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What it Means to be Human — Issue 113, 1 September 2017

SPONSORED FEATURE — ARMSTRONG GIBBS' *ST LUKE PASSION*

Roderic Dunnett: 'The English composer Cecil Armstrong Gibbs (1889-1960), whose *Passion according to St Luke* has just received what is almost certainly its premiere performance in The Cathedral of All Saints, Derby, UK by the cathedral's Voluntary Choir, is one of that collection of British composers whose music was unjustly neglected from the 1960s onwards. This was largely owing to their allegiance to tonal idioms, deemed to be of the past, in preference to the "modern" and Serialist elements then coming into vogue.

'The existing pencil vocal score of the *Passion*, which is undoubtedly the only source, strongly suggests that here is a major work that remained unperformed. It is characterised as "*The Passion according to St Luke* by C. Armstrong Gibbs, for soloists, choir and piano or organ: vocal score, pencil, dated, 66 pages and title page".

'Now at last a knowledgeable and enterprising musician has taken up the cudgels on its behalf. David Johnson, formerly assistant organist at Derby Cathedral, stumbled across the *Passion* amongst some Armstrong Gibbs manuscripts at the Britten-Pears Library in Aldeburgh, and was struck by the cogency of the writing — far too good to be left in a drawer or on the shelf.

'So with the assistance of Dr Nicholas Clark, the librarian at Aldeburgh — which is home to most of Gibbs' *Nachlass* of writings, letters, scores and manuscripts — Mr Johnson obtained a copy of the pencil MS and set about proofing and editing it for performance. The task proved not too onerous, for, as he explains, Gibbs' writing was quite legible, and the music not too badly in need of editing, adapting or "realising". This task, such as it

was, and the business of typesetting it for the first time, he willingly undertook.

'The result is that David Johnson has generously furnished us with a very acceptable new, essentially "unknown" 1950s work, in a largely tonal idiom but with many interesting additional touches, chromaticism and so on, suitable for performing by any choral society, or — arguably — by even a good or accomplished parish choir.



Cecil Armstrong Gibbs at home with his wife Honor, and (right) their son David, who was killed in Italy in 1943.

The *St Luke Passion* may relate to his death.

Photos: the Armstrong Gibbs Society

'At Eastertide, Stainer's well-known and much lauded *The Crucifixion* is often performed. So, very occasionally, is Charles

Wood's *St Mark Passion*. Wood was one of Gibbs' composition teachers; another was E J Dent. His organ teacher, fifteen years his senior, was briefly the influential composer Cyril Rootham, later organist of St John's College, Cambridge, who was also one of Gibbs' friend Arthur Bliss' teachers.



David Johnson, to whom credit goes for bringing to life Armstrong Gibbs' *Passion according to St Luke*

'But that *The Passion according to St Luke* should have languished for so long without being recovered seems an injustice. Now Armstrong Gibbs' work, full of feeling, has at last been aired, conducted with spirit and insight by David Johnson, with Hugh Morris, Director of Music at Derby Cathedral taking the important organ part.

'Armstrong Gibbs — he fervently disliked the name Cecil — was, it

has been said, one of those many English composers who, without pretensions to "significance" or greatness, left "much attractive and worthwhile music without which we would be the poorer". But perhaps, when his output comes to be assessed as a whole, he was more than that.

'Gibbs (a contemporary of Eric Coates, Ernest Bullock, Gurney, Bliss and Howells), who admired Debussy but abhorred Schoenberg and Wagner, employing chromaticism but never rendering it as integral as that, was notably prolific. Recordings of his considerable *oeuvre* have appeared slowly, although virtually none of it is choral.

'His songs, now widely admired by cognoscenti and introduced by leading singers to the concert platform — Gibbs composed more than 150; among poets he was drawn to, a particular favourite was Walter de la Mare, who became a personal friend — are helping to restore his reputation overall. An enterprising Hyperion disc (*CDA 67337*) remarkably includes some 36 solo songs, shared between soprano Bernadette Greevy and baritone Steven Varcoe, with Roger Vignoles accompanying. Another 25 can be found on the Naxos-administered Marco Polo label (*8.223458*).



