



Kaija Saariaho – Issue 171, July 2023

CD SPOTLIGHT – SAARIAHO'S LAST GIFT

John Dante Prevedini: *Reconnaissance* is the upcoming release from **BIS Records** of six choral works, including four in world premiere recordings, composed by the recently deceased **Kaija Saariaho** and performed by the Helsinki Chamber Choir and the Uusinta Ensemble under the baton of Nils Schweckendiek. The eighty-two-minute album, which will be available in both CD and digital format, includes an extensive booklet with liner notes on each piece by Saariaho and collaborating librettist Aleksis Barrière (her son) in English, German and French. In addition, the booklet features translations of sung texts and an artistic statement by Saariaho on her lifelong compositional practice. The album, which was completed prior to Saariaho's passing on 2 June, is now posthumously dedicated by BIS to her memory.

The four works heard on the album in world premiere recordings are *Horloge, tais-toi!* (2005), *Écho!* (2007), *Überzeugung* (2001) and the eponymous *Reconnaissance* (2020). The other two works - previously recorded by other ensembles - are *Tag des Jahrs* (2001), placed in the midpoint of the album between *Écho!* and *Überzeugung*, and *Nuits, adieux*, which actually appears twice on the album in separate versions. The album opens with the 1991 version for four voices and electronics, and it closes with the 1996 *a cappella* version for four solo voices and choir, thus lending a powerful symmetry to the album's layout. *Nuits, adieux*, an eight-movement setting of texts by Jacques Roubaud and Honoré de Balzac, is presented here with both versions conveying a palpable sense of closeness and immediacy, allowing us to hear the many subtle and fundamental differences between the two. [READ MORE](#)



'... a palpable sense of closeness and immediacy ...'

[READ JOHN DANTE PREVEDINI'S LATEST FEATURES](#)

Recent losses to the classical music world include **Kaija Saariaho** and the English composer and pianist **Peter Dickinson**, who, as a colleague of Basil Ramsey's, made some important contributions to this magazine in its early days.

They also include British composer and teacher **Clarence Barlow**, French soprano **Rachel Yakar**, Russian composer and teacher **Vyacheslav Nagovitsin**, Romanian composer and conductor Cornel Țăranu, Turkish violinist Suna Kan, Greek composer Yannis Markopoulos and South African pianist Niel Immelman.

Another recent loss is the Dutch oboist, conductor and researcher **Werner Herbers**, conductor of Ebony Band, whose final CD with this group is reviewed below. [MORE NEWS AND OBITUARIES](#)



Geoff Pearce: I had not heard of the composer Wilhelm Grosz (1894-1939) before so was pleased to listen and be entertained by this forty-one minute short opera. Grosz was one of those composers who fled Vienna and Germany during the Nazi persecution and war, and he settled in America. He was of Jewish ancestry and held prestigious positions in Berlin and Vienna as a composer, pianist and arranger. He was a student of Franz Schrecker and wrote a lot of works for film, stage and cabaret, as well as symphonic works and opera. He is a contemporary of people like Kurt Weill, but stylistically is more influenced by Schrecker and Richard Strauss, but at times his musical language is also similar to that of Weill.

Achtung Aufnahme was composed around 1930, and is called an 'absurdist' opera. The text was written by Béla Balázs, who also wrote the libretto for Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* and Weill's *Dreigroschenoper*. The music is very colourful and easy to listen to.

'... a snapshot of a different age, captured brilliantly.'

The composer is a fine orchestrator, writes engaging and catchy melodies and has a feeling for the theatrical. Whilst at times, his music inhabits the same world as Weill, I also find his style a little less cynical, and perhaps a bit more absurdly comical.

A good feature of this recording is that the libretto is also included so one can follow what is happening in this rather odd rehearsal. The singers and the Ebony Band are all on fine form. One is transformed to what I would imagine would have been the cabaret / theatre scene during the days of the Weimar Republic.

Walter Goehr (1901-1960) wrote *Komödien in Europa* as part of a review about the same time as the previous work. The text for this spectacle, which mocked the power of the entire world economy, including the Geneva League of Nations, was written by Swiss writer Ferdinand Lion. Goehr lived in Germany and then in the UK. He wrote a lot of music for the stage and film, and, like Grosz, was also a director of a record company and a conductor. He was also a student of Schoenberg. The little work presented here is very brief, lasting just over twelve minutes, is described as a potpourri and does not contain any vocal music.

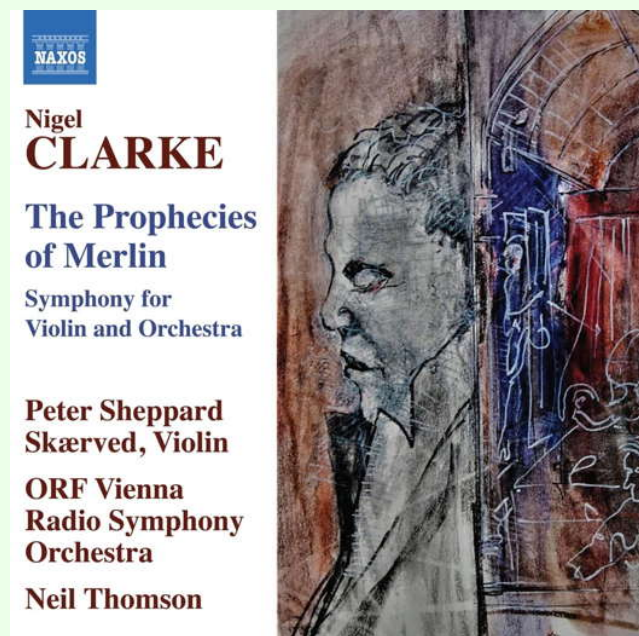
Stylistically, I find this is a little closer to Weill than the previous work, and is more inspired by the cabaret and dance music of the times. It makes interesting listening and the work is quite fragmented in that melodies end abruptly and odd things are often juxtaposed. This is very lively music that certainly entertains. [READ MORE](#)

Geoff Pearce: The young violinist Christian Li shot to fame in 2018 when he won the Junior Category of the Yehudi Menuhin Competition for Young Violinists at the age of ten. He went on to release his first CD - of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* - where he directed and performed with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. On this new CD, he plays works which revolve around the composer **Felix Mendelssohn**, including some pieces that would have been dear to Mendelssohn's heart.

The first work is Mendelssohn's popular *On Wings of Song*, beloved by so many, arranged here for strings and harp. It is a nice arrangement, and Christian Li takes the melody and freely embellishes it in the middle of the work. I don't know if the arranger, Simon Parkin, wrote the embellishments, or whether he left them up to the soloist. It is beautifully played, simply and without the undue schmalz that often turns this lovely song into mush. Li phrases beautifully and his intonation is faultless. [READ MORE](#)



'... assured technique, passion, agility and grace ...'



'Peter Sheppard Skærved certainly rises to the occasion in this demanding work.'

