



Fascinating Insights — Issue 98, 1 May 2016

Tiara Atai: 'When Pamela Kaufman asked how her old friend Martin Jarvis (the musicologist who had the idea behind the film *Written by Mrs Bach*) had been getting on, she was informed that he had just finished writing his PhD at Charles Darwin University in Australia. Perhaps more surprising was that his PhD was written entirely on the theory that Johann Sebastian Bach's wife, Anna Magdalena, had written the six cello suites and the first prelude in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, amongst other compositions. "Don't be ridiculous" was Pamela's first reaction, though nine years later she would find herself as the Executive Producer of the films *Written by Mrs Bach* and *Written by Mrs Bach: Broken Silence*, the latter being premiered on Thursday 7 April 2016.



Martin Jarvis and Pamela Kaufman

'*Written by Mrs Bach: Broken Silence* is essentially an extended version of *Written by Mrs Bach*, screened by *BBC Four* in 2015. After the release of the film, Martin and Pamela found themselves at the centre of a media frenzy, sparking discussion — and often rage — in academic and public circles alike. Rarely had musicological research resulted in so much furore not only in the

world of academia, but outside it too, with performers and music critics writing scathing articles and reports. However, Pamela and Martin did find some supporters to fight their corner, including Myleene Klass, Bruno Giurianna, Tilly Cernitori, and even the prodigious eleven-year-old composer Alma Deutscher. As Pamela tells us before the screening of the film, with such important and talented musicians on their side, making an extended version of the film felt like a natural step.' [Read more ...](#)

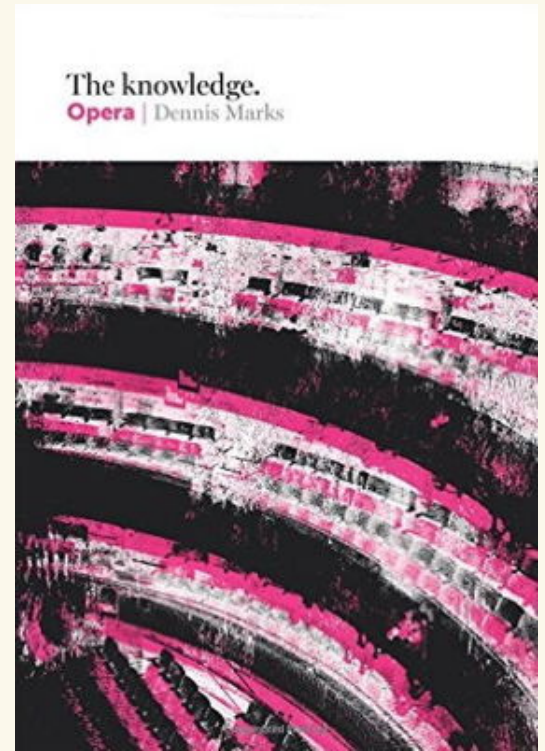
BOOK REVIEW - DENNIS MARKS' OPERA GUIDE FOR 'THE KNOWLEDGE'

Roderic Dunnett: 'In Quadrille Publishing's handy series *The Knowledge*, this is a pocket book to treasure, and to cherish all the more as it must have been completed months or even weeks before Dennis Marks' early and much regretted death in 2015.

'It is written by someone who knew opera inside out, and with the shrewdness of one who not only served as General Director of English National Opera, but before that was head of music at the BBC.

'The book covers an impressively wide range. Such overviews can run into trouble — embracing so much material that the coverage becomes slightly trite; striving to ensure that nothing is omitted, and thus running to excess in certain areas, while inadvertently failing to pay due attention in others.

'I found Marks' book succumbs to none of these errors. It is shrewd, incisive and entertaining: following a chronological route which is perspicacious in that it brings together not just different periods, but different types of opera. There is one slight irritation: intending to maintain interest, Marks slips in higgledy-piggledy summaries of key operas — Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Puccini, Strauss, Janáček, Britten — and even Puccini, Poulenc, John Adams — which slightly obstruct the run of the book. Ten pertinent pages offer a summary of these composers themselves.' [Read more ...](#)



The Knowledge. Opera. Dennis Marks.
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MAURO BERTOLI — CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS



Dan Redfeld

Young Italian-Canadian pianist Mauro Bertoli is recognized with a new award for young performers. Dan Redfeld announces the release of classical CD *A Hopeful Place* for soprano and chamber orchestra on Navona Records.