Armstrong Gibbs in mid life.
Photo: The Armstrong Gibbs Society

'Several of his songs appear intermittently on other discs, a couple most notably sung by Dame Janet Baker. One further historic recording made available previously by Dutton is by the Griller Quartet, a formidable and celebrated ensemble of the 1930s and '40s, who include Gibbs' String Quartet in A, Op 73 with works by Bax and Elizabeth Maconchy.

'The Gibbs, in effect his fifth quartet — by 1922 he had already composed four — first heard at the Hereford Three Choirs Festival in 1933 (at which his

work *The Love Talker*, Op 75, for mezzo-soprano and or orchestra, was also premiered), was second prizewinner in a competition sponsored by *The Daily Telegraph*. The Dutton disc is not currently listed, and is available, seemingly, only second-hand. Appallingly, the vast majority of Armstrong Gibbs' chamber works remain unpublished.'

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SPONSORED FEATURES

Roderic Dunnett's Armstrong Gibbs feature was originally published here in May 2017, but it recently received a *Music & Vision Magazine* Article Sponsorship.

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ENSEMBLE — WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN

Maria Nockin: 'Composer Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) had a day job with the diplomatic corps, and from 1917 to 1919 he was secretary to poet Paul Claudel, the French ambassador to Brazil. There, Milhaud heard the Brazilian folksong *O Boi no Telhado* (The Ox on the Roof), in French, *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*. Later, in Paris, Jean Cocteau choreographed a popular ballet to Milhaud's music. Milhaud, Georges Auric and Arthur Rubinstein could often be heard playing a six-handed version of *Le Boeuf* at a bar called La Gaya.

[Joel] Revzen and the orchestra presented a wonderfully translucent interpretation of Milhaud's multi-facteted piece. Revzen coordinated Milhaud's Brazilian folksongs and jazz excursions with his fascinating polytonality to form a modern piece that had the toes of many audience members tapping. *Le Boeuf* was an excellent way to open the concert.



Joel Revzen

'Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings allowed the wind and percussion players some time off while the violins, violas, cellos and basses expressed the deepest thoughts of the composer's anguished soul. With this work, Revzen changed the mood as fast as weather changes in the high Sierras because his orchestra gave this modern audience an understanding of this composer that few people of his own time enjoyed. The string players are from great orchestras across this country and they played together in exquisite harmony.

'H L Mencken wrote: "I am convinced that the most portentous phenomenon in the whole history of music was the first public performance of the *Eroica* on 7 April 1805." Mencken felt that Beethoven had captured the true spirit of humanity in his third symphony. That is why Classical Tahoe programmed it

as part of the program entitled *What it Means to Be Human*.'

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Giuseppe Pennisi: 'The production underplays the philosophical aspects of the work. They are in the background whilst in the forefront there is the humanity of Wozzeck, Marie, Andres and the other characters, even of the arrogant Captain and of the psychopathic Doctor. Stage director William Kentridge and his creative team — Luc De Wit, co-director, Sabine Theunissen, sets, Greta Goiris, costumes, Catherine Meyburgh, video compositing and editing, Urs Schönebaum, lighting and Kim Gunning, video operator — place the action on a mountain of precarious platforms, staircase fragments and discarded furniture. Through a series of doors, we see the Captain's office, the

Doctor's laboratory, Wozzeck and Marie's poor dwelling, the military band parade, the tavern and the woods without changing scenes. In addition, through projections of World War I photographs and animation, as the drama unfolds, we see crashed airplanes, maps of troop movements and tense waiting. In this context, the tension is more on war than on class condition. However, the war is not viewed as the first world conflict itself, but as a permanent status of humanity.



Matthias Goerne in the title role of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* at the Salzburg Summer Festival, with Jens Larsen as the Doktor. Photo © 2017 Ruth Walz

'The Wiener Philharmoniker, conducted by Vladimir Jurowski, provides the right interpretation for this concept of the production, especially in the engrossing interludes and in the moving D minor finale.