Geoff Pearce: I was pleasantly surprised with *The Prophecies of Merlin* (2021). It has great vision and scope and some very effective orchestration. This is the work's first recording.

The idea for this piece came from the soloist Peter Sheppard Skærved, with whom the composer has enjoyed a long collaboration, and was first mentioned at the beginning of the COVID epidemic. The work is inspired by the writings of the twelfth century cleric Geoffrey of Monmouth. In *De gestis Britonum and Vita Merlini* he depicts Merlin who, dispirited with events in his life, is basically driven mad and pronounces a series of dire prophecies concerning his native land. After drinking from a spring in Wildwood, eventually his mind clears and he renounces the prophecies.

The piece is in five tapestries and is described as a symphony for violin and orchestra, the violin being representative of Merlin's feverish mind, and the orchestra - here the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Neil Thomson - sets the mood and often supports Merlin's visions.

The first tapestry is entitled 'Calidon Wood' and this was where Merlin first wandered in retreat. It starts rather gloomily and very softly in the bass instruments, and after a while the violin solo emerges, soaring above the gloomy carpet. There is something quite magical about this section, and percussion and woodwind figures help create this magical feeling. The music becomes frantic with rousing and quite savage writing for the orchestra, and the solo violin weaves in and out of this texture. Ultimately it all subsides and the music ends almost as mysteriously as it started. [READ MORE](#)

Geoff Pearce: I was a young lad when I first heard **Dmitri Shostakovich's** Symphony No 14 in 1970. (It was written the previous year.) I did not warm towards it at first and I mistakenly thought that it was based on Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, but I later learned that it set eleven poems by four authors who died either unnaturally or prematurely, and that most of the poems dealt with death. I have another recording of this work (conducted by Rostropovich) and I got to like it a great deal. I suppose that the first time I heard the work, I was somewhat put off by the whole idea of death.

The disc starts, however, with Six Verses of Marina Tsvetayeva (1892-1941), Op 143a from 1974, for contralto and orchestra (originally conceived for piano and contralto). The poet had a sad and troubled life, and the music reflects this. It was written a year before Shostakovich died, and whilst he was on holiday after receiving notification of a fatal illness. Whilst thematic threads connect all the songs, it is not generally regarded as a song cycle.

The first song, 'My Verses', is brooding, reflective and quite dark, and it would seem as if the reflection looking back on life and work was not a happy one, but more one of resignation. [READ MORE](#)



'... testament to John Storgårds' abilities to interpret this strangest of all Shostakovich's works ...'



'A thrilling orchestra, inspired direction, a great cast of singers, two Ravel masterworks, sumptuous recorded sound and a most informative booklet ...'

style of composers such as Schoenberg and the 'sprechgesang' that he was developing around the same time. The orchestral forces to some extent imitate this, but also have to provide atmospheric effects of their own. [READ MORE](#)

Geoff Pearce: I was excited to review this disc. *Les Siècles* directed by François-Xavier Roth grabs my attention at any time, and I have to admit a fondness for this group that performs music on instruments of the period, in this case **Maurice Ravel's** first opera, *L'Heure espagnole* - a short opera that is one of my favourites. To be perfectly frank, even though I admire Ravel's orchestrating skills, *Bolero* tends to irritate me a bit, so I seldom listen to it, but to hear it played on the instruments that Ravel would have conceived it for, and heard, is really well worth listening to. The accompanying booklet mentions all the instrumentalists and brass and woodwind instrument details, and there is also an interview with the conductor who shares his insight - a very welcome addition to the recording itself.

L'Heure espagnole was written quickly in 1907 for the vocal score and Ravel completed the orchestration in 1909. The plot is basically a situation that involves a clockmaker, his wife and a couple of the wife's suitors. It is a rather ridiculous story, and Ravel creates a vocal style in which the cast sings, without seemingly being seen to do so. It is quite unlike the

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Gerald Fenech: Adolphe-Charles Adam (1803-1856), famous for the ballet *Giselle* (1841), wrote fourteen such works. These have been virtually ignored by posterity, but thanks to **Richard Bonyng** they are slowly coming to the attention of music lovers in general.

Orfa is the thirteenth of Adam's compositions in this genre, and shows the fruit of his long years of working in the theatre as an opera and ballet composer. After its premiere at the Paris Opera on 29 December 1852, the work enjoyed fifty-one performances in Paris until 1860, but very soon after this successful spell, *Orfa* found itself by the wayside.

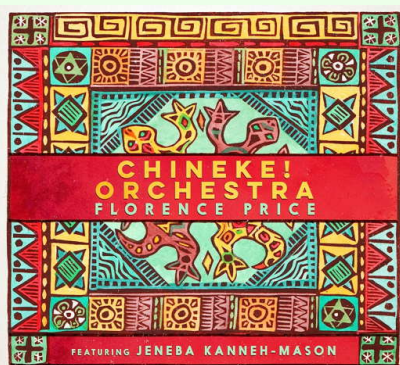
This splendid recording should put the record straight and shows what we have been missing for so long. The plot describes the conflict between older gods being superceded by the new ones in a generational change that harks back to antiquity, the abduction of a loved one by a powerful magician and the quest for the hero to find and liberate the beloved. There are echoes here of Ludmilla, Brunnhilde and Odette among others.

The plot, by Henri Trianon and François-Hippolyte Leroy, is a strange mixture of elements from Nordic mythology and gives scope for romantic adventure with mythological overtones and the opportunity for stage spectacle, especially the evocation of Iceland's landscape. The intriguing scenario also shares analogies with Hesiod's *Theogony* and Wagner's *Ring* cycle.

In the last phase of his life, Adam displayed a new and growing dynamism evinced in the increased breadth and depth of his orchestral imagination and its new dramatic dimensions. One sees this in *Orfa* where Adam experiments with the orchestra as never before. He uses the largest instrumental canvasses essayed up till then and displays real skill in orchestration and dramatic aptitude. The score of *Orfa* has a great sense of propulsion, imagination and tonal colour, and the melodies are simply gorgeous. There is terrific brass playing in the last Act, especially where the cornets are used both methodically and harmonically. Indeed, the apotheosis attains a spine-tingling breadth and grandeur of effect. [READ MORE](#)



'... really arresting playing full of joy and rhythmic beauty.'



'This is music overflowing with an abundance of melody, tinged with sadness and regret, which is crying out to be heard.'

Price's music is at last being resurrected with a real vengeance, and bit by bit we are discovering what a fine composer she was. [READ MORE](#)



Gerald Fenech: Florence Price (1887-1953) was an American classical composer who was active in Chicago from 1927 until her death in 1953. Price is noted as the first African-American woman to be recognised as a symphonic composer, and the first to have a composition - her Symphony No 1 - played by a major orchestra. Price composed over three hundred works, in several genres, but after her death she was completely forgotten. It is only in the last fifteen years or so that her music has started to emerge.

