



Peace comes dropping slow — Issue 183, July 2024



Bernadette Greevy

Robert McCarney: I recently listened to a soprano saying with polite exasperation how that when people find out she is a musician they typically ask her what instrument she plays. When she informs them that she sings they typically respond 'ah but that's not an instrument'. The veracity and tact of this statement are inversely proportional to the ignorance from whence it oozed. For anyone out there who thinks the human voice is not an instrument, I would ask you to ask yourselves why do all professional and many amateur singers spend decades training their larynxes, diaphragms and lungs. Not to mention investing so much time and effort in the ability to reproduce, with precision, what are oftentimes enormously complex vocal scores. On top of this the far more nebulous art of interpretation requires as much dedication and study as any singer has at their disposal. Why do trained singers even in the world's largest opera theatres not need artificial amplification to make every note they emit perfectly audible? Artificial amplification that it seems not even buskers can dispense with these days.

The human voice in its fundamental role in not only the Western classical tradition from Gregorian chant on but also in so many ancient and vigorous indigenous musical traditions from around the world is arguably the greatest of all musical instruments and when trained can produce music unlike anything else in the universe. [READ MORE](#)

Robert's article above was dedicated in loving memory to Owen Thomas Aquinas McCarney (1934-2023).

Robert is back with a new series of *Echoes* which has already, during this month, mutated into a new audio format with the title *Resounding Echoes*. The first two episodes in the new format and two episodes in the previous format are all here to explore. [READ MORE](#)

ENSEMBLE — BRINGING OUT THE PARADOXES



From left to right: Stephen Hopkins, Andrea Carroll and Joshua Guerrero. Photo © 2024 Karli Cadel

Ron Bierman: About halfway into her two-hour plus recital with tenor Joshua Guerrero, soprano Andrea Carroll gave a well-earned compliment to their accompanist Stephen Hopkins for his technique and versatility. Both were challenged during the unusually varied program the two singers had fashioned.

The mix began with *Santa Lucia*, a Neapolitan song Guerro sang as he entered stage right. After two less familiar selections from the genre, he revealed that his career as an award-winning opera singer had begun with the Neapolitan songs he'd sung in his early twenties while working as a Las Vegas gondolier. I've asked many successful singers over the years how they became interested in opera and prepared for a career as a singer. Gondoliering has never come up.

But it was easy to picture the hit Guerrero must have been as he steered through Vegas waters while singing traditional Italian love songs for romantic couples. Though at this concert, it did take a stanza or so before his tone sounded entirely comfortable.

Many opera singers, male and female, attempt forays into pop or jazz idioms. Few succeed. After years of training a voice for opera, it's hard to turn off the resulting vocal precision and unamplified power and projection. Guerrero is an exception. He'd easily pass for a modern Italian crooner, and later in the evening he showed why he's also an award-winning operatic tenor.

Each time he finished a song, Carroll playfully pretended it was her turn and bounced onto the stage with the start of a cheerful coloratura vocalese from Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, the princess's start of a conversation with equally cheerful birds. When it actually was her turn, she repeated the theme then outlined her own path to opera. She was singing when she 'came from the womb', and grew up with the music of cartoons and Broadway. [READ MORE](#) [READ RON BIERMAN'S LATEST FEATURES](#)

Jeffrey Neil: I doubt I am alone in failing to grasp the nuances of plot in *The Magic Flute* no matter how many times I see it - in spite of a lifetime studying precisely that genre of romance with its complicated plot twists and - if we're being honest - random episodes. Mozart's final opera was a collaboration with librettist and comedic actor/singer Emanuel Schikaneder to create a humorous fairy tale that also advanced Enlightenment ideas and possessed coded references to freemason rituals. But the fairy tale is in its heart of hearts a benighted form of storytelling, dependent on repetitions that don't necessarily lead to self-knowledge and curses that a character can't reason himself out of. There are episodes that are merely there to entrance, but have no purpose in advancing a plot along Aristotelian lines where some action inevitably leads to another. Barrie Kosky and Suzanne Andrade removed the *Singspiel* altogether and replaced spoken dialogue with silent cinema intertitles accompanied by forte piano renditions of Mozart's *Fantasias*.

In doing so, the animated vision enriches the underlying paradoxes of the opera, such as the elevation of 'reason' and the ideal of a sublimated, 'wiser' love. The Komische Oper of Berlin's production awakens us to the absurdity and dysphoria under the quest for transcendence, but not by bludgeoning us with depressing scenery and a cast arrayed in black trench coats. Instead, delightful animations and creative blocking make us laugh our way into the realization.

