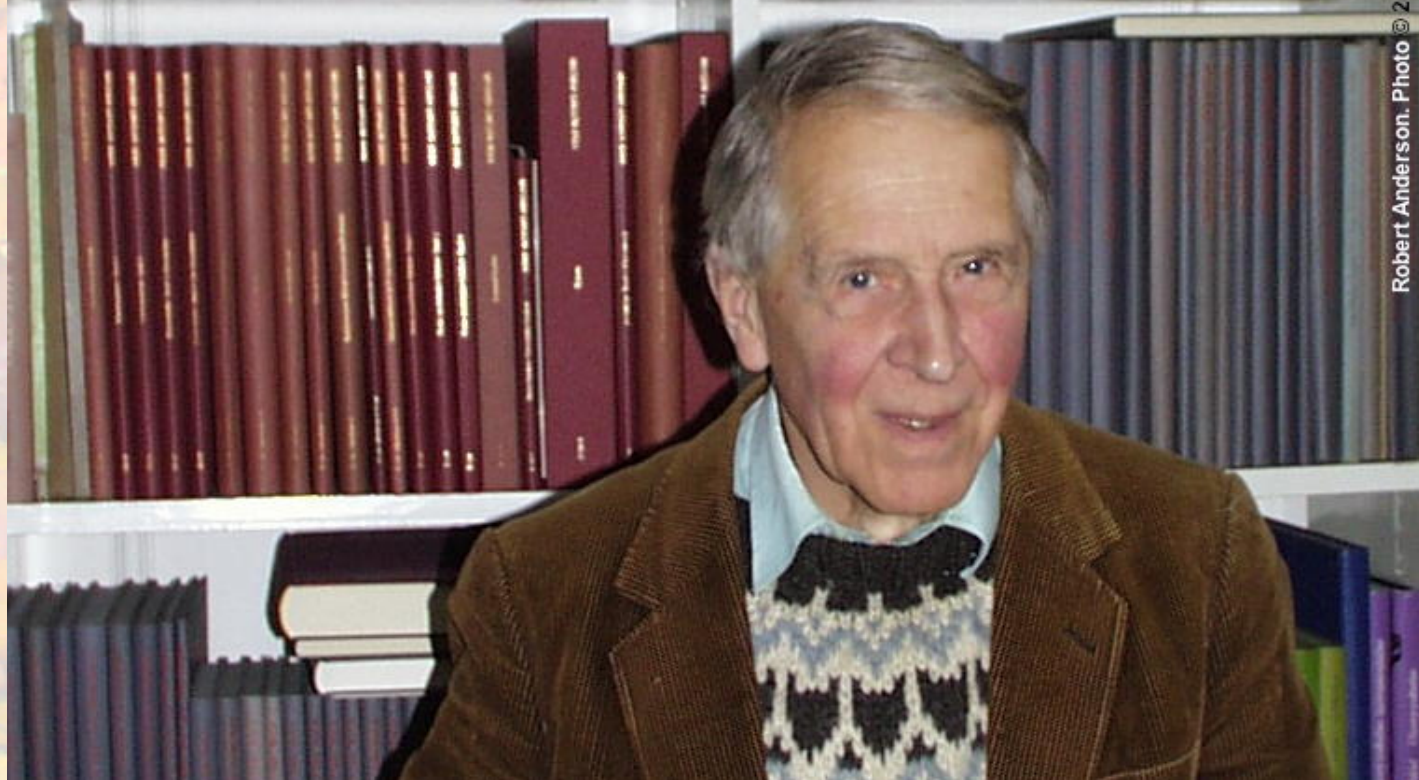


CLASSICAL
MUSIC DAILY

Robert Anderson. Photo © 2003 Keith Bramich



Set Your Heart on Books – Issue 115, 1 November 2017

The memory of British Egyptologist, conductor, lecturer, teacher and writer Robert Anderson (1927-2015), lives on in the work of RARCT, the Robert Anderson Research Charitable Trust, and in his legacy of books and other writing, both on Egyptology and music.

Set Your Heart on Books, a new book of Robert Anderson's music writings, is to be published shortly, available on subscription only. This is the sequel to *Opera Nights and Nightmares*, **previously reviewed here** in *M&V*. Robert wrote for *Music & Vision* more or less continuously, from our online magazine's very beginning, in 1999, until his death in 2015, so the new book should be of interest to anyone who has followed Robert's writing here, giving access to many other book reviews which were published elsewhere, and only in print.

