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Isabella Pitman and Tom Lowen in
Freddie Meyers' 'A Sketch of Slow Time'



A Sketch of Slow Time — Issue 116, 1 December 2017

SPONSORED FEATURE — FREDDIE MEYERS' NEW OPERA

Alice McVeigh: 'Freddie Meyers' brand-new opera [performed 2 and 3 November 2017 at the Jacqueline du Pré Building, Oxford University, UK] is based around the fascinating history of Arnold Schoenberg's marital crisis: the affair between his close friend, Richard Gerstl (an artist) and Mathilde Schoenberg, beginning with the affair's inception, and ending with the aftermath of Gerstl's suicide. The libretto was apparently either inspired by, or else directly lifted from, extant letters between the principals — at the end, to shocking dramatic effect. In the programme, Meyers scripted a short and cogent essay about his method of extrapolating from available sources, while acknowledging the fact that the Schoenbergs would have been furious at him, having been desperate to keep the scandal under wraps during their lifetimes.

'Although the Jacqueline du Pré hall is not huge, its acoustic is so glowy that Steven Isserlis and other musical luminaries regularly perform there. The chamber orchestra was set up in the balcony — with the exception of the pianist, perched on the edge of the stage behind a grand piano. This should have occasioned issues with blending — or, at very least — of ensemble, but Meyers' conducting was so decisive, and his pianist David Palmer so alert, that the separation worked.

'The set was rather basic, as were the costumes — Gerstl seemed to have wandered in from a muso's gig, while Schoenberg was garbed as a City exec — but the ladies had both made efforts at historical authenticity and, from the beginning, a lively, and 90% full, house was reduced to rapt attention, by Director Cassie White's notion of having Isabella

Pitman's soprano singing, unseen, from the left balcony. Pitman, tall, fair and languorously beautiful, proved an inspired choice for Mathilde, as her sinewy instrument is already capable of pitch-perfect roulades as well as exquisite control. At times, she also acted very well — she should have smouldered rather more, but I sense that the smouldering will come. (There was one moment — her silvery soprano glissandoing skywards, when she took my breath away.)

'As Schoenberg, Tom Lowen had far fewer shots at smouldering: his was the most passive third of the love triangle, and, despite a rich bass voice, he appeared so rigid, taciturn and brooding in character as to tug one's sympathies towards the guilty pair. Still, his chilliness at the conclusion was gripping, while throughout there was that poised, deep sound, so intelligently employed!' **Read more ...**

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ENSEMBLE — LAVISH AND EFFECTIVE

Giuseppe Pennisi: '*La Ciociara* by Marco Tutino was premiered in San Francisco in Summer 2015. At the time, the title used was *Two Women*, the same title as Vittorio De Sica's Oscar-winning 1960 movie. On its own account, the movie was based on Alberto Moravia's successful 1959 novel. It is noteworthy that *La Ciociara* / *Two women* is the first opera commissioned from an Italian composer by a large and prominent American opera house since Puccini's *Il Trittico* by the Metropolitan Opera House, premiered in 1920.

'In San Francisco, Tutino's opera was reportedly a great success: the audience applauded for nearly fifteen minutes. However, the reviews were mixed. A balanced review by James Sohre was published in this magazine — **Taking Flight, 6 July 2015**. The production is the same, even though there are some cast changes, so this review is only intended as an addition to Sohre's 2015 article.

'There are two preliminary questions. Why was the Italian premiere in Cagliari on 24 November 2017 — I was in the audience — and not in Turin, shown as a co-producer when the opera was staged in San Francisco? And why did many American reviewers consider *La Ciociara* to be a late *verismo* opera? See **Autumn Trilogy, 23 November 2017**.

'The answer to the first question is trivial: in-fighting within Turin's opera house caused never-ending delays until the management sold the Teatro Regio co-production rights to Cagliari's Teatro Lirico. Turin embarked on a major internationalization program, but lost the opportunity to premiere in Italy the best Italian opera since the beginning of the twentieth century.

'The second question raises more complex issues. On the one hand, most Italian opera composers are devoted to experimental music, with a few performances in small theatres. Only a few — Marco Tutino and Giorgio Battistelli — work on traditional large-scale operas which can be appreciated by vast audiences.