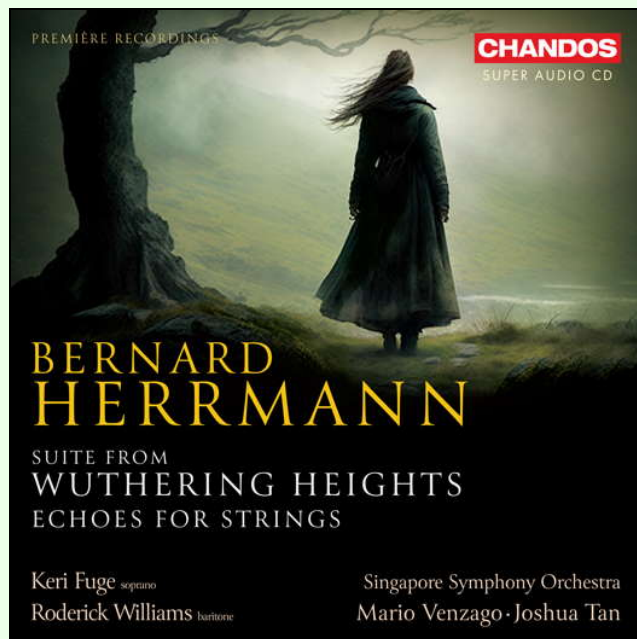
Neglected for decades, Florence

Gerald Fenech: Bernard Herrmann (1911-1975) was an **American** composer and conductor best known for his work in composing for films. As a conductor, he championed the music of lesser-known composers. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest film composers. Alex Ross writes that:

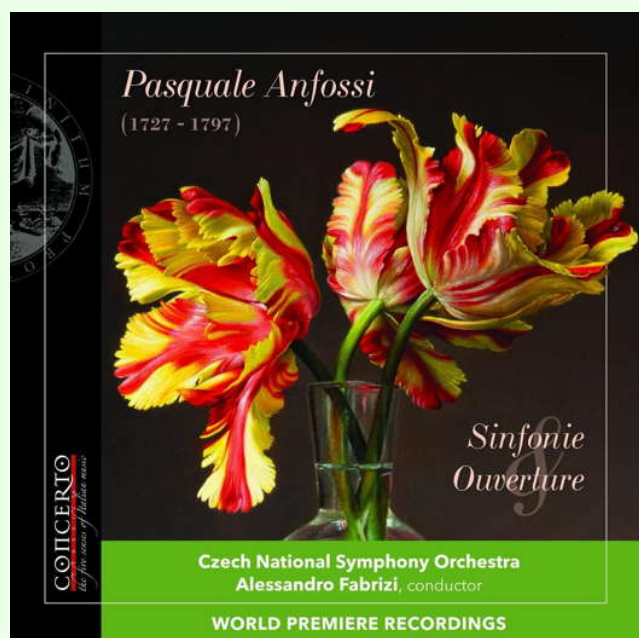
Over four decades, he revolutionized movie scoring by abandoning the illustrative musical techniques that dominated Hollywood in the 1930s and imposing his own peculiar harmonic and rhythmic vocabulary.

An Academy Award Winner for *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1941), Herrmann is known for his collaborations with Alfred Hitchcock. Indeed, he wrote the scores for seven Hitchcock films, from *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) to *Marnie* (1964), a period that included *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest* and *Psycho*. Herrmann's most famous score remains that for *Psycho*. Using only the string section of the orchestra, the music was very unusual for a thriller at the time. The screeching violin heard during the famous shower scene is one of the most impressive moments in film score history.

Herrmann's music is typified by frequent use of *ostinati*, novel orchestration and an ability to portray character traits not altogether obvious from other elements of the film. Maybe, at this stage, one gets the impression that Herrmann wrote only film music, but this is not the case. Indeed, he wrote for the concert hall and for the stage, and although relatively unknown, he also composed an **opera**, *Wuthering Heights*, which had to wait until April 2011 to get a complete theatrical performance, despite being recorded by the composer way back in 1966. [READ MORE](#)



'This is impassioned advocacy for this American genius, in heartfelt performances full of unbridled emotion and unaffected sincerity.'



'... animated performances full of verve and spirit.'

'Sinfonia', a musical form that the Neapolitan musical consolidated and developed with the enormous number of musicians who trained in the city, starting with Alessandro Scarlatti. [READ MORE](#)

Gerald Fenech: Pasquale Anfossi (1727-1797) was an **Italian** composer and violinist who successfully ventured into all musical genres of his time. He was very much in demand, especially where **opera** was concerned. His production from 1774 to 1789 counts about forty such works, both serious and comic, and these were staged in several Italian cities as well as abroad. Most important, Anfossi was among the protagonists of the Neapolitan musical school and, together with such famous names as Piccinni, Paisiello and Cimarosa, he raised the level of *Opera buffa* to its maximum splendour.

In his works Anfossi managed to develop a tender and graceful lyrical vein that is able to leap easily to the comic using procedures that were later taken up by other contemporary composers. In *Opera seria*, Anfossi's production is directed decisively in the direction of the reform of Gluck and Traetta. Its originality, while following the usual tracks, is marked by a musicality of great dramatic power. Furthermore, Anfossi was part of the large group of enthusiasts of the

Gerald Fenech: The reasons why **Gabriel Fauré** (1845-1924) composed his Requiem are uncertain. One possible impetus may have been the death of his father in 1885, and his mother's death two years later on 31 December 1887. However, by the time of his mother's death he had already begun the work, about which he later declared: 'My Requiem was not written for anything - for pleasure, if I may call it that.'

The earliest composed music included in the piece is the *Libera me* - just like Verdi's work - which Fauré wrote in 1877 as an independent composition.

In 1887-88, Fauré composed the first version of the Requiem, which he called 'a little Requiem' with five movements. In this version the composer decided to leave out the *Libera me*. This initial version was first performed on 16 January 1888 for the funeral of architect Joseph Lesoufuche at La Madeleine in Paris. The conductor was Fauré himself.

In 1889 the composer added the *Hostias* portion of the Offertory and added the 1877 *Libera me*. This second version was premiered on 21 January 1893, again at La Madeleine and Fauré conducting.

In 1899-1900, the score was reworked for full orchestra. This final version was premiered at the Trocadero in Paris on 12 July 1900 during the Universal Exposition. Paul Taffanel conducted two-hundred-and-fifty performers.

In the composer's words:

Everything I managed to entertain by way of religious illusion I put into my Requiem, which moreover is dominated from beginning to end by a very human feeling of faith in eternal rest.

In 1924 this last version of the Requiem was performed at Fauré's funeral. Indeed, this Requiem is totally different from that of Berlioz and Verdi, and to a lesser extent, from that of Mozart. The beauty of it is that it captures the real feeling of eternal rest and consolation with potent simplicity.

