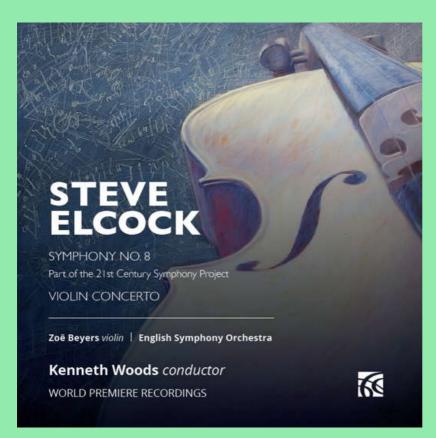


Originality and Freshness — Issue 182, June 2024



'... well-balanced and quite beautiful ...'

Geoff Pearce: I do not think that I have heard anything by Steve Elcock (born 1957) before. This is my loss, because he is regarded as one of the UK's foremost composers, even though this has only recently come about. Whilst he is a self-taught composer, this is not evident in these two works, and his output is quite substantial including ten symphonies to date. If the two works presented on this release are any indication to the depth and quality of his work, then he will be a composer well remembered.

The Violin Concerto, Op 13, is in three movements and was started in 1996. There was a long break before the composer worked on the last movement in 2006. It was not until 2022 that the work was premiered - with the same forces as on this recording.

The first movement is fast and energetic and the soloist enters almost from the beginning. There is an originality and freshness in this movement. While there is an intensity and drive, it is not at all grim and there are moments where the

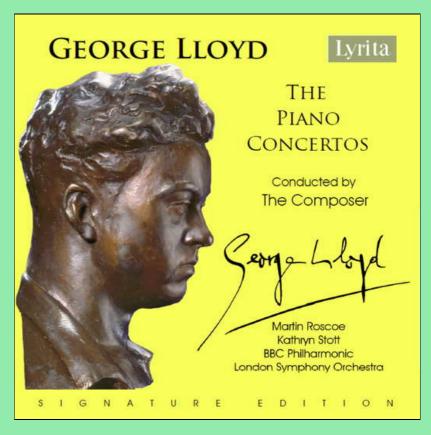
music relaxes so one does not feel overwhelmed. This is obviously modern music, but it is definitely very listenable. The composer has a firm grasp of orchestration and the forces gathered give their all to deliver a fine result.

The second movement contrasts the first movement. It is slow and reflective for the most part. The composer uses a 'change-ringing technique' to get the effect of distant bells in the strings, against which the soloist thoughtfully sings above. The effect is quite glorious and beautiful, and the climax of the work is filled with joy, before the subdued nature of the opening of the movement reasserts itself. **READ MORE** 

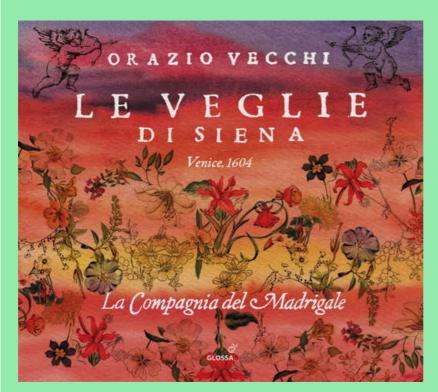
Geoff Pearce: For some time I have been intrigued by the composer George Lloyd (1913-1998), and have heard a few of his symphonies, but not the piano concertos. This set is interesting because the recordings are all conducted by the composer, and feature two very fine orchestras and soloists. Lloyd served in World War II, was severely affected by it, and the first three concertos on this set show the influence of that.

The first concerto, entitled *Scapegoat*, was composed in 1963 and dedicated to and first performed by the composer's friend, **John Ogdon**. On this recording, the soloist is **Martin Roscoe**, performing with the **BBC Philharmonic**. It is divided into five tracks for this recording. The piece is interesting in that it is unmistakably music of the **twentieth century**, but there are moments when its romantic soul shines forth rather gloriously. **READ MORE** 

READ GEOFF'S LATEST REVIEWS



'... there is much to be gained from this set ...'



