



Sonic Transparency — Issue 99, 1 June 2016

'TURANDOT' FOR CHILDREN — LIVE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Giuseppe Pennisi: 'Many opera goers will be surprised to learn that, this season, one single production of Giacomo Puccini's well-known *Turandot* is scheduled for one hundred and fifty performances over about twelve months. It is a joint effort of the Associazione Lirica di Como (AsLiCo) with its lovely Teatro Sociale, the world famous Teatro Liceu of Barcelona, and of the elegant Theater Magdeburg, with a catchment area from Hanover to Leipzig. Readers would be even more astonished to learn that this *Turandot* production is especially tailored for children. As mentioned on other occasions, even though the libretto indicates that the action is "in China at the time of the fairy tales", the opera is far from a fairy tale: it is a crude demonstration of power and cruelty versus innocence, not an abstract joke like in Busoni's opera of the same title, drawn from the same eighteenth century play by Carlo Gozzi. Also, the libretto is full of Freudian sexual overtones, and the score is almost expressionistic, similar to that of post-romantic composers approaching the second Viennese school.

'Along with its regular opera season as part of the Lombardy lyric circuit, AsLiCo has, for twenty years, had a special program to prepare future generations of opera listeners. Called *Opera Domani*, this quite successful program is addressed at various categories of youngsters, including elementary school children aged between six and eleven. Over the last few years, other European theatres have joined in with AsLiCo.

'On 16 May 2016, I attended a performance for 6-11 year old pupils in the 2,000 seat Teatro Olimpico in Rome. The children are not only part of the audience, but take an

active role in the performance as they are trained by their teachers to sing some of the choral parts from their orchestra seats. They are also made to wear some simple Chinese paper masks.' [Read more ...](#)

Giuseppe also investigates Sex and Murder in Giordano's *La cena delle beffe*, and reviews the new critical edition of Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West*, Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* and Britten's *Albert Herring* in Florence :

'Benjamin Britten's *Albert Herring* is a staple of British, North American and Australian opera houses. It is a brilliant comic opera, as sparkling as an icy cup of high class champagne. It requires a simple stage set and an orchestra of twelve soloists where each instrument is closely linked to a character on stage. It can easily move from city to city. Finally, it is perfect for young voices and singers with great ability to act; thus, it is often a choice of music schools. It is also frequently seen and heard in Germany and Central Europe because it is very funny and has a key message against hypocritical petty middle class. Most *M&V* readers will be familiar with the plot (based on a Guy de Maupassant novel) and with the lovely libretto by Eric Crozier.

'However, *Albert Herring* is a rarity in Italy. It was staged for a few nights in Florence in the Teatro della Pergola in 1968 and in a few theaters of the southern regions in 2004. I have no memory of other productions, except a one-evening-import from Britain by the Associazione Filarmonica Romana some forty years ago.



Sam Furness as Albert Herring, Rachel Kelly as Nancy and Philip Smith as Sid in Britten's *Albert Herring* in Florence. Photo © 2016 Michele Borzoni

'I was at the Teatro della Pergola in Florence on the 21 May 2016 opening night. I hope that this new British and Italian production will travel to other European opera houses because it is just a delight. The stage direction by Alessandro Talevi and the sets and

costumes by Madeleine Boyd are designed for a swift action. With a few props and a curtain, the single set transforms the location quickly from Lady Billows' pretentious palace to Mrs Herring's fruit and vegetable shop, the church, the banquet room and the central square of the East Suffolk village which contains the Herrings' store and house. The singers — S Furness, O Boylan, R Kelly, P Smith, G Sborgi, A Gillingham, C Lemmings, Z Altman, K Huml, M Custer, B Callaghan, S Gallagher and N Challier — have good voices and are excellent actors too. All fit the score and the stage well. *Albert Herring* is mostly an ensemble opera, with only one recitative and aria by the title role (Sam Furness) in the second act. In between ensembles, there are some "chit-chat" moments — eg in the conversation between Sid (Philip Smith) and Nancy (Rachel Kelly).'