For those new to Robert's writing, it can be sampled **here**.

The deadline for becoming a subscriber to *Set Your Heart on Books* is 2 November 2017, so time is limited. The cost is £20, including UK postage, and a list of subscribers will be published in the book. You can apply by post, directly to Robert's executor, Howard Davies, West Hill Books, 9 Holly Terrace, London N6 6LX, England, or via the *M&V* contact form, generating an email which we will forward directly to Howard.

Howard gives more information in this letter, circulated last month:

'Dear Friend,

'Robert Anderson: Set Your Heart on Books

'It will be no surprise to friends of Robert's to learn that he left a number of further writings ready for press which he hoped would be seen into print on behalf of his Trust. As his Executor, I have responsibility, where possible, for seeing to their publication.

'The first of these publications is the second volume of his collected music criticism, devoted to his reviews of books on musical subjects, relating primarily to those composers in whom he was expert — above all, Wagner, Delius and Elgar. The reviews were published over his many years as associate editor of the *Musical Times* and contributor to the *TLS*, *The Times*, and latterly to the online magazine *Music & Vision*. They contain much of his most pungent writing, as well as that wide scholarship for which he was renowned.

'Many of you will already know the first volume in this series, *Opera Nights and Nightmares*, covering his years of opera-going and, later, of CD and DVD reviewing. This sequel will be similar in format, running to some 240 pages with 8 pages of black and white illustrations. It will be produced once again by the publishing department of the Jagiellonian University, Krakow, with publication expected by the end of this year.

'Copies of the book are limited in number, and will be available by subscription only, at £20 per copy (to include UK postage and packing). A List of Subscribers will accompany the text, for those names submitted by 2 November 2017. Subscriptions will help defray the costs of publication, and thus increase those funds within the Estate which under his Will are to be transferred exclusively to his Charitable Trust, the website for which may be accessed at <robertandersontrust.org>.

'Should you wish to subscribe, kindly send your details to myself at West Hill Books, at the email or postal address above. Payment will be requested only when the book is ready for distribution.

'I look forward to hearing from you.

'Yours sincerely,

'Howard Davies
Executor for the Estate of R D Anderson'

Marcus Paus (born 1979) is one of the most sought after Norwegian composers. His catalogue includes numerous chamber, solo, choral and orchestral works, along with several operas, and music for stage and screen. He is noted for having re-embraced tradition, tonality and melody, and has been lauded by critics in Norway and abroad. Paus was named Composer of the Year 2017 by the Norwegian Music Publishers Association.

On 3 November 2017 Sheva Contemporary will release a recording (*SH 174*) presenting a diverse cross-section of Paus' output, from the darkly coloured to the resolutely joyful. Perhaps a particular highlight is *Love's Last Rites* for solo violin and strings played with sumptuous beauty by the great Henning Kraggerud.

Marble Songs was composed in response to an exhibition by Norwegian sculptor Håkon Anton Fagerås, whose luminous works continue to be a great source of inspiration to Paus. Knowing that Fagerås spends much of the year working in Pietrasanta, Tuscany, an area with an important relation to art history through its connection with marble, Paus wanted to write a piece in celebration of that lineage, and the oboe d'amore seemed ideally suited to the task. In these songs, Paus has aimed to reflect the beautiful paradox of stillness and plasticity in Håkon Anton Fagerås' sculptures. Jan Bertelsen, one of Norway's most active and versatile oboists, is the soloist on this recording.



Norwegian composer Marcus Paus, born 1960

Shostakovich in Memoriam initially formed the first movement of Paus' Symphony No 1, written in celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) in 2006. The symphony is a memorial to this great composer and, as such, Paus chose to base the symphony on Shostakovich's signature motto *DSCH*, the notes *D*, *E flat* (*S*), *C* and *B natural* (*H*) (from the German spelling of Dmitri Schostakowitsch). This motto pervades the entire work motivically, harmonically and structurally. This level of harmonic concentration is unique in Paus' output, and lends a distinctive austerity to the music. The piece was inspired by the composer's tombstone, which bears the signature motto. As such, the music is both monumental and funereal. It is performed here by cellist Ole Eirik Ree with the Oslo Camerata.

