

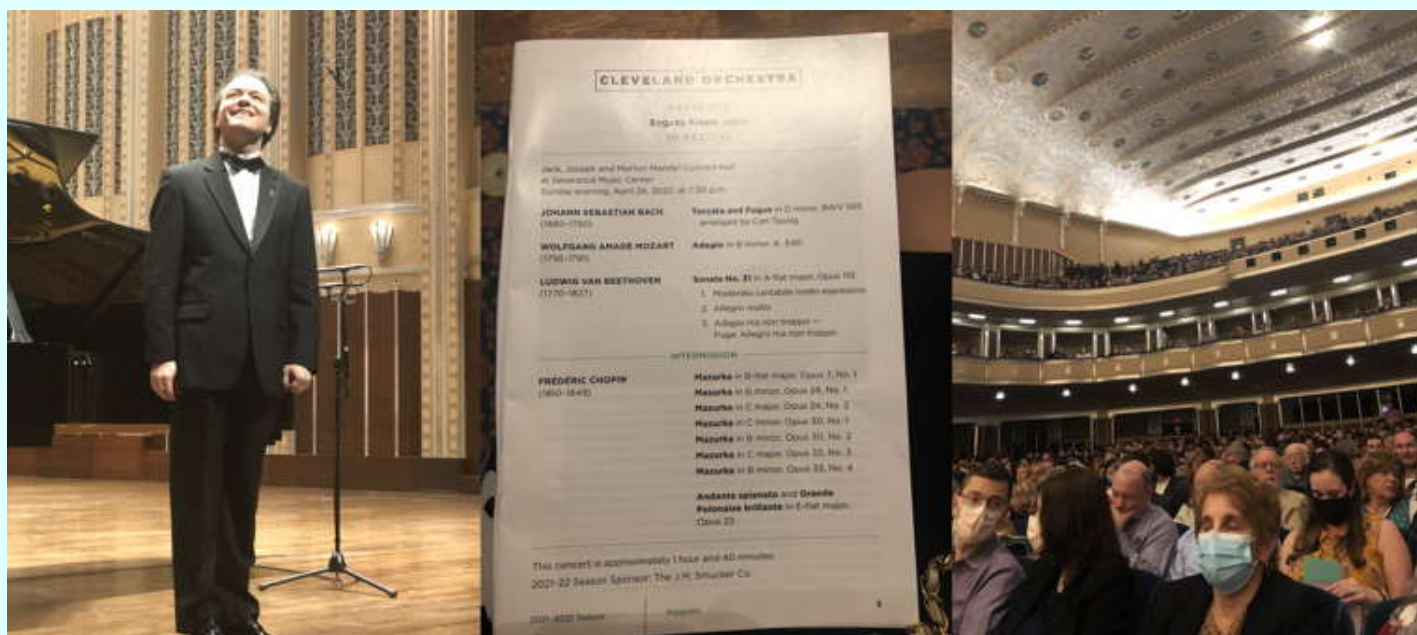


Fascinatingly Elusive — Issue 157, May 2022

Halida Dinova: In the light of the terrible reality of war in Ukraine, the concert of Eugeny Kissin in Cleveland, Ohio, USA on Sunday 24 April 2022 (Russian Orthodox Easter) was an absolutely extraordinarily beautiful event. The Mandel Concert Hall in Severance Music Center was packed beyond capacity. People drove from far away towns.

With the sincerity of every musical phrase and the warmth of the piano sound, Kissin played on a transcendental level as the evening progressed, giving us, the audience, the gift of a spiritual boost, like as if the pandemic and the war hadn't happened.

Eventually, after the last Chopin piece on the program, the *Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise Brillante*, the outpouring of the audience's love and the appreciation resulted in thunderous ovations ... The pianist smiled and warmed up to five encore pieces. Such an unforgettable evening for so many reasons!



