

Classical Music Daily

Fall and Decline — Issue 152, 1 September 2021



John Dante Prevedini: Navona Records' new release, *Fall and Decline*, is the recording debut of the recently-composed eponymous work in five movements for six solo voices and electronics by the American composer Gregory W Brown, here performed by the vocal sextet Variant 6. Each of the five movements is a setting of text from a different period in human history, the common focus among them being the impermanence of all human endeavors. The album, which is available both digitally and on vinyl, comes with liner notes that include artist biographies, texts and program notes by the composer.

At thirty-three minutes the work is just long enough to constitute a full album on its own, and Brown uses this relatively brief time effectively to create a listening experience that is at once engaging, provocative and full

'... engaging, provocative and full of genuine surprise.'

of genuine surprise. This is evident in many dimensions of the music's structure, from the layout of the form across the five movements to the composer's use of harmony, rhythm and the electronic soundscape. Perhaps even more essential, however, is that all of these elements come together holistically in a way that really does convey the meaning of the work's theme: the inevitability of a fall and a decline. Brown clearly

understands the mechanics of symbology and how archetypes can be embedded within sonic structures to deliver meanings that are potent and immediate ...

... Gregory W Brown indicates in the liner notes that *Fall and Decline*, from its composition to its recording and editing over the course of a few years, is 'a product of its time: hope and creativity in the face of decline'. I imagine many people these days would agree with the notion that ours is a time of decline, even if they might bitterly disagree over what the nature and source of that decline are. If this recording can nonetheless provide any perspective, I believe it is the reminder that life is always a window of opportunity, however fleeting, to live as well as we can for the sake of both the present and the future. After all, Cambyses' reign did not last particularly long, but the aftermath of its destructiveness is still being sung after 2,500 years. What kind of aftermath are we leaving behind in our own brief time?

MORE ...

Simon Farrugia: The Argentine tango composer and bandoneón player Astor Piazzolla, born in 1921 and known in his native land as 'El Gran Astor', revolutionised the traditional tango into a new style - *nuevo tango*. Piazzolla innovatively incorporated elements from classical and jazz music. There is a general consensus among his biographers that Piazzolla's compositions amount to three thousand pieces, five hundred of which were recorded by him. Piazzolla impressively composed over three hundred tangos and fifty film soundtracks. Some of his orchestral works include: *Concierto para Bandoneón, Orquesta, Cuerdas y Percusión*; *Doble-Concierto para Bandoneón y Guitarra*; *Tres Tangos Sinfónicos*; and *Concierto de Nácar para 9 Tanguistas y Orquesta*. In addition to these compositions, one cannot fail to mention that Piazzolla also composed music in song-form compositions, like *Balada para un loco* and *Adiós Nonino*. Most of these compositions are still very popular among the general public.

Showcasing his musical prowess as an excellent bandoneonist, Piazzolla performed most of his own compositions with various ensembles: initially with the 1946 Orchestra, and subsequently with the 1955 Octeto Buenos Aires, the 1960 First Quintet, the 1971 Noneto, the 1978 Secondo Quintet, and the 1989 Sextet. Notably, Piazzolla also performed with several world-renowned musicians, such as the jazz saxophone player Gerry Mulligan and the cellist Yo-Yo Ma. One of Piazzolla's characteristic performance ensembles was the quintet, comprising a bandoneón, a violin, a piano, an electric guitar and a double bass. Piazzolla's music has been arranged and performed widely by numerous musicians. Duo Praxedis's new album *Piazzolla: Works for Harp & Piano* is one such presentation of Piazzolla's musical world which enchants both ear and soul.

MORE ...



'The freshness of sound presented in this album gives a new dimension to Piazzolla's music ...'

Geoff Pearce listens to *Back to Stockhome* and to *Xiaogang YE: Winter*, both on BIS Records. Gerald Fenech listens to Bellini's *I Puritani* on Delos, to Wilhelm Fürtwängler's First Symphony and music by Marianna Martines and Beethoven on CPO, to music by Ludwig Krebs on Brilliant Classics, to Paul Abraham's *Ball at the Savoy*, Haydn's Baryton Trios and music by Albert Ketelbey on Naxos, and to *Favourite Orchestral Classics* on SOMM Recordings' Ariadne label. Giuseppe Pennisi listens to piano suites by Giacinto Scelsi on Wergo, and to Cantatas and Serenatas by Stradella on Dynamic.