In spring 2012, Paus provided the music for Norwegian dance company Frikar's «8», a show featuring four of the company's folk dancers, as well as four young Kung Fu monks from China's Wudang province. The youngest of these was Zhou, a boy of about ten, who seemed to inhabit a world halfway between reality and myth; at four, he'd had a vision that he was destined to become a Kung Fu master, and so off he went to the temple to begin his training.

When asked to assemble and orchestrate some of the music for a TV ballet based on the show (originally scored for string trio and percussion), it occurred to Paus that he could re-cast parts of it in the form of a concertino for flute and orchestra, with the soloist playing the part of Zhou and so *A Portrait of Zhou* was written.

Having grown up in the 1980s, Paus was also channeling some of his own childhood fantasies, informed by the many martial arts films that were so popular at the time. In this work he has tried to capture the feeling of such a 'hero's quest', as well as the awe and energy of young Zhou's real-life journey towards mastery. Tom Ottar Andreassen (co-flautist of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra) is the soloist on this recording, performing with The Norwegian Radio Orchestra.

In summer 2014, Paus received a private commission for a solo violin work, which was to be recorded at the Emanuel Vigeland mausoleum in Oslo. Emanuel Vigeland made it his life's work to turn his studio into a planned mausoleum, covering its walls with the mural that he titled *Vita*, a darkly sensual depiction of the cycle of life through love, passion, death and rebirth. Paus wrote *Vita* as a lyrical tribute to Emanuel Vigeland's art, and as a token of friendship and admiration for violinist Bjarne Magnus Jensen who performs on this CD.

Love's Last Rites was written for violinist Henning Kraggerud who is the soloist on this recording with The Arctic Chamber Orchestra. Paus wanted to give Kraggerud a piece that could showcase his wonderful expressivity and phenomenal *cantabile*, his ability to make the violin truly sing. Almost all of the material is derived from the theme intoned by the solo violin after a short, lilting chordal introduction. The theme itself is one of tenderness and tension, restraint and regret. Paus says that it has become one of his most personal and confessional works.

In other news, Erato is to release a rare complete recording of Berlioz's opera 'Les Troyens', recorded live in Strasbourg.



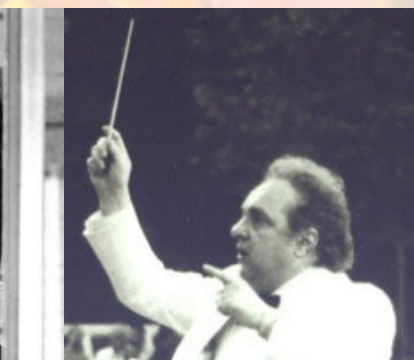
Ingvar Lidholm
(1921-2017)



Heather Slade-Lipkin
(1947-2017)



John Manduell
(1928-2017)



Vincent La Selva
(1929-2017)

We mark the passing of John Manduell, Heather Slade-Lipkin, Ingvar Lidholm, Vincent La Selva, Coriún Aharonián, Klaus Huber and Dmitry Smolsky.

Read our latest news

ASK ALICE — INCITING RIOTOUS BEHAVIOUR

Alice McVeigh: 'Almost every time I've played *The Rite of Spring* the conductors have mentioned how we have to open our ears, whichever orchestra it might be, to how bizarre and extraordinary it must have sounded when first played. Nobody would riot now, regardless of what an orchestra did: we've become inured to every jarring sound, every crazy thrust — the young most especially. Our capacity, to shock and to be shocked, has gradually become blunted. It's not that new music is "ho-hum" — believe me, that Sawyers has grip! — and you could have heard the proverbial pin — rapt attention — during his premiere, but nothing that Sawyers or Adams or Turnage or indeed anybody could do would make that kind of involvement — the pure level of shock — ever stun us again.



Cartoon of
Alice McVeigh.
© 2015 Pat Achilles

'Our ears have become deadened by the "ubiquitous media sound track". Probably by their mid-teens, the average westerner's ears will have been resolutely dinned into near-indifference by it all. And yes, there are implications for classical music, hampered as it is by an unfair image (of elitism, respectable stodge and older audiences), by the anti-intellectualism currently destroying America and creeping in elsewhere, and by the pressure to put STEM subjects and material wealth ahead of all the arts, aided and abetted by governmental austerity.