'*La Ciociara* has little to do with verismo, even though the vocal writing for the villain Giovanni — Sebastian Catana in the Cagliari production — has echoes of the role of Scarpia in *Tosca* and the final aria of Michele (Aquiles Machado), "Come faranno i boschi", resembles "E lucevan le stelle" and "Ella mi creda" — two war horses for Puccini tenors.' **Read more ...**



From left to right: Lavinia Bini as Rosetta, Anna Caterina Antonacci as Cesira, Aquiles Machado as Michele and Sebastian Catana as Giovanni in Marco Tutino's *La Ciociara*. Photo © 2017 Priamo Tolu

Giuseppe was also in Ravenna for their Autumn Trilogy: 'As underlined several times here, Ravenna, like Salzburg in the Austrian Alps, is a festival town on the shore of the Adriatic sea. After a long Summer Festival in June and July, it features an "Autumn Trilogy" — three operas on a theme with the same stage director, creative team and conductor as well as a young cast. In addition, there is a regular opera season, featuring eight productions this year, as well as a concert season. As Ravenna was the capital of the Roman Empire and of two different Kingdoms from 402 to 751, opera and concert goers can enjoy quite a bit of sightseeing. An important part of the audience is non-

Regional, or coming from abroad.

The "trilogy" is masterminded by Cristina Mazzavillani Muti, who also has a key role in the Summer Festival. This November, the title of the trilogy is *On the Brink of the Twentieth Century*. It includes three operas that had their debuts between 1890 and 1900 — *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Pietro Mascagni, *I Pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo and *Tosca* by Giacomo Puccini. The operas are presented in three cycles so that the audience can see and listen to all of them during a three day stay in Ravenna. I saw the trilogy on 17-19 November 2017.



A scene from Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* at the Ravenna Festival's 'Trilogia d'Autunno'. Photo © 2017 Zani Casadio

As the first two operas are relatively short, each of them is prefaced by a forty minute performance where children, aged eight to sixteen, show their understanding and views of the opera about to be shown. The operas have the same conductor, Vladimir Ovodok, and the same creative team — Cristina Mazzavillani Muti for stage direction, Vincent Longuemare for lighting, David Loom for visual design, David Broccoli for video programming and Alessandro Lai for costumes. In the pit is the Luigi Cherubini Orchestra, created and often conducted by Riccardo Muti. The chorus is provided by the Teatro Municipale di Piacenza, directed by Corrado Casati, and the children's chorus Ludus Vocalis is led by Elisabetta Agostini. This provides for artistic unity. Finally, the cycle represents travel from Sicily (*Cavalleria*) to Calabria (*Pagliacci*) and Rome (*Tosca*) during the last decade of the nineteenth century.' **Read more ...**

Back in Rome, Giuseppe was at the ballet: 'On 15 November 2017, Teatro dell'Opera di Roma's new ballet season started with a new production of Ludwig Minkus' *Don Quixote*. This year the ballet season is not just a very few performances encapsulated as part of the opera program. It now has its own standing, under the leadership of Eleonora

Abbagnato, and features six grand ballets and a program for youngsters and children. In Italy there is demand for ballet; in Rome alone there are three theatres almost entirely devoted to this form of art. Ballet is costly: minor theatres often offer performances to taped music. Many major theatres have closed their ballet companies. As Teatro dell'Opera di Roma's ballet has now reached high quality, it might evolve as the British Royal Ballet or the US American Ballet, performing in Italy's various theatres. At the inaugural performance there were, in central orchestra seats, the Mayor of Rome, Ms Virginia Raggi and the *étoile* Mikhail Baryshnikov, almost seventy years old but in excellent shape.



Iana Salenko and Isaac Hernández in Ludwig Minkus' *Don Quixote*
at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. Photo © 2017 Yasuko Kageyama

'The production is very different from that reviewed five years ago — **Very Elegant, 30 December 2012**. First a few words on the composer. Ludwig Minkus had been born in that part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which is now the Czech Republic, moved to Vienna as a child, but his career started in Paris where ballet had an important role among the performing arts. From France he moved to Moscow and St Petersburg where he had gained the esteem, trust and appreciation of Marius Petipa, then the "real boss" of ballet in the Imperial Theatres. For the Moscow Imperial Bolshoi Theatre 1869-70 season, Petipa commissioned Minkus to create a grand ballet based on Cervantes' novel. Petipa himself worked with another choreographer, Alexander Gorsky. As a matter of fact, *Don Quixote* is only a pretext for a contrasted love story where the knight settles things right, after, of course, a fight with the windmills. This explains why Minkus supplied a score filled with a great variety of Spanish-style flare, juxtaposed with late romantic and neoclassical music (in the "dream" scenes) and quite a few reminiscences of Vienna and of Austrian music. The conductor David Garforth seized this point very well.' **Read more ...**

Giuseppe also covers two different attempts to modernise Monteverdi and Mozart, one of the last performances of Stefano Belisari as Elio e le Storie Tese, in a mini "Magic Flute", and celebrates the seventieth birthday of Salvatore Sciarrino, by attending the first Italian performance of *Superflumina*, and the first performance of *Ti vedo, ti sento, mi perdo*: 'On 14 November 2017, I was one of seventy-four music reviewers accredited by La Scala for

the world premiere of *Ti vedo, ti sento, mi perdo* by Salvatore Sciarrino. The opera is a joint commission of Milan's Teatro alla Scala and Berlin's Staatsoper unter den Linden, where the same production is scheduled to be shown in May 2018. This magazine has often discussed Sciarrino's works, most recently on 8 November.

