

Imaginary Folklores — Issue 163, November 2022

Robert McCarney: On the evening of 29 October 2022 the people of León had the good fortune to hear Azorean pianist Diana Botelho Vieira perform an unusual and fascinating programme of twentieth and 21st century music inspired by European folklore. Before the concert Diana was kind enough to agree to an interview; the main points of which I shall outline before I give my impressions of her recital.

Diana, you were born on the Azorean island of São Miguel. Can you tell me how you got from there to where you are now as a professional musician?

Diana Botelho Vieira: I am one of seven siblings and we were lucky in that my mother's parents, who were both primary school teachers, were also very keen amateur musicians and they used to teach us, especially in summer, to sing and play a variety of instruments: piano, guitar, recorder. So playing music for all of us became second nature at an early age. And as the oldest took more serious steps to becoming real musicians we all followed naturally in their footsteps so that now four of us are professional musicians. The others are engineers. (She laughs.) Being from the Azores there is a limit to how far you can take your studies if you want to become a professional musician, so when I was eighteen years old I went to Lisbon to complete my initial studies and in order to do a masters degree I decided to go to Chicago when I was twenty-two and I stayed there for four years. Since coming back to Portugal in 2011 I have worked as a piano teacher which is what I do now in the Academy of Music in Lisbon. For many years I played piano publicly mostly as an accompanist, but a few years ago I decided to stop that and dedicate myself to recitals, mainly because I wanted to play repertoire that I chose, which was never the case when I played as an accompanist.

RM: *Thank you. Can you tell me a little about the programme you are going to perform for us tomorrow?*

DBV: I have to say that the typical idea of only preparing a recital to be played once in public I found and still find quite stressful and also a bit of a shame. For that reason I wanted to prepare programmes that I could play more than once so that they and I could develop with each performance. [READ MORE](#)

CARL FLESCH – VIOLINIST, TEACHER & STORYTELLER



Károly/Carl Flesch was born in this house in Mosonmagyaróvár, Hungary. Photo © Anett Fodor

Anett Fodor: The world-famous violinist and well-renowned teacher Károly/Carl Flesch was born in Moson (today Mosonmagyaróvár), Hungary, on 9 October 1873. At the end of the nineteenth century, he was the student of Jakob Grün in Vienna. Later he was taught by Martin Marsick and Eugene Sauzay at the Paris Conservatory.

After completing his studies, Flesch taught at the Conservatory in Bucharest and was the leader of the Romanian Queen's string quartet. For five years he taught at the Amsterdam Conservatory and also held a celebrated series of concerts in Germany. He achieved international recognition as a member of the Schnabel-Flesch-Becker Trio and became a distinguished professor at the Music Academy in Berlin. He also taught at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia.

His students included such world-renowned soloists as Henryk Szeryng and Ida Haendel. Flesch wrote several books including: *Urstudien* (Ancient Studies), *Die Kunst des Violin-Spiels* (The Art of Violin-playing), *Das Skalensystem* (The Scale System), and *Das Klangproblem im Geigenspiel* (The Problem of Resonance in Violin-playing).

However, apart from his musical publications, he also shared some amusing anecdotes of his twelve stays in America with the readers of Hungarian newspapers. Here I would like to present two of them.



Carl Flesch (Source: *Színházi Magazin*, 13 January 1943)

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OBITUARIES

We mark the recent deaths of those in the classical music world, including Czech conductor Libor Pešek, Japanese composer and pianist Toshi Ichiyanagi, French musicologist, critic, historian and violinist Jean Gallois, and Hungarian pianist and composer Béla Szakcsi Lakatos. [MORE ...](#)

NEWS — BEETHOVEN MARATHON

British pianist and composer Julian Jacobson will celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday by repeating his unique and seldom-performed marathon performance of all Beethoven's thirty-two piano sonatas, from memory, in one day.

Jacobson's 2003 marathon raised £6,000 for WaterAid, and the repeat event in 2013, at St Martin-in-the-Fields in London, was broadcast around the world, attracting much media coverage and impressive reviews:

It soon became clear that the pianist's mastery of Beethoven's idiom was such he could easily have improvised himself out of any momentary difficulty [- not that any such occurred]. - Robert Anderson, at Julian Jacobson's 2013 Beethoven Marathon

The event takes place from 09:00 until 22:00 UCT/GMT on 12 November 2022 at St John's Church, Waterloo, London, SE1 8TY, UK. A live stream is available. Further information and tickets at julianjacobson.com

Six days later, on his seventy-fifth birthday, Jacobson will repeat the event in Uruguay, as part of the fifth Festival Internacional de Colonia (15-20 November 2022). Details: festivalcolonia.org



Julian Jacobson

Applications for the 38th Irving M Klein International String Competition ('The Klein') opened on 1 November 2022. The competition is produced by the California Music Center at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, takes place 3-4 June 2023 and will be streamed live as well as before a live audience at the Conservatory. [MORE ...](#)

Young dancers at Dutch National Ballet are nominated for awards in *Dance Europe's* Critics' Choice. [MORE ...](#)

Daniel Barenboim steps back from performing activities after being diagnosed with a 'serious neurological condition'.

The UK's ISM (previously the Incorporated Society of Musicians) changes its name to 'Independent Society of Musicians'.

The Edinburgh International Festival announces full details of a series of films available free in November 2022, which form the festival's digital programme series, *Edinburgh International Festival At Home*.

Michael Shapiro announces performances of two very different works - a musical score set to the 1931 silent movie *Frankenstein*, and *Voices*, his latest requiem, which coincides with the anniversary of Kristallnacht.

