



## *Jakub Józef Orliński – Issue 133, 1 February 2020*

**Anett Fodor:** Despite his youth, the twenty-nine-year-old Polish opera singer, Jakub Józef Orliński has been the worthy laureate of numerous international prizes. Amongst many others to his credit, he was awarded the prestigious Young Artist of the Year Award in the Gramophone Awards of October 2019.



Facce d'Amore - Jakub Józef Orliński.  
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You could say that he launched into the international musical scene and stimulated public awareness at the same moment! In the summer of 2017, both Orliński and his accompanist appeared in flip-flops and shorts in one of *France Musique's* online streaming programmes. The young singer claims that they believed the engagement was a radio broadcast. Despite their very casual attire, or perhaps because of it, this footage became a roaring success. The video, in which Orliński sings Vivaldi's *Vedro con mio diletto*, has had an amazing high rating: nearly five million views since 2017!

Orliński's second solo album, *Facce d'Amore* (Faces of Love), was released in November 2019. Its arias span eighty-five years of the Baroque era. Eight of the eighteen on the CD are world premieres, never having been previously recorded. In addition to Handel, Cavalli and Alessandro Scarlatti, lesser known

composers such as Orlandini, Predieri and Matteis are featured. Love has been an evergreen topic for many composers and artists throughout the centuries. Rather unusually, Orliński chose to express not just its beauty, but also its darker side with the pain and anguish that can bring.

His extraordinary singing technique and sense of style illustrate the rich and varied colours of his voice. His masterful acting ability shines on the stage and concert platform yet is just as evident in his recordings; every word of the text is articulated into life by it. His Baroque style is exemplary: ornamentation is vital yet always tasteful and illustrates the flexibility and ethereal qualities of his voice. His *sostenuti* are captivating!

In this recording, directed by Maxim Emelyanichev, it's as though Orliński and the whole ensemble breathe as one. All of the musicians are eminent Baroque players and guests of well-renowned concert halls.

My favourite aria on this CD is *Pena tiranna* from Handel's opera, *Amadigi di Gaula* (1715). Filmed in a contemporary setting, this brilliant video was released online by Warner Classics. Its rating broke records: within slightly more than two months, half a million people had seen it.

Amadigi (the legendary warrior of Charles the Great), Oriana, the sorceress Melissa and Dardano are involved in a complicated love plot. Oriana has abandoned Dardano (Orliński) for Amadigi and will no longer return his advances. Obsessed by her, Dardano is granted the ability to transform his appearance into that of Amadigi by Melissa's magic spells. He metamorphoses into 'Amadigi' and takes his rival's place so that he can, thus disguised, continue his passion for her.

Orliński has been a successful fashion model as well as a talented break dancer - not the usual prelude to the career of a successful counter tenor! He says that stage directors with whom he has worked recently have appreciated his acrobatic prowess. A winner of several dance competitions, he has thus been able include dance in some recent productions. His dream is to be part of a 'hip-opera', an amalgam in which both Baroque music and breakdance could be blended together. Through such an event, he would like to promote opera to young people.

I keep my fingers crossed for him.



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## IN DEPTH — GEORGE FLYNN ON CD — AN OVERVIEW

**Esdras Mugatik:** George Flynn is America's most sophisticatedly intense composer. His creativity plumbs the depths of the seething unconscious, but also aspires to transcendental elation. Nicholas Slonimsky wrote that his music 'is of a quaquaversal nature, disdaining nothing, absorbing anything of modernistic application.' Happily, many of George Flynn's works are represented on a considerable collection of CDs, which give a clear and substantive overview of the range and ambition of his inspiration.

Born in Montana and raised in the state of Washington, Flynn encountered the giant 'Concord' Sonata when young with the expected transformative and suggestive effect. Indeed, to compare this example of Ives' music and aspiration with Flynn's would be very suggestive. Both are a combination of seething emotion and Emersonian hope.

George Flynn has the most certifiable of Modernist credentials, having studied composition with such legendary figures as Vladimir Ussachevsky, Jack Beeson, Chou Wen-chung and Otto Luening at Columbia University in New York. Considering his excellence as pianist, though, I find it odd that of his piano studies I can find little information.