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Mike Wheeler: 'When a performance of a familiar piece like Berlioz' *Roman Carnival* leaves you with the feeling almost that you were hearing it properly for the first time, you know you're in the presence of something special. French conductor Fabien Gabel and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, UK, 12 May 2016) made an immediate impression with sonic transparency allied to a driving pace that was exhilarating without feeling rushed. The clarity with which the contrapuntal strands in the canonic passage emerged was symptomatic of the evident care that went into preparing the kind of repertoire piece it's easy to take for granted.'



Fabien Gabel. Photo © Gaetan Bernard

Mike also listened to Prokofiev from the BBC Philharmonic, to 'Me and my aunts' - a Shakespeare celebration, Rheinberger and Parry from the Sitwell Singers, to Derby Choral Union's anniversary concert and to Clare Hammond playing new music by Robert Saxton :

'Nothing if not eclectic, Clare Hammond's programme (Derby Chamber Music, Multi-Faith Centre, Derby University, 22 April 2016) began with J S Bach's Toccata in D minor, BWV 913. The improvisatory quality she brought to the opening section threw in to relief the clean articulation and buoyancy of the two fugal movements, which were further heightened by an introspective approach to the intervening slow section.



Clare Hammond

'At the Presteigne Festival in August this year Hammond is due to give the complete world premiere of Robert Saxton's *Hortus Musicae* 2, written for her, like Book 1. Here we heard the first three of the seven pieces, enough to suggest an important series waiting to be unveiled. The measured climb from the brooding opening of No 1, towards the sudden blaze of light at the end was firmly controlled. In No 2, which belongs to the tradition of water pieces marked out by Liszt, Debussy and Ravel, glittering figuration was nicely balanced with calmer, more measured passages, and the rhythmic intricacy was a delight. The chant-like opening of No 2, and the subsequent processional had a firm, measured pace.'

Maria Nockin: 'During the premiere of the Metropolitan Opera's first-ever staging of *Roberto Devereux*, the soprano Sondra Radvanovsky completed her triple play, singing Donizetti's three Tudor Dynasty queens within a single season. In the seventies, Beverly

Sills sang the English and Scottish queens in New York but they have not been heard there since. Now Radvanovsky has conquered *bel canto* with the three difficult Donizetti roles. Her previous Tudor queens this season were Anna Bolena (Anne Boleyn) and Maria Stuarda (Mary, Queen of Scots).

'On 16 April 2016, she completed the triple play by singing the aging Elizabeth I of *Roberto Devereux*. This reviewer saw the Encore of the Met Live in HD performance on Wednesday 20 April. Radvanovsky's characterization and powerful vocal performance exuded queenly authority while showing Elizabeth I's difficulties in maintaining her position as ruler.



Sondra Radvanovsky as Elizabeth I in Donizetti's *Roberto Devereux* at New York Metropolitan Opera. Photo © 2016 Ken Howard

'Compared to the music Donizetti wrote for his other queens, Anna Bolena and Maria Stuarda, Elizabeth's lines are more dramatic. She is angry much of the time. Radvanovsky's vocal colors were strong and she gave a most impressive portrayal of the historical queen. Her coloratura was always accurate and there was not a slurred phrase to be heard in the entire performance. The surprise was her acting ability. Obviously she worked well with McVicar so he was able to help her achieve a finely detailed characterization.'

Malcolm Miller: 'The winning ensemble of the 2016 BPSE Beethoven Chamber Music Competition was the Louko Piano Trio: Erkki Louko, violin, Wayne Kwon, cello and Victor Lim, piano, all students at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, who played as one dynamic entity in their stirring account of Beethoven's "Ghost" Trio, Op 70. Second prize was awarded to Amarins Wierdsma, violin with Edward Liddall, piano, students at

the Guildhall School of Music, with special mention to fellow Guildhall student, Jonel Manciu. The annual competition, held at London's Steinway Hall on 18 May 2016, followed two days of masterclasses with distinguished pianist Peter Frankl, who joined BPSE (Beethoven Piano Society of Europe) Vice-Chairman Alberto Portugheis on the Jury for the competition. Nine ensembles participated, each performing a duo sonata or trio of their choice, to regale a select Steinway Hall audience.



