



MUSIC &  
VISION

classical music  
newsletter

*Aldo Ciccolini — Issue 83, 1 February 2015*

Italian-born French pianist Aldo Ciccolini has died, on 1 February 2015, following a long illness.

Born in Naples on 15 August 1925, Ciccolini studied at the conservatory in his home town with Paolo Danza, from the age of nine, and played at the Theater San Carlo from the age of sixteen. He won the 1949 Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaut competition in Paris, and stayed on there to study with Marguerite Long. He became a French citizen in 1969.

In 2002 he was rewarded with the Diapason d'or for his recordings of the solo piano music of Leos Janáček and Robert Schumann. Ciccolini's repertoire includes music by Charles-Valentin Alkan, Ludwig van Beethoven, Alexis de Castillon, Claude Debussy, Franz Liszt, Jules Massenet, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Sergei Rachmaninov, Maurice Ravel, Erik Satie and Déodat de Séverac.

In other news, *Cubanacán: A Revolution of Forms* — the first Cuban opera in almost fifty years, begins the 2015 Havana Biennale.

Russian pianist Grigory Sokolov records *The Salzburg Recital* — a live recording of Mozart and Chopin — his first album since recording Schubert sonatas in 1992 for release in 1996, and his first release as an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist.

Italian mezzo-soprano Annalisa Stroppa is to return to Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu and will also make her Valladolid debut.



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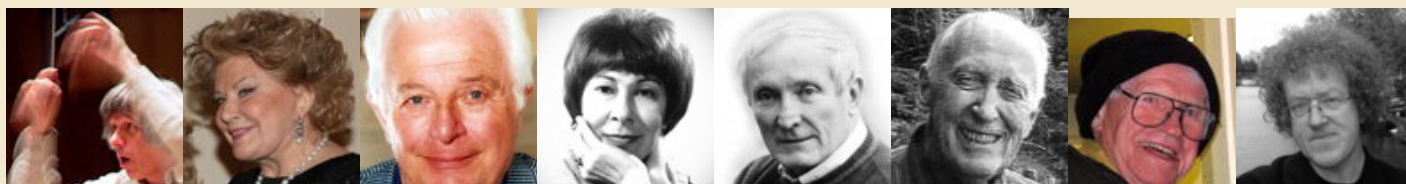
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Volume 4 of British pianist James Brawn's Beethoven Odyssey will be released in Spring 2015.

Twenty-eight-year-old Elim Chan from the UK won the 2014 Donatella Flick Conducting Competition.

We mark the passing of Aldo Ciccolini, Israel Yinon, Elena Obratzsova, Waldemar Kmentt, Vera Gornostayeva, Ward Swingle, Lawrence Gushee, Bob Gilmore, Michael Kennedy, Patrick Gowers and M&V contributor George Balcombe.



From left to right: Israel Yinon, Elena Obratzsova, Waldemar Kmentt, Vera Gornostayeva, Ward Swingle, Lawrence Gushee, George Balcombe and Bob Gilmore

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## THE WAR IS ALWAYS ON — CONCERT AND OPERA REVIEWS

'When Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* was presented at the Salzburg Festival, the title of my review was (suitably) *World without God* [**See 30 August 2012**]. The production was a joint venture with La Scala, where a series of performances opened on 17 January 2015. I hope that other opera houses will show this very enthralling and engrossing production. *M&V* readers are referred to the 30 August 2012 review where the opera is discussed extensively; also the main production team and the principal singers at La Scala are the same as those who staged and performed the opera two and a half years ago in Salzburg.



Daniel Brenna as Deportes and Laura Aikin as Marie in Part 1 of Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* at Teatro alla Scala, Milan. Photo © 2015 Brescia-Amisano

'However, in Salzburg, the opera is performed in the Felsenreitschule, the huge hall formerly for riding horses, and home to horse shows during wintertime. It has an oversized wide front stage and a perfect acoustic which almost envelops the audience. The Wiener Philharmoniker (suitably expanded) was divided by the conductor, Ingo Metzmacher, into three sections: the pit for the regular orchestra, and the left and right sides of the audience, mostly for the percussion, the tubular bells, the harpsichords, the celesta and the organ. The stage sets by Alvis Hermanis and the costumes by Eva Dessecker place the action during World War I.' — Giuseppe Pennisi was in Milan for Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten*, in Rome for Willy Decker's production of Massenet's *Werther* and in Bologna for Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*.

'As Hungarian pianist Dénes Várjon told us during the course of his Sunday morning recital (Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, UK, 25 January 2015), one of the great things about Janáček is that he is such a good fit with a wide range of other composers, whether romantics like Schumann or early twentieth-century modernists like Berg and Bartók. Immediately before, he had demonstrated just that with his opening group — two pieces from Janáček's *On an overgrown path* fitting easily between two Chopin Nocturnes.

'He combined attention to details with both clarity and a firm sense of direction and overall shape, giving point and depth to a potentially samey group. Chopin's *Lento Con Gran Espressione*, often known as his Nocturne in C sharp minor, though Chopin himself never called it that — emerged delicate and spell-binding.' — Mike Wheeler praises Várjon's recital, and also listens to Polish soprano Agnieszka Kozłowska, to the BBC Philharmonic and Juanjo Mena, with Stephen Johnson's *Discovering Music* and to Duncan Ward's debut concert as principal conductor of Sinfonia Viva.



