



Classical Music Daily

Beautiful, Powerful Music – Issue 175, November 2023

THE MAGNANIMITY OF MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS



Bass-baritone Dashon Burton, who sang in MTT's Beethoven 9 in San Francisco. Photo © Tatiana Daubek

Jeffrey Neil: The word 'magnanimity' is what comes to mind when I think of my public and personal experiences with San Francisco's long-time conductor. We shared a personal friend who took me backstage a few times after performances. Maestro Thomas had a long line of colleagues, sycophants, and friends queued up to see him. I found it remarkable that he always remembered me and asked me about what projects I was working on. My own relatively unimportant work was given a sense of importance by his curiosity: this is the essence of magnanimity. Instead of the diva-like scorn or cool indifference I have encountered in other accomplished musicians, the magnanimous maestro sweeps everybody up in his generous spirit; he makes us also desire to be creative and industrious.

When the baritone floods the audience with his warm, enveloping, and inescapable 'O, Freunde!' toward the end of the Ninth, he embraces us in a gesture of magnanimity - one that is sorely missing from the world.

In my life, I have found that when people who are great in their fields show an interest and curiosity in me, they invite me to feel as if I were part of their own lofty world. Even if the interaction is just for a few minutes, it has the capacity to elevate and provide direction. [READ MORE](#)

Jeffrey Neil is a lecturer in Comparative Literature and a writing teacher. His writing on music includes *Tristan und Isolde's* arias, Spanish Golden Age songs in Cervantes' plays and a forthcoming piece on the sound of radio jingles in 1930s Hollywood films. He studies voice with Jonathan Nadel.

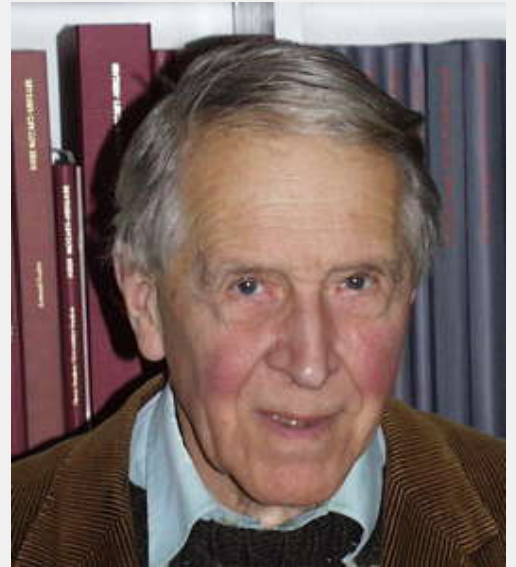
CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — THE ROBERT ANDERSON TRUST

Robert Anderson (1927-2015) was an egyptologist, a choral and orchestral conductor, a cellist who played duets with Jacqueline du Pré and a top quality writer about classical music who contributed greatly to this online magazine's predecessor, *Music & Vision Magazine*.

Robert also created a charitable trust which continues to help students to visit London to undertake academic research. The Robert Anderson Trust is now inviting applications for research visits to London in 2024. Accommodation and limited financial support is provided for visits of one month.

Robert's Trust also has a resident music scholar - currently Michal Oren - and it continues to support a student of viola at London's Royal College of Music and to make various other awards.

Further information: robertandersontrust.org



Robert Anderson.
Photo © 2003 Keith Bramich

Young Korean Conductor Deun Lee was unanimously awarded the first prize of the Plovdiv Opera Competition, conducting Act I of *La bohème*. As part of the prize, he was appointed Assistant Conductor of Plovdiv Opera, for a season of concerts in Bulgaria and Kazakhstan.

More than a hundred and twenty participants took part in the competition, which was organized by Plovdiv National Opera and Artes Association, and which took place in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 5-30 September 2023.

Further information: plovdivoperacompetition.com

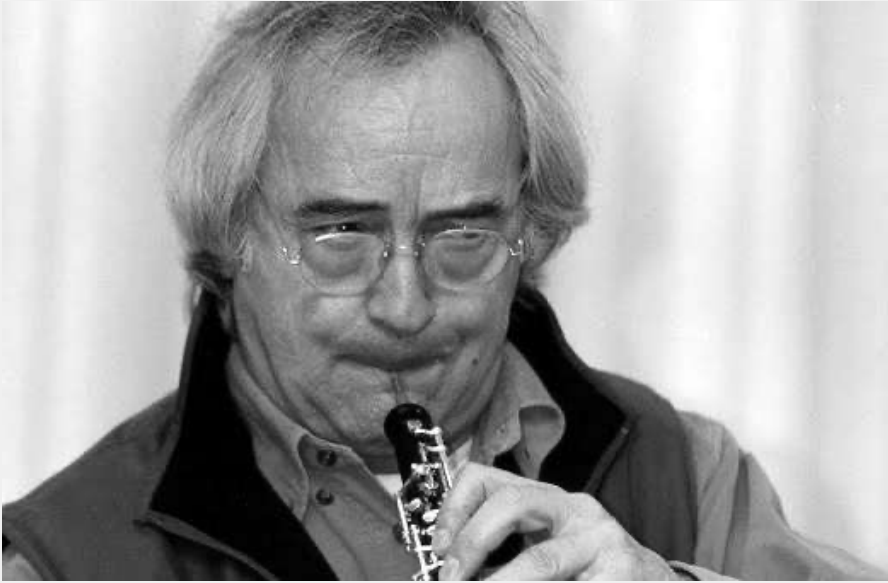
The UK's McNicol Ballet Collective is proud to announce a brand-new creative residency programme, *Compositions & Configurations*, offering paid opportunities for composers and choreographers to experiment together in a studio setting at DanceEast, with the Collective's professional dancers, before embarking on a formal creative process.