The Louko Piano Trio at the 2016 BPSE Beethoven Chamber Music Competition in Steinway Hall, London. Photo © 2016 Bobby Chen

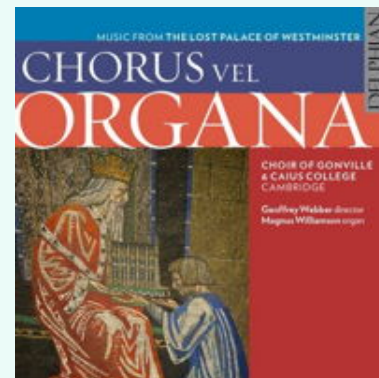
'Introducing the Jury decision, Alberto Portugheis thanked Peter Frankl and emphasised how fortunate the BPSE were to have such a distinguished teacher for the masterclasses in which everyone had learned so much, and improved their styles. Peter Frankl, in his preamble to awarding the prizes, observed that in some cases the musical personalities were impressive but the task was to judge the ensemble playing. For that reason the first prize was awarded to the Louko Piano Trio, who, he believed, really listened to each other, giving a really enjoyable performance.'

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POWERFULLY TRANSCENDENT — CD REVIEWS

Gerald Fenech: 'This superb Delphian issue has a double value: musical and historical. Maybe very few are aware that London's modern Houses of Parliament conceal a lost royal foundation: the collegiate Chapel of St Stephen. Founded by Edward I and raised into a college by his grandon Edward III in 1348, it cherished an outstanding musical legacy for two hundred years, before being dissolved by Henry VIII in 1548, when the building became the first permanent meeting-place of the House of Commons. This recording attempts to reflect something of the musical life of the college in its final years, before Henry's *coup-de-grace* almost obliterated the memory of its existence forever. Many modern performances and recordings of pre-Reformation Tudor church music entwine the extended Mass, Magnificat and Antiphon settings of the time with plainsong.' (Delphian *DCD34158*)



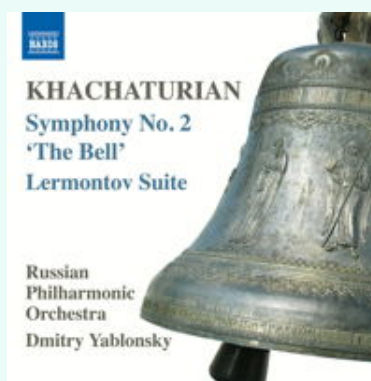
'... gracefulness and musical conviction ...'



'... great zest and alacrity.'

Also on Delphian, Gerald listens to Benjamin Nicholas play Elgar organ works (*DCD34162*), to the Choir of King's College London singing in memory of David Trendell (*In Memoriam*, *DCD34146*) and to choral and orchestral music by Antonio Lotti (*Crucifixus*, *DCD34182*). Gerald also listens to orchestral music by Faradzh Karaev (paladino *pmr 0070*), to Michael Balfe's *Satanella* (Naxos *8.660378-79*) and to René Jacobs' Haydn Symphonies 91 and 92 (harmonia mundi *HMA 1951849*).

Geoff Pearce: 'Generally I am a big fan of twentieth century Russian music. I listened to Khachaturian's Symphony No 2 from end to end, then heard certain sections of it several times, to get to grips with it, but even though the composer called it a "Requiem of wrath ... of protest against war and violence", it did not have quite the same impact on me as the symphonies or other works on the subject of war by Shostakovich or Prokofiev. I don't quite know why — there was no lack of grimness, power or the cold but tremendous build-ups of tension, but it is certainly a powerful statement and deserves to be performed much more often.'