Even without taking into consideration the Masonic codes embedded in the music and the narrative of *The Magic Flute*, there is much that is perplexing. For starters, the score is sometimes at odds with the musicality of the poetic language itself. Mozart wrote music in parts that obfuscates the regular meter or rhyme of the poetry. Then, there is the plot, which is confounding if one gives it any thought at all. The Queen of the Night and her three maidens save Tamino from the serpent; the purportedly evil queen provides him and Papageno with the help from the three boys and the enchanted tools to confront any conflicts; and let us not forget that the Queen is the one who has introduced the lovers to each other without forcing them to undergo any trials. Sarastro, on the other hand, abducts the princess and then forces her and Tamino to undergo totally unnecessary trials. But in the rhetoric of the opera, Sarastro is elevated and considered an enlightened ruler. The logic of the plot is maddening. [READ MORE](#)



Kwangchul Youn as Sarastro and Zhengyi Bai as Monostatos in San Francisco Opera's production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Photo © 2024 Cory Weaver

Mike Wheeler: Writer and broadcaster Stephen Johnson returned to Nottingham's Royal Concert Hall - Nottingham, UK, 31 May 2024 - with the **BBC Philharmonic Orchestra** and conductor Martyn Brabbins, for his latest Discovering Music event, in which his presentation is illustrated by live excerpts from the orchestra, followed by a complete performance of the work in question. The subject this time was **Alexander Glazunov**, and his three-movement Fourth Symphony in particular.

Before Johnson came on stage, we heard what is probably Glazunov's best-known piece, 'Autumn' from his ballet *The Seasons*. The opening Bacchanale had a real sense of celebration, though taken at not quite such a headlong pace as some I've heard. As became clear later, some extra impetus was being kept in reserve for its final return. Glazunov's bright orchestral colours glittered and sparkled. The waltz, reprised from the Summer section, swayed deliciously, and the last appearance of the

Bacchanale was suitably boisterous. When at the end, the stars began shining, according to the ballet's original scenario, the BBCPO captured all the gleam of Glazunov's scoring.

Stephen Johnson began his presentation of the Symphony with a potted biography of the composer. Anecdotes included references to him keeping a secret stash of vodka handy while teaching, and, unavoidably, his disastrous conducting of Rachmaninov's First Symphony at its premiere. He then drew attention to Glazunov's skills as a tunesmith. To illustrate the point, the cor anglais player (names of individual orchestra members were not available on this occasion) gave us part of the solo theme that opens the Symphony - a typically sinuous piece of Russian orientalism that could have stepped straight out of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, and none the worse for that.

Describing Glazunov's prodigious early career, Johnson pinpointed his Symphony No 4 as 'confident, mature'. We heard the cor anglais tune again, at its full extent. He suggested that Glazunov's long themes reflected the Russian landscape's huge open spaces, referring to his own experience of travelling through some of them.

Moving on to the Scherzo second movement, Johnson drew attention to the transparent orchestral sound, and how it could be sometimes be deceptive - he owned up to having previously mis-remembered a non-existent harp part.

The finale's introduction, he suggested, not only acted as a surrogate slow movement, but suggested the 'strange northern twilight' of high summer. As the quick music takes over, the trombones and tubas, he commented 'come into their own'. He went on to say what a 'player-friendly' work this is, which, he discovered when he asked the players, every section of the orchestra enjoyed playing - a point confirmed to me by one of the violinists I got chatting to afterwards.



Alexander Glazunov

In the performance itself, the introduction, with the cor anglais theme beguilingly played - as it had been in previous excerpts - with all the expansiveness Johnson had referred to earlier. After a no-fuss transition, the main section had plenty of forward drive, lit up by some characterful woodwind solos, and a way of moving in and out of energetic passages without the result sounding disjointed. Brabbins and the orchestra had a way of bringing out details of scoring without making it all sound cluttered. The Scherzo was taut and springy, with the trio marked by a beguiling clarinet solo, a heady, swirling carnival atmosphere at the climax, and a deft pay-off. The finale moved seamlessly from slow introduction to festive *allegro*, with the brass, largely held back until now, making their full impact in the linking fanfares. While the movement tends to be somewhat episodic, the performance made it all hang together.

Glazunov's Fourth may not be one of the great symphonies, but it's a thoroughly attractive work, all the same. Yes, there are echoes of **Borodin** and **Rimsky-Korsakov**, but it never sounds derivative, and Brabbins and the orchestra did it proud. Time for a Glazunov re-evaluation, I think.

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

Roderic Dunnett: Two recent events, centred on Oxford and Worcester, have served yet again to confirm the extraordinary talent, freshness and originality, and deep insight of **Ian Venables**, one of the most intensely admired and justly acclaimed English composers at work today.



Ian Venables. Photo © Anthony Cheng

Ian Venables' preeminence in the realm of English song has long been recognised. Each new work is a revelation. Whatever the texts he chooses to set - and by now they feature many different ones, one is overjoyed to point out - at its heart is the poetry itself, and the unique skill he displays to probe and prise out from the words, so impressively, both meaning and subtext.

Time and again, a Venables setting has proved a veritable marvel, especially for the unexpected discoveries it makes: not just its extraordinary empathy with the text; but so frequently the beauty, the joy or pathos, depending on the slant of the words. Each song - or more significantly, each cycle - is an exploration, and reveals a recognisable, highly individual, vitally appealing and invariably attractive style, through which he draws the constantly absorbed listener in and personifies each stanza and paragraph of his chosen poet. Invariably, he does his authors, whether British or other - American, for instance - a special service: he illuminates them by underscoring the intention and drift of the words, exploring their undertow, artfully teasing out, capturing and encapsulating the finest detail, lending specific emphases that enhance and uplift the understanding of the listener.