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This year's Malcolm Arnold Festival is a little different to usual, with an online day of free-to-watch-and-listen content: malcolmarnoldfestival.com

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COMMENT — ISABEL BEYER AND HARVEY DAGUL

26 October 2022

Hello,

I just read Bill Newman's wonderful [2005 interview with Isabel Beyer and Harvey Dagul](#). I really enjoy their music and have purchased everything I can find available from sellers that will ship to the USA. (About 16 CDs and 3 or 4 records.)

I'm looking for some help in tracking down one of their CDs. Is there anyone at your website that could offer some advice? If so, please read on.

My favorite CD of theirs is *Jeux D'Enfants*. The problem is that the CD manufacturing process must have been faulty - every copy I have purchased (and to date I must be past fifteen copies of this disc) appears to have CD rot, where the plastic outer layer leaks and the metalized layer of the CD has tarnished - causing severe distortion of the music. I have been trying to find a clean copy of this CD since 2015, but have yet to succeed.

I emailed their son and *Jeux* CD producer Guy earlier this year but got no reply. (I did get a reply from him years ago, but he wasn't able to help me.) I have scoured the internet and rarely find any of their CDs for sale, least of all *Jeux*. And I don't know of any music service that is streaming Isabel and Harvey's wonderful recordings.

Any suggestions on what I might do next would be greatly appreciated.

Best regards, Steve Mallon

[MORE COMMENTS](#)

ENSEMBLE — A WORTHY VENTURE



A scene from Hong Kong Ballet and Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra's *The Last Song*. Photo © 2022 Keith Hiro

Adam J Sacks: A double premiere and an orchestral collaboration with ballet is certainly attention grabbing. The Hong Kong Ballet and Hong Kong Philharmonic have joined forces for the world premiere of *The Last Song*, and the Asian premiere of Septime Webre's *Carmina Burana* from 14-16 October 2022, and inside each work is a further collaboration across centuries and creators between Oscar Wilde and Bach, and Carl Orff and Virginia Woolf respectively. Boundary bending between the arts and the genders, Bach's concertos and suites are the backdrop for a reimagined *The Nightingale and the Rose*, where the story of elusive love and sacrifice is transposed to the dreaming creator and a distinctly male muse.

The drama of the staging is greatly enhanced by placing the orchestra directly on the stage, as violin and cello duets mirror that of the two principal dancers visually on stage, while a staircase without end in the middle stands in for journeys unattainable.

The Asian premiere of Webre's *Carmina Burana* creates an even more monumental set with the chorus of singers locked into a multistory scaffolding panopticon like cage.



A scene from Hong Kong Ballet and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra's Asian premiere of Webre's *Carmina Burana*. Photo © 2022 Tony Luk

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Anna Tsybuleva. Photo © 2021 Olympia Orlova

Mike Wheeler: Anna Tsybuleva, winner of the 2015 Leeds Piano Competition, opened the new season of Sunday morning recitals at Nottingham's Royal Concert Hall - Nottingham, UK, 23 October 2022 - with an interesting twist on the old 'three Bs' formula - Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, yes, but on this occasion the Bach was Carl Philipp Emanuel, not Johann Sebastian. She began with the second of his six 'Prussian' Sonatas, Wq 48. Breezy accounts of the two outer movements framed a ready identification with the introspective world of the second movement, finding expressive depth in the long trills, in particular.

Tsybuleva suggested a link with this movement in the slow introduction to the first movement of Beethoven's 'Pathétique' Sonata. By not going flat out in the main part of the movement, but allowing the intensity to build gradually, she showed a firm grasp of the music's architecture, making her sudden withdrawal at start of the development section all the more telling. The second movement was on the slow side, with a tendency to over-romanticise, but with a compelling inwardness and concentration. The finale seemed positively perky to begin with, but the overall seriousness was never in doubt, and the quiet major-key moment just before the end was made to sound like a ghostly echo from earlier. [READ MORE](#)

Mike Wheeler: There's a lot more to Dukas' *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* than just an orchestral showpiece, or straightforward comedy. The BBC Philharmonic Orchestra's performance, conducted by Ben Gernon -

Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, UK, 20 October 2022 - brought out the increasingly dark nature of the Goethe poem on which it's based. Starting in expectant stillness, it developed a rhythmic panache that felt it could topple into hysteria at any moment. The contrabassoon and bass clarinet duet, as the chopped-in-half broom comes back to life, had a real sense of menace, and the final climax arrived with a palpable shock.



Ben Gernon



Zlatomir Fung. Photo © Fred Conrad

Elgar's Cello Concerto has consistently attracted young soloists. One of the latest, Bulgarian-Chinese player Zlatomir Fung, brought to it some remarkable qualities. His restrained way with the opening flourish signalled a player completely attuned to what Elgar, in a different context, called his 'stately sorrow'. Throughout the first movement, this was a reading that hardly dared to raise its voice, though every note carried, with orchestra and conductor backing him to the hilt. It also danced at appropriate moments. There was similar restraint at the start of the second movement. The playing all round was a marvel of will o'the wisp fragility that also threw into relief the sheer skill of Elgar's orchestration. The third movement was both totally inward and totally riveting - a masterclass from everyone on the platform in holding an audience's attention. The finale's ambivalence - Elgar's former confident manner, but also not - was nicely caught. The clarinets adding their tangy colour was just one ear-catching detail. The eventual glance back at the third movement was shot through with a sadness that didn't need to draw attention to itself, and the return of the first movement's opening flourish seemed more a natural outcome rather than an unexpected turn of events.

