



CLASSICAL
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A Precocious Gift – Issue 108, 1 April 2017



'The composer's melodic instinct, mastery of orchestration and sense of form are evident throughout ...'

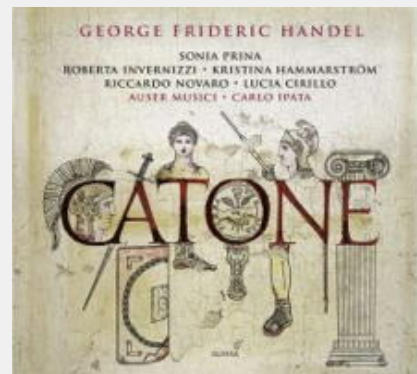
Gerald Fenech: 'Born in Chile on 15 July 1884, Enrique Soro is regarded, and rightly so, as Chile's national composer and an important representative of South American music. Born to an Italian-born father and a local teacher, the boy grew up in a family brimming with musical and literary talent, and it was no surprise that the young Enrique displayed a precocious gift for music when still very young. Initially taught by his father, he made rapid progress, but when his father died, he set sail for Europe in 1898 to make a career on the Old Continent. He graduated at the Milan Conservatory in 1904, following which he travelled to Paris to have his works performed there.'

'The successful Paris adventure spurred the composer to embark on a busy career in music, combining composition, conducting and teaching. Following his trip to America in 1916, he won the trust of New York-based publisher G Schirmer, through whose co-operation many of Soro's works were published. In a short time, performances of his compositions were travelling the world over.' (*Enrique Soro Orchestral Works*, Naxos 8.573505)

Also on Naxos, Gerald listens to Halvorsen and Nielsen Violin Concertos played by Henning Kraggerud (8.573738) and to Richard Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos Suite* played by the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra with JoAnn Falletta (8.573460), and there's more Strauss from François-Xavier Roth and the SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden und Freiburg on SWR — *Metamorphosen* and *Symphonia domestica* (SWR19021CD).

Gerald recommends music by Handel — Daniela Dolci and Musica Fiorita's *Messiah* (Pan Classics, PC 10351) and the pastiche *Catone*: 'It was common practice for eighteenth century composers to put together an operatic score by collating arias by several fellow composers and adapting them to a more coherent plotline: the "pasticcio" or pastiche. Up to very recent times these so called "operas" were regarded as the product of singers' whims and impresarios' revenues rather than the lofty demands of Art with a capital "A". More contemporary studies, about Handel's pasticcios in particular, have changed this perception, and they have shown that this practice originated from a series of less mundane or prosaic reasons than previously had generally been believed to be the case.

'*Catone* (1732) is a prime example of this genre. But what reason, one may ask, pushed a genius like Handel to resort to other composers' scores when he could have easily created a work all of his own? Most probably Handel's choices were due to a desire to put together a production for London in a very short time and also to satisfy the singers' demands, which were aimed at showing off their natural skills. Whatever the case, *Catone* comes across as a truly fine work, full of dramatic moments complimented by a score abounding in melody and invention.' (*Handel: Catone — Auser Musici / Carlo Ipata*, Glossa GCD 923511)



'Carlo Ipata and his masterful band of singers and instrumentalists give a most persuasive and fascinating performance capturing all the nuances of the score with impressive conviction and verbal dexterity.'



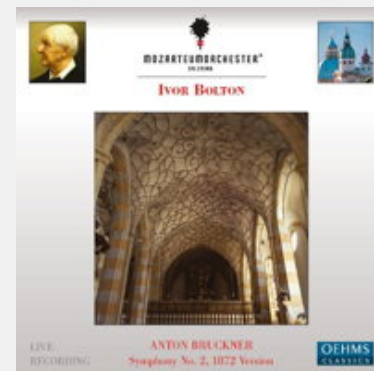
'... sacred and profane are skillfully enmeshed with wonderfully successful results.'

Gerald continues: 'The greatest Argentine composer of the tango will always remain Ástor Piazzolla, who is responsible for the dance's revolution, but there are others as well who followed in the master's footsteps. One of these is Martín Palmeri (born 1965). One of the grandsons of Piazzolla, Palmeri has a significant number of sacred and vocal works where references to the European style tango are incorporated in his creations.