'*Ti vedo, ti sento, mi perdo* can be misunderstood easily because it is set in baroque times and deals with the murder of a well-known composer, and womanizer, Alessandro Stradella — never on stage but always present in the dialogues and the arias. In my view, the centre of the two act opera is different: it deals with the triumph of music over any other form of artistic expression. In short, this is the same theme as Richard Strauss' *Capriccio*. As in *Capriccio*, there is a woman (the "Cantatrice", an excellent Laura Aikin) who has to choose whether to sing or not to sing an unfinished Stradella cantata after the news has arrived that the young composer had been murdered for an affair with a woman. As in *Capriccio* there are two antagonists: the musician (the "Musico", Charles Workman, not in his best shape on the night of the premiere) and the writer and poet (the "Letterato", Otto Katzameier, in very good vocal and acting condition).



Laura Aikin as The Cantatrice, Otto Katzameier as Letterato and a dancer in Salvatore Sciarrino's *Ti vedo, ti sento, mi perdo* at Teatro alla Scala, Milan. Photo © 2017 Matthias Baus

'Of course Sciarrino, composing in 2017, is not Richard Strauss in 1942. Sciarrino has been away from any specific form of *avant-garde* and has developed his own specific and peculiar style based on declamation, *sprechgesang* and spoken dialogues, as well as arias and musical numbers such as duets, trios and concertato. In *Ti vedo, ti sento, mi perdo*, there are also quotations and reminiscences from Stradella and other baroque music as well as from the French twentieth century style, eg in the Intermezzo at the end of the first act.' **Read more ...**

Maria Nockin: 'Thomas Adès conducted the American premiere of his newest opera *The Exterminating Angel* at the Met. This reviewer saw its HD transmission in Arizona on Saturday 18 November 2017. Adès based his opera on Luis Buñuel's darkly amusing 1962 film *El Ángel Exterminador*, and he wrote both arias and ensembles for the huge cast of soloists called for in the story.

'*The Exterminating Angel* is Thomas Adès' first new opera in more than a decade and since 2004, when he wrote *The Tempest*, the scope and depth of his work has increased enormously.

'On entering the auditorium we hear bells. Supers walk three live sheep around the stage as if they were curly-haired dogs. Later, while the orchestra plays Adès' labyrinthine version of Bach's *Sheep may Safely Graze*, the cast eats grilled lamb.



The guests at dinner, in the New York Metropolitan Opera production of Thomas Adès' *The Exterminating Angel*. Photo © 2017 Ken Howard

'The story begins as exquisitely dressed upper class guests assemble for a post-opera dinner wearing Hildegard Bechtler's jewel-colored mid twentieth-century formal garb. Servants are fleeing the property, however, for no apparent reason. Bechtler's set consists mainly of a huge doorframe through which the right to enter seems to be determined by unseen forces.

'In an interview for the *New York Times*, Adès said, "We stick fairly closely to the final screenplay". In some ways, however, the music of the opera enhances the power of the

story over the minds of the audience. Words go to the brain, music to the heart. As Adès puts it, "I amplified some things that in a way are suppressed in the final film". Librettist Tom Cairns, who also directed the production, wrote the text in collaboration with Adès.'

Read more ...

Mike Wheeler: 'Scottish violinist Michael Foyle and Estonian pianist Maksim Štšura have one of those perfectly meshing musical partnerships that is a joy to hear. Playing Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata and Franck's Sonata in A from memory freed them up to focus on their interaction as a duo with such complete unanimity that you couldn't help but be drawn in. (Derby Chamber Music, Multi-Faith Centre, Derby University, Derby, UK, 10 November 2017.)



Maksim Štšura (left) with Michael Foyle. Photo © Alastair Merrill

'The start of the Beethoven was commanding but also thoughtful, balancing lyricism and truculence as it went on. Paradoxically, its revolutionary features emerged all the more potently for not being over-projected. In the second movement, Foyle conjured up birdsong in Variation 1 to rival Beethoven's "Spring" Sonata, Variation 2 was fresh and skippy, the minor-key No 3 thoughtful and introspective. The dancing energy he and Štšura brought to the finale summed up a performance that, contradictory as it sounds, wore its gravitas lightly.' **Read more ...**

Mike also listens to pianists Daniel Lebhardt, Lara Downes and Mark Bebbington, and to cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason with Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra: 'With the CBSO on its current form, under dazzling music director Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, and with local hero Sheku Kanneh-Mason playing Shostakovich's

Cello Concerto No 1 on his home turf, this was a self-selecting highlight from the moment the Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham's 2017-18 season was announced. (Nottingham, UK, 9 November 2017.)