Fung's encore was not announced, but thanks to *BBC Sounds* - the concert was broadcast live on *BBC Radio 3* - I learned that it was the second movement of *Pirin* by Dobrinka Tabakova, a three-movement work, originally for solo viola, named after a mountain in Bulgaria - a nod to the player's and composer's shared heritage. It sang, it

danced, aided by the pin-point accuracy of Fung's double-stopping. [READ MORE](#)

Mike also listens to Haydn, Szymanowski and Debussy from the Fitzroy Quartet, to Smetana, Rachmaninov and Strauss from Pavel Kolesnikov, Mark Elder and the Hallé Orchestra and to *From Pub to Pulpit* - a celebration of Vaughan Williams as folk song collector.

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Giuseppe Pennisi: On 27 October 2022 at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, full in every order of seats, the ballet season ended with *Giselle* by Adolphe - Charles Adam, a performance part of a cycle in honor of Carla Fracci who for years directed the ballet of the theater and who has prepared a new choreography specifically for this ballet. *Giselle* differs from other ballets of French romanticism in two respects: the quality of the music and the literary sources. The ballets performed before *Giselle* have almost no custom-made elements: many are orchestrated with pieces similar to others or even borrowed. The music of this ballet instead is woven respecting the intention and creativity of the choreographer and the author and shows very few direct similarities with the music of the time. The only short passages not written by Adam are eight bars from a song by Lōise Puget and three lines from Carl Maria von Weber's *Euryanthe*.

Giselle is also the first ballet in which the author introduces the *leitmotif* specifically as a narrative element. There are seven main themes in the ballet: four of these belong to the people: the farmers, the hunters, the Villi and Hilarion. Three of these are less specific: the theme of dance and two leitmotifs of love. To appreciate the musical qualities of the score, this requires an excellent orchestra, such as that of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, and a conductor specialized in this type of music such as Kevin Rhodes.

It was Théophile Gautier, authoritative writer and art critic, who conceived *Giselle*, leafing through the pages of the novel *De l'Allemagne* by Heinrich Heine. The author was deeply fascinated by the legend of the Villi, spirits of the Slavic tradition. Heine and Gautier were a huge leap forward from the ballet librettist of the time. The choice of the composer to set the ballet to music could only fall on Adolphe-Charles Adam, a musician of great fame in the production of ballets. The music was composed in just eight days, in close collaboration with the authors of the libretto. *Giselle* thus had her music, new, and well received even by the critics of the time.

At the Opéra National de Paris, on 28 June 1841, her twenty-second birthday, Carlotta Grisi performed for the first time in *Giselle*, together with Lucien Petipa in the role of Albrecht. The ballet was an incredible success, so much so that even today it is considered as one of the greatest classical ballets ever performed. [READ MORE](#)



Claudio Cocino as Hilarion and Marianna Suriano as Myrtha in Adam's *Giselle* at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma.
Photo © 2022 Fabrizio Sansoni



Enrico Saverio Pagano conducting Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in Rome on 15 October 2022. Photo © 2022 Max Pucciariello

Giuseppe Pennisi: In perfect continuity with the previous one, the 2022-23 season of the IUC - University Institution of Concerts of the University 'La Sapienza' of Rome - has an ambitious program: it ranges from Renaissance polyphony to today's music. The inauguration of the season with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in concert form for three evenings goes in this direction: 15, 17 and 18 October. I was at the 15 October 2022 performance. This is an original production that brings back to the IUC the Canova Chamber Orchestra and its founder/conductor Enrico Saverio Pagano, artists who have been in residence at the institution since last season, confirming the attention and enhancement of the young talent always pursued by the IUC.

This is an intent further reiterated this year by the entry of Enrico Saverio Pagano in the IUC Artistic Council, supported by President Rinaldo Gentile. 'It is not often that an opera like *Don Giovanni* is entrusted to a conductor under thirty', says Enrico Saverio Pagano. 'Yet, as happens with all masterpieces, *Don Giovanni* also takes on a particular character and meaning depending on the age in which it is faced. It is a privilege for me to have the opportunity to try my hand at this work at the age of twenty-seven, even more so in relation to the fact that it will be performed in concert form, where music will be in the foreground. Working with IUC has also allowed me to build the vocal cast, in which emerging young people are near to leading names on the international scene. This possibility of casting will allow you not to have to adapt the musical choices to the

voices you have available, but to proceed in the opposite way: that is, having chosen the voices in relation to the style and balance that I consider appropriate for the reading of the work.'

Born in Rome in 1995, winner last year of one of the TOYP (The Outstanding Young Persons) awarded by the Junior Chamber International - Italy, Enrico Saverio Pagano returns to lead his orchestra in the 'Prague version' of Mozart's masterpiece using a cast made up of some of the most brilliant emerging voices. In addition to the three performances in Rome, additional performances are planned in the North of Italy.

Don Giovanni is probably the opera on which the most has been written and, precisely for this reason, it has been much misrepresented over the decades, also attributing to it meanings very far from what was probably the initial idea of the authors. We must not forget that Mozart and Da Ponte were first and foremost two great men of theater, who knew the taste of the public and who knew how to amaze and satisfy it. The reading by the Canova Orchestra and the singers focuses on the contrasts and surprises of Mozart's theater, on the vital momentum and freshness that his music always contains, and on the energy that is in the DNA of a group of young performers. It is a lively reading. In Rome we remember some excellent productions of the work - for example the one directed by Gigi Proietti and the conducting of Gianluigi Gelmetti in 2002, but also that of 2019 literally destroyed by the scenic reading of Graham Vick.

