



Towards the Unknown Region – Issue 166, February 2023

Ron Bierman: Recently retired Nicolas Reveles was the face of San Diego Opera for forty years, known to most opera goers primarily because of his informative and entertaining pre-performance talks. I suspect few in the audience knew he was also an opera composer, a choir director and a piano prodigy.

In an hour discussion via *Zoom*, we spoke about his background and how he came to write *Ghosts*, a three-act opera that will premiere at the San Diego Opera in April. *Ghosts* echoes a scene from *Sextet*, an earlier work he'd written on commission for San Diego's Diversionary Theatre. The scene reflected his love for the horror genre.

'And it had stuck with me. I thought it was the best scene of the opera's six, and I always wanted to either revisit it or find another way of writing a similar piece, like a one act opera for a small group of singers and players in a small space. The right subject never came to me until I met Michael Vegas Mussman at a party.

'He's a young playwright in the area and was interested in writing a libretto. After a long conversation, I explained what I was looking for, but he didn't like horror. I thought, well that's the end of that. So it was a surprise when I heard from him a few weeks later. He'd discovered a film that inspired him, the 1950s French horror film *Diabolique*. I knew it well and thought, oh my God, that's perfect. It's just the right idea.'

The idea became *Dormir*, with a libretto by Mussman based on the film. 'Halfway through the movie, we see two women murder a man who is the husband of one and keeps the other as a mistress. With another forty-five minutes left, where on earth is this film going? And it's very simple. One of the women just starts seeing the man in various places. Why and how?'

Although General Director David Bennett took to the concept and wanted to stage it, they agreed the opera was too short to stand on its own. Reveles told Bennett he'd see if he could come up with another story.

'And I did. It came from a dream, a vision of a woman driving up to an old house in the country in midwinter, taking two children out of the back of the car, unloading the trunk, walking up the steps of this old ramshackle house, going into the house and closing the door. Then we see what happens to her and the kids while they are there.'

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MUSIC, MIGRATION AND MOBILITY



Music, Migration and Mobility - 17 January - 16 April 2023 at the Royal College of Music Museum, Prince Consort Road, London SW7 2BS, UK

Malcolm Miller: 18 January 2023 marked the 120th anniversary of the birth in Hamburg of the *émigré* British composer Berthold Goldschmidt (1903-1996). The date might have passed one by except for the fortuitous coincidence that it also marks the opening of a brand new exhibition in London on *émigré* composers at the Royal College of Music's recently rebuilt and refurbished Museum, an exhibition entitled *Music, Migration and Mobility*, which runs until 16 April 2023. Supported by an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) grant, it forms part of a major RCM research project in collaboration with Royal Holloway, University of London and University of Salzburg.

The exhibition itself focuses on the legacy of *émigré* musicians who found refuge in Britain from Nazi Europe in the 1930s and 40s. At the opening preview on 16 January 2023, which I was fortunate to attend, the select audience included several *émigrés* and their descendants who had donated objects (including scores, documents, recordings and other everyday objects), as well as scholars and interpreters who have in recent years been involved in the process of reclaiming much of the neglected music and musical history of the Second World War and immediate post-war period. To launch the exhibition preview, we were regaled with an impressive performance by flautist Hannah Gillingham of the *Capriccio for Solo Flute* (1949) by **Roberto Gerhard** (1896-1970), the Spanish-Catalan-born *émigré* composer who studied with Schoenberg in the 1920s, and lived in Cambridge from 1939.



Flautist Hannah Gillingham at the opening of the exhibition. Photo © 2023 Claire Chevalier

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[MORE FROM MALCOLM MILLER ...](#)

CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS - A NEW ORGAN IN POLAND

One of the largest new instruments to be built in a European concert hall in recent times was inaugurated in a special concert in Katowice, Poland, on Friday 13 January 2023. The new instrument has over a million parts, more than seven thousand pipes and a-hundred-and-five stops, measuring thirteen metres high, nine wide and six deep - a volume of 150 square metres, equivalent to a single-story house. It has an integral console with four manuals and a dual electro-mechanical action, as well as a mobile console which can be used alongside an orchestra anywhere on the stage. [READ MORE](#)

The Reina Sofía School of Music in Madrid, Spain has announced that German soprano Juliane Banse will be head professor of the Alfredo Kraus Fundación Ramón Areces Voice Chair from the 2023-2024 academic year. Banse joins the prestigious list of artists who have led this chair: Alfredo Kraus, Teresa Berganza, Tom Krause, Ryland Davies, Francisco Araiza and her predecessor Susan Bullock.

