



# MUSIC & VISION

classical music newsletter

*Art, Fire, Soul – Issue 96, 1 March 2016*

'Pianist **Elizabeth Moak** has received awards for her collaborative work from the Music Academy of the West and Peabody Conservatory of Music of Johns Hopkins University (studying with Leon Fleisher, Ann Schein, and Julian Martin).



'For *Art, Fire, Soul*, Moak, who studied at Peabody Conservatory and the Suisse Neuchâtel Conservatory, is a celebrated Baltimore debut performer of a versatile, diverse, self-recommending concert programme focusing on numerous works by acclaimed performer, author and academician, **Judith Lang Zaimont** (born Tennessee, 1945).

'Zaimont has a rare capacity for crafting wide-ranging, stylistically accessible and heartfelt piano music that's both challenging and audience-friendly. MSR's notable clarity is especially ear-catching and the standout Moak tonal

Composer Judith Lang Zaimont (left) and pianist Elizabeth Moak with sound engineer Richard Price at one of the recording sessions for *Art, Fire, Soul*. Photo © Jennifer Nulsen

aptitude gives her encyclopedic recital (with a number of its items world premiere recordings) a stature of compelling merit.' **Read more ...**



'... a stature of compelling merit.'

The late Howard Smith listened to *Art, Fire, Soul* (MSR Classics MS 1366) in 2013. His recently published review has now received an *M&V* article sponsorship, which makes the whole review, with its seven sound samples, available to anyone, and puts it at the top of the list of sponsored features on our homepage. Anyone can sponsor any *Music & Vision* article at any time,



'... remarkable balance, clarity and sensitivity.'

with just a few restrictions. It's a great way to reward the author and to give the writing extra visibility. **Read more about sponsoring articles.** Howard Smith was such a prolific writer that, on his sudden death in 2015, he left more than eighty unpublished *M&V* CD reviews. With the permission of his family, we are continuing to publish approximately two of these per month. Also published recently is a Howard Smith review of another MSR Classics disc — Christine Howlett's *Love Raise Your Voice — Music or Soprano, Violin and Piano* (MS 1384).

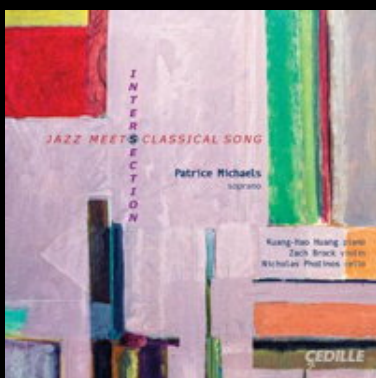
We also have a review of a more recent MSR Classics CD, which comes highly recommended by Gerald Fenech : 'American composer, organist, teacher and musicologist Barbara Harbach gives a towering performance of Bach's pieces, while her Pachelbel has a rich and colourful palette that gives these works their unique and distinct timbre.



'... Barbara Harbach gives a towering performance ...'

'A wonderful double album in sumptuous sound quality, with a couple of quite exhilarating essays by Alfred Mann and Rob Haskins that make for some enthralling reading.'

Gerald Fenech also listens to orchestral music by Mieczysław Weinberg (Toccata Classics TOCC 0313), to songs with orchestra by Michael Csányi-Wills (also on Toccata, TOCC 0329), to Shudong Braamse singing Massenet (Navona Records NV6017), and to orchestral music by Respighi, including his *Metamorphosen*, on BIS (BIS-2130 SACD).



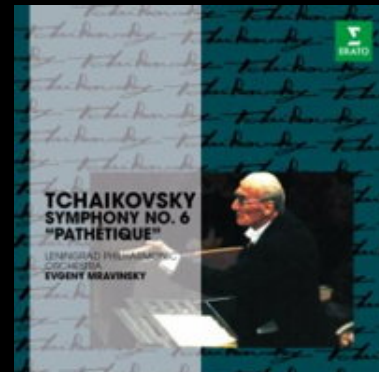
'Plenty of good things here ...'