It has proved doubly exciting to discover that just as Venables excels so marvellously at what is known as Art Song (*Lied*), he is also a fine composer in other genres. Chamber music - his Piano Quintet, for instance, and especially energised, enterprising early String Quartet but also works for solo instrument - attracted him from quite early on, and it should not be forgotten that several of his song cycles have been coloured additionally by a solo instrument - clarinet, for instance, or viola - or latterly by a select group of instruments, as in his striking latest achievement. But church music too: he has composed anthems, perfect for the forces, some of them quite dazzling; a set of Responses; and to be heard this summer, both Evening Canticles - the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis. But above all comes his shining *Requiem*: gorgeously expressive, and widely hailed as one of the finest - if not *the* finest - of present day settings of the Mass for the Dead, it is has won huge recognition for its economy, eloquent, highly sensitive word setting and pervading tenderness. The entire work is - and many take the same view of his finest song cycles - a masterpiece. [READ MORE](#)

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Keith Bramich: Ross' orchestra of thirty-five players, led by Tina Bowles, was drawn from members of the Royal Academy of Music and from various amateur orchestras around London, and made a very impressive sound - definitely at the top end of amateur performances. The Strauss/Higgs *Rosenkavalier* suite was a great and fascinating concert opener, with interesting percussion and other effects. It features several scenes from the 1911 Strauss opera, set in Vienna in 1740.

Were there any common threads linking all the works in this concert? Influences of Viennese waltzes can be heard throughout the Strauss, and so yes, as far as I'm aware, the two threads here were *opera* and *dance*, with each work linked to at least one of them.

James Ross is musical director of several orchestras in the UK, and he also has a significant presence conducting in various other countries. He has conducted many first performances of new works and he's also director of the record label and music consultancy **Ulysses Arts**.



James Ross

Ross organised this event with **Clara Rodríguez**, who made her first appearance in a warm and sprightly account on St James Church's Fazioli piano of one of **Mozart's** most popular piano concertos - No 23 in A, K 488. I heard one or two tiny slips in the piano part here, but this is a very small price to pay for the thrill of live music making - if you need 100% accuracy, stay at home and listen to a recording. (Maybe I wouldn't have noticed had my seat not been almost closer than the soloist to some of the piano strings!)

In case you're wondering, the connection here with one of the threads mentioned above is that this concerto was written while Mozart was working on his opera *The Magic Flute*. The concerto's slow movement is seriously operatic in character, and the bubbly final *Allegro assai* has something of the feel of *opera buffa*.



Clara Rodríguez

Although she was born in Venezuela, Clara Rodríguez studied in London (and elsewhere) and is well known to London audiences for her concerts here. She also teaches at the Royal College of Music. She first appeared in this magazine's predecessor nearly twenty years ago, interviewed by the late Bill Newman in his fascinating and detailed feature, ***South American Belle***.

Clara Rodríguez next treated us to a selection of Venezuelan music, beginning with the simple *Mi Teresita Waltz* (1884) for solo piano by Caracas-born pianist, soprano, conductor and composer Teresa Carreño (1853-1917). The story of this piece is that it was written to accompany (in private) the composer's daughter Teresita's first dance steps, but later, having run out of encores at the end of a recital, she decided to play it in public, and this was so successful that she continued to play it hundreds of times at the end of her concerts.

Ross and his orchestral strings returned to accompany Rodríguez in selections from the *Antología de Valses Venezolanos* (Anthology of Venezuelan Waltzes) arranged by contemporary Venezuelan composer Juan Carlos Núñez (born 1947). This selection of three waltzes began with the nineteenth century *Vals Venezolano* (Venezuelan Waltz) by Rafael Saumell. This was followed by Núñez's own *Retrato de Ramón Delgado-Palacios* (Portrait of Ramón Delgado-Palacios), and the selection ended with *Mi Aplauso* (My applause) by the same Ramón Delgado-Palacios (1867-1902). [READ MORE](#)

CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — HIGH PEAKS

Performances, talks and masterclasses - events are free and open to the public at the fifteenth annual Berkshire High Peaks Festival, to be held this year, 20-31 July 2024 at a new venue: Bard College, Simon's Rock, 84 Alford Rd, Great Barrington, Massachusetts, USA.

At the core of the festival are over forty international students who, as they prepare for their professional lives, gather for intensive study, are coached as part of performing ensembles and enjoy discussions with and workshops by various composers, teachers and other figures in the music world.

To date, over six-hundred-and-fifty young musicians have been inspired by the High Peaks programme, many on full or partial scholarships.

For audiences and listeners, High Peaks offers wall-to-wall performances as participants - string players, pianists, vocalists and wind players - showcase their talent at the Kellogg Music Center, often alongside their mentors. [READ MORE](#)

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@ THE KELLOGG MUSIC CENTER
AT BARD COLLEGE AT SIMON'S ROCK

MONDAY, JULY 22 @7:30PM — RESIDENTS
TUESDAY, JULY 23 @7:30PM — RESIDENTS
THURSDAY, JULY 25 @7:30PM — FACULTY
SUNDAY, JULY 28 @7:30PM — RESIDENTS
TUESDAY, JULY 30 @7:30PM — FAREWELL

Moonlight Sonatas Concerts at Berkshire High Peaks Festival 2024



Bach & Telemann: Collegium Musicum concerts

The American chamber orchestra Kontrapunktus, founded in 2015 and based in the Los Angeles area, plays classical music in a Baroque style. The orchestra returns in August 2024 with five performances of its longest, most ambitious production yet, 'Bach & Telemann: Collegium Musicum'.