'So yes, read Havighurst's article. It's important to recognise our enemies. But don't just read the article. Buy Philip Sawyer's Third Symphony (just released, review in progress). Show up for new works. Support your local arts organisations. Become friends of your nearest orchestra. Don't just lie down and let classical music — the arts in general, even — slip from the mainstream into the muddy bywaters of our international cultural heritage. Resist. Revolt.

'If necessary, riot.'

The Devaluation of Music — It's Worse Than You Think

More episodes of 'Ask Alice' ...

Ask Alice your classical music-related questions ...

ENSEMBLE — PURE GOLD

Maria Nockin: 'On Saturday 7 October 2017, the Metropolitan Opera broadcast *Norma*, the new production with which the season had opened. Originally designed as a vehicle for Anna Netrebko, she has since found that the role no longer suited her voice and she cancelled her appearance. Sondra Radvanovsky, famous for the *bel canto* Tudor Queens, took on the role and had a marvelous success with it. I saw the repeat performance on 11 October.



Sondra Radvanovsky as Norma and Joyce DiDonato as Adalgisa in Bellini's *Norma* at New York Metropolitan Opera.
Photo © 2017 Ken Howard

'Radvanovsky's musical style was impeccable, her agility impressive, and her breath control in Bellini's long vocal lines amazing. Moreover, her acting and characterization did a great deal to enhance the credibility of the drama. She is a true dramatic coloratura, a rare gem in the world of operatic jewels. She floated light, airy *pianissimi* that thrilled the audience and when the story demanded it she hurled vocal thunderbolts at her adversaries.

'She framed her aria, "Casta diva", which comes early in Act I, with silver-lined tones that matched the moonlight around it and decorated those tones with flexible, smooth runs and gorgeous *fiorature*. After these performances, Radvanovsky will join the company of great Normas that includes: Lehmann, Ponselle, Callas and Sutherland.

'Director David McVicar took great care to emphasize the drama in such a way as to make each main character a credible individual. Norma and Adalgisa are friends who find a way to overcome their jealousy. Pollione is a faithless lover who thought he was getting away with loving two women, while Oroveso wants to overthrow the Roman colonial yoke.'

'The forest set by Robert Jones showed an immense expanse of old growth trees, many bare, a few with remaining mistletoe. Aided by Paule Constable's atmospheric lighting, in Act I, they were tinged with silver tinted reflections of the full moon seen during the overture. For the final scene there was a huge tree trunk that leaned directly forward at a threatening angle. Since Jones did a great deal of research on ancient Gaul, Norma's home was a livable iron age structure upheld by natural tree branches with an opening at the top to let smoke out. Along the curved wall were iron cooking pots and tools of the time for spinning and weaving. On her bed were animal skins and pelts of local animals.'

Read more ...

Maria was also in the cinema for Metropolitan Opera's transmission of *The Magic Flute*: 'Seen at the Met, Julie Taymor's production is a spectacle built upon Masonic symbols, Japanese puppetry, costumes from Chinese opera, African masks, and aspects of East Asian theatre. For her *Flute*, Julie Taymor and fellow puppet designer Michael Curry mixed all of them with other colorful delights into a kaleidoscopic visual *soufflé*. Although the production is now thirteen years old, it has been well kept up by the Met, and despite its lack of digital technology, it still looks new.'

'George Tsypin's scenery consisted of platforms on many levels and steps between them, with transparent walls, metal-lined shaped openings, and blowing bright-colored curtains that disappeared with the character that stepped between them. All of this was united by Donald Holder's superb lighting design.'

'Taymor's costumes were fanciful but wearable and never overdone. The Queen was a gossamer night-flying moth and Sarastro a huge, column-like sunbeam. Tamino was an Eastern prince and Pamina a Western ingenue, while Papageno wore a sports outfit of knit fabric covered with pieces of bird cage and topped by a cap with a bird-beak brim. Evil-minded Monastatos had bat wings and The Speaker wore a box that made him look like a walking electronic component.'

Read more ...