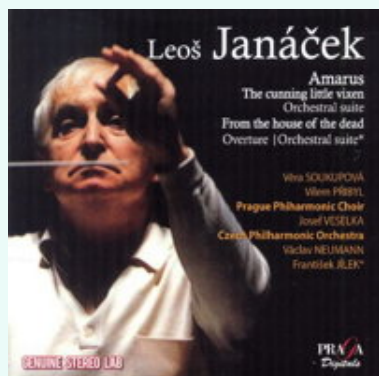


'The orchestra and conductor are superb, and committed to bringing out the very best of this music ...'

'Even from the opening dissonant chords, you know you are not listening to music by anyone else. Khachaturian orchestrates very well, and has a keen melodic sense. Often the melody is underpinned by chords moving in the same direction, and he employs pedal point and *ostinato* to great effect, generating and then releasing tension.'

'In the powerful first movement I heard gestures and snatches sounding as if they were strongly influenced by Tchaikovsky (and particularly the second movement of the *Pathétique Symphony*), and other sections that sounded as if they had been lifted from Khachaturian's own works *Gayane* and *Spartacus*.'

Also on Naxos, Geoff listens to Randall Thompson's Requiem (8.559789), and on BIS to chamber music by Berwald and De Puy associated with Frans Preumayer (*A Bassoon in Stockholm*, BIS-2141 SACD).

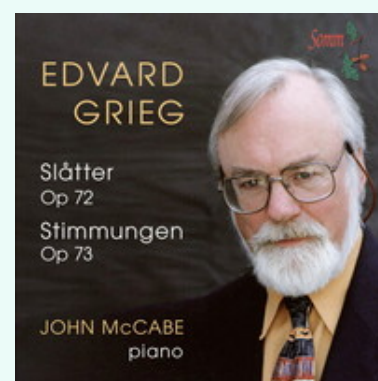


'It's good to hear Neumann in such fine form.'

Stephen Francis Vasta: "Václav Neumann conducts Leoš Janáček", the back of the jewel box proclaims — well, for most of the program, anyway. Since the early 1990s, the Praga Digitals label, based in Paris, has performed a tremendous service by issuing concert performances by Czech artists; I used to enjoy finding their discs on my travels in the Czech lands. In this instance, I suspect there simply weren't enough Neumann Janáček performances for a CD-length program. So, as a makeweight to the conductor's 1974 and 1979 performances, the producers have added František Jílek's 1988 account of his own orchestral suite from Janáček's opera *From the House of the Dead*.

'It's good to hear Neumann in such fine form. He has the measure of this composer's characteristic angular contours; prickly, stabbing accents; and ongoing harmonic instability, and he projects the irregular metrical groupings with skill and purpose — there's none of the rhythmic stiffness that mar his Dvořák and Mahler cycles for Supraphon. The conductor draws characterful, incisive playing from the Czech Philharmonic. The only cavil might be a lack of real dynamic variety: changes of demeanour, rather than of volume, signal the music's various moods and textures. The calling brass chords at the close of both *The House of the Dead* prelude and *Amarus* — the latter recalling the final perorations of *Taras Bulba* — are full-bodied and triumphant.' (Praga Digitals PRD 250 308)

Ron Bierman: 'The late John McCabe was at first best known for taking on difficult modern music, but his wide interests always included more traditional fare such as the keyboard works of Haydn and Grieg. In album notes for this release, and in a recent *Gramophone* article, his widow, Monica McCabe, describes the pianist's lengthy search for the seemingly unavailable score for Grieg's *Peasant Dances*. After accidentally finding a copy in a used-book shop, in 1978 he recorded them, along with *Moods*, Grieg's final work for solo piano.'



'McCabe gets to the heart of these relatively unfamiliar pieces ...'

'Somm's re-release relies on a battered master tape from the original RCA recording session. Thanks to the company's engineers, the CD has the sound of any good modern recording.'