From a popular work to a rarity: the *Messe des pêcheurs de Villerville* (Mass of the Fisherman of Villerville) was composed in 1881. Fauré wrote it in collaboration with André Messager (1853-1929), his former pupil. In five movements, this Mass was premiered on 4 September 1881, accompanied by a harmonium and a violin. The concert was in aid of the fishermen's charitable association in Villerville, and it was warmly received. Messager orchestrated the first four sections and Fauré the last. A second performance in the same venue was given the following year, this time with full orchestra.

In 1907, Huegel and Cie published a version removing Messager's sections and the *Gloria* and incorporating a new *Kyrie* by Fauré. This version later appeared under the title of *Messe basse*. The music is of an astounding beauty, music that not only nourishes the hope that death is not the last word, but that also draws the listener into a spiritual intimacy with the mystery of immortality.

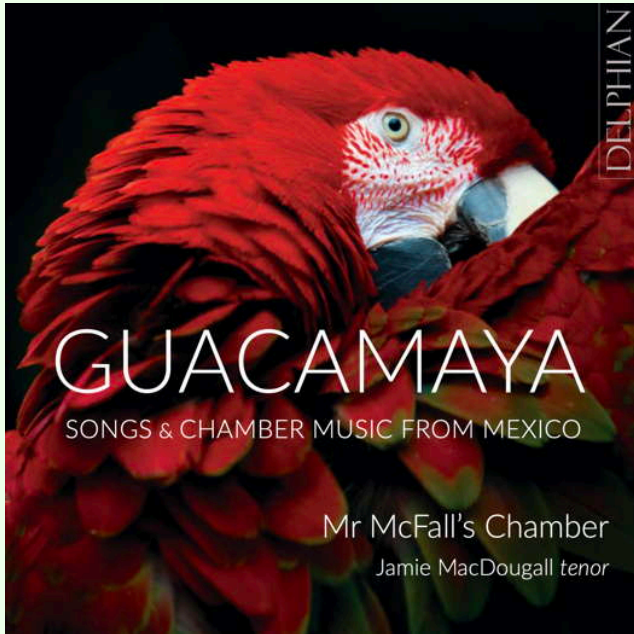
Recorded in 1988, this disc is most deserving of this re-issue. Indeed, performances are full of profound grandeur and Philippe Herreweghe's interpretation is tremendously moving and with an intensity that reveals all of Fauré's wondrous score with revelatory insight. [READ MORE](#)

Gerald also listens to music sung by Jessye Norman on Decca, to Chandos' third album of orchestral music by Eric Coates, and to baroque music by Nicola Matteis the Younger on Signum Classics.



'... performances are full of profound grandeur ...'

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'... a very interesting and well-presented disc.'

for this - it might be more familiar in its English version, as *What a Difference a Day Makes*, but it just seems so much more sensuous and bitter-sweet in Spanish, especially given a lush accompaniment as here.

Her other song, *Júrame*, is not too far behind. The lyrics of all songs are given in Spanish and English in the booklet, so one can savour the passion of the latino soul.

Agustín Lara's famous *Granada* is here, the arrangement mixing the full-blooded - featuring some nifty cello fills which I would have liked to hear more forward in the mix - with some lovely quieter sections. There are many orchestral arrangements of this but it is good to hear it with just quintet, piano and percussion. His *Arráncame la vida* (Tear Out My Life!), a tango, has some wonderfully over-the-top lyrics, but the presentation itself stays under control. Joaquín Heras's *Canción en el puerto* is for cello and piano, a deceptively simple song-like piece, but a long way from the earlier popular song styles on the album. It is romantic, but with an edge, and played so by cellist Su-a Lee and pianist Claudio Constantini.

Among the more modern composers here we have Javier Álvarez (born 1956), whose *Metro Chabacano* was used to accompany a kinetic sculpture outside the eponymous underground station in Mexico City. It has a motoric, driving quaver pulse, but does not become excessively minimalistic due to the wandering melodic material, constantly shifting accents and varying patterns of harmonic material and bassline. It does however seem strangely congruent with the idea of trains somehow.

Arturo Márquez (born 1950) is represented by *Homenaje a Gismonti*, a tribute to the Brazilian guitarist, which starts with *pizzicati* redolent of the guitar. Like the Álvarez, it is built on repeated patterns but very inventively continually refreshes itself by varying all aspects of the music, and in the process really putting the string quintet through its paces, milking it for everything it can do. Cross rhythms and metrical changes all add to the fun and complexity, before a unison finish. It needs all the energy that the quintet put in to it.

Having moved out of the salon into the concert hall, we have a major composer in the form of **Silvestre Revueltas**. Dying young in 1940, he nevertheless made a major mark on Mexican music, following the lead of Carlos Chávez, whose work tried to excavate Aztec music from the past.

As a composer seeking to turn away from nineteenth century European romanticism and colonial influences, his *Tres piezas* for violin and piano display Bartókian modernism in the treatment of folk material, and a touch of Stravinskian primitivism to boot. The first piece is a driving affair, contrasted with a second that is largely pentatonic as so much folk music is; while the third returns to the Chávez-influenced world of the first, showing Revueltas developing a particular Mexican sensibility in the context of the time he lived. This is a piece that takes no prisoners, and the performers (either Cyril Garac or McFall on violin, and Constantini - unfortunately the track list doesn't list soloists) are equal to the often hair-raising requirements of it. [READ MORE](#) [READ THE LATEST CD REVIEWS BY PAUL SARCICH](#)

Stephen Francis Vasta: I've never really warmed up to **Anton Rubinstein's** piano concerti, though I keep trying, at least when review opportunities present themselves. The man may have been Tchaikovsky's composition teacher, but it's hard to fathom what the teacher could have taught the pupil. Rubinstein had a fair-to-middling melodic gift - nothing like his student's - and, frankly, a fair-to-poor sense of form. This makes the music heavy going, no matter who's playing it.

The Third Concerto is practically a compendium of the problems. The first movement opens with beautiful warm string phrases, answered by sparkling if unimaginative piano arpeggios.

After a bit of this back-and-forth, those themes never return: a nice oboe solo is followed by a simpler, lighter second theme in the minor. You see what's happening: the movement feints at a structure, but keeps going off in different directions: you end up with no coherent structure at all. I kept waiting for the good stuff to start, and it never did, so the movement, paradoxically, actually feels 'too short'!

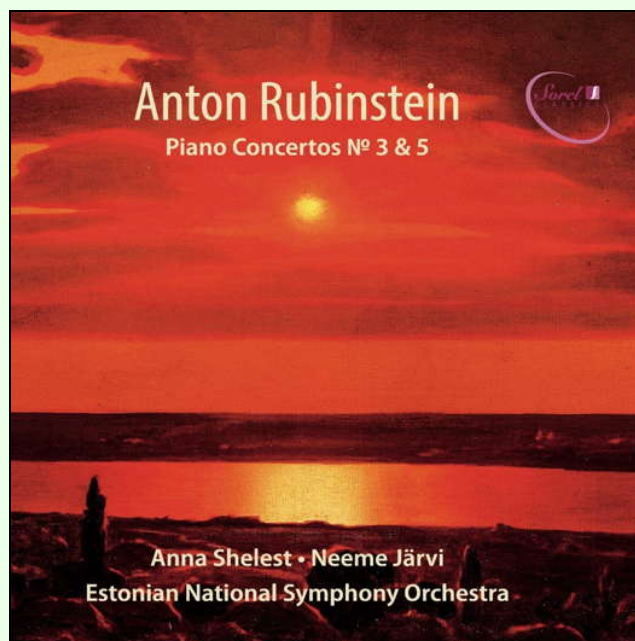
The *Andante*, generated from endless repetitions of a brief motif; quickly becomes short-winded and tedious.