American conductor James Levine will end his tenure with New York Metropolitan Opera at the end of the company's

2015-16 season. Artistic director George Vass announces the 2016 Presteigne Festival, 25-30 August 2016. Korean violinist Kyung Wha Chung signs to Warner Classics, returning to the recording studio after a fifteen-year gap. Leaked documents reveal Russian cellist Sergei Roldugin as instrumental in hiding Vladimir Putin's money.

We mark the passing of Gabriele Sima, Mei Baojiu, Jan Henrik Kayser, Royston Nash, Brian Asawa, Guy Woolfenden, and Howard Cable.

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Mauro Bertoli.
Photo © Wenfei Ye

ANDRÁS SCHIFF — LIVE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Malcolm Miller: 'Sir András Schiff's latest three-recital series at London's Wigmore Hall (2, 6 and 9 April 2016) set out to explore the concept of "late style" by focusing on the last three sonatas of each of the Viennese classic-romantic masters, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. The first recital featured the first of those last three works in a feast of choicest Viennese masterpieces that spread a history of the classic-romantic sonata before eyes and ears in a single, delicious sweep. Schiff's beautiful pianism engaged the rapt audience in this exploration on "lateness" in style for nearly two hours without an interval, a remarkable feat in itself. Haydn's sonata in C, H XVI: 50 of the 1790s is notable for being the first published sonata with pedal markings: and amongst the magical highpoints were certain pedalled passages in which Schiff produced a type of music box effect with resonating high register melodies over delicate "alberti" basses!



András Schiff. © 2007 Birgitta Kowsky

'We knew we were in for some surprises from the start, where Schiff projected the opening *staccato* falling octave motif using a type of Chico Marx-style single finger attack (as also in the repeat), as crisp, witty and delightful as the vintage comedian; he then drew the whole phrase towards its goal: a lingering, questioning, freshly articulated chord. Later on in the movement the *staccato* theme returns in the bass, now *legato* and mysterious in mood, underlining Haydn's prophetic predilection for thematic transformation of an almost Romantic cast.' [Read more ...](#)

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Maria Nockin: 'On 2 April 2016, The Metropolitan Opera transmitted the production of Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* directed by the late Anthony Minghella, CBE, to cinemas in seventy countries. Michael Levine's stark set consisted of a large berm over which the characters walked from the sea and its docks and a square house with walls and doors that slid back and forth to form various configurations. Minghella's widow, director and choreographer Carolyn Choa, gave a traditional representation of the story except for the portrayal of Butterfly's son, Trouble.



Ana Maria Martinez as Butterfly and Maria Zifchak as Suzuki in Puccini's 'Madama Butterfly' at New York Metropolitan Opera. Photo © 2016 Marty Sohl

'Trouble was a traditional Japanese puppet and several black-clad handlers worked with the cast onstage to play him. All of Hans Feng's authentic costumes were constructed of fine fabrics, including the American styled outfit by which Butterfly showed her desire to share Pinkerton's culture. Peter Mumford's lighting placed each scene at the intended time of day and created the appropriate moods.' [Read more ...](#)

Mike Wheeler: 'Composer George Butterworth died a hundred years ago, during the Battle of the Somme. So what more natural starting-point for this commemorative concert (Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, UK, 8 April 2016) than his orchestral rhapsody *A Shropshire Lad*? Based largely on material from his A E Housman setting "Loveliest of Trees", its elegiac tone could easily slide into mere pastoral meandering. But conductor Mark Elder and the Hallé weren't going to let that happen, taking a particularly sombre view of the piece that refused to wallow in mere nostalgia.