George Flynn: Trinity. Fredrik Ullén, piano

It has been said that it is for massive works of great scope and vitality that Flynn is best known. *Trinity* for solo piano is a prodigious collection of three works *Kanal*, *Wound* and *Salvage*.

*Kanal* is titled from the Polish for 'sewer' — has there ever been a musical work so named? — and was inspired by the film by Andrzej Wajda, which depicts the uprising in occupied Poland in 1944. There can be no more devastating or devastated music possible.

This overwhelming set — where the second, *Wound*, is considered as 'arguably the most taxing piano music in the published repertoire' — has been recorded twice: once by Flynn himself in 1999, and then by Fredrik Ullén in 2007. Flynn's pianism has a snap and inner

propulsion to it that are deeply characteristic, while Ullén's has a steely tone and a bitter clarity.

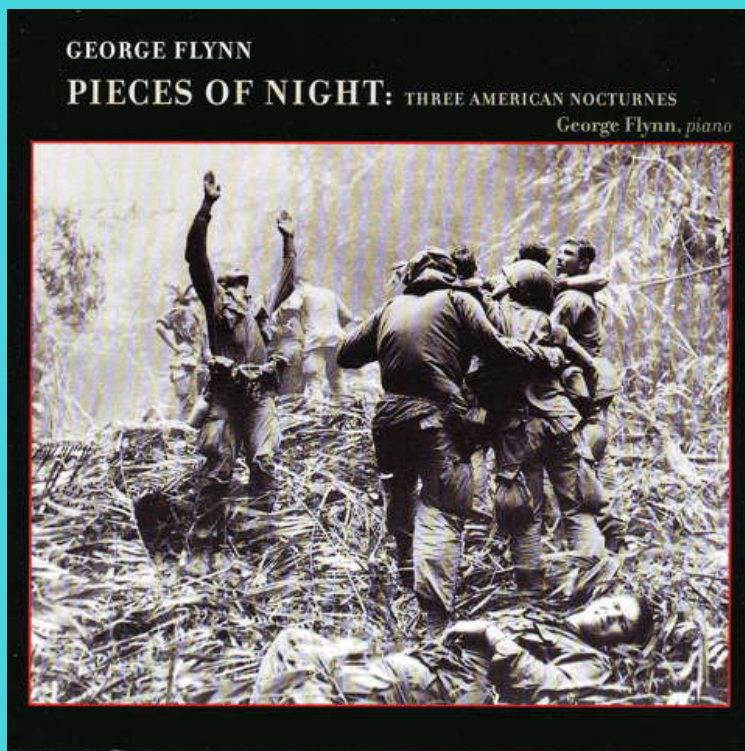
At the other spectral end of Flynn's imagination are his works *Pieces of Night: Three American Nocturnes*. These are works that 'meditate on the American experience' of the Vietnam War. The cover photo of the CD is of dying and wounded American soldiers and it is no small matter that one movement is subtitled 'Nightmare' and another 'Tumult and Lullaby'.



The discussion so far only brings us face to face with the sheer intensity of George Flynn's music. It burns. In my estimation, Flynn is the only composer with the inner fire capable of setting Ginsberg's *Howl* — that rabid, inverted and maniac paean to the American style, manner and mode of hyper-insanity. And Flynn has. [READ MORE ...](#)

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George Flynn: Pieces of Night: Three American Nocturnes. George Flynn, piano

## CD SPOTLIGHT — REMARKABLE EXPRESSIVENESS



'Uriel Tsachor performs these ingenious pieces with a poetic brilliance that is consistently arresting ...'

**Gerald Fenech:** It is pertinent for many music lovers to know that the nineteenth century was littered with many geniuses of the keyboard such as Liszt and Schumann. But apart from playing their own compositions, as was the custom, these composers also expanded a tradition that had existed for centuries, that of the piano transcription. We know of J S Bach creating transcriptions of his own works and that of others, and Beethoven also followed suit by creating significant works from his own compositions.

The expansion of this tradition was both in number and style. Composers like the ones mentioned above arranged numerous paraphrases and fantasies - mostly Liszt - based on themes from operatic and symphonic works and lieder. These works have their own

form, development, harmonic language and pianistic embellishments that do not follow the original works, but instead, stand on their own as new creations.

