatas and a three-movement sonata by Baldassare Galuppi, who was one generation younger than Scarlatti. These trifles are rendered with admirable clarity, but the final Scarlatti sonata is given a bombastic ending.

I have two additional small complaints. First, the concert recordings include both preceding and following applause, sometimes tracked separately. The preceding applause in particular seems unnecessary. Second, although Michelangeli is a pianist of high perfection, he does have one mannerism: occasional asynchronies between the hands, with the left leading the right. It crops up in all per-
performances, and it is less appropriate with some composers (Mozart, Schubert) than with others. It is true that such asynchronies often serve a useful expressive purpose, but I don’t think this applies to all instances in these recordings. At least in part, they seem to me a remnant of a long outdated performance practice, applied somewhat indiscriminately.

In summary, my listening to this collection confirmed what I felt about Michelangeli’s playing on the basis of earlier encores—namely that it is admirable but difficult to love. This also seems to have been true of his person, judging from his dour countenance on almost all photographs and from comments by others that he was difficult to fathom. Several such comments appear in the candid liner notes by Cord Garben, the producer of most of the pianist’s DG recordings and his conductor in the Mozart concertos. (He also published a book about the pianist in 2002, which I have not seen.) The most surprising tidbit he offers is that Michelangeli was an avid reader of Mickey Mouse comics. It seems that the man will remain an enigma, but his great art is preserved on his many recordings.

**Cuban Piano**

Alexandre Moutouzkine

Steinway 30064—51 minutes

This seems to be the debut disc for Russian-American pianist Alexandre Moutouzkine, whose boyish appearance belies decades of study (he is now teaching at the Manhattan School of Music). It includes 18 bonbons by 17 Cuban composers, about half still living, the shortest 40 seconds and the longest 6-1/2 minutes. Most will not even be names to the best informed listener, so if you pride yourself on your hipness, this will be an introduction to another universe. Two of the works particularly stood out for me—the evocative ‘Habanera del Angel’ by José Maria Vitier (b. 1954) and the driving, jazzy, compelling ‘Pan con Timba’ by Aldo Lopez Gavilan (b. 1979). (Gavilan has just started making a name for himself in the USA; he composes compositional chops with an amazing touch at the keyboard.) But all of the selections are worth getting to know. A fine anthology for musicologists, collectors, and piano lovers.

**Lebanese Piano**

FULEHAN: Sonata 9; KHOURY: Sonata 3; GELALLIAN: 3 Cicli; Canzona & Toccata; BAZ: Esquisses; SUCCAR: Oriental Variations

Tatiana Primak-Khoury

Grand Piano 715—70 minutes

This collection traverses three generations of Lebanese music, showing how Lebanese folk music threads through different musical stylings from Fuleihan to Khoury (Primak-Khoury’s husband). The liner notes sketch a picture of a country where the Orient and the Occident meet. Owing to the country’s turbulent history marked recently by civil war and instability, much of the music deals with such concerns.

All of these works require strong technical command, and Ukrainian-Lebanese pianist Primak-Khoury meets these demands. Fuleihan’s Piano Sonata 9 is my favorite from the set. Full of different timbres, the work has elements of folk intermingled with virtuosic passages. Primak-Khoury emphasizes the tender and sensitive moments. In contrast, the percussive ‘Tre Cicli’ is a tour de force. The last movement even sounds militaristic. The ‘Canzona e Toccata’ with harmonic language chromatic on the verge of atonality, is an exciting work reminiscent of the Samuel Barber piano sonata. BAZ’s Esquisses is playful, in the vein of Bartok’s Romanian Dances, and sounds highly influenced by Lebanese musical idioms.

Excellent recording.

**Anastasia Rizikov Recital**

Naxos 573725—63 minutes

The “Laureate Series—Piano” is new to me for this label. This young Canadian pianist of Ukrainian descent won the 2015 Jaen Prize International, and this was recorded in Spain at the Infanta Leonor Theatre. The relatively little-known competition, first established in 1953, has us in its debt by presenting a pianist with musicality and technique well worthy of recognition and enshrinement on record.

Beethoven’s Sonata 17 opens the program on a positive note by demonstrating her ability to compete in well-known territory. The opening movement is stormier than most, but it is the Adagio that captures the heart. While many performers fall down here, Rizikov holds one spellbound with her ability to sustain the nine minutes with subtle concentration while not losing the thread of musical argument. The concluding Allegretto begins gently, but gains

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power with each turn of phrase. I will be returning to this often.

'Triana' from Albeniz's *Iberia* gives us but a taste of what she can do with this masterwork. It's deliberate, exacting, strong beyond the music's requirements, and finally a little too wound up for me. Juan Cruz-Guevara's (1972-) *Sonado Maria Magdalena* keeps its Spanish inflections in the context of a more contemporary view. It works effectively, though you will not end up humming the piece. It's played with wild splashes of color and no lack of dynamism. As a colleague commented "She sure beats the hell out of the piano". True enough, but it fits the piece to a T.

Grieg's Sonata in E minor is a welcome rarity on this program. Once again the performance is strong, and her attention to its architecture brings a new freshness to the piece. Here the tension works beautifully, and her emotionally laden playing brings out a revelatory greatness I had not previously attributed to it. Norwegian nationalism seeps from its pores, and again I will be returning to this often.

With good sound and informative notes, Naxos has done itself proud for this pianist. She is well deserving of attention, and I look forward to her future endeavors.

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44 Waltzes on 88 Keys
Peter Schaaf, p
Schaaf 102 — 72 minutes (800-BUYMYCD)

Nicely self-produced collection of waltzes by four different composers. Schaaf, winner of the Kosciusko Foundation's Chopin Prize in 1961 and the Morris Loeb Prize from Juilliard in 1965, was a student of Rosina Lhevinne and switched careers to become a portrait photographer. He returned to his musical career in 2011 with an impressive recording of Albeniz's *Iberia*. This new recording, dedicated to his children and to the memory of his wife, is his second solo recorded effort.

Given his purpose for making the recording, his cover photograph, and the intimacy of his notes, I was predisposed to like his playing. I was not disappointed.

Schubert's *Valses Nobles* D 969 takes us through 12 pieces in just under 12 minutes. Call it the true minute waltz, though a few take less. All are pleasant trifles performed with plenty of Viennese affection.

The Brahms Op. 39 set of 16 is more substantial and definitely better known. Brahms turned to these three times, once for piano duet, and twice for solo piano in an easy and more difficult edition. Schaaf plays the latter.

To avoid waltz overload, listeners should hear one set at a time. Even with the keen competition available these do not disappoint, but it cannot be said that they dominate rather than join the field. Schaaf uses little pedal and in general keeps things lightly toe-tapping from downbeat to downbeat.

Dvorak's Op.54 set and Ravel's *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* are more challenging technically, but no less enjoyable to hear. Once again Schaaf is a sensitive player, never pushing things to achieve his goals. I would have preferred a recording with a trifle more resonance, but this is not of major importance, and I doubt if anyone else has done these with greater clarity. If you're hankering for a waltz fest, this will do nicely.

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Dream Catchers—Masters in Miniature
Julia Siciliano, p
Blue Griffin 381 [2CD] 113 minutes

Ms Siciliano, gazing at us pensively from the front and back of this recording, attended the Eastman School of Music for her Bachelor degree, and the University of Michigan for her Master’s. A run of awards and recognitions accompanied her rise in the concert world, and this set of challenging music attests to her considerable abilities.

Beethoven's Bagatelles Op.126 starts us off on a somewhat unusual path. It is a refreshing choice and fits in with the miniature aspect of the program. They are efficiently and effectively dispatched with considerable charm and elegance. Her evenness in executing rapid passagework and her trills are the stuff of which legends are born.

Schumann’s *Carnaval*, consisting of many miniature sections, has become a rite of passage for most young pianists these days. From the opening 'Preambule' it is evident that this is going to be an out of the ordinary performance. Schumann’s often peculiar phrasing and unique rubato requirements have thwarted many pianists. That is definitely not the case here: all flows naturally, as if inborn with the pianist. Nothing is ever forced, and the composer’s special brand of romanticism is realized to perfection. The oft eliminated 'Sphinxes' is played here in total simplicity, and all sections speak as one grand unit. This definitely belongs in the top group of *Carnaval* performances.

The four Schubert Impromptus Op. 142
can hardly be called miniatures since two of them exceed 10 minutes and the others 5. The notes spend most of their time justifying miniatures. But we can enjoy the lyrical beauty of the playing. One of my desert island pieces has always been the composer’s *Rosamunde* incidental music. Here we can enjoy a section of it in its piano variation incarnation as the third impromptu. It would be difficult finding more satisfying performances than these.

Ravel’s *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* and Debussy’s second book of *Images* find the pianist perfectly in accord with the idioms. The playing even drew a few tears from my usually inscrutable countenance. In ‘Bells through the Leaves,’ the first Image, she introduces a bit of pianistic haze (pedaling) that is totally appropriate and not lathered on. This she continues through the last note of ‘Goldfish’ yet allows us to clearly hear each flick of the tail. It is only here that I wonder about the size of the carp. Yes, they can grow to rather large proportions, but my preference is for the more diminutive variety.

Sound engineering has been especially kind in reproducing this piano, though we are not told the instrument’s maker. In any case, this is superb music making and introduces us to a pianist worthy of much future attention.

BECKER

*Dedications*

BRAHMS: *Quintet*; FAIROUZ: Sonata 2; LISZT: Sonata; SCHNITTEK: *Concerto*; SCHUBERT: *Winterreise*; Sonata, D 960

Pieces by Arensky, Bach, Bartok, Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin, Debussy, Haydn, Gabunia, Grieg, Lassen, Liszt, MacDowell, Mozart, Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Queen, Scarlatti, Schubert, Schumann, Scriabin, Spooner, Wagner

Steven Spooner, p; Borromeo Quartet; Chris Thompson, bar; Kremlin Chamber Orchestra; Misha Rachlevsky

Life of Music [15CD & DVD] 17 hours

(509-338-5226)

Joyce Hatto alert? Such a breadth and variety of difficult pieces by a pianist I never heard of made me wonder at first if this was a hoax. But, no, the DVD proves that Steven Spooner is the real deal, a pianist of apparently limitless raw technique that’s almost note-perfect. My first thought on hearing him was “faculty pianist”, a little rough around the edges, lacking that high-sheen refinement and consistent interpretive insight of the best pianists. Indeed he is assistant professor of piano at the University of Kansas. But he might be the best faculty pianist I’ve heard.

I think his most impressive skill is improvisation on well-known tunes like ‘Amazing Grace’, ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’, and even ‘We Are the Champions’ by 1970s rock band Queen. His style hews to the gently jazzy, chromatically saturated harmonies of Keith Jarrett and Ola Gjeilo, and his three Concert Etudes draw much inspiration from Vladimir Horowitz’s encores. The set includes an hour of Spooner’s improv and compositions, and they’re my favorite pieces here.

His Liszt sonata is also first rate, gulped down in one long, exhilarating hot flood of notes; perfectly transparent accelerandos and ritards weld the work’s many sections, making it absolutely seamless. Then he performs it again on an 1885 Bechstein grand, the very one Liszt played on his last tour of England, in almost identical fashion, though with a whiff of hesitancy and caution. He also plays ten Debussy preludes (from Book 1) on the same Bechstein. It sounds much like a modern Steinway, except the treble is a little shy and velvety rather than crystalline.

Another high point is *Winterreise*, thanks mostly to baritone Chris Thompson. This is a brisk performance, under 67 minutes, a young man’s canter, though Mr Thompson has a rich, rotund, avuncular instrument bespeaking middle age; so there’s a clash of poetry and voice. One hopes no 40-year-old would indulge this sort of mewling self-pity. Spooner’s accompaniments are well judged, illustrative and assertive at crucial points, then fading to backdrop to let Thompson take center stage.

Another big Schubert piece, the last sonata, is also a high point. This is also a young man’s Schubert, brawny and Beethovenian—fierce accents, craggy fortissimo climaxes, and II has a hushed depth of tranquility unmatched by any other I’ve heard. A mighty interpretation.

There are a couple of works, besides Spooner’s compositions, available only in this set: Mohammed Fairouz’s Sonata 2, *Last Resistance*, and Nodar Gabunia’s *Pupil’s Diary*. Spooner was a student of Gabunia, whose five pieces here are post-Debussy songs without words: gently impressionist, jazzy, naïvely sing-songy evocations of childhood. Spooner plays them with obvious affection. Fairouz’s four-movement Sonata 2 (2011) is modern but tonal, brimming with minor-mode belligerence, defiant and clamorous in outer movements. The mid-tempo II is a parade of silly, probably ironic tunelets, and the short III is almost motionless and silent.
But... you knew there's a but. Other than the sonata and the heavenly delicacy of the Consolation 3—a perfect reading—Spooner's Liszt is clattery and abrasive like the bad old days before pianists took Liszt seriously as a composer. His Debussy preludes are interesting, structurally clear, but not as plush and perfumed as I like. And other than the pieces I singled out for praise above, the rest are merely competent, nothing special, and not preferable to my favorites. Here and there I'll hear something new or perceptive, but the inspiration is never sustained. He reminds me of Naxos's indefatigable workhorse pianist Jenö Jando: sometimes great, but usually serviceable at best.

The good news is that this set can be had for $29.95, so it's a bargain, like getting 15 short recitals for the price of one concert ticket (everything on the DVD is also on the CDs, so I didn't include it in the 17 hours). It's a mix of studio and concert recordings, so there's some applause.

There is no booklet. Instead Mr Spooner discusses each recital on CD in his high tenor voice, delivered in the earnest, halting cadence you hear on National Public Radio, with lots of "uhhs" and "sort of very", that nonsense phrase endemic to NPR. His chats consume over 2 hours of playing time, so there's actually about 15 hours of music. The DVD is 16:9 widescreen, 720p resolution, but encoded at 1080i.

About the title, "Dedications", each disc's program is inspired by and dedicated to a pianist he admires: 8 to Sviatoslav Richter, 3 to Horowitz, and 1 each to Van Cliburn and Emil Gilels—plus the 2 chatty discs.

**Old Italian Arias**
Parisotti collection
Nilo Caracristi, hn; Giancarlo Guarino, p
Vermeer 40010—48 minutes

This album has horn player Nilo Caracristi playing 18 of the lovely Old Arias from the venerable collection by Alessandro Parisotti. When he published the first volume in 1885, it was an introduction to long-forgotten early music. The collection includes (and Caracristi plays) such favorites as Caccini's 'Amarilli, mia bella', Giordani's 'Caro mio ben', and other works by Vivaldi, Scarlatti, Cesti, Caldara, Cimarosa, and others. My favorite is 'Danza, danza', by Francesco Durante (1684-1755). Also included is 'Se tu m'ami', attributed by Parisotti to Pergolesi, but attributed later (since no Pergolesi manuscript was ever found) to Parisotti himself.

Caracristi and the fine pianist Giancarlo Guarino play from the Parisotti book: same keys, all marked dynamics and articulations, etc. You can watch the music, too—it's available at imslp.org.

Caracristi has a beautiful horn sound, but my complaint is that all 18 pieces have him in the low register. He has a good sound down there, but it is the sound of total ease. If only some were an octave higher, or even a fifth higher, we would hear a little more of what makes the horn special: that upper-register tone that takes a little effort to produce, that is a little more compact, sometimes a little searing.

Playing it all this low was deliberate, of course. The goal was to follow Parisotti's instructions to the singer, to "be pure, guileless, serene, legato; movements calm and totally unrushed". Caracristi and Guarino carry out those commands beautifully. But they forget that those instructions were for someone who was singing text, conveying more than just lovely melody, harmony, and tone. Minus the text, serene can seem too serene after a while. Playing some an octave higher would add a interest and a spark of life.

KILPATRICK

**The Right Frame of Mind**
Rodrick Dixon, tt; Edward Mallett, eu; Alvin Waddles, p
Blue Griffin 411—52 minutes

A most unusual collection of songs performed by tenor Rodrick Dixon, euphonium player Edward Mallett, and pianist Alvin Waddles. Most are show tunes: 'I Got Plenty o' Nuttin', 'Somewhere', 'Make them Hear You', etc. Some are spirituals and other religious songs: 'On My Journey Now, Mount Zion', 'The Lord's Prayer'. There is a medley of patriotic songs, and there are a couple well-known classical works: 'Nessun Dorma' and the Rachmaninoff Vocalise'.

All are arranged by the performers, and they are good arrangements. Tenor Dixon has a great big voice that sounds just right much of the time, but maybe a little too big for the Rachmaninoff. Euphonium player Mallet also has a big tone, a big vibrato (a little too big and omnipresent for my taste). Pianist Waddles plays very well.

American Record Guide 177
The three musicians sound very comfortable together. If you are looking for what they offer—familiar music in unusual arrangements—you will enjoy this album.

**KILPATRICK**

*Luther in Music*
Ludwig Güttler, trumpet
Berlin 848—77 minutes

This is a collection of Lutheran chorale settings, compiled from various recordings released over the past 30 years by the renowned German trumpet virtuoso Ludwig Güttler. The program begins with several settings of ‘Ein Feste Burg’ and ‘Vom Himmel Hoch, da Komm Ich Her’. There follow further settings and arrangements of a variety of Luther’s chorales, by Krebs, Buxtehude, Bach, Reger, Matthias Kleemann, and Jean Langlais. Güttler’s playing is flawless and refined. It reminds me of the 4-disc release titled *Ludwig Güttler Festliche Klänge aus Dresden*, which already in 2006 seemed to bestow on the virtuoso a kind of sanctified status (Berlin 8391; May/June 2006).

**LOEWEN**

*Like Me*
Schumann, Sanson, Stojowski, Tomasi, Krol, Bernstein
Vincent LePape, trb; Eglantina Grapshi, p; Torino Theatre Philharmonic
Summit 676—56 minutes

To hear Vincent LePape play the lovely Three Romances (1849) on trombone is to lament that Schumann never wrote solo music for the instrument. If a trombonist wants to play solo music by Schumann, works for oboe, clarinet, or cello must be borrowed. One wonders if Schumann ever heard a trombonist with tone this beautiful through a very wide range, with impeccable intonation, with smoothness and subtlety and depth of feeling. If so, might he have written something for trombone? Maybe. He was not averse to brass, having composed ‘Adagio and Allegro’ for horn and piano and a Konzertstuck for four horns and orchestra.

It surprises me that Summit includes not a word about these performers. LePape was born in France, studied in Paris with the best trombone teachers, and since 1994 has been principal trombone of the Royal Theatre orchestra in Turin, Italy. Pianist Eglantina Grapshi was born in Albania, studied in Germany, won numerous competitions, and is active as a chamber musician all around Europe. She is the official pianist for international trombone competitions in Europe.

The rest of the program offers actual trombone pieces. From the standard literature are works by Sigismund Stojowski, Henri Tomasi, and Leonard Bernstein. LePape takes Stojowski’s ‘Fantasie’ at a very measured pace; some gestures that are usually played fast are played more deliberately here. It is a very thoughtful reading with lots of rubato. Tomasi’s Trombone Concerto (1956), something of a lament on trombonist Tommy Dorsey’s ‘I’m Getting Sentimental Over You’, is given the same treatment: quite detailed, never terribly fast, plenty of expression. II (‘Nocturne’) is particularly enjoyable, with performer-added touches of swing and big, emotional climaxes. Leonard Bernstein’s ‘Elegy for Mippy’, also with performer-added swing, ends the album.

Bernard Krol’s ‘Capriccio da Camera’ is not very well known. I have only heard it previously with the piano reduction, so I am happy to hear it as originally scored for trombone with seven instruments (woodwinds, brass, piano, double bass). It has the trombonist engaging in witty dialogs and chases with individuals and ensembles. It is a rather odd work, but I like it better as an octet than as solo with piano.

This is the first recording of Davide Sanson’s 3-movement, 11-minute Concertino. I is sunny, lyrical, a very pleasant conversation between trombone and piano. II is a lovely ‘Cantilena’, III a jovial presto. Once it becomes available, it should be a popular work.

I don’t remember complaining about a brass player’s breathing before, but LePape’s is quite noisy—a very audible and distracting gasp. And the translation of the notes is awful.

**KILPATRICK**

*Playing Favorites*
Bourgeois, Goldstein, Lias, Arban
Deb Scott, trb; Ron Petti, p
Navona 6075—51 minutes

Deb Scott and Ron Petti are colleagues at Stephen F Austin State University, where she is trombone professor and he is director of piano accompanying. Ms Scott’s best playing attribute is beautiful tone in the high register, something to which all brass players aspire. Mr Petti is an excellent collaborator.

Perhaps of most interest in this program is the 3-movement, 11-minute *River Runner*, composed for Scott by Stephen Lias after they (with spouses) took a kayaking trip in Big Bend National Park. I (‘Lajitas’) is about “the excite-
Sentinel’ depicts “the shapes and moods of the somber landscape of the desert Southwest”. III (‘Rock Slide’) portrays “the terrifying and exhilarating physical sensation of bumping into boulders, skittering over loose gravel, and being pulled into a dangerous current’. Scott and Petti handle the technical challenges well and deliver an exciting reading.

Scott’s proclivity for playing in the high register helps her do well with William Goldstein’s jazz-infused Cologoy. As for the rest of the program, Ms Scott is at her lyrical, expressive best in the slow movement of Derek Bourgeois’s light-hearted but challenging Trombone Concerto (1988). The outer movements expose weaknesses, though, such as shallow low-register tone and uneven triple tonguing. And the ubiquitous Carnival of Venice, composed by JB Arban but heard here in an arrangement by Donald Hunsberger, also shows Scott’s technical shortcomings. The close miking doesn’t help.

KILPATRICK

Masters of Baroque

Vivaldi, Bach, Albinoni, Tartini, Telemann, Bellini
Guido Segers, tpt; Czech Chamber Philharmonic/ Filip Dvorak
Arcodiva 185—51 minutes

To play the little piccolo trumpet well, you must have great breath control—more control than power. The instrument cannot be forced; it must sparkle a little but sound delicate and golden. Belgian trumpeter Guido Segers, principal of the Munich Philharmonic, makes it sound like that.

Most of these 18th-Century pieces were not composed for trumpet, which at that time (when it lacked valves) could not have played them. A Vivaldi Concerto in G was originally for violin, strings, and continuo. So was the familiar Larghetto from Bach’s Concerto in D (S 972) and Tartini’s Concerto in D (D 53). Albinoni’s Concerto in D and Bellini’s Concerto in E flat—not from the baroque era, of course—were originally for oboe. All sound quite good here. So does Telemann’s Concerto for trumpet, two oboes, strings, and continuo.

Segers plays a larger instrument and makes a warm and beautiful tone in familiar melodies from Bach’s B minor Mass and cantata Ich Steh’ Mit Einem Fuss im Grabe.

KILPATRICK
You Experienced? (1989), by David Lang (b 1957). It is strange but riveting. Named for the 1960s Jimi Hendrix album and scored for electric tuba, narrator, and chamber orchestra, the 6-movement, 23-minute work is given a spirited reading. Narration by Steven Stucky (the noted composer who passed away not long after making this recording) starts in a surreal I, where he tells us we have been struck on the head, are falling to the floor, and are having fast-paced and confused thoughts on the way down. In II, Tindall’s electrified tuba vividly captures Hendrix’s avant-garde style. It’s not pretty, but it holds your attention. Narrator Stucky returns in III to tell us we’re still lying on the floor, in bad shape. IV is ‘On Hearing the Voice of God,’ and if I were hearing this in a near-death state, I’m sure I would want to live—but I would especially want this maddening music to end. V (‘Drop’) offers no relief. That blow to the head has apparently done significant damage; everything seems to be crashing down on us. The finale, ‘Sirens’ Song’ is also maddening but less brutal. Still, the sudden cessation of it all, and the complete silence afterward, is about as graphic a depiction of death as I can imagine. It is a potent, disturbing piece, and once is enough.

This is some of the most impressive tuba playing I have ever heard. Aaron Tindall is tuba professor at the Frost School of Music, University of Miami. His sound is huge down low and amusingly strong way up high. His technical skill is superb, accuracy utterly secure, sense of authority powerful.