Paul Sarcich, on *Intersection — Jazz Meets Classical Song* (Cedille CDR 90000 149) : 'There are those who would doubtless run at the sight of the subtitle of this album: after all, there have been many attempted marriages of jazz and classical music, and many of those have sounded like shotgun weddings. But this attempt in fact stretches much wider than jazz — there are influences from various world musics, plus Tin Pan Alley, Broadway and other forms of Americana as well. Which might cause others who bolt at the thought of "crossover" to do just that. They'd be missing out actually, although this is certainly not an album for purists of any stripe. Jazzers might balk at the thought of a backing group consisting of piano, violin and cello; classicists and musical theatre mavens could gnash their teeth at the liberties taken in the musical

and lyrical treatments.

'All of which would be a pity — although a spirit of adventure is undoubtedly needed here, rewards are definitely to be had. Patrice Michaels is an American soprano who claims her first love as jazz, but has an impressive list of classical and operatic performances to her credit. She also plays flute and piano, and writes both music and lyrics. She has drawn on all of this to produce a double CD, so the material ranges far and wide. Hers is a light, flexible voice with which she is prepared to tackle a wide stylistic range.' **Read more ...**

Stephen Francis Vasta: 'Evgeny Mravinsky's early-stereo recordings of Tchaikovsky's last three symphonies from circa 1960, licensed in the West by Deutsche Grammophon, long held a near-legendary status among collectors. (That they were long unavailable Stateside no doubt enhanced the legend.) Those recordings, which have become more readily available on CD, have provoked interest in the conductor's concert performances, such as this one.



'... the conductor seems unwilling to give himself over wholeheartedly to the music's affect.'

'Part of the older recordings' mystique came from their avoidance of sentimentality in this much-abused music. The first movement of this *Pathétique*, however, perhaps takes this too far. In the clear, well-organized exposition, the conductor seems unwilling to give himself over wholeheartedly to the music's affect. Even the clarinet's reflection on the lyric theme, just before the development, feels reined-in, reticent. (In the recapitulation's longer version of the same material, the player is allowed a bit more expressive scope.) The attack on the development section is ferocious; the passage, while effectively fierce, gets too hard a sell. At the climax, the sustained brasses completely cover the rising string line, and the big landing at 13:28 — as that description might suggest — isn't together.' (Tchaikovsky: Symphony No 6 — Evgeny Mravinsky, Erato 0 825646 138289) **Browse our latest CD reviews ...**

## MIRGA GRAŽINYTĖ-TYLA — CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS



Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla.  
Photo © Vern Evans

Lithuanian conductor Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla has been appointed as the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra's twelfth music director, with effect from September 2016, for an initial three-year period. The winners of Les Victoires de la musique classique and the classical winners at the 58th annual Grammy awards have all been announced. The Barlow Prize Competition and the Barlow General or LDS Commission have been announced — applications and scores must be received by 1 June 2016. VIVAT's latest release — Mendelssohn's 1833 reconstruction of Handel's oratorio *Israel in Egypt* — will be available from 18 March 2016.

We mark the passing of Francisco Kraus Trujillo, Eri Klas, Howard Quilling, Pascal Bentoiu, Piero Buscaroli, Louis Lane, Steven Stucky, Leslie Bassett, Ulf Söderblom and Saulius Sondeckis. **Read more**



Nick van Bloss

Andrew Schartmann: 'A fresh interpretation of oft-played music is a rare treat. Yet that is precisely what patrons of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra experienced when English pianist Nick van Bloss performed Beethoven's monumental "Emperor" concerto. Each movement had its surprises — stark deviations from tradition that drew forth new musical characters from the timeless score, all executed with confidence and supreme artistry.

'The opening *Allegro* showcased a confident van Bloss, bold enough to take liberties with the tempo by stretching it to and fro like an elastic band. These liberties garnered knee-jerk resistance from some — "That's not how it goes!" — but in the end, the audience was won over by van Bloss' unique and deeply musical conception of the work.

'The sublime *Adagio* was treated with great care, as van Bloss sculpted Louvre-worthy melodic arcs, tender and soothing in character. It was as if he were taming the notes — rocking them gently to sleep, and in turn, lulling the audience into a meditative state of mind.

'The finale bustled with a fiery energy, though this was stilted ever so slightly by a brief hesitation over the tempo. Once van Bloss settled in, however, the music burst forward with perpetual drive. In particular, the movement highlighted his refined sensitivity to changes of key. All of the piano's mechanisms were put to work in coloring the different tonalities, such that each part of the form had its own particular shade. These fine hues were overshadowed at times by an overeager brass section, but by and large, the overall effect was well-balanced.' **Read more ...**



Titania (Anne Carolyn-Bird) watches over a dozing Bottom (Nathan Stark), and the Fairies help keep watch, in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Hawaii Opera Theater

James Sohre: 'In a world opera schedule packed with safe bread-and-butter warhorses, Hawaii Opera Theatre (HOT) gambled on a Britten rarity and came up smelling as sweet as a tuberose lei.