Brahms and his musical colleagues did not form part of the nineteenth century Wagner-Liszt 'New German School', but rather remained faithful to pure, non-programmatic musical expression, continuing and building on the philosophies and technique of their predecessors. Their piano transcriptions adhered to this tradition by faithfully following as much as possible the form, mood, texture and musical layers of the original. The pieces on this recording follow this strict dictum.

The main transcribers here are Max Reger (1873-1916) and Theodor Kirchner (1820-1903). The former has five to his credit, the latter three. Reger's transcriptions include all four slow movements from Brahms' four symphonies plus the *Poco Allegretto* from the Third. [READ MORE ...](#)

**Gerald Fenech:** After Mikhail Glinka's first Russian operas during the 1830s and 40s there was a lull in the genre. Then came the next generation of mature composers, among them the group known as the 'Mighty Five' which aimed to take Russian folk music as a starting point and wanted to bring song closer to spoken intonation. The leader of this group was Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov who had to support the other members, to orchestrate for them and to complete their operas, but undoubtedly the most daring and progressive was Modest Mussorgsky, a flawed genius who was a victim of alcoholism and who died aged only forty-two in 1881.

His greatest opera is *Boris Godunov*; indeed, it is considered to be the absolute masterpiece in all of the Russian repertoire. The composer wrote the libretto himself based on Pushkin's drama and the work was completed in 1869. Mussorgsky hoped to have his piece performed soon after, but it was refused by the Imperial Theatre in St Petersburg. Today this sounds strange, but Mussorgsky's music was anything but mainstream and many aspects of the opera astounded the direction at the theatre.

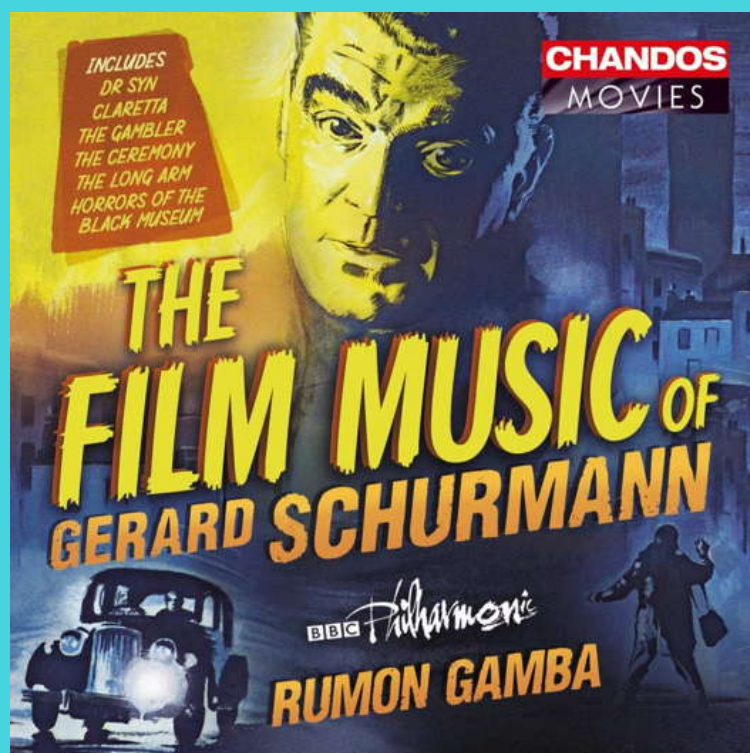
The composer's unadorned style in combination with the realistic intonation from spoken Russian in the vocal parts were stylistically far in advance of their time. Another snag was the omission of a love story and no female principal. This caused Mussorgsky to add the so called 'Polish Scene' between the 5th and 6th scenes, where the false Dimitry falls in love with the Polish Princess Marina Mnishczek. Because of the latter inclusion the work was now divided in a prologue and 4 acts instead of the original 7 scenes. This scene now became the 3rd act, and Mussorgsky spiced the action further with the inclusion of folk and children's songs for the 2 children of the Tsar and their nurse. A scene was also added after Boris's death in which the false Dimitry rides into Moscow and takes over the



'Nagano's formidable insight is able to take the listener on a musical journey into the dark depths of the human soul. Painful, yes, but unmissable.'



government. This version was also rejected, but the opera was ultimately performed in St Petersburg in 1874. [READ MORE ...](#)



'Notes and sound are superb. A must for film addicts.'