Eugeny Kissin in Cleveland, Ohio, USA on 24 April 2022. Photos and text © 2022 Halida Dinova

Mike Wheeler: Croatian composer Dora Pejačević (1885-1923) is attracting quite a bit of notice at the moment - Chandos has just released a CD of her Piano Concerto and Symphony - and from what I've heard so far the attention is long overdue. So it was good to make the acquaintance of her Overture in D minor, thanks to the Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Jan Latham-Koenig - Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, UK, 8 April 2022. Here's a composer with both a lively imagination and the technique to support it. The rhythmically quirky opening is fascinatingly elusive, and the performance sustained that level of interest all through Pejačević's mixture of ebullience and lyricism. D minor may be a notionally sombre key, but her Overture is as festive as they come, and this performance did it proud.

... Mahler's First Symphony starts from a slender thread of sound. It opens out into a kind of stylised dawn chorus, before the cellos launch into a song from his *Lieder eines Fahrenden Gesellen*. Latham-Koenig and the orchestra pieced together Mahler's mosaic of small details to create a sense of both freshness and expectation, which they maintained throughout. After the big climax the sound of the brass in full cry was bold but not unduly overpowering. The second movement was perhaps just a shade too brisk, but it went with plenty of swing, finding a contrasting sophisticated elegance in the trio section.

Is there an element of play-acting in the funeral march slow movement? The ambiguity was gently hinted at alongside the solemnity, while the klezmer moments felt less like intrusions than integral parts of the fabric, as did the gentler episode later.



The Zagreb Philharmonic Orchestra

The anguished outburst at the start of the finale was properly electrifying, and what followed lacked nothing in ferocity and strenuousness, while the quiet episode held out the possibility of consolation. The longer central passage is like the kind of moment that in Schubert can suggest something unreal and unattainable. Here it felt genuinely complementary to the rest, rather than contradictory. The long slow build-up was inexorable, the horn players stood at the climax, as Mahler asked, and the final pages were thrilling. At the same time, Latham-Koenig and the Zagreb Philharmonic seemed to suggest that there is something provisional, not final, about the triumphant ending. [MORE ...](#)

Mike also listens to J S Bach, Handel and Purcell. [MORE ARTICLES BY MIKE WHEELER ...](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi: On 19 April 2022, after more than thirty years, what many consider Vincenzo Bellini's masterpiece returned to Rome: *I puritani*. I was in the audience. This new production was scheduled for last season. Given the COVID19 lockdown, it was offered in concert version and streaming: the cast is almost identical. The only change is the tenor - John Osborn in the role that, in the concert version, was sung by Lawrence Brownlee. I reviewed the concert version on 26 January 2021 ...

'When we started rehearsals', says stage director Andrea De Rosa, 'almost simultaneously the invasion of Ukraine began. I felt the need to bring something of this great tragedy into an opera in which war exists even if, in the libretto, it is in the background. I returned it through the obsession that Elvira relives every time you hear the horns in the orchestra, the horns of war precisely, she is frightened, she stops her ears, as certainly happens when the anti-aircraft sirens sound in places of conflict. In the foreground, there is instead the great trauma of the protagonist who thinks she was abandoned by her lover on her wedding day. From here, the central episode of the work emerges: madness. Elvira completely loses sight of reality, she no longer sees and no longer recognizes what is in front of her. I interpreted and staged this madness through a form of blindness of the protagonist.'

These intentions are not fully reflected in the actual stage direction since acting is lacking - strange because De Rosa's experience is above all in drama theatre; probably given only a year ago the same work was presented in concert version, few stage rehearsals were made; this aspect can be taken care of in the replicas. A great idea in the first part: Elvira's wedding veil becomes the link between the various elements. Nicolas Bovey's scenes are simple but efficient. The costumes by Mariano Tufaro are timeless. The lighting by Pasquale Mari was good, especially in the second part.