KILPATRICK

Violin & Viola

MOZART: Duo I; Sinfonia Concertante; MARTINU: Madrigal I; SPOHR: Duo; PONCE: Sonata a Duo; HALVORSEN: Passacaglia; PLEYEL: Symphonie Concertante; BRUCH: Double Concerto

Davide Alogna, v; Jose Adolfo Alejo, va; Camerata de Coahuila/ Ramon Shade

Brilliant 95241 [2CD] 132 minutes

This is a remarkable release because it contains music for violin and viola played unaccompanied (first disc) and accompanied by orchestra. The music is generally of a very high quality. The Mozart Duo I and the Sinfonia Concertante are backbones of the repertoire for violin and viola. The Martinu Madrigal I is one of the composer’s best works for violin and viola. Spohr’s Grand Duo is heavy on smooth melody and double-stopped harmonizing. A delightfully executed work that I had not heard before is Mexican composer Manuel Ponce’s Sonata a Duo. This piece is refreshing in Latin melodies and rhythms. The famous Handel-Halvorsen Passacaglia is a showpiece for the two instruments. Ignace Pleyel’s Symphonie Concertante is a pleasant piece, but not nearly as fine as Mozart’s, especially in its use of the orchestra. I would have preferred hearing one of Pleyel’s duets, which are quite fine.

The Bruch Double Concerto was originally conceived for Bruch’s son, Max Felix, who was a clarinetist, and was originally written for clarinet and violin, but Bruch also created this version for violin and viola. As Brahms said of Bruch’s Violin Concerto 2, who wants to open a concerto with a slow movement?

Davide Alogna and Jose Adolfo Alejo are clean, efficient players, and the Camerata de Coahuila under Ramon Shade offers good support. This would be a fine acquisition for musicians looking for audition material.

Alogna plays a violin made by Giuseppe Fiorini in 1906.

MAGIL

Polychrome

RAVEL: Violin Sonata; PROKOFIEFF: Sonata 2; STRAUSS: Sonata

Tobias Feldmann; Boris Kusnezov, p

Alpha 253—67 minutes

This is the second opportunity I have had to hear this young German violinist. His earlier disc was made when he won first prize at the German Music Competition in 2012 (Sept/Oct 2014). This disc also has an eclectic program.

I am glad that Feldmann chose to play Ravel’s gorgeous Posthumous Violin Sonata. It is really one of the jewels of the repertoire if done well, and it certainly is here. This is one of the very best performances I have heard of the piece—nearly in the same league with Regis Pasquier’s intoxicating performance (Jan/Feb 2009).

The Prokofieff sonata, arranged from the composer’s flute sonata at the behest of David Oistrakh, is one of the neoclassical masterpieces of the 20th Century. This not as affecting as a performance as a few others I know and cannot compare with the expressive performance by Franziska Pietsch (Nov/Dec 2016), but it is shaped with the care and precision of a jeweler. The Strauss sonata, one of the composer’s more significant juvenilia, is the last chamber work the composer wrote. It already has the heaven-storming character of his mature works, with his characteristic ascend-
ing melodic lines. Again, this is one of the very best performances I know of this work.

Feldmann is a very clean, controlled player. His playing here is more committed than it was on his earlier disc, and his feelings have deepened. With time, he may learn to throw technique to the winds and play with true abandon, but I am very happy with how he plays now.

Feldmann plays a violin made by Nicolo Gagliano in Naples in 1769 with a bow made by the incomparable Dominique Peccatte.

**Czech Viola Sonatas**
Martinu, Husa, Kalabis, Feld
Kristina Fialova; Igor Ardashev, p
Supraphon 4211—61 minutes

This disc contains a number of un- or little-recorded works. Is that a viola joke? Well, let's see.

The only piece I can find anywhere else is the Martinu sonata of 1935, a two-movement composition of beauty and energy, as one might expect from this great composer. My heart leapt when I saw the name of an old friend, conductor and composer Karel Husa (1921-2017) who inspired me in my youth in the Cornell University Orchestra and who died recently in North Carolina. His 1945 Suite, Opus 5 is a short and lively three-movement piece in a more modern but still very attractive Czech idiom. Then comes Viktor Kalabis (1925-2000) whose Opus 84 Sonata of 1997 is in one strong and lyrical movement and is unpublished. Finally we meet Jindrich Feld (1925-2007) whose three-movement sonata of 1955 is the most lush-sounding work here, a most satisfying example of Czech romanticism.

All of this lovely music is played with warmth and clarity by these two fine musicians. This release gives us little-known music by fine composers. It makes an important addition to my collection.

**Tubes Only Favorites**
Sibelius, Fauré, Monti, Debussy, Suk, Falla, Schubert, Shostakovich, Korngold, Rachmaninoff, Paganini, Arensky, R & C Schumann, Chausson, Dvorak
Daniel Gaede, v; Wolfgang Kühnl, p
Tacet 229—66 minutes

“Tubes Only Favorites”? What's this, RCA tubes, socks, tires, department store vacuum tube systems? No, it about making recordings using only equipment made with good old-fashioned tubes—microphones, amplifiers, pre-amps, faders, recording equipment. Yes, I was skeptical too, knowing that good recordings depend on many other factors as well—halls, mike placement, and all the production steps that affect what we actually put into our players. But once I started listening, all skepticism vanished. This is without question the smoothest sounding album I have heard in years. And the mike placement is perfect, with a warm balanced set-it-and-forget-it sound.

On top of that, when I was done listening, my spouse who was ironing simply said, “That one's a keeper, isn’t it!” Gaede is the former concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic, Kühnl is pianist for orchestras in Berlin, and here they make a stunning hand-in-glove team.

Sibelius's Novelette, Op. 120:1, and Fauré’s ‘Apres un Reve’ are long-lined and lyrically flowing with rich tone color and subtle rubato. The duo turns Vittorio Monti’s famous Czardas into an old-world “my darling babushka” foot stomp with moments of recitative and portamento. Their tight rhythms and consummate style are nonpareil. These arrangements of Debussy’s ‘Valse Romantique’ and especially ‘Clair de Lune’ are exquisitely played; I listened intently to both artists wrap themselves around each other’s leads.

Falla’s ‘Jota’ moves from a shimmer to a slight glissando to a tour de force with a few violin bars played eerily on the bridge. Schubert’s Serenade Leise Flehen Meine Lieder (Silent Plead My Songs) has such slur potential, but here it moves alertly and elegantly. In Shostakovich’s Prelude, Op. 34:1 the violin digs out the melancholy beautifully with double stops. Fauré’s ‘Berceuse’ is the perfect follow-up to ‘Pierrot’s Dance-Song’ from Korngold’s Tote Stadt—same key but contrasting brightness with darkness. And Paganini’s ‘Cantabile’ is the perfect follow-up to Rachmaninoff’s Romance, Op. 6:1. Gaede and Kühnl wrap the Rachmaninoff in melancholy, rubato, and deep emotion, turning it into a statement. In the Paganini listen to Kühnl’s obbligato—infinitely varied, no monotony, and what a wonderfully inventive, lithe, (improvised?) coda.

Arensky’s Serenade, Op. 30:2 is straight out of Sardi’s, as everyone gradually puts down their silverware and can’t help but listen. And listen to the breadth of violin shading and expression in Schumann’s Fantasiestücke, Op. 73:1—“hear ‘em again for the first time”!

I’ve heard Kreisler’s arrangement of Dvo-
rak’s ‘Slavonic Fantasy’ a hundred times but never as lovely as this, in both instruments. Clara Schumann’s Romance, Op. 22/1, is not especially outstanding. The only real disappointment is the final selection, Rachmaninoff’s ‘Vocalise’. It was recorded apart from the other 18 selections; the sound is not as resonant—more air is needed around both instruments. Nor is the performance as inspired: no portamentos in the violin, the transcription seems thin, and at 5:20 its full length is cut short.

Forget those last two selections, 9 minutes out of 66. As my spouse said, “This one’s a keeper.”

**French**

**Magma Duo**

**POULENC:** Violin Sonata; **NAMAVAR:** In de Magmakamer; **VERMEULEN:** Sonata; **COPLAND:** 2 Pieces; **IGUDESMAN:** Sonata 2

The Magma Duo is violinist Emmy Storms and pianist Cynthia Liem. They are a pair of young musicians who, I believe, are based in The Netherlands. Both are very fine technicians and fully up to the demands of the pieces assembled here.

The Poulenc sonata shows the duo’s strengths and weaknesses. Storm handles the technical demands on the violin as if they are nothing, but the tragic character of the music just doesn’t come through. Reza Namavar’s (b 1980) *In the Magma Chamber* is a lighthearted piece with a certain humor. What it has to do with magma is beyond me, but it is apparently related to the duo’s name. The booklet notes do not enlighten me.

Dutch composer Matthijs Vermeulen’s (1888-1967) two-movement Violin Sonata of 1925 shows certain modernist characteristics of the time and a striking degree of individuality. It begins with a very slow, mysterious movement that sounds like something that could have been written at least 50 years later. The following movement is split between fast and slow. There is an ominous quality to the constant, slow, steady bass line and how it contrasts with faster figures in the right hand and the violin. This piece doesn’t sound like any I had heard before. Vermeulen was an interesting character who had great difficulty getting his music performed, and this sonata was no exception, having had to wait until 1963 for its first performance. It is an interesting work, and I certainly don’t believe it had to wait because it wasn’t good enough. Rather, it was ahead of its time.

Aaron Copland’s Two Pieces from 1926 begin with a Nocturne that sounds like it could accompany Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks* and concludes with the silly ‘Ukelele Serenade’. The Bulgarian Alexsey Iguidesman’s (b 1973) Violin Sonata 2 bears the stylistic eclecticism common to postmodernism, opening with a Tango Russo and following with a very slow, moody Intermezzo with a constant rhythm in the piano and a slightly pleading melody in the violin; concluding with a perky movement titled ‘Rush-Hour’.

The Magma Duo has assembled an interesting program. The avant-garde and postmodern works play to their strengths, but they are not quite deep enough for the tragic Poulenc. I wish that the recorded sound, though clear and well balanced, had more allure.

**Mutterissimo**

Anne-Sophie Mutter, v

DG 4796834 [2CD] 150 minutes

If you are a big fan of this violinist you will want this, but be warned: one disc is isolated movements from violin concertos, and the other is short “encore” pieces, often oddly done. (You have never heard such weird hesitations in the two Brahms Hungarian Dances.) That disc does have the Prokofieff Sonata in D—the only complete work of any substance. And I think it has all been available before.

I can only say that despite the excellent sound and collaborators I have no appetite for this sort of thing—but then I have never been thrilled by her playing, either. She always strikes me as a little sloppy. She does have character; her playing is not very much like anyone else’s. You just have to prefer her quirky approach and tone. I think the best thing here is a movement of the Korngold concerto (Previn conducting), and I don’t think we reviewed that recording when it came out (2003?). At any rate, if that interests you, find the whole thing (still around on DG, I think). Why would anyone want to listen to mere movements?

**Vroon**

I would rather control the modes of music in a city than its laws, because music has a more decisive effect on the formation of character.

Damon of Athens

May/June 2017
L’Ange & le Diable
Chouchane Siranossian, v; Jos van Immerseel, hp—Alpha 255—68 minutes

This baroque violin recital by Chouchane Siranossian returns to works often performed by an earlier generation of violinists, such as Henryk Szeryng, to begin their recitals. This continuity of repertoire (if not performance style) is discussed in Reinhard Goebel’s booklet essay. The three sonatas are among the most difficult of the baroque violin repertoire: Pietro Locatelli, Sonata in D minor (Op.6:12), Jean-Marie Leclair, Sonata in C (Op.9:8), and Giuseppe Tartini, Sonata in G minor, Devil’s Trill.

Siranossian has the technical skill to perform these compositions but she is perhaps too careful and sedate. For comparisons, I got out my other recordings of the Tartini, including Albert Spalding (originally recorded in 1935) and Nathan Milstein (Nov/Dec 1998: 277). While I very much disliked the pounding piano accompaniments, there was much more drama in their performances. As to period instrument performances—and there are not many—Elizabeth Wallfisch sounds more at home in the Tartini (May/June 2000), and though there is less vibrato, there is still a great deal of Milstein’s sense of drama. Note should be made of Andrew Manze’s extravagant recording as an unaccompanied violin sonata (Harmonia Mundi 907213).

The sole accompaniment on this new release is harpsichord, and Jos van Immerseel brings both creativity and sensitivity to his playing, which is also evident in the selections from Antoine Forqueray’s Suite 5 in C minor for viola da gamba, whose own son made these arrangements for harpsichord.

BREWER

Joy
PATERSON: Violin Sonata 1; CORIGLIANO: Sonata; DZUBAY: Capriccio; SANGREGORY: Reverberation

Linya Su, v; Blair McMillen, p
AMR 1045—67 minutes

Linya Su was born in Taipei, Taiwan, and now lives in New York, New York, as does Blair McMillen. Su has a rather nasal tone and little imagination; her technique is sufficient but not impressive, and she comes across as emotionally distant from the music.

Robert Paterson’s sonata (2003) is a four-movement neo-classical piece. Parts of it remind me of gentle Prokofieff; elsewhere, the writing is spikier. The quiet adagio coda ends with a violin scratch meant to depict a needle yanked off a record. II, ‘Schizando’, is the scherzo, and the lack of vibrancy in the playing stands out with every phrase. III is a slow “tickling clock” movement, and IV is Stravinsky-esque. The sonata as a whole has grown on me; it is not a masterpiece, and the piano part could be more creative, but it is appealing, and I’d love to hear a better performance.

As you can probably imagine from what I’ve already written, the Corigliano doesn’t flourish here, either; it’s the most technical of the pieces, and that pushes her tone into screechiness sometimes.

David Dzubay’s Capriccio is from 1998; the harmonic language isn’t too far from Bartok, and the craftsmanship is apparent. Paul San-Gregory’s Reverberation (1991) is in four short movements: ‘Reflectively,’ ‘Playfully,’ ‘Expressively,’ and ‘Energetically.’ It is also neo-tonal yet fairly dissonant, and the mood is stern. Both pieces are worth hearing, and, really, Su has chosen a fine program; I just wish the performance were better.

ESTEP

Cecilia Zilliacus, v
BACH: Partita in D minor; HENRYSON: Sonata; SANDSTROM: Dansa

with Lena Willemark, voice
BIS 2159—77 minutes

This is an unusual violin-voice album of Bach and Bach-inspired contemporary music. It opens with violinist Cecilia Zilliacus’s delicate, resonant performance of Bach’s Partita. The recording, made in a church in Sweden, has a special sense of space, allowing the music to float in an ethereal cloud. Zilliacus is a sensitive Bach player: she always sounds musical, never mechanical, molding each phrase lovingly. But there is more than the Partita in this rendering: interwoven into the performance are the chorales from the Bach violin parts, sung with straight-toned eloquence by Lena Willemark, converting a solo violin work into one for violin and voice. Willemark performs two chorales a cappella and interpolates chorale material into the Ciaccona finale. If one wants the Partita served straight-up, one should avoid this, of course, but I find it a worthy adventure.

In the spirit of Bach violin music is Swedish composer Svante Henryson’s 2009 Sonata, with its grave, symmetrical lines and austere ambiance. Exceptions are the ‘Three-headed Ostrich,’ the lively fourth movement, inspired by the composer’s children, and the

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Bartokian central section of II. In those sections Zilliacus gets to show off her virtuosity.

In the final work, Sven-David Sanstrom’s ‘Dansa’, Willemark sings a variety of riffs, some folkloric, others Bachian, still others thoroughly contemporary, with leaping intervals or near-inaudible whispers, all to a poem by Maria Wine. In one section, Zilliacus picks up a fiddle and juxtaposes a polka with quotations from a Bach Chaconne.

Skillfully crafted as this work is, it has so many Bachian gestures that I found myself longing for Bach. And why not? In the notes, Zilliacus herself says, “Why play anything else, really?”

SULLIVAN

18th Century Masonic Music
Mozart, Salieri, Cherubini
Annunciata Musical Academy/ Sergio Delmastro
MV 101—80 minutes

The inspiration for this release appears to come from recent scholarly investigations into the estate of Baron Peter von Braun, a director of the Viennese court theaters. Amidst his English gardens the baron between 1796 and 1800 had constructed a largely hidden Temple of the Night, which contained a grand statue of the Queen of the Night, placed on a Roman chariot that was pulled by two horses. This grotto was the site of many Masonic rituals, which were accompanied by music—including, we think, these pieces. (Today only ruins of the Temple survive.)

The most interesting piece is certainly the Mozart Serenade for 13 Winds, which in 1799 was transcribed for eight winds by an unknown musician in the Vienna Court Theater. The other works are a Small Serenade (Piccola serenata) by Salieri in the traditional four movements (fast, slow, minuet, very fast), a March of Cherubini, and Salieri’s Harmony for a Temple in the Night.

The nine players of the Annunciata Musical Academy play period instruments: two 2-keyed oboes, an 8-keyed B-flat clarinet, a 5-keyed B-flat clarinet, two baroque bassoons, two horns, and double bass. Their playing is spirited and musical, but your appreciation of this will depend on your tolerance for 80 minutes of sketchy intonation and the sound of these instruments. The arrangement of the Mozart is effective enough, but hardly an improvement over the original. The works of Salieri and Cherubini are pleasant and harmless.

SULLIVAN

French Saxophone Quartets
Bozza, Desenclos, Dubois, Francaix, Pierne, Schmitt
Kenari Quartet
Naxos 573549—65 minutes

In 1846, Belgian instrument maker Adolphe Sax turned heads in Paris with his “saxophone”, a single-reed instrument intended to connect the woodwind and brass sections of the expanding romantic orchestra. But the orchestra is a tough club—the clarinet had to wait almost 50 years to become a regular member—and Sax knew that in the meantime solo and chamber music would have to drive the enthusiasm for his creation.

In the late 1850s Sax opened a publishing house and asked several leading musicians in Paris to create a repertoire for his invention. Among those that responded are Joseph Arban, Leon Chic, Jules Demersseman, Hyacinthe Klose, Jean-Nicholas Savari, and Belgian compatriot and violinist Jean-Baptiste Singele, who wrote the first known saxophone quartet (1857).

The efforts earned the saxophone only a handful of invitations to the orchestra hall, but they did establish the instrument as an important constituent in the recital hall, especially in France.

Here the Kenari Quartet, a prize-winning ensemble formed in 2012 by four Indiana University college students, explores the legacy of the French saxophone quartet in the early to middle 20th Century.

The program consists of the Jean Francaix Petite Quartet (1935), the Gabriel Pierné Introduction and Variations (1937), the Eugene Bozza Andante and Scherzo (1943), the Florent Schmitt Quartet (1943), the Pierre Dubois Quartet (1955), and the Alfred Desenclos Quartet (1964). Members of the group include Bob Eason (soprano), Kyle Baldwin (alto), Corey Dundee (tenor), and Steven Banks (baritone).

The Kenari Quartet is one of the best young ensembles to appear in several years. Their playing is very professional, fusing exceptional balance, blend, clarity, and control with superb technique, outstanding teamwork, and skillfully nuanced phrasing. The scores have room for more risk-taking in volume, color, and personality; and as the group grows together, some of that may evolve. Still, they form a fine-tuned machine humming with Gallic charm, and even the most fastidious listener will be swept down the Avenue des Champs-Elysees.

ALTHOUSE
Inventions
Williams, Wolfgang, Broughton, Mackey, Daugherty
North Texas Wind Symphony/ Eugene Corporon
GIA 1004—75 minutes

Discoveries
Mackey, Dooley, Nagao, Schoenber, Feld, Corigliano, Daugherty
North Texas Wind Symphony/ Eugene Corporon
GIA 1005—77 minutes

Masks & Machines
Dooley, Perrine, Gandolfi, Oquin, Salfelder, Briggs
University of Florida Wind Symphony/ David Waybright
Mark 52466—79 minutes

Confluences
Boerma, Iannaccone, Perrine, Mennin, Barnes, Oquin, Spaniola, Zare, Schop, Biedenbender
Drake University Wind Symphony/ Robert Meunier
Mark 52493—56 minutes

Hosannas
Husa, Corigliano, Ives, Boysen, Maslanka
Stephen Ng, t; West Chester University Wind Ensemble/ Andrew Yozviak
GIA 1005—77 minutes

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Hosannas
Husa, Corigliano, Ives, Boysen, Maslanka
Stephen Ng, t; West Chester University Wind Ensemble/ Andrew Yozviak
GIA 1005—77 minutes

In the World of Spirits
Jindrich Feld
Chorus, orchestra
Mark 52466—49 minutes

The concert band—or wind ensemble, wind symphony, symphonic band—is alive and well in American universities, and a steady stream of fine recordings proves it. Some bands make a recording every year. Not to be outdone, Eugene Corporon’s North Texas Wind Symphony makes two. GIA 1004 (Inventions) is a spectacular album that opens with John Williams’s terrific march ‘For the President’s Own’ (2013), which in turn opens with a long and spectacular trumpet-section fanfare. Most of the playing is actually rather quiet. Gernot Wolfgang’s 15-minute Three Short Stories (2001) has a swinging ‘Uncle Bebop’, soulful ‘Rays of Light’ with a series of beautiful woodwind solos, and a lively ‘Latin Dance’. Bruce Broughton’s 11-minute In the World of Spirits (2011) is a wonderful work that pairs technical challenges with spooky sounds. Michael Daugherty’s haunting Winter Dreams (2015) ponders the work of Iowa artist Grant Wood. The album includes two pieces by John Mackey: the whirling ‘Ringmaster’s March’ (2014) and the 3-movement, 31-minute Wine-Dark Sea (2014), an epic depiction of tales from The Odyssey. The work was commissioned and recently recorded by the University of Texas (Jan/Feb 2017: 217). I enjoyed that recording, but this one is a knockout. UT’s seems restrained; NT’s is a sonic spectacular.

GIA 1005 (Discoveries) includes some of the same composers as GIA 1004; they are big in the band world these days. In Sasparilla (2005), John Mackey’s first work for wind band, effects of the alcohol dispensed in an old-west saloon become increasingly apparent. Paul Dooley’s 3-movement, 10-minute Masks and Machines (2015) was inspired by early 20th-Century bauhaus art, the music of Stravinsky, 17th-Century Venetian brass music, and so forth. June Nagao composed ‘The Earth’ in 2013 as an original addition to an arrangement of Holst’s Planets. It includes quotes and paraphrases from Holst’s original. In his 5-movement, 23-minute American Symphony (2011), Adam Schoenberg hoped he could help the country pull together after Barack Obama’s election. It is a beautiful piece—especially the ethereal II—that attempts to tell a big story of hope. What a turn that story has taken in recent months!

Jindrich Feld’s 3-movement, 9-minute Divertimento (2000) is lighthearted, John Corigliano’s ‘Elegy’ (1965) serious and dramatic, Michael Daugherty’s Rio Grande (2015) full of exaggerated cinematic action. Of the two North Texas albums, I am most taken by GIA 1004, but this one is good, too.

Mark 52466 (Masks and Machines) is named for the same Paul Dooley piece as heard in the NT recording. Here it’s done by the University of Florida Wind Symphony, and done well. If we must compare the two accounts, perhaps the NT band’s soloists are stronger. Some of the chords and gestures in Aaron Perrine’s Only Light remind me strongly of Lauridsen’s ‘Lux Aeterna’. Michael Gandolfi’s Latin dance-infused Vientos y Tangos is a popular wind band work these days. Adam Gorb’s 5-movement, 15-minute Yiddish Dances is lively and full of color. Wayne Oquin’s Affirmation is lovely, the solo playing obviously by young musicians. Kathryn Salfelder’s Crossing Parallels is eerie, marred by some shaky intonation. Roger Briggs’s noisy Boogie & Blues elaborates on material from the old ‘Muscle Shoals Blues.’ Very boomy percussion thickens an already ambient recorded sound.

Mark 52493 (Confluences) has the Drake University Wind Symphony opening with Scott Boerma’s bustling Cityscape (2006), proceeds to Anthony Iannaccone’s noisy After a Gentle Rain (1981), then finally quiets down in Aaron Perrine’s Only Light (2014). The program
includes a few older works like Peter Mennin’s venerable Canzona (1951), dating back to a time when mirroring was a way to make music sound modern but comprehensible. James Barnes’s ‘Yorkshire Ballad’ (1985) is always pleasant, and a Bach chorale is also included (it is quite rare to hear a Bach chorale on a band recording). Wayne Oquin’s Affirmation (2014) is given a moving reading. Joseph Spaniola’s jazz-infused Blow, Eastern Winds (2015) is quite busy, and of course a work with the word tranquil in it is not (Roger Zare’s ‘Mare Tranquillitatis’, 2012). David Biedenbender’s ‘Luminescence’ (2009) sparkles. Good playing by this university band under the direction of Robert Meunier.