'Inspirational performances ...'

Rome, Verona, Florence and Ferra Eventually he went back to Modena with the hope of putting things straight, but considerable financial difficulties hampered the advancement of his career. **READ MORE** 

Gerald Fenech: Orazio Vecchi (1550-1605) was born in Modena and studied with Salvatore Essenga, a Servite friar there. In addition he prepared for holy orders with early education at the Benedictine monastery and took holy orders sometime before 1577. By the end of the 1570s he was well connected with the composers of the Venetian school since he collaborated with them in writing a 'sestina' for a ducal marriage. During this period he accompanied Count Baldassare Rangoni on his travels, going to Bergamo and Brescia.

He was maestro di cappella at Salò Cathedral between 1581 and 1584. Following this, he was the choir master at the Cathedral of Reggio Emilia until 1586. In that year he moved to Correggio where he was appointed canon of the cathedral there. He composed copiously during this time there, though he felt isolated from the major musical centres of Italy such as Rome, Verona, Florence and Ferrara.

Gerald Fenech: Today John Williams (born 1932) is considered as the most prolific and widely honoured living composer of film music and the most Oscar-nominated person alive. He was born in New York but moved to Los Angeles with his family when he was sixteen, where he studied composition with Mario Castelnovo-Tedesco.

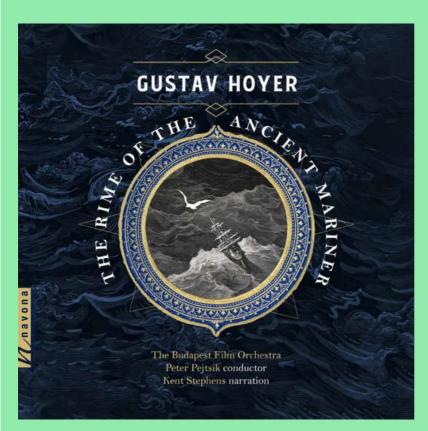
After service in the Air Force, Williams returned to New York to attend Juilliard where he studied piano with Rosina Lhevinne. He also worked as a jazz pianist in both clubs and on recordings. Williams eventually moved back to Los Angeles where he began his career in film studios, working with such composers as Bernard Herrmann, Alfred Newman and Franz Waxman. In 1960 he went on to write music for many TV programmes, winning two Emmy Awards.

Gerald also listens to Nielsen from Edward Gardner and the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra on Chandos, and to six volumes of *The Thomas Jensen Legacy* on Danacord.

READ GERALD FENECH'S LATEST CD REVIEWS



'... so much to have fun with.'



'... a sensitively crafted release ...'

John Dante Prevedini: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is the recent release from Navona Records of the setting of the Samuel Taylor Coleridge poem of the same name by composer Gustav Hoyer for orchestra and narrator. The work is performed by the Budapest Film Orchestra under the baton of Peter Peitsik with narration by Kent Stephens. The hour-long album is available in digital format with a booklet accessible on the Navona website, and the release features the entire seven-part work in two versions. The first seven tracks showcase the work with narration, while the last seven tracks present a purely orchestral version without the spoken words.

Following the seven parts into which Coleridge's poem is divided, Hoyer's piece spans seven movements played attacca. The scoring utilizes what some might describe as a neo-Romantic idiom, featuring a tonal harmonic language frequently shifting in key center and employing voice leading that is both chromatic and diatonic. In terms of text painting, the music is arguably not so

much thematic - or even motivic - in its intent. Instead, Hoyer seems focused on expressing the immediate emotion of each particular moment in the action of the poem. In this sense, his programmatic setting of the poem is perhaps rather 'cinematic' in its architecture as a determiner of compositional form.

