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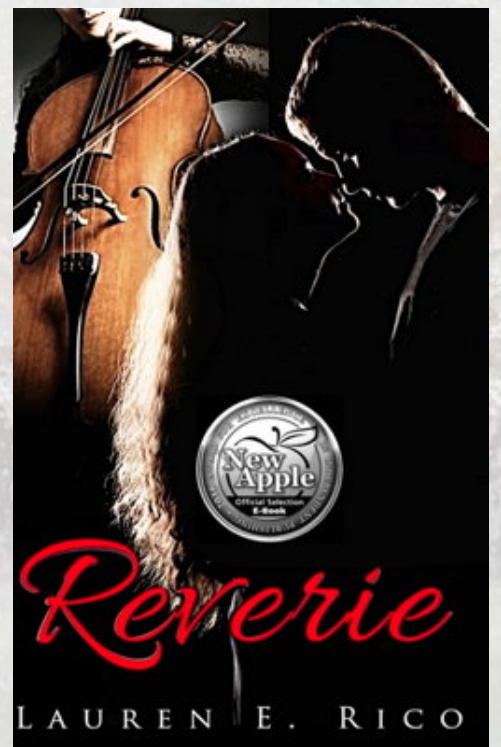
classical music newsletter

Plenty of Surprises – Issue 102, 1 October 2016

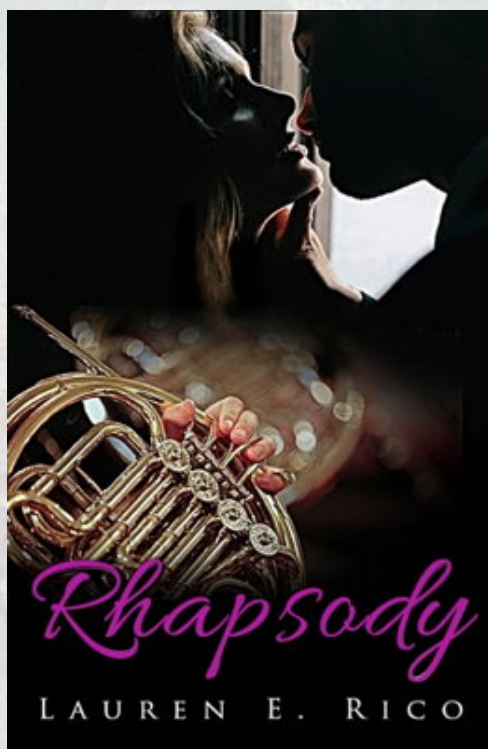
REVERIE – LAUREN E RICO'S AMBITIOUS FIRST NOVEL

Ron Bierman: '*Reverie* will have a special appeal for *Music and Vision* readers. Author Lauren E Rico is a classical-music radio-program host who once studied the French horn in hopes of joining a major symphony orchestra. Many of the novel's scenes are set on a concert stage, or in a practice room, and descriptions of the lives of professional musicians are convincing.

'The lead characters are Julia James and Jeremy Corrigan. Julia is a vulnerable female cellist who is trying to start a successful career, in spite of having been abused and abandoned as a child. Jeremy is a charming, handsome, supremely confident horn-player. Their changing relationship is the main storyline. Both are students in New York City's fictional McInnes Conservatory, first-chair players in its orchestra, and competitors in the Kreisler International Music Competition. The stakes are high.' **Read more ...**



LAUREN RICO'S TRILOGY CONTINUES — CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS



Reverie is the first novel in a trilogy, but published today, Saturday 1 October 2016, is Lauren Rico's latest novel, *Rhapsody*, the second book in the trilogy which the author describes as just the beginning of her mission to expose a whole new audience to classical music by making it an integral part of a steamy, twisty page-turner.

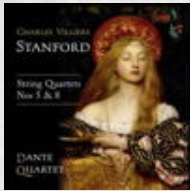
Riding high on his gold medal win at the Kreisler International Music Competition, Jeremy Corrigan is stunned to find his reputation in tatters, along with his plans for fame and fortune. But Jeremy isn't one to tolerate failure.