Compositions & Configurations will foster collaboration between dance and music, continuing McNicol Ballet Collective's mission to shape the future of contemporary ballet and original composition.

Successful applicants will have the opportunity to explore original music and choreographic concepts during a one-week studio residency at DanceEast with McNicol Ballet Collective's professional dancers and live musicians. The residency programme also offers pre-residency meetings and workshops, guest speaker sessions, and mentoring and support from a dramaturg throughout the creative process. The residency concludes with an informal sharing of the artist's work to an invited audience and industry professionals. Following the residency, McNicol Ballet Collective plans to commission at least one choreographer and composer to further develop their work and present it as part of the Company's 2024/2025 season.

Applications for *Compositions & Configurations* are now open and will close on Monday 15 January 2024. Applicants must be based in and have the right to work in the UK. The successful applicants will be announced in February 2024. The residency will take place from Monday 15 - Saturday 20 July 2024, with regular preparatory meetings taking place from March.

Further information: mcnicolballetcollective.co.uk



French oboist, conductor and teacher Maurice Bourgue (1939-2023)

Follow the link below for more classical music news, including the The Global Music Education League Competition in Beijing, Martyn Brabbins' resignation from English National Opera, Jaap Nico Hamburger's new opera *Ariella*, excerpts from which are to be performed across Canada, ISCM World Music Days in South Africa, the Irving M Klein International String Competition 2024 and December 2023 performances of Handel's *Messiah*.

We also mark the recent passing of Maurice Bourgue, Rafail Kasimov, Lena McLin, Jacqueline Dark, Herbert Handt, Patricia Janečková and others. [READ MORE](#)

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A TREASURE TROVE

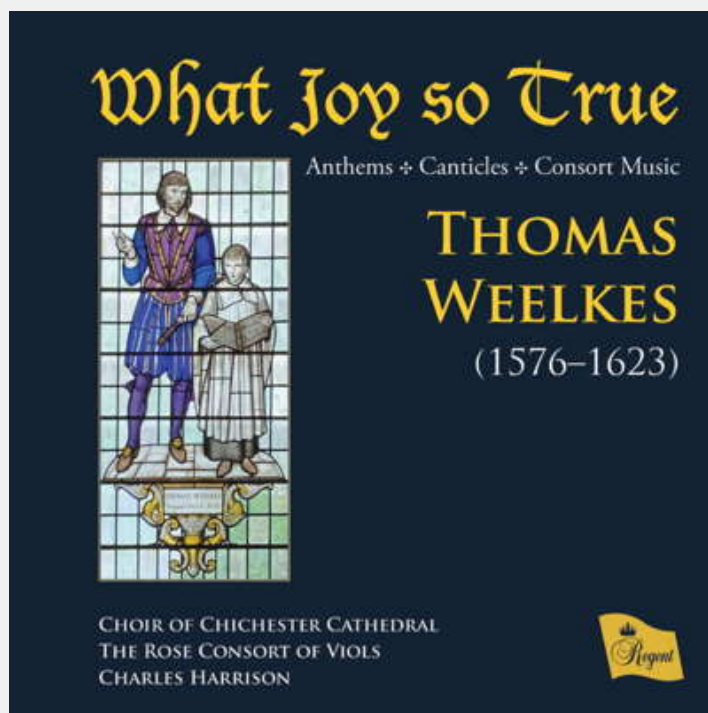
Roderic Dunnett: **Regent Records** is a label so easy to recommend, and applaud, in every way possible. Its achievements and its catalogue are as gratifying and enriching as they are deeply impressive.

They keep popping discs through my letterbox, so it's pleasing to be able at last to repay a bit.

One of Regent's latest wonders has been its recording devoted completely to the Tudor composer **Thomas Weelkes**. We hear of Byrd - the quatercentenary of his death is this year - and Tallis; maybe Gibbons; possibly Taverner; but Weelkes - although his four hundredth anniversary is in the same year as Byrd's - is far less well known.

REGCD 571 is all the more welcome, since the choir is that of Chichester Cathedral - which is where Weelkes (1576-1623, having served briefly, from roughly age twenty-two, at Winchester) was a somewhat drunken organist, with intermissions, for over two decades.

