

CLASSICAL MUSICAL DAILY

Five Thoughts on Everything — Issue 136, 1 May 2020

CD SPOTLIGHT — UNIQUE AND MOST COMPELLING



'... in these three pieces, Sørensen is the consistent champion of the understatement.'

Eugene Takeuchi-Williams: It has now long been acceptable for repetitiousness in art music to be met with scepticism. The fundamentally American school of 'Minimalism' *per-se* has seemingly exhausted its musical possibilities. Rhythm as timbre; melodies and rhythm as one and the same; the use of unisons to create ambiguities between instruments; the use of overlapping simplistic elements to form atmospheres; the acousmatic effects that arise from prolonged periods of repetition; and any combination of the above listed (give or take some others).

Sceptics of the 'school' — depending on whether you take the idea of 'schools' seriously: Steve Reich doesn't — likely suffer from a kind of confirmation bias. If Einaudi is the regrettable popular face of 'classical' music, surely Minimalism is spent, or at the very least, woefully out of touch.

It's true that for many of us Einaudi cheapens the music of his peers by association. But we ought not to be too hasty in putting a torch to repetition in general, as a musical device in the 21st century. Simplicity isn't and never was the same as Minimalism. I am a little less cynical than Reich about musical 'schools' as a non-composer myself: composers of 'New Simplicity' and the Danish 'Den Ny Enkelhed' — a separate movement spearheaded by Abrahamsen — often sound 'simple' without ever sounding like American Minimalists. And John Adams, 'post-minimalist' though he may be, was never actually 'simple'.

So, where does one place Bent Sørensen's repetitions, a regular feature of the pieces here concerned? It's clear that, if an organic feature of his style, it's a feature intent on staying. All three pieces on this album are concerti written pre-2010. In 2018, Sørensen won the Grawemeyer Award for *L'Isola Della Citta* (2016), a triple concerto which features those very same percussive repetitions, along with the signature glissandi and truncated melodies. In fact, it is a repeated G minor chord spread between the soloists that ends the piece, making it reminiscent of Britten's Second Quartet in that respect. (This is not an obvious comparison — Sørensen's ending is sombre and desolate — a long way from Britten's insistent finish.)

Sørensen's repetitions have never been the focal point of his pieces. This is what separates him from the more serious Minimalists, for whom all musical ideas must be filtered through those repetitions (whether the repetitions are themselves 'the point'). When you hear the repetitions, I find it feels like time has frozen in that brief moment — the ending to *L'Isola* ... — or that a rhythm played in one section of the orchestra is being mockingly echoed by another — strings and winds, Trumpet Concerto Mvt I, 2:25.

It is especially interesting when the line is blurred between boisterous steady pulses — Trumpet Concerto, Mvt III — and those more tentative 'echoes' into which they sometimes recede.

(Note 2:30 in *La Mattina*, Mvt V, where the orchestral repetitions lull the soloist into action.)

According to the composer, his music is centrally concerned with melody. His exploration of melodic lines is undoubtedly strongest in the Trumpet Concerto, done great justice by Tine Thing Helseth's dynamic performance. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given that it most directly resembles the traditional three movement concerto; here, Sørensen is freer to explore those compositional techniques. For example, what I called his 'truncated' melodies never feel like gimmicks in this piece, whereas they risk sounding tacked-on at the ends of movements in *La mattina* — the piano concerto which opens the album.

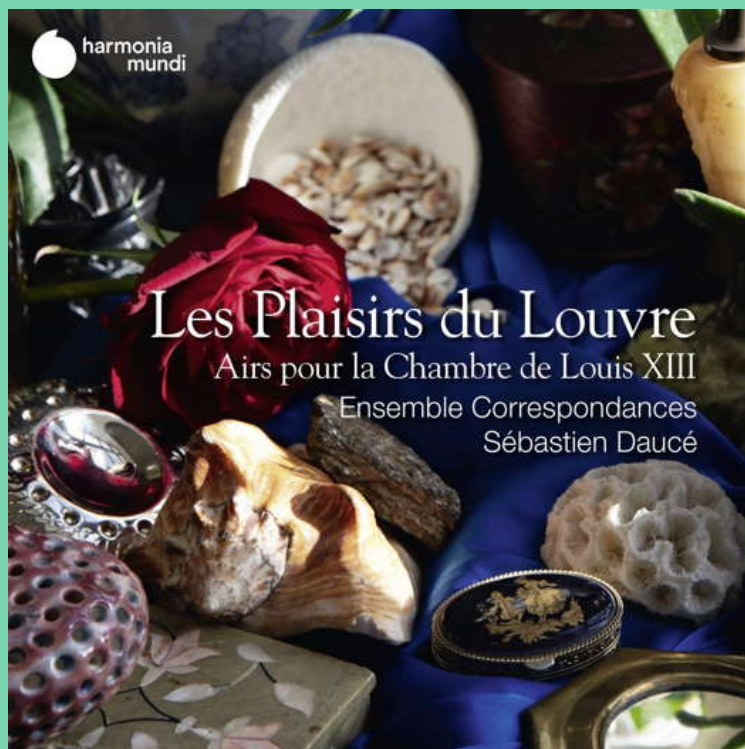
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Gerald Fenech: The 'air de cour' at the time of Louis XIII was a by-product of the humanist debate of the late Renaissance and served as an embellishment to royal ballets and divertissements, whose splendour it enhanced with large-scale vocal solos and stirring choruses. Much of these 'airs' were settings of 'galant' poetry, and the music composed for this particular genre of literature was capable of expressing all the passions of the realm of love. Indeed the 'air de cour' was one of the emblematic elements of a society where the real man devoted himself to the art of pleasing those around him in an elegant way according to the codes of culture imposed by literary 'preciosite'.