'Director Henry G Akina has skillfully crafted an unfussy, straight forward, tightly organized production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that offered few surprises but ample delights. Mr Akina's clarity of story-telling is a welcome asset, and he moves his performers around like the seasoned pro he is, with utmost clarity of purpose.

'Mortals, gods and rude mechanicals alike are well-characterized here, not only as definitive, identifiable groups, but also as highly individualized components in the story. Some whimsical touches drew audible audience appreciation, whether it was Tytania playfully wriggling her behind onto a hammock, Puck's astonishing defiance of gravity with weightless leaps and jetées, or Lysander's and Demetrius' use of Helena as a human rope for an amorous tug-of-war.

'Peter Dean Beck's set design was highly efficient: a workable center stage unit set of platforms and stairs that provided an ideal environment for varied scenes and locales. This unit was beautifully framed by a diaphanous "forest" of legs and borders on which were projected a spectacular series of images, masterfully designed by Adam Larsen.' **Read more ...**



Titania (Anne Carolyn-Bird) cradles a docile Bottom (Nathan Stark) after lovingly scratching his head, in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Hawaii Opera Theater

Maria Nockin: 'On Saturday 30 January 2016, The Metropolitan Opera presented Giacomo Puccini's last opera, *Turandot* live in HD to cinemas in seventy countries across the globe. This reviewer saw the encore on Wednesday 3 February at the Deer Valley Imax Theater in North Phoenix. *Turandot* is a major work for chorus and the Met's group, led by Donald Palumbo, was as much a star as any solo singer. Palumbo's performers not only sang the *Matinée Turandot* that was broadcast around the world, they also sang the evening performance of *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* after a few intervening hours. Lucky for them the Met is dark on Sunday.



Act II scene 2 of Puccini's *Turandot* at New York Metropolitan Opera. Photo © Ken Howard

'Conductor Paolo Carignani showed his tremendous skills in the preparation of this massive score and his authoritative interpretation of its opulent orchestration resulted in the excellent performance heard on Saturday evening. Franco Zeffirelli's elaborately detailed production was ornate and colorful. David Kneuss' stage direction told the story as an Asian fairytale. Anna Anni and Dada Saligeri's costumes reflected the glories of Imperial China and the traditions of other Asian countries found along the Silk Road.

'As the visiting Prince Calaf, Marco Berti's huge voice enveloped the audience when he told of his fascination with the cruel princess. He did not sing many soft tones, but his fortes were most impressive. He sang "Nessun dorma" in a dramatic style that involved short bursts of tone rather than in longer, more lyrical lines.

'Anita Hartig sang the role of Liù, the slave who loves Calaf madly and loses her life in order to save his. She has a wonderfully poignant sound and her singing brought tears to some eyes. Ukrainian bass Alexander Tsymbalyuk's Timur was in superb voice. He is new to the Met's HD audience but we hope to hear a great deal more of his deep but warm sound in the near future.' **Read more ...**

Alice McVeigh: 'My singer friend called me up, the one with tickets to spare — unexpectedly — for *L'Etoile*, at the Royal Opera House.



Christophe Mortagne as King Ouf I, Kate Lindsey as Lazuli and Simon Bailey as Siroco in rehearsal for Chabrier's *L'Etoile* at Covent Garden

"It's not great music", she warned me. "In fact, it's light, so light that it'll probably fly away. The reviews have not been outstanding. But, if you'd like to come ..."

'I knew nothing of Chabrier, and less of his *L'Etoile*, but — as I'm always game for any opera, especially one I'd never been to — I was keen. And I went.

'And it was fab.

'It comprised a plot so silly

Gilbert and Sullivan might have disdained it, including a King intent upon finding someone to impale for a national holiday, plus offbeat direction cribbed pretty much directly from *Monty Python* — but still with that kind of freshness and esprit — from everyone from the merest walk-on roles to the stars — that made for a delightful evening.' **Read more ...**

Mike Wheeler: 'It would be too easy to fall back on clichés like "Gallic clarity and elegance" to describe French pianist Emmanuel Despax's recital, but those qualities helped make this one of the most impressive contributions to the Nottingham Royal Concert Hall's Sunday morning piano series in its five-year history (Nottingham, UK, 21 February 2016).