'It began, though, in a very low-key way, with Rakhmaninov's tone-poem *The Isle of the Dead*. The sombre opening saw the composer's characteristic fatalism charged with menace from the buzzing stopped horns. The intricate string writing that came through as the mood momentarily lightened was typical of the careful attention to balance. The climax of the central section was stormy and expansive at the same time, brought to a halt by whipcrack brass and string chords, and the *Dies Irae* chant that threads through the work sounded forlornly on low woodwind and cellos at the end.



Sheku Kanneh-Mason in 2016

'Sheku Kanneh-Mason repaid the enthusiastic welcome to which he came on stage with an account of the Shostakovich that was taut and incisive in the first movement, joined by an authoritative contribution from principal horn Elspeth Dutch in what is almost a second solo part.' **Read more ...**

Finally, Mike was at Opera North's *Six Little Greats* for three double bills — the well-known "Cav and Pag", plus *Trouble in Tahiti* paired with *Trial by Jury* and *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* with *Osud*: 'Živný, the central character of *Osud*, is a composer with an unfinished opera weighing on his mind. He wrote it after he and his former lover Míla were forcibly separated by her mother, but when they meet again at a spa resort the relationship is rekindled. Four years on — Act II — they are married and living with their son (from their first liaison) and her now mentally unhinged mother. The



A publicity image for Opera North's *Osud*

opera has become a bone of contention between them, but as he penitently begins tearing up the score, Míla's mother bursts in, and sings the theme of the opera's love duet in scorn. As she rushes to the balcony Míla tries to stop her, but they both fall to their deaths. In Act III, eleven years later, Živný's conservatoire students are working through a storm scene from the opera. Živný himself enters, and the students ask him about the work's background. But he is overcome by its intense personal significance, and as a storm breaks outside he collapses, saying that the unfinished last scene 'is still in God's hands'.

'This potentially compelling scenario suffers from a mismatch between Janáček's powerful score and a plodding, impossibly wordy libretto, in which, bizarrely, the composer himself had a hand (after the breakthrough of *Jenůfa*, which just goes to show that a creative artist's development doesn't always move in straight lines). Annabel Arden's production is held together by two compelling central performances: Giselle Allen's Míla switches credibly from seductive in Act I, to worn down by circumstances in Act II, while John Graham-Hall gives Živný a driven, haunted air which adds weight to the would-be transcendence of his final moments.' **Read more ...**

Paul Sarcich: 'This concert was one of eight comprising the second annual festival ("Echoes") mounted by the Iberian and Latin American Music Society (ILAMS) in conjunction with the Instituto Cervantes; concerts which, spread from September through November, forefront the classical music of the Hispanic-speaking world, in everything from guitar recitals to a singalong Victoria Requiem.'



Performer line-up at the Echoes Festival's 'PanAmericana' concert
on 29 October 2017 at Milton Court, Barbican, London UK

'The PanAmericana concert was well at the light classical end of the spectrum, bleeding over into show music and popular song. Comprising eighteen mostly short pieces, most of them of a song form of some kind, it represented six USA and ten Latino composers in an examination of cross-influence between North and South American music, mostly from the early to mid twentieth century. Many well-known favourites in the program, together with some lesser-knowns to add spice.

'Given that eleven pieces out of the eighteen were given as solos or duets, and three more as trios and quartets, it often felt like this was a program more suited to a club than a concert hall, the intimacy of the music itself and many of the performances heightening the feeling. Festival Director Helen Glaisher-Hernández doubled as pianist and arranger for the concert, and it was a little surprising that only in the finale, Gottschalk's *Escenas campestres* No 2, did she use the full complement of performers available. Villa-Lobos' witty *Food for Thought* (bit of an unknown gem of a cabaret song, this) and Chávez' *Quisiera ser danzantito* gave us sextet backings, with three strings, percussion and piano behind the singers, raising the musical interest level above the many duets. The addition of a bass to the lineup, however, would have really fired things along, and there was a bit of lost opportunity in not using a bigger group behind Lecuona's *Always in my Heart* or Bernstein's *Tonight*.

'Glaisher-Hernández showed herself to be a sensitive accompanist, whether in the pungent harmonies of André Previn's *Tango Song*, or the sinuousness of Celso Machado's *Pé de moleque*. I would have liked to hear her cut loose more in Ricardo Lorenz's *Salsa inglesa*, done as a duet with percussionist Wilmer Sifontes, who throughout the evening gave a lesson in how subtle latin percussion can be.'

Read more ...