One noteworthy aspect of his orchestral writing here is that, despite the depth and breadth of sonic devices he employs in his palette, the music maintains a continuous lightness and playfulness from start to finish. This seems to remind us that we are still in the cheerful warmth of the wedding feast, the setting wherein the mariner is really telling this long tale in the poem, just as much as we are in the **Antarctic** sea voyage recounted in the mariner's tale itself. All of this speaks to Hoyer's simultaneous attentiveness to many layers of emotional and atmospheric depth. Another notable aspect of the piece is how it uses the narration from a compositional standpoint. While the orchestral material is constantly fluctuating in tempo, dynamics and timbre, the narration unfolds at a near constant pace. This sets up the sense of surprise when the narration halts for a long dramatic pause - for an instrumental interlude - during a particularly important moment in the story.

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### READ JOHN DANTE PREVEDINI'S LATEST CD REVIEWS

Keith Bramich: Humanity's most influential governments and other political systems appear to be failing to push through the necessary changes to save our planet. Whether this is due to the incessant lobbying of oil and gas companies, thirsty for profit, or to resistance by ordinary people to the increased taxation and reductions in everyone's quality of life necessary to implement those changes in a timely fashion remains to be seen. Regardless of the cause, many of we humans are burying our heads in the sand and continuing as if there is no climate crisis.

Even before listening to the 2015 oratorio *Terra Nostra* ('Our Earth') by American composer **Stacy Garrop** (born 1969), her solution to our planetary crisis seems obvious just from reading the names of the oratorio's three parts - *Creation of the World*, *The Rise of Humanity* and *Searching for Balance* - in Garrop's words, a 'harmonious balance'.

Cedille Records' 2023 recording of Garrop's *Terra Nostra* was planned for release last month on *Earth Day* - 22 April 2024. **READ MORE** 



'... powerful, quirky and beautiful by turns, given life by the soloists, chorus and the varied orchestral accompaniment ...'

Keith also listens to *Sonatas, Songs and Chant* from the Auerbach-Pierce Duo on MSR Classics.

READ KEITH BRAMICH'S LATEST ARTICLES

Our reviews of recorded music 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.

LATEST CD REVIEWS

CD INFORMATION PAGES

NEW RELEASES

### DE-SCREENING — INVESTIGATING 'THE WIZARD OF OZ'

**Jeffrey Neil:** San Francisco Symphony's film series puts overlooked orchestral 'background music' in front of the screen. Focusing on the score of any of the epic Hollywood films on the line-up at Davies Hall will inevitably allow audiences to appreciate music that during a normal screening is relegated to mood enhancement or ambiance. But this 'de-screening', or upstaging of the actors by the symphony's musicians, is especially significant for a film like *The Wizard of Oz*, whose fame from the inception has been tied to its on-screen 'technical wizardry', acting, and the vocal virtuosity of legendary Judy Garland, Ray Bolger, Jack Haley and Bert Lahr.

The film's composer Herbert Stothart (1885-1949) has been eclipsed by his musical co-creators, songwriter Harold Arlen and lyricist Edgar 'Yip' Harburg, who are responsible for the songs. SF Symphony's world class musicians, under the direction of Esa-Pekka Salonen, elevate the orchestral music in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or 'Total Work of Art', in which cinematography, dialogue, and music work together to totally transport the audience into a vision that is more than just entertainment. It is also political, psychological, and philosophical. The music in particular has a surprising role in both lulling the audience into an intoxicated euphoria and awakening them from that stupor.

Behind the major key of the children's story in *The Wizard of Oz*, there is indeed a 'minor key' of parable and, I daresay, musical manipulation that speaks to a specific political reality in 1939: the Great Depression and a movement that believed technology could pull the country out of a decade of unemployment and malaise. The movie industry, as dream machine, provided a psychological escape hatch, while fueling its own growth at the ticket counter. But there was another political and economic reality, extending a half century from 1890 to the date of the film's release, which *WOZ* itself obfuscates through its sentimental portrayal of the Midwest and Dorothy's incomprehensible mantra about returning from whence she fled.