'His lucid, informative spoken introductions were models of their kind, and all of a piece with his playing. In Haydn's Sonata No 47 (Hoboken XVI 32) his clean articulation nicely pointed up the first movement's baroque roots, and found just the right level of wistfulness in the second movement. In the finale his intelligent treatment of Haydn's silences kept the musical current flowing.' **More ...**



Emmanuel Despax. Photo © Benjamin Ealovega

Mike also listens to Andrew Dunlop, Ria Nolan and the Eblana String Trio, to Sinfonia Viva's schools residency concert, and to Mark Bebbington's return visit to Nottingham.



Mariella Devia as Norma, Stefan Pop as Pollione and chorus in Bellini's *Norma* at Teatro di San Carlo.  
Photo © 2016 Luciano Romano

Giuseppe Pennisi on a new production of Bellini's *Norma*: 'This new production is neither set in a distant land nor in recent times, but, following the tragedy by Alexandre Soumet the opera is based upon, it is set during the Gallic wars when the Druids were under Roman occupation. However, it is not a "peplum" *Norma*. The production team (Lorenzo Amato as stage director, Ezio Frigerio for sets and projections and Francesca Squarciarino for costumes) placed the Gallic wars in a "fantasy context" with forests, ruins and grottos almost drawn from *The Lord of the Rings* or *Game of Thrones*, with also inspiration from paintings by Corot and Friederich. There are plenty of special effects, eg in the last scene, the pyre seems to flame the entire stage and also the orchestra seats. Paradoxically, this allows for underscoring a very intimate drama, more romantic than neoclassical, based on the confrontation between a father, his daughter, her husband and his most recent mistress. Thus, this *Norma* is both traditional and quite innovative.' **More**

Giuseppe also reports on 'Rossini's Revenge' — the first of three new productions of *The Barber of Seville* marking the opera's bicentenary, on Hervé's *Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde* in Venice, on Handel's *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, and on Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, ending Palermo's *Ring* cycle.

Keith Bramich listens to Haydn and Schubert from the Hornton Chamber Orchestra at the Royal Academy of Music in London. **Browse our latest concert and opera reviews ...**



## ASK ALICE — ON COMFORT MUSIC WHEN MOURNING

Alice McVeigh: 'As readers will know, I lost a friend recently, and this got me thinking about comfort food — and comfort music.'

'As for the food, well, it was very weird, but suddenly I lost all taste for my usual spicy, ethnic and meat things: preferring such boring dinners — sorry, family!!!! — as cauliflower cheese or shepherd's pie without much interest to it.'

'In terms of music, I found that I couldn't bear anything too rich either: no Strauss, no Mahler, no late romantics altogether, in fact, falling back on Bach (particularly the Sir John Eliot Gardiner Bach cantatas), on Peter Holman's Parley of Instruments' Locke recording (of which I've written before), and on one or two others, which I haven't.' **Read more**

Alice also pays tribute to the late Christine Jackson : 'There are orchestral cellists, teaching cellists, principal cellists, chamber music cellists and cello soloists. And then there was Christine Jackson — all of these rolled into one, and an ebullient, glowing, glittery character besides — who died this week at only fifty-three.'

'I first met Christine — already a near-legend in British terms, as she had as a teen starred in the televised Du Pré masterclasses — when I was twenty-three and had just been allowed to work in the UK. She was barely twenty.'

'Christine and I hit it off instantly, even though I apparently told my husband on the phone that she was outrageous. (In my defence, she was outrageous.) For a start, there were those trousers. While the rest of us, in pokey little changing rooms from Weston-super-Mare to Ely to Kendal to York to Scunthorpe, were changing into long black skirts and long-sleeved blouses, Christine was — quite literally — lying on the floor, cursing while attempting to peel her skin-tight black leather trousers over her slimline legs, and not caring in the least about our quips at her expense.' **Read more**

**More episodes of 'Ask Alice' ...**

**Ask Alice your classical music-related questions ...**

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.

The editorial and advertising copy deadlines for our April newsletter are both Monday 28 March 2016. Details here.

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