

The Music & Vision classical music newsletter



Brian Mulligan in the title role of Stephen Sondheim's 'Sweeney Todd' at San Francisco Opera. Photo © 2015 Cory Weaver

A Bloody Good Time – Issue 91, 1 October 2015

James Sohre: 'Brian Mulligan is an excellent match as the titular barber. The role is a Big Sing, and Mr Mulligan has a big, searing, burly baritone housed in a big bear of a strapping physique that fills out the part like nobody's business. He, too, takes risks, and finds tremendous abandon in what is (dare I say it?) a cutting edge performance. His was such a forceful, seething approach that I worried for his vocal health as he rasped a few held high notes in *Epiphany*, but my fears were short-lived when he thereafter continued to sing with controlled and mellifluous tone the rest of the night.'

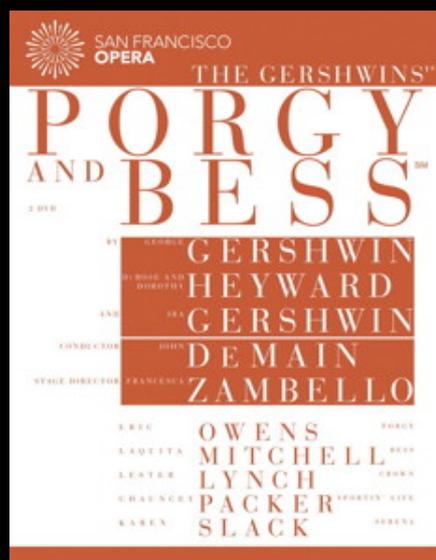
'I have enjoyed Heidi Stober's enchanting, silvery soprano on several occasions, and her Johanna did not disappoint. Ms Stober is petite, lovely, and comports herself beautifully as the imprisoned young ward. *Green Finch and Linnet Bird* was a model of floated phrases and endearing *legato*. Eliot Madore (Anthony) has grown substantially as an artist since last I saw him. His baritone still has its freshness and appealing warmth, but Mr Madore has further developed an imposing core to the sound that serves him especially well in the rhapsodic exultations of Johanna. And he has also refined a charming stage savvy that has taken him from being merely good-looking to being Madore-able. Eliot and Heidi struck some heated sparks between them and made the young couple far more interesting and empathetic than I thought possible.'

Read more ...



Heidi Stober and Elliot Madore in Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* at San Francisco Opera. Photo © 2015 Cory Weaver

James Sohre was also at San Francisco Opera's *Luisa Miller* — rare Verdi, unjustly neglected. [Read more ...](#)



Ron Bierman watches the same company's DVD (Euroarts 2059638) of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*: 'Eric Owens as Porgy and Laquita Mitchell as Bess have strong voices and are convincing. Owens' Porgy is kind, well-meaning, and strong in spite of his handicap. Mitchell too is believable as a weak, confused temptress, attracted to three very different men who all welcome the temptation. Audiences, of course, favor Porgy, while Crown is the clearest villain. The most thrilling and affecting moment in the opera, and this performance, offers an American version of *La bohème*'s first-act love duet. In the close-up camera shots, this could even be an artist's garret.' [Read more ...](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi: 'Amongst the seventy concerts over twenty-two days offered by the 2015 Enescu Festival, I selected two by the French group Les Dissonances - a very special ensemble, without either a director or a conductor - just a group of soloists who love to play together. The concerts took place (as did several others) in the Ateneul Român, a lovely eight-hundred seat concert hall built in 1888 with two rows of boxes and a perfect acoustic. It is one of the few Bucharest buildings which survived various wars and revolutions over the last one hundred and twenty years. I was told that special protections were built during World War II as well as during the 1999 upheaval. On both occasions the Royal Palace (now the National Museum), just in front of the Ateneul Român, was set on fire and badly damaged. Rightly, Romanians have a special affection for this unique concert hall.'