'The two works on this recording are prime examples of this unorthodox fusion, where the sacred and profane are skillfully enmeshed with wonderfully successful results. Indeed, Palmeri's style shows that the two are not strange bedfellows after all.' (*Martín Palmeri: Misatango; Tango Gloria / Matthias Jung*, cpo 555 092-2)

Gerald is impressed by Tchaikovsky from Jennifer Koh (*Tchaikovsky Complete Works for Violin and Orchestra*, Cedille) and Valery Gergiev (*The Nutcracker* and Symphony No 4, Mariinsky MAR0593), and by Bruckner on *Oehms Classics*: 'The Second Symphony in C minor has at least four revisions. Completed in September 1872, it reveals Bruckner's coming of age, and the work is considered to be, together with the F minor Mass, the composer's first mature work in the genre. The Second is often called the "Symphony of Pauses" due to the many instances of silence that occur after *fortissimo* passages, something Bruckner is famous for.'

'Ivor Bolton's choice is the 1872 version, which in fact is not the first, since Bruckner originally put the *Scherzo* after the *Adagio* movement. Unfortunately, by the time of the world premiere, the middle movements had already been exchanged.' (OC 447)



'... Bolton's interpretation is wonderfully paced, and his careful attention to detail allows all of the composer's thick orchestration to reveal its many touches of genius that give the score its grandeur and natural beauty.'



'The composer's melodic instinct, mastery of orchestration and sense of form are evident throughout ...'

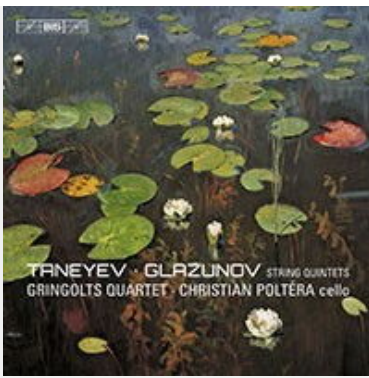
Gerald also highly recommends Les Arts Florissants' Monteverdi on harmonia mundi: 'This third and final volume in Les Arts Florissants' ongoing cycle of Monteverdi's complete madrigals is dedicated to this Venice period, and includes some of the best-loved gems to come from Monteverdi's pen. Alongside the great operas that have survived from this period, these final madrigals methodically explore the many possibilities offered by the rapidly developing practice of *basso continuo* and by a wholly new exploitation of solo voices.' (HAF 8905278)

Giuseppe Pennisi: 'Whilst Vivaldi conceived his *Four Seasons* as a cycle of three movement *concerti*, Piazzolla combines his own suite only after composing loose descriptions of the four seasons. The intermingling of the movements was the idea of violinist Gidon Kremer who recorded them in 1999. More significantly, Vivaldi's violin and chamber orchestra *concerti* are serene and the listener is left with a sense of peace, whereas Piazzolla's description of nature is highly dramatic. The difference is felt from the very beginning in comparing the depiction of Spring by the two composers ...

'On this recording, the Kurpfälz Chamber Orchestra led by Johannes Schlaefli is top notch, but Yury Revich is a superb soloist, a real virtuoso with tremendous imagination and a splendid use of his instrument. He is especially remarkable in the final *Allergro* of Vivaldi's *L'Autunno*.' (8 Seasons — Vivaldi / Piazzolla / Yuri Revich, Ars Produktion ARS 38 170)



'... Yury Revich is a superb soloist, a real virtuoso with tremendous imagination and a splendid use of his instrument.'



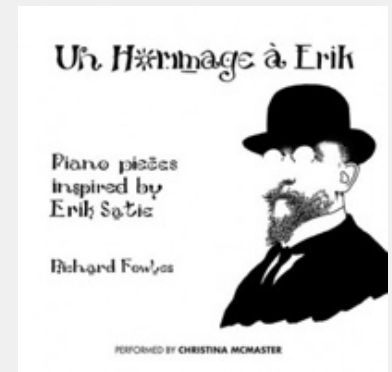
'... the Gringolts ensemble plays expertly, projecting the music's sense of "symphonic" weight and importance while maintaining the vivid interplay among the parts.'