During the 1890s, the decade that inspired L Frank Baum's novel, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, farming provided an uncertain living because of the numerous droughts, blight, and then an economic depression, which saw crop prices plummet. Henry Littlefields' reading of the book as a political parable argues quite convincingly that the yellow brick road is an allegory for the gold standard in the US, which William Jennings Bryan's candidacy was meant to challenge by adding silver to the currency supply to stimulate the depressed economy. Jennings Bryan's presidential platform won over Midwestern farmers by vowing to increase the supply of money and, the theory goes, drive prices for agricultural goods up. In the book, Dorothy wears silver shoes, which Littlefield argues give her the kind of powers the populists believed silver had. Another fascinating interpretation of the parable of the story is that the Wicked Witch of the East represented the factory overlords of the East Coast cities, who enslaved their workers, as she does with the Munchkins. The reason the Wicked Witch of the West is killed by water is that recurrent droughts were the cause of Midwestern farmers' woes and grinding labor.

But in 1939, the farmers of Kansas, Oklahoma, and the northern panhandle of Texas were in another desperate situation now called the first man-made environmental disaster. In the spring of 1935, dust storms of monumental proportions blackened the landscape, like the tornado scene in the film. After years of using the newest plowing technology to rip up the delicate topsoil and plow up millions of acres as fast as possible, dry winds roared in and caused a deadly storm that spewed Midwestern topsoil all over the continent. People died from suffocation, and farms turned into desert overnight. Even the politicians in the District of Columbia and the nouveau riche



A dust storm approaching Spearman, Texas on 14 April 1935 (US National Archives)

industrialists in New York could not escape the dark cloud that blew over and enshrouded those cities. As if under a witch's spell, it was night in those great eastern cities during the middle of the day. READ MORE

READ JEFFREY NEIL'S LATEST ARTICLES

### **ENSEMBLE — TOP OF THE LISZT**



Melisa Ibrahimi in León on 19 May 2024. Photo © 2024 Fundación Eutherpe

Robert McCarney: Sunday 19 May 2024 was an unusually chilly day for this time of year in the north of Spain. I don't know if that made most people prefer to spend the evening sheltering in the warmth of their homes but whatever the reasons were, fewer people than usual seemed to be taking their evening stroll. For the hardy few who ventured to León's Sala Eutherpe for the evening concert that was on offer they and I were rewarded for their curiosity and love of live music with an unexpected marvel of a performance.

Our performer for the evening was young Kosovar pianist Melisa Ibrahimi. Having a musician from a sovereign state that is still not recognised as such by the Spanish government was unusual enough but equally so was Melisa's demeanour in the ten or so minutes before the concert. Usually at this time the musicians who are due to perform are firmly hidden behind a screen presumably trying to tame their last-minute nerves and get 'into the zone' as they say these days. Miss Ibrahimi on the other hand couldn't have been more relaxed and seemingly only wanted to spend her final free minutes before the concert engaging with her public as much as possible.

When the appointed hour arrived and the lights dimmed, Miss Ibrahimi strode scoreless onto the stage and proceeded to

dazzle us for the next hour or so. She started off her recital with two crisply executed sonatas by the still underplayed **Domenico Scarlatti**. A very clever Neapolitan *antipasto* with a definite Spanish twist to ease her and her audience gently into the evening.

She followed this with a most impassioned performance of **Beethoven**'s so-named twenty-third piano sonata. Through no fault of her own I had some misgivings about the health of the piano, particularly in some of those magical pedal-heavy bass chords. On the positive side these sounds only served to make one think how extraordinary and extraordinarily daring or crazy these sounds must have seemed back in the early nineteenth century, especially when played on a typical piano of that era.