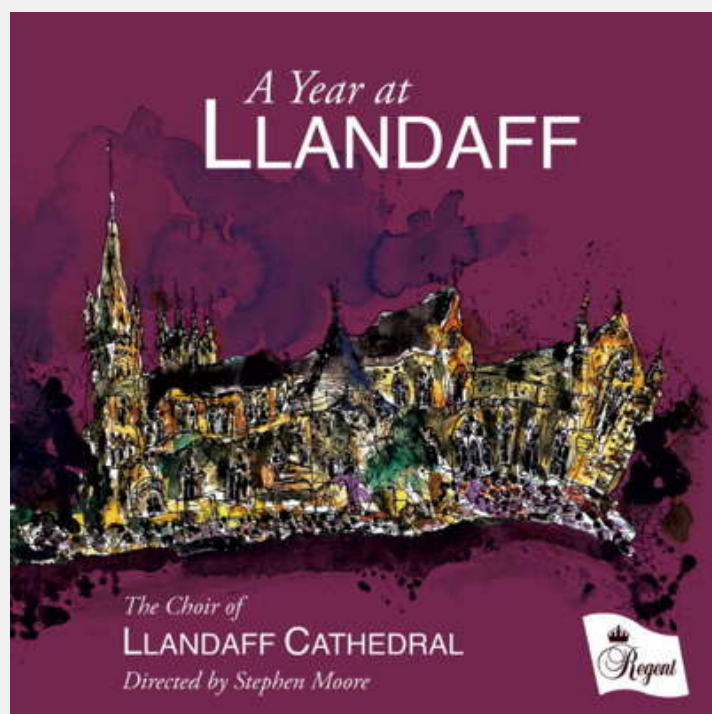
Chichester's choir has improved wondrously of late, firstly under Sarah Baldock, the second woman in England to be appointed a cathedral organist, but now most memorably under Charles Harrison. Weelkes' music is glorious, even if his 'Hosanna to the Son of David' takes a more subdued approach to Gibbons. Several pieces, sacred or secular, on *571*, I have never even heard, or myself sung, or knew existed, which makes it an even more exciting find.



REGCD 571 is a striking recording devoted to Thomas Weelkes from Chichester Cathedral, where he was organist for over twenty years.

He died in 1623, exactly four hundred years ago.

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Llandaff Cathedral is the latest to join Regent's *A Year at* liturgical series, adding a handsome and immensely pleasing collection on *REGCD 573*.

© 2023 Regent Records

Chichester excels throughout this enticing disc. True, this isn't the only all-Weelkes collection on CD. What is so fascinating, apart from the distinctive quality of singing and musical direction, is that when one takes all these versions together, one finds Weelkes composed an astonishing number of anthems - not including his extensive madrigals ...

On another front, a very special one, Regent has a really excellent - and original - series that has been building over several years. It's called 'A Year at ...', and it showcases the sacred music of each cathedral by stages through the Christian year.

The latest is from Llandaff, in South Wales, another choir which has made a miraculous improvement, even recovery, I suspect under Stephen Moore, who moved there from the famously splendid St Matthew's, Northampton. Llandaff sounds terrific at present, and their disc (*REGCD 573*), which features, for instance, contemporary works by the masterful Philip Wilby, Simon Lole, Will Todd, as well as Stainer's stupendous 'I saw the Lord', is to be highly recommended. [READ MORE](#)

ENSEMBLE — AN UNCANNY COOL AND RELAXED DEMEANOUR



Kevin Chen at St John's Smith Square in London. Photo © 2023 Bobby Chen

Malcolm Miller: Cheers and ovations and two encores give some indication of the enthusiasm of the near-capacity audience at Kevin Chen's recital at St John's Smith Square, **London, UK**, on 15 October 2023. Chinese-Canadian Chen was the Gold Medalist at this year's Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition, held in March 2023 in Tel-Aviv, Israel, and at the tender age of eighteen, his pianistic talent is no less than phenomenal. Already winning several major prizes including the 2021 Liszt Competition and the 2022 Concours de Genève, he sports a superb technique and interpretative maturity beyond his years.

This London concert, promoted by the UK Friends of the Arthur Rubinstein International Music Association, the first of a string of international appearances including at Carnegie Hall and in Australia, gave us a foretaste of an exciting career in the making. Indeed, he joins an impressive roster of international soloists who have won the award since the triennial competition's formation some fifty years ago, including Emmanuel Ax (1974), British pianists Ian Fountain and Benjamin Frith (1989), Kirill Gershtein (2001), Daniil Trifonov (2011), and, most recently, Juan Pérez Floristán (2021).

In his intelligently chosen programme involving technical wizardry and searching musicality, Chen dazzled with a sparkling virtuosity redolent of great pianists such as Shura Cherkassky, coupled with an intensity of expression fueled by subtle use of rubato and dynamics, dynamism and the energy and sincerity of youth. To open was **Mendelssohn's** Prelude and Fugue in B flat, Op 35 No 6, in which finesse in the left hand motifs underpinned the Prelude's rich harmonies, with echoes of characteristic Mendelssohnian scherzos in the flickering frothy fugue, each voice beautifully shaded with textural lucidity. [READ MORE](#)

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Ron Bierman: Any superstitious concern that a Friday the thirteenth concert might turn out badly had disappeared by the time the audience rose to demand an encore from the all-star trio of pianist **Jean-Yves Thibaudet**, violinist Lisa Batiashvili and cellist Gautier Capuçon. It had been an exceptional chamber music performance. Given the musicians' resumé you might think that was a sure thing. Most in the audience probably did, and the concert sold out early. But the large egos of some major artists who solo in front of the world's greatest orchestras can be difficult to throttle back for the cooperation needed in a small chamber group. There was little doubt that each of these three artists would play at a high level of artistry, less certainly they would be listening to each other to ensure the beauty of the ensemble.

