



C L A S S I C A L  
M U S I C D A I L Y

*Jessye Norman — Issue 130, 1 November 2019*

American soprano Jessye Norman was born on 15 September 1945 in Augusta, Georgia, into a family of amateur musicians, beginning piano lessons when she was young, showing talent as a singer and singing gospel songs in church at the age of four. At sixteen she took part in the Marian Anderson Vocal Competition in Philadelphia. She didn't win, but showed enough promise to be offered a scholarship to study at Howard University in Washington DC, where she studied voice with Carolyn Grant, sang in the university chorus and professionally as a soloist at church.

After graduating she moved to Europe, won the ARD International Music Competition in Munich and was given a three-year contract with Deutsche Oper Berlin, where she made her operatic debut as Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser*, and was praised by critics as having 'the greatest voice since Lotte Lehmann'. She continued to perform with German and Italian opera companies. In 1971 she appeared on a recording of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* with Colin Davis and the BBC Orchestra which made the finals of the Montreux International Record Award. In 1972 she appeared at La Scala, Covent Garden, the Hollywood Bowl and Tanglewood, and toured the USA.

She moved to London in 1975 and concentrated on recital and concert work. Over the next few years she established herself in Europe, appearing at Edinburgh, Salzburg and Aix-en-Provence, and touring recital programmes.

She returned to the operatic stage in 1980 as the title role in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Hamburg State Opera. In 1982 she made her US operatic debut, and in 1983 she first appeared at New York Metropolitan Opera. By the mid 1980s she was one of the world's most popular and critically acclaimed dramatic sopranos.



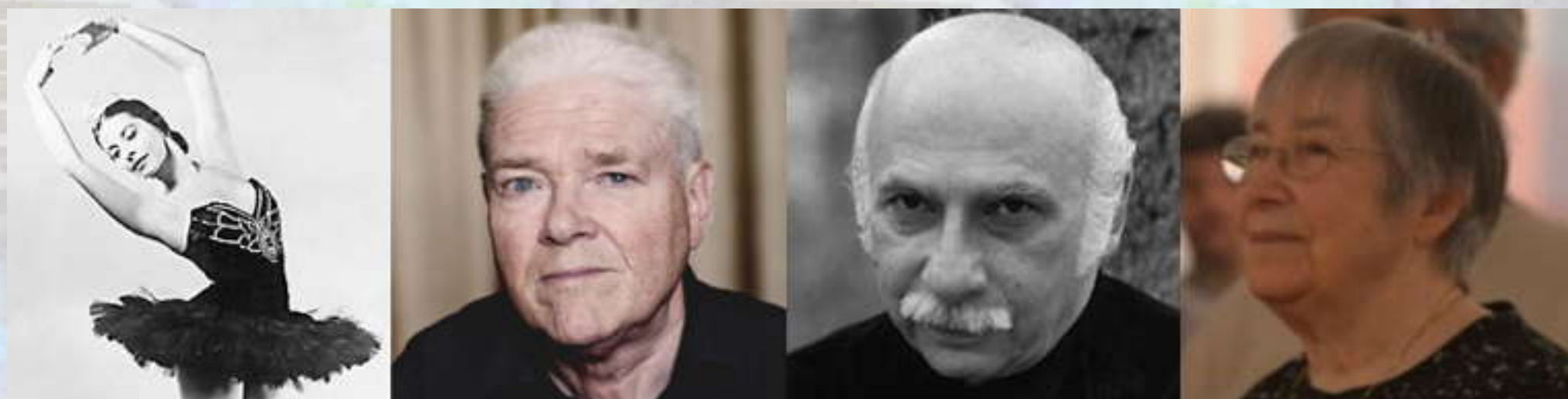
She sang at two American presidential inaugurations, at UK Queen Elizabeth II's sixtieth birthday celebration, at the two-hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution, at Tchaikovsky's 150th Birthday Gala in Leningrad and for the seven-hundredth celebration party of Swiss National Day.

She made many recordings and television appearances, and also worked with less familiar repertoire such as Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* and *Erwartung*, Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Poulenc's *La voix humaine*.

In the mid-1990s and early 2000s, now living back in the USA, she began to sing mezzo roles, and appeared in various jazz crossover projects, including taking performances of the sacred music of Duke Ellington to Vienna and London. She also sat on the boards of many influential arts and charitable organisations. She returned to Augusta and funded a pilot school of the arts for children in Richmond County. A documentary film was made about her life and career.