**Gerald Fenech:** During the Second World War, Gerard Schurmann, who was born in Java in 1924, was not only a promising young composer living in England, but also an active pilot in the RAF. By the 1950s he felt he was ready to embark on a true composing career, and the period seemed to favour the ambitions of the young Schurmann. Indeed, this was a time when film makers were turning to established names of the day such as Vaughan Williams, Walton, Rawsthorne, Arnold and Bliss to provide music for their movies. It was an era of opportunity, but the big snag was that it was also a time when the full-time job of the 'film composer' was not yet fully established in England. But being the talent he is, Schurmann was soon composing film music, on assignment, of the highest

order.

His compositions came in for high praise, and his name soon started to be associated with colourful symphonic music, full of dramatic impact and a strong visual sense, enabling him to provide a score that complimented and enhanced the events and emotions represented on the screen.

His big break came in 1953, when Alan Rawsthorne was writing the score for the war picture 'The Cruel Sea'. Pressed for time, the composer was unable to finish the music on schedule and left an important battle-at-sea episode requiring a substantial chunk of musical imagery. Rawsthorne left the job in Gerry's hands. The piece turned out terrifically good, but despite efforts to secure film work for his pupil and valued collaborator, the chiefs at Ealing Studios were not convinced to entrust one so young and inexperienced to write music for their productions. So Rawsthorne decided to have the score played to producer Michael Balcon and director Charles Freud. The trick worked. Both men expressed great enthusiasm for the score; indeed, they even conceded that it was one of Rawsthorne's best compositions, especially 'Battle at Sea'. At this stage the composer let out the secret and Schurmann's career was on its way.

This splendid addition to the 'Chandos Movies Series' has the composer's fingerprint written all over it, thus enhancing its musical and interpretive value no end. Indeed, Schurmann (who will be ninety-six years old tomorrow) chose and arranged sequences and titles in such a way as to reflect events, actions and underlying emotions expressed in the various pictures, thus capturing the essence of his music for each production.

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Gerald also reviews Dvořák's Stabat Mater on BR Klassik, Mahler's Symphony No 4 on SWR Music, Weinberg's Complete works for flute on Naxos and Mendelssohn String Symphonies on Naxos.

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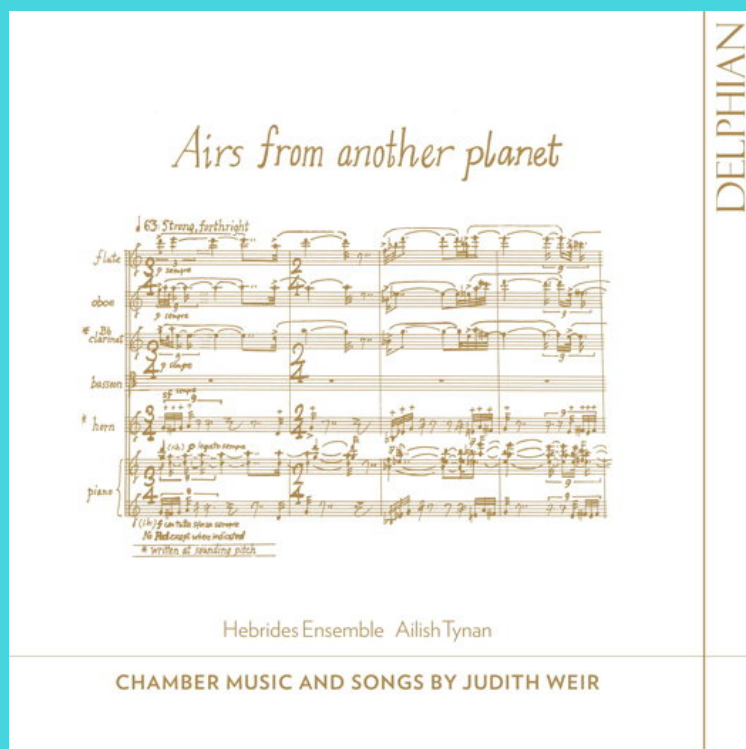
**Geoff Pearce:** This is my first real exposure to the music of Judith Weir, who occupies the prestigious position of 'Master of the Queen's Music'. This disc is quite illustrative of the wide range of styles and ideas that the composer utilises, and the works range over a thirty year period.