The three works on the program ran the gamut of emotions while encapsulating three centuries of music. **Haydn** completed the forty-fourth of his forty-five piano trios near the end of the **eighteenth century**. It uses the forms and harmonic conventions of the Classical era to enrich easily appreciated melodies. The first movement is a cheerful delight, the second a moment of somber reflection. The finale returns to Haydn's more frequent buoyant optimism.

Haydn described his piano trios as sonatas for piano with violin and cello accompaniment, and Thibaudet demonstrated appropriately forceful leadership along with admirable technique. His crystalline bubbling liquid runs were a special delight.

It became more evident that the three musicians were equal partners, and indeed listening to each other, as they gave a stunning performance of the beautiful melodies, lush textures and more diverse emotions of **Ravel's** only piano trio. Tempos and dynamics maximized the impact of one of the most beautiful and effective of the composer's compositions. His **twentieth century** work was a perfect vehicle for the performers' ravishing string sounds and the interplay of three superb musicians.

Mendelssohn's second piano trio, written late in the **nineteenth century**, was the last on the program. The performance offered more of the same luxurious tone and precise articulation that went before. Mendelssohn consistently demonstrates some of the best elements of the Romantic era. Drama, warm melodies, stormy interludes and harmonies unfamiliar to the Classical era are highlights of the first two movements. The third has the energetic skittering strings of the composer's memorable *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture and *Italian* Symphony. The meaty texture of the final movement, especially in a performance of this strength, seems to include two or three extra instruments, and its ending had many leaping from their seats to applaud.

After three curtain calls, the trio relented and returned for a delicious nightcap, the final movement of **Dvořák's** 'Dumky' Piano Trio. Its infectious Slavic melodies and rhythms completed an outstanding concert.



From left: Lisa Batiashvili (© André Josselin), Gautier Capuçon (credit not known) & Jean-Yves Thibaudet (© 2021 Elisabeth Caren)

[READ RON BIERMAN'S LATEST FEATURES](#)

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Sinfonia Viva performing in Derby Cathedral under Luke Jerram's *Museum of the Moon*. Photo © 2023 Ali Johnston

Mike Wheeler: Sinfonia Viva is undertaking a five-concert season in Derby, running until next March. The first of the series coincided with the return to **Derby Cathedral** of Luke Jerram's *Museum of the Moon*, a seven-metre-wide globe featuring NASA imagery of the Moon's surface, internally lit, and suspended over the cathedral nave. Even though **Holst's** *The Planets*, which ended the evening, is only superficially about the solar system, Jerram's installation felt entirely appropriate - Derby, UK, 18 October 2023.

Obviously, it suited **Mozart's** *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* as well, opening the concert in a one-to-a-part uncondacted performance, crisp and elegant - brisk in the first movement, both gracious and wistful in the second. The Minuet had the right tone of robust courtliness, with the trio almost becoming a waltz. The finale bounced along at a lively but not breakneck speed.

Olivia Clarke was the conductor for the rest of the programme, and she and the orchestra were joined by soprano Nadine Benjamin in a radiant, beguiling account of **Richard Strauss's** *Four Last Songs*. The players set up a strong current enabling Benjamin to soar in 'Frühling', and convey a moist-eyed acceptance of the changing seasons in 'September', even suggesting a hopeful looking-forward to the next spring. David Tollington's horn solo at the end breathed complete serenity.

Benjamin added a few theatrical touches of her own, turning anxiously towards leader Benedict Holland during his touching solo in 'Beim Schlafengehen', as though looking for reassurance. And in the utter tranquility of 'Im Abendrot', her face lit up at the appearance of the two larks at the end, gently impersonated, in James Leger's effective scoring for chamber orchestra, by Rachel Holt, flute and Chris Swann. Maddy Aldis-Evans, cor anglais, and Alex Mitchell, viola, brought real warmth to the climactic quotation from Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung*. [READ MORE](#)

Mike also listens to the Coull Quartet, to the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Ben Gernon, and to Supriya Nagarajan and Lucy Nolan.

[READ MIKE WHEELER'S LATEST FEATURES](#)



Thomas Trotter. Photo © Adrian Burrows

Roderic Dunnett: **Thomas Trotter**, the celebrated virtuoso English organist, has just achieved a milestone in his career. This year he has completed forty years as Birmingham City Organist: as he put it, 'my dream job'. And while a tribute in his honour by other forces, such as his performing with the **City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra** - he has performed and recorded with many top ensembles - would have been well deserved, it was Trotter himself who, in association with B:Music, the charity responsible for the second city's two main concert venues, took to the Symphony Hall podium to treat his audience to yet another solo display, a celebration of both music he specially loves, and of this special occasion, but above all showcasing his dazzling finesse as a performer.

Trotter's very active role has been to perform regularly on each of Birmingham's superb four-manual organs, the one at the beautifully refurbished Greek architecture-inspired Town Hall, which has stood since it opened in 1834 on what became only days before the Queen's death in 1901, Victoria Square, shining throughout Mendelssohn and Dvořák's time, and which has the most splendid and vivid, restored Victorian organ case; and on the organ of Symphony Hall, still looking sparkling new, its horizontal trumpets thrusting through from the smart case to provide a dazzling effect ...