After all that Beethovenian fire Melisa treated us to a prelude by **Rachmaninov** from his Opus 32 set. I have to come clean and say that little of Rachmaninov's music does much for me but after Melisa's rapt rendition of this B minor jewel, maybe as close as Rachmaninov ever got to sounding like Ravel, I was reminded that this was one piece of his I wanted to hear again. **READ MORE** 

# READ ROBERT MCCARNEY'S LATEST ARTICLES

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**Jeffrey Neil:** During a visit to Cologne Dom last February, I had a rather stunning realization about the stained glass windows. If you walk around this vast cathedral, you encounter panels that, while dazzling, are not always easy to connect to a story or a character in Scripture. And so it dawned on me that this commonplace about the pedagogical role of stained glass to illustrate stories to the unschooled might not be all that true. If two visitors - both of us with higher degrees in theology - were having a hard time identifying some of the stories, how transparent would these stories be to a medieval congregant who attended Mass twice a year and could not read the Bible? And how much of what is considered religious art does more than just shock and awe with color, like the random computer-generated patterns of colored glass that Gerhard Richter installed in the south transept across from the ancient stained glass?



Stained glass windows in Cologne Cathedral. Photo © 2024 Jeffrey Neil

These questions of the pedagogical function and devotional possibilities of art were on my mind during the San Francisco Bach Choir's performance of the *St John Passion* on 18 May 2024. Is it just gorgeous music that you can allow to flood over you, but otherwise does not do much to deepen one's relationship to Scripture, or does the music challenge our conventional understanding of the text? It's not only that the Reformation and vernacular translations of the Bible made Scripture more accessible and intimate than a story told in large colorful images in a cathedral. **Bach** embeds hymns and tunes that would have been familiar to a regular churchgoer and stories that they knew backwards and forwards from Scripture. But the interplay of music and text, vocalization and instrumentation, creates a piece that is greater than the sum of its parts. READ MORE READ JEFFREY NEIL'S LATEST ARTICLES

Ron Bierman: The first act of Opera A La Carte's production of *La bohème* featured costuming and wellused furniture that made Rodolfo's bohemian Parisian garret seem more real than the elaborate expensive sets and costumes of many other productions. After all, Rodolfo - tenor Adam Caughey - and his three friends are starving artists, and bohème is a notable example of opera verismo.

Who knew? Turns out you can stage a memorable version of *La bohème* with underappreciated local singers and a modest budget.



A set for Opera À La Carte, San Diego's La bohème. Photo © 2024 Ron Bierman

I spoke briefly with Director Angelina Réaux before the first act. She said she'd spent four months shopping for props and costumes - seventy-four of the latter. Irregularly scheduled rehearsals were running during the same four months of shopping. It must have required enormous dedication and hard work for her and soprano Abla Hamza, the company's founder and Executive and Artistic Director, to keep the cast and support staff committed for that long when many probably had other commitments.

A decision to stage performances on four consecutive nights added to the challenge. A double set of singers was needed for the exhausting roles of Mimì, Rodolfo, Musetta and Marcello so that neither set sang Puccini's taxing vocal score on two successive evenings and risk damaging their voices. When I attended on the second evening, the performers sang and acted with entertaining strength and confidence.

Director Réaux said she'd moved the opera's setting a century ahead to occupied France during World War II. She explained it added an additional element of struggle to the story. In the Café Momus of the second act, for example, the original Alcindor is a French official dining with Musetta. Soprano Michelle Gallardo-Arias' interpretation of Quando m'en vo, one of Puccini's most popular arias, was one of the evening's highlights. When she rose to sing it in Réaux's setting, the official - Réaux's husband, baritone Michael Sokol - wears the uniform of a collaborating Nazi officer, and there is little doubt Musetta, his seductress and Marcello's ex, is flirting with Marcello - baritone Michael Segura - and humiliating Alcindor. She then compounds her risk when she exits with Marcello and leaves Alcindor with the bill for Marcello and his friends. READ MORE

Ron also reviews San Diego Opera's Madama Butterfly production. READ RON BIERMAN'S LATEST FEATURES