Roderic Dunnett: 'For sly productions, clever rhyming translations, bold young singers and inspired synopses, head in 2018 back to Bampton (www.bamptonopera.org). Director Jeremy Gray has already proved, with a splendid updated production with entertaining costumes and even better moves and staged management, that Salieri's *Falstaff* (starring Mark Saberton) is, astoundingly, a comic rival to Verdi's. Salieri's *The Cave of Trofonio*, a beautiful forerunner to Mozart's *Così*, full of good jokes and vitally staged, they proved another claimable masterpiece.

'At Bampton Jeremy Gray and Gilly French, founders and spirited joint producers, recently returned to Salieri, bringing to life his *The School of Jealousy* (*La scuola de' gelosi*, Venice 1778, Vienna 1780 then 1783), its text by the prolific *opera buffa* librettist Caterino Mazzolà.

'Thanks to a sumptuous and dense box hedge, Bampton's acoustic outdoors always emerges magically lucid; and so it did here. Salieri concocts an unexpectedly intelligent fusion of genres: Blasio's horn-decorated Act 2 aria (Matthew Sprange) underlines this composer's indebtedness to Gluck, whom Bampton have avidly championed.



Portrait of Antonio Salieri by Joseph Willibrord Mähler



Countess Bandiera (Rhiannon Llewellyn), the Count (Alessandro Fisher), Lieutenant (Thomas Herford), Ernestina (Nathalie Chalkley) and her husband Blasio (Matthew Sprange) in Bampton's *School of Jealousy*

'Incidentally Gluck's *Orfeo*, following their buoyant productions of *Rinaldo*, *Xerxes* and *Alcina*, received a scintillating staging from Longborough's Young Artists, invigoratingly directed by Maria Jagusz, and musically enriched by Jeremy Silver's incisive conducting.

Longborough will stage *Poppea* in 2018.

'Meanwhile Bampton's Salieri was surely on a par with their very best. The treasures began early. Carlotta, the maid (Kate Howden), sings an aria about jealousy (in others) that was as much sheer delight as her ensuing recitative. There is a fair amount of snooping around, for which Salieri provides some delightful, tongue-in-cheek creeping music. The first (admonitory) aria by Lumaca, her fellow servant, was an equal delight; you could hear Mozart in the wings. And already the libretto, in French and Gray's as always musically adroit, supple and witty translation, was producing laughter galore from the audience, while under Opera North conductor Anthony Kraus (Bampton is a beneficial home not just for young rising singers, but for conductors of assurance and potential) the touches of orchestral detail — decoration, little flourishes, pert additions — were showing this beautifully structured opera in the best possible light.' **Read more ...**

Roderic also discusses the building of a new opera house: 'While Nevill Holt's 2017 season, with a *Tosca* originally conceived for a triple venue performance in Londonderry (Derry), directed by Oliver Mears, the new Director of Opera for the Royal Opera who has directed six out of the eight operas staged by NH's own company, and conducted by Nevill Holt's inspiring, clear visioned Artistic Director Nicholas Chalmers, lived up to the anticipated magnificent standards (including, with one vivid *trompe l'œil*, the revealing rearstage, for the Act III prison scene, of the entire orchestra in pits side and rear of the action.)

'The pair, whose brilliant joint imagination lies behind the recent triumphant emergence of Opera Northern Ireland (in a province where opera was, apart from the courageous private Castleward Opera, previously pretty dismally served), and their endlessly innovative Designer, Simon Lima Holdsworth, have established an enviable reputation for quality opera at this unique rural Midland venue.



The stone stable block at Nevill Holt, which houses the new theatre in its ancient courtyard

'2018 will be the first to see stagings in the new four-hundred seater permanent opera

house (whose foundations were laid only in 2016) within the seventeenth century stable block courtyard. A new *Marriage of Figaro* should display their usual mastery of detail, both visual and aural. The other work will be a staging devised by Antony McDonald for NI Opera, a suitably in-your-face revival of Thomas Adès' chamber opera *Powder Her Face*.



Witherford Watson Mann's artist's impression of the view from the stage of the new opera house

'Scrupulously harnessed to planners' requirements and Ross's own determination to preserve the exterior and interior of the manor buildings intact, the new state-of-the-art opera house design will, as Chalmers comments, "provide a beautiful permanent home for NHO, and breathe new life into this historic building".

'The Opera House concept is designed by the RIBA's 2013 international Stirling Prize winners (for "the year's greatest contribution to evolution in architecture") Witherford Watson Mann, whose work includes Southwark's Bankside development, an applauded new display at The Courtauld Institute, Deptford's Albany Arts Centre and the extensive space being regenerated in the aftermath of the London Olympics, alongside acoustic and theatre interior experts Sound Space Vision, whose achievements include the celebrated pavilion for Garsington Opera at Wormsley and the Victoria and Albert Museum's medieval and renaissance galleries in London, alongside music practice rooms for Ross's old school, Uppingham, and arts centres in Minneapolis, Hong Kong, Toronto, Abu Dhabi and Istanbul.' **Read more ...**

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CD SPOTLIGHT – DIVERSE ELEMENTS



'... passionate and wholly committed performance ...'