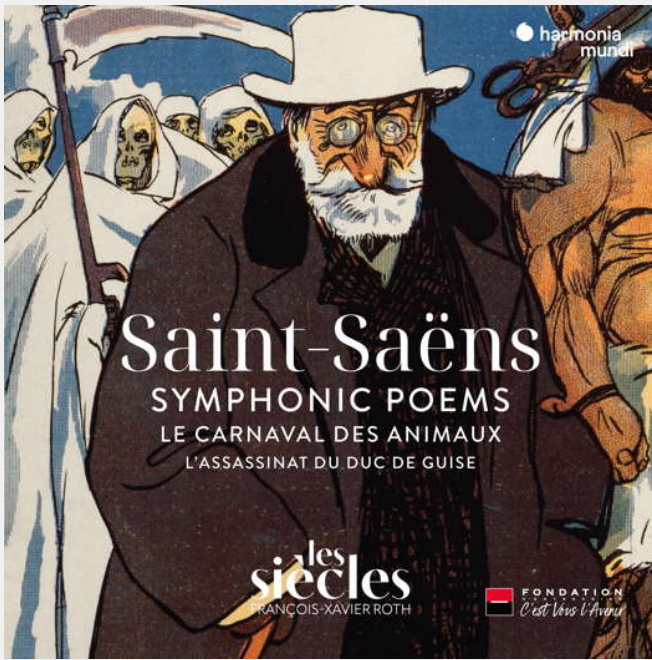
To summarise some of Thomas Trotter's arresting programme on that memorable evening of Friday 6 October 2023: two Fantasias and Fugues, at the outset **Bach's** G minor - one of his best known organ works, with a famous fugue, as perky as a Gigue, to which parodying students appended the nickname 'Old Ebenezer Prout, he is a silly man' (Prout was actually an eminent English teacher, editor and executant in the late nineteenth century); the other, **Franz Liszt's** greatest work for organ, also a Fantasia and Fugue.

[READ MORE](#)

Roderic also visits the 2023 Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester and reviews Henry Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* at Longborough Festival Opera.

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SPOTLIGHT — A GLORIOUS LISTENING EXPERIENCE



'... a thrilling and vibrant journey of melodic invention.'

Gerald Fenech: With the advent of silent pictures, a technical revolution occurred that was to change the form of entertainment forever. In 1907 Paul Lafitte, a wealthy novelist, publisher and financier, founded 'Le Film d'Art' to produce French films which he hoped would gain the admiration of the cultural elite as well as the patronage of the common people. His baptism of fire came in 1908 with *L'Assassinat du duc de Guise*, a French historical drama lasting just eighteen minutes. The film was a resounding critical success which opened the gates for an incessant flow of other productions.

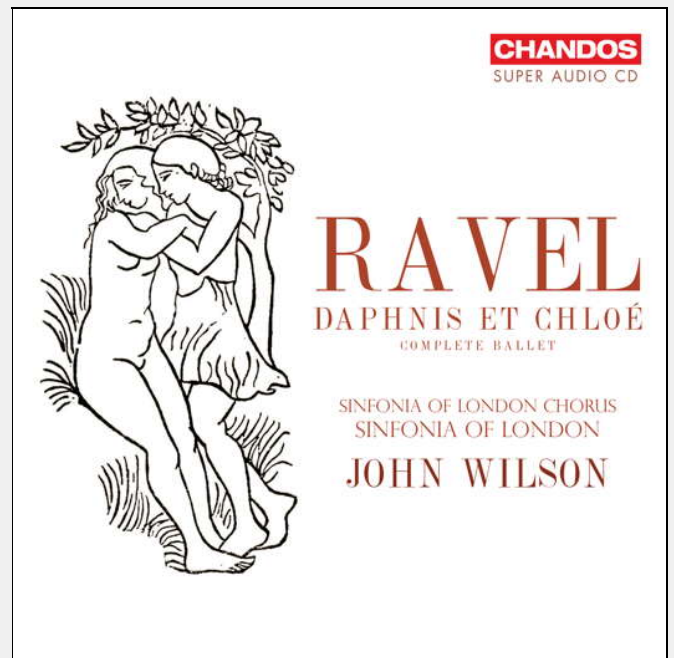
At this stage you might be asking where does Saint-Saëns fit in? Well the composer was commissioned to write the music required to support the action on screen and, fascinated by this opportunity to break new ground, he accepted wholeheartedly. He was provided with a finished version of the film and, after viewing its scenes several times, Saint-Saëns composed an introduction and five distinct tableaux to support its narrative.

He was not afforded a large budget and, consequently, he hired a small chamber ensemble. Saint-Saëns chose to utilize leitmotifs to support the identities of the two main characters and, using this method, he was also able to focus on the film's characters, imagery and narrative with more intensity. Saint-Saëns' music for this film served as a seminal event in the history of film score art, in that it represents the inaugural effort to support a film's narrative with originally descriptive music, paving the way for those overpowering scores that were to come later, when cinematic art became what it is today. [READ MORE](#)

Gerald Fenech: Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) composed *Daphnis and Chloe* between 1909 and 1912. We cannot consider the evolution and role of time - or the theme of desire - in **twentieth century music** without visiting *Daphnis and Chloe*. Conventions of rhythmic organization were becoming increasingly disregarded by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the most radical innovation being the distortion or outright avoidance of a clear beat. The opening of Ravel's ballet is a prime example of this development.

