

Bulla Frères: The Apotheosis of Giacomo Meyerbeer



# The Music & Vision

## classical music newsletter

*ON ANGEL WINGS – Issue 81, 1 December 2014*

### MEYERBEER AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARISIAN GRAND OPERA

'Jacques Meyerbeer (1791-1864) dominated the Parisian grand opera scene from the 1830s until beyond his death. Yet apart from his letters there is no current book about him in English. Ironically, a near contemporary, Hector Berlioz, was always disregarded by the French musical establishment but is now seen in Britain as a genius of musical innovation. Being also the best musical critic of his time, he wrote of being overwhelmed by the *Blessing of the Daggers* episode from *The Huguenots* and praised Meyerbeer's unprecedented use of enlarged orchestra and chorus in the crowd scenes.' — George Colerick investigates. **Read more ...**

### CD AND LP REVIEWS – COMPLETE RACHMANINOV; RESPIGHI 'SUPER-LP'



'The Soviet Union naturally felt only scorn for Rachmaninov's setting of the St John Chrysostom liturgy. He was no churchgoer, but it was a work he pondered for a long time, turning it over constantly in his mind, and well aware that Tchaikovsky had already trod this particular path

successfully. Ultimately the work was quickly done. The Russian Church could only modestly approve, as the words seemed to have inspired too luxuriant a music. There is certainly no doubt of Rachmaninov's sincerity.' — Robert Anderson samples Decca's 32 disc set.

'It's been years since I've had the opportunity to review a so-called 'super-LP' — a heavyweight (here, 200-gram) vinyl pressing of a carefully remastered recording (here, at half-speed) — and I'd forgotten what I'd been missing. There's an unusual transparency and lifelike detail in the quiet passages, with the instrumental sound retaining that spaciousness as the music builds. But does the vinyl really deserve the credit for all this? Unlike most of the 'super-LPs' that appeared during their 1990s vogue, which were reissues of 'golden age' stereo productions, this is a comparatively recent (2001), and digital, recording, from a company, Reference Recordings, acclaimed for its audiophile-quality engineering. Conveniently, I had the original CD of these performances on hand — RR-95CD, with the Dance of the Gnomes as a substantial makeweight — so a comparison seemed worthwhile. And the choice is less clear-cut than you might expect.' — Stephen Francis Vasta investigates.

'Here the five highlighted Asian composers are Zhou Long (born Beijing, 1953), Chinariy Ung (born Cambodia, 1942), Gao Ping (born Sichuan, 1970), Toru Takemitsu (born Tokyo, 1930-1996) and Tan Dun (born Changsha, Hunan, 1957), each represented by music of breathtaking, unexpected, expressive beauty. The New Zealand quartet has particularly impressive credentials for performing music of south and east Asia, and in these scintillating performances their expertise is more than evident.' — Howard Smith is impressed by Asian music for string quartet on Naxos, and also listens to an eight hand two piano arrangement of Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony on Melba Recordings.

'The last piece on the disc is a sonata by the Czech composer Lubos Sluka. This is an arrangement of his cello sonata of 1954 and was realized in 1971. I predict that this sonata, and the Eliezer Sonata will become major pieces in the bassoon and piano repertoire. These are great performances from Maria Wildhaber and her colleagues, and I will enjoy playing this album often.' — Geoff Pearce listens to Eastern European music for bassoon and piano on the MSR Classics label, and to Handel organ concerti played on the piano on CPO.

'Violinist Jennifer Koh and pianist Shai Wosner preface their new album of works by Janáček, Kurtág, and Bartók with the following words: "Each work on this album inhabits two worlds: the influence of folklore on one hand and the composer's striking originality on the other". Seen in this light, their project navigates a delicate merger between modernism and old-world sounds. The result is a delightful array of sensitive performances — eminently colourful interpretations of pieces that rarely get the airtime they deserve.' — Andrew Schartmann listening to Cedille Records' *Signs, Games + Messages*



'... a mixed disc, but one very much to be welcomed, as a thought-provoking, intelligent and hugely authentic addition to the unfolding history of the Bach Cello Suites.' — Alice McVeigh listens to Viola de Hoog on the Vivat label.