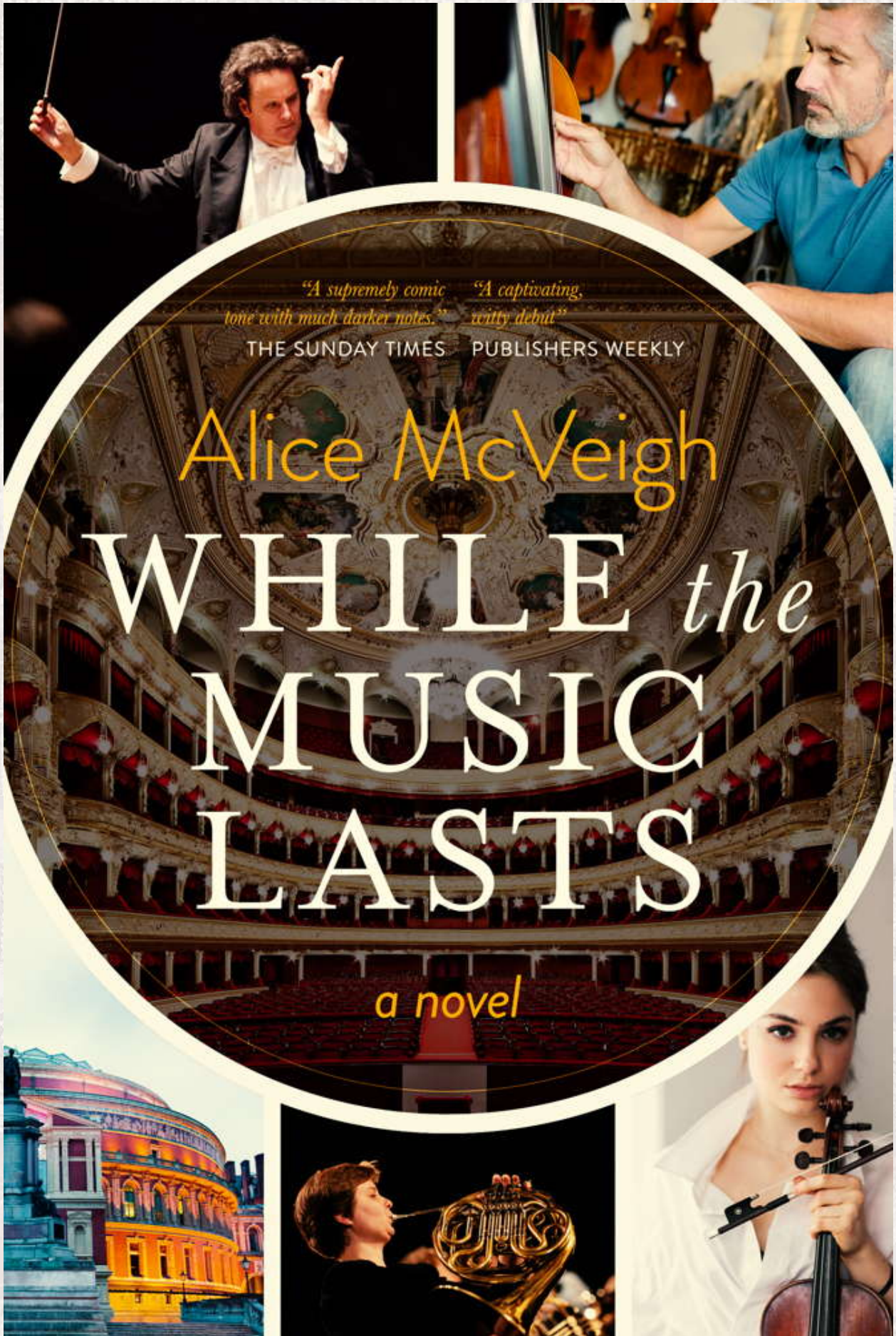
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Giuseppe also reviews Gluck's *Alceste* at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma.

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CD SPOTLIGHT — SIMPLICITY AND INNOCENCE

Robert McCarney: Many moons ago when I lived in Italy, living in the apartment across the hall from mine was a young man who had the exceedingly frustrating habit of repeatedly shouting at somebody or something most nights. On the numerous occasions I knocked on his door in order to explain my frustration and ask him to stop, he refused to open. Mercifully a month or two after I had moved in he moved out and a very pleasant and extremely quiet couple moved into his place. In the time before he left in a bid to get my message across I had pinned a sheet of paper to the outside of the door of my apartment with the words. // *rumore non fa bene, il bene non fa rumore*. In English this (after losing most of its palindromic poetry in Italian) means 'Noise doesn't do you any good, what's good doesn't make any noise'. Words I would be happy to see on my grave.

I took these words from one of the greatest pieces of music composed in the last half century, namely *Inverno - In Ver* by Niccolò Castiglioni. This same piece was also the cause of my fondest ever Proms memory when I was lucky enough to hear the late Oliver Knussen conduct it in 2011. If I say that Castiglioni was for me a kind of musical monk, obsessed with purity, clarity, silence and a superficial simulacrum of simplicity that was anything but simple in its construction or conception, you may well think of another great twentieth century Italian maverick: Giacinto Scelsi, and you would not be wrong to do so. It says everything about Scelsi and Castiglioni that their music sounds nothing like each other's or like anybody else's for that matter. And while they both very often used minimal means their music has nothing to do with the mind-numbing strand of minimalism.

Although quite a bit of Castiglioni's music has been commercially recorded there is still a lot that hasn't and this present CD contains no less than five world premières. That comes with the caveat that some of these compositions have never been published. Castiglioni was an extremely talented and accomplished pianist in his own right. After he completed his studies he regularly performed in public and played some exceptionally demanding repertoire but with the passing of the years he concentrated more and more on composition and less on performance. Even knowing that Castiglioni as a young man was devoted to Stravinsky the first piece here, the Piano Sonatina in G composed in 1952, comes as quite a shock.

It is not so much neoclassical as purely classical as it reminds one of Scarlatti or Haydn, the middle movement has a touch of Satie about it. On closer reflection one can already notice the clarity of form, transparency of detail and rejection of anything superfluous that would characterise all of his output. Added to this is his attraction to epigrammatic statements and the simplicity and innocence of the world of childhood which is already evidenced in the *Piccola Suite* from the same year.