In 1909 Ravel accepted a commission from the Ballets Russes impresario Sergei Diaghilev to produce a score for one of their new ballets - a new version of an ancient Greek tale that had been popular in France since the Renaissance. The composer described his score as 'a choreographic symphony in three parts where the intention was to write a vast musical fresco, less scrupulous as to archaism than faithful to the Greece of my dreams'.

Daphnis received a lukewarm reception at its premiere at the Théâtre du Châtelet on 8 June 1912, but Ravel did not lose heart. Soon after, he published two concert suites derived from the original score which encapsulate the complete score. [READ MORE](#)



'Sound and presentation complement the music to the hilt.'



Gerald Fenech: Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) wrote three concertos for solo instrument and orchestra: for violin, cello and piano. The Piano Concerto, which the composer wrote between August and September 1876, though a masterwork in its genre, is the least performed of the three. The concerto is in three movements, each possessing distinct characteristics.

The opening *Allegro agitato* bursts with energy, introducing the piano and orchestra in a lively dialogue, punctuated by lush melodies and rhythmic motifs.

The middle *Andante sostenuto* takes a more introspective turn, offering a lyrical and deeply emotional experience, as the piano and orchestra engage in a heartfelt musical conversation.

The final *Allegro con fuoco* exudes exuberance, as Dvořák weaves Slavic folk elements into the fabric of the music, infusing it with dance-rhythms and vibrant melodies.

'... Dvořák's Piano Concerto is made to sound as convincing as the composer might have wished.'

This concerto requires particularly wholehearted advocacy as well as formidable virtuosity to overcome the technical shortcomings of Dvořák's piano writing, but the effort is rewarded with episodes of no less ardent lyricism than the high points of the composer's other two concertos for violin and cello respectively. Indeed, the piano concerto burns with a ferocity all of its own, more similar in that regard to Schumann's impassioned writing for soloist and orchestra.

[READ MORE](#)

Gerald Fenech: Bruckner's symphonies broke new ground, the sheer size and scope of each work combining the passion of Beethoven and the orchestral weight of Wagner. The musical language is darkly glowing, overwhelmingly beautiful, but also energetic and innovative. Indeed, many expert critics consider Bruckner's symphonies as a universe of immeasurable tonal expressive and metaphysical dimensions.

This monumental cycle has been six years in the making but it was worth waiting for. **Andris Nelsons** is a Bruckner interpreter of the highest order, and the way he builds from the bottom up is truly second nature to him. The Leipzig Gewandhausorchester responds with some gorgeously resplendent playing where all the mystery and grandeur of these works are exposed in translucent music making.

This ten-CD box also includes several orchestral excerpts from Wagner's operas. An extra treat to partner Bruckner's orchestral cathedrals. Sound, notes and presentation are simply outstanding.

[READ MORE](#)



'... all the mystery and grandeur of these works are exposed in translucent music making.'

Gerald's other recent reviews include Aled Jones on Decca, to *Sturm und Drang* 3 from Ian Page on Signum Classics, to Jean-Efflam Bavouzet playing Mozart, Marco Albonetti's *Postcards from Italy* and to *Oklahoma!*, all on Chandos, to Jonathan Tetelman singing Puccini and to music by Florence Price and William Dawson, both on Deutsche Grammophon.

[READ GERALD FENECH'S LATEST CD REVIEWS](#)



'The BBC Philharmonic Orchestra is on top form ...'

Geoff Pearce: I have been listening to quite a lot of the music of **Mieczysław Weinberg** (1919-1996) recently, since I first heard his gorgeous cello concerto. Before this time, like many listeners, I had not heard any of his music and knew absolutely nothing about him. He was certainly not known to me whilst I was a music student, and it is only recently that there has been an interest in his music, which has resulted in a number of fine recordings and performances.

This Chandos disc, *Weinberg: Dawn; Symphony No 12*, opens with a tone poem entitled *Dawn (Zarya)* and is the composer's Op 60. It was written to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the October 1917 Russian revolution. Whilst leading artists and composers were expected under the Soviet Union to contribute to these five yearly events, it appears that this work was not performed in the composer's lifetime, and didn't make its first appearance until a recording made in Manchester in 2019, under the baton of John Storgårds.

and starts almost from nothing with basses and muted brass. This quiet, mysterious mode is maintained, even with the addition of woodwind, until a lovely flute solo appears. It does remind me of some of the quiet and mysterious moments that occur in some Shostakovich symphonies; indeed the influence of Weinberg's friend and mentor Shostakovich is felt. All of a sudden, the music takes quite an animated and anguished turn, depicting the revolution and the call to arms. [READ MORE](#)

Geoff Pearce: This very interesting recording showcases three symphonies by **Dmitri Shostakovich** that revolve around the year 1917 and the events that transpired that momentous year. They are also the three most neglected Shostakovich symphonies. This recording certainly does them justice, and they have found a worthy champion in these assembled forces. The second and third symphonies also incorporate choral forces, and all are to be played as single movement symphonies, although all can be divided into four sections. Also included is Symphony No 13, 'Babi Yar' (although this title was not given by Shostakovich).

The Second Symphony is presented here in two sections. It was composed in 1927, is entitled *To October* and commemorates the ten year anniversary of the October Revolution. I think this is the strangest of all the Shostakovich symphonies and was very experimental for the time. It is a brief work lasting about ten minutes over all. It is here divided into two sections. The first section starts with one of the strangest openings I have ever heard and simulates chaos from which order emerges.