'John Casken's oboe concerto *Apollinaire's Bird* was commissioned by the Hallé for its principal oboist Stéphane Rancourt, and they gave the premiere in Manchester in April 2014. Its starting-point is Guillaume Apollinaire's World War One poem *Un Oiseau Chante* ("A Bird is Singing"), musing on the sound of birdsong on the battlefield. Casken's solo writing is virtuosic without unnecessary showiness, incorporating techniques such as quarter-tones and multiphonics. Rancourt was again the soloist, taking his place in an orchestral landscape that is darkly atmospheric without labouring the obvious imagery. The second of its two extended movements opens in a more lyrical frame of mind, with a lengthy solo cantilena leading to a sizeable cadenza. Rancourt's pliable phrasing together with Casken's fastidious scoring at least suggested the possibility of a more positive energy, latent if not yet fully realised. A work of major importance, and not just for oboists.'

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John Casken. Photo © 2009 Tom Bangbala

Mike also listened to an adventurously programmed flute and piano recital in Derby: "Where would twentieth-century French music be without the flute?" I wondered, after flute and piano duo Rosanna Ter-Berg and Leo Nicholson's recital for Derby Chamber Music (Multi-Faith Centre, Derby University, 1 April 2016). Only three of the works on the programme were by native French composers, but a distinctly Gallic air spilled over into at least some of the rest.' [Read more ...](#)



Rosanna Ter-Berg

Giuseppe Pennisi: 'Fifteen years after the sudden and premature death of Giuseppe Sinopoli (1946-2001), the National Academy of Santa Cecilia celebrated him with an *in memoriam* concert given by the symphony orchestra with two world-known artists: conductor Yuri Temirkanov and baritone Markus Werba. The concert was repeated three times on 23, 24 and 25 April. I attended the 23 April 2016 performance. This was the long Spring week-end which coincided with a national holiday for the end of World War II; thus, the balconies were full in the huge three thousand seat auditorium, but in the most expensive orchestra seats, some rows were empty. They are subscribers' prime locations, and quite a few of them had most likely gone to open their beach or country secondary residences. They should regret it because they missed one of the most fascinating concerts of the National Academy's 2015-16 symphonic season.



Markus Werba (left) and Yuri Temirkanov at the Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome on 23 April 2016.
Photo © 2016 Musacchio & Ianniello

'The first part of the concert included Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante défunte* and Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*, two quite different musical pieces dealing with the same subject: the death of young innocent children. In Ravel's piece, Temirkanov underlined the tenderness as well as the references to Basque and Spanish popular music. In Mahler's lieder, Temirkanov, Werba and the orchestra gave a deeply moving reading of the five songs composed using poems written by Friedrich Rückert when two of his six children died of scarlet fever.

'The second part was dedicated to Johannes Brahms' Symphony No 4 in E minor, Op 98, one of the last works of the Romantic repertory, and thus particularly suited to Temirkanov's temperament. Its focus is on man's loneliness, even in the third movement, an *allegro giocoso* which sounds like a tragic epitaph — a reminder of Sinopoli's loneliness in the years when he tried to turn Rome's Teatro dell'Opera around.' [More ...](#)

Also in Rome, Giuseppe was at a performance of Puccini's *Il Trittico*: 'The present staging is a co-production between Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, Copenhagen Royal Theater and the Vienna an der Wien Theater. The basic concept of the stage director, Damiano Michieletto, who worked hand-in-hand with conductor Daniele Rustioni, is that *Il Trittico* is a single opera in two parts. The first part encompasses both *Il Tabarro* and *Suor Angelica*, and *Gianni Schicchi*, after the intermission, forms the second part. The action is today in a single set by Paolo Fantin, mainly featuring containers. In *Il Tabarro* the containers are on a harbor front, in *Suor Angelica* they become a women's jail where the protagonist has been secluded for seven years (without being informed of the death of her son), and in *Gianni Schicchi* they are covered by wallpaper to create a Florentine duplex apartment owned by a rich man. The characters are poor or even destitute in the first part. In the second part, they are lower middle class sliding to poverty; thus, they are so interested in the 'last will and testament' of their wealthy relative. The costumes by Carla Teti and the lighting by Alessandro Carletti are very telling. Finally, a child is often present in the action: the memory of a dead child in *Il Tabarro* and *Suor Angelica*, and a spoiled little brat in *Gianni Schicchi*. Thus, the theme of innocence is added to the theme of death.