Even though Leipzig did not enjoy the same illustrious reputation as Dresden, Venice, Paris or Vienna during the Baroque era, it was a burgeoning musical scene that would eventually be recognised over time because of two composers who started and continued a tradition of performing music for the benefit of its townsfolk: **Georg Philipp Telemann** and **Johann Sebastian Bach**. The orchestra that performed under their direction would come to be known as Collegium Musicum. [READ MORE](#)

To the Body (2024), an immersive soundscape by American composer Nico Muhly for the exhibition *Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust* can be experienced at Chiesetta della Misericordia, Campo de l'Abazia 3550, Cannaregio, Venice, Italy until 24 November 2024. *To the Body* is commissioned by *Works & Process*, with support from the American Academy in Rome and the New York's Guggenheim Museum's *Asian Art Circle*.

On 10 November 2024 at 7pm, a second live performance of *To the Body* will be presented by *Works & Process* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, USA. *Yu Hong: Another One Bites the Dust* is now on view at the Chiesetta della Misericordia until 24 November 2024. The nearest vaporetto is Ca' d'Oro and the exhibition's opening hours, each week from Tuesday until Sunday, are 11am-7pm, (until 29 September) and 10am-6pm (1 October-24 November 2024). [READ MORE](#)



Nico Muhly. Photo © Heidi Solander

Erato has signed a new exclusive agreement with conductor Nathalie Stutzmann. The first recording under this new agreement, due for release in August 2024, is a Dvořák album with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, featuring the Symphony No 9 ('From the New World') and American Suite. [READ MORE](#)

Young Belgian-American conductor, pianist and composer Giulio Cilona will return to the Orchestra of the Opéra national de Lorraine in Nancy, France, as Principal Guest Conductor (Premier Chef Invité) starting from the 2024-2025 season. [READ MORE](#)

Twenty years after returning from Iraq, where he was deployed twice from 2003 to 2004 as a US Army journalist and photographer, American composer, church musician and combat veteran Jason Phillips has overcome his psychological war wounds to compose *A Soldier's Symphony* and complete his graduate music studies at Arizona State University. [READ MORE](#)

OBITUARIES

American-born pianist, puppeteer and puppet maker **Norman Shetler** died on 25 June 2024, aged ninety-three.

Australian musicologist and composer **David Tunley** died on 23 June 2024, aged ninety-four.

Estonian soprano **Margarita Voites** died on 20 June 2024, aged eighty-seven.

Scottish conductor **James Loughran** died near Glasgow on 19 June 2024, aged ninety-two.

Belgian soprano **Jodie Devos** died in Paris from breast cancer on 16 June 2024, aged only thirty-five.

Armenian-American violinist **Kevork Mardirossian** died in Bloomington, Indiana on 11 June 2024, aged sixty-nine.

Swiss tenor **Éric Tappy** died on 11 June 2024, aged ninety-three.

American musicologist and Bruckner expert **William Carragan** died on 9 June 2024, aged eighty-six, following a stroke.

German composer and music producer **Ernstalbrecht Stiebler** died on 7 June 2024, aged ninety.

Italian viola player **Luciano Iorio** died on 4 June 2024, aged eighty-seven.

American composer **Emma Lou Diemer** died in Santa Barbara, California on 2 June 2024, aged ninety-six.

Dutch conductor, composer and arranger **Harry van Hoof** died in Eindhoven on 1 June 2024, aged eighty-one.

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RICHLY-DESIGNED AND ORIGINAL — WORCESTER'S THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL

Roderic Dunnett: Year upon year the Three Choirs Festival stands out as one of the most fascinating weeks of the English musical summer. Innovative, imaginative, wide-ranging, vivid, exploratory, enterprising and captivating.

Staged in turn by three Midland cathedrals - those of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester - the Festival features a dazzling series of choral concerts, vocal and chamber works, plays, community events, walks, related lectures, and an unbelievably impressive gathering of musical happenings of all kinds.

Worcester in 2024 will see as inventive and daring a collection of new and rare works as any recent Festival. Worcester's 2020 Festival - and that had planned some immensely original events - was wiped out by the disaster of **COVID-19**. This summer, at the end of July, Worcester speaks for itself: a vast amount of ingenious, resourceful programming. What a treat it will surely be.