Mike Wheeler: 'Ravel presided like a tutelary deity over the opening of the new Nottingham Royal Concert Hall season (Nottingham, UK, 17 October 2017), with two of his most popular works in the first half, and his orchestration of Musorgsky's *Pictures From an Exhibition* in the second. The Hallé Orchestra and conductor Mark Elder served up a vibrant opener with a reading of *Rapsodie Espagnole* that had plenty of subtle, delicate moments — pastel shades alongside the strong primary colours. Their soft, gentle "Prélude à la Nuit" set up an expectant atmosphere that carried over into an



Charles Castronovo as Tamino (front left) and Christian Van Horn as the Speaker in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at New York Metropolitan Opera. Photo © 2017 Richard Termine

incisive "Malagueña". After one of the most laid-back accounts of the "Habanera" I've heard, "Feria" sparkled at a fairly steady tempo. While the balance at the penultimate climax was a little brass-heavy, there were plenty of delectable touches elsewhere; the soft muted-string glissandos in the quiet central section were particularly alluring.

'Attention to detail also informed their account of *Bolero*, a work it must be so easy just to power through on autopilot. The steady build-up, from an extremely quiet opening, was inexorable, with ear-catching moments like the pungent soprano saxophone entry, the trombone swoops later on, and genuine relish for the work's most bizarrely effective piece of scoring, when the tune is given to two piccolos, horn and celesta. The lift into E major at the end has long ceased to be a surprise, but as Elder and the Hallé showed, it can still come over with a real jolt.' **Read more ...**

Mike also listens to the Rogeri Ensemble, to two concerts by Sinfonia Viva, and to music by Judith Weir: 'Derby Concert Orchestra has championed Judith Weir on two previous occasions, with performances of the *The Welcome Arrival of Rain* and the song-cycle *Natural History*. This time (St Peter's Church, Littleover, Derby, UK, 14 October 2017) it was *Heroic Strokes of the Bow*, a work prompted by the title — not so much the picture itself — of one of Paul Klee's best-known paintings. The music gradually coalesces around a series of abrupt, isolated gestures, and the silences that punctuate this opening section were charged with expectation. The dominant impression is what Weir describes as the painting's "suggestions of excessive physical energy applied to a small piece of wood", and the strings were sharp and incisive in their rapid repeated-note figures. The energy is balanced by quiet moments, whimsical or enigmatic as the case may be; these were given equal expressive presence.' **Read more ...**



Judith Weir. Photo © Suzanne Jansen

Giuseppe Pennisi: '*The Girl from the Golden West* is a masterpiece, not performed as often as it ought to be because of the huge resources it demands: a gargantuan orchestra, three leads, quite special voices — a Wagnerian-Straussian soprano; a tenor with a strong central register; and an almost Verdian baritone — some fifteen soloists, each with a specific musical function and color, and an elaborate stage set almost as complex as that of a top class Western movie.



Svetla Vassileva as Minnie in Puccini's *La fanciulla del West*. Photo © 2017 Priamo Tolu

'The operation was masterminded by four theatres: those (in alphabetical order) of Cagliari, Charlotte, Lucca and New York. Other theatres joined, whereby eight theatres shared the cost and nearly forty scheduled performances will amortize it. Two of the theatres are American: Carolina Opera (where the production was shown in May) and New York City Opera (where it was staged in September). From Cagliari the production will go to Lucca (where Puccini was born), Pisa, Livorno, Modena and Ravenna. Who knows? Some other theatres, either Italian or American, may be attracted to lease it. In any event, this transatlantic operatic cooperation gives the very Italian Girl, composed on the Massaciuccoli lake near Lucca, an American flavor.' **Read more ...**

Giuseppe reviews *La Rondine* in Florence: 'Dennis Krief, stage director and also designer of the sets, costumes and lighting, places the action in today's Paris, not in the *Belle Époque*. In the first act, we are in a loft where elegant Parisians wine and dine; they can see and view the roofs and the "grey skies" described in *La bohème*. In the second act, the action is a dancing hall, le Bal Bullier, where the protagonist Magda had gone in disguise to escape, for a few hours, from the wealthy *milieu* she is in. There she meets the country boy Ruggero and starts an affair with him. In the third and final act, they are in

a white beach house at the seaside, which looks more like Brittany than Provence. There Ruggiero proposes to marry her without knowing a thing about her past and present life. She declines because she knows that she will never be a good wife in a small provincial town. Thus, like an arrow, she flies back to the Paris she belongs to. The acting by all the interpreters was quite good. The chorus is to be commended because of its dancing in the second act: Florence Opera no longer has a *corps de ballet*, and the chorus members danced the waltz and fox trot while singing.