'... a rich array of delicately chiselled miniatures full of fragile beauty and sweet-sounding textures.'

It is pertinent to point out that before Versailles, the epicentre of power in France was the Louvre, a genuine theatre of French 'pomp and circumstance', where music was duty-bound to impress with its magnificence and inventiveness.

In Louis XIII's reign (1640-1643), the 'air de cour' and ballet inspired the elite of composers to embrace this popular form of entertainment, and this CD is devoted to pieces by some of the most prolific musicians of this age; composers such as Pierre Guedron (circa 1565-1620), Étienne Moulinié (1599-1676) and François de Chancy (circa 1600-1656).

Still, the most famous of all remains Antoine Boesset (1587-1643) who steered the polyphonic air, inherited from the Renaissance, towards a more intimate conception which preceded the opulence of the 'Sun King'.

The programme also includes instrumental pieces by Louis Couperin (1626-1661), Jacques Chambonnières (1601-1672) and Louis Constantin.

This collection is certainly a rich array of delicately chiselled miniatures full of fragile beauty and sweet-sounding textures. Above all, they reveal a great understanding of the poetic text and a keen awareness for word-setting, melody and counterpoint.

Sébastien Daucé and his Ensemble Correspondances give translucent performances that are warm and expressively controlled, while remaining loyal to the style of the age. A splendid issue, with eye catching presentation and generous playing time plus some really riveting notes to boot.



'A hugely enjoyable album, well worth hearing ...'

Gerald Fenech: This CD highlights great organ pieces by two very famous French composers: Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) and Francis Poulenc (1899-1963).

Saint-Saëns was a household name in his time, and during his long career he composed more than three hundred works across all genres, but his organ compositions are comparatively few. A real pity this, as he was considered to be one of the finest organ improvisors of his age; indeed, Liszt was full of praise for his ability to transcribe two of the former's works from piano to organ.

Saint-Saëns' admiration for the great virtuoso was also great, and when Liszt died on 31 July 1886, Saint-Saëns dedicated his Organ Symphony (No 3)

to the master just departed. This spectacular work was in fact Saint-Saëns' fifth effort in the genre, but since the first two are not numbered, the Organ Symphony is considered as the Third. Composed between 1885/86, this unconventional piece does not use the organ concertante but treats it as part of the orchestra. Also, the work is subdivided in two movements, but the traditional four-movement structure is maintained.

Considered a milestone in French symphonic history, the symphony was a great hit, even up to our times, and this success led the composer to remark: 'Here I gave everything I was able to give. What I have accomplished I will never achieve again.' He was indeed right, as this work has everything; masterly orchestration, colour, warmth, immense excitement and, above all, a dynamic vitality rarely found in French symphonic music. Saint-Saëns was obsessed with 'perfect clarity' and in this symphony he poured all his genius to create music that is striking for its tranquillity, soothing harmonies, soft modulations and flowing style.

Born in Paris in 1899, Francis Poulenc was already a teenager when he joined the group known as 'Les Six' founded in 1918 by Erik Satie and Jean Cocteau. Both men stood for radical simplicity and this left its mark on the young Poulenc. The composer never attended a conservatory, but teachers such as Charles Koechlin for composition and Ricardo Vines for piano helped him nurture his musical talents. Poulenc also fell under the spell of Chabrier, Ravel and Stravinsky.

Poulenc's life was a turbulent one. In 1946 he fathered an illegitimate child, and later in life, his homosexual inclinations turned him into a social outsider. He suffered from depression all his life, but a pilgrimage to the Rocamadour site and tragic events among his circle of friends, renewed his interest in Catholicism. When he died in 1963 his works were nearly forgotten, and it was only in 1999, the centenary of his birth, that people began to take an interest in his wide-ranging *oeuvre*.

One of Poulenc's most concise works is his Organ Concerto completed in 1938 after a veritable struggle that pained him a lot. The work juxtaposes sounds reminiscent of the interior of a church with the boisterous mood of a fairground. [READ MORE ...](#)

Gerald Fenech also reviews Suk's *Asrael Symphony* on BR Klassik, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* on Orfeo, Rachel Mahon's recital of Canadian organ music on Delphian, harp music by Boris Tishchenko, songs and chamber music by William Mathias and Beethoven's *King Stephen*, all on Naxos, Mike Block's *Step into the Void* on the Bright Shiny Things label, *Leiderkreis — Decades of English Song* Volume 4 on Vivat, and to Prokofiev's *Sinfonia Concertante* on harmonia mundi.

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Giuseppe Pennisi: At the beginning of this year the International Classical Music Awards (IMCA) declared Marina Rebeka Artist of the Year with the following motivation:

The Latvian singer Marina Rebeka embodies, perhaps more than any other, the idea of the 'absolute soprano': her repertoire spanning from Baroque to Verismo, from Belcanto to Russian music. She always stands out for the astounding perfection of her singing, her immaculate diction in many languages and a moving commitment to the theatrical demands of the different characters.