LATEST CD REVIEWS

SEPTEMBER 2021 NEW RELEASES

ENSEMBLE — GREEK TRAGEDIES AND MUSICAL THEATRE

Giuseppe Pennisi: When in the Renaissance a group of aristocrats created the 'Florentine comrades association', where opera was born, their intention was to give new life to Greek tragedy, that is, a show that included dramatic action, words, dance and music. Similarly, in designing 'the total work of art of the future', Wagner and Nietzsche thought of the Greek theatre of which, at that time, precisely because of the research of important German writers and archaeologists, important discoveries were being made. An Italian politician loves to repeat: 'Those who do not know the Greek theatre, know nothing of the human soul and have difficulty entering the political contest'. I could go on with the quotes. For example, Canadian director Robert Carsen recently recalled how fundamental Greek theatre has been and is for his staging.

This year the centenary of classical theatre performances, promoted by the National Institute for Ancient Drama (Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico - INDA), is celebrated. In fact, a first staging - *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus - took place in the spring of 1914, but World War I, first, and the Spanish flu epidemic, later, prevented the experience from continuing. The cycles resumed in 1921, in the huge theatre of Syracuse, dug into a hill overlooking the Ionian Sea (and with a capacity of 10,000 spectators), as promoted by a group of Sicilian intellectuals. The success was enormous: the King of Italy and the President of the Council went to Syracuse to attend the performances. A beautiful exhibition, curated by the Managing Director of INDA, recalls the event. In a first phase, the cycles were held every two years; then they became annual. They were always held in the Spring. For years, the practice has been to end the shows - as in Greece of 500 BC - at sunset.



A scene from Euripides' *Bacchanti* in Syracuse. Photo © 2021 Michele Pantano

Due to the pandemic, this year the performances take place in July and August. Due to climatic conditions, they start at 8pm - sunset in Sicily - and run, without intermission until 10.30-11pm. Four titles were on the billboard. I saw *Nuvole* (The Clouds) by Aristophanes on 15 August and *Baccanti* (The Bacchantes) by Euripides on 16 August 2021. On both occasions, the theatre was full to the capacity now allowed because of COVID-19 - an audience of three thousand. Even though the performances were in Italian translation of the Greek original text, a good part of the audience was non Italian; they could follow the plays due to the program notes, astute stage direction and the music.

[MORE ...](#)

Giuseppe also visits the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro, discussing Regietheater, and reviews a performance of *La bohème* in Rome. Ron Bierman waxes lyrical over the San Diego Symphony Orchestra's new outdoor concert hall, Lucas Ball visits the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester, UK and, also in the UK, Mike Wheeler completes his reports from the Buxton Festival and also listens to choral and organ music in Derby.

[LATEST CONCERT AND FESTIVAL REVIEWS](#)

NEWS — OBITUARIES

We mark the passing of Canadian composer R Murray Schafer, English composer Hugh Wood, Italian-Monégasque conductor and composer Gianluigi Gelmetti, British choral director and composer Stephen Wilkinson, and Polish bass and opera manager Kazimierz Kowalski.

[LATEST NEWS](#)

BEYOND COVID-19 IN SAN DIEGO

Ron Bierman: San Diego's classical music scene has coped with the COVID-19 invasion by trading shuttered concert halls for parking lots and online media. Appreciative bravos and bravas have been replaced by either honking horns, flashing headlights or painful silence.

The city's Mainly Mozart was an early adopter of drive-in performances. Its first was in July of last year with an audience of 150 vehicles voicing raucous automotive approval for San Diego Symphony Concertmaster Jeff Thayer and seven musicians from the Los Angeles Philharmonic, including concertmaster Martin Chalifour. The musicians, delighted to be playing in person under any circumstances, delivered lively versions of an early Mozart divertimento and the Mendelssohn octet.

[MORE ...](#)

Finally, Keith Bramich draws attention to a new website about British conductor Lawrence Leonard (1923-2001), who was in charge of the first London run of Bernstein's *West Side Story* and who collaborated with British rock band Procol Harum and the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra in Canada. [MORE ...](#)

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.

All rights to the material in this newsletter are reserved, and nothing contained here should be re-published elsewhere
without the consent of the copyright holder — usually the author — and of *Classical Music Daily*.

Read us every day at www.classicalmusicdaily.com

[Contact us](#)

[Your privacy](#)

[Newsletter archive](#)

This PDF newsletter's background image is derived from a detail of Bourges Cathedral in France, showing the Last Judgement.