The dance in the finale of Act II of Puccini's *La Rondine* at Opera di Firenze. Photo © 2017 Michele Borzoni

'The large orchestra was conducted well by young Valerio Galli, who is becoming a Puccini specialist. At times, the orchestral sound covered the voices, but this can be attributed to the huge pit and to the place where I was sitting. Yet the theatre is brand new — some more attention should have been given to the acoustics.' **Read more ...**

Giuseppe was also in the audience in Rome for Auber's *Fra Diavolo* and Szymanowski's *Krol Roger*, in Como for an opera about the Italian theoretical physicist Ettore Majorana, in Busseto for *La Traviata* at the Verdi Festival, and in Pisa for Donizetti's *Pia de' Tolomei*: 'Quite often, Italy's smaller and least Government-financed *teatri di tradizione* (traditional theatres) offer more interesting discoveries than the important lyrical foundations. The former are about thirty old opera houses in cities that were once capitals of communal republics, and are full of works of art. They are required to balance their accounts. The latter are twelve large houses, often full of debts, in major cities such as regional capitals.

'A new revealing reference of this point is Donizetti's *Pia de' Tolomei* produced by Teatro Verdi in Pisa — a lovely house with rows of boxes and elegant frescoes — as a joint venture with the theatres of Livorno and Lucca — where it can be seen and heard until 27 March 2018. Next Spring it will be a key event of the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South

Carolina. As readers of this magazine know, it is not unusual for *teatri di tradizione* to join efforts with analogous opera houses in Germany, France or Spain. It is, however, the first time that one of their productions has been accepted by a major American festival. I saw and heard the opera on 14 October 2017, the opening night of the production.



A scene at Pia's house in Act I of Donizetti's *Pia de' Tolomei* at Teatro Verdi di Pisa.
Photo © 2017 Imaginarium Creative Studio

'*Pia de' Tolomei* is an opera by a mature Donizetti, composed when Verdi melodrama was changing the Italian operatic landscape. There are two versions, with several changes in some parts of the truculent plot: they were both premiered in 1837, in Venice and Senigallia. It disappeared from the opera houses after a few years. In 2005, La Fenice attempted a rediscovery; the performances were successful and a good CD and DVD were produced, but no other opera house took up the task. Thus, *Pia de' Tolomei* is mostly known through a few verses from Canto No V of Dante's *Purgatory*.'

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Listings of forthcoming concerts and festivals

NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE

We're building an archive of our monthly classical music newsletters. They've been published in this PDF format since September 2013, and you can download and read any of them from **this page**.

CD SPOTLIGHT – HIGHLY POETIC



'... both technically and poetically impressive with a wide range of emotions ...'

Lucas Ball: 'In the programme notes of this CD, Bryce Morrison comments: "... Chopin's stature is sometimes questioned by those who claim he composed no operas, symphonies or oratorios. But the answer by this 'dreamer in strange places' is that he wrote all of these, but for the piano." So I found that I wanted to listen to this recording as if it was a recording of operas or oratorios written for the piano. Although it was difficult to imagine what the exact narrative would be if these works were operas or oratorios or even to imagine the orchestral instruments whilst listening to these works as if they were symphonies, I accept that there is, in Chopin's piano *oeuvre*, highly poetic music where the listeners themselves think of whatever the music may bring to mind. The audience,

in their own minds, might therefore create their own narrative, there being surely no rule book about this.

Instead of images or narrative, we, the listeners, may contemplate pianist Angela Brownridge's delivery of the emotional range and depth of Chopin. Emotional range (during for example, the *March Funèbre: Lento* from the Sonata No 2, Op 35) is very strikingly sonorous with both grandiose and delicate moments.' (*Frédéric Chopin: The Four Ballades — Angela Brownridge*, Challenge Classics CC72728)

Geoff Pearce: 'This CD introduces me to a very fine composer in Gerard Schurmann, born 1924 in Java, but now domiciled in the US. Whilst he wrote quite a lot of film music early in his career, in later years his chamber music and songs have made his name known. If this CD is anything to go by, his reputation is well deserved.

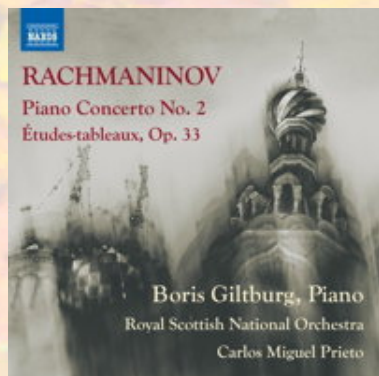
'The first piano quartet was written in 1986, and in a lot of ways, looks back to composers such as Bartók, Shostakovich and Benjamin Britten. However, Mr Schurmann is no imitator and speaks in his own individual voice. The opening movement is entitled "Ricerca" after the much earlier musical form. Whilst this is atonal music, it is beautifully shaped and a pleasure to listen to. There are strong rhythms and shapes, and the performance is ravishing.