In April 2018 she became the twelfth recipient of the Glenn Gould Prize for her contribution to opera and the arts.

Jessye Norman suffered a spinal cord injury in 2015, and she died at Mount Sinai-St Luke's Hospital, Manhattan, New York on 30 September 2019, aged seventy-four, from multiple organ failure and septic shock, caused by complications from her earlier injury.



From left to right: Alicia Alonso, Hans Zender, Giya Kancheli and Márta Kurtág

We also mark the passing of [Márta Kurtág](#), [Zoltán Jeney](#), [Hansheinz Schneeberger](#), [Chou Wen-chung](#), [Hans Zender](#), [Raymond Leppard](#), [Alicia Alonso](#), [Hossein Dehlavi](#), [Marcello Giordani](#), [Giya Kancheli](#), [Martin Wesley-Smith](#), [Paul Badura-Skoda](#) and [Christopher Rouse](#).

In other news, Qatar wins the bid to host the 2023 World Symposium of Choral Music; the Albert Schweitzer Organ Festival Hartford announces the winners of its Young Professional Division (US) national competition — Alexander Pattavina, Joseph Russell and Elena Baquerizo; Carolina Eyck releases *Elegies for Theremin & Voice* on Butterscotch Records; there's information about John Morrison's shared listening workshop which creates a sound haven which awakens compassion for ourselves and others; and Donald Nally's professional chamber choir The Crossing is featured on the New York Philharmonic's new recording of Julia Wolfe's *Fire in my mouth*.



## PORTRAITS – ZOLTÁN KODÁLY

**Anett Fodor:** After the great success of *Psalmus Hungaricus*, Kodály's career advanced in leaps and bounds. Premieres rapidly succeeded one another.

The first performance of *Háry János*, a folk opera in four acts, took place in the Royal Opera House, Budapest, on 16 October 1926. Kodály said of this piece:

*He (Háry) is a sort of figment of a collective Hungarian story-telling imagination. He never lies, he just spins a tale; he is a great poet. What he says never actually happened, but as he has lived through it in his imagination, for him, it has become truer than the truth!*

Tales of Háry János abound throughout the Folk Songs Kodály collected. This is essentially a Hungarian legend and rather difficult for those who do not speak Hungarian to follow. The chances of the work being frequently performed abroad were therefore non-existent, so

Kodály extracted a six-movement orchestral suite from the folk opera. This has proven to be very popular and has been performed frequently throughout the world since its creation in 1927.

*Four Italian Madrigals* was inspired by a special occasion. The wedding of Arturo Toscanini's daughter, Wally, took place in Budapest in 1931. Kodály was Wally Toscanini's witness and gave this choral work to her as a wedding present. The first madrigal was interpreted in Kodály's apartment after the ceremony.

Also, during the 1930s, *Dances of Marosszék*, *Mátra Pictures*, *The Spinning Room*, *Dances of Galánta*, *Jesus and the Traders*, *Te Deum* and *Peacock Variations* were his next outstanding works.



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or knowingly translated by  
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A scene from Kodály's *Spinning Room* — a one-act theatre piece.  
Photo from the old Hungarian newspaper *Színházi Élet*, 1-7 May 1932

During World War II, two significant masterpieces were first performed. Kodály had been commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to write the Concerto for Orchestra to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary. This was premiered on 6 February 1941. The second was the *Missa Brevis*. During the siege of the Hungarian capital, Kodály and his wife hid in the cellars of the Budapest Opera House. The first performance took place in the cloakroom of this wonderful building on 11 February 1945, during that very siege.

In the 1950s, the *Kálló Folk Dances* for Mixed Choir and Orchestra was premiered at the debut performance of the State Folk Ensemble in the capital. *The Hymn of Zrínyi*, for solo baritone and choir, was very well received and also greatly impressed its Budapest audience.

In the last decade of Kodály's life, his Symphony in C (*in memoriam Toscanini*) was first performed, in the composer's presence, at the Lucerne Festival in 1961. Five years later his last completed work, *Laudes Organi (Fantasia on a XIIth Century Sequence)*, which had been commissioned by the Atlanta Chapter of The American Guild of Organists, was first performed in Atlanta.