This is followed by a rather sadonic yet jaunty march like section, and the music changes quite frequently, is sometimes melancholic, and then almost frenzied dance-like music that is polyphonic. It has to be just about the strangest piece that Shostakovich ever wrote. After a weird fanfare-like moment, the section becomes quieter and reflective and ends quietly. [READ MORE](#)



'... a very interesting and fine set.'



Geoff Pearce: This is not a disc that will suit everyone's taste, but the music is interesting and the horn playing is phenomenal. I had not heard of María Rubio before, but her playing is going to change that. Horn and brass players, especially those that like cutting edge contemporary music, will enjoy this disc very much.

Air for solo horn by **Jörg Widmann** (born Munich, 1973) was composed in 2005 for the performer's teacher. The work is constructed from the natural harmonic tones produced by the horn. There is an interesting effect in that a grand piano must be placed facing the bell of the horn, and its sustain pedal held down throughout the performance. This causes sympathetic vibrations within the piano and provides an interesting, veiled accompaniment. This very demanding work employs a wide range of dynamics and effects.

e-Corno for solo horn and electronics by Vicent Gómez Pons (born 1961) was dedicated to another teacher of María Rubio. It is in three sections with a cadenza, and lasts a little over eight minutes. It also contains 'real-

'... one cannot help but be impressed with the performances, the power of the music and what it is expressing ...'

time' electronic processing. This is a very interesting sonic experience, and each section explores a different sonic interaction between horn and computer. Even if you do not care for such music, you are going to find this a fascinating and strangely satisfying journey.

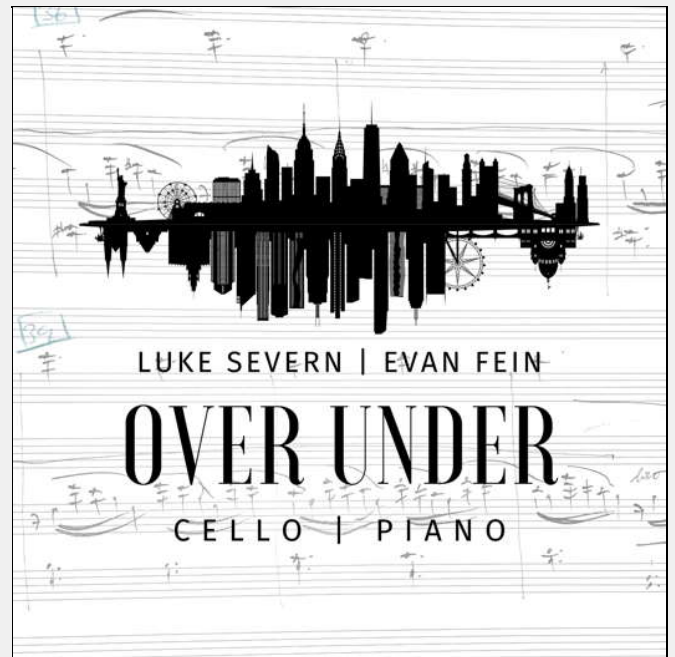
One's Song (2012-2015) by Nina Šenk (born Ljubljana, 1982) is scored for horn and *ad libitum* instrumental group. The duration is about eight-and-a-half minutes. The original version was for solo horn, and this second version of the piece employs the instrumental forces as a kind of echo of the horn melodies, and refers to them as an 'echo ensemble'. They are very much more than this, and there is a clear explanation in the accompanying booklet. [READ MORE](#)

Geoff Pearce: This fine recording features a collaboration between two fine artists - Australian composer, conductor and cellist Luke Severn and American composer and pianist Evan Fein - and contains two sonatas. It is a great recording with concise programme notes and very good sound quality.

Evan Fein's Sonata for Cello and Piano No 2, Op 28 (2020) is a substantial and quite tonal work. I think that listeners will readily enjoy this well-crafted composition.

The first movement is serene and warm, as the title suggests. There are contrasting moments where the nature is more playful, but in character, it reminds me of a warm sunny day. There is a nice little flourish at the end. Both performers are very competent musicians who do this work justice. This is one collaboration that has worked very well. [READ MORE](#)

Geoff also listens to Muzio Clementi sonatas on Piano Classics, to Emily Howard's *The Anvil* on Delphian Records, to music by Todd Mason on Ulysses Arts, and to *October Skies*, piano music by Harry Ore and to Nicole Esposito and Çağatay Akyol's *Intersections*, all on MSR Classics. [READ GEOFF'S LATEST REVIEWS](#)



'... I particularly enjoyed the new sonata by Evan Fein.'



'The singing and the playing are largely excellent, but this is not the greatest production available ...'

Patrick Maxwell: Ah, Bayreuth. There is definitely something ultimately mystical and alien about the idea of the annual **Richard Wagner** festival to many British music-lovers: we are treated to a huge variety of music for every summer festival, from the Proms to the Three Choirs, even with the familiar favourites. The notion of a hugely expensive festival dedicated entirely to the works of Vaughan Williams, built on the foundations laid down by the composer himself and with a devoted and devout fan base of highly opinionated regulars seems obscure at best. It certainly wouldn't get very far through the paperwork of Arts Council funding at the moment.

