

# Classical Music Daily

*More corn than gold? — Issue 170, June 2023*

## CD SPOTLIGHT — QUITE ECLECTIC



'... insight, commitment and verve.'

**Geoff Pearce:** I had not heard of **Joachim Mendelson** (1897-1943) at all but **Grażyna Bacewicz** (1909-1969) is much better known, both to me and also the music going public as well. They are both Polish composers but Mendelson was to die tragically at the hands of a Gestapo officer whilst hiding in Warsaw. His music is not well known, and was to survive the war largely because of the efforts of his sister.

Joachim Mendelson's first String Quartet, dating from the early 1930s, was one of the few works that was performed at least once during his lifetime. It is in three movements. The first movement is overall happy in nature and dancelike, and the composer has obvious skill in writing for this combination. The work is well structured and coherent, and there are numerous changes of mood and speed over the course of just over five minutes. [READ MORE](#)

**Geoff Pearce:** I don't think I've heard any music by **Paul von Klenau** (1883-1946) before. He was born and died in Denmark but spent most of his working life in Germany and Austria. He was friendly with many of the Nazi figures of the day, but never became a party member and the relationship between them was often described as one of mutual opportunism. His musical influences were quite wide-ranging, including Bruckner, Richard Strauss, French impressionism and also the serial techniques of Arnold Schoenberg, and he was in the inner circle of Alban Berg and his friends. Whilst his musical output was not large, it includes nine symphonies, six operas and a number of other works.

The Violin Concerto which opens this disc is in three movements and dates from 1941. The work is classical in its form and whilst the composer describes it as twelve tone music and even outlines the rows applied, the overall flavour is late Romantic and it is lush, melodic and harmonious.

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'The Singapore Symphony Orchestra responds well to the direction of conductor Hans Graf ...'



'... a most welcome recording ...'

**Geoff Pearce:** I was looking forward to hearing this work, as apart from the Flute Concerto made famous in a James Galway recording, **Saverio Mercadante** (1795-1870) was not known to me. He was an important composer of opera and church music, particularly in and around Naples, where he lived for most of his life. He is regarded as the most important composer of Italian opera between Donizetti and Verdi, and was highly regarded, even by such composers as Liszt.

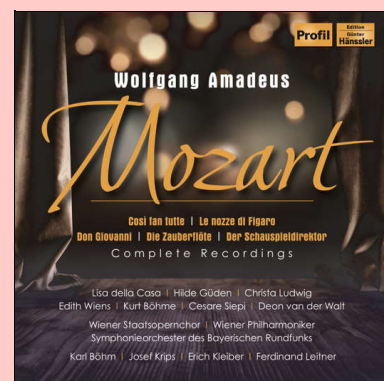
This work is over seventy minutes long, and was of interest to me because there are extensive concertante passages for both cor anglais and violin. He was quite ambitious for his time harmonically, and was also a master of counterpoint.

Right from the outset, I could sense that his skill in writing for an operatic chorus was evident here. The opening *Kyrie* starts in quite a brooding fashion with some interesting harmonic shifts. When the chorus and full orchestra enter, I can't help but think that his music must have been an influence on Verdi, even though their relationship was often stormy.

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Geoff also listens to music by Dvořák on Nimbus, to Airat Ichmouratov on Chandos and to Britten's Violin Concerto on Alpha Classics. [READ GEOFF PEARCE'S LATEST CD REVIEWS](#)

**Gerald Fenech:** During his too-short thirty-five years on earth, **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756-1791) wrote more than six hundred works, including some of the most popular and beloved symphonic, chamber and choral works, but he was particularly at home in the operatic genre. His melodies are uncomplicated, beautiful and brimming with expression. He delighted in writing sections for multiple characters to sing at the same time, and he was especially adept at making the language clear. He also had complete command of the orchestra's colours, and deftly selected groups of instruments to produce unique sounds and effects. In addition, Mozart had an uncanny knack for choosing the juiciest plays from which to make operas.