I was impressed by her first important international role, at the Salzburg Summer Festival in 2009: under Riccardo Muti's baton, she was one of the protagonists of Rossini's *Moïse et Pharaon*, while she was almost unknown, and she enthralled the audience. I enjoyed hearing her at other times in live performances in opera houses, eg at the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro in Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*. I should add, *inter alia*, her performances at the Rome Teatro dell'Opera in Rossini's *Maometto Secondo*, in Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda* and again in Salzburg in Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*.

She is an absolute soprano for her perfect emission, her consummate technical skills, her voice's extension, her abilities to fit different roles from those requiring lyric coloratura to heavily dramatic roles and those originally written for a mezzo. For instance, she might be the only living soprano who can sing Norma as Bellini conceived it. There are rumours that she was contacted by the management of La Scala, where Norma has not been performed for the last forty five years. I can only hope that if there are ongoing negotiations, they will be successful.



'... perfect emission ... consummate technical skills ...'

This CD is the fourth solo recording by Marina Rebeka. It shows the range of her abilities in women's roles in French repertoire of the nineteenth century. It starts with the aria from Charpentier's *Louise* — *Depuis le jour où je me suis donnée* and ends with Gounod's *Dieu! Quel frisson* from *Roméo et Juliette* — two very dramatic pieces. [READ MORE ...](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi also reviews music by Hindemith on Ondine.

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'The maverick Finnish conductor and composer Leif Segerstam ... and his varied forces give a splendidly committed and characterful account of the complete entertainment.'

admired Rossini's 'Barber of Seville' (while expressing the view that Rossini should restrict himself to comic opera). He could never have set a libretto such as *Così fan tutte*. Of course the central work, perhaps in his entire output (though not necessarily the greatest), is the opera *Fidelio*, which cost him many years of labour, necessitating a complete revision and change of title from 'Leonore', and causing him much trouble with the censors. He was nevertheless always looking for suitable subjects and his other completed theatre scores include the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus* and the *Egmont* music, for the 1787 play by Goethe.

The somewhat confusing plot of the *Ruins of Athens* concerns the return of Minerva, after a gap of two thousand years, to Athens which she finds in ruins. A chorus of dervishes serenades her, which she swiftly dismisses.

a Turkish band of Janisseries makes a din which Beethoven conveys with the addition of piccolo and contrabassoon, and 'all possible noisy instruments such as castanets, cymbals etc' — Beethoven. Minerva bids Athens farewell but is informed of the 'new Athens' which will be Pest. In a splendid temple the chief priest welcomes the two muses Melpomene and Thalia, to be completed by the Emperor Franz II (Holy Roman Emperor).

Julian Jacobson: It is wonderful to have a complete recording of Beethoven's somewhat obscure music to August von Kotzebue's play of the same name. It was composed to celebrate the opening of the new German theatre in Pest in 1812. The only numbers likely to be familiar to Beethoven buffs today are the Turkish March, often heard in various transcriptions as well as the theme for Beethoven's splendidly zany Op 76 Variations, and the Chorus of Dervishes — the Overture is rarely played. These are surely unusual and characterful enough to whet one's appetite to hear the complete score.

Beethoven had an uneasy relationship with the theatre. His earnest, moral and political nature could not occupy itself with mere entertainment, much as he

This ripe farrago drew from Beethoven a kind of *Singspiel* with much spoken dialogue and some ten musical numbers. Little of the music is top-drawer Beethoven, but it certainly isn't negligible, some of it breathing the same air of elevated solemnity as the ceremonial music of *The Magic Flute*, alongside the more picturesque moments for Turks and dervishes. It's also easy to spot Beethoven's possibly subconscious self-borrowings, most obviously from the 5th Symphony. But it's a treat to have all the music, especially in such winningly performances as we get on this Naxos CD, the first recording to include all the spoken dialogue. [READ MORE ...](#)

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Ona Jarmalavičiūtė: The musical cultures of the East and West seem to have nothing in common, yet many attempts to bind the two together have bred many different innovative and unique works of art. Another such project — *Jin Yin* (golden tone) — has been given life by US-based musicians of Chinese descent and five living Chinese composers. Here one can find world premiere recordings of works by Yao Chen, Vivian Fung and Lu Pei, as well as new arrangements of pieces from Zhou Long and Chen Yi.

Founded in 2011, Civitas Ensemble is known to be among Chicago's finest, continuously pursuing a community-outreach program. The moving spirit of the group's newest CD, *Jin Yin*, is Chinese violinist Yuan-Qing Yu — one of the ensemble's founders. The other Civitas Ensemble musicians collaborating on this recording are Kenneth Olsen, Chicago Symphony Orchestra assistant principal cello; J Lawrie Bloom, CSO bass clarinet; and Winston Choi, head of the piano department at Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts. Guest artists here are CSO flutist Emma Gerstein, CSO principal percussion Cynthia Yeh and award-winning pipa master Yihan Chen.

This musical crossover between eastern and western musical cultures presents ways, unique to every composer, of bringing different parts of their identity to the music. The performers, due to their personal experiences dancing to both American and Chinese music, are expressive and precise in the delivery of the CD. Civitas Ensemble takes on the cultural and traditional implications of such a recording and provides an imaginative and exceptionally intense performance. The individuality of each composition's cultural identity is felt throughout, unifying traditional elements in an innovative way. It all results in a rewardingly unfamiliar, yet enjoyable sound.



'... truly striking performances.'

Each piece has far-reaching philosophical underpinnings, explained by the composers themselves. Sometimes these feel difficult to spot when listening and having the first aural impression of both western and Chinese musical elements combined together.