Stephen Francis Vasta: 'Sergei Taneyev's quintet, the first of his two, has a distinctly Tchaikovskian, cosmopolitan veneer, its rich textures intensified by the layering of contrasting elements. Huth describes the first movement as 'a dense, large-scale sonata movement', but the effect is more fantasia than sonata: it's easy enough to hear where the exposition ends, but it's less clear where the development sidles into the recapitulation. Chugging accompaniments recalling Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* propel the movement, maintaining its impetus through the lyric passages ...

'Alexander Glazunov's output was inconsistent: the spontaneous-sounding melodic gift he displays in *The Seasons* and other shorter works seems somehow in abeyance in his works of "substance" — the symphonies and the full-length

ballet *Raymonda*. I found this quintet, his only such, quite pleasing, full of melodic gestures that sound lovely and expressive "in the moment", even if they don't linger long in the mind afterwards. Both the first movement and the *Scherzo* feint at a conclusion, then veer off into a new paragraph in a different key; the episode in the *Scherzo*, which goes on for a while, becomes annoying. Otherwise, the structures are cohesive and attractively wrought.' (*Taneyev and Glazunov String Quintets — Gringolts Quartet, Christian Poltéra, BIS BIS-2177 SACD*)

Paul Sarcich: 'The ideas for the pieces come from Satie's life, but only for the first three does Fowles claim direct acknowledgement of Satie. These he has called *Knossiennes*, obviously based on Satie's *Gnossiennes* but also referencing the excavations taking place in Knossos at around the time of Satie's composition of them. They use the Satie hallmarks certainly — the languid tempo, vamping left hand, use of grace notes and melismatic right hand melodic lines that seem at times quasi improvisatory. In the latter, and in some of the harmonic movement, Fowles produces enough twists and turns of his own invention to keep things interesting and not merely imitative.



'Christina McMaster is fully sensitive to the spirit of the enterprise ...'

'The three *Biquis*, written after Suzanne Valadon, an artist's model and painter who was Satie's only known lover, are each given at two different tempi, *andante* and *lento*. Surely an idea that Satie would have approved, as the character changes noticeably, with pianist Christina McMaster going with the changes in tone and weight that such an experiment calls for. In contrast to the *Knossiennes*, these pieces are based on simple, chordal hypnotic motifs, which are related throughout the three pieces, producing an effect similar to Satie's *Gymnopédies* — three different viewpoints of the same object.' (*Un Hommage à Erik — Piano pieces inspired by Erik Satie, MMC Recordings MMC111*)

The late **Howard Smith** listened to *Margo Guryan: The Chopsticks Variations* (Dartmoor Music OGL 81619-2), to *Dragonetti's New Academy* (Dragonetti's New Academy DNA2009), to *Ulrich Heinen: Bach+* (Metier msv28511) and to *New Music for Banjo — Mark Sylvester* (Zucca the Cat 7 00261 26288 8).

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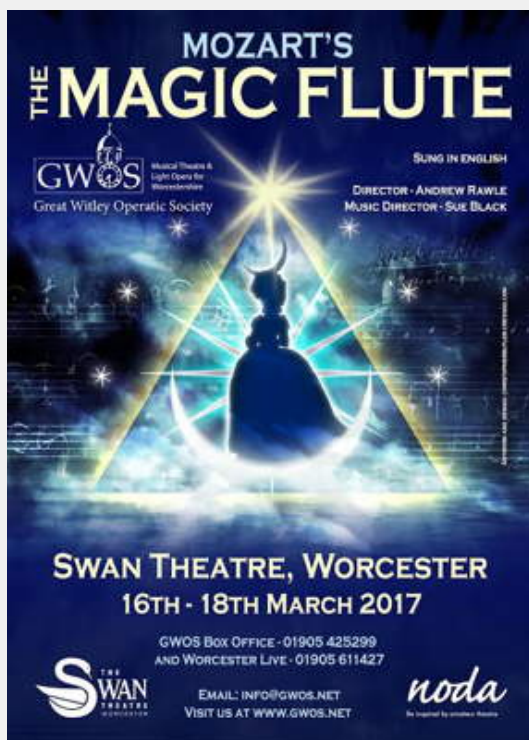
Lucas Ball: 'I can't help having mixed feelings about Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem*. I admit it has its stirring moments in the first, second and fourth movements but the latter part of the work is rather more stagnant.