Coming of age as he did in the 1950s, Castiglioni could not avoid having to deal with Webern and serialism in some form or other, whether that meant rejecting or accepting it. Like everything regarding Castiglioni his take was unique. He did both and neither. His *Quattro Canti* of 1954 give the lie to the idea that music composed using serial means has to sound a particular way. His serial treatment of the compositional material is taken further in *Momento Musicale* which he composed in the same year. [READ MORE](#)

Robert McCarney: We start with Weinberg's Seventh Symphony which he composed in 1964 for the unusual combination of harpsichord and strings. I can never think of the harpsichord without remembering Weinberg's late compatriot Elizabeth Chojnacka, one of the most extraordinary musicians I ever heard. However this particular piece was inspired by another exceptional figure, namely Andrei Volkonsky. Volkonsky was a harpsichordist, organist, daring composer and all-round general thorn in the side for the social realist police of the USSR. On this occasion the soloist is Kirill Gerstein but bizarrely and unacceptably we are not given any information about him or the other soloist on this CD. A state of affairs



'Aldo Orvieta ... definitely has the measure of Castiglioni's unique universe and does this music proud.'

made even more egregious by the fact that, rightly, all members of The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen and the CBSO are named.



'... a wonderful rich ripe legato feel and sound.'

The opening *adagio sostenuto* reminds me, in form at least if not in effect, of the opening palindrome of Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste*. It might be fanciful musing on my part but the seeming serenity of the harpsichord solo introduction compared to the rather less serene body of strings may be an analogy of Weinberg the Jewish composer in his predicament facing the implacable might of the Soviet cultural authorities. The five movements are played without a break and the middle three evidence Weinberg's mastery of string writing. Perhaps this has something to do with why I have, as of yet, never been as impressed by any of his symphonies to the same extent as I have been by his string quartets. The playing and recording throughout these movements has a wonderful rich ripe legato feel and sound.

The final movement opens with a high pitched tremolo on the harpsichord which Verena Mogl - the author of the informative but rather brief liner notes - speculates may be a rather literal representation of a ringing telephone; alluding to Stalin or his henchmen's *modus operandi* of terror. Knowing what I do of Weinberg's

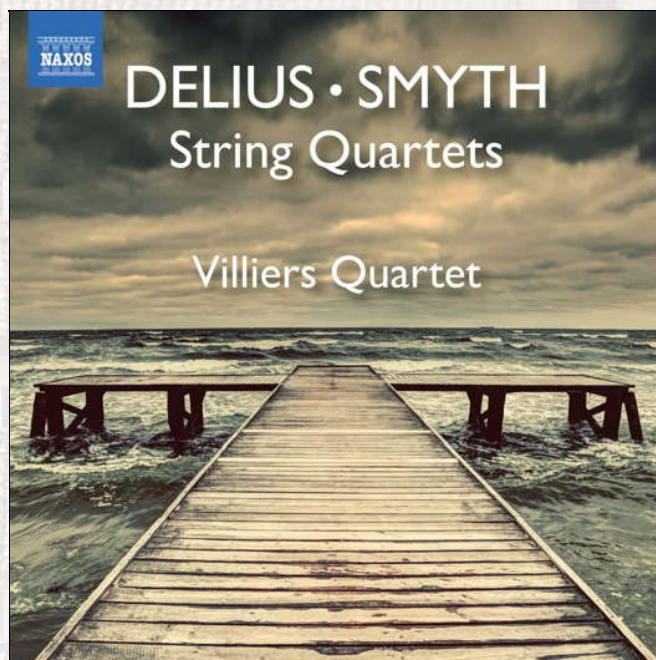
weirdness at times and his penchant for quotation and allusion, I can well believe that she is right. Not being one who likes to view music as anything more than music. It is hard to deny that this whole symphony seems to be narrating some kind of story. [READ MORE](#)

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Geoff Pearce: Both of these composers - Ethel Smyth and Frederick Delius - have been lifetime favourites of mine, and I was pleased to receive this most welcome recording as I had not heard either work before. I can remember, as a boy, reading a book about Ethel Smyth, with quite a bit featuring her own memoirs. She was certainly a larger than life character, and she led a long and interesting life. It is unfortunate that her music has taken a long time to be appreciated, but with the rise of interest in women composers generally, this is, at long last, changing.

The String Quartet in E minor was the last of six string quartets that Smyth wrote. The earlier ones were composed in the late 1870s and 80s but the one recorded here was composed between 1902 and 1912. One of the interesting things about this work is that the viola is given considerably more prominence than the instrument often receives in string quartets. At forty minutes in length, the work is quite long for a string quartet. The music itself is lush and romantic, and is an interesting work to hear as there are many changes of mood and texture.

The composer is very skilled, innovative and quite unique, and I think most listeners will be captured by the journey she takes us on. The work is in four movements, with the first and third being the longest. The third movement is one of the most beautiful pieces of music I have ever heard. [READ MORE](#)



'... the recording ... is of pleasing quality.'



Geoff Pearce: I have been interested in performances of works played on instruments from around the period that the works were written, and have reviewed a previous disc of Les Siècles and François-Xavier Roth playing Debussy. As he and this ensemble are a combination I admire, I was pleased to receive this recording.

I had not heard the first work, *Première Suite D'orchestre* before. It was composed whilst Debussy was still a student between the years 1882-1884. It was then forgotten for many years, only being mentioned in 1977, and being rediscovered in 2008. There was one manuscript with four movements for two pianos and the other, three movements (with the third movement lost). The third movement, *Rêve*, was later reconstructed from the two piano version by Philippe Manoury. He did a masterly orchestration, quite in keeping with the other three movements.