The first and longest composition is Zhou Long's *Five Elements* for flute/piccolo, clarinet, percussion, pipa, violin, and violoncello. Different energies in the piece present five kinds of matter — metal, wood, water, fire and earth — as well as stages of transformation and seasonal change. Each element is presented in turn, using sonic gestures, percussive allusions, the pervasive sound of the pipa, etc. Instrumental solos for Cynthia Yeh on percussion, Emma Gerstein on flute and piccolo and Yihan Cheng on pipa are featured.

Night Thoughts by Chen Yi, originally composed for flute, cello and piano in 2004, was arranged specially for Civitas Ensemble last year, changing flute into violin. Violinist Yuan-Qing Yu, cellist Kenneth Olsen and pianist Winston Choi, each using their own voice, evoke a nocturnal, serene atmosphere, moving and interacting with each other in cluster groups. The composer draws inspiration from a Chinese poem by Li Bai and brought its shimmering loneliness and ethereal nostalgia into music. The piece is dedicated to Ms Heather Hitchen, President of *Meet the Composer*, for her support for composers.

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Ona Jarmalavičiūtė also reviews music by Richard Strauss on BR Klassik.

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'Suzuki's forces create this inner energy in a way that surges, through the music, into the crucifixion, creating the mix of oratorio and opera that Bach must have been envisaging when the work was first performed across the church of St Thomas' in Leipzig in 1827.'

Patrick Maxwell: Performing Bach's Passions is always a unique musical task due to both of the pieces' strange place in the repertoire. Bach, although aware of the desire for operatic work, never attempted any theatrical work, especially in view of his church patrons' desire for strictly liturgical works. Yet both the *John* and the *Matthew*, perhaps the former more so for its shorter length, have annually inspired some to consider their dramatic potential, driven by the constant juxtaposition of the Evangelist, the mob-like Chorus and its counterpart, the devout, reflective Chorale singers. They are distinctly dramatic, drawing in the audiences to the engrossing story, putting the irate, bitter, choruses and the urging voice of the *recitativo* against the lyricism and sonority of the arias and choruses. As Sir John Eliot Gardiner has written:

What most distinguishes his Passions from operas of the time is the way he does away with the convention of a fixed point of reference for the audience, rejecting the idea of a listener who surveys the development of the dramatic narrative more like a consumer — entertained, perhaps moved, ingesting spoon-fed images, but never a part of the action.

This new recording of the *St Matthew*, Bach's 'Great Passion', from the Bach Collegium Japan, under the direction of Masaaki Suzuki, is perhaps the summation of the achievements of the group, who have previously recorded all of the cantatas and the *John Passion*. Suzuki does not break any new boundaries with this recording, but takes on the fierce urgency that is necessary to communicate Bach's message through the ferocious intensity of the drama from the first chorus on the Mount through to the final, passionate sarabande, and the inner momentum that Bach's writing possesses in describing the story of the Passion. There are however times where Suzuki's idiosyncratic styles and *tempi* seem unreasonable, especially at the end of some numbers.

The soloists are excellent throughout; Carolyn Sampson has a slight advantage over her fellow soprano Aki Matsui, as does Damien Guillon over Clint van der Linde as an alto. Sampson produces a sublime rendition of 'Aus Liebe', which takes the same part in the drama as 'Zerfließe, mein herze' in the *St John*.

Van der Linde does give a spellbinding version of the famous 'Erbarme dich', accompanied by (presumably) Ryo Terakado on the violin. This aria, which marks the point where we contemplate Jesus' ensuing trail and derision at the hands of the baying mob, marks surely one of the most poignant and visceral moments of devotion in the whole canon of not just the Bach *oeuvre*, but the whole of Western music. [READ MORE ...](#)

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Geoff Pearce: This disc of Ernst von Dohnányi's dance pantomime *The Veil of Pierrette* is most welcome as there is a general lack of recordings of this composer's music. This work was first performed in 1910 and is based on a pantomime play by Viennese writer and dramatist Arthur Schnitzler (1862-1931), dealing with a tragic love triangle. The plot is well explained in the interesting booklet notes. After its first performance, the work was met with varying success, but the 'Wedding Waltz' was widely performed in many arrangements and was a popular choice for radio broadcasts.



The work consists of three acts, with a prelude and six scenes in Act I, two scenes in Act II (opening with the seventeen-minute Wedding Waltz) and three scenes in Act III.

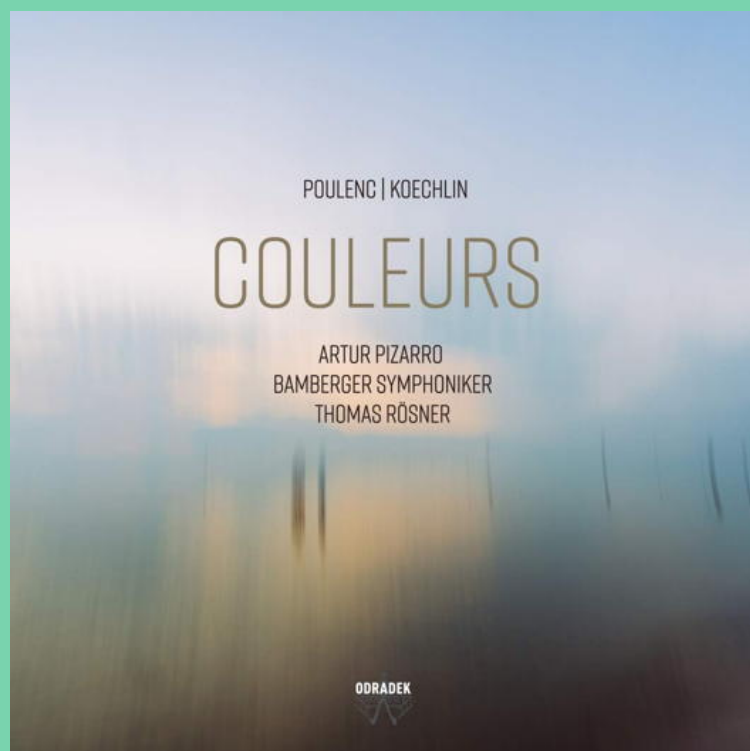
'The rapid changes of mood and atmosphere are well done, and the playing of all concerned is exemplary.'