'Having said that, there was tremendous justice given to the German words (and their sacred meaning) in the account of *Ein Deutsches Requiem* given by Worcester Festival Choral Society on Saturday 25 March 2017 at Worcester Cathedral [Worcester, UK], conductor Peter Nardone encouraging interplay between chorus, soloists (baritone Andrew Davies and soprano Helen Neeves) and the orchestra, the Meridian Sinfonia.

'Nardone also encouraged interplay between the brass, strings and percussion forces of the Meridian Sinfonia during the other item in the evening, Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*. Here, it was as though, in order to create the jaunty-nature of Dvořák's score, little or no effort was needed from Nardone, even when the orchestration was at its most involved. It was easy to visualise the dances perhaps because of *tempi* changes (*rallentandi* and *stringendi*) and dynamic changes that were here, there and everywhere.' [Read more ...](#)



Peter Nardone



Poster for Great Witley Operatic Society's production of 'The Magic Flute'

Lucas, writing his first reviews for *M&V*, was also at Great Witley Operatic Society's *The Magic Flute*, a production that emphasised the opera's fun elements:

'*The Magic Flute* is essentially comic, and this wonderful Andrew Rawle-directed production has a remarkable knack at emphasising the comic elements in this piece.

'Moments in the storyline that almost cry out for audience interaction appear in Tamino's character when he says: "Was that for real?" and "I will go to Pamina's rescue". This understandably had the audience in giggles, and it is a safe bet that the audience probably had to bite their tongues to stop themselves shouting out: "Yes, it could have been for real, Tamino", and, "That's right, you go to Pamina's rescue". Andrew Irwin's interpretation of Tamino (and Andrew Rawle's direction) worked wonders.

'At some points during the unravelling of this fairy tale, one might easily have forgotten that *The Magic Flute* is an opera that Mozart composed with not-so-comic intentions. Along with his librettist

Emmanuel Schikaneder, Mozart wrote the opera as a way to tell audiences about the serious subject of the opposing forces of ignorance verses enlightenment. (As buffs might tell you, Mozart and Schikaneder were freemasons and this, together with the serious side, comes over in this production as well.)' [Read more ...](#)

Mike Wheeler: 'Living in shabby accommodation, with a shiftless father, a mum at the end of her tether and no food in the house, it's no wonder Hansel and Gretel escape into their private world, via their smartphones and live video. That's the basic set-up for Opera North's new production of Humperdinck's opera, directed by Edward Dick (Theatre Royal, Nottingham, 22 March 2017), and for two thirds of the evening it works brilliantly.



From left to right: Katie Bray as Hansel, Susan Bullock as the Witch and Fflur Wyn as Gretel in Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* at Opera North. Photo © 2017 Robert Workman

'Katie Bray and Fflur Wyn are a lively pair of pre-teen kids — Bray's boyishness is particularly convincing. Phillip Rhodes' Father has just the right insouciant bravado, while Susan Bullock is every inch a Mother worn down by a life of worry.



Katie Bray as Hansel and Fflur Wyn as Gretel in Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* at Opera North. Photo © 2017 Robert Workman

'Hansel and Gretel turn their cameras on each other and whatever is around the place. (The results are projected onto the stage set.) Miniature Christmas trees on the floor waiting to be put up become huge shapes covering walls and ceiling, and there we are in the wood.'

[Read more ...](#)

Mike also listens to Mahler, Mendelssohn and Vaughan Williams from Derby Concert Orchestra, Mozart, Enescu, Stravinsky and Brahms from Savitri Grier and Richard Uttley, and to Mozart, Beethoven and Sibelius from Angela Hewitt, Yutaka Sado and the Vienna Tonkünstler Orchestra.

Maria Nockin: 'German director Willy Decker's unique production of Verdi's *La traviata* was a tremendous hit at the Salzburg Festival in 2005. Metropolitan Opera General Manager Peter Gelb brought it to New York in 2010 and oversaw its transmission in high definition to cinemas around the world with different casts in 2012 and 2017. I saw the Encore performance conducted by Nicola Luisotti with Sonya Yoncheva, Michael Fabiano, and Thomas Hampson on Wednesday 15 March 2017.



