



C L A S S I C A L  
M U S I C      D A I L Y

## *Magical Transformation — Issue 119, 1 March 2018*

**Ron Bierman:** Lise Lindstrom has returned to San Diego to sing the lead in Puccini's *Turandot*. We spoke for nearly an hour in a rehearsal room at the San Diego Civic Center where she'd just finished working on makeup for the performance. You might think that someone with Lindstrom's powerful voice would have known, and been told from the age of twelve or so, that she was destined to become an opera star. But it didn't happen that way for the well-known dramatic soprano, nor is it likely to for any other would-be diva. No matter how potentially great your voice is, it takes a bit of luck and a whole lot of hard work to become a success.

Before college Lindstrom had been interested in theater and jazz. She did a year of jazz studies immediately after high school, but decided musical theater was a better fit.

When Lindstrom's parents, both professional singers at some point in their lives, saw how excited she was with the idea of a singing career she said they offered advice, 'If there's anything you can do other than sing, please do. They knew how difficult a life it was and how seldom someone would find a real success ... Keep singing, but don't expect to make money as a singer.'

Temporarily taking her parents' advice, she briefly tried business administration then psychology at San Francisco State University but in the end graduated with a BA in music history, and later a Master of Music degree from San Francisco Conservatory of Music. The transition to operatic training began at San Francisco State. 'I auditioned for the chorus in an opera because we all had to have chorus credit in the music school.' Famed



mezzo-soprano Blanche Thebom was directing the opera. 'She asked, "Have you ever taken voice lessons?" I said no. My mother was a teacher and taught me a few things, but not really. Blanche said, "You should study classically because you have a classic sound to your instrument, and I think you could be quite successful.'" Lindstrom replied that it wasn't for her.

'I wasn't into it. It's such a produced sound. It's not natural. I come from a dance background. So I was very physically aware and couldn't figure out how to coordinate my body to make the sound. Singing classical is very physical. We use the whole body to support the sound, to breathe the right way. We breathe the same way you would if you were starting any physical exertion.'

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Ron Bierman's conversation with Lise Lindstrom was first published on the website *Broadway World*. Lise Lindstrom's photo at the start of this newsletter is shown courtesy of San Diego Opera.

This run of *Turandot* at San Diego Civic Theatre ends with two further performances: Friday 2 March at 7pm, and a matinée performance at 2pm on Sunday 4 March 2018. For further information about *Turandot* and other San Diego Opera productions, visit [sdopera.com](http://sdopera.com)

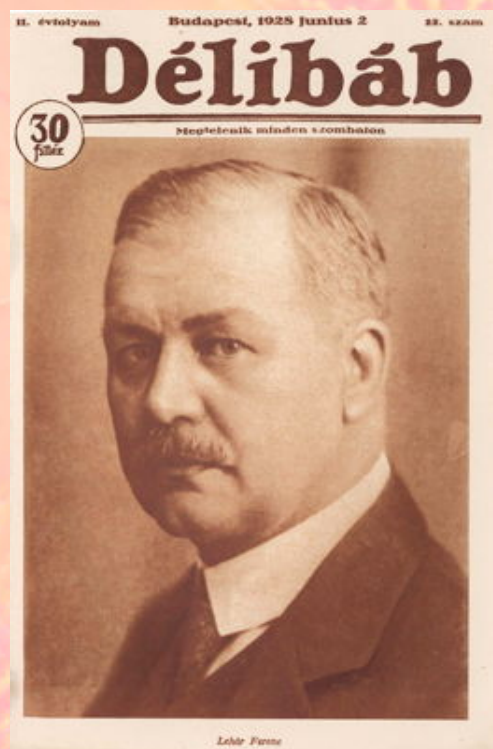


## MIXED SUCCESSES — THE OPERETTAS OF FRANZ LEHÁR

**George Colerick:** Before the broadcasting era, the most performed and popular musical world-wide had been *The Merry Widow* (1905). From its *Vilya* idyll, witty *Cavalier* song, the best known of all sung waltzes, the male knees-up in tribute to the ladies and the night club finale, its vivaciousness, colour and contrasts excelled. It was first taken as following the mild satire in the manner of nineteenth century classical operetta ('golden'). Curiously, its motivating theme reminds us today of the siphoning of billions of dollars to the West by oligarchs. Yet it was at the start of a new style of romantic operetta ('silver'), along with composers Emmerich Kálmán, Leo Fall, Oscar Straus and others.

Its composer, Franz Lehár (1870-1948) followed it with *The Count of Luxemburg* which in retrospective seems like a twin in its pace and Paris setting and which became almost as famous. This side-swipe at arranged marriages has the exquisite if ambivalent theme-song 'Tell me, can this be love?'

Having reached the heights in that genre, Lehár would take a more reflective view of life in a story also embracing less privileged citizens. By 1910, he was celebrating his native music, evocatively, with its folk instrument, the zimbalom, prominent. *Gipsy Love* (1910) is the story of a Romanian girl Zorika used to a



Franz Lehár on the front cover of the weekly magazine *Délibáb* in 1928



conventional middle class society but seduced by the 'freedom' of gipsy life until disillusionment sets in, also with her new lover, to a song expressing the sadness of life. A furious *czardas* is used as a weapon by her female Hungarian rival.