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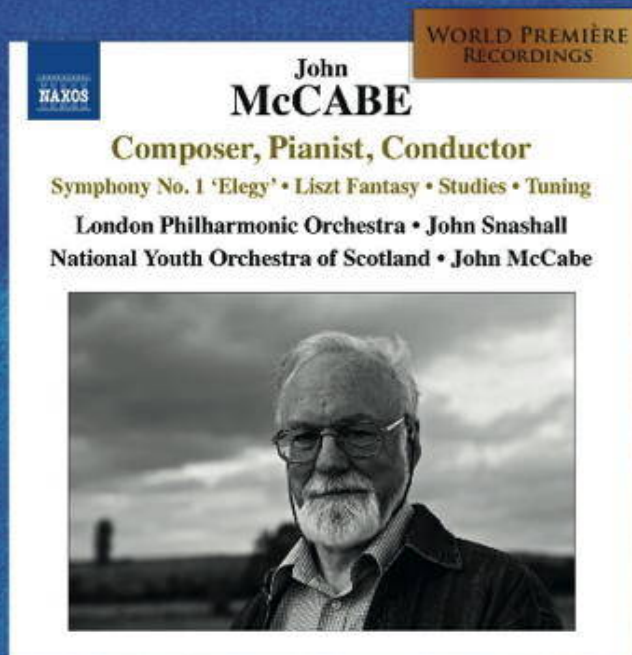
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## NEWS AND EVENTS

A new CD of works by John McCabe is Naxos disc of the month for December 2014.

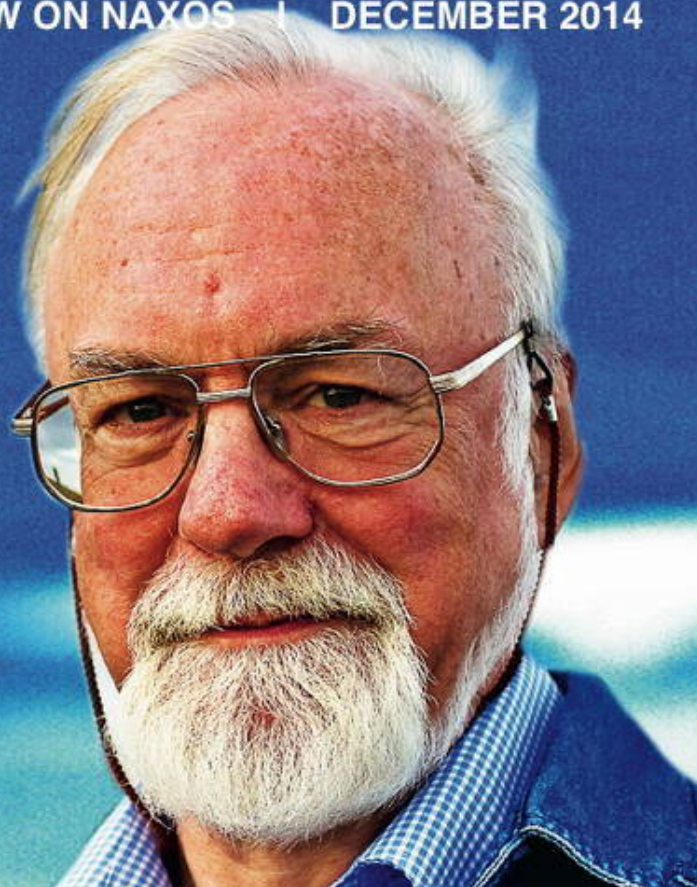
NEW ON NAXOS | DECEMBER 2014



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John McCabe, composer, pianist, conductor - New on Naxos, 1 December 2014



A unique Christmas concert in London features a retelling of the Christmas story 'On Angel Wings' by Michael Morpurgo.

We mark the passing of Arthur Butterworth, Wang Kun, James Erb and Richard Kanter.

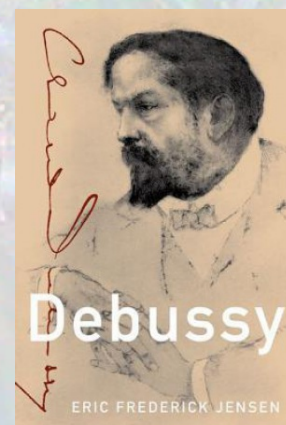
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## IMPRESSIONISM AND SYMBOLISM — DEBUSSY BY ERIC JENSEN

'... in 1905 came the first performance of *La Mer*. I am sure the sea can be impressive enough at Eastbourne, where Debussy studied it. But I would have urged on him a visit to Shetland, where I have watched the infinite fascination of wave and spray for hours on end. It is meaningless to criticise *La Mer* for lack of form; it has the endless variety of the sea itself, restless and haunting. I am grateful to Jensen for bringing back to mind much glorious listening, but I cannot think he has given much verbal impression of the magic Debussy can distil at his best. The ground is most competently covered, but I still think Lockspeiser preferable.' — Robert Anderson reads Eric Jensen's *Debussy* from Oxford University Press.