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Other recent longer features include George Colerick's essays on Bizet, Brahms and Dvořák, Gershwin, Gounod, Lehár, Liszt and Sibelius, plus Roderic Dunnett's extended review of the Vivat Foundation's latest CD of countertenor duets by Purcell and Blow, sung by Iestyn Davies and James Hall, with Robert King and the King's Consort.

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## CD SPOTLIGHT — TO BE OR NOT TO BE

Recent CDs reviewed include Franco Faccio's opera *Amleto* (Naxos, 8.660454), a Munich recording of Rossini's early opera *Sigismondo* (BR Klassik, 900327) and Dvořák's *Saint Ludmila* (Naxos, 8.574023-24), all heard by Gerald Fenech; twentieth century oboe sonatas (Cedille Records, CDR 90000 186), Martin Setchell playing the Christchurch Town Hall Rieger organ in New Zealand (Pipeline Press, PP2), music for girls' choir by Petr Eben (Navona Records, NV6228) and Symphonies by Nikolay Myaskovsky (Naxos, 8.573988), reviewed by Geoff Pearce; music by Australian composer Mark John McEncroe (Navona Records, NV6247) and Peruvian composer Jimmy López Bellido (MSR Classics, MS 1737) both heard by Ona Jarmalavičiūtė; and countertenor duets by Purcell and Blow (Vivat Music Foundation, VIVAT 118), given a very positive review by Roderic Dunnett.

[LATEST CD REVIEWS](#)

[NEW RELEASES](#)

## ENSEMBLE — SATISFYINGLY UNEXPECTED

Recent live performance reviews include coverage from Derby and Nottingham by Mike Wheeler, from Salzburg, Rome, Florence, Milan and Palermo by Giuseppe Pennisi, from Hong Kong by Adam J Sacks, from San Diego by Ron Bierman and from California by Maria Nockin.

[LATEST CONCERT REVIEWS](#)

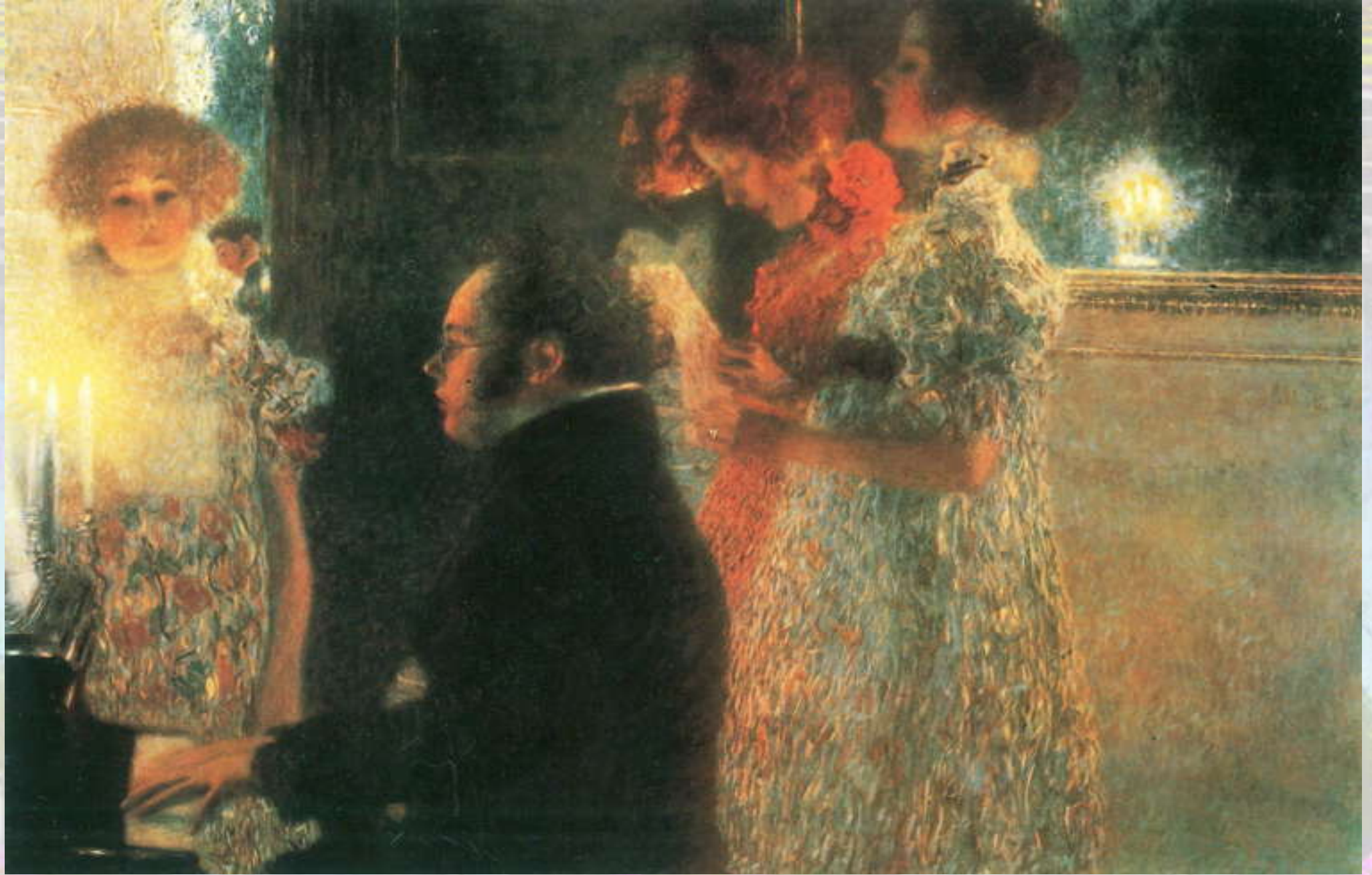
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[FORTHCOMING FESTIVALS](#)