Mark 52463 (Hosannas) opens with Karel Husa’s rousing ‘Smetana Fanfare’ (1984), based on two Smetana pieces. John Corigliano’s gentle ‘Lullaby for Natalie’ (2012) contrasts the noisy opener nicely. Old Home Days is a step back in time: Jonathan Elkus’s arrangements of five Charles Ives songs and piano pieces. My favorite is the wonderful little ‘Slow March’. I also enjoy Andrew Boysen’s dramatic This is the Drum (2012), which includes lots of (need it be said?) percussion, plus some very faint singing by the band. The big piece is David Maslanka’s 7-movement, 24-minute Hosannas (2015). I is very slow and meditative. II is also slow but with driving rhythms, propulsive minimalism, and big, ominous bass notes. After III, a quiet rumination by the clarinet section on ‘O Sacred Head’, IV is dramatic: at first discordant, then triumphant. V is another chorale, this time set for brass: first uncomfortably low for low brass, then for trumpets and trombones, and then for muted brasses. VI has a sort of infernal under-world kind of sound until it brightens. Finally, VII (the longest movement) has WCU faculty tenor Stephen Ng singing a Richard Beale poem. I especially enjoy the high-pitched portion where Ng abandons vibrato. Fine work in this recording by conductor Andrew Yozviak.

**War Memorials**

Britten, Holloway, Pankhurst, McCabe, Dobson, McGhee, Higgins

Tredegar Town Band/ Ian Porthouse; Cory Band/ Philip Harper, Robert Childs

NMC 226—79 minutes

I listened to the first piece and wondered how such a cheerful, bubbly, intricate work as Benjamin Britten’s ‘Occasional Overture’ could be included in a program called War Memorials. Then I learned it was composed for a 1946 (postwar) broadcast on a new BBC radio station devoted to the arts. The BBC Symphony played it, Britten didn’t like the performance, and it was not heard again until 1983. Tredegar Town Band is the very fine brass band in this reading.

The same band is heard in Lucy Pankhurst’s moving and very creative Voices (In Memoriam), which commemorates the now-famous Christmas Eve celebrated in the trenches by opposing forces in World War I. The Tredegar brass players also perform the album’s big piece, actually a collection of eight works by five composers. It is a pleasure to hear these fine players in Diversions after Benjamin Britten and St Edmundsbury Fanfare, which includes Britten’s four St Edmundsbury fanfares (the first three are combined, ingeniously, in the last). Interludes (Diversions) are by Pankhurst, Simon Dobson, Paul McGhee, and Gavin Higgins. Pankhurst’s ‘Prelude—His Depth’ is thoughtful, Dobson’s ‘Scherzo—His Vitality’ virtuosic, McGhee’s ‘March—His Sympathy’ spooky and without any resemblance to a march, and Higgins’s ‘Toccata—His Skill’ bursting with energy.

The Cory Band plays the rest of the album. Robin Holloway’s two War Memorials are fairly long, and both run the gamut of emotions and technical challenges. The Maunsell Forts, so named for anti-aircraft gun emplacements, is by turns moody and violent. Fine readings by both bands. They play in tune.

**KILPATRICK**

Ars Elaboratio

Ensemble Scholastica/ Rebecca Bain

ATMA 2755—72 minutes

This is a curious, even fascinating release, but also odd.

This group has been exploring the idea of plainchant elaboration: that is, how church singers of the 10th to 13th century would make their own expansions of or additions to chant melodies, in the context of the first developments in polyphonic part writing. Such elaborations would not have been preserved in most cases. This ensemble has sought to identify what those practices of elaboration might have been and then to recreate them.

This release is the fruit of long and careful research—and probably much experimentation. The program offers 13 selections, where the performers have not only filled out a supplemental voice part or two, but even added
texts and created polytextual pieces of their own. The results are often quite interesting, even if it must be owned that they are entirely speculative.

But there is a major difficulty in all this. The ensemble consists of nine singers, some of whom also play instruments. They are all women. Now, I know I risk being promptly hanged from the nearest lamppost, but Latin liturgical music in the Middle Ages was by and for men. Yes, boys’ voices would sometimes have been used in some grander services. And there might have been some rare places (some convents) where women might well have sung Latin liturgical music. And it is true that most of the original chants treated here celebrate female saints (Scholastica, Cecilia, Catherine, of Alexandria, and the Virgin), except John the Baptist.

The chant literature was of and for men—monks and church singers. This ensemble follows in the footsteps of those feminist commandos, Anonymous 4, who were determined to hijack male music. To my historical objections, I add the personal feeling that male voices sound strong and natural in chant, whereas female voices sound forced and cumulatively cooing. (There, I’ve said it. Get the noose!) There is the further problem that these performers introduce instruments (even with solo moments) in a number of the selections, and one is a solo for organetto. Historical evidence for such recourse is slender and highly debatable.

These are undoubtedly skilled performers who sound lovely. But that, of course, was part of the trap of Anonymous 4. This program is stimulating for the exploration of lost practices in the age where plainchant was giving birth to polyphony, and on that basis it may appeal to serious students of chant. But as a venture in feminist speculation I cannot recommend it.

The booklet contains extensive notes, texts and translations.

Llibre Vermell
Capella Reial de Catalunya; Hesperion XXI/ Jordi Savall
Alia Vox 9919—71:46 (+DVD: 73:45)
The Red Book of the Abbey of Montserrat is one of the famous treasures of Spanish medieval music along with the Codex Calixtinus and Las Huelgas manuscript. So there are many recordings, including at least one by Savall himself from 1978 for EMI’s Reflexe series. The manuscript transmits ten pre-Ars Nova compositions on folios 21 through 27 (you can see high-resolution color photos of all of them at lluisvives.com).

The highly-orchestrated performances of these works that Savall recreates here are extremely speculative. For example, ‘Stella splendens’, in the manuscript, consists of two parts, a vocal part with text underlaid, with refrain and several verses, and a tenor part, both of them notated with an F-clef on the next-to-bottom line of a four-line staff (i.e., no indication of any sounds higher than a baritone voice). Savall adds women’s voices an octave above, adds words to the tenor, adds an instrumental ensemble of recorder, viol, hurdy-gurdy, shawm, cornetto, sackbut, harp, bells, etc. etc. It’s lovely theater, but how much does it have to do with the 13th Century? This is probably best enjoyed with the texts and translations in hand, watching the DVD (Alia Vox offers a lovely book, worth the price of admission in itself.)

Hic et Nunc
Capella de Ministrers/ Carles Magraner
Licanus 1641

To characterize this release, I am tempted to use one of our President’s favorite words: “disaster!”

It is, on the face of it, an epilogue to a project that Magraner carried out for the Licanus label in 2016, issued either in three single discs or in a book-package set (N/D 2016). That was a commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the death of Ramon Llull (1233-1316), the wide-ranging medieval preacher, theologian, visionary, and poet. He is regarded as the founder of Catalan literature, and so has inspired Catalan writers and musicians to extensive celebrations.

Not least among Llull’s many activities was his advocacy of intercultural contact, promoting the learning of Arabic, and undertaking pilgrimages with the goal of bringing all mankind to a tolerant Christian faith.

In the previous discs for Licanus, Magraner symbolized Llull’s efforts in a collection of the music of his time, derived from a range of sources. Here he is at it again, in a public concert given in July of 2016 (with recurrent sallies of applause). This time, his group consists of only five instrumentalists, one of Middle Eastern origin. The 20 selections are once again drawn from various cultures around the Mediterranean: French, Provencal, Galician (Alfon-
so’s Cantigas), Spanish monastic, Catalan, Italian, Greek, North African.

Most of these were vocal pieces, but here they are presented in instrumental arrangements, which, of course, totally destroy their message and meaning. Moreover, the arrangements are mostly insipid, with a tendency to “orientalize” their sound as much as possible. No respect is given to the variety of cultural identities that would have delighted Llull.

The concert program is called “Hic et nunc” (here and now), but nothing is said to explain the title. The booklet (full of photos of the players) has only a single page of simplistic notes in four languages. The translators put Lull’s name through an absurdity of contortions, culminating in the stupidity of “Raymond Lully”.

The mixing of this concert was terrible, creating an impossible dynamic range. There is one spoken passage, which is almost inaudible. Many of the instrumental arrangements are so soft, even blurred, that you must turn up your volume, at least until the inevitable arrival of the drumming, at which you must leap to turn it down. Not relaxing listening.

I can see no argument in favor of this release.

BARKER

Metamorfosi Trecento
Transformations of Myth in the Ars Nova
La Fonte Musica/ Michele Pasotti
Alpha 286—63:37

This is more than just a program of vocal pieces from the 14th Century (trecento or 1300s). It explores the thesis that the practitioners of the Ars Nova, conscious that they were transforming music itself, were also captivated by themes in Ovid’s retelling of stories in ancient myths of the physical transformations of characters. The poetry these composers set began with a mythic transformation and used it to make a comparison to a lover’s transformation in their own world.

The approach is to a large repertoire, extending from the Ars Nova formulator himself, Philippe de Vitry, of the early 14th Century to Matteo da Perugia of the early 15th. Also brought together are two different regional traditions. On the French side we have Guillaume de Machaut and the more obscure Solange. On the Italian side we have the famous Francesco Landini and Jacopo da Bologna, plus the less known Maestro Piero, Paolo da Firenze, Bartolino da Padova, Niccolo da Perugia, and Filippotto da Caserta. Pieces by all these composers are jumbled willy-nilly, and little concern is shown for stylistic differences, nationalities, and generations. The booklet annotations devote little attention to the music itself and more to the poetry.

Fortunately, the performances are excellent. There are four singers: two sopranos, a tenor, and a baritone. Their work is handsome vocally and shows careful attention to poetic expression. There are also six instrumentalists (two on fiddles, one each on recorder, clavicymbalum, harp, and lute), and their role is, for the most part, kept proper and responsible. But 2 of the 15 items are given only instrumentally, which rather contravenes the poetic interest of the program.

The recording is vivid and lifelike, but, for some reason, there is a blank-out at the beginning of track 6, which creates an initial silence of over 20 seconds, with a loss of the opening words, before the sound does kick in. Strange that this defect was not caught.

Full texts and translations are included. Certainly this is a survey of a stylistic development not often offered to collectors of Medieval music.

BARKER

Imago
Virgilio nella Musica del Rinascimento
De Labyrintho/ Walter Testolin
Stradivarius 37065—59 minutes

Classical Greek and Roman poets used a highly metrical system, quite at odds with the usual stress system of speech, built rather on the juxtaposition of long and short vowel lengths, eventually codified in what has been called an “Alexandrian” system. By the late 15th Century, composers who were inspired by Renaissance humanistic ideals of recreating ancient culture began to set the verses of ancient Roman poets. Through most of their efforts, they ignored the “Alexandrian” traditions of quantitative metrics and simply used the normal stress values of Latin prosody—an idea somewhat dubiously labelled “Aristotelian”.

Only a few musicians, following the work of humanist scholar Konrad Celtis, attempted to create settings that honored the ancient metrical values in Latin texts (especially of Horace). But, by the latter half of the 16th Century, French musicians were caught up in transferring metrical and quantitative principles to the setting of French poetry written according to the rules of vers measures. By the 17th Century the setting of ancient Latin texts was no longer a serious concern of composers.

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There have been recorded samplings of some Renaissance treatments of classical texts, but the first to explore the subject in depth was a program recorded in 2000 by Paul Van Nevel and his Huélgas Ensemble (Harmonia Mundi 901739: J/A 2002, p. 212) under the title “Le Chant de Virgile”. Of its 15 selections 8 were settings of poetry by Virgil (from his Aeneid), 4 of Horace, and 1 by Catullus (in a paraphrase text). The Horace examples (3 by Ludwig Senfl, 1 by Cipriano da Rore) are in the compound asclepiadian metrical formula; but Van Nevel, who has a strong “anti-Alexandrian” bias, did his best to blur or de-emphasize the original metrics. In the Virgil settings his bias was inconsequential, for he had picked ones by composers who ignored the classical epic meter of dactylic hexameter the poet employed. He also had a needless penchant for frequent introduction of instruments.

Eight years later, a somewhat similar recording, made by Roberto Testa’s ensemble, Daedalus, was issued by (Alpha 144) under the title of “Musa Latina: l’invention de l’Antique”—so far as I can find, never reviewed by us. It explored Renaissance attention to ancient Latin poetry and its influences. Of its 13 selections, 3 were examples of settings of antique-style poems in Latin or Italian, imitating classical writers, and 3 others offered specimens of French vers measures. But 6 pieces set actual ancient verses: 1 from Ovid, 2 from Horace, and 3 from Virgil. In all of them Festa’s performers followed the original (”Alexandrian”) metrics.

This new program has a basic difference from the start: save for 2 of its 13 items, it is specifically devoted to the poetry of Virgil. Of those 11, all but one deal only with verses from the Aeneid; 2 more treat poems imitative of Virgil. A passage from Book I of the Aeneid, beginning ‘O socii neque enim ignari sumus ante malorum’ is presented in the same two settings—by Adrian Willaert and Cipriano de Rore—that Van Nevel gave. The lines from the epic most often set by Renaissance composers were from Book IV, the dying words of Queen Dido, beginning ‘Dulces exuviae, dum fata deusque sinebat’. Of those settings, Van Nevel had presented 6, by Josquin Desprez, Jehan Mouton, Mabrian de Orto, Jacob Vaet, Theodoricus Gerarde, and Orlandus Lassus.

Festa gave a more expanded text setting of Dido’s final words (going back to the line ‘At trepidaet coepitis immanibus effera Dido’) by Jacques Arcadelt; Festa also included a setting of some verses from Virgil’s Bucolics. Testolin has repeated the settings of this text by Josquin, Mabriano (if only instrumentally), and Lassus, but he has turned otherwise to ones by Arcadelt, Cipriano de Rore, and Adrian Willaert. In addition, Testolin includes another Josquin setting, of lines from Book IV, beginning ‘Fama malum qua non aliud velovius ullam’.

Now, the composers in all but one of these examples never bothered with respect for the Virgilian metrics. The exception is Arcadelt. Moreover, the program opens with another piece by Lassus, a setting of lines from Virgil’s Bucolics, beginning ‘Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi’. In those two cases, the composers did honor the poet’s metrics, and Testolin gives them their due. Otherwise, the metrical question is ignored.

Van Nevel had discussed that matter head-on in his notes for the Harmonia Mundi release. Festa was up front on the matter from his pro-Alexandrian perspective. But nothing whatsoever is said about it in the notes for Testolin’s Stradivarius booklet. In sonic terms, moreover, both Van Nevel and Testolin are primarily concerned with presenting lovely Renaissance music; Festa’s performances are variously effective and are also marred by too much instrumental intrusion. In the final reckoning, Festa’s program is perhaps the most fully responsible investigation of the issue of metrics in Renaissance composers dealing with classical Latin poetry, though there is certainly room for other attempts.

The performances are quite beautiful and are well recorded. Full texts and translations.

BARKER

Renaissance

ALLEGR: Miserere mei, Deus; TAVERNER: Quemadmodum; WHITE: Exaudiat te Dominus; TALLIS: Lamentations II; BYRD: Domine, quis Habitavit; BRUMEL: Lamentations; PALESTRA: Magnificat; Nunc Dimittis

Byrd Ensemble/ Markdavin Obenza
Scribe 8—72 minutes (206-919-2471)

The Byrd Ensemble is a Seattle-based vocal consort of professional singers under the direction of Markdavin Obenza, who also sings tenor with the ensemble and is producer for the label. The group performs regularly at St Mark’s Cathedral in Seattle, and they have also appeared in New York, Boston, and London.

Here we have substantial works of Renaissance polyphony. The earliest is the set of Lamentations by Antoine de Brumel (c1460-1513), and the latest is the familiar ‘Miserere
Mei, Deus’ by Gregorio Allegri (1582-1652), sung with embellishments to the voice parts. The heart of the program consists of three motets on psalm texts by English composers. ‘Quemadmodum’ by John Taverner (c1490-1545) survives untexted in the sources, but the title allows a reconstruction of the motet. ‘Exaudi te Dominus’ by Robert White (c1538-74) is a work with a powerful cumulative effect achieved largely through the technique of *gimell* or division of parts. In this performance the full choir alternates with a solo ensemble. The conclusion overwhelms the listener with waves of sound in seven voice parts. Clearly the composer retained in mid-century an awareness of the effects of vocal scoring found at the beginning of the century in sources like the *Eton Choirbook*.

A sumptuous choral sound is also heard in the nine-part ‘Domine, quis Habita bit’ by William Byrd (c1540-1623). The remaining works on the program are the second set of Lamentations by Thomas Tallis (c1505-85) and double choir settings of the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis by Palestrina (1525-94). The Byrd Ensemble produces what I would call a bright choral sound, and I would guess that they look to the Tallis Scholars as their model. They have worked with Peter Phillips, director of the Tallis Scholars. In a side-by-side comparison of this recording of White’s ‘Exaudi’ with the 1995 recording by the Tallis Scholars (reissued on Gimell 210), I found that the Tallis Scholars have a more refined and restrained but not inhibited sound with better blend. In the present recording I was too often aware of the character of individual voices. This is not to disparage the achievement of the Byrd Ensemble. They produce a very fine sound, but the competition among early music chamber choirs is stiff. The booklet lists 20 singers for the recording, but not all sing in every piece. It was made in the friendly acoustic of Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Seattle.

**GATENS**

**The Globe’s Landmark Productions**

12th Night, Richard III

Musicians of Shakespeare’s Globe

Globe 2—45 minutes

This is a program of snippets from public performances of Twelfth Night at the Globe Theatre in July 2012 and of Richard III at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse in August 2016, both in London.

After a spoken epigraph—the famous “If music be the food of love”—we are given songs and instrumental pieces from mostly 16th Century sources used in these two productions: 14 items from the one play, 10 from the other. The musical selections stand on their own, detached from any dramatic context.

The instrumentalists are all accomplished period-instrument players. The singers are actors in the casts, whose vocal talents are a bit rough but appropriate to the theater.

This release is a demonstration of the work of the Globe company’s music director, Claire van Kampen, who arranged the performing editions. The bound album is richly illustrated. Otherwise, this is an advertisement for the Globe company, and perhaps useful as a souvenir for anyone who may have attended the productions in person. It contributes nothing to the recorded repertoire of “Shakespeare’s Music.”

**BARKER**

**Guerra Manuscript 4**

Ars Atlantica/ Manuel Vilas

Naxos 573678—77:28

This is the fourth release in a series that continues to grow from strength to strength. The Guerra Manuscript is a collection of 17th Century Spanish *tonos humanos*, secular songs; and among its 20 compositions this release includes 5 by Juan Hidalgo (1614-85) and 4 by José Marín (c.1619-99). In contrast to the three earlier volumes (July/Aug 2011: 252, Jan/Feb 2013: 209, Nov/Dec 2014: 221), this is the first to use more than a single singer. New to this release are soprano Mercedes Hernandez and tenor Francisco Fernandez-Rueda; allow for effective contrasts between the songs. Soprano Yetzabel Arias Fernandez, who sang on Volume 3, contributes two solo songs accompanied by the three musicians of Ars Atlantica.

As in all previous volumes, I continue to be impressed by how inventive Manuel Vilas is in his harp accompaniments. Full texts and translations are available on the Naxos website, and this entire recording is as enjoyable as the first three volumes. I presume there is at least one volume still to come to complete the 100 *tonos humanos* of the original manuscript.

**BREWER**

**Se con Stille Frequenti**

Sara Mingardo; Cenacolo Musicale

Arcana 424—63 minutes

From the later 17th Century through the 18th, the vocal duet was the most popular counter-part to the trio sonata in instrumental music.
The solo cantata was, of course, a widely cultivated form in itself (and sometime in duet form for theatrical effects). But patrons, performers, and audiences could not get enough of the more compact duets, for mostly high voices with continuo.

Italian texts set by Italian composers were the heart of the chamber duet literature. A potent survey of the idiom is given here. There are 7 duets (plus an aria): 3 by the acknowledged master of the form, Agostino Steffani (1654-1728), and 2 each by Antonio Lotti (1666-1740) and Giovanni Bononcini (1670-1747).

These works vary from two sections to six. Many alternate duet sections with solo ones, sometimes reaching the scope of dialog cantatas. Their music was obviously intended for experienced singers. There is a lot of fine melodic writing here—I particularly admired Lotti’s duets.

Sara Mingardo is the “star” singer here, but she sings in only three of the duets. She is also allowed the exceptional item here, an aria from an early Venetian opera by the obscure Francesco Lucio (1628-58)—a lovely ciacona that shows off her rich contralto artistry handsomely.

There are seven other singers: sopranos Lisa Castrignano, Gioria Cinciripi, and Silvia Frigato; mezzo-sopranos Loriana Castellano, Lea Desandre, and Lucia Napoli; contralto Francesca Bilotti. They do some duets with Mingardo but also with each other. That makes for a nice variety of vocal colors, and all sing beautifully.

The recorded sound is also beautiful. The booklet carries admirably thorough notes by the distinguished Michael Talbot and full texts with translations.

I just wish that one of Handel’s quite individual vocal duets might have been included, for contrast from a non-Italian. But certainly, for any collector of Baroque vocal music, this release is a valuable introduction to, and sampler of, the chamber duet.

**Barker**

Dicen que Hay Amor
Cancionero de Mallorca+
Armoniosi Concerti/ Marivi Blasco, Juan Carlos Rivera
Lindoro 3032—71:23 minutes

Spanish music of the period after the Renaissance remains almost entirely unknown to most of us. Is it because of the “Black Legend” (a notion promulgated in Spain that the rest of Europe demonizes the country because of the bad press created by the Inquisition)? Probably not. More likely, because Spain, after the Golden Age, with no Jews or Moors, became a cultural backwater—a net importer of high culture, usually Italian opera, when it bothered. That doesn’t mean that there is not plenty of interesting and unique music waiting to be discovered.

This disc, led by the guitarist Juan Carlos Rivera, and with the young Valencia soprano Marivi Blasco, mostly has works from a manuscript collection now held in the Library of Catalonia, the Cancionero Poetico-Musical de Mallorca. This chansonnier contains 43 songs for voice and continuo, almost all of them anonymous, dating from the latter part of the 17th Century. The few attributed pieces belong to Sebastian Duron, Juan Hidalgo, and Juan de Zelis, and a handful of others. The Spanish style found here has much in common with the Italian cantatas of the same time, except that almost all the works are structured around refrain and verses (in Spanish, estribilla and coplas).

Blasco, with about a dozen discs already to her credit in as many years, has a beautifully produced, light, lyrical voice, well-tuned, easy on the ears, even as it rises to the top of the range, and her singing is well-fitted to these attractive works. My only criticism is that the microphone is too far away from the soloist, emphasizing the resonant acoustic and making the diction almost impossible to understand. I’m not convinced that Blasco herself is really so concerned with clarity, but things might have been much better. Lindoro has chosen not to print a libretto.

**T Moore**

Farinelli
Ann Hallenberg, Les Talens Lyriques/ Christophe Rousset
Aparté 117—79:37

Carlo Broschi (1705-82), who used the professional name of Farinelli, was probably the greatest and most celebrated of the castrato singers who dominated the opera houses of Europe in the 18th Century. His contemporaries praised not only his fabulous artistry, but also his warm and genuine personality.

This recording, made at a concert in Bergen in May of 2011, explores music from operas he sang in—usually composed for him. There are 10 arias from 5 composers he collaborated with. Nicola Porpora (1686-1768), his teacher and guide, is represented 3 times, and
the singer’s older brother, Riccardo Broschi (1698-1756) is sampled twice. There are 2 pieces from Geminiano Giacomelli (c.1692-1740) and Leonardo Leo (1694-1744), and one from Johann Hasse (1699-1783). As a supplement, two arias are added from operas by Handel, including the familiar ‘Lascia ch’io piangia’ from Rinaldo, even though Farinelli never sang them.