'The second movement, "Capriccio", is fast and furious. The dedicatee, Hans Keller, and another close friend of the composer both died when this work was being written. The composer describes this work as being "like an extended, relentless *Dies Irae*". The music has a white heat which reminds me of that from Bartók's middle years, especially with its use of a folk-like theme against a driving rhythm. This fine performance is taut, accurate and driven.



'This fine performance is taut, accurate and driven.'

'The slow final movement, marked "Corale", is lyrical, calm and reflective, and brings all the players together apart from a few brief interludes where one or another has a contrasting solo passage. The mode is one of reconciliation from the intensity of, especially, the second movement.' (*Gerard Schurmann Chamber Music, Volume Three, Toccat Classics TOCC 0336*)

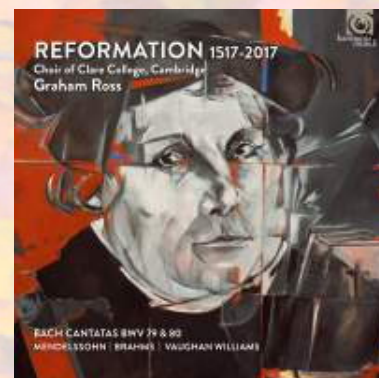


'... the soloist is consistently hands on on these challenging scores and his sense of timing and innate feeling for shaping grand tunes are effectively relayed.'

Gerald Fenech: 'Certainly one of the most popular concertos of all time, Rachmaninov's C minor can be safely regarded as a pivotal work in the composer's career. It was this great piece that launched afresh his career after almost four years of silence and despair, following the First Symphony's disastrous premiere in 1897. The concerto was eagerly awaited by both audiences and critics, and they were not disappointed. Indeed, the 1901 premiere was a tumultuous success. No surprise here, for with its arresting opening coupled with a lyricism and virtuosity that are truly astonishing, the work has always been looked upon as a unique journey from darkness through idyll to dazzling triumph. Maybe the secret of its beauty lies in Rachmaninov's own admission of writing what he truly felt in his heart.' (*Rachmaninov: Piano Concerto No 2, Naxos 8.573629*)

'One of history's inscrutable mysteries is how the course of millions is changed by one single act from one single man. This is indeed the case with Martin Luther. Ever since that October day in 1517 when he wrote his *Ninety-Five Theses*, and by tradition nailed them to the door of Wittenberg Castle Church in a provocative action against the Catholic Church, everything in Europe and most of the world changed forever. The Reformation was on its way, and with it the political, social, religious, intellectual and cultural elements of a continent were never to be the same again, music included.

'In 2017, in celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of this momentous event, Clare College, Cambridge decided to revive a series of cantatas by J S Bach performed liturgically in the College Chapel on the eight Sundays of Lent Term. The aim was to celebrate and explore the exceptional theological, cultural and spiritual legacies of the European Reformation and Counter Reformation initiated by the Catholic Church through the Council of Trent in the mid 1540s. This recording is the culmination of this project, presenting chronologically the two great Reformation Cantatas by J S Bach (BWV 79 and 80) and three chorale-based works by Mendelssohn (*Whoever lets the great God reign*, MVWA7), Brahms (*Why is light given to one in misery*, Op 74 No 1) and Vaughan Williams (*Lord, thou hast been our refuge*).' (*Reformation 1517-2017 — Choir of Clare College, Cambridge / Graham Ross, harmonia mundi HMM 902265*)



'Superb performances, coupled with some excellent sound and scholarly annotations complete a disc brimming with historical appeal.'



'Antonino Fogliani and his forces respond with zealous enthusiasm, and the ensemble pieces in particular are dispatched with marvelous excitement, soliciting in the listener a strong sense of involvement.'