A scene from Puccini's 'Suor Angelica' at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. Photo © 2016 Yasuko Kageyama

'No doubt, it is a daring and innovative reading of *Il Trittico*. The Rome audience responded with ovations, even though a few music reviewers were critical. The main novelty is that the combination of staging and music shows how Puccini was closely in contact with the expressionism of the so called "Second Viennese School".' [More ...](#)

Away from Rome, Giuseppe also reviews Alfredo Casella's *La Donna Serpente* in Turin, Mahler in Monte-Carlo and Respighi's *Sunken Bell* in Cagliari.

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STUNNINGLY ATMOSPHERIC — CD REVIEWS

Geoff Pearce: 'This is an interesting pairing — a rather early concerto, from Prokofiev's early twenties, is paired with his last, written nearly two decades later. The insight in pianist Vadym Kholodenko's performances has previously impressed me — he is a true poet. I hadn't heard the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra before, but it is a fine ensemble and very ably conducted by Miguel Harth-Bedoya.

'I was impressed right from the *Andantino* which begins Piano Concerto No 2 by the breadth Kholodenko brings to the work. Few other performers give this work as much spaciousness and lyricism. This is a majestic, lovely recording, full of colour and detail. Its precision and virtuosity never overshadow, and it picks up the detail and beauty lost by most other recordings. I would recommend the CD for this movement alone.'



'... a majestic, lovely recording, full of colour and detail.'



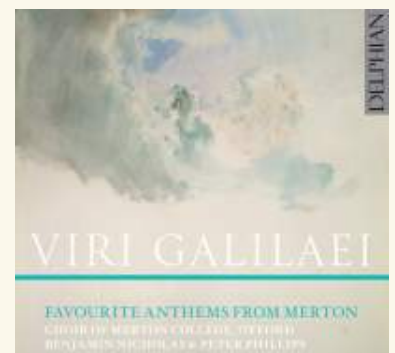
'... it has all the power that is needed, it moves forward and does not get bogged down ...'

Geoff also listens to Bruckner: 'One of my favourite Orchestras, a great conductor and a monumental work ... I have three recordings of Bruckner's Ninth: Karajan, Georg Tintner, and now Mariss Jansons and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. They are all very special in their own way. Karajan's is heavier in sound and perhaps a bit more ponderous as a result. Tintner's is monumental, with moments of great beauty and lyricism.

'I like this new RCO recording. In the first movement, my favourite, there are moments of sublime lyricism and moments of breathtaking grandeur too. More importantly, there is a sense of phrase, often missing from many conductors. There is also a silence between phrases. The attention to detail is truly admirable — something that Georg Tintner also displayed — and the bridge passages connecting the main ideas always made sense. This is music that is never dull or stodgy, and the palate is always changing.'

Gerald Fenech: 'Now firmly established as one of Oxbridge's most outstanding choral foundations and at the same time definitely its youngest, the Choir of Merton College performs this selection of favourite anthems with superlative clarity and heart-on-sleeve approach, and the beautifully moulded lines reveal a musicality that is not encountered very often.

'Indeed this is an immensely responsive mixed-voice choir which is among the most exciting ensembles performing today. Sound quality and the particularly high-brow annotations complete a disc that is elegant, affective and at the same time intense as anyone could wish for. Another gem from Delphian.'



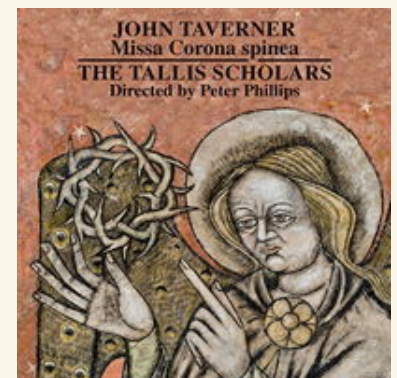
'... beautifully moulded lines ...'



'A wonderfully attractive recital ...'