'The singers never exceed in emphasis and deal with the vocal score as an elegy. Matthias Goerne (Wozzeck) and Asmik Grigorian (Marie) are perfect in their roles, full of humanity and without any indication of psychosis as seen in recent productions. The large group of other characters around them are also very "normal".

'This makes this production even more dramatic. The audience was enthralled.'

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In addition to *Wozzeck*, Giuseppe reviewed three other operas at the Salzburg Summer Festival — Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, Handel's *Ariodante* and Aribert Reimann's *Lear*: 'One good tradition of the Salzburg Summer Festival is to perform a contemporary opera by a living composer. I timed my arrival to see and hear *Lear* by Aribert Reimann [on 20 August 2017]. Last year's *The Exterminating Angel* by

Thomas Adès was a world premiere, but *Lear* had been first performed at Munich's National Theatre in 1978 when Reimann, now eighty-one years old, was still relatively young. Yet, based on Shakespeare's *King Lear* tragedy, it deals with the difficulties of ageing, of giving power to others and of receiving no gratitude but betrayal.

'Giuseppe Verdi longed to compose an opera based on *King Lear*, but he never found a librettist able to summarize Shakespeare's complex four to five hour plot in a text that would fit the melodrama style. Reimann's librettist, Claus H Henneberg, took up the task and kept the basics of *King Lear* while eliminating several sub-plots and philosophical and ethical discussions. The opera is titled *Lear*, not *King Lear*, to emphasize that it deals with problems and issues everyone must face sooner or later. It is a perfect fit for Salzburg Summer Festival 2017 because one of its main themes is 'the panoply of power'. In Reimann's *Lear*, as well as in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the protagonist's decision to retire and enjoy retirement opens the way to very cruel power fights. Greedy for power, all the main characters kill each other and the stage is covered with blood ...



Gerald Finley in the title role of Aribert Reimann's *Lear* at the Salzburg Summer Festival. Photo © 2017 Thomas Aurin

'Gerald Finley is exceptional in the impervious role of Lear. He is nearly always on stage and is an excellent actor. He uses all aspects of vocal skills wisely, from declamation to *arioso*, and his *pianissimi* were magnificent. In the men's group, there were remarkable performances by countertenor Kai Wessel as Edgar, Michael Maertens as the Fool and Charles Workman as Edmund. In the women's group, outstanding performers were Evelyn Herlitzius as Goneril, Anna Prohaska as Cordelia and Gun-Brit Barkmin as Regan.' **Read more ...**

Giuseppe also reports on three operas from the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro — *Torvaldo e Dorliska*, *La Pietra di Paragone* and the first performance of the original version of *The Siege of Corinth*: 'The plot revolves around the conquest of the Mediterranean Basin by the Muslims and the love between the daughter of the Christian commander for the defence of Corinth and Mohamed the Second, in charge of the Muslim Army. The finale is quite tragic: both Corinthians and Muslims fall under a fire of the city, lit to prevent the downfall and invasion of Corinth.'



From left to right: Nino Machaidze as Pamyra, Luca Pisaroni as Mohammed II, John Irvin as Cléomène and Iurii Samoilov as Omar in Rossini's *Le Siège de Corinthe* in Pesaro. Photo © 2017 Studio Amati Bacciardi

'A Muslim-Christian war is a sensitive subject. Stage director Carlus Padrissa and his team — Lita Cabellut for video and costumes, and Fabio Rossi for lighting — set the action in an undefined historical period where the war was not about religion, but water. It works quite well, also due to very good acting and effective movements of the masses.'

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From the Macerata Opera Festival, Giuseppe is critical of a joint production of Puccini's *Turandot* with Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb. Back in Rome, he reports on a double updating of Teatro dell'Opera di Roma's 2013 production of Puccini's *Tosca*.

Mike Wheeler reports on three of this summer's Derby Cathedral organ recitals — by Michael Overbury, David Davies and Jennifer Bate: 'After a gap of several years, Jennifer Bate made a welcome return to Derby Cathedral's summer organ series (Derby, UK, 2 August 2017).