One of his first recommendations was a play written by Pierre de Beaumarchais called *Le nozze di Figaro*, a humorous and contentious send-up of modern society and politics. *Figaro* provides excellent examples of the real motivations that drive Mozart's characters.

'... I have never heard Mozart played with such finesse and beauty.'

A year after *Figaro*'s premiere, the city of Prague asked the composer to write an opera for the wedding of the emperor's niece. And what story did he choose to set to music for this holy marriage? That of *Don Juan*, the most womanizing sociopath of all time. Despite everything, **Don Giovanni** was a resounding success. [READ MORE](#)

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'... the soloist's supreme mastery of each piece is unimpeachable throughout.'

**Gerald Fenech:** To say that pianist **Isata Kanneh-Mason** is in great demand is an understatement. Born in May 1996 her talents came to the fore very early on, so it is no wonder that despite her young age she is already an international star in constant demand. She offers eclectic and interesting repertoire with her recital programmes encompassing music from Haydn and Mozart via Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann, Chopin and Brahms to Gershwin and beyond. In concerto, she is equally at home in Felix Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann, whose piano concerto features on Isata's chart-topping debut recording, as in Prokofiev and Dohnányi.

In 2022/23 Isata steps into her role as Artist in Residence with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, performing three concerti across the season at London's Cadogan Hall. She will also be returning to Dortmund's Konzerthaus as one of their 'Junge Wilde' artists and

multiple visits to the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic are also on the cards. Other highlights of the season include recital performances at the Barbican, Queen Elizabeth and Wigmore Halls in London, the Berlin Philharmonie, Dublin National Concert Hall and Perth Concert Hall. The Prinzregenten-theater in Munich and the Sala São Paulo in Brazil will also host this budding star of the keyboard. As concerto soloist, Isata appears with the Orchestra of Opera North, New World Symphony Miami, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Duisburg Philharmonic, Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, Geneva Chamber Orchestra, Detroit Symphony and the Norwegian Opera Orchestra. Recently she made her long-awaited debut with the LA Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl. [READ MORE](#)

Gerald also listens to music by Berlioz on Erato, to the work of conductor Emil Reesen on Danacord and to opera arias played by trumpeter Matilda Lloyd on the Chandos label.

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**Keith Bramich:** The popular and frequently performed *Messa da Requiem* by **Giuseppe Verdi** (1813-1901) was first heard in Milan on 22 May 1874 - the first anniversary of the death of Italian writer Alessandro Manzoni, one of Verdi's heroes. Verdi's intensely operatic work is usually performed by large choirs in concert halls rather than liturgically, but this new arrangement by English composer **Richard Blackford** (born 1954), at the request of Bach Choir conductor David Hill, may be a game changer.

I suspect that my friend, the late **Giuseppe Pennisi**, had realised this, because he asked to review this recording a couple of months ago. I know that Giuseppe received the CD in Rome, but I'm not sure whether he was able to listen to it. Sadly, he couldn't share his thoughts about it with us, so, as we think about **what might have been**, I'm dedicating my relatively feeble words here to Giuseppe's memory. [READ MORE](#)

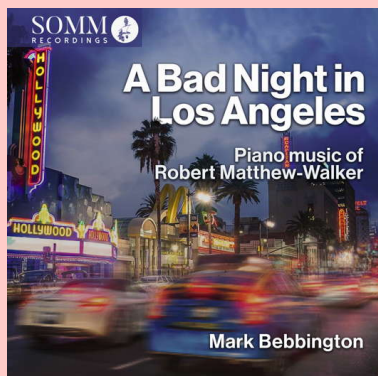


'... Richard Blackford is a respected and experienced composer, and this is no mere thinning of the texture ...'

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'Mark Bebbington ... is exemplary here, bringing out all the contrasts and mood changes ...'