Samuel Hudson, artistic director of the Worcester Three Choirs Festival.
Photo © Michael Whitefoot

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SPOTLIGHT — A COMMON OBJECTIVE

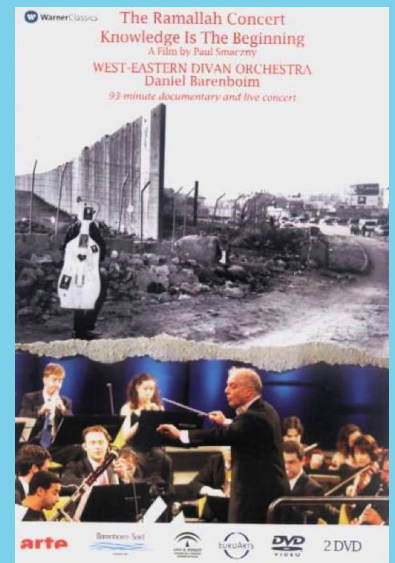
Ron Bierman: This review was originally published in 2011. *Classical Music Daily* is bringing it back with an update about how the orchestra has fared since the Ramallah concert discussed in the review. Publicity for the few on-going successful attempts to improve relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors is especially important today when violence seems the only alternative for both sides. The continuing success of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra shows that even bitter foes can work together when they share a common interest and come to a better understanding of the people and culture they hate.

As I said more than a decade ago:

This is an inspiring release both for those who despair over Middle Eastern politics and those who believe music can do more than entertain. The first DVD in the set of two contains a documentary that explains the origins of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra; the second is the recording of a concert it gave in Ramallah, a Palestinian city on the Jordan's West Bank.

The orchestra is the result of a collaboration between its conductor **Daniel Barenboim** and the late Palestinian scholar, Edward Said. It consists of talented young musicians from Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Spain and Syria. Not a list of countries noted for close cooperation. Under Barenboim's charismatic and demanding direction, the musicians have worked together to achieve a thoroughly professional sound.

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'... a tremendous, emotional, not-to-be-missed experience.'



'... something quite magical.'

and I enjoyed the take on this movement as I feel that this was a very carefully worked emotional conception, and initial reservations evaporated when I heard the movement as a whole.

The second movement is compelling, with a lot of contrast of mood and a wide dynamic range. I have always found **Janine Jansen** to be a player who is passionate and insightful. She has a great sense of intonation and a wide range of tonal palette, and she certainly does not disappoint here. The orchestral balance is very well-managed.

[READ MORE](#)

Geoff Pearce: I was quite excited to receive this recording. I have loved both concertos since my youth, and two of my favourite artists performing with the Oslo Philharmonic was too good an opportunity to pass up. Did this recording live up to my expectations? I have to say that it did.

The **Sibelius** concerto was first performed in 1904, then extensively revised and performed again a year later, in 1905 (with none other than Richard Strauss conducting the Berlin Philharmonic and Karel Halif as soloist). Certainly in my lifetime it has been one of the most popular violin concertos and is a real crowd-pleaser.

The first movement, up to the cadenza, is interesting as no liberties were taken with the *tempi*, and initially this took me by surprise somewhat as it wasn't the typical performance, but then this all changed from the beautifully played and passionate cadenza, and the rest of this movement. It was full of life, power, romantic drama

Geoff Pearce: Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767) is a composer who I like very much, but I am only familiar with his instrumental writing. I was surprised to learn that he had written possibly over fifty operas (of which nine survive intact), and 1,043 sacred cantatas. This recording is of six cantatas for middle voice, violin and basso continuo and is Volume 8 in the series of cantatas of the Harmonischer Gottes-Dienst written between 1725-1726. This comprised a set of seventy-two cantatas, and Volume 8 is the recording for the middle voice and forces mentioned above. The notes that accompany this recording are very comprehensive and give historical information, analytical breakdown and information about the superb performers.

The first cantata in this series, *Am sechsten Sonntage nach der heil. Drey Könige: Was ist das Herz?*, TWV 1:1516, comprises two recitatives and two *da capo* arias and uses the violin as an obligato instrument. It opens with a recitative that says basically there is no room for true light in a human heart. This is followed by an aria which is gentle and asks for enlightenment of the human heart to true light. This is followed by a recitative, again speaking of the darkness in the human heart, and the concluding aria illustrates the consequences of not following a path to the light.

The second cantata, *Invocavit* (First Sunday in Lent) *Fleuch der Lüste Zaubereien*, TWV 1:549, comprises an opening *da capo* aria, followed by a recitative and concluding with another aria. In the first aria, the soul is advised to fight against the false things that tempt it at every turn and not be seduced by false beauty and attractions. The recitative speaks of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, whilst the final aria concerns a battle which will end in the defeat of the flesh and distress, and the successful combatant will enter into a place of peace and joy. [READ MORE](#)



'... a very fine result ...'



'There is so much beautiful music that is just waiting to be performed, recorded and listened to.'

Geoff Pearce: The Orchestra Now (TÖN) is new to me - a graduate orchestra based at Bard College in New York State, USA with members from all around the world. It was founded in 2015 by Leon Botstein, the conductor on this recording.

The impressive and very enjoyable first work is the first of five symphonies by Moravian-born composer Hugo Kauder (1888-1972), in four movements. In spite of being composed in 1920-21 and performed in 1924, it had to wait until 2022 before being performed again. Dedicated to Alma Mahler, the second movement, in particular, shows the strong influence of her husband.