A concert in Bucharest's Ateneul Român

Whilst in Bucharest, Pennisi heard two concerts from the French group Les Dissonances, and two German operas — *Elektra* and *Wozzeck*. **Read more ...**

Giuseppe Pennisi also attended the Sagra Musicale Umbra, to hear the Tallis Scholars celebrate Arvo Pärt's eightieth birthday: 'Why an early music group for a contemporary composer? Arvo Pärt is a Roman Catholic who lived for the longest part of his life almost secluded in his native Estonia, where the local culture was Lutheran. However a long annexation to the Soviet Republics had made atheism the State cult. Pärt is introverted and solitary. Working alone, he kept far away from the contemporary music schools of the period following World War II, and rediscovered Medieval music. He works with very few elements with a perfect accord, with voices (one, two or a small ensemble) which are very pure — ie with no vibrato. In short, his style is extremely simple and shows how sacred music can be composed at the highest level with an almost elementary harmony and vocal melody. Briefly, his approach is halfway between monody and polyphony.' **Read more ...**



Arvo Pärt. Photo © 2011 Eric Marinitsch

Back in Rome, Pennisi experiences John Adams' opera *I Was looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky* and a rare visit by La Scala Philharmonic, forming part of a larger project remembering the 1915 Armenian genocide. **Read more ...**



Sunwook Kim

Mike Wheeler listens to David Little's organ recital from a newly refurbished Derby Cathedral, and reports from a Hallé Orchestra concert in Nottingham: 'Rakhmaninov's Piano Concerto 3 is a big, romantic virtuoso work, of course, but as soon as soloist Sunwook Kim began working his soft, luminous magic with the chant-like opening theme you knew that hogging the limelight was not going to be his number one priority. In this deeply expressive performance, dialogue with the orchestra was much higher up the agenda. Kim can certainly whip up a storm when he needs to, unleashing blistering pent-up energy in the first half of the cadenza. Like many players today he went for Rakhmaninov's more virtuosic first thoughts, but even this was all about the music and not showy grandstanding.' **Read more ...**

Malcolm Miller reports from the Wigmore Hall / Kohn Foundation International Song Competition: 'First prize (10,000 pounds) was awarded to Milan Siljanov, with his partner Nino Chokhanelidze receiving the 'Pianist's Prize' of 5,000 pounds. Second prize (5,000 pounds) was awarded to German baritone Samuel Hasselhorn and third prize (2,500 pounds) to British baritone James Newby, the youngest competitor still in his undergraduate studies. Newby also received the prestigious Richard Tauber Schubert Prize (3,000 pounds), offered by the Anglo-Austrian Society, whilst the Jean Meikle prize for a duo (5,000 pounds) was, surprisingly perhaps, given to a duo not featured in the finals, Australian mezzo-soprano Kate Howden and her accompanist Sachiko Taniuyama, from Japan. As first prize winner, Milan Siljanov is also selected for the Perth International Arts Festival Prize, giving concerts in Perth in 2016.' **Read more ...**



Milan Siljanov and Nino Chokhanelidze performing at London's Wigmore Hall on 10 September 2015. Photo © 2015 Ben Ealovega

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Young Russian pianist Anna Tcybuleva has won the 2015 Leeds International Piano Competition. Jamaican pianist Orrett Rhoden has big plans for his International Music Festival of Jamaica.



Anna Tcybuleva



David Willcocks
(1919-2015)

Famous for his energy, for exercising complete and decisive control over all aspects of his recordings, and for his boyish charm, British choral conductor, organist and composer David Willcocks, who died in September, aged ninety-five, never lost sight of the fact that he was working with music and with people.

He co-edited OUP's well-known *Carols for Choirs* publications, was Director of Music at King's College, Cambridge, and musical director of The Bach Choir.

His connection with composers such as Britten and Vaughan Williams, his stature as a choir director, and his development of King's College Choir were an inspiration to choirs and choral directors everywhere.

We also mark the passing of Manuel Oltra, Cor Edskes and Jacques Israelievitch.

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ASK ALICE — ON CELLO LESSONS BY SKYPE

Alice McVeigh: 'When a pupil of mine asked if I could poss do a Skype cello lesson (she had an allergic reaction and her face had puffed up, plus she comes forty miles for her lessons) I was a little dubious.

'I'd seen these "study with me by Skype!!!" things on various websites and cello things and thought: theoretically possible but far from ideal.

'Anyway, I agreed to try it: an experiment!!!!'

Alice also describes an embarrassing moment for her string quartet at a wedding.

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Alice McVeigh. Cartoon © 2015 Pat Achilles

HELD WITH LOVE - HALIDA DINOVA REMEMBERS HOWARD SMITH

'Howard Smith, British journalist, music critic and artist's manager, passed away on 4 August 2015 at the age of seventy-six.

'Since the mid 1990s, Smith lived with his family in Wellington province, New Zealand, most recently in Masterton. For the last fourteen years he was a regular contributor to *Music & Vision*.