The finale starts a bit better, with stormy orchestral gestures answered by the piano's proud chorale; the coda is reasonably crisp and compact, but, again, bears no relation to anything that's preceded.

The Fifth Concerto is rather better, though it's still not entirely convincing. The long, nineteen-minute first movement, like its analogue in the Third, suffers from a surfeit of unrelated material, though it's better material. In spots, this or that theme will feel like an important arrival; thus, after the strings' turbulent whirling figure at the start and a bit too much impressive pianistic padding, the orchestra intones what feels like the real first theme, answered by the piano.

Later on, the orchestral triplets are so much padding, and a turbulent patch seems unmotivated. The lovely, yearning theme introduced at 14:37 promises much, but, again, never really comes into play ...

Anna Shelest does what she can with the material - her big chords are resonant, and her sparkling arpeggios delightful - though she can't supply either inspiration or variety where the composer didn't. At the podium, Neeme Järvi's general musicianship is evident, but he doesn't bring any particular sense of texture or colour to the job. He actually begins to lumber in the Third Concerto's extended 'development', and much of that score is overresonant and opaque. Then again, even some of Shelest's playing seems to 'bunch up' in the lower-midrange, so perhaps the engineers - and the composer - are to blame. [READ MORE](#)



'Anna Shelest does what she can with the material - her big chords are resonant, and her sparkling arpeggios delightful ...'

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CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — AN ACT OF LOVE

Malcolm Miller: *Dedication*, recently on stage at London's Marylebone Theatre, acted and performed by the American pianist and playwright Roger Peltzman, is a moving multi-media tribute to the memory of his uncle, Norbert Stern, an outstanding pianist whose life and career as a virtuoso pianist was brutally cut short by the Nazis in 1944. Superbly staged by the innovative NY director Jessi D Hill, with stunning multi-media effects and live musical performance, the show tells the story of how, aged only twenty-one, Stern had already, since his teens, garnered prizes for his virtuosity, including the King of Belgium's medal, at the Royal Conservatory in Brussels, the city to which his family had migrated in 1933 from Berlin to escape the Nazis. His parents were originally from Poland; and with his sister Beatrice the family enjoyed a certain normality until the Nazi occupation of Belgium in 1940.



Roger Peltzman performs in *Dedication* at London's Marylebone Theatre

Initially they avoided deportation by hiding in an attic, while the young pianist risked safety by going to a nearby house to practice the piano. On one fateful night the SS turned up and broke into the attic; by some miracle Beatrice had the idea of climbing onto the roof through the bathroom window, but the rest of the family were taken away and murdered tragically in Auschwitz. Some days later Beatrice, ingeniously disguised as a nun, was taken to a convent, and was saved by the resistance, eventually travelling to the USA. It is Beatrice who, as Peltzman's mother, provides the link of past and present, connecting to his own personal journey of discovery and of self-discovery.

Peltzman recounts anecdotes about his youth in post war American Jewish society with lightness and humour, contrasting the attitudes of his parents, his mother who maintained a mistrust of the Europe of her youth, and his more relaxed and tolerant father. He paints a picture recognizable as the experience of the children of survivors, resonating with aspects of 'second generation trauma', such as the need to reconnect with the absences which have been so present in the family narrative: lost family members of whom photos, documents and family stories remain. Living with 'ghosts' is how Peltzman poetically portrays it, notably his grandparents and uncle. Through his quest for enlightenment, involving some detective work and sheer coincidental luck, he brings those ghosts to life, as if communicating with his uncle across the decades, and achieves closure. [READ MORE](#)

In other news, we look at various summer music festivals, including the International Stretto Piano Festival, Berkshire High Peaks, Verbier, Presteigne and the recently renamed Oxford International Festival of Song.

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Publicity for the Verbier Festival, 14-30 July 2023

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YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CHORAL MUSIC



Choral singing. Photo by David Beale

Scott Butterly, who has grown up in the Anglican choral tradition, argues, in his first feature for *Classical Music Daily*, that choirs, in any form, allow young people to fully gain the benefits of classical music.

Scott Butterly: A common theme I tend to spot in cathedrals is that young people are rarely attending unless it is with their own family on concert nights at Christmas or Easter time, when performances of the likes of *The Messiah* are popular. Although, according to *The Guardian*, The Church of England is only identified with by two percent of young adults, there is no scarcity when it comes to young people in cathedral choirs. Choir directors work tirelessly with outreach programmes in schools which aim to spark musical interest in children and provide children from a multitude of backgrounds an equal opportunity to explore and develop an interest in classical music.

It is evident that cathedral choirs provide young people with a strong foundation in music and provoke an exploration of faith. They often provide children with music lessons and life experiences which many other children are not able to attain. They form the basis of youth engagement in choral music in the Anglican tradition.

Choirs in England are bursting with potential and choristership is a great way to allow children to develop in their musical ability, social skills and teaches them to work cooperatively with other members of the choir. Not only does it allow them to progress musically - it also allows them to develop spiritually, as bible study groups with members of clergy are common and allow children to develop in their journeys of faith.

From my own experience, choral music is the perfect way to engage in classical music. This is because not only does it provide you with regular listening but also allows you to be a part of the music and fully immerse yourself. Young people tend not to listen to classical music by their own accord because many of them would much rather be in the performance itself, which explains why choirs are flourishing with young people whereas congregations at choral services are not.

When my voice changed and I left the Cathedral Choir of Derby (UK), I felt a strong sense of loss - a loss of routine, belonging and being able to explore my long-developed interest in choral music. As a result, I found myself being drawn back and so took up a choral scholarship.



The tower of All Saints Church, Derby
- now Derby Cathedral - in 1889,
painted by Alfred John Keane (1864-1930)

During my absence I found myself being able to enjoy listening to choral music more often in my spare time. Composers such as Bach and Handel became part of my daily listening routine to the point where my listening was comprised mostly of classical composers. This is evidence that being involved in choral music at a young age enables you to fully immerse yourself in the experience of listening.



A painting by Edouard Hamman (1819-88) of G F Handel (centre) and King George I on the River Thames in the UK on 17 July 1717

Prior to being a chorister, I had not extensively explored classical music but my time as a chorister taught me to understand all the hard work that goes into choral music and as such, I naturally became more appreciative of it, which made me more inclined to be engaged with listening to it.