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## MELTING RHAPSODY — SPONSORED FEATURES

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Melting Rhapsody — Malcolm Miller enjoys Jack Liebeck and Danny Driver's 'Hebrew Melody' recital, plus a recital by David Aaron Carpenter: **Read more ...**

An Integral Part — Lindsey Wallis looks forward to the Canadian Music Centre's tribute concert to composer Roberta Stephen: **Read more ...**

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## STEALING THE GLORY — CONCERT AND OPERA REVIEWS

*M&V*'s writers are, as usual, out and about: Gerald Fenech at Festival Maribor in Slovenia and Roderic Dunnett at James MacMillan's Cumnock Tryst in Scotland:

'... one event for me stole the glory. This was the National Youth Brass Band of Scotland, particularly buoyant under their current Music Director, Russell Gray. The thing that always surprises and delights me about brass playing — and these youngsters in their mid to upper teens, plus a few supporting extras, were to all intents professional performers — is the amount of colouring and textural variety the individual players manage to contrive.'



The National Youth Brass Band of Scotland in the Old Church, Cumnock. Photo © 2014 Robin Mitchell

Giuseppe Pennisi was in Naples for Richard Strauss' *Salome*, in Milan for Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* and in Rome, both for the opening concert of the National Academy of Santa Cecilia's season and for troubled Opera di Roma's *Rigoletto*.

'On the basis of brand new legislation, Italian Central Government and Rome City Government undertook to save the theatre from going into compulsory liquidation, but they required a business plan which would balance the accounts within a three-year time span. The theatre's unions, especially those of the chorus and of the orchestra, did not take this lightly, and organized a series of wildcat strikes during the summer season. The honorary music director for life, Riccardo Muti, could not face this messy situation any longer and resigned.'



A scene from Verdi's *Rigoletto* at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. Photo © 2014 Corrado Maria Falsini

Maria Nockin enjoyed Metropolitan Opera's live HD Mozart *Marriage of Figaro* transmission in Arizona :

'Production Director Richard Eyre updated the action to the eve of World War I and most of the text still made sense, although the titles shown on the screen were rather freely translated. Designer Rob Howell's intricate set worked well for every scene, but his equally intricate costumes seemed slightly busy ... Eyre did not make Dr Bartolo and Marcellina elderly people. They seemed to be in their late forties or early fifties. Susanne Mentzer was a delightfully amusing Marcellina who loved finding out Figaro was her lost child.'

In London, Alice McVeigh is impressed by Britten's *Albert Herring* at Hampstead Garden Opera but less impressed by Sophocles' *Electra* at the Old Vic. In *Ask Alice* she reviews Bromley Youth Music Trust's *Phantom of the Opera*:

'As everyone knows, *Phantom* is by Andrew Lloyd Webber, and is possibly his best work, with the saccharine sentiments, ridiculous plot and inane lyrics suiting his style perfectly. Lloyd Webber is the McDonald's/Burger King of music: instantly satisfying, utterly forgettable — and, in the long-term, even sickness-producing. However, there was still something wonderfully refreshing about this *Phantom*, probably because teenagers naturally empathize with such melodramatic music (along with Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky etc) and also because it was so heartfelt.' **More ...**

Malcolm Miller enjoys Peter Dickinson's eightieth birthday concert, recitals of Jewish music in London, and Estonian-born pianist Maksim Stsura's recital at St Martin-in-the-fields.

Mike Wheeler listens to Die Marienkantorei, Osnabrück, Derby Choral Union, Derby Bach Choir's 'Concert for Peace', Ji Liu's Bach *Goldberg Variations*, Harry Christophers and The Sixteen on tour, the Aquinas Piano Trio, Leticia Moreno, Yuri Temirkanov and the St Petersburg Philharmonic, and the Derwent Singers.

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## GEORGE BERNARD SHAW AS LONDON MUSIC CRITIC

'The ultimate ridicule of Victorian music and melodrama came from a collaboration of genius, now not thought of as parodists but as a serious national tradition, Gilbert and Sullivan. Sullivan should have persisted with the comical, not aim at high-flown opera, such as *Ivanhoe*. His rarely performed *Utopia Limited* was to Shaw the masterpiece and inspiration. It satirised a future privatised revolution, a century before Thatcherism. One song gives advice equally applicable today: how to make easy money by creative accountancy. Set up a limited company, "lose" the money, file a petition and start another one, whilst the liquidators say "never mind, you needn't pay".' — the world of GBS, explored by George Colerick. **Read more ...**



D'Oyly Carte Opera Co poster for Gilbert and Sullivan's *Utopia Limited*

This newsletter, edited by Keith Bramich, is a monthly taster for Basil Ramsey's high quality and colourful online classical music magazine, published every day since January 1999.

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