**Mike Wheeler:** In Sir Mark Elder's penultimate visit to Nottingham's Royal Concert Hall as Music Director of the Hallé Orchestra - Nottingham, UK, 17 May 2024 - they were joined by **Stephen Hough** in a performance of **Brahms**' Piano Concerto No 1 which I don't think I've ever heard equalled for its poleaxing intensity. Yet it never overplayed its hand. After the ferocity of the opening paragraph, the gentler second theme registered a sense of numbed shock. Hough's first entry suggested a process of coming to terms with what we just heard, his second theme offering a few moments of emotional equilibrium, just as the woodwind episode, in its stillness, suggested that some degree of consolation was possible. The moment before the start of the big build-up even managed a hint of playfulness. Brahms then begins hammering away at his approach to the recapitulation, to the point where you think he's overdoing it. But he's overdoing it for a reason, and as Hough crashed in with his E major chord, after the thumping D minor cadence, it delivered a real jolt - almost physical in its impact. Brahms is not a composer I generally associate with primal-scream levels of expressive force, but this came pretty close, and the coda's fieriness was simply staggering.



Stephen Hough. Photo © 2016 Sim Canetty-Clarke

The start of the second movement breathed the kind of tranquility that has come through the worst, and has started to pick up the pieces. The strings' opening theme glided along smoothly, creating a consoling atmosphere so still you hardly dared breathe. Throughout, the assuaging quality of Hough's solo passages matched the orchestra's spell-binding concentration.

Soloist and orchestra established a blend of impetuosity and determination at the start of the finale. As so often on previous occasions, the central fugue vindicated the Hallé Orchestra's regular stage layout, with the second violins to the conductor's right - the clarity with which their initial entry came across was enough to make the point. By now the performance was starting to sound festive in a way that felt earned, not glib. (Brahms is never glib, even at his most relaxed.) Hough's solo cadenza felt like a lightning-rod for the few remaining tensions, and the late episode in which the woodwind imitate a village-band was a delight.

READ MORE

**Mike Wheeler:** With Alexandre Bloch and Sunwook Kim replacing, respectively, the advertised conductor and soloist, the Philharmonia Orchestra paired two major works from the 1880s that set each other off very effectively - Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, UK, 1 May 2024.

**Brahms**' Piano Concerto No 2 was launched by Ben Hulme's tranquil horn solo. Kim replied in kind, before pouncing like a tiger on his next theme. Conductor, pianist and orchestra hung on tight to the music's expressive twists and turns â€" at times fiery enough to evoke the turbulence of Brahms' First Piano Concerto, at others able to make the storm and stress simply melt away.



Sunwook Kim. Photo © Marco Borggreve

There was more tigerish pouncing at the start of the second movement, offsetting a disembodied high violin line. The chiming figure in the trio section balanced depth of bass tone and bright upper strings, before returning to the opening music, which I don't think I've ever heard sound so angry.

Alice Neary's cello solo, opening the door into the third movement, was the perfect response, the calm after the storm. Kim stole in gently, and the movement had a profound healing quality. There was still some turbulence to be laid to rest, but the calmness over the later pages was breathtaking, with Neary duetting delightfully with, first, Timothy Rundle, oboe, then Charlotte Ashton, flute.

Mike also writes about concerts given by the Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra, Derby Choral Union and the Sitwell Singers.

READ MIKE WHEELER'S LATEST REVIEWS

Lucas Ball: The Worcestershire Symphony Orchestra's latest outing involved the remarkable virtuosity of English violinist Katy Smith in Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto. She brought out all the tragic Russian elements that are unmistakably Tchaikovskian but also the folky moments as well.

Katy Smith's reverence for the **romanticism** of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto would seem to be as great as her interest in the development of the violin bow and its impact on different repertoire. Very conspicious was the layers of emotion in Katy Smith's rendition of the Tchaikovsky and I can't help but think that her interest in bows must have affected the romantic energy in the performance. READ MORE

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Katy Smith

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## CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — WHO'S GONE WHERE?