I think that choirs, in any form, allow young people to fully gain the benefits of classical music. Many children do not enjoy being coaxed into attending music lessons whereas going to choir to interact with your fellow choristers doesn't seem like a burden but rather inspires you to be interested. Choirs provide the opportunities of building your confidence and appreciation in music alongside making lifelong friendships.

We should all have a great deal of respect for the parents of children in cathedral choirs, as driving them to rehearsals and services is often disruptive to their daily routines. However, parents of choristers can often see the benefits of it and as such be proud in the knowledge that they are helping to preserve choral tradition. [READ MORE ABOUT SCOTT BUTTERLY](#)

THE SELF-ASSURED CONDUCTOR

Anett Fodor tells the story of Arthur Nikisch, from his Hungarian roots to international acclaim, including a notorious episode where Nikisch received advice from Brahms involving the Berlichingen injunction!

Anett Fodor: Arthur Nikisch, the world-famous conductor, was born on 12 October 1855 in Lébényszentmiklós (now Mosonszentmiklós), Hungary. His mother, Ludovika Roboz, belonged to a noble Hungarian family, whilst his father, Augustin, hailed from Moravia and worked as an accountant on the estate of Baron János Sina in Hungary.

Arthur's musical talent was already obvious when he was four years old. At the age of eight, he was performing as a piano virtuoso and attracted a great attention with his dynamic playing.

He spent his early childhood in Lébényszentmiklós before pursuing his musical education at the Vienna Conservatory, where he studied under Joseph Hellmesberger and Felix Otto Dessoff.



Arthur Nikisch was baptised in this picturesque church of Lébényszentmiklós in 1855. Photo © 2023 Anett Fodor



Nikisch Artur.

Nikisch Artur. Source: old Hungarian Magazine *Magyar Szalon* (April-September 1895)

Nikisch excelled on both the violin and the piano. In March 1877, Henryk Wieniawski gave a violin recital in Vienna, with Nikisch accompanying him on the piano for Mendelssohn's well-known concerto. Upon completing his studies, Nikisch joined the orchestra of the Vienna Opera House as a violinist, performing under the baton of notable figures such as Liszt, Verdi, Wagner and Brahms. These direct personal experiences influenced his development of a distinctive performing style as a future conductor.

Nikisch's illustrious international career began when he was appointed as a choral coach at the Leipzig Opera, and within a year, he ascended to the position of principal conductor. During his time in Leipzig, Nikisch acquired invaluable knowledge and expertise as an opera conductor.

As his reputation spread, Nikisch received invitations from important cities across Europe, as the New World also beckoned. In 1889, he embarked upon a four-year sojourn in America as a guest conductor with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Travelling extensively on a luxurious train dedicated to him, Nikisch's extraordinary artistry received acclaim in cities throughout America. [READ MORE](#)

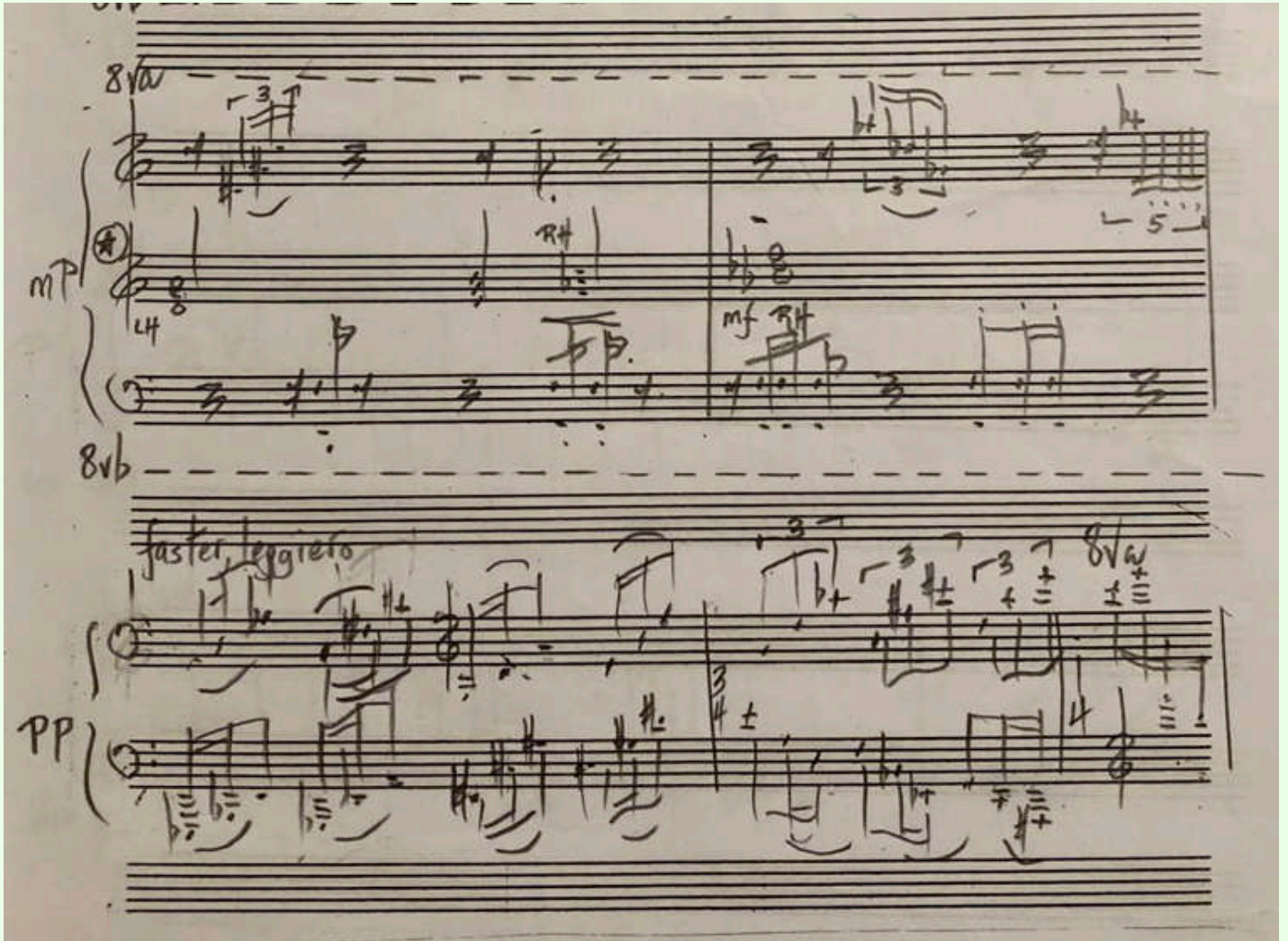
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MUSIC AS A FORM OF MAGIC

Let us believe for a brief moment that Music is a form of Magic. Then a musician might be considered a Magician. There was a time when the Magus was considered an especially wise man, equal of philosopher and poet. By a stretch then a musician might be considered fit in that high company.