This is a glorious and joyful recording. Roth had presented the work in concert with a few orchestras, and recorded this along with *La Mer* in 2013. This

'This recording will be one that delights you again and again.'

recording has since been remastered and is now presented by harmonia mundi. The instrumental sound is sumptuous and colourful, the conductor's direction is compelling and the work itself is a very attractive addition to the repertoire. This is also a world first recording. The four movements are 1: *Fête*; 2: *Ballet*; 3: *Rêve* and 4: *Cortège et Bacchanale*.

The second work on the recording, *La Mer*, composed in 1903 and published in 1905, is one of Debussy's best-known works and will be familiar to most concert goers and classical music lovers. Debussy was strongly attracted to the sea: indeed he is reported as saying that if he had not engaged in a musical career, he would have wanted to be a sailor.

This performance is one of the very best I have ever heard of this work, and the attention to detail, the beauty of sound captured in this recording, not to mention that all the wind instruments and the harp performing here are French instruments that were mostly made during Debussy's lifetime, is astounding. There is a luminosity and clarity here that is often lost on other recordings. I wonder how much of this is due to the choice of instruments used, and I suspect this has a lot to do with it. Another feature that impresses me a great deal is the actual balance of the sections and the very pleasing ambiance.

This recording is a great pairing of an early Debussy work, never recorded before, along with a mature very well known work, with instruments that the composer himself would have been familiar with and very well may have heard, along with a conductor who, in my mind, is one of the finest interpreters of French orchestral music today. This recording will be one that delights you again and again.

MORE ARTICLES BY GEOFF PEARCE ...

Geoff also listens to orchestral music by Stravinsky from the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Andrew Davis on Chandos *CHSA 5315*. and we also have two reviews of another Chandos disc of music by Alberto Hemsí (*CHAN 20243*) - by Geoff Pearce and Robert McCarney.

GEOFF'S HEMSI REVIEW

ROBERT'S HEMSI REVIEW

Our CD reviews are worth exploring in more detail than shown here. They are all illustrated with short sound samples, usually chosen by the author of each review, and each review has a detailed information page about the album under scrutiny. We also publish a long list of new releases, normally once each month, with a new selection due soon.

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OCTOBER 2022 NEW RELEASES

Gerald Fenech: Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) was a boy prodigy. Indeed, in November 1810 he staged his first opera, *La Cambiale di Matrimonio*, at the small Teatro San Moise. He was just eighteen years old. By 1815 the composer had produced nine other stage works, which alternated between the comic and the serious. By then, Rossini's fame as an outstanding opera composer was already on firm ground, so it was no surprise when in May of that year the composer was invited to take up the post of director of music for the royal theatres in Naples. These included the Teatro San Carlo, the city's leading opera house; its manager Domenico Barbaia was to have an important influence in Rossini's career there. The musical establishment of Naples was at first very unwelcoming, as Rossini was seen as an intruder into its cherished operatic traditions, but *Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra* soon won them over, and consequently Rossini's position in Naples was assured.

Between 1815 and 1822 he composed eighteen more operas, nine for Naples and nine for other opera houses in other cities. *Otello*, *Mose' in Egitto* and *La Donna del Lago* for the former and *La Gazza Ladra* and *La Cenerentola* for the latter readily come to mind, not to mention the 1816 perennial hit *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* for the Teatro Argentina in Rome. It was during this period in Naples that Rossini composed his *Messa di Gloria*. Written for the Arciconfraternita di San Luigi, this nine-movement Mass was first performed on 24 March 1820 in the Chiesa di San Fernando. It is in the traditional form of a Gloria Mass, that is a setting of only the first two prayers of the Catholic Mass, the 'Kyrie' and 'Gloria'. [READ MORE](#)



'... heartwarming performances full of glowing fervour and devotional ardour.'



'... dazzling music-making that sweeps you off your feet.'

Gerald Fenech: Even today, the symphonies of Robert Schumann (1810-1856) continue to occupy an exceptional position in the history of musical interpretation. While no-one would deny that they are a part of the core repertory of major orchestras and conductors, they are much less often performed and recorded than the Brahms set, to say nothing of the towering presence of Beethoven, especially his Ninth. It is a fate they share with the symphonies of Schumann's friend and colleague Felix Mendelssohn. And the reasons for it are not hard to find. From an early date, Schumann's critics found fault with his handling of the orchestra, claiming that it failed to do justice to the technical improvements in instrument-making in the nineteenth century, and did not exploit the enormous range of tone colours that had now become available. Schumann's sound - the critics claimed - was too undifferentiated, even monochromatic, with the result that his instrumentation needed retouching, which is exactly what one of Schumann's admirers, Gustav Mahler, was to do to his First Symphony later in the century.

A second fatal argument was also adduced by no less a composer than Richard Wagner, who argued that Schumann's gifts were limited, and that he had the presumption to attempt to do something for which those gifts were simply inadequate, namely create bolder large-scale forms. When seen from this perspective, Schumann appears to represent a stylistic compromise that met the aesthetic demands of a prosperous but politically frustrated bourgeois public. What Wagner failed to mention was the rich inner life that lay concealed beneath the neoclassical surface, and how much he himself had profited from this. In their own attempts to bring the symphony and the symphonic poem into closer alignment, Franck and Tchaikovsky

both appealed directly to Schumann. To borrow a phrase from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, we could say, therefore, that Schumann's symphonies are aimed 'at everyone and at no one'.