The robust voice of mezzo-soprano Ann Hallenberg is a plausible match to what Farinelli’s must have been like. Her rich tone, her vigorous address, and her superb precision are joined with a sensitivity to moods. She can be warm and gentle or fiercely athletic, as the piece requires. I do wonder if her slightly flutery singing fits in vocal literature that must have been treated with a somewhat more “straight”, even vibratoless sound. Also, little is said in the album about the matter of embellishments. I could detect some (notably in the famous Handel selection), if not too much. Still, so much of the music designed for Farinelli was already full of florid and super-virtuosic passage work that there was little room for more.

Rousset and his well-established ensemble supply colorful and highly spirited support. The recording is exemplary. The booklet contains extended notes that not only give a thorough biographical picture but fit the concert’s selections into that context. There are also full texts and translations.

Among the growing number of recorded reincarnations of long-dead singers, this one is certainly an outstanding example.

**The Cardinal King**

Henry Benedict Stuart in Rome, 1740-91
Cappella Fede/ Peter Leech
Toccata 300—73:20

The name of Henry Benedict Stuart (1725-1807) is likely known only to intense students of England’s Stuart dynasty. He was a grandson of the deposed King James II, son of James Francis Edward Stuart, the “Old Pretender”, and brother to Charles Edward Stuart (“Bonnie Prince Charlie”). In his youth he supported his brother’s campaign to “recover” the English throne, but after its failure he gave up dynastic claims. After the death of his brother (1788) Henry was regarded by hardened Jacobite partisans as “Henry IX of England”, but he contented himself with using the title Duke of York. Meanwhile, he turned to a career in the Roman Church. He was ordained a priest in 1747 and made a cardinal the following year. He rose to high ranks in the Curia, and his term of service as a cardinal (69 years) is one of the longest in Roman Church history. His tomb may still be seen in St Peter’s in the Vatican.

The “Cardinal-Duke of York” was not only a devout practitioner of his faith, but a passionate patron of the arts—of music in particular. He surrounded himself with talented musicians and spread his patronage widely to composers. With many of these composers, Henry not only was generous in his support but seems to have developed very warm personal relations. Even before his ordination, he became a supporter of Carlo Tessarini (1690-1765), four of whose pieces for violin and bass, called Allettamenti—from a collection published in 1740 and dedicated to the young Henry—are the earliest items here.

Three other Italian composers whom Henry supported as a cardinal are represented, all by sacred works: Giovanni Battista Costanzi (1704-78); the obscure Giovanni Zamboni (??); and Sebastiano Bolis (c.1750-1804). Costanzi’s sole contribution to this program is a lovely Ave Maria. I confess that the 3 sacred pieces by Zamboni strike me as rather dull. But there are 7 items by Bolis, all of them quite imaginative and appealing, above all a substantial setting of the Miserere that puts the over-hyped Allegri setting to shame.

There are no stunning discoveries here, but this program gives a rare, very enjoyable, and even illuminating picture of music-making in Rome in the latter half of the 18th Century, and we are lucky to have the Cardinal-Duke of York as the uniting and igniting figure for it all.

This is the first recording by Peter Leech’s new British ensembles. Capella Fede is a chamber group consisting of four singers (S-Ct-T-B) and four instrumentalists (violin, cello, bass, organ). They are all outstanding performers. Harmonia Sacra is a chamber choir of 15 singers who blend beautifully in the (mostly a cappella) choral pieces. The general variety of textures, nicely recorded, makes this generous menu a treat.

Very fine notes, and texts with translations.

**Any civilization is imperiled once high culture, reason, learning, and moderation are overcome by violent greed and ignorance.**

Steven Runciman
Nationalism and romanticism—the twin forces that united the countries of Central and Southern Europe into their modern form—also worked their magic on Scandinavia. It just took them a little longer to get there. But when they arrived, they pushed Norway toward nationhood as they had Italy, Germany, and the others a generation or two before.

This is a look at some of the music that did it. Most of it is 19th Century fare by composers we don’t know well—except for Grieg, of course. Songs by Johan Halvorsen, Alfred Paulsen, and a few others cross into the 20th Century. But whichever side of the timeline you’re on, musical nationalism is the order of the day.

Foaming oceans, violet-blue fjords, North Sea sails, spring weddings, somber shorelines, great warrior kings, majestic spruces amid heavy snow, and crimson summer nights are just some of the nation’s gifts extolled in the songs. Taken individually, the selections are not really memorable. But as a collage of Norwegian images in sound, they could be of interest. The men sing with commendable feeling, though things can get strident in the tenor department. English notes and translations are included.

**Night Shifts: Choral**

**BRAHMS:** Nachtwache I+II; **HENSEL:** Schweigend Sinkt der Nacht; **RABERG:** The Tyger; **MANTYJARI:** Die Stimme des Kindes; **NORGARD:** Wiigen-Lied; **RAUTAVAARA:** Lodus Verbalis; **RAVEL:** 3 Chansons; **PART:** The Deer’s Cry; **NYSTEDT:** Missa Brevis; **REGER:** Nachtlied; **SISASK:** Benedicte

German National Youth Choir/ Florian Benfer

Carus 83476—63 minutes

The German National Youth Choir is an ensemble of 30 or so of the country’s best young singers, aged 16 to 27. Their conductor also leads the Stockholm Chamber Choir and is regularly engaged by such groups as the Swedish Radio Choir, the Eric Ericson Chamber Choir, and the Royal Swedish Opera Chorus. The singing is lovely: clear, controlled, handsomely phrased, and very much inside the music.

The repertoire stretches from the lush romanticism of Rheinberger and Brahms to the elegant brush strokes of Ravel and the spiritual yearnings of Knut Nystedt’s superb *Missa Brevis*, to urgent *sprechstimme* that is both eerily intense (Norgard) and a bit cheeky (Rautavaara).

The group’s bright, forward sound might leave you wanting something darker and more plaintive for Pärt, but everything else is hard to find fault with. You don’t come across Ravel’s ‘Nicolette,’ ‘Trois Beaux Oiseaux du Paradis’ and ‘Ronde’ very often, and it’s a pleasure to encounter them here. The centerpiece of Nystedt’s Mass is his uncommonly expressive statement of the Creed. If you don’t know it, you should. Urmas Sisask’s bouncy ‘Benedictio’ and Emil Raberg’s zippy evocation of William Blake’s poetry keep the sassy rhythms coming. Notes, texts, and translations are included.

**Gregg Smith Singers:**

**20th Century Choral**

**COPLAND:** In the Beginning: An Immorality; 4 Motets; **FOSS:** The Prairie; **SCHUMAN:** Prelude for Voices; **RIEGGER:** Who Can Revoke; **SESSIONS:** Turn, O Libertad; **THOMPSON:** Alleluia; **BERNSTEIN:** Choruses from The Lark; **IVES:** William Will; **IMBRIE:** On the Beach at Night; **HENNAGIN:** The House on the Hill; **DRUCKMAN:** 4 Madrigals; **SMITH:** The Lion and the Unicorn; **MADISON:** Bitte; **NAJERA:** In Dulci Jubilo

Oresta Cybriwski, Raymond Beegle, Alan Buratto, p; Marilyn Chandler, v; Rosalind Rees, Jeanne Distel, Kevin Treadway, s; Ani Vervanian, mz; Linda Eckard, Fay Kittelson, c; Jerold Norman, t; Patrick Mason, Harlan Foss, bar; Gregg Smith Singers, Texas Boys Choir; Long Island Symphonic Choral Association, Orpheus Ensemble, Brooklyn Philharmonia/ Gregg Smith, Lukas Foss

Albany 1646 [2CD] 158 minutes

Gregg Smith, who died last July at the age of 84, excelled across the choral spectrum in his long and productive career. Gabrieli, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky are three of the composers he helped us get to know back in the 60s and 70s. But it was in the American choral songbook that Maestro Smith left his most lasting legacy. He championed the music of William Billings of Boston—America’s first choral composer of note—and had important things to say about the music of Charles Ives, William Schuman, Roger Sessions, Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Lukas Foss, Jacob Druckman, and other 20th Century composers included in the present anthology. Smith conducted all of these performances, save for Lukas Foss’s *Prairie*, a 45-minute setting of...
Carl Sandburg’s uplifting and panoramic poetry. There, Mr Foss himself was in charge of his own soloists, the Brooklyn Philharmonia, and—of course—the Gregg Smith Singers. Sandburg’s images of dust storms, cornfields, solitary fences, holiday fireworks, chirping mockingbirds, forced migrations, relentless urbanization, and even more relentless American optimism inspired the composer to create some of his most stirring and colorful music. You can almost hear him saying, “Why should Aaron have all the fun with this Americana stuff? I might not have been born here, but I can do it too!”

The notes tell us that each track on the program was selected and approved by Mr Smith. The performances had actually been given decades earlier in preparation for America’s bicentennial and were stored at the Gregg Smith Singers Archives at Syracuse University. This is the first time they have been released commercially. The roster of composers reads like a who’s who of modern American music. Despite the familiar names, though, a lot of this repertoire has stayed off the beaten path, which adds to the attractiveness of the release.

Druckman’s Madrigals must be damned near impossible to sing, but are pretty easy on the ear. Andrew Imbrie puts the solemn and moody words of Walt Whitman to work in his atmospheric Beach at Night. (Does Whitman ever not remind you of the Civil War?) I also admire Maestro Smith’s own Lion and Unicorn for boy soprano (Master Treadway), violin, piano, and the sopranos and altos of the Texas Boys Choir. It’s delightful. And in case current events have left you nostalgic for the politics of another era, meet ‘William Will;’ Charles Ives’s delightful commentary on the 1896 presidential contest that pitted William McKinley against William Jennings Bryan. Nice to know we can still chuckle about politics, even if we have to jump into the time machine to do it.

The singing is very professional, so if the repertoire appeals to you, there’s no need to back away. I will say, though, that the ensemble often sounds small and not especially youthful—and the clear, close recording sometimes chills the voices. I also won’t argue the point that more engaging performances of some of the works can be found elsewhere. Copland’s motets, Thompson’s ‘Alleluia,’ and the Bernstein Missa Brevis (culled from Lenny’s incidental music to Jean Anouilh’s play, The Lark) will affect you more on Hyperion 67929 (Nov/Dec 2015, p 204) where Stephen Layton and Polyphony have at them.

Even so, I won’t underestimate this release and neither should you. The breadth of the music—and of Gregg Smith’s lifetime of devotion to it—makes for a worthwhile acquisition. Full texts and excellent notes seal the deal.

**GREENFIELD**

**St Basil, Houston**

King, Baldwin, Allain, Palestrina, Creston, Daley, Moore, White, Beck, Haan, Parker, Saint-Saëns, Dupré, Mawby, Pearson, Bingham.

Yuri McCoy, org; University Singers/ Brady Knapp

Gothic 49303—61 minutes

The University Singers of the University of St Thomas (RC) in downtown Houston, Texas, is an auditioned ensemble of undergraduate and graduate students, mostly music majors. Their principal performance space is the modernist Chapel of St Basil, one of the last designs of architect Philip Johnson (1906-2005). The booklet lists 35 singers, but some are designated “friends of UST music” and others as “UST vocal alumni.” Their director is Brady Knapp, a member of the university faculty and also director of music at Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church in Houston. As heard here, the ensemble produces a very good mixed choir sound of young voices in a friendly acoustic. The program slightly favors the women’s voices—there are several selections without tenors or basses. In addition to choral music, there are several instrumental pieces: organ works by Paul Creston, Seth Bingham, and Raymond H. Haan plus the first recording of Canzona for Oboe and Organ by David Ashley White performed by Yuri McCoy with oboist Grace Tice.

A large part of the program consists of conservative works by living composers such as Antony Baldwin (b 1957), Richard Allain (b 1965), Eleanor Daley (b 1955), and Robert Parker (b 1960). Most are gentle. There are pieces in what I call the “Anglican tug-on-the-heartstrings” idiom.

The performances are above serious technical reproach, with exemplary choral blend and discipline. In some spots I find the 16-foot organ pedal too obtrusive, but that is a relatively small complaint. I suspect that this program will appeal less to the general listener than to church music fans, who will find it very attractive.

**GATENS**

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May/June 2017
As Dreams

NORGARD: Dream Songs; Singe die Garten, Mein Herz; LACHENMANN: Consolation II; JANSON: Nocturne; SAARIAHO: Überzeugung: Nuits, Adieux; XENAKIS: Nuits

Norwegian Soloists’ Choir; Oslo Sinfonietta/Grete Pedersen—BIS 2139 [SACD] 61 minutes

Welcome to 61 straight minutes of atmospherics created to explore the world of dreams. And if you’re one of those fuddy-duddies who likes music to unfold melodically, harmonically, and rhythmically, you’d best batten down the hatches in anticipation of a long hour. Mind you, I tolerated Per Norgard’s meandering images of childhood pretty well in Drommge-sange, with the catchy fragment of a child’s tune popping up repeatedly as the subconscious elements chugged on by. The rest of the way, I looked at my watch and dreamed I was somewhere else. Such was the case when Iannis Xenakis had the choir screaming Sumerian, Assyrian, and Achaean phonemes at me in anger over human rights violations perpetrated by the military junta that once controlled his Greek homeland. Sounding even madder was Helmut Lachenmann in his misnamed exercise in whispering, whistling, yelling, hissing, and glissing. If you take any Consolation from all that noise, my guess is you’ll be the first. The effects achieved by the singers are remarkable. I suppose, and both the choir and orchestra are caught in strong, detailed sound by the BIS engineers. But to the greater glory of what or whom, I’m not entirely sure.

GREENFIELD

American Canticle

PHILLIPS: Jubilate Deo; Te Deum; Lord, You Now Have Set Your Servant Free; MARTIN: Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis (2 settings); NEAR: Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis on Plainsong Themes; KING: Canticle of Praise; HELVEY: Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis; FRIEDELL: Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis in F; SOWERBY: Nunc Dimittis in D; PLAINSONG: Beata es, Maria

St Philip Cathedral Choir & Schola; David Fishburn, Patrick A Scott, org; Atlanta Symphony Brass/Dale Adelmann—Gothic 49302—75 mins

Atlanta’s St Philip’s Cathedral (Episcopal) has a long and distinguished history of fine liturgical music, enhanced by a wonderful Aeolian-Skinner organ and resonant acoustic. This recording demonstrates that the tradition continues to flourish under the capable leadership of Dale Adelmann. The program, by American composers, consists of settings of the canticles for Morning and Evening Prayer in the Anglican liturgy: Jubilate Deo, Te Deum, Benedictus es, Domine, and the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis.

The choir exhibits a beautiful blend, secure intonation, clear diction, and expressive musicality, producing that characteristic “Anglican” sound. Craig Phillips, Gerald Near, Leo Sowerry, Harold Friedell, and Larry King will be familiar names to church musicians—Roland Martin and Howard Helvey perhaps less so—but all of them write with great artistry and sensitivity to the words. This is “service music Anglican in heritage, yet American in spirit”. The choir is joined by members of the Atlanta Symphony brass and percussion sections for the Phillips pieces. Notes on the composers, texts, and specification. A handsome production in every way.

DELCAMP

Luthers Lieder

Sophie Harmsen, mz; Matthias Ank, org; Athesius Consort Berlin/Klaus-Martin Bresgott; Stuttgart Chamber Choir/Frieder Bernius

Carus 83.469 [2CD] 148 minutes

To celebrate the 500th anniversary of Luther’s Reformation, Carus has produced a monumental release that brings together all 35 of Martin Luther’s chorales. The program on each disc juxtaposes settings by composers representing different eras, no doubt to demonstrate the broad reach of Luther’s influence. Although these fine ensembles emphasize German Renaissance and Baroque masters such as Walter, Praetorius, Schütz, Scheidt, and JS Bach, they also include later works by composers like Mendelssohn, Margot Kässmann, Frank-Walter Steinmeir, and Markus Meckel. The choral and solo singing is excellent. The notes include a brief English commentary about Luther’s achievements as a poet. The chorale texts and commentary about individual settings are in German only.

LOEWEN

Speaking to members of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in 1852 American Abolitionist Wendell Phillips said: "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty; power is ever stealing from the many to the few. The hand entrusted with power becomes, either from human depravity or esprit de corps, the necessary enemy of the people. Only by continued oversight can the democrat in office be prevented from hardening into a despot; only by unintermittent agitation can a people be sufficiently awake to principle not to let liberty be smothered in material prosperity.”
Threads of Gold

BYRD: Vide, Domine, Afflictionem; Ne Irascaris; Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; O Lord, Make Thy Servant Elizabeth; Tribulationes Civitatum; MUNDY: Evening Service in Medio Chori; TALLIS: O Salutaris Hostia; O Sacrum Convivium; In Manus Tuas; Videte Miraculum; GIB- BONS: Glorious and Powerful God; Great Lord of Lords; O God, the King of Glory

David Pipe, org; York Minster Choir/ Robert Sharpe

Regent 488—71 minutes

The Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods are often regarded as the Golden Age of English sacred music. It was a time of relative ecclesiastical tranquility between the upheavals of the Reformation and brief Catholic restoration under Queen Mary at one end and the turmoil of the English Civil War and Commonwealth at the other. It was a time that saw the flourishing of English arts, letters, science, and music. As program annotator John Lees points out, it was a period when the English were quite self-conscious about their cultural and political achievements.

This recording contains substantial works by four notable composers of the period. The earliest is Thomas Tallis (c1505-85), whose career began in the reign of Henry VIII and ended in Elizabeth’s. ‘Videte Miraculum’ is a Vespers responsory for Candlemas and probably dates from the reign of Queen Mary. ‘In Manus Tuas’ and ‘O Sacrum Convivium’ come from the Cantiones Sacrae of 1575 that Tallis and Byrd produced in collaboration. By then Latin motets were probably intended for domestic use, as Anglican services had to be in English. The Eucharistic hymn ‘O Salutaris Hostia’ was not part of the 1575 collection, but appears in various manuscripts of the late 16th Century.

Next in chronology is William Mundy (c1529-91), the least familiar of the four composers. He is represented by his Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis In Medio Chori, a large-scale setting for six-part choir and an ensemble of solo voices, probably intended for the Chapel Royal and dating from after 1563. It is likely that the solo ensemble was positioned between the facing choir stalls where the main divided choir would be, hence the subtitle.

William Byrd (c1540-1623) remained a faithful Catholic for the whole of his life at a time when it was risky. He was undoubtedly the most gifted English musician of his generation, and that may have kept him in the royal favor. He continued on the payroll of the Chapel Royal even after he retired to the village of Stondon Massey in Essex, near the estate of his patron Sir John Petre, a member of the Catholic gentry. Byrd’s anthem ‘O Lord, Make thy Servant Elizabeth’ is an early work, dating from his time as organist of Lincoln Cathedral (1563-72), perhaps written for a royal visit. ‘Praise Our Lord, All ye Gentiles; on the other hand, was not written for Anglican worship, but sets a psalm translation from an English-language Catholic primer. The motets ‘Vide, Domine, Afflictionem’, ‘Tribulationes Civitatum’, and ‘Ne Irascaris’ are lamentations from the Cantiones Sacrae of 1589. Such works were understood to be thinly coded messages on the plight of English Catholics.

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625) spent the whole of his career in the service of the Anglican Church. He is represented here by three of his verse anthems: ‘Glorious and Powerful God’, ‘O God, the King of Glory’, and ‘Great Lord of Lords’. The last-named was an occasional piece written for the visit in 1617 of James I to his native Scotland. It is sung here to a more serviceable text written by Henry Ramsden Bramley for Sir Frederick Ouseley’s edition of 1873.

The York Minster choir produces a very fine sound. If it is not quite to the standard of Christ Church, Oxford or St John’s College, Cambridge, it is not far behind. I find the recorded sound a little too close and forward for comfort, but the ear adjusts to that. In many of the motets Robert Sharpe brings the music to a gentle landing with a concluding diminuendo, but for the most part there is very little dynamic nuance. There is always a hazard of subjective excess in imposed dynamics, but here I do not believe the essential phrase rhetoric gets adequate play. At the same time, it is not as dispassionate as some performances I have heard. Among other recordings by traditional English choral foundations, Edward Higginbottom and the Choir of New College, Oxford strike a good expressive balance in their 1983 recording of nine motets from Byrd’s Cantiones of 1589 (CRD 3420, Nov/Dec 1991). I find those performances far more engaging than the ones at hand.

Mignon

Natasa Antoniazzo, mz; Mia Elezovic, p

Antes 319298—41 minutes

The 11 songs of this program are setting of 4 Wilhelm Meister texts of Goethe by 7 composers: 3 each by Schubert and Wolf and 1
each by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Schumann, Berg, and Liszt. The biggest advantage of the program is the chance to compare settings of the same texts. The biggest problem is the singer’s voice. Antoniazzo’s thick and throaty Slavic voice is deeper and richer than a lighter mezzo—it’s really more of an alto—and may not be to everyone’s taste. The interpretations are OK, but they lack delicacy and are not compelling.

Notes, texts, translations.  R MOORE

**Song Recital**

GLINKA: 8 Songs; CHOPIN: 7 Polish Songs; DVORAK: 7 Gypsy Melodies; TCHAIKOVSKY: 5 Songs; RACHMANINOFF: 5 Songs

Anda-Louise Bogza, s; Marcel Javorcek, Galina Aleshkevich, p

ArcoDiva 159—76 minutes

This is one of those great discovery CDs: an artist previously unknown that proves to be so good that you find yourself sharing it with friends, students, and colleagues. From her rich low register that begins the first Glinka song to the big moments in the *Gypsy Songs* to a pianissimo high B in Rachmaninoff’s ‘*Zdes Khorasho*’, Bogza’s voice is a superb, even instrument, always under control, but never lacking intensity and beauty. This is a big dramatic soprano voice doing repertoire I might associate with the great Galina Vishnevskaya. Where she had a voice with the steel core many Russian sopranos are noted for, Bogza (Romanian born) has rounder edges but no less size and carrying power.

Since the beginning of her performing career, she has been closely associated with the State Opera and National Theatre in Prague, and has or is scheduled to sing leading roles in seven different operas between the two houses this season (*Tosca, Aida, Turandot, Macbeth, Nabucco, Andrea Chenier, Trovatore*). That should give you an idea of her voice. She does not appear to have performed in the US and only has made a few discs (one of which became the best-selling disc in the Czech Republic in 2010).

It is my good fortune that this came my way. As a pianist and long-time accompanist, I have played several of the songs here. The Glinka songs are rarities. ‘The Lark’ is well represented in Balakirev’s solo piano transcription, but the original song may be a little harder to find. Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich (at the piano) did a wonderful Glinka and Rachmaninoff disc with only three duplicates (DG 477 6195). Chopin’s songs are more often heard in Liszt’s piano arrangements, but these early works show some melodic skill and interesting accompaniments. The Dvorak, Tchaikovsky, and Rachmaninoff groups contain many great songs. Bogza uses two different accompanists, both of whom play with skill, and their ensemble with the singer is exemplary. She seems at ease in Russian, Polish, and Czech.

The song lyrics are only given in their original language (and alphabet—all the Russian ones are in Cyrillic). The program notes in English are more than satisfactory. Recorded sound favors the singer more than the piano. With a voice like Bogza’s even a pianist can be happy with the balance. This is a special recording that will be on my active music stack for quite some time.

HARRINGTON

**Songs from Our Ancestors**

Ian Bostridge, t; Xuefei Yang, g

Globe 1—70 minutes

Globe is a new record label from Shakespeare’s Globe Theater. This elegantly packaged release is the first in a projected series of programs intended, as their notes put it, “to capture the intimacy of our candlelit concerts in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse”, a 17th Century-style theatre that opened in 2014 and “has quickly established itself a world class chamber music venue”.

The collaboration of Ian Bostridge, 49, and Xuefei Yang, 37, has produced a program that beautifully and imaginatively connects their British and Chinese heritage. Bostridge sings five Dowland lute songs accompanied by Yang on guitar. That is followed by ‘Drunken Ecstasy’, attributed to 3rd Century scholar and musician Ruan Ji, written for the guqin, a Chinese 7-stringed zither and adapted by Yang for guitar.