Music would then not be mere acoustic wall paper (as **R Murray Schafer** often deplored). Music would be a passage towards wisdom, towards magic, towards enchantment, towards G-d. It would not be merely the accompaniment of lustful images or sweaty frictions. Music would reach some other field of the Mind.

If one accepts such a stream of pseudo-syllogistic thoughts, arguments, implications or intimations, then we must in all honesty consider Larry Sitsky a Musical Magus.



Larry Sitsky: *The Crusader Castle at Sidon*, composer's manuscript. © Larry Sitsky

The Russian ancestry, Chinese born, Australian **Larry Sitsky** is an astounding collection of characters and achievements: pianist, composer, scholar, indefatigable researcher, mentor, and now octogenarian creator of vast and complex music. His most recent book is his final volume in a series about the composer **Busoni**. Without question he is Australia's foremost composer and has created a giant library of works ...

[READ MORE](#)

[READ MORE ABOUT AUSTRALIAN COMPOSER LARRY SITSKY](#)

ENSEMBLE — JOY INDEED

While reviewing a recent performance in San Diego, Ron Bierman mentions in passing some of the more singular performances of Beethoven's *Choral Symphony*, including a lock-in.



Beethoven's Symphony No 9 in San Diego. Photo © 2023 Ron Bierman

Ron Bierman: San Diego's Mainly Mozart All-Star Orchestra this year included twelve concertmasters and twenty-seven principals among other fine musicians from cities such as Cleveland, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Toronto. With changing but similar personnel, the orchestra has appeared here for a month each summer for the last thirty-five years. This year, led by Music Director and Conductor Michael Francis, it performed six Mainly Mozart concerts in two weeks. The sole piece on the final program was **Beethoven's** ninth symphony with four operatic singers and the San Diego Master Chorale joining the orchestra.

If there'd been little rehearsal time for the work, it wasn't apparent. Each of the musicians had almost certainly performed it before. Soloists were compelling and section work precise.

Under Francis's emphatic urging, the first movement mirrored Beethoven's heroic determination to overcome what was, by that time in his life, total deafness. The vigorous pace continued until heroic struggle becomes resigned acceptance.

Yes, almost certainly he was reacting to the agony of lost hearing, but great music expresses emotions rather than facts. Beethoven was likely also thinking of the withdrawal of the dedication of his third symphony after Napoleon had changed from heroic champion of the people to failed despot.

The ninth's second movement is in a lighter, more optimistic mood of rhythmic compulsion. Woodwinds took advantage with bubbling, dance-like enthusiasm. [READ MORE](#) [READ RON BIERMAN'S LATEST FEATURES](#)



Rossini's *La Cenerentola* at Nevill Holt Opera - Angelina-Cinderella (Grace Durham) with a typical shambles behind her - left, Malachy Frame as the disguised Dandini, and right, Aaron Godfrey-Mayes (the real Prince, Don Ramiro).
Photo © 2023 Genevieve Girling

Roderic Dunnett: This staging - Simon Wells' deliciously apt set, the costumes, the galvanising, spot-on orchestra and all the singers - was a sizzler from start to finish. Nevill Holt invariably puts a slice of fun into its visual - and musical - diet. Thanks to the prodigious knack and panache of its Director, Owen Horsley, this one was jam-packed with laughs, and that's why the audience was clearly so entranced.

Indeed that's what all Rossini comedies with their ingenious librettos must be: stock-full of mirth and merriment, chortles and chuckles - titters galore, as Frankie Howerd would have said. *Cenerentola*, sung here in remarkably crisp Italian - voice coach: Alessandra Fasolo - cries out for a rip-roaring, almost in-ye-face staging, a bedazzling, ticklish, edge of seat, champagne-popping zip. Right through. Rossini penned this one (at incredible, unbelievable speed) as a knock-you-for-six parody of the famous fairy tale. Oddly it doesn't have a fairy: instead, a brilliant Merlin-like bloke, who as a worker of miracles may or may not be fairy-like, and of whom more later.

It's all nonsense anyway: and the way two miraculous singers: first, the Prince (British relative newcomer Aaron Godfrey-Mayes - no wonder he collected the Royal Academy of Music Pavarotti prize) and Cinders (widely-travelled Grace Durham - think Zurich, Innsbruck festival, Dresden's staggering Semperoper: Cherubino, can you believe it) fall for one another in five seconds, ruling out everyone else, looked here (perhaps to advantage) as ludicrous as ever. But then everything hit the jackpot here, as it always does with Nevill Holt. The audience uproar at the curtain calls spoke reams.

One way Horsley - engaging in unbelievably his not-quite first opera production or coproduction (Garsington, New York: may there be many more) - kept the entertainment buzzing non-stop, was his endless invention with the (all-male) chorus. The most important thing about this gobsmackingly talented six-man choir was its singing: certainly as good as any opera chorus I can remember lately. Rossini uses the voices fabulously, so that all six - from tenor to lowest bass - were audibly offset and finely balanced, some emerging, others sidling alongside - something young Greek newcomer conductor Dionysis Grammenos prised out with notable expertise. Whether cavorting with the principals or setting sail on their own, this appetising all-male ensemble was balanced, dexterous, and all the more remarkable for the fact that individual voices actually stood out within the textures. [READ MORE](#)



Conductor Keith Slade with members of the Worcestershire Symphony Orchestra. Photo © Paul Baker

Lucas Ball: **Gustav Mahler's** *Resurrection Symphony* (Symphony No 2 in C minor) is an ambitious undertaking for a local orchestra, but clearly well within the grasp of the Worcestershire Symphony Orchestra (WSO).

The majestic opening was impressively tight and confident, and every contribution from the WSO felt utterly committed from the outset. Exciting builds from nothing or almost nothing leading to climactic moments worked very well indeed. It is obvious that the members will have worked very hard in rehearsing this momentous work.

The disturbing moments in the *Resurrection Symphony* came over well, the loud brass being one conspicuous asset. Episodes of charm also shone through in the second movement where the Mahlerian folk style was intoxicating. I liked both the sudden bursts of energy here as well. If one were to try to list all the 'solo moments' in a performance of this work (such as leader Victoria Lee's violin solos), somehow one would not do justice to either Mahler's score or to this rendering of it.

Conductor Keith Slade's beat is very clear here as it was elsewhere. Off-stage bugle-calls were particularly exciting.

When the voices finally do emerge it is one of those very special, goose-bump moments in Mahler's entire symphonic output. Curiously, the solos from Verity Bramson and Jennifer Mugleston were from behind the orchestra (and in front of the chorus), but still came across memorably for all that.

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AGNESI — A CLASSICAL MUSIC WORD PUZZLE

Allan Rae: **Maria Teresa Agnesi Pinottini** (1720-1795) was an eighteenth century Italian composer. Though she was most famous for her compositions, she was also an accomplished harpsichordist and singer, and the majority of her surviving compositions were written for keyboard, the voice, or both.