'These are skilled, appreciative interpretations. Even the most difficult pieces are played with flair.' (SOMMCD 0154)



'... brilliantly articulated ...'

Tiara Atai: 'Levin is undoubtedly a true artist — a musician of the highest order who has a keen sense for musicality. It's clear that the execution of every note in the album has been carefully thought about, though at times, it feels as if the thinking is getting in the way of the music-making. However, *Personae* is certainly worth a listen — although her artistic choices don't consistently ring true, her playing provides a welcome contrast from the "done-way", even if the alternative isn't always perfect.' (*Personae* - Beth Levin, Navona Records NV6016)

The late Howard Smith listened to Mary Ann Joyce-Walter's *Cantata for the Children of Terezin* (Ravello Records RR7845). [Browse our latest CD reviews ...](#)

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'ENTANGLEMENT' — CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS



A scene from 'Entanglement' by Charlotte Bray and Amy Rosenthal

In the summer of 1953, nightclub manageress Ruth Ellis (Kirsty Hopkins) meets two men with whose lives her own will be fatally intertwined. As lonely businessman Desmond Cussen (Howard Quila Croft) loses his heart to her, so Ruth loses hers to troubled racing-car driver David Blakely (Greg Tassell), with whom she spirals into a violent and

obsessive co-dependence. Set amidst the grubby glamour of London in the 1950s, *Entanglement* (music: Charlotte Bray, libretto: Amy Rosenthal) charts the lives of the trio as they are driven towards their tragic destiny - and the act that will see Ruth Ellis defined forever as the last woman to be hanged in Britain. This joint-commission between Nova Music and the Cheltenham and Presteigne festivals, supported by the Britten-Pears Foundation and the Arts Council of Wales, tours the UK this summer as a double bill with Thomas Hyde and David Norris' *That Man Stephen Ward*. [Read more](#)

The lines between love and obsession are blurred in Lauren E Rico's recently released debut novel, *Reverie* (Harmony House Productions, 2016, available in paperback, 430 pages, and for Amazon *Kindle*, 1927kB). Part dark romance, part psychological thriller, the author describes it as having the heat of *Fifty Shades*, the twists of *Gone Girl* and the warped obsession of *Black Swan*. It's set at a fictional music conservatory in New York City against the backdrop of a major international classical music competition. The main characters play the cello, French horn and viola. Many of the book's reviews concentrate on its classical music aspects. [Read more](#)

Sixteen-year-old Dutch recorder player Lucie Horsch has signed to Decca Classics, and her debut album of Vivaldi is to be released on 7 October 2016. Film and television composer Shie Rozow announces the release of his first classical CD *Musical Fantasy* on 4Tay Records (CD 4047). The album features performances by the Lyris Quartet, violist Luke Maurer, pianist Robert Thies and French horn player Brian O'Connor's final recording.



Reverie by Lauren E Rico
Harmony House Productions 2016

We mark the passing of Ursula Mamlok and Dmytro Hnatyuk. [Read our latest news](#)

ASK ALICE — YOUNG MUSICIAN OF THE YEAR

Alice McVeigh: 'It used to really annoy me, as my late mother-in-law was convinced that everyone in it was destined for Ashkenazy-level of international stardom, when — in the 80s — they certainly weren't, on the whole, but now ... Now, if the profession survives at all, surely we can predict stardom on some level for all three of this year's finalists. They were fantastic, far beyond the standard of the past.'