The first work is also one of the most recent in terms of its date of composition - 2015. I also find it to be the most easily accessible of the works on this disc. Weir has set four poems by three different African women, and the music is evocative and, like all the works presented here, very skilfully written. The poems are in order: *Berceuse*, *Le Tam-tam*, *Crocodile*, and *Le Village*. I am particularly drawn to the *Berceuse* and *Crocodile* - a lonely vegetarian crocodile that just wants friends. Ailish Tynan and the Hebrides Ensemble's performances are really lovely and polished.

Three Chorales for Cello and Piano (2015-2016) - 'Angels bending near the earth', 'In death's dark vale' and 'O Sapientia', inspired by three different sources, are interesting and contrasting, and the musical language is more complex, reflecting extra musical ideas. All works are interesting, but I am particularly fond of the third of these chorales, 'O Sapientia', which draws on a melody by Hildegard of Bingen. [READ MORE ...](#)

Geoff also listens to Paul Reale's *Children's Palace* on MSR Classics, and to three discs from Navona Records featuring Arcadian Winds and duo526, and a selection of contemporary orchestral works and concertos under the title *Prisma 2*.

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'... the polished, accomplished performances, and the readily accessible music will gain this important English composer a lot of new friends.'



'Not many harpsichord players are as multifaceted and expressive as Jory Vinikour when interpreting modern music.'

**Ona Jarmalavičiūtė:** The harpsichord was one of the most important keyboard instruments in European music from the sixteenth through to the eighteenth century. The instrument's role at that time was usually as a continuo instrument, playing a harmonized bass part in nearly all orchestral music, with the player often also conducting the orchestra. The first appearance of a concerto with solo harpsichord was in 1710 - Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No 5 in D major, BWV 1050. During the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the instrument underwent considerable evolution and became one of the most important and fashionable European instruments. Unfortunately, since the harpsichord is incapable of dynamic gradation, it gradually disappeared from the musical scene with the development of the fortepiano in the eighteenth

century. During the twentieth century, it made a resurgence, being used in historically informed performances of older music, in new compositions, and in certain styles of popular music. Factory-made revival or twentieth-century harpsichords continued to be built through the 1990s. The course of modern harpsichord development changed. The instrument was also resurrected by prominent harpsichord players of the twentieth century, such as Wanda Landowska, Elliott Carter and Violet Gordon-Woodhouse.

One of today's brightest harpsichord players has to be the Grammy-nominated and world-wide acclaimed soloist Jory Vinikour (born 1963). His outstanding passion for harpsichord playing has been expressed throughout his life and career. After he mastered the instrument in Paris with Huguette Dreyfus and Kenneth Gilbert, he toured as a soloist throughout Europe, Asia, South America and the United States. His solo appearances have included Carnegie Recital Hall and the Baldwin-Wallace Bach Festival, performing original baroque harpsichord concertos, as well as modern pieces for the instrument. He is celebrated for his intensive artistry, subtle flexibility of expression, style, virtuosity and musicality. The attractiveness of his musicality also hides an easy and sensitive touch in the various solo timbres.

Since Jory Vinikour has performed with the planet's leading orchestras, it comes as no surprise that on this CD, 'one of the country's finest symphonic orchestras', the Chicago Philharmonic, is accompanying. This orchestra is known as a unique, musician-governed musical society. Conducted by Scott Speck, the orchestra performs with exemplary fashion and vigorous style. Since the presented pieces are all symphonic and based on early harpsichord music structure, the orchestra's collaboration with the soloist is very sympathetic and aimed towards the same musical purpose. [READ MORE ...](#)



Ona also listens to *Born In Dirt An' Din* from Mr McFall's Chamber on Dephian Records.