**Keith Bramich:**... I've just listened to the nocturne *Reflection at Midnight* - the first track of **Mark Bebbington's** excellent disc of Bob's music for **SOMM Recordings** - and this is the first time I've heard anything written by him. Sensitive, quiet and rather spectral-sounding, my first reaction is that this is an impressionistic miniature, slightly improvisatory in feel, but carefully crafted by someone who really knows what he's doing.

Next there's a very short, percussive, fanfare-like *Toccata on three notes*, presumably greeting the following morning, although Bob's notes state that these two pieces for the left hand were written several years apart.

Matthew-Walker's jazzy *Three American Pictures* are snapshots of USA scenes - *Break Dancing at Washington Square*, *At Gershwin's Grave* and *A Bad Night in Los Angeles*. In typical Bob fashion, there's a story associated with this last movement, described in detail in the CD notes. [READ MORE](#)

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.

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## ENSEMBLE — AN IMPORTANT VOICE



Florence Price

**Mike Wheeler:** In 1933, **Florence Price** became the first black American woman to have a composition played by a major American orchestra. That in itself is a important achievement, but as her work becomes more widely known, so her significance grows.

In the latest in the Royal Concert Hall's 'Discovering Music' series, presenter Chris Wines talked us through that landmark work, her Symphony No 1. As always, the **BBC Philharmonic Orchestra** was on hand, conducted on this occasion by Joshua Weilerstein, to provide the illustrations, and to give a complete performance in the second part of the evening - Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, **UK**, 24 May 2023.

Wines sketched in Price's background - her studies, her years of teaching, her move to Chicago with her family in 1927 following racial violence in Arkansas, where she was living, and the success of her First Symphony.

He also quoted Leonard Bernstein's description of the 1920s and 30s as American concert music's 'kindergarten years', which is a little unfair to some earlier figures - where does it leave Charles Ives, for instance? - though you can see what Bernstein was getting at. [READ MORE](#)

**Mike Wheeler:** **The Sixteen**'s annual Choral Pilgrimage with conductor Harry Christophers takes them to cathedrals and other venues all over the UK and Ireland. As you would expect, this year's tour acknowledges the four hundredth anniversary of **William Byrd**'s death. But rather than offering Byrd wall-to-wall, the programme placed four of his Latin motets, and two English anthems, not only against the backdrop of the persecuted Catholic communities he represented and composed for, but also in the wider context of works by three European contemporaries, and two new commissions from **Dobrinka Tabakova**. In two instances, this also offered the chance to compare settings of the same text - Derby Cathedral, Derby, UK, 12 May 2023.



#### Online publicity for The Sixteen's Choral Pilgrimage 2023: A Watchful Gaze

Byrd's *Arise Lord into thy rest* was an apt choice of opener, the word-painting on 'arise' engaging our attention, as well as offering a counterbalance to the penitential tone of much of what followed. Netherlands lutenist and composer Philip van Wilder settled in London in the 1520s. His secular chanson *O doux regard* similarly rises from an initial low sonority - typical of the connections the programme draws attention to, without forcing the issue. [READ MORE](#)

Mike also listens to the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra conducted by Kazuki Yamada and to the Iceland Symphony Orchestra on its recent UK tour. [READ MIKE WHEELER'S LATEST CONCERT REVIEWS](#)

**Ron Bierman:** **Rafael Payare** continues to impress. The most recent program in the San Diego Symphony's Rady Shell season saw him at the helm for the **Brahms** second piano concerto, **Dvořák**'s seventh symphony and the world premiere of **Gity Razaz**'s *Methuselah (In Chains of Time)*.

The concerto is a challenging catalog of virtuosity and emotional moods from the brief, warmly romantic opening theme for French horn to a finale of surprisingly dance-like, almost Mozartean charm. Pianist Inon Barnatan and Payare didn't compromise despite the work's exhausting length. Tempos were excitingly brisk in even the most difficult passages of runs and mixed rhythms, Barnatan's intensely passionate concentration evident in the diligent camera work displayed on four large screens.