'Clive Alfred Howard Smith, to give him his full name, was born in Chester, England on 7 July 1939 where he lived with his parents and two older brothers Rodney and Graeme. The family moved to Hamilton, New Zealand when Howard was seven. Music was always a large part of Smith's family life, so he learned to play violin and played with his brother Rodney in groups and local orchestras.

'After a degree in Theology from Victoria University in Wellington, Smith began his long career as a journalist, working first for *The Dominion* in Wellington. He left New Zealand to work as sole leader writer for *The China Mail* in Hong Kong. From the mid 1970s until 1987 he worked for Thomson Regional Newspapers (TRN) in North East England, writing exclusively on arts, travel and news background topics. Subsequently from his then base in Minneapolis MN, he provided copy for a variety of outlets throughout the American mid-west.

'In the mid 1990s, Smith with his wife Pauline and two children Amy and Ben moved back to New Zealand.



The late Howard Smith with members of his family and Kazan pianist Halida Dinova, the author of this tribute. From left to right: Indiana Smith, Pauline Harter, Montego Smith, Howard Smith, Aria Smith, Halida Dinova and Ashton Smith in Masterton, New Zealand, on 28 April 2015. Photo © 2015 Amy Jacquilla Smith

For some years he was a senior interviewer/writer, TV and arts critic with major dailies including *The New Zealand Herald* (Auckland), *The Dominion* and *Evening Post* (Wellington), *Waikato Times* (Hamilton), *Wairarapa Times Age* (Masterton) and *Christchurch Press*.

He supplied programme notes for the NZ International Festival of the Arts in Wellington (1996-8), the Naxos Chamber Music Festival 1999, and *The Strad*, London (1999-2001). He also wrote commentary for Decca Records (UK), EMI Records (UK), Hyperion Records, Opera North (Leeds), Opera Wellington, the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (Wellington), the Auckland Philharmonia, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (MN, USA), Hamilton Chamber Music Society (Waikato), Greytown Music Group (Wairarapa NZ) among others, and presented a weekly program on *Arrow FM* radio (Hitz 89 FM Masterton NZ).

Since the mid 1990s, Smith has been on assignments in Hatsukaichi, Japan, Almaty and Uralsk, Kazakhstan, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Pacific Russia, and Nouméa, New Caledonia.

In the last decade Smith has been the New Zealand agent for Kazakh-born virtuoso violinist Marat Bisengaliev and Serbian pianist Sonja Radojkovic, and recently also for me.

'Violinist Marat Bisengaliev wrote :

'I have received really sad news about our dear friend Howard. Lots of good memories ... Our first meeting happened in Grassington where I performed a recital where Howard lived then with his wife and two little children.

'I invited him and his family to my place, and since then we became close friends. Howard is the only person who has managed to cover all my discography up to date and he has written a book about me which was translated into Russian and published together with my memoirs under the title Do Re.

'I talked to him through emails constantly as he was keen on organizing a tour for me next year. We were planning for him to come back to Kazakhstan, which he really loved, and perhaps visit me in France. (I moved to the South of France nearly four years ago.) A truly sincere, wonderful human being and the very best friend. For me his loss is a huge void in my life.

'My personal encounter with Howard Smith was a happy one. In 2008 I unexpectedly received an email from him in New Zealand with encouraging words about my recording of Brahms' Concerto No 2 Op 83 with Gustavo Plis-Sterenber and the St Petersburg Academy Symphony Orchestra. I was so grateful that a serious critic had listened with an open mind to somebody who is not a famous authority on Brahms. He wrote a good review in *Music & Vision* [**Distinctive Spontaneity, 5 October 2008**] and invited me to tour in New Zealand in 2012 (with a return in 2015) to perform solo recitals. I feel I have lost a close friend and will be forever grateful for him accepting me into his heart and introducing me to his family and friends.

'On all sides he was held with love.' **Read more ...**



From left to right:
Ben, Montego and Amy Smith
with Marat Bisengaliev in 2004.
Photo © Estate of the late Howard Smith

Howard Smith left more than eighty unpublished CD reviews, and his family have given us permission to continue to publish them here, over the next couple of years. Six of these, all written by Howard earlier this year, have recently been published: harpist Katrina Szederkényi's *Fantasias & Fugues* (MSR Classics *MS 1527*), *Lux* from Voces 8 (Decca *0289 478 8053 0*), Gloria Cheng's *Montage* — Great film composers and the piano (harmonia mundi usa *HMU 907635*), Saint-Saëns piano trios from Trio Latitude 41 (Eloquentia *EL 1547*), Bridge Chamber Virtuosi (Con Brio Recordings *CBR21440*) and two discs of piano music by English composer Lionel Sainsbury (Navona Records *NV5999* and *NV5951*). [Read more ...](#)