Sonya Yoncheva as Violetta and the Metropolitan Opera Chorus in Verdi's *La traviata* at New York Metropolitan Opera.
Photo © 2017 Marty Sohl

'Decker swept away all the furniture and settings, choosing to set his story in an atmosphere of finality using designer Wolfgang Gussmann's white corrugated walls, oversized clock, long, plain bench, angular white couches, and yards of rose-printed fabric. Dr Grenvil, perhaps representing Death, was always there, too. Gussmann's costumes were well made but plain. As Violetta, Sonya Yoncheva wore a short, red cocktail dress over a similarly cut ecru chemise. As Alfredo, Michael Fabiano wore a dark, snug fitting suit. Both Violetta and Alfredo wore rose printed dressing gowns that matched the covering on their couches during their short happy time together. The elder Germont was dressed in more formal outfits from a previous era, as was Violetta's servant, Annina. Flora and the entire chorus were dressed as men, some with female masks that they occasionally pulled over their faces at the end of a phrase.

'Supertitles have become an integral part of opera, and the Decker production translation of this opera is one of the best. It conveys both the meaning of Francesco Maria Piave's Italian text and much of the spirit of Giuseppe Verdi's music in easily understood modern English. Conductor Nicola Luisotti chose inflexible *tempi* that sometimes seemed a bit slow for the singers and his tonal coloring seemed unreasonably restricted with an orchestra of this caliber.' [Read more ...](#)

Maria also writes about San Francisco Opera's 2008 film of *La bohème*.

Giuseppe Pennisi: '... *Visions fugitives* Op 22 by Sergei Prokofiev (performed in the string version by Rudolf Barshai) were composed during 1915 and 1917 — hence before the October Revolution — and have the flavor of innovative twentieth century music which exploded in Prokofiev's American and French periods (eg *The Love of Three Oranges*).



Yuri Bashmet conducting the Moscow Soloists at the Istituzione Universitaria dei Concerti in Rome on 14 March 2017.
Photo © 2017 Barbara Rigon

Also Dmitri Shostakovich's Chamber Symphony No 110 (a string ensemble transcription of his Quartet No 8) is dedicated 'to all victims of fascism and war'. Shostakovich added: 'I have an immense pain for those killed by Hitler but have the same pain for those murdered on Stalin's command'. Composed while in Dresden under the anguish for its destruction, it is almost a personal confession of the suffering due to the war; it ends with an *adagio* which is almost an unreal view of peace.

The Chamber Symphony No 14 by Georgy Sviridov is also molded by the days when war was devastating Europe in the year 1940 when the composer was twenty-five. Alfred Schnittke's *Concert for Three* is full of nostalgia. It was composed in 1994 for Bashmet, Gidon Kremer and Mstislav Rostropovich who, like Schnittke, were living in exile. In Rome the three soloists were Bashmet himself on viola, violinist Andrey Poskrobko and cellist Alexey Naidenov.

The concert ended with the first performance in Rome of Silvia Colasanti's *Preludio, Presto e Lamento*, a virtuoso piece written especially for Bashmet and the Moscow Soloists.

The hall was full. The audience discovered a different Russian revolutionary music and was enthralled. [Read more ...](#)

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Alice McVeigh: 'A scintillation of solo violin trills under probing horn. A sweet-sour oboe trading sardonic asides with the clarinet under a soaring tenor. A glowing flute, sniped at by a Chinese gong. A creamy mezzo recollects the sun glittering on a Tang Dynasty river scene ... There is no work remotely like this one. In 1908, at the very height of his powers — but also in the depths of a deeply personal despair — Mahler gave birth to this work (really his 9th symphony, but he shared the superstition about 9th symphonies and entitled it differently). Mahler had recently been unfairly dismissed from his job at the Viennese opera, buried his beloved four-year-old daughter and been told by a doctor, with extraordinary bluntness, "You have no cause to be proud of a heart like that." His heart disease proved inoperable and he wrote Bruno Walter (who premiered this work after his death), "This is the most personal thing I have ever done ... I have lost any calm and peace of mind I ever achieved. I stand *vis-à-vis de rien*, and now, at the end of my life, have to begin to learn to walk and stand. *Das Lied von der Erde* was the first, most difficult step." It was also, of course, to prove to be one of his very greatest masterpieces.