Bostridge gives a lovely reading of ‘The Second Lute Song of the Earl of Essex’ from Britten’s *Gloriana* arranged for guitar accompaniment by Julian Bream. That is followed by ‘Flowing Water’, an anonymous Chinese piece from the time of Shakespeare also originally written for guqin and arranged by Yang “to capture the spirit of the guqin”. Four Schubert songs in arrangements by Tilman Hoppstock for guitar accompaniment are performed sweetly by Bostridge and Yang.

The program keeps getting more interesting and engaging. Yang gives a virtuosic performance of ‘Sword Dance’ by Xu Changjun (b.
This is one of the latest releases in an extensive series on the Bongiovanni label called “Il Mito dell’Opera”—Legends of the Opera World. This consists mainly of a recital that Bruscantini and pianist Maestri gave in Ancona in 1981. Some collectors may own the original LP release. The recital offers, in very good sound, verbally alert and musically smooth readings of baritone arias—usually the most famous ones—from seven Italian operas (by Cimarosa, Mozart, Donizetti, plus Ford’s aria from Verdi’s Falstaff), as well as two well-known songs by Tosti. The hall seems to have been a small one, and the singer, though 62 years old, does not force his voice, which in fact sounds quite well preserved. These recordings offer lessons for any young singer on how to handle Italian and comic inflection. The only unusual bit of repertoire turns out to be a charmer: a tuneful ‘Le figliole che so’ de vent’anni’ from Cimarosa’s Astuzie Femminili.

The recording ends with excerpts from operatic performances of Renato’s two arias from Un Ballo in Maschera and three excerpts from Puccini’s Tosca. Two of the latter fade out disconcertingly, but the concluding section of Act 1 (‘Tre sbirri, una carozza’ and the later ‘Te Deum’) stands very well on its own. These opera-house excerpts were recorded 1973-1978. The voice, now engaged at full volume, sounds more worn than in the recital, and is sometimes not fully captured by the microphones (the orchestra comes through clearly). Even here, though, we gain a fine sense of how a smart singer was able to husband his resources through a long and distinguished career.

Belgian composer Dirk Brossé, music director of the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia since 2012 (see Jan/Feb 2017), has selected 19 traditional Chinese songs and orchestrated them for Western-trained opera singer Qilian Chen, using a Western orchestra and adding orchestral introductions and postludes. Four are listed as “folk songs”, and the others are from nine provinces plus Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Taiwan. The orchestral arrangements are very “pops” and somewhat commercial—not trashy, just commonplace, rhythmically very regular, and on the whole not very interesting, though each song flows very nicely. Chen has a pleasant but somewhat constricted

Record collectors value his performance of major baritone roles, especially comic but also serious ones, on many complete opera recordings, such as the Barber of Seville (with Victoria de los Angeles). He continued to perform at major houses until at least 1985 and even recorded Mozart’s Don Alfonso in 1991, when he was 72.

Sesto Bruscantini
Fabio Maestri, p; orchestra
Bongiovanni 1236—74 minutes

Sesto Bruscantini lived from 1919 to 2003. Record collectors value his performance of major baritone roles, especially comic but also serious ones, on many complete opera recordings, such as the Barber of Seville (with Victoria de los Angeles). He continued to perform at major houses until at least 1985 and even recorded Mozart’s Don Alfonso in 1991, when he was 72.
tone with an almost constant vibrato that is mild enough that I always know what pitch she's singing, but she never changes her tone color and has a rather narrow range of expression.

Just as I began to feel that all the songs were starting to sound alike (all use that damnable pentatonic scale), they began shifting to a wider variety of keys and character. The last few selections have orchestral introductions that seem to go on forever, even though the longest song on the album is only 4:23. Engineering is warm and balanced.

**In War and Peace**

Joyce DiDonato, Il Pomo d’Oro/ Maxim Emelyanychev

Erato 92846—79 minutes

Last year (2016) Joyce DiDonato gave the fullest expression yet of her commitment to broadly conceived humanistic and humanitarian goals, extending her already remarkable operatic career. Drawing on her particular facility in Baroque music, she conceived a program she called “In War and Peace”. She recorded this with Emelyanychev's ensemble in March of 2016.

Then in the following months she undertook an “album tour” of concerts that drew on that program but included other selections as well (among them, a few purely instrumental ones). That tour ended at Carnegie Hall on December 15. By all accounts, it was a highly theatrical confection of music, video projections, dancing, fashion, and makeup, some of it bordering on the bizarre.

Reduced simply to the original recording, DiDonato’s venture still retains its humane message, contrasting the human propensity for both violence and beauty.

The recording contains 15 selections, divided into two overall groupings. Under “War” she presents seven arias: one is from an opera by Leonardo Leo, the rest from works of Handel and Purcell. Under “Peace” there are eight arias: two by Purcell and four by Handel, plus one by Monteverdi and two by Niccolo Jommelli. A few in both categories are rarities—notably the ones by Leo and Jommelli, which are claimed as world premiere recordings. Many, on the other hand, are chestnuts of the Baroque literature.

All are examples of musical beauty and dramatic expressiveness. To be sure, the connections with the ideas of war and peace are somewhat strained in a number of instances. And the character of the selections in both categories is more varied than might be expected: despite a lot of warlike upheaval in some, “war” is represented by a lot of quiet thought and poignant tragedy; and, for all the gentle idealism of most “love” items, there is room for some energetic musical whoopee.

In the end, the themes disappear and leave us with an extraordinarily rich and generous anthology of wonderful music, as performed by one of the world’s leading singers and prime specialists in Baroque music. DiDonato is simply fantastic. There is a lot of highly virtuosic music here, and she handles it with utter security, sometimes fitting in some clever embellishment. But she can also be almost heartbreakingly moving. I have only one slight reservation: I wish that her diction were a bit clearer sometimes. Nevertheless, this is a collection that can be enjoyed and studied for years to come—however our chaotic international situation works out.

Emelyanychev’s group of period players, some 27 strong (and including the likes of Andrew Lawrence-King) and led from the harpsichord by the director himself, are ideally inspired collaborators. The recording is excellent. The booklet has unusually excellent notes, along with full vocal texts and translations.

Regardless of your militarist-pacifist sentiments, this is a recording not to be missed!

**Rene Fleming: Distant Light**

Stockholm Philharmonic/ Sakari Oramo

Decca 26096—48 minutes

In this, her first studio album in three years, Fleming turns her sumptuous voice to a surprising mixture of music: Samuel Barber’s *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, Anders Hillborg’s *Strand Settings*, and three songs of Icelandic pop singer Björk arranged by Hans Ek (with a fourth available for purchase through iTunes). The album title, “Distant Light”, comes from a line in the first of the four Hillborg songs. It’s a pity the program is so short.

Fleming is in marvelous voice in the Barber and Hillborg pieces and shows how much at home she is in dissimilar styles. She gives a warm-voiced but somewhat matter-of-fact performance of the Barber.

Hillborg is currently one of Sweden’s leading composers. The *Strand Settings* is a 20-minute cycle of four songs using texts by the late Mark Strand, 1990-91 US poet laureate, written for Fleming, who sang the world pre-
miere in 2013 with Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic. The NY Times aptly called the cycle “atmospheric, elegiac, unsettling.” Strand’s texts present a hypnagogic and almost surreal world where elements of nature conjure melancholy emotions. This is brilliant and evocative writing performed expressively by Fleming, and it is the chief reason to obtain this album. The Royal Stockholm Orchestra under Sakari Oramo performs admirably.

Everything shifts dramatically with Fleming’s performance of three arrangements of songs by Björk. Her singing here is in a different category of style altogether and does not present her voice in the way that has thrilled audiences for so many years in Mozart and Strauss. Here she uses a softer and breathier voice and is more closely miked. Orchestral accompaniment is mixed with electronic sound effects.

In the liner notes, Fleming tells of her commitment to explore new musical paths. Having now turned 58 she has announced that this season will mark her final performances in Strauss’s Rosenkavalier. “This will be my last Marschallin, but I definitely am hoping to do some new work in the future, and there’s a couple of things buzzing right now. I’m looking for repertoire that is interesting to the public that’s a little bit more modern.” Some may be pleased with her desire to pursue other musical paths; others will begin their time of grieving.

Her voice is distantly recorded in Barber and Hillborg, producing a more ethereal quality while retaining her magnificent silvery glow. My chief concern is that her enunciation of the text tends to be fuzzy, with primary emphasis on vowel sounds.

The notes do not offer much commentary about the music but tell about Fleming’s association with it. Texts included.

In Jest—Comic Art Songs
Julia Kogan, s; Tyson Deaton, p
FHR 42—64 minutes

Kogan and Deaton sound like they had a lot of fun with this program. The French-American coloratura soprano selected 25 favorite witty songs by a wide range of composers, including Purcell, Mozart, Poulenc, Ravel, Saint-Saens, Satie, Schubert, and Wolf. The program offers a chance to have fun hearing songs not often heard on programs, except perhaps as encores. If you want a light-hearted song recital, this is an enjoyable one.

The performances are good and the recorded sound is fine. Kogan sings with excellent articulation in English, German, French, and Yiddish. Her technique is solid and her soubrette voice is well suited to these songs.

The notes describe Kogan as also a “writer and presenter.” That would probably make her effective in performance. Her written notes show a sense of humor that comes across as lame in print and would probably work better on stage.

Notes, texts, and translations, though some texts are not included for copyright reasons.

Memorial: in honor of Daniela Dessi
Marta Mari, s; Fabio Armiliato, t; Marco Sollini, p
Urania 14027—60 minutes

Daniela Dessi, probably the most versatile Italian soprano of her generation, died August 20, 2016, aged 59. This concert given in Loreto, Italy October 8, 2016 was a memorial to her, one that she was supposed to have sung in herself. Her husband Fabio Armiliato and pupil Marta Mari were accompanied by Marco Sollini. It is a beautiful program of settings of the ‘Ave Maria’ (by Schubert, Bach-Gounod, Giacometti, etc.) and other sacred songs, including two original compositions by Armiliato himself and closing with Franck’s ‘Panis Angelicus’.

This was a very emotional occasion for all involved, and the participants perform as well as can be expected. Armiliato’s voice is rather leathery sounding at this stage in his career, but his diction and sincerity are great bonuses. Marta Mari’s soprano is a little quavery; whether that’s because of the occasion or how she normally sounds I can’t tell. Marco Sollini offers excellent assistance at the piano, playing several solo pieces himself—works by Pergolesi and Mascagni. The sound is clear and captures the voices well. This is a worthy tribute to a fine singer who left us too early.

Gods & Monsters
Schubert, Brahms, Mahler, Beethoven, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Wolf
Nicholas Phan, t; Myra Huang, p
Avie 2368—64 minutes

His relationship with children prompted Nicholas Phan to prepare this program. “As more and more children have entered our lives, most notably my longtime recital partner Myra Huang’s two daughters and my niece, storytelling has become a greater part of our
personal lives, leading us to this program of songs about various myths, legends, and fairy tales. Almost all the great giants of the German liedere repertoire are represented, and every song is one of these composers’ musically imaginative retellings of stories about various gods, monsters, witches, kings, knights, and all sorts of other fantastical creatures.” This was released in advance of their February 2017 Wigmore Hall recital of this program.

“Gods & Monsters” is the title of this program of songs by Beethoven, Brahms, Mahler, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann, and Wolf. It is divided into four sections: Mount Olympus, Knights and Kings, Things That Go Bump in the Night, and Fairy Tales. With his wonderfully animated quality as a natural storyteller, Phan’s program could be a good way for a family to introduce children to lieder. Their performances of some of the dramatic songs (‘Der Zwerg’ by Schubert, ‘Der Feuerreiter’ by Wolf, ‘Ausz Goethes Faust’ by Beethoven) have a spellbinding quality that could captivate kids.

Phan is a singer I have liked very much and have heard on stage in Boston. He has a wonderful legato style and delivers clear articulation of the text. He packs intensity into the words with a commanding display of dynamic gradation and vocal color. He has established himself as a fine interpreter of Britten’s songs (N/D 2012).

In this program it sometimes sounds like I’m hearing two different singers. When he sings softly, his voice is sweet, and he can reduce it to a lovely magical softness. When he sings louder than mf he produces a different voice than I’ve heard before. It sounds like something is buzzing in his throat, as though he needs to clear out some phlegm.

A greater concern is a quality that turned up in his last release, A Painted Tale (M/J 2015)—a tendency to over-interpret with sometimes too contrasted dynamic shifts. It’s as though he is too intent on showing off his vocal technique in music that doesn’t need so much display.

Still, when he is good he is very good. He brings real energy to ‘Der Feuerreiter’ (Wolf) and supreme tenderness to Brahms’s ‘Sandmännchen’.

Aside from that strange buzzing distortion in his louder singing, the recorded sound is vivid, and Huang’s accompaniment is nicely defined.

Notes, texts, translations.

Sylvia Sass: Anniversary Edition
Ballo, Otello, Forza, Tannhauser, Cavalleria, Faust, Mefistofele, Wally, Adriana, Idomeneo; STRAUSS: 4 Last Songs; WAGNER: Wesendonck Songs; MOZART: Ah, lo Previdi; Chi mi Scordi di Te?
Hungaroton 32788—143 minutes

I’ve loved Sylvia Sass’s voice ever since I first heard her as Elvira on Solti’s studio recording of Don Giovanni. The haunting, smoky timbre is unique. She definitely has a vocal “thumbprint”, and once one hears her voice, one doesn’t forget it. She has often been compared to Maria Callas, but they are very different from each other both in voice and temperament.

Sass never had a flawless instrument. From the G just above the staff up to and including the top C (and occasional D-flat), her voice could turn squally and strident. But sometimes (as in a number of tracks here) she ascends to the top with no problems. Furthermore, her diction tends to be clotted with Hungarian vowel placements and can just sound odd. Her intonation is excellent, and she brings a controlled passion to whatever she sings.

These selections are drawn from recitals she recorded for Hungaroton from 1975 to 1986. If you were a record collector back in those days, you probably know the original discs and know what has been left out. I remember the Verdi arias were originally accompanied by an “as written” version of the Mad Scene from Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor. It was unusual and refreshing to hear Donizetti’s original notes without all the ornaments and extra high notes we are so used to hearing.

According to the booklet, Sass compiled the selections herself. Her Mozart arias were recorded before the use of appoggiaturas had come back into fashion, so some of her phrase endings are a little blunt. Her version of Elektra’s ‘D’Oreste d’Ajace’ is very well sung (the scales up to the top C in the latter half of the aria are impeccable) but too restrained. The two concert arias are more passionate (and Andras Schiff’s pianism is stunning). I’ve always enjoyed her reading of Strauss’s Four Last Songs. Some will argue that it’s not the right voice for this music and her German is peculiar, but the involvement she brings to these and the Wagner songs is engrossing.

The Verdi arias are the best selections on the second disc: full, passionate readings with few of the flaws and many of the virtues that
are a part of her art. Her account of Marguerite’s big scene from *Faust* is sung in clear, if individual, French and comes complete with a real trill for the Jewel Song (something not in evidence on a disc of Faust highlights she recorded in Hungarian earlier in her career). That fact that she recorded so much of this demanding repertoire before she was even 30 shows how eager Decca and Hungaroton were to exploit her natural abilities. It also shows why she began having vocal problems—which she was able to overcome and extend her career. 

I’ve often heard Sass fans lament that she didn’t record enough, but she was asked to record more complete sets and recitals than many other singers of her generation. Australian Eloquence has reissued the three records she recorded for Decca back in the late 70s on two CDs. These include two collections of arias and a disc of Bartok and Liszt songs. Any fan of Sass should get those. In addition, she has become one of this generation’s “pirate queens”. There are a number of concert recordings of her in *Traviata*, *Trovatore*, *Ballo*, *Norma*, and other operas, some of which she never got to record in the studio.

No texts or translations are supplied. A rather adulatory interview with Sass is included in the booklet and makes for amusing reading.

REYNOLDS

*Emalie Savoy Portrait*
Jonathan Ware, p; Brandenburg State Orchestra/ Matthias Foremny
Genuin 16436—53 minutes

Since 1952, the ARD—the organization of German radio stations—has run an annual competition for young musicians. Winners have included Jessye Norman, Maurice André, Heinz Holliger, and Mitsuiko Uchida. Starting in 2015, this CD label has offered, as a separate award, the chance for one of the prize winners to make a CD that can serve as a kind of calling card to the larger musical world. In 2016, the second such CD award was given to the Aris Quartet (second-prize winner in the “string quartet” category).

Here we have the first CD to be released in the series—by the American soprano Emalie Savoy, first-prize winner in the vocal category in 2015. She demonstrates great vocal artistry and an ability to handle a wide range of roles and song literature, both with orchestra and with piano. The disc is a bit short, but the five pieces that it includes are undoubtedly meaty: Ravel’s *Sheherazade*; one aria each from Tchaikovsky’s *Iolanta*, Dvorak’s *Rusalka*, and Weber’s *Der Freischütz*; and a complete performance of Barber’s *Hermit Songs*, a cycle of ten short but trenchant settings, for voice and piano, of poems by medieval Irish monks.

Savoy, from Schenectady NY, has a full and generally firm voice that is lustrous when soft and becomes exciting, yet not edgy, on full-throttle high notes. She was well trained at Juilliard (Bachelor’s and Master’s) and has completed the Lindemann Young Artists Program at the Met. I am impressed that a large voice can handle the melismatic passages in the Weber cabaletta so well. In that same cabaletta she also shows that she is well informed about how to resolve appoggiaturas.

Savoy has sung secondary roles at major houses such as the Met and the renowned Grand Theatre in Geneva, Switzerland (Sylviane in *The Merry Widow* and the First Lady in *The Magic Flute*), and leading roles at Juilliard and Mozart’s Countess at the Castleton Festival in Virginia. From what I hear on this disc, her voice would easily fill a big hall. She sings with evident understanding in all the selections. The orchestra plays wonderfully here, as does pianist Jonathan Ware in the Barber songs. (The orchestra’s home is in Frankfurt on Oder—a smallish city in eastern Germany, just across the river from Poland.)

I must also report some weaknesses. Though Savoy rarely if ever mispronounces words in any of the five languages on display here (or at least in the three that I know well enough to judge), she does not always enunciate clearly. I had trouble catching about half of the text in the Barber, even in songs that I have heard many times before. Perhaps the very richness of Savoy’s voice is an impediment. Some long notes also show a slow vibrato that, at least at this point in her development, is not wide but might become an obtrusive wobble over time.

The orchestra is sometimes recorded too far in the background, making the singer an almost overbearing presence. A few times I had to replay a passage in order to hear fully what the orchestra had just contributed. There is sometimes, in the Weber, a loud and long echo that can compete with the singer’s next notes. In the *Hermit Songs* the cavernous echo affects the piano more, making it sound clattery. On the 1954 studio recording of that cycle with Leontyne Price and the composer (monophonic, on Sony), voice and piano are perfectly balanced and Price conveys the words beau-
tifully. The RCA recording of the premiere performance at the Library of Congress (likewise with Price and Barber) was not as well recorded, though I have read that its re-release on Bridge is somewhat improved.

In short, this is an excellent introduction to a gifted new singer. She reminds me of another big-voiced soprano, Angela Meade, who jumped directly from the Met Auditions to singing the main female role in Verdi’s Ernani at the Met. This gave me much pleasure, though, almost inevitably, many of the items are performed at least as well elsewhere. See Ravel in this issue for a more nuanced, more sharply differentiated new recording of Sheherazade.

Full texts in the original languages and in English. The program notes (in German) point out how the five works here all treat the theme of loneliness. Unfortunately, the English translations are sometimes unidiomatic or even wrong: “principal” becomes “principle”, and the song title ‘L’Indifferent’ gets translated as “The Different One”.

Crescendo
Stefano Secco, t
Delos 3482—63 minutes

I had never heard of Stefano Secco before getting this. But I see that, at age 34, he already has had a substantial career, singing major roles at important houses in Europe. In the current season (2016-17) he has sung Hoffmann at the Bastille Opera, Alfredo in Seattle, Manrico in Rome, Don José in Naples, and Edgardo in Beijing. In videos he has sung Macduff and Hoffmann in Paris and Cavaradossi at the Festival Puccini.

Here he performs 15 of the world’s most beloved tenor arias—most of them Italian—with solid tone, perfect intonation, and very clear diction. Though his family name means “dry”, the singing here has lots of juice, under splendid control. In short, he offers just what one wants from an Edgardo (in Lucia di Lammermoor) or a Rodolfo (in La Bohème). The release is titled Crescendo, and Secco has indeed mastered the art of making individual notes get louder; but he can also make them grow softer and more tender. There is much to admire and enjoy here.

Almost inevitably, a certain sameness occurs when someone sings selections from 14 different operas. One small complaint: the traditional high C at the end of ‘Di quella pira’ seems a bit strained, just when one wants to feel that Manrico is at his most confident and determined. The actual written note is G—a fourth lower than the unwritten C! Still, ‘Di quella pira’ ends the program with a bang. It helps that the men of the Kaunas Choir suddenly join in.

The three French selections add some variety. They are the best-known tenor moments from Carmen, La Juive, and Faust. He pronounces the French well.

The conductor, Constantine Orbelian, is an American, born in California to immigrant parents from Russia and Armenia. He has conducted some 30 recordings on the Delos label. He is the principal conductor of the orchestra heard here: the Kaunas City Symphony. I first read the name as Kansas City, but then quickly learned that Kaunas is the second-largest city in Lithuania.

The orchestra sounds fine—sometimes a little small (like many an opera-house orchestra) but very responsive to the push and pull of the tenor’s phrasing. The orchestra plays in today’s standard international style. The clarinet solo that opens ‘E lucevan le stelle’ is beautifully turned and vibrato-free.

Orbelian and his forces supply atmospheric and sensitive backups to what is one of the most enjoyable recitals of tenor singing that I have encountered in a while. Robert Moore (S/O 2015) reviewed a complete recording, likewise on Delos, of Verdi’s Simon Boccanegra, where Secco sings, along with Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Barbara Frittoli, and Ildar Abdrazakov. He called Secco “a commanding tenor with a gorgeous voice in the style of Bergonzi”. He also enjoyed Secco’s disc of songs (with piano), mostly by Tosti (Naxos; J/A 2011).

Texts and capable translations. Brief but helpful notes by former ARG contributor Lindsay Koob.

Formosa Mea
Tone Wik, s; Christian Kjos, hpsi, org; Karolina Radziej, v; Johan Nicolai Mohn, rec
LAWO 1109—60 minutes

This is a collection of 17th Century Italian sacred music sung by Norwegian soprano Tone Wik, and it is the sacred counterpart to her earlier recording of Italian secular music from the 17th Century (May/June 2004: 218). Some of the selections are among the best known examples of this repertoire, including Monteverdi’s ‘Exulta filia Sion’ and Alessandro Grandi’s ‘O quam tu pulchra es’. Others are new to me, including two Italian songs by
Francesca Caccini and others by Frescobaldi, Stefano Bernardi, Bonifazio Gratiani, Biagio Marini, and Tarquinio Merulo.

For contrast, in addition to providing instrumental parts for some of the vocal works, the instrumentalists play pieces by Frescobaldi, Alessandro Piccinini, and Girolamo Kapshberger. Wik’s voice is both very expressive and able to manage the occasional bursts of virtuosity in these pieces, and she is ably supported by the sensitive accompaniments.

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**Beethoven:** Symphonies 7+8; Leonore Overture 3
Vienna Philharmonic/ Furtwängler
Praga 350 127 [SACD] 79 minutes

These performances, all with Vienna, come from slightly different periods in Furtwängler’s career. The earliest is a wartime Leonore 3, recorded in 1944 Viennese concert; next is the Seventh, recorded in studio in June 1950; last is the Eighth, taken from a Salzburg Festival performance in 1954, less than four months before the conductor’s death. The particular attractiveness of this release is the excellent sound, such that even the 1944 sound is almost modern. There is also a multi-channel option with SACD. Rest assured, though, that even without SACD these sound about as good as anything from the 40s or early 50s.

These performances are all classics, likely, I hope, to remain available forever. The Seventh has massive weight and power. The slow movement is more andante than allegretto, but I like it this way, and it makes sense and sounds “right”. The second section of the scherzo is likewise slow, but here I find the music laborious. The opening movement maintains the spirit of dance, if a bit heavy-footed, but the finale is fine and exciting.