A scene from the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma production of Bellini's *I puritani*. Photo © 2022 Fabrizio Sansoni

Roberto Abbado was back on the podium in front of the orchestra of the Teatro dell'Opera. To some listeners, Abbado seemed to conduct a little slowly. It has been so if compared with some famous recorded editions, such as that of Richard Bonyngue with the ensembles of the Teatro Massimo Bellini in Catania and Riccardo Muti with those of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. However, the orchestration is different from that conducted by Bonyngue and Muti. The critical and integral edition requires digging more into the orchestral flows to make the romantic premonitions heard, for example, in the storm with which the third act begins, as well as at the various moments in which the polonaise, with different slants, tilts and colours, is the work's main theme. The excellent orchestra of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma fully supports him: the wind and brass stand out. [MORE ...](#)

Giuseppe also listens to the *Mykietyn Passion* and to *La bohème* in Rome.

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

CD SPOTLIGHT — RATHER JOYOUS IN EFFECT

Geoff Pearce: This is my second review of the works of Gintas K, a fascinating and innovative sound artist, born in Lithuania in 1969 and a person who has generated considerable interest. As with the previous album I reviewed, this electronic music work needs a good sound system or headphones and a nice quiet environment to truly be appreciated. The title of this release, *Lėti*, is Lithuanian for 'Slow' and comprises eleven short tracks.

The first track, *Bells*, consists of different pitched bells and a rather strange crackly background. It starts off relaxed, and grows in intensity before fading away to silence. The middle section is rather joyous in effect.

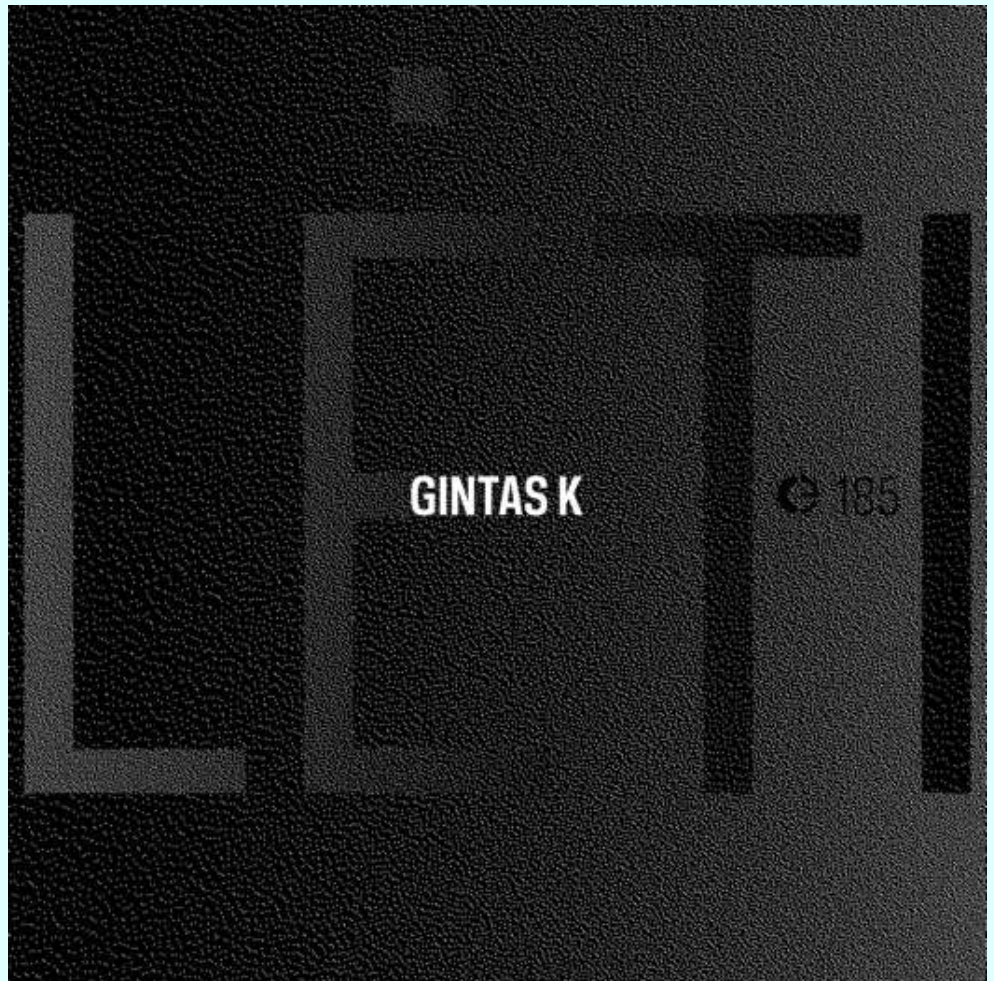
The second track, *Hallucination*, starts in a slightly fragmentary fashion, but a pattern soon emerges that is present throughout the whole track, the sounds