Gerald also recommends the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin's Handel *Water Music* (harmonia mundi HMC 902216), Pachelbel's *Un orage d'avril* ('April Storm', harmonia mundi HMC 902238), Todd Fickley's Bach organ works (MSR Classics' Bach Project, MS 1562), Felix Weingartner's *Die Dorfschule* (cpo 777 813-2) and Franck, Ravel and Ysaÿe from Sophie Rosa and Benjamin Powell: 'The young British prodigy Sophie Rosa, ably supported by pianist Benjamin Powell, interprets this repertoire with authority and yet the overwhelming impression is one of adventurous disposition mingled with a depth of emotion that conveys real exuberance. A wonderfully attractive recital, excellently recorded and presented ...' (Champs Hill Records, CHRC123)

Roderic Dunnett: '*Missa Corona Spinea* was recorded in the chapel of Merton College, Oxford, where Phillips was instrumental in setting up one of the outstanding undergraduate choirs of our time. The acoustic seems to respond marvellously to the choir, lending these readings a warmth and enchantment that makes them a joy to listen to from beginning to end. The Tallis Scholars' quite modest forces (ten or eleven for the accompanying items, Taverner's celebrated pair of settings of *Dum Transisset Sabbatum*) are here augmented somewhat, so they approximate to the Sixteen's regular eighteen voices, and one has to say the effect is well judged and beneficial.



'... a magnificent addition to the wide-ranging Gimell repertoire ...'

'So wonderfully pliant and effortlessly high-riding are the sopranos, singing in effect a descant that soars eloquently over the lower-placed *cantus firmus*, that they set the tone for the whole work. What is going on in lower voices, from the "Means" (lower trebles) down to the bottommost basses, is a glorious elaboration of a chant whose origins are actually unknown: an anonymous melody, as it were, which cannot be connected with even a secular source, such as is the case with the popular folk tune *Western Wynde*.



'... played with great charm and feeling by Warren Mailley-Smith.'

Roderic also listens to the piano music of Charles O'Brien (*Toccata TOCC 0257*): 'The *Arabesque* of 1906 is a piece of joyous bluster and skedaddle; *Daffodils* perhaps not quite as imaginative as the Wordsworth associations might suggest. From a totally different period, the last decade of O'Brien's life, come *Three Grandchildren Waltzes*, Susan, David and Neil. These are not wan or shy, but surprisingly sprightly, and Mailley-Smith's delightful rhythmic precision plus a lightly sprinkled dose of vibrato serve the works perfectly; it is the last which has the most lovely, easeful, cheeky and carefree feel.

'A similarly late *Barcarolle* perhaps lacks the character of the earlier pieces, but this is followed by the second *Rhapsody*, a full thirteen minutes in which the piano lets rip with all the fire and energetic fast flow of its nineteenth century predecessors, both German and Russian, almost aggressively bringing this second O'Brien disc to a truly dramatic conclusion.'

The late Howard Smith listened to three older CDs of piano music: Chopin from Jean-Yves Thibaudet (Dal Segno *DSPRCD060*), Mozart from Maria João Pires (Regis *RRC1345*) and stunningly atmospheric Stravinsky, Ravel and Debussy from Fiona and John York (Nimbus *NI 5866*). [Browse our latest CD reviews ...](#)

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ASK ALICE — LONDON IN A TROUGH?

Alice McVeigh fields questions on auditions, RSI and the accusation that London's music scene is in a trough : 'What I will say is that there are *certainly* fewer reviews written and less attention given to concerts, which is a great shame, though operas still get reviewed. Lebrecht is right to lament this. Also, I don't think he exaggerates the lack of characters and feistiness in orchestras these days, and he's right that the Royal Festival Hall is now only partly classical: it's "sold out" to a zillion other artistic forms. He *may* also be on solid ground about the dead recording industry spawning itinerant orchestras with only a tepid connection to London audiences, while Duchen and others spend a lot of time bemoaning the quality of London's concert halls (quite rightly).



Cartoon of Alice McVeigh.
© 2015 Pat Achilles

'What I think is that the tide of history is, at least for the moment, leaving classical music floundering in the shallows. This could, and almost certainly will change, because change is the one constant. But Norman has, I feel, rather hit the nail on the head here — if perhaps for slightly different reasons than he supposes.'

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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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