The Eighth is just as strong. If you’ve thought of this piece as the “light” Beethoven symphony, Furtwängler will tell you otherwise. The opening movement and the minuet are both broad and a bit heavy. The allegretto, though, is appropriately light, and the finale has lots of energy. Both of these symphonies can sound routine these days, as if the performers were on autopilot. Furtwängler brings a sense of grave importance to Beethoven and makes every symphony a kind of spiritual journey.

The astonishing piece here, though, is the Leonore 3. The main theme after the slow introduction is quite fast, and the piece moves along with lots of dramatic excitement. At the coda (with the tempo change) Furtwängler takes off in a frenzy. The music is already frenzied enough, but the playing is almost unbelievably powerful and exciting. Everyone worked up a sweat on that day!

The different reactions to the overture and the symphonies reinforce a general observation of Furtwängler’s performances. The wartime ones, in concert and usually with Berlin, tend to be more exciting than the post-war ones, usually with Vienna and often in studio. In any case these are performances that any lover of Beethoven’s music should know.

**Bellini:** I Capuleti & I Montecchi
Margerita Rinaldi (Giulietta), Giacomo Aragall (Romeo), Luciano Pavarotti (Tebaldo), Nicola Zaccaria (Capellio); The Hague/ Claudio Abbado
IDIS 6709 [2CD] 116 minutes

Here is a stellar cast in a stage performance from June 30, 1966. But the sound is hardly stellar. It’s fairly good, but not enough. This one is for the chance to hear early Pavarotti, pre-beard, in a role he performed only at the beginning of his career and never recorded.

There is another chance to hear him sing Tebaldo in a 1968 performance with Aragall and Abbado, but with Renata Scotto as Giulietta (Opera d’Oro). Rinaldi is preferable.

No libretto, no notes, only a track list.

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**Phones**

We have eliminated our toll-free phone number, since very few people have used it lately. We still have a phone for outgoing calls only, so as not to tie up the line calls come in on.

WE HAVE NO VOICE MAIL AT ALL. If we are here we answer the phone, so if you get no answer at 513-941-1116, try again—or try e-mail: subs@americanrecordguide.com

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

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May/June 2017
Bellini: I Puritani highlights
Joan Sutherland (Elvira), Dorothy Cole (Enrichetta), Alfredo Krauss (Arturo), Raymond Wolansky (Riccardo), Nicola Ghìuselev (Giorgio); San Francisco Opera/ Richard Bonynge
IDIS 6711—71 minutes

Sutherland and Krauss both recorded I Puritani in the studio, but not together. This is a chance to hear them together in a stage performance.

This album is like a voice from long ago suddenly speaking to you. Lani Spahr, historic instrument oboist and superb audio engineer, has produced a a kind of appendix (not really a sequel) to his Music & Arts Elgar acoustic recording remasterings. As far as I know there is no Spahr M&A issue of the electronic recordings, but there’s a very decent set on Warner as a consolation prize.

Edward Elgar conducting
Somm 261 [4CD] 279 minutes

This album is like a voice from long ago suddenly speaking to you. Lani Spahr, historic instrument oboist and superb audio engineer, has produced a a kind of appendix (not really a sequel) to his Music & Arts Elgar acoustic recording remasterings. As far as I know there is no Spahr M&A issue of the electronic recordings, but there’s a very decent set on Warner as a consolation prize.

Edward Elgar wrote great music; was a first-rate conductor (at least of his own music); and made many recordings. Unfortunately, his career was at the dawn of the age of recorded music: he died in 1934. His recordings fall into two categories: the pre-1924 acoustic and the post 1924 electronic. Incidentally, they are one of the best chronicles of the changes in orchestral playing in the early 20th Century. The portamentos of the early records’ string players had changed into vibrato in the later ones.

The reason that these recordings came into being is that EMI made its electronic recordings (in mono) of Elgar’s conducting with microphones placed in different locations so that it could determine which sounded best. Elgar was given test pressings (some made of the same session, but from different mikes in different spots) to review and kept them. But, if you combine monaural recordings from different spots of the same recording session, you get very credible stereo. Hence this set of recordings. Note that the final product here is not modern state-of-the-art recorded sound, but it is infinitely more alive than the monaural of the recordings we know from previous releases: it’s like going from black-and-white to color in The Wizard of Oz. I can’t overstate how powerful this performance is (and the others here): a whole extra dimension of this deeply emotional music is brought to life, despite the dynamic and frequency restrictions that could not have been avoided when these records were made.

The major work here is the cello concerto with Beatrice Harrison (why don’t we have recordings of her in all of the major cello pieces?), finally given the space and grandeur that it deserves. The only other complete major work here is Symphony 1, but they are well worth hearing. The excerpts of the Enig-
for younger listeners who want to hear "how it is used to be done in the good old days".

ALTHOUSE

Some recordings have remarkable durability, and this is one.

Alessandro Scarlatti was a prolific composer of operas, and this one—"The Triumph of Honor, or The Repentant Rake", first performed in 1718—was among his very late ones. In 1938 Geoffrey Dunn made a modern performing edition, and another was made in 1940 by Virgilio Mortari, an active "modernizer" of Baroque scores. The Mortari edition, heavily cut, was recorded ten years later, in 1950, for Italian Radio. That broadcast was picked up by the old Cetra-Soria label and issued as a 2LP set. It was then revived by the revived Urania label, crammed onto a single disc (22277) and reviewed by me (N/D 2005). Now, here it is yet again, this time spread out onto two discs.

This version would hardly pass muster by today's standards of Baroque performance, but it has some points of interest. For one thing, it is billed as the "First Opera Recording of Carlo Maria Giulini". The maestro later famous for his recordings of Mozart and Verdi operas was 46 here, and his sure hand guarantees musicality in this "primitive" presentation. The singers are of a generation not well schooled in Baroque style, but they are artists of seasoned operatic experience, even if Zareska is the only one whose name is recognizable. They sing with a nice theatrical style, not only in the melodious solo arias but in the recitatives.

The old monaural sound is rather dead and dull, but quite listenable once one adjusts to it. A more serious handicap, of course, is the total lack of a printed libretto, though the booklet synopsis is fairly good.

Even if someday we will have a proper critical edition of this opera at last recorded, this dated venture is worth having as a sample of past performance perspectives.
VERDI: *Un Ballo in Maschera*

Leyla Gencer (Amelia), Adriana Lazzarini (Ulrica), Dora Gatta (Oscar), Carlo Bergonzi (Riccardo), Mario Zanasi (Renato); Bologna/ Olivier De Fabritiis

Myto 283 [2CD] 133 minutes

There are many fine recordings of *Ballo*. This was November 28, 1961 at the Bologna opera house. It is notable for the comparatively young Bergonzi and the feverish Amelia of Gencer. The others sing along, following in their wake.

No libretto, no notes.

PARSONS

WAGNER: *Lohengrin*

Ingrid Bjoner (Elsa), Astrid Varnay (Ortrud), Hans Hopf (Lohengrin), Hans-Guenter Noecker (Telramund), Josef Metternich (Herald), Kurt Boehme (King Heinrich); Bavarian Opera/ Knappertsbusch

Orfeo 900153 [3CD] 208 minutes

There are many things to admire in this recording of *Lohengrin*, as one might expect from a major opera house under a famed Wagner conductor. The performance took place on 2 September 1963. It was the 59th and final performance of *Lohengrin* before the theater closed for renovations. That same year, the National Theater—which had been largely destroyed in an air raid in 1943—reopened, and from that time has served as Munich’s main opera house. The Prinzregentenstrasse theater—with its relatively intimate size—1112 seats—would not be put back into service until 1988. It is often used for plays and dance performances.

The sonics on this recording vary greatly. Whereas selected Bayreuth productions were recorded professionally for broadcast and then released commercially—and those recordings used stereo as early as the mid-1950s—this is monaural and seems to have been made for archival purposes only. I would guess that a single microphone was used, in a fixed position in front of the stage.

The conducting is in capable hands. The singing and orchestral playing vary more. Ingrid Bjoner, from Norway, makes generally beautiful sounds as Elsa, and also develops appropriate toughness in her confrontations with the nasty Ortrud. Astrid Varnay, a Swede, sings Ortrud in a commanding manner. She offers a splendid scene with Telramund in Act 2. Their voices are both tough in quality, and they even handle sneering portamentos in much the same way. These two villains deserve each other.

In the title role, Hans Hopf is not as secure as Jess Thomas (for Kempe) or as wonderfully vivid as Sandor Konya (for Leinsdorf). He sounds metronomic sometimes, as if he is reading the score in his head. This is most obvious in the intimate love duet with Elsa in Act 3. Kurt Boehme is sometimes a bit unsteady as the king but enunciates admirably. Metternich is a first-rate herald. The chorus sings in a resonant, slightly messy opera-house manner. Their shifting moods “tell”: one senses, as one rarely does in opera recordings, a group of real people responding plausibly to one or another event on stage.

Sometimes a solo singer is somewhat far from the microphone, or goes flat, or both. Hopf is flat for long stretches. The chorus as a whole tends to keep pitch with the orchestra, but sometimes the individual members or sections are not perfectly tuned with each other. The winds and brass, too, don’t always tune their chords tightly. Some stretches of solo singing are afflicted with echo. I think this happens when a singer was far from the microphone.

The informative booklet—excellently translated by Chris Walton—stresses that this is the first time any Knappertsbusch recording of *Lohengrin* has been released to the public. I have long heard complaints about Knappertsbusch’s fondness for slow tempos, but the tempos here are similar to the Kempe recording, and Knappertsbusch is just as ready as Kempe to adjust the pace to make a dramatic or musical point. Nothing ever sounds stodgy or inert. The recording would have been only a few minutes longer than Kempe’s except that Knappertsbusch makes a substantial cut in Act 3 that was traditional in many opera houses.

I can recommend the recording for its authentic feel—especially if you enjoy, as I do, hearing portamentos not just in the voices but also in the strings. Still, some of those same virtues are to be found, and in much better sound, in two much-praised Bayreuth recordings that also have Varnay as Ortrud: Keilberth 1953 and, in stereo, Sawallisch 1962. If you are happier with studio recordings, the long-standing recommendation from most critics remains the Kempe (1962-63), with a superb cast and in sound that holds up beautifully after more than half a century. (See our Wagner Overview, July/Aug 2002.)

This set has no libretto.

LOCKE
Erik Then-Bergh

REGER: Piano Concerto; Telemann Variations; Silhouetten 2+6; HANDEL: Suite 4; BACH-BUSONI: Chaconne; BEETHOVEN: Sonata 28; Bagatelles op 33:1+4; SCHUMANN: Sonata 2; CHOPIN: Nocturne op 62:1; Südwestfunk-Orchester Baden-Baden/ Hans Rosbaud—APR 6021 [2CD] 154 minutes

Erik Then-Bergh (1916-82) was a German pianist whose rise coincided with the Nazi regime. Considered one of the Third Reich’s outstanding young talents, he was exempted from military service and performed widely during the war. Little seems to be known about his political sympathies and his activities in the years immediately after the war, and it is possible that a blanket was drawn over them. In the late 1940s he turned to teaching and only rarely performed in public. He was highly regarded as a teacher.

Most of these recordings were made from 1938 to 1942. They reveal an acutely sensitive artist with a delicate touch. The shorter pieces, including the Handel suite, are delightful; and the Chopin Nocturne is especially exquisite. (Come to think of it: How many German pianists have been outstanding Chopin players?) The Beethoven and Schumann sonatas are very fine also. In the Bach-Busoni Chaconne Then-Bergh shows his mettle as a virtuoso and yields little to Michelangeli, whose stunning 1951 recording (EMI) I put on for comparison. While Michelangeli sticks to a basic pulse, Then-Bergh is somewhat less powerful and changes tempo repeatedly. In the Schumann sonata, too, there are many tempo changes, perhaps a little too often in III and too extreme in IV; but his interpretation is always convincing. He is not a purist: there are octave doublings in Handel, and the Chopin Nocturne has an added bass note at the end.

The two major works, both by Reger, are rarely heard in concert now, and for good reasons. The Telemann Variations are less substantial than the serious and bombastic Bach Variations. They are lighter in texture, and each variation is basically a technical exercise, with the simple theme only thinly camouflaged. As the liner notes point out, Then-Bergh (recorded in 1951 on 78s) omitted one variation because he considered it boring. It is not the only boring one, but he makes the best of all of them. Compared to Marc-André Hamelin (Hyperion 66996), whose technical wizardry makes the variations sparkle like Christmas tree decorations, Then-Bergh is more staid and brings out the neo-baroque character of the work while braving the many technical challenges with aplomb. Like Hamelin, he wisely omits all repeats, which would make the work unbearably long.

The Piano Concerto is an unwieldy large-scale work with Brahmsian textures. It is impressive but difficult to love, mainly because of Reger’s incessant modulations that make his themes wander from key to key and inevitably reduce their coherence and memorability. (This tedious Reger characteristic is much less pronounced in the Telemann Variations, making them more accessible.) The slow movement is the best. Then-Bergh’s performance with Hans Rosbaud (from a 1958 stereo LP) is somewhat mellow in sound and touch than Rudolf Serkin’s magisterial 1959 recording with Eugene Ormandy (Sony 46452) but just as fine.

This release rescues an important artist from oblivion. The transfers, mostly by the renowned Mark Obert-Thorn, are excellent, with only moderate surface noise from 78s. The booklet notes (in English only) by Frank Latino are detailed and informative both about the artist and the recordings. Accolades by contemporary critics seem entirely justified on the basis of this hearing. I hope additional recordings by Then-Bergh will come to light.

REPP

Wolfgang Schneiderhan

MOZART: Violin Concerto 5; HENZE: Concerto 1; MARTIN: Magnificat

with Irmgard Seefried, s; Lucerne Festival/ Paul Hindemith, Ferdinand Leitner, Bernard Haitink

Audite 95.644—65 minutes

What unites all of these performances is the violinist and the Lucerne Festival. These are all concert performances. Wolfgang Schneiderhan (1915-2002) was one of the most important violinists in Vienna. Aside from his career as a soloist, he was concertmaster of the Vienna Symphony from 1933-37 and then the Vienna Philharmonic from 1937-51.

The earliest performance here is the Mozart, recorded in 1952 with Paul Hindemith conducting. The sound is monaural but good for its time. The performance is workmanlike rather than inspired or stylish. The concerto by Hans Werner Henze was a work of the composer’s youth. He wrote it in 1947 when he was still studying composition with Wolfgang Fortner. It is a ponderous, modernist work that shows considerable talent that needs to mature. Frank Martin wrote his single-movement Magnificat expressly for Schneiderhan and his wife, Irmgard Seefried, and this is its first per-
formance. Bernard Haitink leads the orchestra. It is a turbulent piece with much declamatory writing for the soprano that I find irritating.

**Let Freedom Ring!**
Lincoln Memorial Concert 1939; Copenhagen Recital 1961
Marian Anderson; Kosti Vehanen, Franz Rupp, p
JSP 683—79 minutes

Anyone who loves Marian Anderson or is a student of the Civil Rights movement here in the United States either knows about or has heard a transcription of this concert. On April 9, 1939 she gave an outdoor recital at the Lincoln Memorial because she was denied the use of Constitution Hall by the DAR. The situation was complicated, and the notes of this fine release go into all the details. She became an icon of the Civil Rights movement and a symbol of hope and perseverance in the face of prejudice and intolerance.

This is certainly the best-sounding transcription I've heard of that famous concert. Earlier copies were afflicted with wow, flutter, and tape instability, all of which have been cleaned up by John Haley's expert restoration. I only wish that NBC had allowed the entire concert to be broadcast (her final spiritual, 'My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord', though announced, was omitted owing to time constraints). No matter: her rich, fervent singing wings across the decades, undiminished by time. Haley also includes Harold Ickes's remarks at the beginning of the program, allowing us to be transported back to a time when legal discrimination and racism were the accepted norms in the United States.

If this concert were the only item here I would still recommend this to students of fine singing and American history. But JSP has unearthed a previously unpublished concert that Anderson gave at the Falkoner Centret in Copenhagen October 27, 1961. That was 22 years later and after Anderson had undergone some serious surgery to remove a tumor from her esophagus (in 1949). The voice isn't quite as rich and solid as it was earlier, but her artistry carries the day. She sings a program that includes lieder by Brahms, Schubert, Kilpinen, and Sibelius; an aria from Samson et Delilah ('Mon coeur'); and seven spirituals, including 'My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord'. John Haley admits to fixing some of Anderson's intonation problems—something I don't normally approve of because this is a historic document. But it's done so subtly one would never guess. There aren't many of her concerts available, so this is a real find. That it is presented so well and with such class is a true bonus. No texts or translations.

**NOTES & CORRECTIONS**

I praised a new recording of ten works by Marie Jaell (Sept/Oct) and erroneously stated that none of these works has been recorded before. I have now learned that Jaell's complete piano works are available in recordings by Cora Irsen (three volumes--one reviewed in this issue). I am delighted that these imaginative works are coming to the attention of pianists.

--Ralph Locke

In my review of Santa Fe Opera's Vanessa (Nov/Dec, p. 19) I wrote that "The attractive young Virginie Verez, in the celebrated role of Erika's niece..." That should have been "in the celebrated role of Vanessa's niece Erika".

--James Van Sant

My review of the Bruckner Quintet in the last issue gave the impression that I prefer string quartets to string orchestras.

In fact, the reverse is true. My biases are always in favor of the larger ensembles.

--O'Connor

Harold Corwin tells us that Eugene Ormandy's Prokofieff symphonies (Jan/Feb) were issued on CD in Japan and are still available there. Another reader got the set from Amazon and says the engineering is superb.

Decimation was a Roman military discipline; there is no evidence that it was applied to civilians (J/F p 249).

--John Barker
NEWEST MUSIC

Field Recordings
WOLFE: Reeling; GHYS: An Open Cage; GORDON: Gene Takes a Drink; MARCLAY: Fade to Slide; LANG: Unused Swan; BRAXTON: Casino Trem; JOHANNSSON: Hz; REYNOLDS: 7 Sundays; REICH: The Cave of Machpelah; Maximus to Gloucester; Letter 27 [withheld]; CALIX: Meeting You Seemed Easy; CLYNE: A Wonderful Day; ZAMMUTO: Real Beauty Turns
Bang on a Can All-Stars
Cantaloupe 21108 [CD+DVD] 72 minutes

Toward The Curve
ROSENKRANZ: Interlude; SWENDESEN: A Sound Does Not View Itself As Thought; FLINT: Spontaneous Combustion; HSU: Lullaby for Morning; KLINGBEIL: Vers la Courbe; JALBERT: Timing & Collisions; CHRISTIE: 3 East to West; LOPEZ: The Piper’s Son
Thomas Rosenkrantz, p
Oberlin 15-02 [CD+Blu-Ray] 75 minutes

BAUCKHOLT: Treibstoff; Lauflwerk; KEIL: Sog
Cikada
2L 116 [Blu-ray+SACD] 55 minutes

GJERTSEN: Landscape with Figures;
MOE: Persefone
Song Circus—2L 117 [Blu-ray+SACD] 57 minutes

Ur
FOOSNAES: 3 Sanger Til Skogen; VE NO Velkomme Med Aera; OVEROYE: Knolkvalen; Steinbiten; Breillabben; GJERDSJO: Lev Var Draum; EIKSUN: Voggesang for Ein Bytting;
KOREN: 3 Reiskapar
Aurum—2L 129 [SACD] 45 minutes

Playful Edge of The Wave
MARTIN: 100 Views of Mt Fuji; Stone & Feather;
BRUCE: Improvisations: Homage to Seb
Shirley Blankenship, Neely Bruce, p
Ravello 7909 [2CD] 146 minutes

Spin Cycle
WJERATNE: 2 Pop Songs on Antique Poems;
SILBERBERG: Transcendence; TEEHAN: Infinite Streams II; LAU: Quartet 3
Afiara Quartet; Skratch Bastid
Centrediscs 21215 [2CD] 93 minutes

In some ways the 2015 release from Bang on a Can All-Stars, Field Recordings, challenges our perceptions of the term classical music while also encapsulating much of what the field is today. The job of each composer of the release was to find a recording of something old or record something new and create a piece with or around it. The choices of the generally hip and important cast of characters appearing on the release were disparate but evocative. Listening to a piece of music like Julia Wolfe’s ‘Reeling’ makes me think about early music recordings by Bartok. Wolfe’s music, for me, is full of the energy of common people, town hall dances, simplicity over frustration, and enjoyment in the face of an increasing complex modernity. Her closing piece, ‘A Wonderful Day’, is honestly one of the most touching pieces I have ever heard. Wolfe’s works alone are worth the price of admission. ‘An Open Cage’, by Florent Ghys, is a spot-on tracking on John Cage’s speech patterns, reading excerpts from “Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)”. Instruments play exactly with his phrasing in a kind of analog Auto-tune The News and expose the musicality in the act of speech. Michael Gordon and Christian Marclay’s additions are both the kind of improvisational, clang-bang-crash with drumset pieces increasing in popularity these days. Johann Johannsson’s ‘Hz’ is airy, mysterious, deeply bassy, and foreboding. The electric guitar adds bite and consequence to the sound, while the piano arpeggios hint at a path toward tonality constantly undercut by the sheer force of the sound. Steve Reich’s Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 27 (withheld) sounds a bit like the overture for Requiem for a Dream with that now familiar feeling of traveling fast and slow at the same time.

The various interludes aside, Thomas Rosenkrantz’s piano program owes as much to the electronics that surround his playing to his technical proficiency. ‘A Sound Does Not View Itself As Thought’ by Peter V. Swendsen has an indeterminate tape originally played through iTunes on an iPad. The indeterminacy is actually the hard work of the iTunes shuffle algorithm the piano plays through, with, and around. The piece opens in a flurry of piano before the electronics take over. Moods and tone shift, drop, and appear, and, on the whole, the electronics are quite noisy. Michael Kingbeil’s Vers La Courbe begins and ends with Scriabin’s mystic chord. It maintains a quantifiable mood and makes ample use of the sustain pedal, low end rumbling, and mid-range leaps. Pierre Jalbert’s ‘Timing and Collisions’ replaces the sustain pedal with a delay and echo manipulation while also having the electronics repeat certain ostinatos. This allows the piano part to play between and over itself as it shifts from an almost Steve Reich
tonalism to a crumbling chromaticism before reverting to clearer harmonics.

Carola Bauckholt’s music derives inspiration from commonplace occurrences. Her translations into music become about musicians communicating in order to work together to recreate the specific sonic landscape she has in mind. In ‘Treibstoff’ there is a propulsion, but also a lengthy section of stop and go traffic, alternating speeds, and a keen awareness that you no longer know, for sure, what instruments are used to produce the sounds. Steel drums from the strings? Horse hooves from the inside of the piano? Bauckholt’s interplay.

The world of sound is deeply interesting on a nonexistent, phonemes are more available, and instruments are used to produce the sounds. The textures and timbres are full and support, and the program’s harmonics are mostly tonal. The liner notes are translated into English, but none of the spoken words are.

Leaving Norway, we head to Japan, but not really, for the winner of the unofficial award for most tracks on a release that isn’t a collection. *Playful Edge of The Wave* is 115 tracks over two discs. The main item is Robert J. Martin’s *100 Views of Mt Fuji: 100 Pieces in 100 minutes—Homage to Hokusai*. Martin’s collection of short piano miniatures is based on a collection of woodcuts titled *100 Views of Mt Fuji*. Movements are grouped, mostly in sets of five, and each one has a title reflecting the image of, on, or around Mt Fuji that it hopes to illuminate. Martin delves into every facet of the piano to keep each movement distinct. Accents, tone, color, rhythm, and dynamics are the main distinctions; and to Martin’s credit, there’s a lot of piano music here, but the piano stays, mostly, in the middle register and uses freely chromatic harmonics. Though not a theme and variation in form, the work can begin to feel like one that has about 60 variations too many.