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Heresy Records is proud to announce the 6 January 2023 release of *The Richter Scale Premixes*. The Premixes are electronic remixes of movements from German composer Boris Bergmann's upcoming recording of *The Richter Scale*. The Premixes were created by Berlin techno producer Khan of Finland together with Bergmann and pianist Ji Liu. Recorded during the pandemic, these electronic orchestrations offer a unique take on *The Richter Scale*, which will itself be released by Heresy Records on 3 February 2023. [READ MORE](#)

The Board of Trustees closed the doors of Scotland's Nevis Ensemble on Tuesday 24 January 2023. Since 2018, Nevis Ensemble has delivered almost seven hundred orchestral performances, as well as hundreds of workshops, and dozens of musician development sessions. The group's vision of *music for everyone, everywhere* has seen Nevis Ensemble remove barriers to accessing orchestral music by bringing performances to the people, wherever they are. From swimming pools, schools, supermarkets and museums to a farm in the Scottish Borders and the summit of Ben Nevis in the Highlands - and everywhere in between, including the biggest ever tour by an orchestra of the Outer Hebrides - their approach to performing has seen them win at the Scottish Awards for New Music in 2019 and 2020, and be shortlisted for the Classical:NEXT Innovation Award in 2022. [READ MORE](#)

The New York Virtuoso Singers conducted by Harold Rosenbaum present *American Invention* on Sunday 19 February 2023, featuring vibrant American choral music from the eighteenth century to today. Taking place at 3pm at Christ & St Stephen's Church, the concert will comprise a wide range of American works including first performances by Pulitzer Prize winner Anthony Davis, Peter Zummo, Elena Ruehr and William McClelland. There are also first New York performances by Pulitzer Prize winner Tania León, David Patterson, and Edie Hill. The concert also includes music by other outstanding American composers, including Florence Price, Annea Lockwood, Jessie Montgomery, Mari Esabel Valverde and Nancy Wertsch, and eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century choral works by William Billings, Lowell Mason, Charles Ives, Henry Cowell and Milton Babbitt, as well as an arrangement by William Appling. [READ MORE](#)

English Touring Opera (ETO) presents its first season under the leadership of new general director Robin Norton-Hale in Spring 2023, with a national tour of three deeply contrasting operas. The Spring 2023 season features two new productions of operas never before staged by ETO – Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* and Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims*, each directed by women staging their first productions with ETO, as well as a revival of one of Handel's most beloved works, *Giulio Cesare*. The tour will take outstanding productions to audiences in fourteen locations across England, making live opera accessible and available to all. [READ MORE](#) [READ OUR LATEST NEWS](#)

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OBITUARIES

We mark the recent deaths of:

- French pianist and teacher Gabriel Tacchino
- Russian composer and pianist Zhanna Pliyeva
- American composer, pianist, teacher and writer Easley Blackwood Jr
- American violinist Michaela Paetsch
- French baritone Loïc Guguen
- Mexican composer and pianist Victor Rasgado
- German composer, conductor and musicologist Clytus Gottwald
- Georgian pianist and teacher Manana Doijashvili
- American violinist and teacher Charles Treger
- Chinese composer, conductor, lecturer, journalist and musical ambassador Doming Lam
- Spanish composer and teacher José Evangelista
- Norwegian organist and choral conductor Magnar Mangersnes
- Japanese composer Yoriaki Matsudaira
- German conductor and composer Siegfried Kurz
- Greek composer, guitarist, columnist, radio producer, songwriter and teacher Notis Mavroudis
- German stage director Kurt Horres
- British composer and teacher Andrew Downes

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TOWARDS THE UNKNOWN REGION

George Colerick: Ralph Vaughan Williams - 'RVW' as he was known - and George Bernard Shaw date back some four or five generations, but their musical writings, spanning some eighty years, remain unusually stimulating. Their conflicting opinions on many composers are revealing, and especially over the issue of nationalism in music.

Though a mere sixteen years younger, RVW's published writing dates from his maturity, a time after GBS had completed the bulk of his. GBS the dramatist wrote like a journalist; **Ralph Vaughan Williams** the composer as a teacher and often like a historian. More than anyone else, he has made me go back, or forward to works which he has presented in an invitingly fresh light.

A grand-nephew of Charles Darwin and related to the Wedgewoods, he received a classical education and took a history degree at Cambridge. A man of very enlightened social views and a good, relaxing mixer, his broad approach to music is revealed in countless anecdotes, but I particularly like hearing details about the occasion when he gave a street musician a hand in fashionable High Street, Kensington by banging-out tunes on his barrel-organ. The only surprise is that he did not subsequently compose a work for that instrument to which he specially liked to see children dancing. That and the lilt of a chorus joining-in a popular music hall song were among his notions of what composers' 'raw material' should consist.