Her maiden name, *Agnesi*, is one of the words hidden in the word puzzle, below, provided here for your entertainment, similar to those which *Classical Music Daily* published here about three years ago.

Just to remind you, with these puzzles, words can be hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally and in retrograde.

The solution is complex as many letters are used multiple times, so only marking a line 'stroke' through the word is necessary. (Many commercial puzzles specify that each word should be circled when found; on these hand drawn puzzles, however, it is necessary just to stroke.)

L	G	B	R	U	B	E	C	K	R	E	G	N	I	A	R	G	E	L	L	M	A	N	A	I	D	A	C	A				H	T	
A	Y	N	A	I	V	O	G	E	S	E	P	T	E	T	Q	U	A	R	T	A	L	F	R	A	N	C	A	O	G		A	A	G	
C	M	O	I	M	A	Z	U	R	K	A	Y	R	E	R	U	N	S	E	K	N	O	E	U	G	O	L	O	R	P	N	I	J		
I	N	I	R	Z	S	M	E	L	O	D	R	A	M	A	I	A	T	T	R	C	P	K	O	R	N	G	O	L	D	L	E			
S	O	T	P	B	T	B	P	R	A	G	T	I	M	E	N	M	M	N	E	I	P	A	D	R	A	N	O	E	L	I	A	S		
S	P	A	L	R	A	R	R	S	T	N	E	C	C	A	T	L	A	A	N	N	O	E	A	S	D	A	L	E	L	G	T	N	I	
A	E	R	A	I	G	A	O	A	O	R	G	E	L	L	A	E	N	H	E	I	C	R	E	T	S	O	F	O	I	H	O	I	D	
L	D	T	Y	G	I	S	K	L	O	C	T	E	T	S	L	Z	U	C	K	E	R	T	N	A	V	E	L	I	E	T	N	E	A	
C	I	S	D	E	N	S	O	L	E	Q	U	A	R	T	E	T	E	G	R	U	T	A	M	A	R	D	O	S	H	F	A	L	W	
O	E	E	N	R	G	N	F	E	N	W	I	L	L	I	A	M	S	L	A	T	I	C	E	R	E	R	R	S	T	O	L	S	A	
E	S	H	A	R	S	R	I	B	A	A	I	N	O	F	N	I	S	P	H	R	A	S	E	S	C	A	I	U	N	O	I	E	J	
N	R	C	M	A	H	O	E	A	V	R	I	N	A	L	D	O	O	Z	R	A	M	O	B	E	O	M	D	N	A	T	T	N	D	
A	E	R	R	G	A	D	F	R	A	W	H	I	S	T	L	E	N	A	M	E	D	I	S	G	R	A	M	E	T	S	Y	S	R	
M	G	O	O	L	M	A	F	A	P	O	E	G	A	K	C	A	P	I	N	T	O	N	E	N	D	T	S	H	A	N	T	Y	A	
Z	G	T	C	E	B	T	A	K	L	O	P	H	G	A	Y	A	N	E	B	O	N	G	O	A	I	I	A	S	R	O	T	M	M	
L	E	U	A	L	A	N	F	L	U	T	E	T	L	R	I	K	S	T	E	L	L	A	B	R	N	S	D	E	R	I	E	P	A	
A	N	B	S	A	L	E	A	Z	N	E	D	I	A	R	T	I	S	T	S	N	A	G	R	O	G	T	K	R	A	T	P	H	T	
S	O	K	A	G	A	V	I	V	A	C	E	N	E	S	E	R	A	V	S	L	A	N	I	G	I	R	O	O	N	A	P	O	U	
Y	H	C	L	I	A	E	O	L	I	A	N	G	I	E	W	Z	N	I	E	W	G	R	A	N	A	D	A	C	G	I	I	N	R	
	E	A	S	C	S	R	E	G	O	R	O	A	G	U	D	E	L	O	B	L	U	E	S	L	E	V	O	N	E	R	T	Y	G	
		S	N	E	L	E	K	T	R	A	S	L	Y	D	I	A	N	L	M	L	A	C	I	S	U	M	P	E	D	A	L	S	I	
	A	O	R	K	N	O	T	S	I	P	L	E	N	D	P	I	N	I	E	G	I	B	B	O	N	S	R	E	I	V	I	V	C	
K	E	A		O	E	E	H	P	C	M	E	R	E	N	G	U	E	N	J	R	A	B	A	N	A	J	A	L	F	R	A	N	O	
L	V				D	R	E	S	D	E	N	A	M	L	U	H	S	S	D	E	T	A	M	K	C	E	H	C	S	Y	A	L	P	

My 'Find a word' puzzle *Agnesi* is shown above. How many words can you find? If the puzzle is not visible, or if you can't see the letters in the puzzle clearly, then please [click here](#). All of the words shown on the next page are hidden in the puzzle above.

If you can't see the list of words clearly, please [click here](#). You may find it useful to print out the puzzle and the word list, so that you can mark the squares with a stroke and mark the words that you've already found.

Acadian	Accents	Aeolian	Agnesi	Agudelo	Airplay	Albinoni
Alfrano	Allegro	Antheil	Arabella	Arditi	Arrange	Artists
Atonality	Ballets	Blues	Bomarzo	Bongo	Boulanger	Brass
Brubeck	Casals	Casulana	Chanter	Checkmate	Cigale	Classical
Copland	Coppola	Denza	Djawadi	Djembe	Dramatist	Dramaturge
Dramaturgic	Dresden	Easdale	Eastman	Elektra	Elgar	Encores
Endpin	Enesco	Florid	Flute	Foster	Franca	Gayane
Gellman	Gibbons	Gjeilo	Grandval	Grainger	Granada	Grøndahl
Gymnopédies	Handel	Honegger	Intone	Janabar	Kabalevsky	Kassia
Korngold	Krenek	Leonarda	Leoncavallo	Levant	Lewinsky	Lightfoot
Lortzing	Lydian	Maazel	Mancini	Mayer	Mazurka	McPhee
Melodrama	Merengue	Musical	Nelson	Neoclassical	Nielsen	Nightingale
Novels	Nussio	Octets	Orchestration	Organs	Originals	Ormandy
Package	Pavane	Pedals	Phrases	Piston	Plays	Polka
Prologue	Quartal	Quartet	Quintal	Ragtime	Ranges	Recital
Recording	Reruns	Rinaldo	Rogers	Sackbut	Sadko	Salzman
Segovia	Septet	Shambala	Shanker	Shanty	Shulman	Sideman
Sinfonia	Skirl	Staging	Symphony	System	Tailleferre	Tippett
Varèse	Variations	Ventadorn	Varèse	Violins	Vivace	Vivier
Weinzweig	Whistle	Williams	Zbriger	Zelman	Zuckert	

Good luck! Please let me know how you get on, via the *Classical Music Daily* [contact page](#).

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