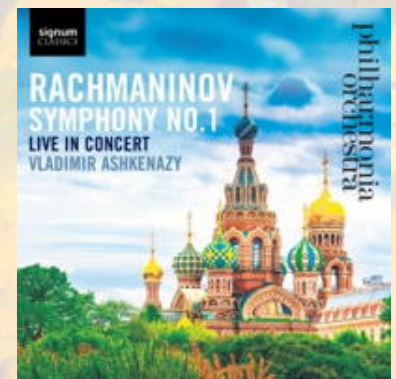
'The Rossini/Naxos series from Wildbad continues unabated with this 2015 recording of one of the composer's least performed works. *Bianca e Falliero*, unlike other Rossini stage works, took some two years to materialize when others were put on in two months or less. Following the success of *La Gazza ladra*, La Scala's impresario Angelo Petracchi and Rossini fell out with one another for reasons unknown. The rift did not last long on Petracchi's initiative, promising him the first opera of the 1818/19 Carnival.

'By the time *Bianca e Falliero* was premiered at La Scala in December 1819, much had passed under the bridge, but at least Rossini's work had come to fruition. The opera was shunned by the critics, but the Milanese public loved it. It was performed on not less than thirty-nine evenings during its first run, but three years had to pass before *Bianca e Falliero* was mounted again, following which the work held its own for the

following ten years. Then total oblivion. Now, thanks to the recent rise in Rossini discoveries, we can assess afresh this most beautiful creation that has languished in the dark for far too long.'

(*Rossini: Bianca e Falliero*, Naxos 8.660407-09)

'Rachmaninov composed his first symphony between January and August 1895, when he was just twenty-two and had a teaching post at the Mariinsky Institute for girls in Moscow. The composer was just starting out on his journey, this being only his third orchestral work, so he was fervently hoping for a successful outcome. Unfortunately, this symphony almost put a premature end to Rachmaninov's career. The premiere in St Petersburg on 27 March 1897 — five days before the composer's 24th birthday, with the famous Alexander Glazunov conducting — was an absolute disaster. Glazunov's conducting was utterly deadpan, and the composer left the hall inflamed and disgusted at the way his work was treated by such an eminent musician. To make matters worse, the press were highly abusive, and condemned the symphony as utterly gloomy and worthless. No surprise really, as the St Petersburg critics were strongly prejudiced against the Moscow school.



'Ashkenazy and his Philharmonia forces exude a quite brilliant performance full of explosive intensity and exuberance, and yet when warranted, their sensitive attention to detail is consistently refreshing.'

'No wonder Rachmaninov tore up the score and refused to allow the work to be published. Moreover, this antagonism to his creation plunged the composer into a deep depression that lasted almost four years during which no new works were composed. Then in 1901 the Second Piano Concerto hit the musical world and from then on Rachmaninov's career never looked back. Miraculously, the orchestral parts came to light during the Second World War in the Leningrad Conservatoire, and with the aid of these and the composer's own reduction for piano duet, the score was carefully reconstructed by Soviet musicologists. The premiere of this resuscitation was given in the Moscow Conservatoire on 17 October 1945, nearly fifty years after its initial failure.' (*Rachmaninov: Symphony No 1 — Philharmonia / Ashkenazy*, Signum Classics SIGCD484)



'... the programme is as explosive as one can hope for.'

'From time to time certain labels tend to issue a compilation of pieces showcasing the variety of their catalogues as well as giving the opportunity to listeners to taste some of the juiciest items on the menu. This Chandos CD is just that, and indeed the programme is as explosive as one can hope for. Eighteen pieces from seventeen composers in the form of Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Verdi, Orff, Nielsen, Janáček, Bartók, Ginastera, Respighi, Lutosławski, Mussorgsky, Wagner, Grieg, Holst, Copland and Khachaturian. Add to this eminent lot some of the best orchestras and conductors, and you have a package of musical delights to regale you for some eighty-two minutes.

'The works included are a mixed bag of unusual and very popular pieces. Random examples of the former are Nielsen's *Oriental Festival March*, Bartók's *A Shabby Room in the Slums*, Wagner's *Overture to Das Liebsverbot* and Lutosławski's *Intrada*.'
(*Explosive Classics*, Chandos CHAN 10989 X)

The late **Howard Smith** listened to *Cantilena — music for flute and piano* on Divine Art *ddv24137*, to the Kreutzer Quartet's *Northern Lights* on Metier *msv28507* and to Enrique Graf's Bach, Mendelssohn and Mussorgsky on Cougar Classics 7 96873 03975 8.

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