The lengths of the scenes vary considerably, ranging from 41 seconds for the final Act III Scene 3, to nearly eighteen minutes for Act I Scene 6 and Act II Scene 1. The musical style is late Romantic and thoroughly enjoyable, going through a whole range of moods, as one might expect in a tale of this nature. Some movements (such as Act I Scene 2) are positively coquettish, some grand, some tender and some very tragic or conflicted.

The opening Prelude and Scene 1 are sombre at the opening, and one senses that this will be a tragic work. The playing by the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Ariane Matiakh is everything you could wish for.

The rapid changes of mood and atmosphere are well done, and the playing of all concerned is exemplary. I am particularly impressed with the various woodwind solos, and the precision and sumptuous sound of the strings is a delight to hear. When one hears the brass (as they are used somewhat sparingly), they are fantastic and play with precision and sonority and with some lovely biting menace when required. I am most impressed with this orchestra and its overall sound. The Wedding Waltz is in the vein of Richard Strauss's Waltz scene from *Der Rosenkavalier* with its glorious overblown Romantic splendour. [READ MORE ...](#)

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'Odradek and the Bambergers have produced clean, well-balanced recordings and treated both composers with great sensitivity. The orchestral playing is first rate.'

Paul Sarcich: Two works by Poulenc and two by Charles Koechlin feature on this album, the title justified by the undoubtedly colourful music we would expect from early-mid twentieth century French composers.

Poulenc's Sinfonietta is titled somewhat self-deprecatingly, with four movements and at nearly thirty minutes it has claims to being a full-scale symphony. The first movement puts us firmly into the Poulencian world — a world of eclecticism, where flowing, even sombre themes are juxtaposed with moments of explosiveness and light, where snippets of self-quotation mix with bits stolen from other composers. Written for the then BBC Third Programme and premiered in 1948, this movement may not always be sunny, but it is not full of angst either, despite

its suddenly serious ending after a lot of previous good humour.

The scherzo second movement is played here with a great spirit of playfulness, having more than a hint of Bizetian folk-danciness, as well as influences from Tchaikovsky and Mozart. The slow third isn't all that slow, having plenty of movement in its treatment of the

chanson-like themes. This could easily be ballet music, never getting heavy or maudlin even though there is a real whiff of nostalgia, especially in the second main theme.

The Finale returns us to the world of the first movement: self quotations, a direct steal from Mozart's *A Little Night Music*, and an Offenbachish section which summons up the world of Parisian theatre, all contrasted with a darker, more dramatic middle section before a return to the hi-jinks of the opening and a filmic coda.

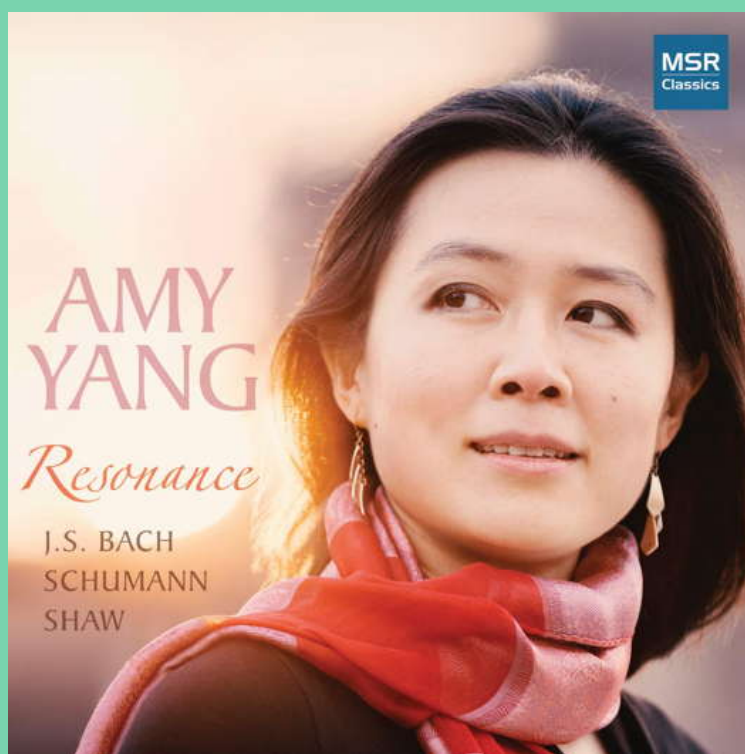
The Bamberg Symphony, although noted for its dark sound, is sensitive to Poulenc's idiom, and conductor Thomas Rösner's familiarity with it since his students days means that nothing is laboured, a suitable flow is maintained throughout, and it would be invidious to single out individual soloists or sections for all the excellent solo work. This comes across as music that simply flowed out of the pen.