Gerald Fenech: 'In his Requiem, Duruflé chose to adapt the spiritual, contemplative aesthetic found in Gabriel Fauré's piece for the genre, and the 1947 Paris premiere was a great success. The work went on to become one of Duruflé's most popular compositions, and has remained so ever since. And why not? With its self-contained contemplative aura permeated by a constant conciliatory and peaceful tone, this Requiem is indeed the perfect balm to the troubles and anxieties one finds oneself in day after day.'

'Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936) is regarded as one of Italy's great twentieth century composers of orchestral music. His unique sound is a mixture of the most diverse elements: the French impressionism of Debussy, the magical orchestration of his one-time teacher Rimsky-Korsakov, the imaginative language of Richard Strauss, and even elements from folklore and neoclassicism. But to a large degree, Respighi based his creations on the music of earlier centuries.'

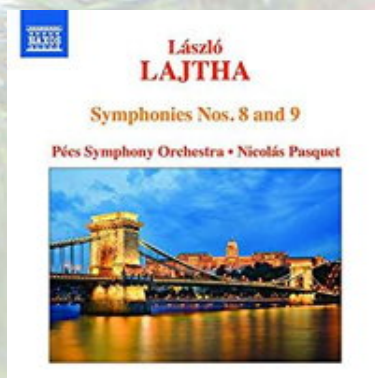
'With the help of his wife Elsa he discovered the beauties of Gregorian chant and, fascinated by the purity of the genre combined with the system of old church modes, he soon set to work on the *Concerto Gregoriano*. The world premiere of the work took place in Rome in 1922, but to Respighi's chagrin, the reception was, to say the least, lukewarm. Sadly the Concerto was never performed again in the composer's lifetime.' (*Duruflé Requiem; Respighi: Concerto gregoriano*, BR Klassik 900320)

Gerald also listens to Haydn quartets: 'Out of the eighty or so quartets that he wrote during a career spanning more than fifty years, the six Op 20 are regarded as some of the most original pieces he ever composed. Indeed, throughout the three quartets on this recording, and in all six of the Op 20 pieces, the same miracle is renewed each time they are listened to with the imagination and intensity they warrant, and all this is because our listening is an active and vibrant part of the fabric of these works.'



'These quartets are conceived as multi-dimensional dialogues in the unfettered interchange of topics, characters and catalytic ideas that define Haydn's approach to quartet-writing. It is a cause of wonder how the four-way drama of the interactions between the musicians is achieved with effortless ease, and even more arresting how this dialogue of dialogues is interpreted and imagined in our ears as listeners. This is music that invites us all to be participants in an act of musical recreation whenever we are gripped by a new illuminative moment of discovery hidden in these enriching works.' (*Haydn: 'Sun' Quartets Op 20 Nos 4-6*, BIS BIS-2168)

'The renowned Chiaroscuro Quartet gives superlative renditions of these masterpieces, and with tempos, blend and balance superbly judged, refinement and subtlety are consistently to the fore.'



'... the performance and recording are truly first rate.'

Geoff Pearce: 'The eighth Symphony starts very softly with an asymmetric pulse, and with percussion and low instruments it then develops a jaunty melody that seems optimistic and happy. There are some lovely shimmering effects and strong tonal sections. This cannot be an easy piece to rehearse, but this excellent orchestra plays with confidence and conviction, and all sections excel. There are elements of Hungarian folk music here, and glimpses here and there of Bartók and Kodály. I am reminded at times of Bartók's Concerto For Orchestra.'

'The second movement starts sombrely, and a pervading sadness overlies this music's lighter moods and moments.'

The brass and percussion have a particular role in keeping the mood dark and mysterious. A lovely cor anglais solo is underpinned by shimmering strings, and this is later taken over by clarinet in the lower register over a held cor anglais note that oscillates, as the strings did earlier. The tune transfers to saxophone but the almost menacing cor anglais is still present in the background. Every so often there are rather frantic interjections by brass and percussion. The whole feeling is one of apprehension and sadness. Even with the sublime melody in the violins, the dread and sadness remain.

'The third movement, fast and furious, has powerful brass and percussion passages interspersed with really bleak quieter sections, which are even more disquieting and do nothing to dispel the terror enveloping this music, which is very unsettling and at times quite nightmarish. It includes some very difficult oboe work, where the instrument almost screams, particularly in the high notes. There is a franticness and urgency in this movement.'