'As she herself pointed out, her opening three pieces were linked by a devotion to J S Bach on the part of Mendelssohn and Samuel Wesley. Sturdy accounts of the first and last movements of Mendelssohn's Sonata No 4 included some nicely throaty pedal reed colouring at the start of the finale's fugue. In between, the two middle movements emerged simply as songs without words for organ, played for what they were worth, neither more nor less.



Jennifer Bate

'Although from a generation earlier, Samuel Wesley's Voluntary in D inhabits a more or less similar world. Bate revealed the minuet underlying the opening *Largo*, and negotiated the curiously angular second movement fugue subject with aplomb. Her stately way with the final March suggested the sort of thing to which a Jane Austen heroine might have walked down the aisle. In Bach's Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C, BWV 564, Bate used to eloquent effect the silences that punctuate the opening, and produced a striking sonority for the big pedal solo in the middle. A rock-steady pulse highlighted the *Adagio's* lyrical quality, while in the Fugue Bach's teasing rhythmic games were lucidly laid out.' **Read more ...**

'David Davies, who recently stepped down from his post as Assistant Director of Music at Exeter Cathedral to focus on a freelance career, brought a refreshingly unusual programme to Derby Cathedral organ series (Derby, UK, 9 August 2017).



David Davies

'Edwin Lemare's transcription of the Prelude to Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* got off to a decisive start, with Davies maintaining a good firm pace, easing into moments of relaxation without letting it flag.

'More than many performances I've heard, his account of Vierne's *Carillon de Westminster* placed it firmly in the French organ toccata tradition, though one of the least flamboyant examples of the genre. The opening was lucid, the pedal part emerging with welcome clarity, and the approach was maintained right through to the sonorous ending.' **Read more ...**

'This has to get the award for the recital programme with the widest historical spread (Derby Cathedral, Derby UK, 16 August 2017), not just in this year's Derby organ series, but since they started over thirty years ago. Michael Overbury, until last year Director of Music at Worksop Priory, Nottinghamshire, took us right back to the earliest known source of keyboard music, with a bouncy, energetic *Estampie* from the fourteenth-century *Robertsbridge Codex*. Coming forward a hundred years and more, a *Praeambulum* from the *Tablature of Adam Ileborgh* (1448) provides the earliest known specifically-indicated pedal part, supplying mostly a drone beneath a chant-like melody.



Michael Overbury

'After these brief glimpses of a fascinating sound-world, we were on the slightly more familiar ground of organ music from the Elizabethan/Jacobean period. *Robin*, by John Munday (or Mundy), a set of variations on a popular song of the day, was given invigorating treatment. For *A Gigge: Doctor Bull's myselfe*, by Munday's younger contemporary, John Bull, Overbury supplied plenty of tonal variety, some agreeably pungent reeds for the opening enhancing its incisive rhythmic style.' **Read more ...**

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CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — A STRESSFUL COLLABORATION

Los Angeles-based composer Gerard Schurmann has made an addition to the feature he wrote here in 2009, **A Stressful Collaboration**, in response to many enquiries from readers asking why Schurmann did not collaborate with Maurice Jarre on the subsequent film, *Dr Zhivago*. Schurmann's new final sentence reads: 'I thought it would be invidious to explain why I turned it down, and for a time this was quite badly resented by David [Lean], not least because the first recording of the *Dr Zhivago* score was rejected, and my refusal to participate held at least partly to blame.'



Gerard Schurmann in 2011

In other Gerard Schurmann news, Toccata Classics' third CD of Schurmann's chamber music has been released. An interview with Schurmann, along with a video of the first performance of Schurmann's *Romancing the Strings* (a 2016 commission from the Tucson Chamber Music Festival) is available [here](#) on YouTube.

Gerard Schurmann is currently preparing and arranging over seventy minutes of his music from nine films for a Chandos CD with the BBC Philharmonic conducted by Rumon Gamba, to be recorded at the BBC studios in Salford next year.