The Piano Concerto was not terribly well-received at its Boston premiere in 1950, and is not on the A list of piano concertos today. Poulenc's eclecticism and love of stark contrast may have been too much for the Bostonians then, and too much for some now, as it is even more marked here than in the Sinfonietta. Rachmaninov's spirit hovers over much of the first movement, but filtered through a Parisian sensibility. Pianist Artur Pizarro is aware of this and does not indulge in tub-thumping, keeping the octave work chirpy and not trying to overwhelm in the passages where the notes flood out. There is a chamber music-like air to this performance, a good balance between piano and orchestra, lots of short solos in the orchestral writing, and a mix of the Romantic and Neoclassical. 4:43-5:20 shows how Poulenc can switch musical worlds almost insouciantly, and the whole movement rips through styles from the wistful to the fanfaric. [READ MORE ...](#)

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Lucas Ball: This release is something of a marvel. With her rendering of *Davidsbündlertänze*, Amy Yang takes us to a world that Robert Schumann was very much involved in. With each movement, these states of mind conflict with one another. We experience 'Florestan' and 'Eusebius' or even both within the same movement.

To match Schumann's states of mind, Yang's delivery can be wild and exciting and even irritable but also depressing, lonely and longing. We also experience his love for Clara Wieck. (One commentator says that it is based on Wieck's Mazurka, Op 6, No 5 and yes, one can see the resemblance when looking at the score with some of the same sentiments that come with Wieck's work.)



'... Yang's delivery can be wild and exciting and even irritable but also depressing, lonely and longing.'

Amy Yang begins this recital with a rendition of Bach's Partita No 4 in D major, and this too takes us to the various contrasts that Bach has to offer. This time, the movements are, of course, Baroque dances — *Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande*, *Gigue* — together with other movements — *Ouvertüre*, *Aria*, *Menuet* — and Yang deftly takes us on an exploration of Bach's various states of mind.

The one living composer on the CD is the American Caroline Shaw (only born in 1982) and this greatly pays homage to Clara Wieck in Chopin's Mazurka Op 17, No 4. Again the resemblance is striking and it fits in with the overall ethos of the other items on the programme.

Caroline Shaw seemingly does not feel the need to be at all *avant-garde* — her work *Gustave Le Gray* (2012) is clearly tonal and adds to the character of what comes before with the Bach Partita and to what comes after with the Schumann *Davidsbündlertänze*.

It is not difficult to see why the CD is called *Resonance*.

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Because of COVID-19 and the dearth of concert reviews, we have a bumper crop of CD reviews this month, by Lucas Ball, Gerald Fenech, Julian Jacobson, Ona Jarmalavičiūtė, Patrick Maxwell, Geoff Pearce, Giuseppe Pennisi, Paul Sarcich and Eugene Takeuchi-Williams, and they're worth exploring in more detail.

Our CD reviews are all illustrated with sound samples, usually chosen by the author of each review. If you enjoy listening to these, you can usually hear an extra sample on the 'CD information page' linked from the bottom of each review. An alternative way to reach these CD information pages is via our New Releases section, where you can also find information about recent CDs, including those which haven't yet been reviewed, and this also enables you to follow the review cycle process for any particular CD.

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The quarantine suggestions in Gordon Andrew R's quarantine article *Life Under Quarantine — Suggestions for the classical musician* are being updated every day, so even if you read this feature last month, there is now much more to see. If you have any ideas of your own, [contact us](#) and we'll add yours to the list.

MUSIC AND THE PANDEMIC — THE CASE FOR ITALY

Giuseppe Pennisi: The COVID-19 pandemic is making excellent victims in the field of the economy of culture and, above all, of the performing arts — the cornerstone of economic activity and employment in many areas. This is particularly true in Italy. Think of cities like Venice and Florence (and many others) that live on cultural tourism as the main if not the only source of work and income.



The Palazzetto Bru Zane in Venice. Photo © 2010 Matteo da Fina

Museums and major exhibitions are closed: for example as the exhibit on Raffael in Rome, an event of world importance, opened on 5 March 2020 for only three days instead of three months, even though tickets were almost all sold out. With travel blocked, social distancing and other restrictions, the sector has a huge net loss. *The New York Times* wrote that the virus caused a loss of employment in Rome alone of 170,000, equal to that detected in Hollywood.

'Baumol Disease', named after the New York-based mathematical economist William Baumol (1922-2017) adds pains to COVID-19. In the 1960s — during just a year spent in Italy, especially in Rome — he wrote a fundamental treatise on the sector, showing that in a world of rapid technological progress, without public support (through grants or tax reliefs targeted to philanthropic donations), theatres and above all, opera and symphony organizations, will die. German theatres have grants that cover an average of 90% of the costs and are always full thanks to a widespread, popular and active 'underlying' culture where all groups of the population are raised and grow with the habit and custom of going to concerts and operas since they were youngsters. For Italy, where music theatre was born four hundred years ago, this means a heavy loss of national heritage.

The danger is serious: for La Scala a month of closure means a loss of one million receipts, and the financial damage to other theatres is at similar levels, not to mention the summer festivals in danger of not running, with the loss also of the external effects they activate. For instance, the summer season of Rome's Teatro dell'Opera at the Terme di Caracalla — an audience of 4,000 — and the main Florence Spring festival have been cancelled. [READ MORE ...](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi and *Classical Music Daily* invite you to comment on this feature (or write a new article) and put the case for the performing arts in your country at this unusual time.