'The torment and anguish of the third movement are felt even more keenly in the fourth movement. At just over eleven minutes long, it is the longest movement, and is made up of a number of sections. This very powerful music is quite relentless. The only respite is in an interlude with a clarinet solo, but this does not last, and the violin solo and the music that follows it, dispels any light. This work affected me a lot, and I had to listen several times before I could write about it.' (*László Lajtha: Symphonies Nos 8 and 9*, Naxos 8.573648)

'Two outstanding artists — Christopher Nichols and Julie Nishimura — perform on this impressive disc of music for clarinet, and clarinet with piano, most of it relatively unknown, recorded by Navona Records. For lovers of clarinet music, it is a very interesting compilation and will, I am sure, delight most listeners.'

'John Cage's very early (1933) and short sonata for clarinet alone is quite virtuosic. Although not really a challenge for the listener, this is an interesting work. The slow movement is particularly beautiful and dreamy, and the last movement is a *tour de force* with a lot of quick grace notes and flourishes.'

'Aurelio Magnani's beautiful, heartfelt *Elegia* for clarinet and piano is a romantic aria, showcasing the clarinet's beautiful vocal qualities. Evidently it is seldom performed, so I



'This great disc will bring joy to everyone who listens to it.'

hope that this recording helps to secure more performances. The clarinetist plays on fully synthetic Legere reeds. On the evidence of this performance alone, I would say these reeds are a qualified success. He gets a great dynamic range, not a hint of harshness, and the reed always speaks on demand. The pianist is supportive where she needs to be, and is obviously a very fine accompanist indeed — a true associate artist.' (*Elegia — Cage, Magnani, Saint-Saëns, Rabaud, Cope, Verdi and Cavallini*. Navona Records NV6120)



'If you love English guitar music, and the performances of Julian Bream in particular, you will truly enjoy this disc.'

'This is a very fetching CD of English music for solo guitar, performed by a young man of twenty-three who I believe is going to be one of the pre-eminent guitar virtuosos of the 21st century. His playing is crisp, infinitely varied in tone colour and he shows, even at this age, a musical insight and virtuosity which is dazzling without ever being flashy. He also produces none of the rather off-putting string rubbing sounds that many players are afflicted with.'

'He starts with the 5 Bagatelles of William Walton, written when the composer was nearly seventy. These are youthful, energetic works, played with great style and aplomb. In the quieter passages, Sean Shibe's sound is ravishing, as illustrated in the first bagatelle.'

'His harmonics are beautifully wrought.'

'The second bagatelle, a gentle rocking work, is again beautifully judged and executed, and its magic is slowly revealed. The *cantabile* lines really sing, and often his playing reminds me a lot of Julian Bream.' (*Dreams & Fancies — English Music for Solo Guitar — Sean Shibe*, Delphian DCD34193)

Alice McVeigh: 'I'm a terrific fan of Red Priest, who put the "mad" into the "mad baroque" — but with such style and inventiveness as to almost kick-start a new art-form. Piers Adams' brilliance never flags: Angela East's glorious energy never dips — disclaimer here: the best principal I ever had was A East, end of story. David Wright is perhaps less extroverted but every centimetre as talented, while Adam Summerhayes' lunatic arrangements will bring both quiet smiles and manic grins to every music-lover — loved the subversive insertion of the "Blackadder" theme!'

'Having said all that, this really is a tipsily crazy CD. I happened to be in the States while reviewing it and my eighty-five-year old, super-critical mother popped her head in the door and said, "What on earth are you listening to?!"'

""A bunch of wild and nutty but stunning baroque specialists, just messing about," I told her, with complete accuracy. "But you can always shut the door."



'... extreme alternations of mood, from manic charges to bucolic brusqueness, with serious offbeat percussive work ... and general anarchy ...'

"Well hey," she said, "I like it!"

'And the door stayed open.' (*Red Priest — The Baroque Bohemians — Gypsy Fever from Campfire to Court*, Red Priest RP 014)

The late **Howard Smith** listened to *Timbrando* from the Meridian Arts Ensemble on Channel Classics CCS SA 25508, and to Maurice Sklar's *Hebrew Melodies* on Artists of Faith 69212501109.

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CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — DMITRI HVOROSTOVSKY



Dmitri Hvorostovsky (1962-2017)

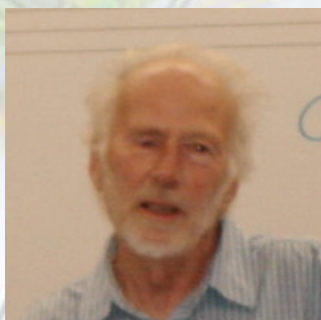
Russian baritone Dmitri Aleksandrovich Hvorostovsky was born on 16 October 1962 at Krasnoyarsk in Siberia, where he studied with Yekaterina Yofel at the Krasnoyarsk School of Arts and made his debut performance at the Krasnoyarsk Opera House as Marullo in *Rigoletto*.