Once he has determined that cellist Julia and her husband, violist Matthew, are to blame for his troubles, there's nothing he won't do to regain control over his fate ... and theirs.

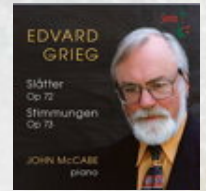


James MacMillan performing on St Kilda. Photo © 2016 James Glossop

In other news, James MacMillan performs 'The Lost Songs of St Kilda', giving the only ever concert on the deserted Scottish island of the same name.



Murray Perahia signs with Deutsche Grammophon. SOMM Recordings' September 2016 Stanford release signals the start of a series of string quartets never recorded before, and the same company is awarded Record of the Year 2016 by The Grieg Society of Great Britain for John McCabe's CD of Grieg's late piano music.



Peruvian tenor Juan Diego Flórez will give a special concert in London next summer.

We also mark the passing of Hidayat Inayat Khan, Knut Wiggen, Johan Botha and Raymond Daveluy.

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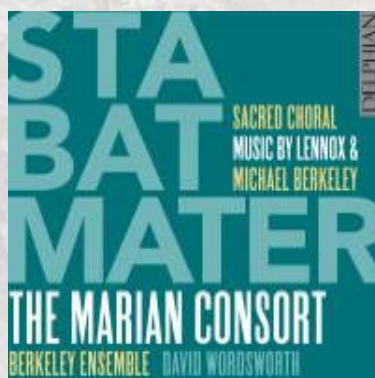
SHEER JOY — CD REVIEWS

Geoff Pearce: 'There's something for everyone on this debut CD featuring young Australian clarinettist Som Howie with his father David on piano. Of all the discs I've reviewed, this is the one I'm most enthusiastic about. It's an amazingly demanding recital and I have no reservations about any part of it.

'The disc opens with Debussy's *Première rhapsodie* — one of the best known pieces in the repertoire, and you won't get a better performance than this. The clarinettist has a lovely expansive open sound, fantastic intonation and firm control over the full range of his instrument at all dynamics. He creates the right amount of tension and relaxation in this work, his timing is judged to perfection and his fast passages are very impressive. This goes for the rest of the disc too.' (Cala Records CACD 77020)



'... a lovely expansive open sound ...'



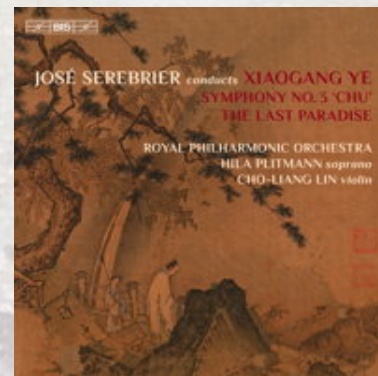
'... thrilling performance.'

Geoff also recommends choral music by Lennox and Michael Berkeley: 'It is very pleasing that this disc has been issued — Lennox Berkeley's music is not performed or recorded enough, particularly outside the UK, and this is a great pity. His output is large — over 230 works, and I know very few of them. I have played his *Sonatina for Oboe and Piano*, and have a recording of arguably his best-known work, *A Dinner Engagement*, but many of his other works, including the four symphonies, are unknown to me. I've heard recordings of a few of his son Michael's works, and believe these to be two major voices deserving so much more.

'We are blessed with two recordings of the first work, *Stabat mater*, both released this year. This Delphian recording is the first, and I think it may be this work's first recording on CD. It is unusually scored for six solo voices and twelve instrumentalists, and whilst the forces are not large, the emotional intensity is very strong. Dating from 1948, the *Stabat mater* lasts about thirty-five minutes, and is divided into ten short movements. In a lesser

composer's hands, the soundscape would be very limited, but Berkeley is a master of this genre, and shows great skill in working with these small forces. Right from the opening, with its clean but throbbing intensity, this is a thrilling performance.' (Delphian *DCD34180*)

'Xiaogang Ye (born 1955) is hardly a household name for most of us but, on the basis of these two works, this could change. He studied at the Central Conservatory in Beijing and at the Eastman School of Music in New York with such luminaries as Louis Andriessen and Alexander Goehr. His music has strong connections to Chinese culture, using traditional instruments to add colour to the orchestral palette. His Piano Concerto *Starry Sky* was premiered during the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics.