around it changes as does the pattern itself, but it is always recognisable and I tend to focus on that more than the sounds around it. The pattern is shortened towards the end of the track, but sometimes the memory fills in the rest. This quite a fascinating movement. It does portray what the title suggests it might.

Track 3, *Various*, starts almost organ-like and swells and pulses and grows increasingly louder. Eventually it becomes more complex as other sounds cut across and some are absorbed into this pedal note. A slow melodic figure grows around this pedal note. About half way through, the intensity of the pedal note becomes less and the music relaxes and becomes quieter, apart from the rather spiky interjections. This reminds me of some of the very early electronic music I heard in my youth and is the longest work on this disc. Towards the end of the track the music is much less dense and it fades away to a single point of sound.

Variation seems to revolve around the pedal note in the previous track and there are various short abrupt tones that suggest that the pedal is there, without it generally being so. Maybe this is just my imagination, but I believe this music leaves it wide open for you to feel or imagine what you will. Every time I listen, I hear new things and my perspective changes.

Atmosphere, is announced by a couple of guitar notes, and then a dense field is built up around that, sometimes two note patterns, sounds that are a little like whale song, again with a pedal being maintained, although this does change in pitch slightly as the work progresses. This track is certainly atmospheric, perhaps also being a statement of the atmosphere that envelopes and nourishes us all. **MORE ...**



'... different pitched bells and a rather strange crackly background.'

**5 DISCS**

POULENC

Complete Chamber Music



'... the performers are all very fine ...'

Geoff Pearce: This lovely set comprising five CDs ... is a real gem. It encompasses music that Poulenc wrote over his life, from his earliest public composition, *Rapsodie Negre*, to the very last, his sonatas for oboe and piano and for clarinet and piano. There is some music that I am very familiar with, and some that I had never heard before. Poulenc, who wrote chamber music intermittently throughout his life, is a composer that has always appealed to me for his sparkling wit, quicksilver changes of mood, confident writing and clarity of texture. I feel that his music is so essentially what I consider 'French'.

The first disc comprises the Sextet for Piano and Wind, Sonata for Oboe and Piano, Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon, Sonata for Flute and Piano and *Villanelle* for Pipe and Piano. I was familiar with all of these works, except for the *Villanelle*. The Sextet

receives a beautifully tight and detailed performance, and the virtuosity of the players - Alexandre Tharaud, piano, Philippe Bernold, flute, Olivier Doise, oboe, Ronald Van Spaendonck, clarinet, Laurent Lefèvre, bassoon and Hervé Joulain, horn - is evident.

The Oboe Sonata, performed by Olivier Doise and Alexandre Tharaud is equally very fine, and I am most impressed with Olivier Doise, who is a very assured and sensitive player, able to colour his sound beautifully and understands this work, which is not so easy to play. I do not think that I have heard a finer performance, and only wish that I could perform this as well.