Cartoon of Alice McVeigh.
© 2015 Pat Achilles

'In his biographer Fischer's words, *Das Lied von der Erde* was "one of the vessels into which Mahler poured his attempt to achieve clarity and calm by wresting them back again." Astonishing as it seems, Mahler, with death looming, invented a new artistic form: the "song-symphony" — choosing to set to music ancient, autumnal, sometimes transcendent, occasionally defiantly furious Tang Dynasty poetry (from the 700s) culled from Hans Bethge's *Die chinesische Flöte*. Here, discovered near the end of his life, was the true Mahlerian ideal: images of mortality, exhilaration, Spring, mourning, renewal ... He wanted, though dying, "to embrace the world", as he wrote Sibelius ... For the purpose, Mahler pared down his style to a refinement even he had never found before. The (massive) orchestra is almost never used all at once: instead the voice and solo instruments weave in and out of a lieder-like texture, brush-strokes on Chinese silk. In terms of subtlety, it is pitch-perfect: in almost every bar there is some minute touch of genius. In common with the soprano's text in the famous final song, life had "not been kind" to Mahler but, as Bruno Walter observed, "He was faithful to the task laid upon him: to extract a divine significance from his suffering, and to turn it into glory."

'From the first wild blast of unrepentant horn and swashbuckling tenor we are captured. Amidst needling violins and a spiky cor, a drunkard rails savagely against fate: the message: drink up, for life is short. A bitter xylophone, an insidious trilling violin, restless winds with a viciously swirled edge of musical development: on the phrase "Nicht hundert Jahre darfst du dich ergötzen" tenor and violins share the same melody, but not straightforwardly, as if in split perspective. The song, in constant development itself, still stands fisting against death, even in the more nostalgic second section, with yearning tenor, before the singer returns to rail again against fate: ("Dark is life. Dark is death!") Horn, oboe and high violins corroborate this verdict, a shimmer from solo trumpet and a whipped crack of death at the close.' **Read more ...**

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Louis Frémaux

We mark the passing of Louis Frémaux, Kurt Moll, Alberto Zedda, Gido Kokars and Francis Thorne.

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Kurt Moll

SPECIAL FEATURE — SING YE TO THE LAW

Jabez Hogsbarrow reports from the London International Contemporary Composers' Conference: 'Last night's well-attended inaugural London International Contemporary Composers' Conference, the brainchild of Carol Jon McNaughy, gave attendees the chance to meet a wide-range of the world's up-and-coming composing talent. One clear observation is that never have there been more female composers actively working in the industry, as you can see for yourself by browsing the attendee list below. These include New Zealand-born Avril Ngaire Poisson, featured previously on these pages, and the brass band composer Bertina Engeldinck Umpa. The evening was fascinating not just for the awards ceremony or the networking opportunities, but also for the chance to hear more than an hour of live performances, including new compositions from the much-hyped school of the *Stylus Neo-Phantasticus*.

'Most interesting of all was a talk on *mu-runes*, thought to have been invented by obscure Albanian nun Prill Mjaullin (c1620-1657), which, in a similar way to Chinese *hànzì*, encapsulate the essence of complete works of music in small, delicate but complex logograms. Mjaullin, who is also believed to have written the words set by Rossini in his *Duetto buffo di due Gatte*, must have had a brilliant mind, on a par with that of Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, Leonardo da Vinci or McRonald J Trunk.

'A wide range of sponsoring publishers of contemporary music were in attendance, notably Eugenberg, Hoosey & Barks, HUMP, Karmus, Muzak Fails, Recalldy, Rover, Sabre, Schrilmer and Schplott.

'The evening concluded wonderfully, when Martina Field and her Academy of St Neville in the Marriners (divided into the requisite six geographically separated quartets) gave us a complete performance of a work never previously performed in London — Adolpha Maugham-Villiers' amazing *Six Phantasy String Quartets on a theme of Thomas Tallis the Tank Engine*.' [Read more ...](#)

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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