'... superbly directed and played ...'

'Symphony No 3, *Chu*, composed in 2002, draws its title from the ancient state of Chu (1030 to 224 BC). The harmonic and melodic language of this seven movement work, whilst not being "traditional", is never so strange as to be confronting, and the listener will be rewarded with highly individual music full of interesting colours. The second and seventh movements have a wordless soprano voice (here Hila Plitmann), and Chinese traditional instruments appear at various times.' (BIS *BIS-2083*)

Geoff also listens to Joshua Pierce playing J S Bach, Haydn and Mendelssohn piano concertos (MSR Classics *MS 1496*), to music by Frances White and Valeria Vasilevski (Ravello *RR7915*) and to folk songs from the Red River Valley (Big Round Records *BR8940*).



'... austere yet mystic beauty.'

Gerald Fenech: 'Jón Nordal (born 1926) can certainly be regarded as the greatest living composer to come out of Iceland during the twentieth century. Despite his venerable age he is still very active, but somehow, his music does not seem to have gained the popularity it deserves. Indeed, this CD is my first introduction to this composer, and it proved to be a surprise in more ways than one.

'The five orchestral works on this issue present a certain symmetry as to the period of composition: a set of three pieces written in 1973-75 (*Langnætti*, *Epitafion* and *Leiðsla*) with a seven year lapse separating them from the preceding and the following pieces, from the 1966 *Adagio* and the 1982 *Choralis*.

'This sixteen year span may be considered as the heart of his creative career, a long one indeed, yet punctuated by doubt and self-restraint, with a number of creative pauses. After the brilliant debut of his 1957 Piano Concerto, one was expecting a regular supply of compositions, but this did not materialize. For Nordal, composing has always been a very intimate act, and he never takes anything for granted. Despite his solid musical education and successful beginnings, craftsmanship never held sway over spiritual utterings, and in this respect he was totally uncompromising, causing severe tension to both himself and those involved in his projects.' (Ondine *ODE 1282-2*)

'Henry Purcell is undoubtedly a composer very much in vogue these days, and compilations of his theatre music have started proliferating of late. This one dates from 1994, more than two decades ago, and features Sir Neville Marriner and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields — always a safe bet for this type of baroque repertoire.

'The disc opens with a suite from *The Fairy Queen* with the orchestra going along at a jolly old wallop in the First Music featuring the hornpipe. I also enjoyed the overture from Act I and the evocatively titled *Dance for the Green Men* — whoever these are remains rather mysterious.' (Capriccio C8001)



'... full-blown Purcellian splendour ...'



'... compelling throughout ...'

'I must admit, I am not much of an admirer of contemporary American music, but this CD by Kevin Puts (born 1972) struck a particular chord, if only for the highly descriptive Second Symphony. A native of St Louis, Missouri, Puts won the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for his debut opera *Silent Night*, and at present he occupies the post of Chairman of the Composition Faculty at the Johns Hopkins Peabody Institute. Considered one of the most important composers of his generation, Puts' language has been lauded by critics and audiences alike for its richly coloured, harmonic and inventive melodic voice enmeshed within a highly emotional framework that is compelling

throughout, and the music on this disc is a prime example of the composer's innate ability to create a canvas of sound that goes straight to the core of one's imagination.