The Sheraton Cadwell Orchestra in Toronto has 'ceased to exist' after its management sent an ill-judged email to the group's vocal soloists. The email asked those who were not 'fit and slim' to refrain from wearing tight-fitting dresses:

Kindly note that for all future shows — as per our highly selective casting requirements for vocal artists taking on a prominent leading role on stage — only singers who are physically fit & slim (or, at the very least, those who know how to dress strategically/suitably in order to not bring attention to their temporary physical/dietary indulgences) would be showcased with our boutique orchestras.

Following a large backlash to the comments, the orchestra's management board has been forced to resign, and, in a statement sent to CBC Toronto, it was made clear that the orchestra would cease to exist in due course, but that the reason is due to loss of funding for the organisation's music training and community service programmes.

The 38th edition of the Pesaro's Rossini Opera Festival closed on 22 August 2017 with the Italian composer's *Stabat Mater*. The box office registered 15,850 ticket purchasers (making it the fourth top Festival ever with regard to audiences) and an intake of 1,060,000 Euros — the third highest in the festival's thirty-eight years of activity.

The percentage of foreigners attending has been calculated as 70%, with no fewer than forty-one foreign nations present and some new arrivals, such as Georgia and New Caledonia. In first places come France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the USA, Japan, Austria and Russia.

The 39th Rossini Opera Festival runs from 11-23 August 2018 and offers three new productions: *Ricciardo e Zoraide* (conducted by Giacomo Sagripanti; stage direction by Marshall Pynkoski), *Adina* (conducted by Diego Matheuz; direction by Rosetta Cucchi) and *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (conductor: Yves Abel; director Pier Luigi Pizzi), as well as the *Petite Messe Solennelle*, which will close the Festival by solemnly commemorating the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the death of Gioachino Rossini.

We mark the passing of Dmitri Kogan, Enzo Dara, Aloys Kontarsky, Fredell Lack, Pavel Egorov, David Maslanka, John Bell Young, Xavier Benguerel i Godó, Marian Varga, Pēteris Plakidis, Jan Stulen, Patrick Thomas, Gilles Tremblay and Ivana Loudová.

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CD SPOTLIGHT — FAMOUS AND UNKNOWN

Gerald Fenech: 'Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868) composed thirty-nine operas and nearly all became, in one way or another, popular hits. Only two or three never made it, and *Sigismondo* is one of them. Indeed, this work was highly criticized by audiences and critics alike even at its premiere at Venice's La Fenice in 1814, and since then, modern performances have been few and far between. When Rossini wrote the piece, he was certainly no novice, and he could already boast twelve stage-works.

'So what is the reason for *Sigismondo's* ill fortune? Many put the blame at Giuseppe Foppa's feet, a seasoned librettist, whose choice of subject was considered by most to be highly immoral and distasteful. Putting the emphasis on the plight of an abused wife who holds steadfast in her love for her deranged husband against a background of madness and guilt, was not the right recipe to attract opera lovers to the theatre. Regardless of this fact, my contention has always been; judge an opera not by its libretto, good or bad, but by its musical imagination and invention, and *Sigismondo* is certainly no trifle. It incorporates all of the composer's musical hallmarks, and is punctuated by some wonderful arias and duets, not to mention the fastidious orchestration for which Rossini was so famous. And the mastery by which inner feelings are made manifest in expressive coloraturas is nothing short of fascinating.' (*Rossini: Sigismondo*, Naxos 8.660403-04)



'... an excellent live recording of a rare bel canto gem that deserves serious scrutiny by all those interested in Italian melodrama.'



'... Sebastiano Rolli keeps things ticking over nicely, thus never diminishing the boiling undercurrents that continually simmer in the protagonists' spirits.'

""Thank God for Donizetti" — a statement which for some may be an exaggeration, but for others like me, certainly sounds appropriate. The maestro from Bergamo composed some seventy operas, a huge achievement for a man who died prematurely aged fifty-one in 1848, but today only a handful command a regular place in the repertoire. Notwithstanding this, most of his stageworks get the occasional revival, and thanks to the endeavours of labels such as Opera Rara and Dynamic, one can certainly have the chance to discover more the immeasurable wealth of beauty of Donizetti's music.