“Spin Cycle” is an unusually thorough program in its intentions as well. Each piece is presented in the original form from one of four composers from Toronto, Canada. The string quartet is then remixed by DJ Skratch Bastid; and this, in turn, serves as inspiration for the original composer to craft a response for the Afiara Quartet to play either with or against the remix. The program unfolds across two discs for the simple reason that the dialog this approach engenders requires the runtime to accomplish it properly. Dinuk Wijeratne’s *2 Pop Songs on Antique Poems* takes a brisk, sweeping approach in ‘A Letter from the After-life’ and becomes a mid-tempo, improvisational, groove in ‘I Will Not Let You go’. The remix, ‘Soul Searching’, mirrors the two parts with a chill mood but adds piano chords, drum kit, and a heavy dose of scratching. The synthesis of these two pieces yields a calm groove with heavy backbeats and a bit of attitude in the new string lines in the first part and a 1980s hip-hop throwback feel in the second, quicker section. This same kind of interaction flows into the other three works, remixes, and responses. Pop sensibilities inform the tonally-based string quartets, with some sounding slightly more modern than others, and the scratch remixes are tasteful explorations and mash-ups that create meaningful perspectives on the music. The composer’s ability to respond to the remix advances the dialectic and illustrates, in a microcosm, where artists can end up by working together.
MAY/JUNE 2017

SCHNEIDER: Bach, Dracula, Vivaldi & Co.
Albrecht Mayer, ob; Dorothee Oberlinger, rec; Joachim Schaefer, Csaba Kelemen, tpt; Stefan Langbein, trb; Olga Watts, hpsi; Tonkünstler Orchestra/ Kevin John Edusei
Wergo 5114—70 minutes

ARTYOMOV: On the Threshold of a Bright World
National Philharmonic of Russia/ Vladimir Ashkenazy
Divine Art 25143—52 minutes

ARTYOMOV: Gentle Emanation
Russian National Orchestra/ Teodor Currentzis, Vladimir Ponkin
Divine Art 25144—71 minutes

DUNNE: Metaphrase
St Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic/ Jeffery Meyer
Innova 930—51 minutes

PERKINS: The Stolen Child
Audi/ Noah Horn
Navona 6067—49 minutes

TANN: Exultet Terra
Cappella Clausura/ Amelia Leclair
Navona 6069—64 minutes

After hearing Enjott Schneider’s Bach, Dracula, Vivaldi & Co., it is no surprise to learn that he is known for his film work. Even in works that are meant to recall the styles and idioms of older composers and scores, there always seems to be an underlying sense of narrative and dramatic movement that propels each piece. In II of Bach-Metamorphosen, for example, Schneider slows down and stretches out the opening of the Johannes-Passion, but the same oboes figure prominently in other movements, acting as musical characters that go through transformations and metamorphoses of their own. Sometimes these imitative or emulative works do not seem to imitate or emulate at all. Omaggio a Vivaldi, with its solo recorder, sounds to me much more like a semi-improvisational 19th Century concerto than it does “barococo”. (This may be unfair to both Schneider and Vivaldi.) Vivaldissimo, on the other hand, is exactly what I was expecting: all of the shimmer and shine of Vivaldi’s concertos, but freed from some of the harmonic and ensemble-textural conventions of the 18th Century. Draculisismo, it seems, only refers to Dracula as an abstract figure without definite musical representation, though I admit my knowledge here may be lacking. This music is witty and smart, if a bit odd and off the beaten path.

Both of Vyacheslav Artyomov’s records are retrospective collections of orchestral music, from as early as 1990 and revised as recently as 2011. The Russian composer writes in a range of styles, from the straightforward and neoclassical to atmospheric and aggressively modern. Sometimes themes come and go in regular phrases, organized with cadence, harmonic progression, and regular beat; other times his pieces are formed around swarms of strings in cluster chords, passing in and out of audibility through wide dynamic variation. With this flexibility of approach his music never sounds quite stable or steady. Even short works threaten to rupture and swerve from the expected. What may start off sounding like Ligetian density and volume can quickly revert to the bizarre playfulness of a Mahler scherzo. This stylistic cosmopolitanism is a strength that keeps the music aloft, even through a couple of hours. It also presents something of a challenge, in that there is little that is predictable or that can be taken for granted in any of the works recorded here. This constant demand for attention can be tiring, but is usually rewarding. I must admit that I’d never heard of Artyomov before getting these records, but I certainly find myself wanting to hear more!

From a Russian composer of an older generation to an American who studied in Russia: Timothy Dunne’s record Metaphrase is a collection of works that followed his move from one continent to another and from one mode of musical production to another. Studying at the State Conservatory of St Petersburg, Dunne went from performer to composer, producing work that is remarkably performer-centric. Rather than more traditional musical boundaries like singable melodic coherence and regular phrases, this music is driven by sound and noise, gesture, and physicality. Instrumental experimentation and the free, almost stream-of-consciousness kind of frenetic expression in works like Braid seem to suggest near or partial improvisation. Chirping and sliding harmonics, boisterous noise, and eerie soundscapes are complemented by sincere, expressive vocals and solostic passages. It is difficult to sum up Dunne’s music because of its dynamism and flexibility—seemingly nothing is out of bounds. And yet a consistent and compelling compositional voice emerges.

Scott Perkins’s Stolen Child is a collection of three multi-movement dramatic choral works, based on poetry by William Butler Yeats, Walt Whitman, WH Auden, and Walter de la Mare. They progress almost like miniature oratorios
with clear fluctuations in pace and texture, largely in service to the “plot”—or at least to the thematic elements of the text. Everything is a cappella, clearly reminiscent of a long tradition of English choral music, though also distinctly modern in its pacing, texture, and harmony. Toward the end of The World of Dream, suspensions and extended chords abound as Perkins takes full advantage of the dreamy sound of dense, dissonant vocal harmonies. While there are some such redeeming moments, I doubt that I will return to The Stolen Child, in part because constant, dramatic changes in pace and texture seem to insist too often that full emotive attention be paid. Lacking such structural patience, I didn’t recognize much of a payoff in any of the three works.

Hilary Tann’s record of vocal music intersperses her own work with pieces by 12th Century polymath Hildegard von Bingen. Hildegard’s lasting body of innovative musical works is among the largest of any medieval composer, a remarkable feat in itself. Her gender also lends significance to her position as one of the first identifiable female composers in musical history. Tann clearly draws on Hildegard and what she is, emulating to an extent the sound of her music. Most of the first half of the record is all-female a cappella polyphony; and for Contemplations Tann sets the work of Anne Bradstreet, one of North America’s first published female poets. While I don’t find any of these pieces or performances wildly compelling, the sincerity and dedication of both composer and ensemble are undeniable. (Indeed, the composer and ensemble have been performing works by women composers since 2004.) The title piece of the record, ‘Exultet Terra’, sounds to me much more like Stravinsky than it does Hildegard. Chant-like pronouncements by a lone voice are followed by ensemble sonorities rife with floating dissonance. The sparing use of wind instruments alongside sung Latin remind me of his Mass, though I hear Tann’s music as decidedly more optimistic. There is a joy in both writing and in singing that shines through on this record.

ADAMS

When a woman complains to a man, he tries to deal with the problem--tries to come up with a solution, offers advice and suggestions. But that is not what she is looking for at all. What she wants is sympathy and attention; she wants him to look at her, not the problem.

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VIDEOS

ABRAHAM: Victoria and her Hussar

Dagmar Schellenberger (Viktoria), Michael Heim (Stefan), Andreas Steppan (Cunlight), Andreas Sauerzapf (Janczi), Katrin Fuchs (Riquette), Peter Lesak (Count Ferry), Verena Barth-Jurca (O Lan); Morbische Festival/ David Levi

Videoland 22—155 minutes

Oehms 454—74 minutes (CD highlights)

Paul Abraham was a late operetta composer who represented the “new” generation who carried on with German musical theater after Lehár’s “silver-age” operettas. Viktoria und ihr Husar (1930) is an unusual combination of operetta, musical comedy, singspiel, and drama that includes all of the standard operetta elements (displaced royalty, military officers and royalty in disguise, comic secondary characters) along with rousing choruses and dances, waltz scenes, romantic songs, and gypsy folk influences. Viktoria und ihr Husar has all these, but doubled, then tripled, along with some truly embarrassing ethnic cliches.

Given the horrible economic conditions in Germany in 1930, Abraham’s show aims to entertain and lighten the spirit of a country facing hard times. As a transitional show that attempts to combine the familiar (operetta) with the modern (musical comedy), Viktoria seems like two different shows with two different plots. The operetta plot has to do with Victoria, the wife of John Cunlight, the American ambassador to Japan. Her former fiancé, Count Stefan (the titular Hussar), is a Hungarian count who is thought to have been executed during the Russian revolution, but escapes the firing squad and ends up in Japan. The rest of the operetta plot has Victoria trying to make up her mind whom she will end up with, her husband or her lover. The musical comedy plot involves two couples who are related to the operetta characters, but just slightly. The first couple is Count Stefan’s valet, Janczi, who has also escaped to Japan and falls in love with Riquette, Victoria’s maid. The other couple is Victoria’s brother, Count Ferry, who marries O Lan, the Japanese daughter of the aide de camp to the American ambassador. All the characters dream of returning to their beloved Hungarian homeland.

The three acts are in Japan, Russia, and Hungary. The Japan scenes are so stereotyped they are uncomfortable to sit through. The Germans of 1930 had no concept or respect for
Japanese culture (this was also a problem with Lehar’s Land of Smiles). There are huge Japanese fans, sing-song talk, and animated Buddhas. You would think that this 2016 production would have minimized these stereotypes, but no, the images are only magnified by the oversized production. The Second Act takes place in Russia, when the American ambassador is transferred there, along with everyone else. There are some Russian references, but the plot mostly involves the secondary comic characters; and the music and dance numbers have little to do with the setting. Act 3 takes place in Hungary, with lots of goulash and schmaltz, but at least it’s not totally embarrassing. All ends happily with a triple wedding.

If all this doesn’t sound promising, you’d be wrong. Although you could care less about the characters or story, the comedy characters dominate the proceedings and supply enough entertainment for the entire show. The comic characters are far more interesting, and although not necessary to the plot, their performances and music make the show worth seeing. Even In the otherwise dreadful First Act, their spark, energy, and musical scenes are a treat. The songs include Charlestonos, two-steps, and tangos, in athletic and spectacular production numbers and a kick-line that would make Busby Berkeley jealous. Abraham’s music is often inspired—there are beautiful and memorable melodies, swirling waltzes, tricky up-beat tempos, and modern sounding songs (for 1930) that are more musical comedy than operetta.

The Morbische Festival’s staging is spectacular, and the entire gigantic stage is used effectively. There are many colorful tall stairways and sets; the acting, singing, and dancing by the principles is excellent; the well-rehearsed dance numbers very impressive. At the end, the entire company, including the orchestra and technical staff—about 300 people—is brought out for applause. The camera angles are good, and the 16:9 picture quality is good, as is the 2.0 Dolby stereo sound. Subtitles are only in German and English.

The Oehms CD has musical highlights from the same performance. The selections are good, though some dance sequences are shortened. Abraham’s music is very entertaining even without the visuals. Abraham’s operetta excerpts can also be found on Hungaraton 16886 (S/O 2008).

**Bizet: Carmen**

Christine Rice (Carmen), Bryan Hymen (Don Jose), Aris Argiris (Escamillo), Maija Kovalevska (Micaela); Royal Opera/ Constantinos Carydis

Opus Arte 7188 [Blu-ray] 155 minutes

Beatrice Uria-Monzon (Carmen), Roberto Alagna (Don Jose), Erwin Schrott (Escamillo), Marina Poplavskaya (Micaela); Liceu/ Marc Pliulet

C Major 750304 [Blu-ray] 156 minutes

Bizet’s Carmen has survived a lot of abuse. These two videos supply examples of what can go wrong and what can go right. Of the two productions, the Royal Opera is the more traditional, with recognizable sets and costumes that evoke a stylized Spanish town in the 19th Century. There are hordes of town people, children, and soldiers doing what is described in the libretto. The troubling change is that Carmen is no longer a fiery and sultry femme fatale, but a straightforward slut aggressively caressing men. The ‘Danse Boheme’ has little dancing and much orgy. The constant laying on of hands and bodies, raised skirts, unbuttoned trousers, and sex acts puts a nasty and sometimes uncomfortable spin on the already tawdry tale, which was probably director Francesco Zambello’s intention.

 Somehow, Bizet’s music triumphs over the overtly sexual production owing to the performances. Christine Rice plays Carmen as a tramp who sings very well with a deep, smoky, and sultry mezzo-soprano that adds to her sexual characterization. Her Act 3 card scene is very effective. Aris Argiris is a puffed-up Escamillo who rides into Lillas Pastia’s saloon on his horse. Although his singing is rather dull, he is an aggressive fighter willing to take on bulls or people. Maija Kovalevska’s Micaela convincingly acts as the innocent thrown into this boiling pot and still manages to sing beautifully.

What elevates this production to a different level is Bryan Hymel’s outstanding Don Jose. His baritonal tenor voice and singing is controlled and dramatic, and his acting is truly convincing. The ‘Flower Song’ takes on new dramatic meaning here. I have seen many productions and videos of Carmen, and no one comes close to Hymel’s effectiveness as a wounded soul whose love and then rejection by Carmen destroys him. In this production, Don Jose, rather than acting as a doormat, is far more interesting than Carmen, and Hymel steals the show.

This was originally shown in 3D in movie theaters (a 3D Blu-ray is also available). The
camera work is often very close, roaming about the stage following the singers and wandering through the chorus and sets to emphasize the 3D effects. The orchestral playing is excellent, and conductor Carydis makes the most of the key music and dramatic moments. The preludes to Acts 2, 3, and 4 are eliminated, but are heard in shortened versions over the end titles. The 5.1 Dolby sound is excellent, as is the 16:9 picture. The performance uses spoken dialog rather than Giraud’s recitatives.

The 2011 Teatro Liceu production shows how wrong things can go when the director’s concept takes over from Bizet’s intentions. Director Calixto Bieito is known for controversial productions. Here the awful results are performed (again with dialog) on a mostly bare stage during the Franco Fascist period. The libretto hardly matters, as the director’s concept avoids logic. There are large groups of marching soldiers, poor children who come out of nowhere, and an unseen cigarette factory that has plenty of employees that would make Donald Trump proud. The girls and soldiers make their assignations using a pay telephone booth. Carmen in this production goes beyond slut. She literally assaults the men and selects them as if at a meat market. Don Jose is just another piece of meat. The sexual tension and acting is overt and tasteless. Beatrice Uria-Monzon’s Carmen has a harsh, grating voice which fits this grotesque character, but it’s not pleasant to listen to. Roberto Alagna as Don Jose and Marina Poplavskaya as Micaela sing their arias and duets beautifully but are not nearly as convincing as the Royal Opera cast. Alagna’s singing is excellent, but his Don Jose takes all the abuse thrown at him without much involvement.

In Act 2, Lillas Pastia’s saloon scene is performed at the beach. Sex is going on in the back seat of a Mercedes-Benz and people emerge in various levels of undress. The ‘Danse Boheme’ is mostly sexual gyrations. Escamillo’s entry is through the back door of the car. Erwin Schrott’s singing is strained and his voice is rough. The Act 3 Prelude becomes a sexually suggestive dance performed by a totally naked man in front of a bull cut-out. The point of this was lost on me. Autos arrive, like a car rally, and Escamillo and Don Jose are forced to chase each other by jumping from car roof to car roof. The Card scene is ineffectively played on the hood of a car. Act 4 is performed with the chorus lined up (like My Fair Lady’s Ascot scene) commenting on the bull-fight. The death scene is effective enough, but I had lost interest long before the end. The orchestra plays well (they don’t have to look at the production) and Piollet’s conducting is adequate. The 16:9 picture quality (with standard camera placements) is clear and the LPCM soundtrack is very good. Both recordings have subtitles in every language you might need including the original French.

There is no question that the Royal Opera production is the better of the two, and should be seen for Bryan Hymel’s performance. If you can put up with the sexual goings-on you might enjoy the rest of the show. If not, there are many other traditional productions available without the overt sexual content. The Liceu audience should have asked for their money back.

FISCH

CASELLA: La Donna Serpente
Angelo Villari (Altidor), Zuzana Markova (Miranda), Vanessa Goikoetxea (Armilla), Anta Jankovska (Farzana), Candida Guida (Canzade), Simon Edwards (Alditof), Carmine Monaco (Demogorgon); Orchestra Internazionale/ Fabio Luisi
Bongiovanni 20031—150 minutes

Italian composer Alfredo Casella (1883-1947) began his only grand opera in 1928 at the age of 45. Before that he wrote mostly instrumental works and was one of the few Italian composers of his time who did not write operas. In fact, he was skeptical about opera and published articles criticizing Verdi and Donizetti. A change of mind in the early 1920s led to his starting an opera based on 18th Century Italian playwright Carlo Gozzi’s Donna Serpente (The Serpent Woman), which Wagner used for his first opera, Die Feen (The Fairies). Puccini, Busoni, and Prokofiev also wrote operas based on Gozzi’s plays: Turandot and Love for Three Oranges.

Casella had been absorbed in that play for a long time. He finished the opera in 1931 after three years; its premiere was in Rome in 1932. He also made an orchestral suite from the opera (Mar/Apr 2013).

A fairy princess, Miranda, is reluctantly allowed by the Demogorgon, King of the fairies, to marry the mortal king of Teflis, Altidor, but she must not disclose that she is a fairy. When Altidor finds out anyway, he is told he is forbidden to curse her no matter what she does. He is not told that if he fails, she becomes a snake. One trial requires that Altidor watch Miranda throw their two sons into a fire. The king does not curse her, and returns

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to his people, who are at war with the Tartars. The victorious Teflis army returns with a Russian-style chorus of victory, but triumph proves short-lived when a minister falsely tells Altidor that Miranda threw Teflis’s food supplies into the river. Altidor curses Miranda, who soon returns. She tells her husband the truth, returns their children, and leaves to begin her transformation into a snake. The lights switch from Miranda to an amazingly limber dancer who begins writhing with movements that suggest a human turning into a reptile to music reminiscent of the Berceuse from Stravinsky’s Firebird. Miranda then sings a plea to the heavens. With the help of a magician, Altidor defeats three monsters who guard her and releases Miranda from her reptile status. The chorus singing about her return is touching, and the triumphal and processional music are impressive.

La Donna Serpente is a fantastical combination of comedy, militancy, and tragedy set in the Caucasus. The major musical influences are Prokofieff (particularly Love for Three Oranges), Stravinsky (Les Noces), Rimsky-Korsakoff (for the Russian styling and infusion of ballet), and Rossini (the comedic and goofy “patter” ensembles). The music is colorful, with primitive rhythm, lively, complex, and often dissonant orchestra writing, and several choruses. The few passages that approach lyricism are for women. The male writing is more declamatory. The Prologue is primeval, often silly, and not very promising. Act I picks up a little, but repetitiveness becomes a problem by its end. Act II is more lyrical and atmospheric. Act III is more romantic, touching, and triumphant.

The singing is impressive, given the difficulty of the angular, dissonant vocal writing. Zuzana Markova sounds a little like a young Maria Callas; and her clean, silvery soprano adds the only serious emotion to the opera. Tenor Angelo Villari sounds like a refined Mario del Monaco. His music is more declamatory than Markova’s, and he carries it off very well. Soprano Vanessa Goikoetxea is strong as Armilla (the duet between her and Markova is excellent). Carmine Monaco is darkly menacing as the fairy king. The orchestra plays its difficult music extremely well, and Luisi’s conducting is spot on. Also enjoyable are some clever, acted-out effects, e.g. a man’s face remarkably mimicking the rhythms of horses galloping, two men producing an invisible gong, etc.

There is little of what might be called a set beyond arc-like structures that resemble crescent moons and are moved about by cast members. The costumes are colorful, but the dress for most of the male leads is clownish. Some of the men resemble court jesters; other shirtless men look like strippers. The costuming for women is more classically operatic; some wear Brunilde-like costumes with bladed head-dress. It appears that Teflis’s women are more powerful than its men, and it is Armilla and Canzada who lead the Teflis armies.

The camera work is good, with a mix of close-ups and medium shots, but there are moments when mouths are not in sync with the music. Quite unusual are frequent peeks into an orchestra pit that is so dark that the only clear figure is the conductor. The applause for the long set of bows for the large cast is tepid, and cast members do their best to maintain their smiles. I suspect the lack of enthusiasm is directed toward the work, not the performance, and it is sad to watch.

The more I watched La Donna Serpente, the more it drew me in. There is certainly a lot to look at, things keep moving, and its vigor and spirit are hard to resist after a while. That said, the opera is most likely to appeal to admirers of composers like Casella, Stravinsky, and Prokofieff, along with opera buffs looking for something different. If you are unsure, you might try the suite, though La Donna Serpente’s music works better as an opera than as an instrumental work.

The package comes with an excellent essay and plot summary. I must add that I had problems starting the disc, and in order to get English subtitles, I had to choose a “blank” Track 7 or 9 on the Subtitles menu.

HECHT

GLASS: Einstein on the Beach
Antoine Silverman (Einstein), Helga Davis, Kate Moran (Performers), Jasper Newell (Boy), Charles Williams (Mr Johnson); Lucinda Childs Dance Company; Philip Glass Ensemble/ Michael Riesman
Opus Arte 1178 [2DVD] 264 minutes

For years Einstein on the Beach was, for most people, a concert piece; even people who attended a performance would have a hard time quite remembering what they’d seen. A few precious moments of footage (from the 1984 revival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music) were included in Mark Obenhau’s documentary on the piece, which originally aired on PBS: 10 seconds or so of Lucinda Childs performing the ‘Solo for Character in

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mid-80s—I’m not sure.

fall, but Glass had to return to driving a cab to

co-commissioned by a number of organizations, made the rounds in 2012 and 2013; this video was made at the Theatre du Chatelet in early January 2014. It is available in both Blu-ray and standard DVD formats, and it looks spectacular. The video reveals the kind of painterly lighting that marks all of Wilson’s work, and the director (Don Kent) does a good job of balancing the requirements of video to present a variety of perspectives and the static view of the entire stage that audiences would have seen originally. In the opening scene of Act 1, for instance, this allows me to see the tiny seashell on stage magnified to gigantic proportions: it took me a while to realize, after seeing it at the beginning of the scene, that it actually related to something on the stage.

The performers are fine, especially Helga Davis and Kate Moran, who portray the two female characters. Stylized movement and the two ensemble dances, choreographed by Lucinda Childs, occupy a central position in the dramaturgy of the work, and for this reason alone the video is an important contribution to Wilson’s work, and the director (Don Kent) does a good job of balancing the requirements of video to present a variety of perspectives and the static view of the entire stage that audiences would have seen originally. In the opening scene of Act 1, for instance, this allows me to see the tiny seashell on stage magnified to gigantic proportions: it took me a while to realize, after seeing it at the beginning of the scene, that it actually related to something on the stage.

The performers are fine, especially Helga Davis and Kate Moran, who portray the two female characters. Stylized movement and the two ensemble dances, choreographed by Lucinda Childs, occupy a central position in the dramaturgy of the work, and for this reason alone the video is an important contribution to anyone who loves the work and wants to understand it better. I do miss seeing Childs perform the Solo I mentioned above, but a member of her company, Caitlin Scranton, handles it marvelously. The music is superbly performed and recorded. I still miss the ragged imperfections of earlier performances—a kind of extra energy and urgency that I thought served it well—but I’m making my peace with it.

The booklet includes some good information by Glass, who rightly observes there is no current example like the great cultural moment of the late 70s and early 80s, when so many interesting artists were able to work without much worry about commercial success and make so many striking and truly new works of art. Glass and Wilson lost $100,000 mounting the original production of the work; I don’t know how Wilson made up the shortfall, but Glass had to return to driving a cab to help cover what the correspondence in his archive called “The Einstein Debt”. Both artists have endured and gone on to enjoy extensive and financially remunerative careers. I wonder, though, about the others who weren’t so fortunate. And I worry about the future of truly provocative music, which cannot yield the kind of profit that investors seem to require these days. With luck, this video of Einstein might allow some work of this sort to endure in spite of the changing cultural and economic landscape.

HASKINS

Mozart: Marriage of Figaro
China NCPA/ Lu Jia
Accentus 20307 [2DVD] 177 + 16 minutes

For a long time I have felt that Oriental musicians might be the salvation of European-American classical music. They love it and they adapt to it and perform it so well. This video was filmed at January 2014 performances at the China National Centre for the Performing Arts using the CNCPA chorus and orchestra conducted by Lu Jia.