The first movement proceeds in an unhurried fashion. It is obviously influenced by the romantic composers Brahms and Mahler. One noticeable thing is that modulations, often to quite distant keys, are frequent, along with meter changes. The orchestration is colourful and sumptuous and there are many delightful solo passages, as well as some weighty moments for full orchestra too. The composer is economical with his material and the movement is under ten minutes in length.

I love the rather quirky nature of the scherzo-like second movement, where one can immediately recall the rather sardonic wit of Gustav Mahler. The meter though is asymmetric, giving a kind of 'tipsy' effect. The trio is calmer and reflective as a contrast before the return to the opening character.

The third movement is beautiful, intense, slow and written in the very best of Romantic traditions. It is not all peace and tranquility though and there are moments which fill you with anticipation and will take your breath away. [READ MORE](#) [READ GEOFF'S LATEST REVIEWS](#)

John Dante Prevedini: *Poppaea* is the recent release from New Focus Recordings of a one-act opera in twelve scenes composed by Michael Hersch on a libretto by Stephanie Fleischmann. The 2019 opera, commissioned by Wien Modern and ZeitRäume Basel, is heard here in a live recording of a 10 September 2021 performance at Don Bosco Basel in Basel, Switzerland. The performance features the Ensemble Phoenix Basel under the baton of Jürg Henneberger with direction by Markus Bothe. The opera examines the quasi-historical tale of the Roman emperor Nero and his ill-fated relationship with his two wives, Octavia and Poppaea, portrayed respectively by tenor Steve Davislim, mezzo-soprano Silke Gäng and soprano Ah Young Hong. Three additional characters - the Handmaidens - are portrayed by Svea Schildknecht, Vera Hiltbrunner and Francisca Näf, and the opera features the Ensemble SoloVoices in the role of the Chorus. The release is available in a two-disc CD format as well as a digital album, and the substantial booklet includes an essay by Neronian history scholar Lauren Donovan Ginsberg, essays by various members of the production team (Hersch, Fleischmann, Bothe, dramaturge Bernhard Günther and set designers Heinrich Toews and Ioannis Piertzovanis), an interview with Ah Young Hong, a timeline of historical events informing the libretto, the English-language libretto itself and numerous photos from the production.



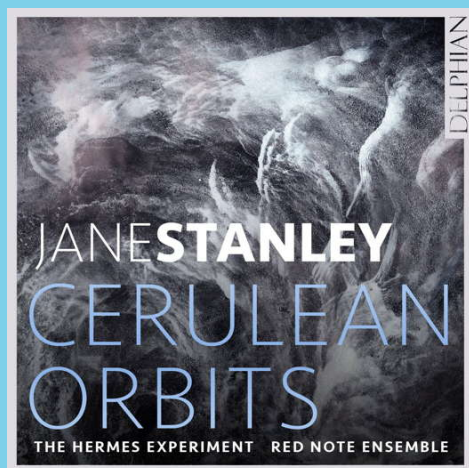
'... a mirror unto humanity and the mechanisms by which some of its darkness traits operate.'

The *Poppaea* story is one which has been part of the Western operatic tradition for nearly its entire four-century history, a fact to which the Fleischmann-Hersch work consciously aims to respond. The new opera takes the action beyond where the plot of Monteverdi's influential 1642 opera left off, depicting how *Poppaea* ultimately meets a similar fate to that of her predecessor Octavia, despite Nero's promises. In addition, it attempts to retell the story from the perspectives of both Octavia and *Poppaea*. In so doing, as the various essays and interviews in the booklet attest, this project is meant to do more than simply revisit and stylistically modernize a classic story. It is an act of centering the perspectives of women in an artistic-historical narrative which has not traditionally centered those perspectives. By addressing both the relative lack of information about these women in the relevant Roman sources and the 'triumphant' Neronian treatment of the story in Monteverdi's setting, the collaborative team hopes to put the audience in a novel perspective of feeling systemically disempowered through whimsically cruel means - as Octavia and *Poppaea* themselves were.

The resulting opera, sonically speaking, is a one-hundred-minute continuous experience of violent explosiveness whose only respites are moments of quiet anxiety that the onslaught will soon resume again. Hersch achieves this sustained effect through the judicious use of a completely atonal - and frequently microtonal - sound world which remains at all times rhythmically, timbrally and dynamically unpredictable. The compositional material seems to be deliberately athematic, such that the audience is never given any sonic 'footing' upon which to make sense of what has happened or what might happen next. This, however, seems highly appropriate for the subject matter of the libretto, which constantly shifts between scenes of murder, torture, assault, traumatic flashbacks and vindictive public rage with no moments of peace or resolution in between.

As *Poppaea* herself sings in the final scene, 'This world - You are released'. In other words, death itself is taken as the only release from the endless and powerless torment of her world. Likewise, the silence after the opera's conclusion is the audience's only release from its meticulously cacophonous musical expression. [READ MORE](#) [READ JOHN DANTE PREVEDINI'S LATEST CD REVIEWS](#)

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'... by turns beautiful, cheeky, dreamy, engaging, gentle, intimate, modern-sounding, poised, reflective, serious, spatial, swirling and thoughtful.'