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BEETHOVEN, LISZT AND THE LITTLE BROADWOOD

Anett Fodor: The London piano manufacturer, Thomas Broadwood, visited Ludwig van Beethoven when he was staying in Vienna. He realised immediately that the Master was suffering from impaired hearing. Broadwood was a great admirer of Beethoven and a few months later, he gave him a six-octave piano that had been carefully selected by world-renowned pianists. English pianos were known to have a more powerful and stronger sound than Viennese instruments at the time. Thomas Broadwood hoped that with his gift, he would be helping the composer.

The 'package' left London in December 1817. It arrived in Trieste after a long journey of several months. From there, it was taken to Vienna by cart. The generous giver, himself, covered the costs of transport between the English and Austrian capitals. The Imperial Court made a special exemption and arranged for import duty to be waived.

Beethoven was working on his famous *Hammerklavier* piano sonata (Op. 106) when the mahogany instrument arrived. He used this precious gift for the rest of his life. Soon after his death (1827), the piano was put up for auction. Ten years earlier, it had been one of Europe's most modern pianos. One decade later, due to what was by then considered its restricted volume, added to its poor condition, made it extremely difficult to sell.

In the end, the piano became the property of Dr Carl Anton Spina. This famous Viennese art dealer was aware that the little Broadwood had a high intrinsic value thanks to its exceptional provenance.

When he was working in Diabelli's publishing house in Vienna, Spina met Ferenc Liszt several times. The art dealer felt such reverence for the Hungarian musician that he gave the piano as a gift to Liszt in 1845. In the following years, the composer kept his predecessor's valuable instrument in his library in Weimar.

On the fiftieth anniversary of his own creative and artistic work, the aging Liszt offered Beethoven's historical relic along with many other precious objects to the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest. He announced his intention in a letter written to the Museum's curator Ferenc Pulszky on 3 May 1873.



Beethoven's Broadwood piano in the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest. Source: mnm.hu

The instrument was first exhibited fourteen years later, after the Hungarian musician's own demise. Since then, it has needed both minor as well as more substantial repairs so that it could be used in both concerts and recordings. During the bicentennial celebrations of Liszt's birth in 2011, Beethoven's Broadwood piano became the artefact of the year in Hungary. [READ MORE ...](#)

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ENSEMBLE — TERRIFIC ENERGY

Mike Wheeler: Nottingham missed out on Opera North's regular March visit this year — the Theatre Royal announced its closure the day the week's run was due to start. Fortunately, *BBC Radio 3* was at the Grand Theatre, Leeds, UK, on 12 February, to record the company's new production of Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*, and this was broadcast on 11 April 2020. So, with the help of some production photos and a few brief video clips on ON's *Twitter* feed, here goes:

Opera North has form with Weill. I remember fine productions of *Arms and the Cow* (*Der Kuhhandel*) and *One Touch of Venus* — there was also *Love Life*, which I didn't get to see. With a cast of over thirty, *Street Scene* is above all a great ensemble piece, and so played right to Opera North's strengths. A high-water mark of Weill's American career, it is based on Elmer Rice's Pulitzer Prize-winning play of the same title. In what is essentially a tragedy of domestic violence, the motif of unfulfilled longing plays out in a number of cross-cutting story-lines. We see the ethnically mixed inhabitants of a New York tenement block coming and going, interacting, gossiping, coping with life's ups and downs — mostly downs — and trying to stay cool in a stifling heatwave.



A publicity photo for Opera North's production of Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*

Central to the scenario are the Murrants — Anna and Frank, their grown-up daughter Rose and younger son Willie.

In her big Act I number, 'Somehow I Never Could Believe', Giselle Allen balanced the poignancy of Anna's disappointed dreams with a still-flickering belief in a better life.

Robert Hayward's Frank was not just a reactionary bully. 'Let Things Be Like They Always Was' gave a glimpse of the pain behind the bluster, the tragedy of someone who simply cannot adjust to a changing world.

Of the two would-be lovers, Alex Banfield captured Sam Kaplan's gauche idealism, while avoiding any tendency to self-pity in a powerful account of his solo number 'Lonely House', which Weill said was 'almost a theme song for the show'. [READ MORE ...](#)

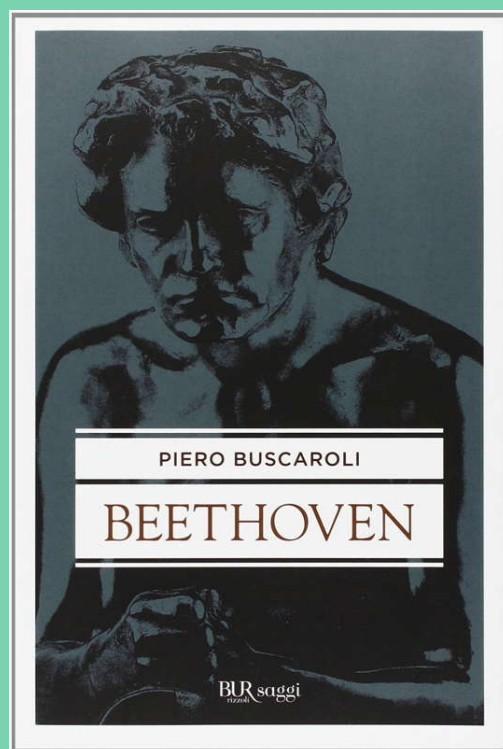
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MUSING ON LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN'S MODERNITY

Giuseppe Pennisi: The 250th anniversary of Ludwig van Beethoven's birth is the event to characterize the 2020 musical year. The composer was born between 16 and 17 December 1770 — music historians do not agree on the exact date and at that time the civil status records were rather lacking — in Bonn, where his grandfather (named Ludwig also) had arrived decades earlier from Flanders where the family practiced small farming. The prefix 'van' — often crippled in a noble 'von' — indicates the Flemish/Dutch origin of the family. He died on 26 March 1827.