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[MORE FROM THE LATE GEORGE COLERICK ...](#)

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ENSEMBLE — PRECIOUS TESTIMONY

Giuseppe Pennisi: Saturday 28 January 2023 at the Aula Magna of La Sapienza University in Rome - row 1, seats 26 and 24 - the usual place for my wife and I to listen to the concerts of the Istituzione Universitaria dei Concerti (IUC), now in its seventy-eighth season. Without a doubt, among the musical institutions of the Italian Capital, the IUC offers the most stimulating and therefore most crowded program, especially of chamber music.

Still quartets, or rather a quartet and a quintet, were on offer, almost immediately after the third episode of the complete quartets of Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) in which the Prometeo Quartet ventured with those of 1956-1960; the review was published here on 28 January. In the IUC concert, we jump back about a century, to the heart of Romanticism, to face the production of **Johannes Brahms** (1833-1897) at a very delicate moment. The piano enters string quartet and quintet with the function of guide and spur, as well as multiplier of the sound power and versatility of the ensemble. [READ MORE](#)

Giuseppe also listens to Shostakovich quartets, to twentieth century colours from Antonio Pappano and the orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, to Vivaldi's pastiche *Tamerlano*, Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* and to Verdi's *Don Carlo*.

[MORE FROM GIUSEPPE PENNISI ...](#)

Mike Wheeler: Nottingham's Royal Concert Hall management was counting on a near-capacity audience for local girl Jeneba Kanneh-Mason's contribution to their Sunday morning piano series, with extra seating made available. The turn-out may well have exceeded even their expectations - Nottingham, UK, 15 January 2023.

Rather than playing the opening figure of Beethoven's Sonata in D, Op 10 No 3 as the fierce leap and pounce we often hear, she made it into something engagingly sly, setting the tone for an exploration of the composer at his most playfully subversive. The many left-hand leaps from bass to treble and back were thrown off with great aplomb. As she explored the second movement's contrasts of darkness and light, she allowed its tragic nature to emerge without heavy-handed over-emphasis. There was emotional restraint, too, in the scherzo third movement, with even the comically galumphing trio section having a degree of seriousness. The last movement returns to the atmosphere of the first and, again, Jeneba had the measure of its teasing start. [READ MORE](#)

Mike also listens to music by Britten, Anna Clyne, Richard Strauss and Johann Strauss II from the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain.

[MORE FROM MIKE WHEELER ...](#)

Ron Bierman: Albert Roussel's Suite No 2 from the *Bacchus et Ariane* ballet is an unusual concert opener. Instead of a typically spirited curtain-raiser, it offers Debussy-like textures and emotions from wistful to chaotic. It's a chance for many soloists and every section to impress. And impress they did, beginning with short moody solos from clarinet, flute and bassoon, soon joined by concertmaster Jeff Thayer's warm Stradivarius.

The California Center for the Performing Arts has a smaller stage and a more intimate feel than that of most symphony halls. That worked in favor of Thayer and other soloists. All of them performed well even at the most frenzied of Ariane's orgiastic moments with Bacchus god of wine (and though less media-worthy, also agriculture). Guided ably by a clearly committed **Domingo Hindoyan**, instrument sections too made the most of **Roussel's** rapidly varying moods and changing tempos. Hindoyan is yet another fine conductor with musical origins in Venezuela's El Sistema. [READ MORE](#)

[MORE FROM RON BIERMAN ...](#)

CD SPOTLIGHT — THE COMMUNITY BEHIND THE VOICE

John Dante Prevedini: *States of Play* is the recent release from Bridge Records featuring a collection of piano solos and duos composed by Robert Carl and John McDonald and performed by McDonald on piano, Scott Woolweaver on viola and Robert Black on double bass. The release has a running time of sixty-six minutes, is available in both CD and digital format and is accompanied by extensive liner notes written by the two composers. Given the nature of the release as a multi-decade retrospective, it is perhaps fitting that the liner notes are extensive and somewhat autobiographical. Taken altogether, these pieces represent over thirty years (1987-2018) of collaboration and mutual artistic influence, not only between Carl and McDonald, but also among the composers and their various colleagues, mentors and students mentioned in the liner notes as instrumental in shaping the compositional voices heard on this album.