'Composed in 2002, the Second Symphony is a one movement work — a symphonic poem, almost — illustrating the events of 9/11. Powerfully conceived and marvelously orchestrated, the piece traces the path of unsuspecting bliss and rhapsodic serenity that is suddenly shattered by a cataclysmic man-made action steeped in uncontrolled hatred. Puts ends the work on a reflective note that contains a hint of uncertainty, true, but it is the virtue of hope that springs eternal.' (Naxos 8.559795)

Gerald also listens to Prokofiev's Symphony No 6 and Waltz Suite from Marin Alsop and the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra (Naxos 8.573518), to Louis Spohr's Symphonies 2 and 9 from Alfred Walter and the Slovak State Philharmonic (Naxos 8.555540), to Sibelius Symphonies 3, 6 and 7 from Osmo Vänskä and the Minnesota Orchestra (BIS BIS-2006), to sacred music from seventeenth century Rome from the Duke Vespers Ensemble (MSR Classics MS 1580) and to Trio Karénine playing Robert Schumann's Piano Trios 1 and 2 (Mirare MIR 311).

The late **Howard Smith** listened to Rachel and Vanessa Fudge at one and two pianos (Dunelm/Divine Art ddv24146) and to Chinese recorder concertos played by Michala Petri (OUR Recordings 6.220603).

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Gary Graden conducting St Jacob's Chamber Choir in the Basilica of San Pietro in Perugia.
Photo © 2016 Adriano Scognamilo

ENSEMBLE — LIGHT FROM ON HIGH

Giuseppe Pennisi: 'With the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, the Sagra Musicale Umbra is one of the oldest Italian music festivals. While the Maggio Musicale lost its original mission (to rediscover forgotten music and provide interesting new productions) and also its audience ('**Troubles In Florence**', 7 May 2013), the Sagra (Feast) Umbra stuck to its mandate: to propose seldom heard high quality "spiritual" music (**An Outstanding Success**, 25 September 2015). "Spiritual" is not intended only as Roman Catholic or Christian music, but as music of religious inspiration. The Sagra lasts about a week: this seventy-first edition offered twenty concerts from 10-18 September 2016. It involved not only the regional capital, Perugia, but also Castel Rigone, Panicale, Assisi, Montefalco, San Gemini, Acquasparta, Bevagna and Torgiano. Thus, the whole Umbria region has a strong feeling of belonging to the Sagra, and many communities contribute to the event. During a couple of days of this busy week, there were three concerts in three different locations of the Region.

The artistic direction makes no compromise on standard, and each Sagra has a specific theme — not just a collection of concerts by ensembles and orchestras travelling across Italy. This year the theme is *Light from on high*, from the verse of a Franciscan chorus: "Light from on high fount of splendor/in thee, sweet love, is our consolation." Every other year, there is a worldwide competition for a choral score, the "Francesco Siciliani Award", named after the Sagra's founder. The competition is promoted by the Pontifical Council for Culture. During the last six years, over six hundred scores have been received — a clear sign that "spiritual music" is alive and well all over the world. This year the theme of the competition was the *Kyrie*. Finally, an internationally known ensemble, the St Jacob's Chamber Choir, was in residence.' **Read more ...**

'The midday concerts I heard in Palazzo del Pero were very good final conservatory essays. On 17 September, I had the opportunity to listen to two very interesting and contrasting concerts. At 12 noon in the gorgeous Galleria Nazionale Umbra, the young but very professional ensemble Nova Alta offered a concert called *Seicento Stravagante* ("The Extravagant Seventeenth Century") and at 9pm in the San Bevignate Church a mostly Tunisian group offered a program called *Au chouer du Soufi*.

'The first comment is on the beauty of the contrasting key elements of the two concerts. *Seicento Stravagante* was entirely happiness and *joie de vivre*, whilst *Au chouer du Soufi* was full of melancholy, with the exception of an outburst of joy in the last number when the entire audience joined the sufi group, clapping their hands. The first concert was very joyful, the second sober and almost sad.'

Read more ...



A member of the Nova Alta Ensemble playing the serpentona at the Sagra Musicale Umbra.