All over the world, major musical institutions have — as is right — programs to celebrate a giant of European composition between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century — a true colossus at the turn of two centuries. We will hear his symphonies, his vast piano production, his chamber music, and his unique, and so troubled, opera *Fidelio* which required three different drafts. New studies and essays will enrich the already rich production on the composer: in his 1080-page volume on Beethoven in 2004, Italian musicologist Piero Buscaroli (1930-2016) recalls having used as many as 120 books as 'main sources' for his research — as well as an immense amount of texts as 'secondary sources'.

I wish that Beethoven's celebrations will not become a fair, as they have been, in the recent past, for Mozart, Verdi and Wagner in their anniversaries. I hope that listeners — the programs have already been defined for years — will follow a thread to give an accomplished sense to the various events. In my opinion, the thread that should link listening to Beethoven's works is the modernity, not of all, but of many titles in his catalogue. It is a line not always followed or understood. It is seen in a reductive way in which Beethoven is considered as a precursor — also of a couple of decades — of German Romanticism. His modernity is much more up-to-date. [READ MORE ...](#)



Piero Buscaroli: *Beethoven*
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CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — FIVE THOUGHTS ON EVERYTHING

Bright Shiny Things releases a recording of music by Dutch composer Jobina Tinnemans. In *Andrea Bocelli: Music for Hope*, Andrea Bocelli and Emanuele Vianelli performed live from the Duomo in Milan on Easter Sunday. The Irving M Klein String Competition, one of America's top string competitions, goes digital.

We mark the passing, last month, of Martin Lovett, David Boe, Lynn Harrell, Vytautas Barkauskas, Robert Mandell, David Daniels, Peter Jonas, Maksimilijan Cenčić, Alexander Vustin, Arlene Saunders, Kenneth Gilbert, Jan Talich (senior), Kerstin Meyer, Akin Euba, Louis van Dijk, Liu Dehai, Shanti Hiranand, Dmitri Smirnov, Richard Teitelbaum, Eileen Croxford Parkhouse, André Stordeur, Silvano Carroli, Michel Wibl , Claudio Spies, Ellis Marsalis Jr and Dieter Reith. May they all rest in peace. [READ MORE ...](#)

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AN ECONOMIST IN THE WORLD OF MUSIC



Leonie Rysanek

Giuseppe Pennisi: I trained as an economist but have been in love with music since I was young. I was not raised in a musical family; my father used to say that he had difficulties in distinguishing between the Italian National Anthem and the ecclesiastical *Tantum Ergo*. Nonetheless, as he was attempting a not very successful political career, for social reasons he and my mother subscribed to the Rome Teatro opening night performances. When I was twelve, since my father was busy with other engagements, I was dressed up to escort my mother to a performance of Wagner's *Il Vascello Fantasma*, the Italian title of *Der Fliegende Holl nder* (The Flying Dutchman), with Karl B hm in the pit and Leonie Rysanek as Senta. I was enthralled. Thus, a life-long love affair began.

At the age of fourteen I enrolled in AGIMUS, the Italian association of young music listeners, for 300 Italian lire — the price of a cafeteria self-service lunch — for a year. This gave me access to a concert performance at the Italian radio auditorium every week and to a dress rehearsal at the Teatro dell'Opera every month. Hence I became a good listener. When older, I flirted with experimental and electronic music and started to follow the initiatives of associations such as Nuova Consonanza; once I was even able to go to the Biennial International Modern Music Festival in Venice.

After my degree in Rome, I won a full fellowship to study at the School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University on a two year program: one year in Bologna and one in Washington DC. When in Bologna, I was able to follow the Teatro Comunale season and a few performances at La Scala too, in the upper tier. Coming back home on the night train, I would reach my student apartment at 5am.

After my degree in Washington, I joined the World Bank at the age of twenty-six in the Young Professionals Program. I loved the institution and I made a reasonably good career: at the age of thirty-one, I was heading a division. I thought that my entire professional life would have been with the World Bank. In Washington, there were several opportunities to follow music: the National Symphony, the Washington Opera season, the Lisner Auditorium Opera-in-English season, a yearly two week tour of the Metropolitan Opera House and a similar tour by New York City Opera. For the bicentenary of American Independence, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts hosted the Paris Opera, La Scala, The Deutsche Opera-Berlin and the Bolshoi. I was such an opera buff that I planned my missions in line with the lyric season. On mission for the World Bank, I was able to catch operas in Seoul — Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux*, and in Addis Ababa — Orff's *Der Mond* — to mention a few examples.



Giuseppe Pennisi and his wife in front of Teatro Massimo di Palermo on 20 January 2019

At a certain stage, my Government invited me to join the Italian civil service in a high position to set up an office to evaluate public investments. The challenge was great. In addition, my wife — who is French — and I were quite aware that if we did not seize this opportunity, it would have been difficult to have a similar chance again. More importantly, at that time, our children were twelve and six; it would have been very hard to relocate them later because of schooling and other determinants. [READ MORE ...](#)

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