'I am not ashamed to admit that practically all of Donizetti's works drive me into a swoon of emotional uplifting. No less this live recording of *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra*, an opera written to a libretto by Felice Romani, written in haste for performance at

the Teatro Pergola in Florence during the Lenten Season of 1834. The February premiere, sadly, was not so successful, but at least the opera was not condemned either. The few subsequent revivals, with revisions, still did not make any headway, so this world premiere recording is the first opportunity for opera lovers to delve into this *bel canto* gem for more than forty-one years.' (*Gaetano Donizetti: Rosmonda d'Inghilterra*, Dynamic CDS7757.02)

'One cannot argue that the brightest part of French history of the last five hundred years is that of the eighteenth century, albeit the end of it was marred by much terror and bloodshed of the Revolution. Still, one cannot ignore the glory and grandeur of what happened just before that history-changing event, especially in arts, culture and science. With enormous wealth and political power at their disposal, French aristocrats could wallow in every kind of leisure and romantic escapades; indeed, they could easily afford to decorate, most extravagantly, their palaces and houses with the latest trends in art, architecture and interior design. Above all they regarded themselves as patrons of the arts, although some were hardly knowledgeable.



'... an intensity and sweetness of tone that is consistently engaging.'

'It was the age of enlightenment as much as that of indulgence, and the music on this disc reflects the tastes of the time, only, the composers featured were not writing only for pleasure but were experimenting new ways to give vent to daring forward-looking avenues. These works from the 1740s and 1750s don't conform to our expectations about Baroque music, but we cannot label them as Classical either. Rather, they mix the humour and wit of early Haydn and Gluck with a hint of C P E Bach's " Sturm und drang" thrown in for good measure.

'Wrap up everything in a lush French harmonic packet and you have a truly unique sound. The result is a fusion of baroque gestures and classical forms that combine with harmonic and technical prowess to yield expressive extremes. The list of composers on display is also a mixture of famous and unknown names. Rameau, Philidor and Duphy relate to the former category, while Blavet and Guignon fall into the latter.' (*Age of Indulgence — Les Délices*, Navona Records NV6098)

Gerald also listens to Furtwängler conducting Bruckner (*Wilhelm Furtwängler — Bruckner: Symphony No 9; Symphony No 7 Adagio*, Praga Digitals PRD/DSD 350 125), to Telemann concerti (*Georg Philipp Telemann: Concerti per molti stromenti*, harmonia mundi HMM 902261) and to ancient European instruments (*Dragon Voices — The Giant Celtic Horns of Ancient Europe*, Delphian DCD34183).



'One cannot fault the playing on this lovely disc ...'

Geoff Pearce: 'The Adaskin Trio is joined by Thomas Gallant on oboe for a very nice recording of the Oboe Quartet, K 370. Right from the opening of the first movement, Gallant's sound is bright, pleasing and brilliant at the top. He is a neat player who shows a true understanding of the music's gracefulness. The balance (between string trio and oboe) is much better in this work. One of the failings with many recordings of K 370 is that it can seem like a duo for oboe and violin. Not here though — I have twelve or thirteen recordings of this work, and this one is up there with some of the best.

'The oboe's role in the second movement is often described as singing an opera aria. The music is quite pensive, and at times seems almost suspended. The oboist can often come to grief here, either by forcing the sound, or cracking on some of the wide intervals. Mr Gallant plays this movement superbly, however, and I highly recommend it. He doesn't get bogged down with the line, and at times is almost jaunty with his dotted quaver-semiquaver patterns right after the little cadenza, and this lightens the mood.

'The last movement, a jaunty little rondo in 6/8, requires crisp agile playing from all, but at the same time great elegance, and very exact articulation from the oboe. Then there is a passage where the oboe plays 4/4 against the 6/8 and has to keep his wits about him. In a fiendish passage towards the end, the articulation over leaps is particularly challenging. Some old recordings of the work actually slow down at this point.