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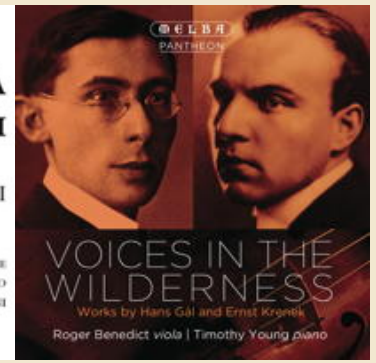
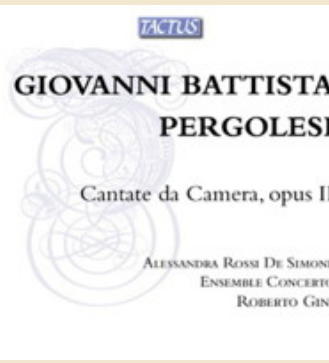
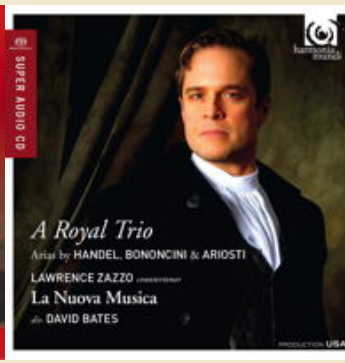
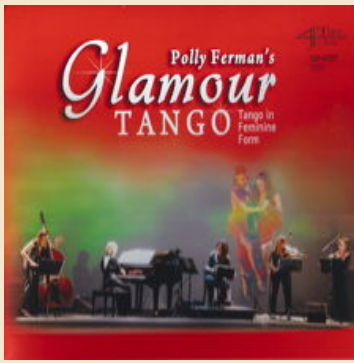
## MASSENET AND FEMMES FATALES — GEORGE COLERICK INVESTIGATES



'By the turn of the twentieth century, the achievements of Jules Massenet (1842-1912) included an exceptional sensibility in female characterisation through a sequence of operas, and musically his reputation in France could not have been higher. He was susceptible to imitation, his melodic influence becoming apparent in the popular French music idiom. Yet in Britain his name was scarcely heard except among connoisseurs, later in the first half of the twentieth century, partly because performed opera was scarcely available outside London and very restricted within. Later, his works would be much revived but not before a soprano, Stella J Wright, was organising the Massenet Society with great élan from Kensington, and whose faith in that composer's genius was fully justified. She performed many of his songs, and had the distinction of organising and playing Ariane in the

rarely seen lyric opera of that name in 1977.' **Read more ...**

## CD REVIEWS — HORIZONTAL INTENTIONS



'Polly Ferman is a Uruguayan pianist, much involved in the propagation of South American music, and the creator of *Glamour Tango*, a multimedia music and dance show, to which this album is presumably the soundtrack, or at least part of it. The hook is that it's an all-female show. Given that tango is often described as the vertical realisation of a horizontal intent, it's got to have a certain interest right there. Certainly having listened to the soundtrack, I hope I manage to catch the show somewhere along the line.' — Paul Sarcich finds heaps of pizzazz and needle-sharp playing on Ferman's CD.

Howard Smith is impressed by Tien Hsieh's Bach and Beethoven on MSR Classics, recommends viola sonatas by Gál and Krenek as performed by Roger Benedict and Timothy Young on Melba and appreciates Russian music sung by SWR Vokalensemble on Hänssler Classic. He also listens to Scriabin's *White Mass* played by Andrei Korobeinikov on Mirare, to *Dreams and Prayers* played by A Far Cry on Crier Records, to Robert Still's four string quartets from the Villiers Quartet on Naxos, to piano music by Delius, Bax, Vaughan Williams and Bridge played by Benjamin Martin on Melba and to violin sonatas by Copland and Zeisl from Zina Schiff and Cameron Grant on MSR classics.

Gerald Fenech is impressed by operatic arias by Handel, Bononcini and Ariosti from Lawrence Zazzo and David Bates' *La Nuova Musica* on harmonia mundi, and recommends the Choir of Merton College, Oxford's collection of music inspired by the Virgin Mary on Delphian.

Robert Anderson is impressed by David Wilde's Chopin on Delphian, enjoys the real enchantment of Pergolesi chamber cantatas from Alessandra Rossi De Simone and Ensemble Concerto on historical instruments, directed by Roberto Gini on Tactus, and listens to a Tchaikovsky rarity plus music by Beethoven and Mendelssohn from the Petrof Trio on Nimbus Alliance.

Geoff Pearce recommends challenging music for violin and piano from Kerry DuWors and Futaba Niekawa on Navona, and listens to the astounding piano skills of Jenny Q Chai in music by Nils Vigeland on Naxos.

Stephen Francis Vasta listens to Richard Strauss orchestral music from Sebastian Weigle and the Frankfurter Opern- und Museumsorchester on Oehms Classics, and Andrew Schartmann listens to Susan Merdinger's Schumann, played on an out of tune piano, on the Sheridan Music Studio label.

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## ASK ALICE – RESTRICTED VIEW RECOMMENDED

'I admit that *Un Ballo in Maschera* is one of the silliest stories Verdi every took on (though *Rigoletto* takes some beating). I also admit that Katarina Thoma's was a pretty dumb production (especially the bit about World War I supposedly breaking out for no good reason at its conclusion) and that the stars' acting was just short of *rigor mortis*. (We had free seats, thanks to orchestra friends, so slightly restricted view. I had feared that this was going to bug me until I realised that the three top international soloists had approximately four expressions between them, so that was fine.) A lot of the costumes looked as if patched together from other productions (especially in the ball scene) and the mimes, like all of Thoma's ideas, such as she had, were overused: enough is sufficient.'



Alice McVeigh finds the sound better than the visuals at Covent Garden, and investigates, for her cello, shoulder braces and lead in the frog.

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