Photo © 2016 Adriano Scognamilo

'On 14 September 2016, a production new for Rome of Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* opened the Fall season of the Teatro dell'Opera and provided an anticipation of the Romaeuropa international festival.' Giuseppe Pennisi was in the audience.



A scene from 'Dido and Aeneas' at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. Photo © 2016 Yasuko Kageyama

'It is a non-subscription production of a very successful German staging that has been touring the last fifteen years. Sasha Waltz is the director and choreographer, with Tanzcompagnie Sasha Waltz and Guests as the main element of the performance. Christopher Moulds conducts the Akademie für Alte Musik and the Vocalconsort, both from Berlin. The stage sets are by Thomas Schenk and Sasha Waltz, the costumes by Christine Birkle, the lighting by Thilo Reuther. The production was premiered at the Staatsoper unter den Linden.

'The Rome audience was simply enthusiastic, even though they saw something quite different from what Purcell intended.' **Read more ...**

Also in Rome, Giuseppe experiences a different *Swan Lake* — Christopher Wheeldon's production for Teatro dell'Opera di Rome. At the Pergolesi Spontini Festival in Jesi he attends two first performances, and he also visits Venice for La Fenice's revival of Bellini's *Norma*.



Nicholas McCarthy

Mike Wheeler: 'Born without his right hand, Nicholas McCarthy is the only one-handed pianist ever to graduate from the Royal College of Music. He has since become a standard-bearer for the left-hand piano repertoire — which is more extensive than you might think — including commissioning new pieces.

'Even so, there are, he informed us, only two full-length sonatas in existence for left hand alone. He launched Nottingham's new season of Sunday morning recitals with one of them, Reinecke's Sonata in C minor, Op 179 (Royal

Concert Hall, Nottingham, UK, 25 September 2016). The opening movement is firm and purposeful rather than tragic, and McCarthy didn't try to inflate it into something it isn't. In the song-like second movement and the finale Reinecke doesn't always manage to avoid some cluttered textures in trying to make one hand do the work of two, and McCarthy had his work cut out to steer us through. The most immediately appealing movement is the third, a capricious waltz invested here with both warmth and ebullience.'

Read more ...

Mike also listens to Jonathan Scott's organ recital at Derby Cathedral, standing in for an indisposed Carleton Etherington.

Keith Bramich listens to the Armonico Consort's Fauré and Rutter Requiems at Malvern Theatres, Worcestershire UK.

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ASK ALICE — COMMENTS ON JESSICA DUCHEN'S FEELINGS ABOUT EXAMS

Alice McVeigh: The pupil isn't normally given a choice. I consider it crucial to actually put it to the child (or adult, but they're generally more clued-in, frankly) :

1. Do you want to take this exam?
2. If so, why? What do you hope to get out of it?
3. (only if the parent is absent) Do you feel pressured to take this exam? (This is normally the case in those crucial years aged 8-11, when scholarships to private schools beckon over the horizon ...)

Should the answers be satisfactory ('Yes, I want to take this exam, and I hope to get out of it more confidence, better musicality, a grasp of more repertoire etc. and no, I'm not feeling pressured into it) then you move on to the actual goals, which I think need to be spelled out very clearly.

1. How important are the scales/scale equivalents?
2. What are my options regarding piece selection?



Cartoon of Alice McVeigh.
© 2015 Pat Achilles

3. What is the balance (see option two in the first list above) between the pieces I can squeeze the most points out of, compared to the 'how much can I learn by studying a work or composer that might not flatter me' question?

Then you need to talk exam timing. I hugely respect a cello teacher called Annie Ashton, who refuses to enter any pupil until he or she has mastered every scale from memory *but* I'm less fussy myself. I know that scales can take time to master. (This is why Annie has no grey hairs, while I have several!!!) **Read more**

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Ask Alice your classical music-related questions ...

NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE

We're building an archive of our monthly classical music newsletters. They've been published in the current PDF format since September 2013, and you can download and read any of them from **this page**, but, in the previous plain text format, the newsletters go back much further.

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 November newsletter are both Monday 24 October 2016. Details here.

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