'Thomas Gallant negotiates this superbly, ending the work with a pianissimo top *F*, which was the highest note on the oboe at that time, and didn't appear all that often.' (*Mozart Chamber Music for Strings, Oboe and Piano*, MSR Classics MS 1447)

'I did not know what to expect of this disc, being familiar with Zhen Chen as pianist, but not as composer. This music, a sort of combination of cultural fusion and crossover, is simple and direct, and enjoyed best as music to relax to, as I do not believe that it is profound. In this vein, the music will be sure to please many people who would not generally listen to "world music" or classical music. The composer plays the piano and is joined at various times by Jaju Shen (pipa), Feifei Yang (erhu) and singer Yixuan Pang.

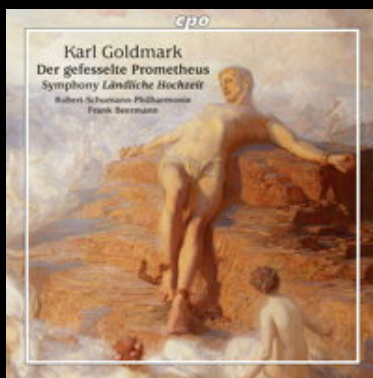


'... quietly expansive and evocative ...'

'The first piece, *Jade*, sets the tone for the rest of the disc, although at 6'14", it is the longest track. Scored for piano and pipa, it meanders along nicely and is quietly expansive and evocative, conjuring images of crisp mountain air and forest, with bubbling water and birdsong.

'The recording is quite live, so I suggest that you do not have the volume too loud as the pipa is a plucked instrument and sometimes, at loud volume, the beginning of the notes can be quite abrupt.

'The short second piece, *Springfield*, is for piano, pipa and ehru, and just under three minutes in duration. A little livelier than *Jade*, this attractive music has a gentle rocking motion. At times it has a celtic kind of feel, and at others much more of a Chinese flavour.' (*Zhen Chen: Ergo — new music for piano and Chinese folk instruments*, Navona Records NV6089)



'Conductor Frank Beermann displays a nice feel for the sonorities: the overture's slow introduction is nicely layered, and clear textures render the lyric passages even more fetching.'

Stephen Francis Vasta: 'It's funny how you discover, or trip over, some music. When I was a young piano student, my teacher discontinued the venerable "John Thompson" method after two years, instead passing me a book he owned called "Melodies Everyone Loves" or such. It was a fairly sophisticated collection — no real chestnuts — comprising mostly good music by second-tier composers, throwing in a few bits of Mozart and some folksong arrangements. (*Elli, Elli*, anyone?) One of the pieces was identified as "Bridal Song" from *Rustic Wedding Symphony*. I didn't study it with my teacher, but, being an intrepid sightreader, I learned it on my own; simple and melodic, it became one of those pieces I played every day, frequently instead of whatever I was supposed to be practising!

'Much later, as a fledgling record collector, I found out that the *Rustic Wedding Symphony* was a "real" piece that professional musicians performed, if infrequently, and that you could get it on a disc. I bought the Bernstein recording on LP, and it's still in my collection.

'Karl Goldmark is a fine example of a second-tier German early Romantic. Eckart van den Hoogen's program note mentions Weber and Schubert as influences, but, to my ears, Schumann comes more readily to mind in the broad, patiently spun lyrical passages and in the occasional surging string phrase. Goldmark adds expert craftsmanship and a modicum of charm, the latter not a quality one always associates with the troubled Schumann.

'The symphony — which CPO identifies only by the German *Ländliche Hochzeit* — is actually a five-movement suite. Its title, and its movement titles, suggest programmatic intentions, but they're general rather than specific. The opening *Hochzeitsmarsch*, for example, is a fifteen-minute theme-and-variations; as van den Hoogen asks, "Is the way from the wedding hall to the church nearly so long?" In that context, the fourth variation, in a melancholy minor, suggests that one of the principals might be having second thoughts! Those variations, however, are nicely worked out, diverse in colour, texture, and rhythm.' (*Goldmark: Overture Op 38; Symphony Op 26 — Beermann, cpo 777 484-2*)

The late **Howard Smith** listened to flute music (*Samantha Chang — Flute Sketches — mosaic of flute favourites*, Chang 8 44667 01439 6) and to Stephen Hough (*Stephen Hough in recital*, Hyperion CDA67686).

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