Yet still Bayreuth continues to maintain its dubious position at the heart of our experiences of Wagner and indeed at some point in the centre of the whole idea of the Western canon. It is still a musical pilgrimage. Yet it doesn't seem too certain that many would want to make such a religious journey, or indeed be converted to a life of Wagner-worship, if they were to chance upon Valentin Schwarz's 2022 production of *Götterdämmerung*.

The last part of The *Ring* cycle should be a field day for any pioneering director in search of a dramatic 'set-piece'. The eventual gift of the cursed Ring to the

Rhinemaidens and the fall of Valhalla into flames at the end in Act III is powerful enough without Wagner's supreme score. Unfortunately it was cut down to such unexplainable banalities by Schwarz's attempt to present the opera as a small scale family drama, if the family we're looking after is some kind of mash-up of the Murdoch dynasty, Russian plutocrats and the Adams family.

Schwarz's ideas came under heavy criticism when the *Ring* came to its conclusion last year, with laments often focusing on its weakness in comparison to the previous radical revamps at Bayreuth, such as Wieland Wagner's in the 1950s. Ultimately, this strange show takes away from some of the wonderful singing, playing and musical direction on offer.

This **Deutsche Grammophon** recording of **Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*** from last year is part of the new Stage+ platform, launched in 2020, with the laudable aim of giving a full online experience to viewers after the traditional rigour and intensity of the DG discs of the last century. It is something of a daring venture: there will only be so many with the time and attention span to sit down to four-and-a-half hours of post-modern Wagner. Yet the filming is immaculate, the attention to detail impressive, and the production gives a good enough sense of being as close as possible to the Festspielhaus itself.

And the singing is largely fantastic, imbued with a dedication to Wagner's intentions that we should expect. The standout performances were Clay Hilley as Siegfried, especially as he stepped in at a day's notice to play the role during the Festival. He gives a beautifully full-bodied rendition, with the mix of macho posturing and intense lyricism to the role. Hilley's voice is essentially perfect for singing of this kind, and an understandable reticence in his acting is more than compensated by a singularly impressive performance. The other highlight is Albert Dohmen's Hagan, whose voice gives more variety and vitality to the monochromatic image Schwarz and the costume director Andy Besuch seemed intent on giving this fascinating character.

Brünnhilde is definitely the most technically difficult and intellectually complicated part in the opera, but Irène Theorin's performances unfortunately remind you certainly of the first of these facts too often. Her performance is muscular and assured at times, but too often the sound is taut when her character needs lightness, and rushed when it needs space. The ramshackle rendering of the opera's final scene, combined with Schwarz's bamboozling setting, is plain strange. [READ MORE](#)

Patrick Maxwell: This wonderfully worshipful recording of **Wagner's** most worshipful opera takes something of a pride of place in the post-war recordings of high German Romanticism. In hearing these venerated discs - like Solti's epic *Ring* cycle from the 1950s and 60s, the first DG recordings of Karajan or the Fischer-Dieskau/Moore Lieder of the same time - it is not difficult to imagine that such impassioned and skilled musicianship was only possible from those who had been born in the first years of the **twentieth century**, survived its middle and had dedicated its second half to their music making alone. That it was the intensity of Schubert, Beethoven, Strauss and Wagner above all that crowned their achievement should come as no surprise. It's as though these magisterial figures, now embossed in recording gold, were fulfilling a desire of their audiences and of themselves to understand the horrors that had gone before with such devotion to the canonical works of the past.



'All these impressive voices, heard here in their prime, combined with Knappertsbusch's wonderful orchestra, make a sound which is truly intimate and doubly intense.'

The reinvention and attempted restoration of Wagner after the War was the focus of this drive. Emblematic of this were the revolutionary set designs of Wieland Wagner, who replaced the traditionally naturalistic scenes with provocatively bare scenes of white. Such minimalism was anathema to **Hans Knappertsbusch**, who had based his admirable musical reputation on intensely moving renditions of Wagner in Vienna and Munich before and during the War, marked by their slow tempi and adherence to Wagner's scores. Above all, Knappertsbusch was known for his *Parsifal*, and this recording shows why.

Slow tempo and ample *rubato* are certainly hallmarks of his style, and the Bayreuth Orchestra duly follows with all the characteristics of the mid-twentieth-century Wagner one would expect: *molto vibrato* in the strings, fierce dynamic changes at points of emphasis, and the shudderingly, out-of-tune brass sound that somehow fits the sense of organic, natural growth Wagner wants to find from it. This sound continued in Karajan, as his 1981 recording displays. Just listen to the almost meandering, penitential strings from the Prelude's *Grundthema* and the mannered articulation of the brass in the 'Faith' motif.

The cast is superlative. **Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's** voice is instantly recognisable to many, but he makes a truly intense and typically text-driven commitment to the role of Amfortas.

Martha Mödl, one of the three great Wangerian sopranos of the second half of the last century, brings a glorious sound to the enchanting Kundry. [READ MORE](#)

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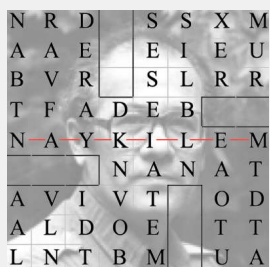
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