The sets designed by Giuliano Spinelli and costumes by Irene Monti are “authentically” Italian, but look quite old and worn. Stage director Jose Luis Castro has nothing new to show. The whole affair looks like a conventional, but good, production from the 1950s. Any secondary opera country would have presented it with pride.

The Chinese singers are excellent. None are known in the West. They sing and act with a gentle beauty. Marcellina (Zhang Zuo) is beautiful, with loads of charisma; and Conte Almaviva (Zhou Zhengzhong) is tall, stately, and extra firm of voice. And it’s all sung in the original Italian.

A 16-minute extra has interviews with the four principal singers, conductor, and state director. All the Chinese speak in almost flawless English, but Castro speaks in Spanish (with projected English translation).

PARSONS

Offenbach: Tales of Hoffmann
Daniel Johansson (Hoffmann), Kerstin Avemo (Olympia, Giulietta), Mandy Fredrich (Antonia, Giulietta), Rachel Frenkel (L’Ameuse, Nicklausse, Mother’s Voice), Michael Volle (Luther, Lindorf, Coppélius, Dappertutto, Dr Miracle), Christophe Mortagny (Andres, Cochenille, Frantz); Bregenz Festival/ Johannes Debus
C Major 735604 [Blu-Ray] 174 minutes

As if there were not enough versions of Offenbach’s unfinished opera, here we have one adapted for the Bregenz Festival (July 2015) by Stefan Herheim, Johannes Debus, and Olaf A
Schmitt. It is still an opera fantastique in five acts, but more fantastique than ever. Forget any Hoffmann you have seen before. This bears no resemblance to it. Norwegian stage director Stefan Herheim, aided by set designer Christof Hetzer and costume designer Esther Biallas, has created a phantasmagoria of excitement and imagination, compelling in its delight and offensiveness. It’s a search for one’s self via a drag show!

This production was not performed on Bregenz’s famous “theater in the lake”, but in the indoor Festspielhaus. The opening is a real shocker. Around a giant set of Busby Berkeley flights of stairs the chorus flows in: the women in tail coats, the men in suspender belts. At the top the diva Stella appears in a sumptuous sequin dress. She is so drunk she falls head-first down the stairs. But fear not, Stella is portrayed by a stuntman. She’s a transvestite! Each of Hoffmann’s three loves wears one of three basic costumes: swallow-tailed coat, erotic lingerie, and evening gown. And so it goes. For the grand finale Giulietta does not exist, Olympia and the Muse sing the Barcarolle and are then joined by Antonia to sing Giulietta’s aria as a trio. Hoffmann foreswears love and drinks himself senseless with a group of bachelors. On waking up he realizes that he, the poet, can never combine art and reality. He stabs himself. All the characters, come to the footlights and proclaim the moral of the story. “One is made great by love and greater by tears.”

The performance is terrific! All are deeply involved, committed, sing their hearts out. Swedish tenor Johansson is strikingly handsome, has the stamina for the demanding role, but is vocally stolid. Two ladies perform in an unusual combination: Aremo for coloratura Olympia and mezzo Giulietta. Fréderich combines lyric soprano Antonio and a doubling of mezzo Giulietta. Frenkel combines spoken, soprano, and mezzo in her three roles. Volle is all four villains—quite a performance. Mortagny does the traditional bit with all of the “clowns”. It’s a rapid-fire, exciting performance.

Parsons

Puccini: La Boheme
Daniela Dessi (Mimi), Alida Berti (Musetta), Fabio Armiliato (Rodolfo), Alessandro Luongo (Marcello); Puccini Festival/ Valerio Galli
C Major 736204 [Blu-Ray] 123 minutes

The well-known Italian film director, Ettore Scola (who died just last year), had staged just one opera before this production. In the notes to this release, he describes how he originally was going to stage the opera in a “very revolutionary manner”, but opted instead for a basically traditional production in the best sense. The set is made up of several tiers that rotate to the different locations as the opera progresses and is very colorful. The chorus is not used very imaginatively, but at least the director makes sure we know where to look with so many people on stage. There is a nude lady present at the top of Act II, modeling for a painter and his companions. One wonders how that would be possible outside on Christmas Eve in Paris (wouldn’t she be awfully cold?), but other than that there is little that should disturb anyone as Scola follows the librettists’ intentions closely.

The singers are all excellent, though it must be admitted that up-close both Armiliato and Dessi look too mature for their characters. This would not be apparent from the audience and is not a real distraction. Both singers have appeared together in other Puccini works on DVD (La Fanciulla del West, Madama Butterfly, Tosca) and they bring real chemistry to their relationship on stage. Whether from habit or conviction, Armiliato sings very loudly all through the performance, with only a few headtones in evidence here and there. His acting is certainly acceptable, but doesn’t have the detail and subtlety of his wife’s performance. Yes, Dessi’s voice was fresher 20 years ago when she recorded the role for EMI with Giuseppe Sabbatini, but the colors of her voice and her handling of the text are exquisite. The fact that she would die within a year or so of this performance makes her portrayal even more poignant.

Alida Berti sings Musetta’s waltz very well and looks stunning in her Act II outfit. Alessandro Luongo is one of those good Italian baritones who doesn’t turn up on these shores very often and we’re all the poorer for it. I have no complaints about the rest of the all-Italian cast except to say that it’s good to hear a cast of singers who all speak Italian as natives and so always know what they’re singing about.

Valerio Galli leads the proceedings crisply. He knows what he’s supposed to do and supports the singers without indulging them too much. The picture is very clear and detailed, the sound excellent. You won’t regret adding this to your Blu-ray opera collection.

Reynolds

May/June 2017
**PUCCINI: Turandot**

Sun Xiuxi (Turandot), Dai Yuqiang (Calaf), Yao Hong (Liu), Tian Haojiantang (Timur), Liu Songhu (Ping), Li Xiang (Pang), Chen Yong (Pong), Liu Naiqi (Emperor); China NCPA/ Daniel Oren

Accentus 20338—127 minutes

Puccini’s grand Chinese opera has been a favorite in China. In 1999 Zubin Mehta took the forces of the Florence May Festival to Beijing for a spectacular outdoor production in the Forbidden City. It’s a worthy performance but simply overwhelmed by the fantastic sets and costumes. It is still available. For Decca Mehta recorded a luxury superstar cast of Joan Sutherland (Turandot), Luciano Pavarotti (Calaf), Montserrat Caballe (Liu), Nicolai Ghiaurov (Timur), Tom Krause (Ping), and veteran tenor Peter Pears as Aloum!

Here the opera is again performed in Beijing—this time indoors in spectacular new China National Centre for the Performing Arts. The production designed by Gao Guangjian (sets) and Mo Xiaomin (costumes) is a modern interpretation of traditional Chinese designs. Stage director Chen Xinya takes full advantage of the modern stage mechanisms of the new theater. The stage rises, it lowers, it comes apart in sections, it sings and dances by itself. Act 1 ends in a dazzling display of color and movement. Dance plays an important part in the spectacle. The towering executioner, PuTin Yao, is accompanied by troupe of skeletal assistants who whirl about him to prepare his executional ax. In the chorus of the rising moon two dancers representing Princess Lou-Ling (in dramatic black) and the Feathered Man (in resplendent white) suggest the personalities and actions of the two protagonists. In the Act 2 sentimental trio of masques three ladies dressed as large lotus flowers glide and drift about.

Whoa! A new ending for Puccini’s unfinished last opera. Chinese composer Hao Weiya has used the original Italian text and a few of Puccini’s sketches for the Turandot-Calaf duet and finale, but not many. One occasionally recognizes a wisp of Franco Alfano’s ending, but most of the music is by Weiya. Throw in a generous helping of dissonance and it’s an effective new ending.

All of the singers have assimilated the grand opera traditional style of singing. Yuqiang (Calaf) is particularly dramatic, a barrel of tenor squillo and gesture. There is a richly sung, dignified Timur. Hong’s Liu is notable for her exquisite sustained pianissimos and a tendency to keep her eyes on the conductor. The trio of masques are a heartily comic lot.

Sun Xiuxi is a strikingly beautiful woman and accomplished actress; her facial expressions reveal a depth of personality rarely seen. Her horror at her defeat in the riddle contest and later pained appeal to her father, the Emperor, humanize Turandot. She hits all the notes with ease, but with a raw, edgy sound. Naiqi’s Emperor is more of a vocal actor than many another.

The only Westerner in the production is conductor Daniel Oren. He draws from his Chinese chorus and orchestra a savage, thrilling performance.

An extensive bonus, “The Making of Turandot”, could be easily overlooked as it is mentioned only in a small blurb on the back cover. It’s well worth watching for its cast and stage director interviews.

Even with a number of other excellent videos this one would make a good first choice.

PARSONS

**PUCCINI: Turandot**

Nina Stemme (Turandot), Aleksandrs Antonenko (Calaf), Maria Agresta (Liu), Alexander Tsymbalyuk (Timur) Carlo Bosi (Altoum); La Scala/ Riccardo Chailly

Decca 743937—136 minutes

**Turandot** is a fantasy opera that is often subject to the director’s interpretation of the material. Puccini allowed a lot of leeway in time and place; he described the action as set in an imaginary China “of the age of fables”. Directors have played fast and loose with Puccini’s intentions, making the characters robots, outer-space creatures, and other hard to believe characters. Sets have included Erector sets, floating clouds, and depictions of Hell. At the opposite end, you have Franco Zeffirelli’s popular candy-box version loaded with Chinnoiserie.

This 2015 La Scala production has both modern and spectacular elements that work effectively. The director, Nikolas Lehnhoff, respects Puccini’s intentions and music; and the staging is sometimes simple, sometimes elaborate, and often impressive. This unusual and somewhat odd production works because the fantasy concept is maintained, nothing is too far out of balance with the scenario and the libretto, and the visual elements don’t detract from the music. The sets are primarily blocks of color against a pyramid shaped
building with several balconies surrounding a fire pit. The chorus wears white masks and black costumes that allow them to act as a faceless mob. The black costumes allow the chorus to disappear when the staging also turns black. Ping, Pang, and Pong are dressed in colorful costumes and clown masks; the Emperor is a ghoulish pinhead with a 20-foot long draped dress, and Turandot wears unusual Chinese-looking goddess headgear. In contrast, Calaf, Liu, and Timur wear simple peasant clothes.

The performances are excellent and everyone is very much involved with their characters and the plot. The La Scala chorus is very large and sings magnificently. Aleksandrs Antonenko's Calaf is noble, with a gorgeous tenor sound. Maria Agresta's voice is beautiful and her characterization is delicate, restrained, and simple. Alexander Tsymbalyuk is a rock-solid bass who acts his small part as a lost soul. Ping, Pang, and Pong are impressive in their Act 2 trio. Nina Stemme is a very powerful Turandot. She is note perfect, her character is haughty, and she sings with great control. She has a very hard edge in 'Questia Reggia' that overpowers the microphones and becomes distorted. She tones this down during her explanation of her ancestor's debasement, and she becomes ever more fearful as Calaf correctly answers her questions.

Act 3 is tense as Turandot and the chorus call for more terrible tortures to reveal Calaf's name. 'Nessun Dorma,' rather than a star turn, fits well into this scenario as Calaf becomes increasingly anguished. Liu is caught up in the frenzy, and her final song of undying love is moving and beautifully sung. Timur's anguished cries on hearing of her death are chilling. Rather than use Alfano's cinematic but quickly resolved conclusion, this production uses Luciano Berio's ending. I've never found it effective, and it adds about 15 minutes of music with very little action. It does, however, allow Calaf and Turandot to have a quiet resolution to all the turmoil that has preceded it.

I enjoyed this unusual and effective production, which, although spectacular, concentrates on the story and characters. There are many videos, including Zeffirelli's Met staging (with Alfano's ending). It has been recorded several times, the best being the original production with Eva Marton and Placido Domingo (DG 30589). The most effective production I've seen (not on DVD) was a 2006 David Hockney production at the San Francisco opera—modern elements with many beautiful sets and costumes without overdoing the spectacle. Avoid the 2002 Salzburg production, which uses David Pountney's robotic symbolism to undermine Puccini's music and defies any logic.

**RAMEAU: Dardanus**

Reinoud van Mechelen (Dardanus), Caelle Arquez (Iphise), Karina Gauvin (Venus), Florian Sempey (Antenor), Nahuel Di Pierro (Teucer, Ismenor), Katherine Watson (Amour, Shepherdess); Pygmalion/Raphael Pichon

HM 9839051—193 minutes

This is something of a "second chance" endeavor with this opera for conductor Pichon. In February of 2012, a recording was made of a concert performance of the work, and that was released in two successive 2-CD audio sets by Alpha (951: M/A 2014; 964: J/A 2016). This new video release captures Pichon's staged production at the Bordeaux Opera in April of 2015.

In 1739, Rameau first presented this opera, freely treating mythological traditions about the founder of Troy. Dardanus is in love with, and loved by, the daughter of hostile King Teucer, Iphise, who is also sought by Antenor; also involved is a sorcerer, Ismenor. It was not a success at first, and Rameau returned to it for a revival in 1744, but with an extensively revised score. The present release is the fourth recorded presentation of the work, and the game is always figuring out which of the two versions has been used. The information given on that count has been rather muddled.

In my reviews of Pichon’s 2012 audio recording, I tried to sort out the issues for those first three. Pichon seems pretty much to have followed the 1744 version, where the action in Acts III to V was expanded and developed more fully. For this 2015 production, however, he has rethought his approach and used the original 1739 core, which has an elaborate dream fantasy in Act IV but a more simplistic working out of the plot in that and Act V—although he does revive an elaborate (and totally irrelevant) pastoral sequence in Act II that Rameau himself cut in 1739. On the other hand, Pichon has followed some other precedents and incorporated a few things—notably Dardanus’s prison monolog in Act IV—into his working score.

As with his audio recording, Pichon marshals a team of mostly young singers. The only familiar one among them is the rich-voiced...
Gauvin. But all of the team is excellent in vocal coloring, agility, and stylistic sense. I particularly enjoy the pert charm of Watson in her various roles, especially as Amour (Cupid). Arquez (the one cast carryover from the audio recording) is very moving in her Act I monolog and elsewhere, and Van Mechelen rises to powerful heights in the great prison scene in Act IV. It was interesting to have the same singer (the excellent bass Di Piero) take the roles of both King Teucer and the sorcerer Ismenor—something not done in the earlier audio recording. Was there some cryptic point being made? The chorus and period orchestra are again (as in the audio release) absolutely on target all the way.

The stage director is Michel Fau, who understands the movements and gestures of Baroque theater, devising a staging of palpable period character. In this he is abetted by the cleverly Baroque theater-in-a-theater set devised by Emmanuel Charles. The costumes are generally apt, if occasionally over the top. (Di Piero has an exaggerated garb as Teucer, with bizarre eye shadow, but an even weirder get-up as Ismenor, wearing sunglasses to cover his other ego's eye makeup.) I like the nuanced lighting devised by Joel Fabing. And there is the contribution of choreographer Christopher Williams, for the element so important in Rameau's operas: dance, lots of dancing. His team of a good dozen lithe dancers constantly adds feasts for the eyes.

Now, why can't William Christie work with a team like this in his Baroque opera productions, instead of the trashmeisters he has so often had?

There is no libretto here. The nicely illustrated booklet does have some good if brief notes and plot outline, with very terse information about the musical edition. And it should be noted that this release comes in both DVD or Blu-ray. Note that it is only on the Blu-ray disc that one gets a "bonus" of background discussion on the production.

All in all, a valuable realization of an important French Baroque opera.

BARKER

Arena Di Verona: The Golden Years
Excerpts from Aida, Nabucco, La Traviata, and Rigoletto
Dynamic 37732—77 minutes

This is a documentary film about the history of the Verona Arena and the various productions that were produced there in the early 1980s. The film includes interviews with various singers, directors, set designers, grounds crew, and conductors. The long neglected 15,000 seat Roman arena was transformed into a theater in the 1850s. Opera performances began in earnest in 1913 with Aida, and over the years some very famous singers have performed there.

The performer interviews include notable singers from the early 1980s: Sherill Milnes, Rolando Panerai, Katia Ricciarelli, Fiorenza Cossotto, and Raina Kabaivanska. They are also seen in short sequences from rehearsals and performances of Aida, Nabucco, La Traviata, and Rigoletto. Interviews with the set designers and production staff help to understand the logistics of producing shows in the huge arena. They do admit that the size of the place brings special challenges for the lighting, orchestral balance, reverberation, and timing, directing the performers so that they can be seen and heard from a distance. The performance footage is interesting, particularly the backstage scenes of moving huge set pieces and marshalling hundreds of extras without interfering with the primary singers.

The Arena is primarily a "destination" theater where spectacle is anticipated and the main customer is the summer tourist. I have seen many videos made there, and performances have ranged from large scale productions that are appropriate for the giant stage (Aida, Nabucco) and others that are hopelessly lost in the vast space (Madama Butterfly, Tosca). It must be difficult for the audience to see who is singing. Even the interviewed conductors admit to the difficulties in having the performers so far away from the orchestra. The videos have the advantage of close camera work, something the audience doesn’t get.

Originally filmed in 16mm, the picture quality is grainy and soft-focused and the sound track is in adequate monaural.

Word Police: quote

In 1970 the American Heritage Dictionary was strongly against use of this word in writing to mean "quotation". In the years since, a more liberal usage panel has come to accept it. ("The first lines of his aria include a quote from Shakespeare.") It is always hard to decide whether looser rules weaken a language; maybe sometimes they are quite neutral or even beneficial. In this case we sometimes let it go thru and sometimes replace it, depending on the rest of the sentence.
**Exploring the World of JS Bach**  
Robert L & Traute M Marshall  
U of Illinois Press, 245 pages; $29.95 paper

This is a travel guide to the 50 or so towns in Germany where Bach lived, worked, and visited (in a few cases we assume he did but have no proof). I have visited a number of these places, and it amazes me that so much is still standing from his time. I wish I had had this guidebook, because I missed quite a bit. I would love to go back to Thuringia and that area with this book in hand. There are maps and good color pictures. There’s a lot of history, but it is summarized helpfully. This is truly a travel book, though Dr Marshall is certainly an important Bach scholar.

**VROON**

**Beethoven’s Skull**  
by Tim Rayborn  
Skyhorse, 270 pages, $21.99 hardcover  
(307 W 36 St, flr 11, NY 10018-6592)

It is amazing to find a hardcover book that’s new selling for so little. The author has collected odd facts about hundreds of composers, and any reader will find it entertaining, though not all of it is news to lifelong classical fans. Some of these composers were weird, and some were probably dangerous (Gesualdo, for one).

The book is in two parts, and the second (beginning at page 150) is called “A Dark and Weird Musical Miscellany.” I find that second part much less absorbing than the first, as if the author were scraping the bottom of the barrel. I am not fascinated by the weird. I often wonder why our whole society seems to be crazy about Halloween. But young people often seem attracted to the weird, so this book will serve them well.

**VROON**

**Nation and Classical Music**  
From Handel to Copland  
Matthew Riley & Anthony D Smith  
Boydell Press, 245 pp, $45

The music historian Abraham Veinus observed that there’s an innate conflict in the Romantic notion of the national composer. Artists generally in the 19th Century prided themselves as having a unique personality and style. Yet national composers claim to represent their entire country.

Riley and Smith examine the mingling of national and classical music across a broad spectrum. They sensibly begin with definitions of what a nation is, though in such detail that the narrative bogs down. When they get to individual countries or regions and specific composers and works, the book becomes genuinely interesting. The authors examine many important aspects of nationhood. As Conte di Cavour’s predecessor D’Azeglio put it, “We have made Italy, and now we must make Italians.”

Music turned out to be a great blender. Choral concerts, such as Mendelssohn’s leading of the Bach St Matthew Passion, became a good medium of mass national expression, helping unite people of several classes in a common goal.

Even within a given nation, the concept could be vague. When Czech music began to flourish, Smetana was considered too German. Dvorak, born of lower origins, and who grew up speaking Czech, was at first more acceptable to their intellectuals. The authors also examine the cult of ruins. They were not only a symbol of nationhood, but represented the “real nation” from the time of its roots, as in the great painter Caspar David Friedrich’s memorializing the ruins of Eldena. The Vysehrad castle in Ma Vlast typifies this. In recent times, both Speer and Hitler shared this fascination.

A problem the authors note is that the folk music of many countries uses similar techniques—modal tunes and harmonies, bass drones, etc. Inverted pedals to depict open spaces are common to Borodin’s Steppes of Central Asia and Copland’s Billy the Kid. Orchestration became one way to differentiate them.

The writers carry their survey through to the 1940s. One of the unspoken ironies is that 12-tone composition, intended by Schoenberg as a technique that would “guarantee the supremacy of German music for 100 years” wound up creating an international, not to say faceless, idiom. When the Bauhausbunders called their architecture the International Style, they gave the game away.

Though more for the specialist than the lay reader, this book, which is well researched and footnoted, is a worthwhile contribution, conveniently assembling details previously strewn about in several volumes.

**O’CONNOR**
**The State of Music & Other Writings:**
Virgil Thomson

Library of America, 1184 pages, $50

We have reviewed other books by or about Virgil Thomson. He was the chief music critic of the New York Herald Tribune from 1940 to 1954. (I started reading the paper regularly in 1956, so I missed him. But I heard stories from musicians I knew who also knew him.) He was an excellent writer—direct and to the point—and he knew music from the inside, as only a composer can. His verdicts on a great many composers and musicians have influenced me all my life.

To construct this book Tim Page—hims elf an excellent critic—has drawn on a number of Thomson’s writings. The first part is *The State of Music*, a book written in 1939 but with a 1961 introduction and revisions. It sums up quite well what was happening in the first half of the 20th Century. *Virgil Thomson*, his autobiography, dates from 1966. I am not much interested in biographies, and I don’t think much of his life is of special interest. Of course, since he lived to 1989, it is incomplete! In 1971 he wrote *American Music Since 1910*, and selections from that form a vital part of this collection. There are also selections from *Music with Words*, about opera and song.

But for me the miscellaneous writings and book reviews at the end (1957-1984) are the only part that measures up to the 1939 first part. I could dwell in that section for hours—and have.

This is worthwhile for anyone who recognizes, as he did, that criticism is a vital part of the music scene.

**VROON**

**The Violin**
Robert Riggs, editor
University of Rochester Press, 326 pp, $39.95

The title of this book led me to believe that it would have chapters about the instrument’s construction, evolution, important makers and bow makers, important players, developments in technique, style, and pedagogy, and important compositions for the instrument. Instead, it consists mostly of brief analyses of compositions. These extend back to the Italian baroque and then move up to Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, the romantics, and the 20th and 21st Centuries.

I found the book uninteresting. The writing is mostly compositional analysis of a kind that has nothing to do with the instrument. I would say that this is a fairly superficial reference book, and not the kind of book that you can sit down and read for pleasure or edification. There isn’t even a picture of a violin.

Another complaint I have is that this book is a hodgepodge. There are chapters on violins and violinists in literature, the violin’s association with death and the devil, recordings as documentation of performance practice, and the violin’s adoption by different cultures. This book casts a wide net, yet fails to catch its subject. I consider that an editing problem. The impression I get is that the editor wanted to write a book about solo music written for the violin but didn’t have enough material, so he included material written by others as padding.

I am afraid that people might purchase this book thinking that it will deal with the topics that I listed in the first paragraph of this review. If you want such a book, a much better volume is *The Amadeus Book of the Violin* by Walter Kolneder or *The Violin and Viola* by Sheila Nelson.

**MAGIL**

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**Meet the Critic:**
**David Reynolds**

David Reynolds is the son of immigrants, an English father and an Austrian mother. There was always music in the home. He graduated from Western Michigan University with a BA in English and a double minor in Elementary Education and German. After teaching in Atlanta for eight years (and writing for ARG) he moved to Los Angeles to pursue film and television work. Some TV shows he appeared on are *Arrested Development*, *Chuck*, *Victorious*, and *Monk*. He also acted in such films as Rob Zombie’s *House of 1000 Corpses*, *Hills Have Eyes II*, and *Sushi Girl*. He has loved opera since 9 years old, when he was introduced via *Hansel and Gretel*. He began collecting first LPs and then CDs, amassing a huge collection. Now living in Pontiac, Michigan, he continues to act and direct in local productions. In addition to opera, he likes choral music, Shakespeare, and classic movies (especially silent ones).
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