The Trio for Piano, Oboe and Bassoon - performed by Alexandre Tharaud, Olivier Doise and Laurent Lefèvre - equally receives a standout performance. This work demands a lot from the players and in particular from the bassoonist, and it was a true delight to hear.

The Sonata for Flute and Piano received a loving and assured performance, without a hint of the shrillness that one sometimes hears in this work. It is an often recorded work but is as fine as any that I have heard.

The *Villanelle*, here played with great charm on recorder by Philippe Bernold with, again, Alexandre Tharaud on piano, is a simple, short piece depicting a love scene between a young couple.

The second disc contains the Sonata for Violin and Piano, Bagatelle for Violin and Piano, Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, and the Sonata for Cello and Piano. Apart from the Clarinet Sonata, I did not know any of the other works and was pleasantly surprised and cannot but wonder why these works are not more widely known. Like all the recordings in this set that I have listened to, I was very happy with the great understanding that violinist Graf Mourja and pianist Alexandre Tharaud brought to the Sonata for Violin and Piano and the Bagatelle which follows. The Bagatelle, from *Le bal masqué*, was a riot, and thoroughly delightful. **MORE ...**

Geoff also listens to music by Wolfgang Rihm. **MORE ARTICLES BY GEOFF PEARCE ...**

Gerald Fenech: Henry Purcell (1659-1695) was one of the most versatile and imaginative composers of the late seventeenth century. His life and work in London were closely tied to the political and social changes under the reign of three monarchs: Charles II, his brother James II and William of Orange (William III). Celebratory odes for royal occasions are a significant part of Purcell's legacy, which also includes anthems for the coronation of James II and funeral music for Queen Mary (Mary II). Yet he was as much in demand in the theatre and in domestic music-making as in the church ...

Purcell's theatrical music of the 1690s is dominated by his masques and semi-operas. These were so called because only minor characters sang in the theatre, meaning that Purcell's dramatic skills could not be deployed for heroic characterisations. But the musical parts for the lesser characters were often extensive, and the instrumental and vocal music for Dryden's *King Arthur* (1691) and *The Fairy Queen* (1692) displays Purcell's vivacity ...

This exhilarating nine CD set focussing on John Eliot Gardiner's recordings of some of Purcell's greatest music is more than welcome. It's so hard to describe the music of this great master of the English Baroque, because it has everything: original inventiveness, harmonic ingenuity, melodic richness, and above all, natural warmth and colour. Indeed, Purcell never falls into superficiality, which was one of the great baroque temptations, but is always consistent with the spirit of the piece he is composing. If it's a dance, then let it be so. If it's a reflective piece, let the soothing light of serenity come forth.

The programme covers a wealth of unforgettable masterpieces in the form of five theatre works, namely: *King Arthur*, *Timon of Athens*, *Dioclesian*, *The Indian Queen* and *The Tempest*, two Odes: *Come ye Sons of Art* and *Hail! Bright Cecilia*, the *Music for the Funeral of Queen Mary*, and lastly, music from the original movie soundtrack *England, my England* by Tony Palmer.

John Eliot Gardiner is famous for his interpretations of the Baroque on original instruments, and this splendid collation should further enhance his reputation, especially with those who are coming to these recordings (made between 1976 and 1987) for the first time. Indeed, these are renditions out of the ordinary, where Gardiner's expressive ardour and unbridled intensity allow him to reveal all the gracefulness, subtlety, pathos and nobility of Purcell's uniquely human music. Also, in Gardiner's hands, the florid ornamentation of these scores is brought out with pristine clarity. Simply outstanding with a capital O. Strongly recommended. [MORE ...](#)



'... renditions out of the ordinary, where Gardiner's expressive ardour and unbridled intensity allow him to reveal all the gracefulness, subtlety, pathos and nobility of Purcell's uniquely human music.'



'... Klaus Florian Vogt and Camilla Nylund rise superbly to the occasion with some searing interpretations worthy of the score.'