I would like to note that I did study composition with Robert Carl for about a year, several years ago; however, since I was not previously familiar with any of the music on this release and do not know anyone else involved in the project, I feel I have enough distance from the subject matter to reflect on it in a clear and balanced manner. One thing I will say about Carl's music, which I believe will help illuminate my analysis of the present album, is that his current harmonic practice is based on a highly individualistic harmonic language which treats chromatic passages as partials in the upper registers of a harmonic series (approximated by equal temperament), arising above various 'fundamentals' heard in the bass. In this way, Carl attempts to philosophically reconcile dissonant and consonant methods of harmonic thinking. As for John McDonald, the biographical section of the album liner notes specifies that he is a composer, a pianist and a Tufts University professor who specializes in such strikingly diverse specialties as 'writing music for young and non-professional performers' and 'music applications for visual art and science' among others.

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[MORE FROM JOHN DANTE PREVEDINI ...](#)

Gerald Fenech: *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, or as it is commonly known, 'The Ring Cycle', by Richard Wagner (1813-1883), certainly needs no introduction. Even those who abhor the work are aware of it, and what it represents. Those lucky enough to admire it never tire of going back to it time and time again. Countless recordings are available, both live and studio ones, and many can claim to have achieved the almost perfect interpretation, but there is one exception: *The Decca Ring Project* (1958-1965), which was the first studio recording of the 'Cycle' under the direction of **Georg Solti**.

The story of how this immense undertaking came to fruition is as exciting as the actual story of **Richard Wagner's** tetralogy, and I believe that bringing it to the attention of the many who still do not know what went on behind the scenes is pertinent more than ever before. Indeed, these recordings, even fifty-seven years after their completion, are still considered by both critics and listeners alike as the greatest ever made in the history of recorded sound, technologically and artistically.

Das Rheingold, this first portion of *The Ring* was recorded in the Sofiensaal, Vienna, between 24 September and 8 October 1958. It was at John Culshaw's instigation that the company decided to start with *Das Rheingold*, the first and shortest of the four operas. Culshaw engaged Solti, the Vienna Philharmonic and a roster of established Wagner singers which included **Kirsten Flagstad** in one of her last recorded performances in the role of Fricka which she had never sung on stage. With the help of his engineering colleagues Gordon Parry and James Brown, Culshaw took exceptional pains to meet Wagner's musical requirements. Where the score calls for eighteen anvils to be hammered during two brief orchestral preludes - an instruction never followed in opera houses - Culshaw arranged for eighteen anvils to be hired and hammered, and Parry and Brown captured the sound in the correct volume and clarity required. Such unprecedented levels of sound quality had never been achieved until then. *Das Rheingold* was issued on 3 March 1959, and the reaction was phenomenal. [READ MORE](#)

Gerald also listens to overtures and concerti by Veracini on CPO and to *Scenes from the Kalevala* on BIS Records. [MORE FROM GERALD FENECH ...](#)

Our CD reviews are worth exploring in more detail than shown here. They are all illustrated with short sound samples, usually chosen by the author of each review, and each review has a detailed information page about the album under scrutiny. We also publish a long list of new releases, normally once each month, with a new selection due later this month.

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ECHOES OF OBLIVION – TURN THAT RACKET DOWN!

Robert McCarney: Today's title is redolent of times from way back in the mists of the last millennium when I was still a young blade. It was one of my, in equal parts, exasperated and enraged father's most often administered admonishments when I would regularly put our JVC stereo through its paces by giving full vent to my penchant for drum solos and percussion from various parts of the world. The emancipation of dissonance is often viewed as one of the defining features of twentieth century music. Equally the emancipation of percussion or more accurately its emergence in its own right, extension and acceptance as a vital and equal part of the symphony orchestra - as well as a wonderful and wonderfully versatile solo and concertante instrument - can be viewed as another emblematic aspect of music of the last century. This acceptance has been hard won. Some may still argue that the fight continues. I have heard at least one percussionist talk disappointedly about how his fellow orchestral musicians disparagingly don't even know the names of many of the multiple instruments he plays. If there is one person who can be thanked for raising percussion to the status it now enjoys I think it has to be **Edgard Varèse**. Although saying that, apart from **Frank Zappa**, I don't know if anybody ever did actually thank him. Along with him and many other composers, the contributions of many extraordinary and extraordinarily dedicated percussionists and percussion ensembles must not be undervalued. So today, to quote the late James Brown, I am going to 'give the drummer some' with five examples of fantastic pieces for percussion solo. [READ MORE](#)

Echoes of Oblivion is Robert McCarney's regular series of features about little-known twentieth century classical composers, which began in August 2022, and which relaunched last month in a new format, appearing every Sunday.

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[MORE FROM ROBERT MCCARNEY](#)

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