**Inon Barnatan. Photo © 2019 Marco Borggreve**

The orchestra was an ardent supporter, the conductor bringing his own passion to the concerto's frequent symphony-like moments, orchestra soloists effective in the spotlight clarity of the Shell's sound system. The third movement's melodic beauty was especially satisfying thanks to the warmth of principal cello Yao Zhao's extended solos and well-balanced duets with Barnatan. [READ MORE](#)

**READ RON BIERMAN'S LATEST ARTICLES**



Francesco Giusti as Ottone for Hampstead Garden Opera's production of Handel's *Agrippina*.  
Photo © 2023 Laurent Compagnon

**Roderic Dunnett:** If there is a hero of this opera, it is not so much the multi-murdering Agrippina ('a snake, a Circe'; great-granddaughter of Augustus, daughter of Claudius' brother, the militarily and morally magnificent Drusus, and not too surprisingly, the sister of Caligula) or, say, the here not unduly malicious Poppea; but the vulnerable Ottone. He unexpectedly survives: the future Praefectus of the Praetorian Guard, and for a mere three months Emperor in 69 ('the year of the four Emperors') following Nero's widely welcomed suicide, Otho here is hardworking, responsible, supportive, caring. And anti-ambitious. Though for dedicated service he is betimes nominated to succeed Claudio - unlikely, for before Nero, the obvious successor is still the nearly fourteen-year-old boy Britannicus.

Indeed Francesco Giusti's singing of Ottone proved a vast highlight in this clever, in his case endlessly moving, production. Handel, at least in this version, sends the countertenor high in his range, something Giusti achieved splendidly. The honesty, loyalty and even innocence of Ottone he captured marvellously - not so much at the outset as the way he developed the character gradually later on. We believed in him, as we must: the only decent personality in the opera. (Even the great figure of Claudius is dragged into the twists and manoeuvrings of the contorted plot.) [READ MORE](#)

**Roderic Dunnett:** Beach hailed from Boston, where a bronze plaque celebrates her, and where she is also buried. Her full married name was **Amy Marcy Cheney Beach** (1867-1944). She was a most formidable musician. She is often classed, surely with good reason (unless others remain to be rediscovered), as the first female American classical composer of note.

As The Spires Orchestra and Chorus demonstrated here so forcibly and impressively, her Mass is a setting of huge substance: fresh, original, powerful, imaginative, subtly varied from section to section: so that at some points she seems even to look ahead to the initiatives of the fast-approaching twentieth century. The possibility of this UK premiere derived from the expert work of Pennsylvania scholar Paula Zerkle, who completed this masterful performing edition some two decades ago, giving the work an authenticity and certainty it perhaps lacked before. [READ MORE](#)

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Amy Beach aged about nineteen, the year she started her Mass in E

**Adam J Sacks:** Yuval Sharon's new 'backwards' **La bohème** which premiered at **Opera Philadelphia** on 28 April 2023 isn't exactly German *Regietheater a l'americain*. Befitting **America** this 'supersized' production can't escape excess in its remake. Traditionanally, German theater by the director proceeds along two paths, either an inventive *neuinszierung* which entirely reimagines setting place and time, or *neustudierung* which calls for a retreat back to the bare bones, to look on an old work again as if for the first time.



The friends come to the aid of an ill Mimi (Kara Goodrich) in Opera Philadelphia's *La bohème*. Photo © 2023 Steven Pisano



Yuval's does neither of these but rather completely reverses the order of the action so that we start with tragedy and end with promise while compressing a usually 3.5 hour four act work into just around a hundred minutes. As a literally death defying act of post-modern *bricolage* and cool objectivity, the scheme does work, melodrama is cut through and an alternative is offered to the tragic sentimentality of the grand finale. [READ MORE](#)

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## CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — THE DAVIDSBÜNDLER FEEST

The Davidsbündler Music Academy celebrates its hugely successful first year with the 'Davidsbündler Feest', from 15-18 June 2023 in Amsterdam, The Hague and at Castle Amerongen in the Netherlands. (*Feest* means party.)