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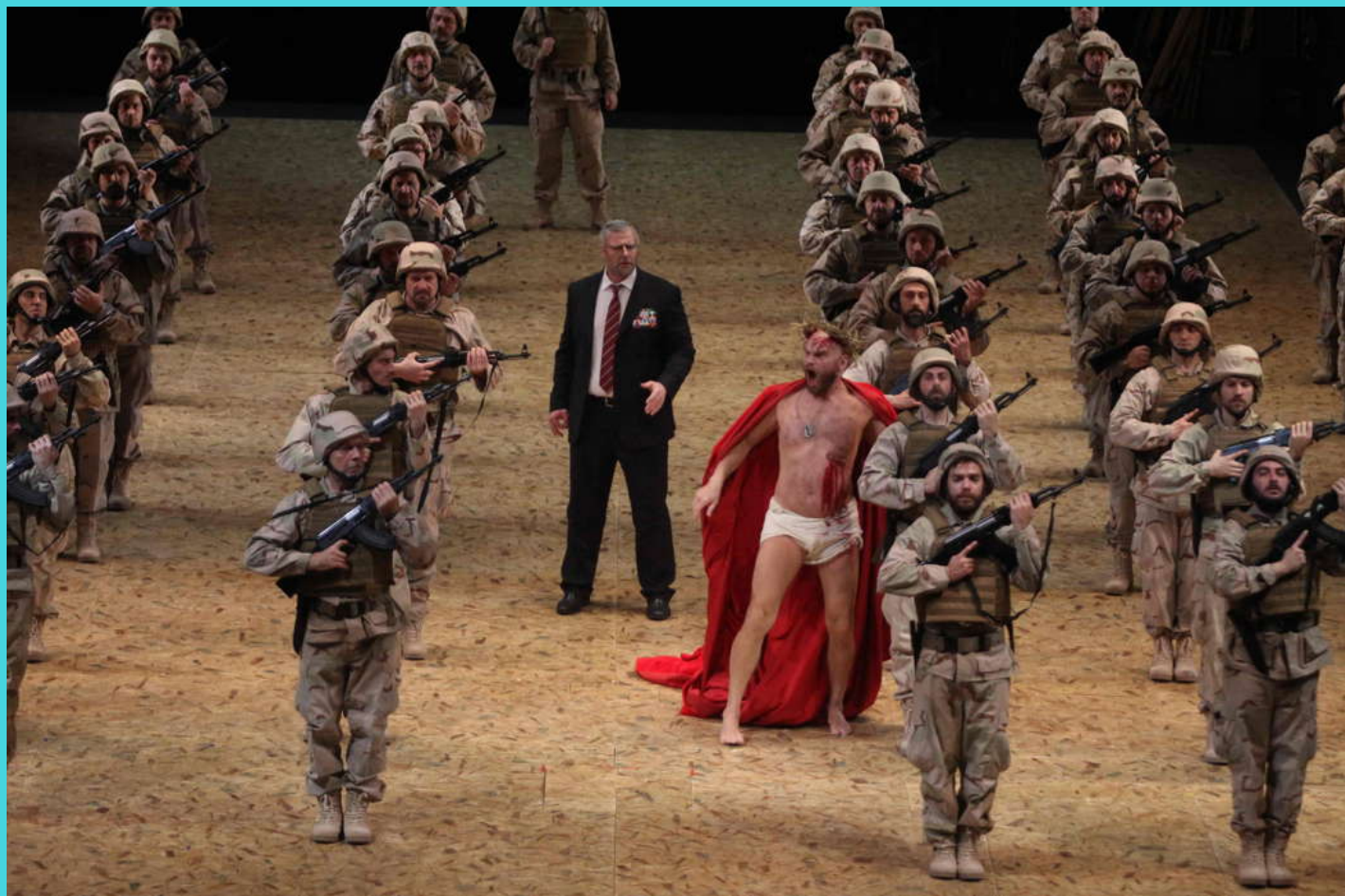
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## ENSEMBLE — WAGNER'S REVENGE

**Giuseppe Pennisi:** On 26 January, the grand opening of the 2020 season at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo had been sold out for several weeks. Many dignitaries were in the theatre. The start of the show was at 5.30pm, ending at almost 11pm, after fifteen minutes of roaring applause, with some shy reserve from the upper tier. I was in an orchestra seat. It was only the third time that Wagner's *Parsifal* had been staged in Palermo. In Italy, it is rarely programmed given the great productive commitment it entails. The staging in Palermo is a co-production with the Teatro Comunale of Bologna, where it will be performed next season. In Bologna, I remember two excellent productions of *Parsifal* in 1980 and 2014, although very different from each other.