The First Symphony in B flat, Op 38, known as the 'Spring Symphony', is Schumann's first completed symphonic work. Until 1841 the composer was largely known for his piano works and 'lieder', but his wife Clara encouraged him to go further. And so he did. Schumann sketched the work in four days, from 23 to 26 January, and by 20 February the orchestration was ready. The premiere took place under the baton of Felix Mendelssohn on 31 March 1841 in Leipzig, where the piece was warmly received. The symphony is full of light and joy and conveys perfectly the longing for spring and the awakening that this season brings with it. Indeed, from the very first trumpet call to the last note, the work is consistently alive with the throb of life reborn. [READ MORE](#)

Gerald Fenech: Ralph Vaughan Williams is one of the most important English composers of the twentieth century. Drawing on the influence of English folk song and Tudor polyphony, Ralph succeeded at reviving British music during a career that spanned over six decades. He was born on 12 October 1872 - exactly 150 years ago today. His interest in music began at an early age, when, in addition to playing the violin, viola, piano and organ, he became increasingly interested in composition. He studied alongside Gustav Holst at the Royal College of Music, then for three years at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was a pupil of Parry, Stanford and Charles Wood. Ralph's early work was influenced by his dissatisfaction with the English music scene. He decided to draw on native resources rather than turning to foreign influences, therefore English folksong became a pivotal part of his compositional work.

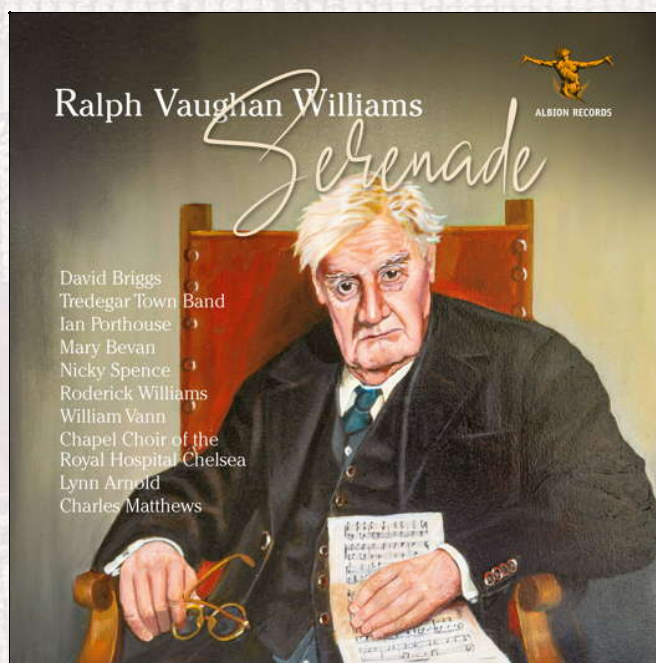
Vaughan Williams' first big public success came in 1910 at the premiere of his *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, before achieving greater fame for *A London Symphony* (1914). During the First World War the composer, out of his own free will, volunteered into army life until the armistice, when he was appointed director of music for the First Army of the British Expeditionary Force. In 1919, Vaughan Williams had returned to the Royal College of Music as a member of the teaching staff and soon became conductor of the Bach Choir and the Handel Society. In 1942, when he celebrated his seventieth birthday, he was completing his Fifth Symphony, which some regarded as a summing up of his career. But Vaughan Williams was in no mood for farewells. Indeed, since 1940, the composer had been enjoying the novelty of film music, and the *Sinfonia Antartica* (No 7) of 1952-53 was a reworking of music for the film *Scott of the Antarctic*.

During the last fifteen years of his life, composition was prolific: four symphonies, the opera *The Pilgrim's Progress* produced at Covent Garden in 1951, choral works and concertos, a violin sonata and several songs. In addition, he went to the United States to give lectures, and continued to conduct at the annual Leith Hill Festival and elsewhere. He attended concerts, plays or operas almost every night of his life up to its sudden end on 26 August 1958.

Vaughan Williams is today mainly remembered as the pioneering spirit of English music in the twentieth century and an inspiring encourager of the young, apart from his superb music, of course. This CD, released today on Vaughan Williams' 150th birthday, can be considered as a celebration of the composer's dedication to his art. The programme is not made up of the familiar pieces we are used to hearing with regularity, but of works that form an array of stimulating surprises that are still somewhat overlooked.

The album takes its name from *Serenade to Music*, transcribed here for organ by David Briggs and recorded on the Willis organ of Truro Cathedral. This fine organist also gives us quite an astonishing transformation of the 'March Past of the Kitchen Utensils' from *The Wasps*. [READ MORE](#)

Gerald also listens to Handel's *Theodora* on Erato (5054197177910) and to orchestral music by Allan Pettersson on BIS (BIS-2480). [MORE FROM GERALD FENECH ...](#)



'... superbly crafted little miniatures ...'



Giuseppe Pennisi: *La bohème* is a very popular opera which I have reviewed several times in this magazine. The last time was on 9 April 2022. I refer to that review for the details of the opera score. I have never reviewed a *La bohème* CD set and have never visited Irish National Opera in Dublin; this CD is based on a production of that opera house. In preparing this review, I learned that Irish National Opera has rich seasons and also produces very difficult operas such as *Der Rosenkavalier* by Richard Strauss and Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*. Last year, the company's production of Vivaldi's *Bajazet* was nominated for Best New Opera Production; it won the award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera. Thus, it is far from a provincial theatre but an opera house worth following. If I were younger than eighty years old, I would make a trip to Dublin to see and listen to some Irish National Opera productions.

'The excellent Italian diction of all the singers, both the protagonists and those in secondary roles, is remarkable.'

This CD set is evidence of the company's high quality. It is not a live CD, but based on live performances, and it was recorded at the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre in Dublin. *La bohème*, as discussed in the 9 April 2022 review, is a very difficult opera, both vocally and

orchestrally. On this recording, the overall rendering is quite good, even though it should not be expected that all the ingredients are top notch.