**The Davidsbündler gang:**

**viola player Dana Zemtsov, violinist Daniel Rowland, bass player Nicholas Schwartz, violinist Tim Brackman, violinist/viola player Floor Le Coultre, cellist Maja Bogdanović, viola player Lilli Maijala and pianist Anna Fedorova**

Students, faculty, special guests and the Davidsbündler Music Academy's founders Anna Fedorova and Nicholas Schwartz will perform various concerts and take part in educational events at the Davidsbündler Salon, Amerongen Castle, Studio 150, Vondelpark and in the Concertgebouw Amsterdam. The Davidsbündler Feest is designed not only to present interesting, challenging and beautiful music to the public, but also to showcase just what exactly is unique about the academy's approach to music education. Celebrate this remarkable first year with them in The Hague, Amerongen and Amsterdam. [READ MORE](#)

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Back from **its recent UK tour, the Iceland Symphony Orchestra** will be collaborating with Canadian soprano and conductor Barbara Hannigan for two concerts in June 2023. Iranian composer Golfram Khayam's short, improvisatory work *I am not a tale to be told*, based on a poem by contemporary Iranian poet Ahmad Shamlou, will receive its first performances in Iceland. It was written for Barbara Hannigan, following her performance at a solidarity concert with the women of Iran. The performances begin with Franz Joseph Haydn's Symphony No 96 in D, conducted by Hannigan, and they also include Gustav Mahler's Symphony No 4, 'The Heavenly Life Symphony', for which Barbara Hannigan will both conduct and sing the soprano part. The first concert is at the Iceland Symphony Orchestra's home - the Harpa concert hall in Reykjavík at 7.30pm on 15 June 2023. The second concert is at the Hof Cultural Center, Akureyri in the north of Iceland, at 7pm on 16 June 2023.



Barbara Hannigan conducting the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia orchestra in Rome.  
Photo © Musacchio & Ianniello

The opera *Edith Cavell* by Maltese composer Paolino Vassallo (1856-1923) has only been performed once, at the Royal Opera House in Valletta, Malta, in 1927. The opera is built around the historical British nurse Edith Cavell who, with a Belgian colleague, was executed in Brussels in 1915 for helping more than two hundred allied soldiers to escape German-occupied Belgium and reach neutral Holland. It's a prime example of the romantic idiom which Vassallo inherited from his teacher Jules Massenet in Paris. To mark the one-hundredth anniversary of Vassallo's death, Dario Salvi, who came across a copy of the score in a Norfolk library, will conduct a concert version of the opera at Pjazza Teatru Rjal, Valletta, Malta at 8.30pm on 17 June 2023. Vocal soloists Martina Bartolotti, Gina Galati, Jorge Pita Carreras, Louis Andrew Cassar, Joseph Lia and Albert Buttigieg join KorMalta and the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra for this rarity.

## MAY 2023 OBITUARIES

Some of the people the classical music world said goodbye to during May 2023 include Günter Wewel, Liudmila Kovnatskaya, Grace Bumbry, Soňa Červená, Seán Keane and Menahem Pressler. May they rest in peace. [READ MORE](#)

## BÉLA HARTMANN — TO TALK OR NOT TO TALK

**Béla Hartmann:** There is a curious phenomenon doing the rounds. Some people are being criticised for speaking their mind on topics either of a general nature or of their own expertise (vis Gary Lineker or Simon Rattle) on top of fulfilling their normal duties. Others are being ostracised for not speaking their mind, or not clearly enough, even though to do so could come at great personal risk (viz Elisabeth Leonskaja and countless other Russian - or Greek - musicians and artists).



Pentti Koskinen's October 1967 photo of Russian pianist Elisabeth Leonskaja (born 1945), Finnish cellist Arto Noras (born 1942) and Russian violinist Oleg Kagan (1946-1990), who toured Finland as a trio.