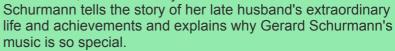
On 1 June 2024, Icelandic composer **Anna Thorvaldsdóttir**'s major new orchestral installation piece, *Metaxis*, will receive its first performance from the Iceland Symphony Orchestra (ISO) conducted by Eva Ollikainen at Harpa Concert Hall, as part of the opening celebration of the 2024 Reykjavík Arts Festival and of the festival's collaboration with Harpa and the ISO.

The annual Sheepdrove Piano Competition - held during Newbury Spring Festival in the UK (11-25 May 2024) - has been won by Misha Kaploukhii from Russia, a student from the Royal College of Music in London.



Carolyn and Gerard Schurmann

In a new video by Steven C Smith marking the centenary of British composer Gerard Schurmann, his wife Carolyn



Chamber Music San Francisco has appointed Jeanette Wong as its next executive director.

The Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, USA has

announced a new director of chamber music - Annie Fullard.

William Donaldson, a young music student at Hertfordshire University in Hatfield, UK has had his very visually inspired orchestral score, Oceanic Voyage, featured in a concert of music by classic film composers.

Intermusica has signed up German composer Detlev Glanert (born 1960) for worldwide general management.



Daniel Lozakovich. Photo © Sasha Gusov

Erato has signed an exclusive agreement



Warner Classics signed an exclusive agreement with young Swedish violinist Daniel Lozakovich.

The Adelaide Symphony Orchestra has announced the appointment of British conductor Mark Wigglesworth (born 1964) as its next chief conductor.

Finnish conductor Eva Ollikainen is to step down as chief conductor and artistic director of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra once she has completed her contract in summer 2026.



Misha Kaploukhii



Annie Fullard

The Australian Youth Orchestra returns to Victoria for two performances in July 2024 with *Mood: Mahler and Wagner*. The concerts feature the first performances of *Overt* by Australian composer Iain Grandage.

B:Music - a music charity based in Birmingham, UK, with a mission to inspire a love of live music through performance, participation and learning - has announced its 2024/25 Birmingham Classical Series at Symphony Hall.

We mark the passing of Peruvian lyric tenor **Francesco Petrozzi**, Polish pianist **Stefan Wojtas**, French opera administrator **Hugues Gall**, Austrian violinist **Werner Hink**, Polish film composer **Jan Andrzej Paweł Kaczmarek**, German tenor **Willi Brokmeier**, American-born British musicologist and Elgar expert **Jerrold Northrop Moore**, Italian conductor, musicologist and writer **Tito Gotti**, British pianist and music teacher **Renna Manduell**, German organist and teacher **Samuel Kummer**, Czech tenor



Iain Grandage

Miroslav Švejda, English conductor Andrew Davis, Cuban oboist and conductor Jorge Rivero Tirado, Finnish organist Kalevi Kiviniemi and Australian composer, arranger, oboist, music educator, critic and eclectic musician lan Keith Harris.

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# CLASSICAL MUSIC WORD-SEARCH PUZZLES

Canadian composer **Allan Rae**'s classical music wordsearch puzzles, including the latest, *Zipangu* and *Tailleferre*, are **here**.



## COMING SOON AT CLASSICAL MUSIC DAILY ...

Look out, over the next few days, for a new episode of Robert McCarney's long-running series *Echoes of Oblivion*, for Jeffrey Neil's reports from San Francisco Opera, for Gerald Fenech's review of Sibelius' Symphonies 2 and 5 on the ATMA Classique label, for Geoff Pearce writing about Janine Jansen's Sibelius and Prokofiev violin concertos on Decca, for Ron Bierman's revisit to a DVD about Daniel Barenboim's West Eastern Divan Orchestra playing in Ramallah and for another word search puzzle from Allan Rae.

This newsletter is an occasional PDF taster for our high quality and colourful online classical music magazine, published every day since January 1999. Founded by the late **Basil Ramsey** and current editor Keith Bramich.

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