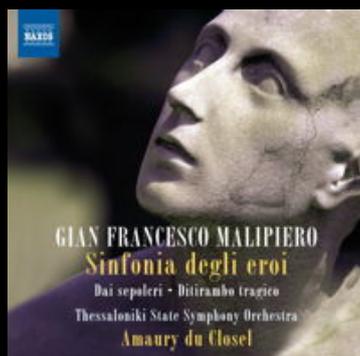
CD REVIEWS — SYMPATHETIC AND INVENTIVE

Paul Sarcich: 'Farkas solved the problem of finding his own voice as a Hungarian composer living in the shadow of Bartók and Kodály by largely turning to neo-classicism — from his studies with Respighi he learned refinement and craft, which he allied to a concern for the patchy development of Hungarian music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and looked backward in order to go forward.

'Both influences are evident in the opening suite of *Old Hungarian Dances* for oboe and strings, where Respighi's *Ancient Airs and Dances* invite an immediate comparison. The pupil is well up to the master, where Farkas' sympathetic and inventive treatments make a delightful suite, with Lajos Lencsés appearing as both soloist and arranger of the oboe and strings version.' (Tocatta Classics *TOCC 0217*)



'The Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra performs with obvious care and commitment ...'



'... the forces on this disc are well up to the challenge.'

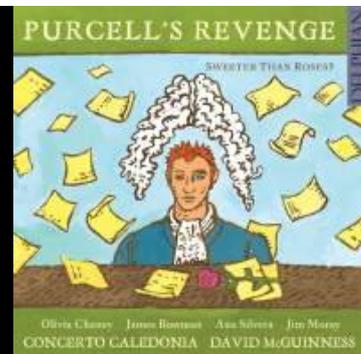
Geoff Pearce: 'Whilst Gian Francesco Malipiero is not exactly a household name, I was amazed that most of the music on this disc had never been recorded before. It appears that the composer had left much of his music from the early part of the twentieth century in boxes in his basement.

'This disc has some fine music and the performances by the Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra conducted by Amaury du Closel are a fantastic addition to my recorded music library, and I'm sure that they'll be a hit in others' collections too.

'*Sinfonia Degli Eroi*, written in 1905, was not performed between 1911 and 2010. The work's motto, from Dante's *Divine Comedy* is: "All things created before me are eternal and I am eternal".' (Naxos *8.572766*)

Geoff Pearce is also impressed by Canadian-born pianist Vytautas Smetona (Navona Records *NV5992*) and by the chamber music of Zae Munn (Navona Records *NV5991*), and he also listens to James M Stephenson's palindromic sequel to Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* (Ravello Records *RR7906*).

Gerald Fenech: 'The present venture, even more than most, eludes verbal description, and the tapestry of arrangements and creative responses are never less than spectacularly passionate and surprising. The disc also encapsulates music by James Oswald, Olivia Chaney and Ana Silvera, whose work rubs shoulders with some of Purcell's brightest creations. For those who love to mix old and new musical potions, this extraordinary programme is a veritable display of exuberance and electrifying instrumental sounds coupled with genuine great performances by some starry guest names.'
(Delphian *DCD34161*)



'A beguiling issue in superb sound and catchy presentation.'

Gerald Fenech also recommends orchestral, choral and organ music by Leif Solberg (*Toccata Classics TOCC 0260*), Jeni Slotchiver playing piano music by Ferruccio Busoni (*Centaur CRC 3396*), and two discs of music by Mykola Lysenko (*Toccata Classics TOCC 0177* and *TOCC 0287*).

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FUTURE PERFORMANCES

Our October listings include Marat Bisengaliev playing Saint-Saëns' Violin Concerto No 3 with Charles Dutoit and the Symphony Orchestra of India, Hong Kong's Joy of Music Festival, Brahms and Bartók from the Seoul Philharmonic, the Cracovia Music Festival in Poland, BeethovenFest Bonn in Germany, Chevalier de St-Georges, and the Spanish symphonists in New York, The Cumnock Tryst in Scotland, the Little Missenden Festival (Buckinghamshire UK), and in London, the Kensington Symphony Orchestra's tribute to John McCabe, Warren Mailley-Smith playing Chopin, and Neruda's Trumpet Concerto.

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