Gerald Fenech: *Die tote Stadt* (The Dead City) is a psychological thriller in three Acts by Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957). Set to a libretto by Paul Schott, a collective pseudonym for the composer and his father Julius, it is based on the 1892 novel *Bruges-la-Morte* by George Rodenbach. *Die tote Stadt* was one of the greatest hits of the 1920s, and within two years of its premiere on 4 December 1920 in Hamburg, it had practically been staged the world over. Korngold started the composition in 1916, but left it for a year to take up military service, before resuming and completing the score. The composer was twenty-three by the time of the Hamburg premiere, but he had already two short one-act operas to his name, *Der Ring des Polykrates* and *Violanta*, and the success of these earlier works was so great that *Die tote Stadt* was subject to a fierce competition among German theatres for the right

to the world premiere. In the end, an unusual double premiere was arranged, and the opera opened simultaneously in Hamburg and Cologne. So very tragic, the work was banned by the Nazi regime because of Korngold's Jewish ancestry, and after World War II it fell into obscurity. Thankfully, in recent years, however, the work has enjoyed a notable revival.

So what is so special about this opera? Well, I think everything. Intoxicating melodies, lush orchestration, ingenious harmonies, wonderful characterization and, above all, a story that challenges the human subconsciousness of each individual. Paul could be easily you or I. At this stage I think that it would be very pertinent to share with you the storyline of this extraordinary opera in substantial detail, as this would give a clearer picture of what the work is all about. It seems that Korngold was very satisfied with the reaction to his opera. Indeed, when a new production was rescheduled for Vienna in 1921, the composer wrote a detailed description of the plot for a special issue of *Blatter des Opern-theatres*, and it is from this literary source that I am sharing with you the dramatic content of this work, albeit in a reduced form.

The action takes place in Bruges at the end of the nineteenth century and, as the curtain rises, we see Paul mourning the loss of his wife Marie, and the gloomy and decaying city in which he lives is constantly a stark reminder of his loss. In one room of his house he has kept everything that reminds him of her, particularly a portrait and a braid of her golden hair, whose beauty and fragrance he adored. Frank, Paul's friend, has just arrived in Bruges and finds Paul in a state of crisis, after having met a woman whose striking resemblance to Marie has driven him into a state of confusing excitement. Paul cannot resist the impulse to invite her to his house to see her walk through Marie's room, 'to see death return to life'. [MORE ...](#)

Gerald also listens to music by Beethoven, Sousa and Santoro on Naxos, Elgar on SOMM, Schubert on Solo Musica and Ravel on BIS. [MORE ARTICLES BY GERALD FENECH ...](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi reviews *Da Gesualdo a Piccinni* on Digressione Music, Francesco Meli's *Prima Verdi* on Warner and music by Giacinto Scelsi on the Kairos label. [ARTICLES BY GIUSEPPE PENNISI ...](#)

NEWS — MUSIC COMPETITIONS

We look at various competitions taking place during the coming months - the 6th Manhattan International Music Competition, the Guido Cantelli International Conducting Competition, the 2022 Birmingham International Piano Competition, ensemble blank's 'Call for Score 2022', the Santander International Piano Competition, the Irving M Klein International String Competition, the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition and the 2023 Donatella Flick Conducting Competition. [READ MORE ...](#)

On 22 April 2022 we published a long list of new classical CD releases. [VIEW THE LIST](#)

Quebec's contemporary music society, the Société de musique contemporaine du Québec (SMCQ), has appointed Serbian-born Ana Sokolovic as its new artistic director. [READ MORE ...](#)

We mark the passing of various musicians, including Nicholas Angelich, Janez Matičič, Harrison Birtwistle, Radu Lupu, Philippe Boesmans, Miguel Ángel Estrella, Elias Davidsson, Boris Brott, Rosemary Duxbury, Karl Korte and Lyell Cresswell. [READ MORE ...](#)

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