Keith Bramich: The music of Australian-born (in 1976) Glasgow-based composer Jane Stanley is, to me, by turns beautiful, cheeky, dreamy, engaging, gentle, intimate, modern-sounding, poised, reflective, serious, spatial, swirling and thoughtful.

The Indifferent (2023) is possibly anything but what its name suggests! This song cycle for soprano, clarinet, harp and double bass - unusual instrumentation - feels folky, poised, simple and also somewhat pointillist. What really comes across in this performance by British group The Hermes Experiment is the music's beauty.

The movements have numbers but no names, but the advantage of this piece over all the others here is that it has words, by contemporary Australian poet Judith Bishop (born 1972), and the booklet contains not just Bishop's words, but also an 'emotional and linguistic score' which explains the setting, breaking Bishop's poem into five sections. The indifference here is basically that felt at the ending of love, and also refers to natural forces, such as endlessly moving waves in the sea. The music's beauty reinforces these feelings.

All the other pieces on this CD are purely instrumental and are played by members of Scotland's Red Note Ensemble. Both groups record regularly for Delphian Records and have a high profile on the British contemporary classical music scene. I can find no fault with any of the performances here.

Cerulean Orbits (2016), a nearly eight minute work for violin and piano, is expressive and swirling, with lots of violin trills. It seems to paint pictures of swirling clouds in the sky, gets angry and ends up feeling rather lonely. [READ MORE](#)

Gerald Fenech: In all truth, I am head over heels about this issue. You might be asking, what's all the fuss about? These three Mozart symphonies are staple diet and their artistic worth has long been established and enjoyed. This is all true, but from my point of judgement, the real star of this disc is the young Finnish conductor Tarmo Peltokoski, whose conducting just swept me off my feet. I am ready to accept different perceptions, but this young musician is undoubtedly a genius of the baton. No wonder he is creating such a stir among people both sides of the Atlantic.

Born in Vaasa on 21 April 2000, Peltokoski is of Finnish ancestry on his father's side and Filipino ancestry on his mother's side. His first piano studies began at the age of eight, but only when he heard Wagner's *Ring* three years later, did he decided to become a professional musician with the urge to discover more. Aged fourteen, his father contacted Jorma Panula about accepting his son for conducting studies. Following a meeting between the young lad and Panula at an annual master class in Vaasa, the latter accepted him as a private conducting student for the next four years. Peltokoski continued his music studies at the Sibelius Academy where his instructors included, among others, Sakari Oramo and Hannu Lintu.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen invited Peltokoski for a guest-conducting engagement in late 2020, and this catapulted him towards his already stellar career. The Bremen appointment led to a more substantial position with this orchestra, when he was named as the first principal guest-conductor of this ensemble in January 2022. Peltokoski is the first conductor to be granted that title in the orchestra's history. [READ MORE](#)



'... absolutely enthralling ...'



'... a vibrant energy ...'

Gerald Fenech: Thomas Arne (1710-1778) is best known for the popular patriotic song *Rule Britannia* and his musical settings of songs from plays by William Shakespeare. He was born in the Covent Garden area of **London**, to a family that had prospered in the upholstery business. He was educated at Eton College and was interested in music from his earliest youth. His sister, Susannah Maria Arne, was a famous contralto, who performed in some of his works, including his first opera *Rosamund*, performed in 1733. He taught her to sing and she first performed with him in 1732, along with her brother Richard.

In 1736 Arne married singer Cecilia Young, whose sister, Isabella, married the composer Frederick Lampe. Arne's operas and masques became very popular and he received the patronage of Frederick, Prince of Wales, at whose country home, Cliveden, the *Masque of Alfred*, featuring *Rule Britannia*, was first performed. In 1750, after an argument with David Garrick, Susannah left Drury Lane for Covent Garden Theatre, and her brother soon followed.

In 1755 Arne separated from his wife who, he alleged, was mentally ill. He had, in the meantime, begun a relationship with one of his pupils, Charlotte Brent, a soprano and former prodigy, who performed in some of his works. She later married a violinist. In 1777, shortly before his death, Arne and his wife were reconciled. The couple had one son, Michael, who was also a composer. Thomas Arne is buried at St Paul's, Covent Garden, London.

The composer's legacy is immense, having written in practically every genre of the time. Still, his greatest contribution was for the stage; indeed, Arne wrote music for about ninety stage works, including plays, masques, pantomimes and operas. Many of his dramatic scores are now lost, probably in the disastrous 1808 fire at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

This splendid CD focuses on Arne's potential to write virtuosic concertos for any instrument, especially for the organ, and the five recorded here are prime examples of the composer's innate gift to write music that is so appropriate for this amazing, versatile instrument.

Indeed, these pieces are astonishingly different one from the other, but each one uses a lightness of touch that is so effective, and the music is consistently transparent as it sings and dances along with lively melodies and imaginative development of themes.

Unfortunately, Arne's music has always been somewhat overshadowed by that of Handel and, although these organ pieces are considered as superior in artistry to those of Handel, they are still languishing by the wayside. Hopefully, these brilliant performances by Andrzej Szadejko, accompanied by the wonderful Goldberg Baroque Ensemble, start to put the record straight.