Alice McVeigh

'Though I was still a leetle disappointed. Not in the standard, but in the judging, which was obviously not unanimous. I mean, I'm a sucker for the Shostakovich cello concerto No 1 (and even No 2, though rarely done) and Sheku Kanneh-Mason played beautifully *but* — and please note, I dislike the saxophone in general and the higher saxes in particular, Jess Gillam was even better. Her piece wasn't

as good, but I've rarely felt such a connection with the listener and tone colours to die for.'
[Read more](#)

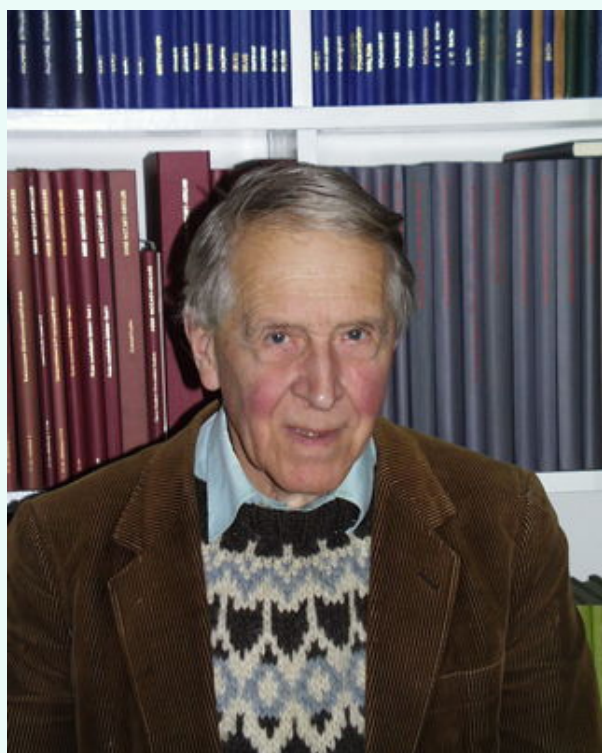
Alice was also at Covent Garden at the beginning of May for Wagner's *Tannhäuser* :

'Loved it. I know that Peter Sieffert was tiring a little towards the end but what a privilege to hear him live, and that sunny tenor still holds its glories. I was v disappointed in Act III that Emma Bell didn't have much to do (because, in my stupidity, I'd forgotten that Elisabeth doesn't get a dying aria but just kind of drifts off in pain and anguish). It's not, as I think I mentioned to you, an opera I know well, whereas I know *The Ring* well enough to sing every line.' [Read more](#)

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HIGHLIGHTING ABSURDITY — REMEMBERING ROBERT ANDERSON



Egyptologist, conductor, scholar and *M&V* contributor Robert Anderson at home in Hornton Street on 4 February 2003.
Photo © 2003 Keith Bramich

Keith Bramich: 'I raised an eyebrow at the dates shown on Robert's replies — the year was shown as 4999 or 5000 instead of 1999 or 2000. Later I learned that this was deliberate. Robert considered all religion absurd, believing that it only caused problems. He felt it more appropriate to start the clock with mankind's first writings, rather than the birth of Christ.

'Highlighting absurdity was one of Robert's great skills, inspiring me and no doubt others to re-think established views on many subjects. The opening sentences of one of his reviews provide a flavour of this:

'Cecilia became patroness of music through a misunderstanding. Legend had her vowing perpetual virginity while an organ played during her unwelcome wedding. Having made Christians of her husband and his brother, she secured martyrdom for them all and was mistakenly thought to have made her vow while performing at the organ herself.' — *Charpentier's dramatic strengths*, *Music & Vision*, 3 September 5000

[Read the whole of Keith Bramich's article here](#). It first appeared on 20 May 2016 as part of the privately published *Memories of Robert Anderson*, collected from various friends and colleagues and edited by Liz Gray and Howard Davies.

In this fascinating collection, which currently runs to 56 pages, you'll read about *Robertus piscis*, Robert's famous Enigmoid Quartet, Jacqueline du Pré accompanying the British National Anthem off-key and then collapsing in a fit of giggles, and how, in Robert's words, '... one symphony by Beethoven is enough for the entire week just as a single terrorist attack is enough for a week.' To read the whole document as a PDF, please [contact M&V](#) and ask for a free copy.

The editors plan to continue to add to this collection, so if you knew Robert and would like to contribute, please [make contact with them via M&V](#).

[Read more of Robert Anderson's own writing here](#).

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