He won a series of competitions: the Russian Glinka Competition (1987), the Toulouse Singing Competition (1988) and the Cardiff Singer of the World competition (1989), launching an international career during which he sang at almost every major opera house. Later he specialised in singing Verdi on stage.

Following a battle with brain cancer, Dmitri Hvorostovsky died in London UK on 22 November

2017, aged fifty-five, leaving a number of CD and video recordings.

We also mark the passing of Clotilde Rosa, Carol Neblett and Ladislav Kubik.



R Murray Schafer

At the opening 2017 General Assembly of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) in Vancouver, running concurrently with the society's annual contemporary music festival, the ISCM World New Music Days, composer, teacher, author and acoustic ecology pioneer R Murray Schafer became the first Canadian to be elected as an honorary member of the society since its founding in 1922. Schafer joins seventy-one honorary members, which include Andriessen, Babbitt, Bartók, Busoni, Cage, Carter, Casella, Copland, Dallapiccola, Finnissy, Gubaidulina, Hindemith, Honegger, Kodály, Koechlin, Krenek, Kurtág, Ligeti, Lutoslawski,

Malipiero, Messiaen, Milhaud, Nancarrow, Pärt, Penderecki, Ravel, Roussel, Saariaho, Schoenberg, Sibelius, Stravinsky, Szymanowski, Takemitsu, Vaughan Williams and Xenakis.

Schafer was born on 18 July 1933 in Sarnia, Ontario, grew up in Toronto and studied at the Royal Conservatory of Music and the University of Toronto — composition with John Weinzwieg. He also met media philosopher Marshall McLuhan, who had a big effect on Schafer's artistic growth. He coined the term *schizophonia* to mean the splitting of a sound from its source, or the condition caused by this split.

Schafer's book *The Tuning of the World* (1977), which concerns his ideas about our sonic environment, has been extremely influential worldwide, and has been translated into many languages.

He has written music which engages with the environment on several levels, is a pioneer of graphic notation and soundscapes, and has created *Patria*: twelve site-specific music theatre works. He has also written twelve string quartets, and much other chamber music, plus choral and orchestra music.

Schafer's other awards include the Glenn Gould Prize (1987), the Walter Carsen Prize (Canada Council for the Arts, 2005), the Governor General's Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Artistic Achievement (2009) and Companion of the Order of Canada (2013).

Read our latest news

ASK ALICE — ADVICE MISCONSTRUED, BAD TIMING AND ILL LUCK



Hi Alice,

Am I allowed to admit to some sympathy for this lecturer?

As far as I can tell, Dr Francesca Carpos was basically giving intelligent and savvy advice in a jokey way that some earnest and worthy types just didn't 'get'. Or am I the one out of line?



Sarah H

Royal Academy of Music sacks lecturer over student guide that referred to string players as 'pond life' and violinists as 'gypos'

You can — indeed I'm *almost* entirely with you. It seems to me that this bassoonist/academic has (mostly) aced the subject of how to get on in UK orchestras. And I'd be manning — or, since we're basically discussing political correctness — perhaps womanning the barricades by her side *except* for the little racial slur that she permitted herself (describing violinists as 'gypos').

Now this seems to me to be wrong, for two reasons.

1) It was a duff call.

Violinists — even first violins — are *not*, as a rule, anywhere *near* as wild, crazy and exciting as gypsies. They're actually — mostly — much closer to the 'pondlife' that they are so often derided as, by brass, basses and percussion. (As in, 'I suppose that now it's eleven you'll all trudge off home, like the good little pondlife you are.')

This term — pondlife, not gypos — was regularly heard, by me personally, in the Royal Philharmonic in the late 90s and early 2000s.

2) The other reason is that anything even slightly tinged with racism, as everyone knows, is completely *unfunny*. Dr Carpos almost certainly *meant* to be funny, but, basically, you can't be too careful, these days, where racism or indeed sexism is concerned. She might as well have said that male bassoon players are more gifted than female ones, or even the other way around. She'd have probably ignited the same capacity for outrage, either way.

In either case, a woefully duff call.

However, I still basically agree with you. What's happened to this lecturer — she has apparently been fired from a full-time position at the Royal Academy — is completely unfair and utterly wrong.

And this is why: There's a massive difference between the kind of sexual assault that really *is* shocking people — the kind of abuse completely rife in Hollywood, in the House of Commons, in the law courts, in the music profession — and the kind of kindly-meant 'advice' Dr Carpos chose to give to eight hundred undergraduate music students, almost all of which was absolutely fine.

Outside of the 'gypo' sentence — and wouldn't a reprimand and an instantaneous apology have met that case? — it seems to me that she has been harshly treated, and has every right to consider her situation a combination of bad timing and ill luck.

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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 this PDF format since September 2013, and you can download and read any of them from **this page**.

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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