## EARLY ROMANTICISM — A CALL TO ACTION

**George Colerick:** Classicism was cosmopolitan, designed for European aristocracies. With some exceptions, nineteenth century composers increasingly became independent of the courts and of royal patronage. Their new audiences were more familiar with popular and folk music and dancing, which would influence Romantic expression. Franz Schubert (1797-1828) had no connection with the Viennese court and his style would develop under the influence of his native Austria's folk idiom. He moved instinctively away from the sharply defined melody of the Classical period to a smoother line, and more flexible rhythms. He also belonged to the first generation brought up with the advantage of composing on what we hear as a 'modern' piano, with its capacity for *legato*. If the piano was the most spectacular, other instruments were being given wide opportunities for virtuosity, especially the violin which had performed a valuable solo role in folk music.





The 1899 oil-on-canvas painting *Schubert at the Piano* (1899) by Austrian symbolist painter Gustav Klimt (1862-1918)

The improved instrument with its sustaining pedal increased harmonic possibilities, so it served for what had always been lacking: the ideal accompaniment to the voice. Schubert often exploited the piano to perfection, heightening the emotive power and Romanticism's fashionable themes, love, nature and death, were prominent. The words were no longer just a pretext for a good tune, the lyrics matching closely to the melody. This effectively created a new genre of distinguished art songs (*Lieder*) and song cycles, and many German composers would follow: Schumann, Brahms, Wolf, Richard Strauss and others: a repertoire of many thousand songs.

Schubert scarcely revised his work, and he used the terms *impromptus* and *musical moments* for short compositions. Later composers would use titles such as *prelude*, *study*, *intermezzo*, *ballade* or those describing dances. Even the early compositions of Liszt, Schumann and Chopin seemed to inhabit a totally different sound world from that of two decades earlier, freer in structure. Composing on the improved pianos, they experimented with chords and harmonies in ways previously not possible. Chopin never completed a score without including piano, whatever the combination of instruments, and his music beyond expressing a mood or atmosphere was always abstract in conception. By contrast, Liszt and Schumann favoured an expressed 'programme', mainly literary, a new trend which became fashionable. Schumann composed great song cycles and his most characteristic piano work was *Carnaval*, invoking characters out of his own fantasies. This was related to his being also a literary spokesman for the 'new German music'. Except for one by Schubert, he initiated a musical form, the piano quintet, combining piano with string quartet. This was successfully followed by Brahms, Dvořák, Franck, the American Amy Beach, Elgar and several others.



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This newsletter is a monthly taster for our high quality and colourful online classical music magazine, published every day since January 1999. Founded by the late Basil Ramsey and current editor Keith Bramich.

The editorial and advertising copy deadlines for our December 2019 newsletter are both Tuesday 26 November 2019. [Contact us here](#).

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