Act II (the Christmas Eve Café Momus Act) is the best part. The full company is on stage and there are, in addition, the chorus, the children's chorus and several extras. Although short, it is difficult to handle for the many singers involved as well as because it is the Act about the happiness of youth. It is like a good cup of Irish Coffee with the right proportions of black coffee, Irish whiskey and whipped cream - really re-invigorating. [READ MORE](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi: This new CD of a very well-known *opéra comique* is a live recording of a quite successful production of the 2021 Donizetti Festival in Bergamo. The listener can hear the laughs and the applause by the audience but cannot see the most innovative aspects of the performance. It was a joint venture between the yearly Donizetti Festival and the Cuba Opera Company. Thus, the action was set not in Tyrol while under the occupation of the Napoleonic Armies but in Cuba at the start of the revolution. The stage direction by Luis Ernesto Doñas, the colourful sets by Angelo Sala and the accurate lighting by Fiammetta Baldisseri were determinants of the success of the production. They can be glanced at in the photos of the booklet included in the CD box. They can be better appreciated on a DVD issued almost in parallel with the CD.

La fille du régiment (The Daughter of the Regiment) is an *opéra comique* in two acts by Gaetano Donizetti, set to a French libretto by Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges and Jean-François Bayard. It was first performed on 11 February 1840 by the Paris Opéra-Comique at the Salle de la Bourse. [READ MORE](#)



'... a good memory of a very good joint production.'

[MORE BY GIUSEPPE PENNISI ...](#)

**Миг невозможного.
Счастья миг.
- Бальмонт**

***A map of the world that does not include Utopia
is not even worth glancing at. - Oscar Wilde***

Robert McCarney: I used to have a colleague who, when customers would make utterly insane demands or make known to us their ludicrous expectations, would calmly say 'the impossible we can do, but we draw the line at miracles'. Throughout Russian political and cultural history there seems to be an intoxicated love affair with the impossible, the otherworldly, the utopian. Maybe it has something to do with the inauspicious precedent of Tsar Peter I's building of paradise in a Baltic swamp where the immense loss of human life, which its realization necessitated, was a trivial inconvenience on the road to realizing a personal and imperial dream.



**Peter the Great meditates on the idea of building St Petersburg next to the Baltic Sea
- a 1916 painting by Russian artist Alexandre Benois (1870-1960)**

Maybe in a world where catastrophe was common, unspeakable misery was on everyone's lips and where the ubiquitous presence of lamplit icons made the transcendent ever immanent, miracles had to be believed in because they just had to happen. Maybe it has something to do with the language. I have picked up a few languages through the years but sadly as yet Russian is not among them. Who could not yearn to learn a language in which as Vladimir Nabokov said:

Love rhymes with blood, nature with liberty, sadness with distance, human with everlasting, prince with mud, moon with many words but sun, and song and wind and life and death with none.

Maybe *impossible* translates into Russian as *mildly inconvenient* or *irresistibly attractive*. I do not know. Whichever, there is a history of seeing the utopian, the miraculous as desirable and eminently attainable.

*But the heart wills and implores a miracle.
Oh miracle, let that happen which never happens.
The pale sky promise me miracles.
What I need is something not found on earth. - Zinaida Gippius*

Before Stalin turned the Soviet Union into arguably the greatest false utopia of the twentieth century - there is strong competition for such a nefarious accolade - the energy unleashed by the Bolshevik Revolution coincided with (and in some part in however an intangible nebulous way was caused by) an already highly charged and wildly creative cultural period in imperial Russia fomented principally through Symbolism and exacerbated by the influence of various radical movements from western Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century: notably futurism and cubism. However, as has always been the case with Russia, whatever sparks made their way in from across Western Europe, they were kindled in that Slavic crucible into an utterly unique and inspired incandescence.

Arguably the most apposite musical example of this phenomenon was that one-man whirlwind Alexander Scriabin. Scriabin started out naturally enough under the influence of Chopin but by the premature end of his life he had magnificently metamorphosed butterfly style by imbibing from a sacred chalice a heady concoction of Nietzsche, Blavatsky, decadence, symbolism and synesthesia to end up ever closer to the flame with his utterly utopian and uniquely megalomaniac vision as exemplified in his *Mysterium*:

There will not be a single spectator. All will be participants. The work requires special people, special artists and a completely new culture. The cast of performers includes an orchestra, a large mixed choir, an instrument with visual effects, dancers, a procession, incense, and rhythmic textural articulation. The cathedral in which it will take place will not be of one single type of stone but will continually change with the atmosphere and motion of the Mysterium. This will be done with the aid of mists and lights, which will modify the architectural contours.

This prosaic description forgets to mention that the performance would take place in the Himalayas, that it would last for a week and finish with the end of the world no less and replace the human race with nobler beings (if only). Perhaps a forerunner of *homo sovieticus*. Not to forget my personal favourite; clouds hung with bells. Maybe Scriabin's *Mysterium* was the last dying flourish of Russia's Silver Age but like that similarly impossible symbol of the new Soviet Union: Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, it remained unrealised by its creator. The fact that they were both unrealisable hardly seems relevant. Indeed when compared to the gloriously insane ambitiousness of these magical dreamers it seems churlish and pointless to point out the feasibility (or lack of) of such wondrous endeavours.



Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

Echoes of Oblivion is Robert McCarney's regular series of features about little-known twentieth century classical composers, which began in August 2022.

As of 1 November 2022, seven of these features have been published here, including, most recently, *Horses for Courses* (spotlighting Swedish-Canadian composer Bengt Hambraeus) and *Artificial Prejudices* (about Portuguese composer Luís de Freitas Branco).

MORE FROM 'ECHOES OF OBLIVION'



MORE FROM ROBERT MCCARNEY

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