I cannot leave out the dazzling organ used for this recording, the Johann Friedrich Rohde organ in St John's Church in Gdańsk, which has a wonderful elegance and lightness of sound ideal for the music from the second half of the eighteenth century. This precious instrument was completely destroyed during the Second World War and so it lay silent for seventy-seven years. After much painstaking work by Szadejko and two expert organ restorers, Guido Schumacher and Szymon Januszkiewicz, this historic instrument has been brought back to life.

This superb **MDG** recording is the first to be made since the organ's restoration, and the festive baroque pomp of the majestic 'organo pleno' combined with the rich orchestral sound radiate a vibrant energy throughout the Gothic cathedral. Mainly for organ enthusiasts, but if you are interested in getting more acquainted with English organ music of the baroque era, this is a fine place to start. Sound and presentation are first-rate. [READ MORE](#)

The image at the very top of this newsletter is a 2019 photo by Yves Alarie of Cork in Ireland.

Gerald Fenech: It was 1902 when the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) finished his Second Symphony - right at a time when his country was struggling with Russian oppression through extreme sanctions on the Finnish language and culture. While Finland fought for its independence as best it could, **Sibelius'** masterpiece became the unofficial light at the end of the tunnel - the voice of Finnish nationalism - and gave a renewed hope to the Finnish people, a truly prime example of beauty created in the midst of chaos.

Art grows from the depths of the soul and many of the greatest creations in history came to pass as a result of the artist's emotional state and experiences. Just as Beethoven's love/hate relationship with Napoleon resulted in his *Eroica* Symphony, Sibelius, too, was influenced by the extreme oppression he lived in. Regarded as one of his most popular works, the Slavic gloom present in many of Sibelius' previous works is replaced with a 'Mediterranean light' in this blockbuster of a work.

The Second was not only influenced by the optimism Finland tried to hold on to but also by the Italian coastal village where Sibelius was on a holiday when composing the piece. Of the work, Finnish conductor and highly acclaimed interpreter of Sibelius, Osmo Vänskä, explained its significance:

The Second Symphony is connected with our nation's fight for independence, but it is also about the struggle, crisis and turning-point in the life of an individual. This is what makes it so touching.

In the first movement Sibelius builds the entire work from one motif heard at the very beginning: three ascending notes that run through the entire work and are varied incessantly.

The second movement starts quietly on a pizzicato motif, but the highlight is in the middle, where Sibelius creates a shattering musical protest against all the injustices.

The third is fast, diffuse and fleeting, but then the hectic increase is suddenly interrupted by a point of rest from the oboe, which plays one of Sibelius' most mellow melodies.

The composer ends the symphony with a dazzlingly heroic movement, but does not storm to the finish. Instead, he allows the music to progress majestically until, by the very end, excitement reaches fever pitch.

The symphony was premiered by the composer on 8 March 1902 to a resounding success.

The Fifth Symphony was composed over a period of five years - 1914-1919. Sibelius completed the first version just in time to conduct it for his fiftieth birthday, a Finnish National holiday on 8 December 1915. A year later he revised it and again conducted it with the Helsinki Municipal Orchestra, which had also performed the first version a year before. The final version was completed in 1919, and this was also conducted by the composer on 21 October 1921. [READ MORE](#)

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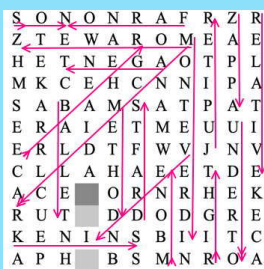
'... a quite spectacular addition to this cycle ...'

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.

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CLASSICAL MUSIC WORD-SEARCH PUZZLES

Canadian composer **Allan Rae's** classical music word-search puzzles, including the latest, *Morawetz*, based on the name of the Canadian composer **Oskar Morawetz** (1917-2007), are [here](#).

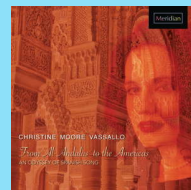


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COMING SOON AT CLASSICAL MUSIC DAILY ...

Look out, over the next few days, for a feature from **Amber Lin** and **Jeffrey Neil** about Christine Moore Vassallo's new Meridian CD *From Al-Andalus to the Americas* - an odyssey of Spanish song, for **Mike Wheeler's** review of Mark Elder's farewell Hallé concert in Nottingham, for more of **Robert McCarney's** new audio feature *Resounding Echoes*, for more from Jeffrey Neil at San Francisco Opera, and for another word search puzzle from **Allan Rae**. We also hope to have another online meeting later this month, at which everyone is welcome: look out for more details about that soon on our [newsletters page](#).



A LEAP YEAR EDITORIAL



Finally, in case you missed it, and you have a bit more time on your hands to read, *A Crack in Time?* discusses leaping into the unknown, Leap Day, its meaning for classical music, the erosion of truth in the classical music world and elsewhere, Charlotte Church, Palestine, Pythagoras and emails touting paid or sponsored articles, in a lengthy, rambling feature which may or may not be continued in four years time ... [READ MORE](#)

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