I want to distinguish two aspects of *Parsifal* as seen and heard in Palermo: dramaturgical and musical. The creative drama team consists of Graham Vick (director), Timothy O'Brien (scenes), Marco Tinti (costumes), Ron Howell (mimic actions) and Giuseppe Di Iorio (lighting). I must admit that the stage direction and set-up was applauded by the audience and by most of the critics too. In my opinion, Wagner's latest masterpiece, called by the author *Ein Behnenweihfestpiel*, translated as 'mystic drama' or 'sacred drama', is eminently religious and transcendental. So, a-historic. The creative team, on the other hand, desacralized it and placed it in the Middle East today. The Grail is no longer the cup in which Joseph of Arimathea preserved the blood of Christ, but is all of us if we work for universal peace. In the final scene, after 'the purification of Amfortas', there is a great embrace between Americans, Israelis, Scythians, Sunnis as well as a crowd of children - the future generations that will, hopefully, live in peace. This is a very political and contemporary reading.



A scene from Wagner's *Parsifal* at Teatro Massimo di Palermo.  
Photo © 2020 Franco Lannino

In my opinion, this reading of *Parsifal* has little to do with the spirit of the opera on which Wagner worked for over twenty years. In other productions in recent years, *Parsifal* has been Buddhist, pantheistic, secular and non-Christian, but transcendence always remained at its center. The stage action was conducted with great expertise, as befits a creative team of such a high level. However, I was puzzled throughout the show and did not find the subsequent conversations with colleagues convincing. [READ MORE ...](#)

Giuseppe also reports on Franco Alfano's *Risurrezione* in Florence, and from Rome on Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Haydn's *Creation* and Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*.

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**Mike Wheeler:** Lauren Zhang won the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition in 2018, and the youthful maturity that netted her the title was amply in evidence in her first appearance in Nottingham Royal Concert Hall's Sunday morning recital series - Nottingham, UK, 19 January 2020.

She began with Schubert's second set of Impromptus, D 935, starting No 1 with determination, and going on to negotiate the shifting emotional landscape with assurance, sparkling one moment, sombre in the middle, reducing her tone to a compelling whisper where appropriate. The poignant song that is No 2 was taken firmly but not over-insistently in hand. No 3 is a set of variations (though not on the theme of the B flat Entr'acte from *Rosamunde*, as some writers have claimed - after the first five notes the two tunes go in different directions). Her way with the first two variations was a reminder that Schubert often played the piano for his friends to dance to. She allowed just enough of a shadow to fall over variation 3; the textures of No 4 were clear even at the more hefty moments; No 5's running scale figures were lucid, and the coda had an aptly withdrawn feel. There was more dance music in final Impromptu, kept nicely on its toes with Zhang's skittish trills and runs.



Lauren Zhang in 2017

Rachmaninov's Sonata No 2 also got off to a determined start. Playing the earlier, 1913 version, Zhang relished the bell-like sonority of the opening gesture, echoed in the chiming figures that appear throughout the first movement. The circling second theme had a haunting presence, and other gentle, intimate moments were equally eloquent. Zhang kept a firm grip on the balance between foreground and background in the second movement with more bell-sounds vibrantly resonant as the movement approached its



climax. The onset of the finale - there's no break between any of the movements - came as a startling irruption, the mood turning almost truculent at times, but with the triumphant ending ringing out splendidly.

Zhang doesn't have a particularly demonstrative platform manner - with playing as eloquent as this, she doesn't need to.

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## CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — OBITUARIES

This month we mark the passing of Othmar Mága, Franz Mazura, Nedda Casei, John Burke, Barry Tuckwell, Bruno Nettl, Guy Deplus, Ana Lucrecia Taglioretti, Emanuel Borok, Joan Benson and Jaap Schröder. [READ MORE ...](#)

As we prepare to publish this newsletter, news is coming in of the death of the American pianist Peter Serkin, on 1 February 2020, aged seventy-two, from pancreatic cancer.

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