It's very confusing for musicians these days - are we meant to speak our mind to power or not? Does the audience want to hear what we think, or would they rather we just got on and played? Is it our moral duty to speak up, or is it a nuisance? Just recently an article in *The Guardian* told me that as an artist my biography and my work are inseparable, but also I should just get on with my job, as people come to listen to my music and not my opinions.

Facetiousness aside, I personally feel artists should stay out of politics as much as possible, because it is my belief that art is best when it has centre stage, and is not some backing track for an unrelated message. Unspectacular clothing, a helpful but not distracting environment, a quiet attentive audience, all this helps me focus on what I come to see when I attend a concert. Of course I have no difficulty in understanding other points of view on this, we are all entitled to our opinions. A musician, or God Forbid a footballer, lecturing me on what is right or wrong is not very helpful in focusing my mind on Chopin or Stravinsky, or even the Liverpool-Chelsea match. [READ MORE](#)

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## ECHOES OF OBLIVION — MORE CORN THAN GOLD

**Robert McCarney:** Some critics would seemingly like to give the impression that all classical music and all classical music recordings are wonderful. Such perennial positivity I find seriously suspicious if not downright dishonest as it stands in blatant contrast to reality. Most classical music just as with most music of any other sort or indeed most of everything in this life is just not very good.

What's great is by definition a minority that starkly stands out and is better than the majority which is mediocre or worse. If everything is great then by corollary nothing is. As proof of this I offer up this week's column. Of the dozens of pieces of music I have listened to over the last seven days with immense pleasure notwithstanding only three have stimulated me sufficiently to make me want to get my finger out and start tapping these keys.

On the positive side this state of affairs is mitigated by the sheer superabundance of music - and everything else - in this universe to such a degree that even if qualitatively only a small percentage is worth bothering with, quantitatively within that small percentage there is still so much magical music in existence that there is more than enough out there to provide you with aural ecstasy every day of your life several times a day for several human lifetimes. [READ MORE](#)

*Echoes of Oblivion* is Robert McCarney's series of features about little-known twentieth century classical composers.

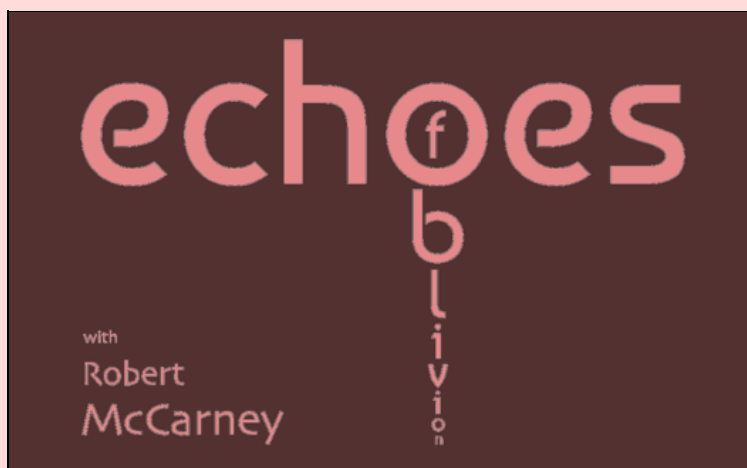
Recent issues include *More corn than gold*, *A hundred not out* and *Rough winds do shake*.

Read Robert's features to find out about these composers and more: Raffaele d'Alessandro, Liana Alexandra, Gustavo Becerra-Schmidt, Erik Bergman, Antonio Bibalo, Anne Boyd, Constança Capdeville, Nektarios Chargeishvili, Yvonne Desportes, Paul Dessau, Zhu Jian Er, Edvard Grieg, Jovdat Hajiyev, Pierre Hasquenoph, Åke

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### MORE FROM 'ECHOES OF OBLIVION'

Can you recognise music by these composers? Take the **Oblivionopolis Audio Quiz** and find out! Each of the twelve music samples is from a piece written by one of the composers listed above.



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