Daisy Burrell with William Spray in the 1913 English touring production of 'Gipsy Love'

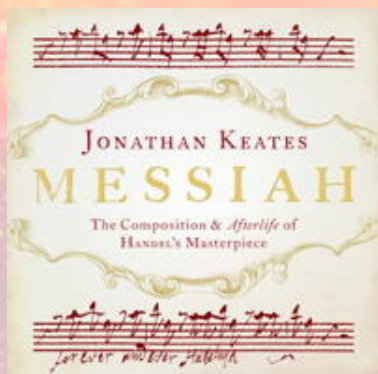
Born Hungarian, Lehár benefited largely from his experiences within the polyglot Austro-Hungarian Empire, his music publishing associated always with the twin capitals, Vienna and Budapest. First travelling as a soldier's son in lands embracing up to twelve races and cultures, he assimilated their musical idioms to an exceptional degree, so apparent in the colourful inspirations of his scores.

His exceptional emotional range by that time helps to explain why he was offered the chance to compose for the sophisticated play *Rosenkavalier* which Richard Strauss later achieved. No wonder that *Gipsy Love* was the only work that led him to rewrite much later as

an opera, *Garabonciás diák*, which exploited its more sinister side.

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## BOOK REVIEW — A REAL GEM



**Gerald Fenech:** The *Messiah* is one of the most famous compositions in the whole of classical music. However, in spite of its familiarity, maybe not all are aware of the history behind the creation of this masterpiece. The book *Messiah — The Composition and Afterlife of Handel's masterpiece* by Jonathan Keates deals precisely with this. Indeed, from the very beginning we are thrown into the background of Handel's life at the time he came to live in England, the composition of his operas and the circumstances that led him to start work on this world-famous oratorio.

The genre of the oratorio itself is explored through its beginnings and then through Handel's masterful use of it in his early oratorios *Esther*, *Deborah* and *Athalia*. The action then moves to Ireland including details of the musical venue and ensemble that was created for the performance of *Messiah* as well as to the lead up to the performance itself which was received with great acclaim by the audience at the time.

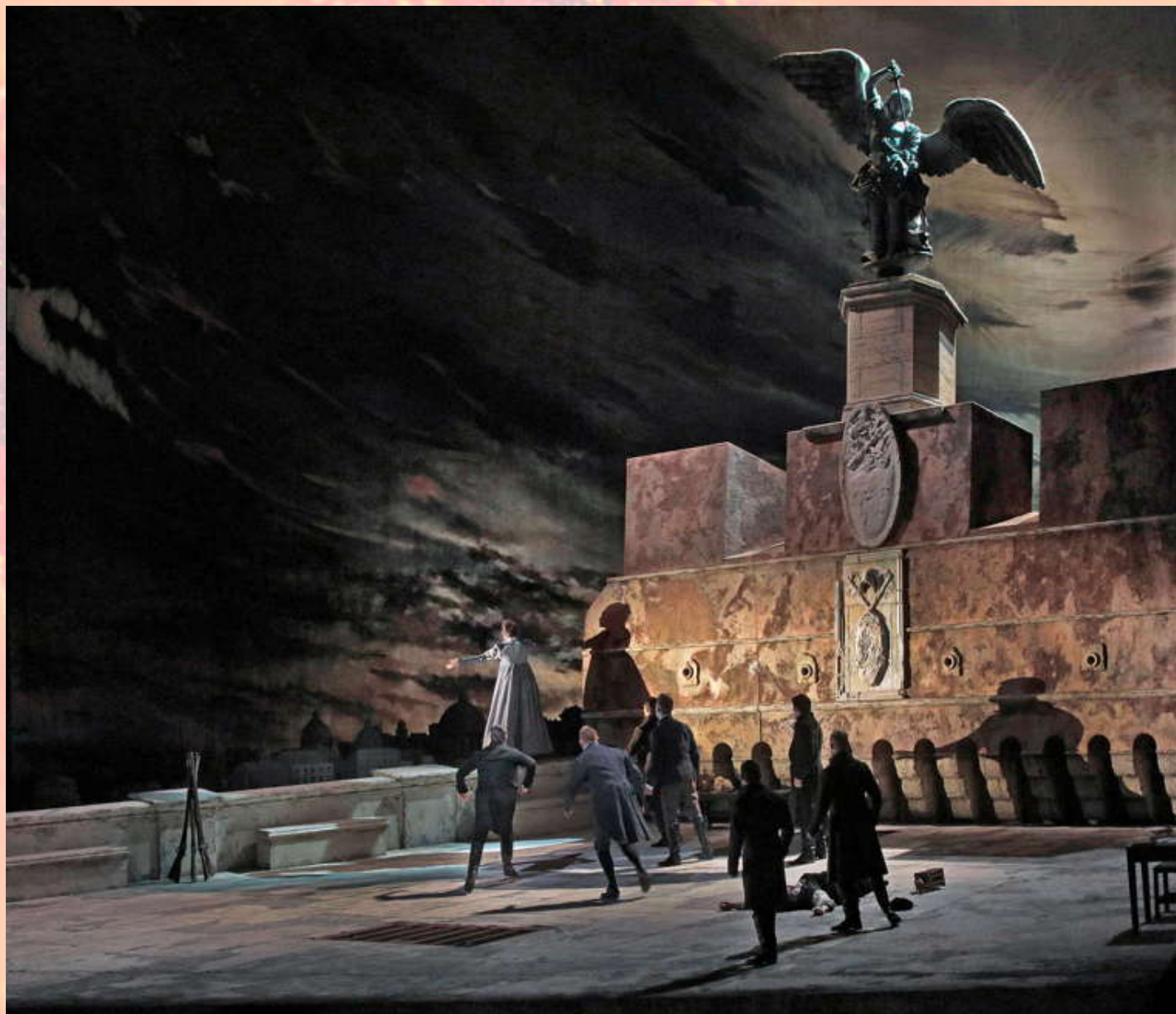
Keates then delves deeper into the work itself. Due attention is given to the collaboration and relationship between Handel and his librettist Charles Jennens. Indeed an entire chapter is devoted to Jennens, examining his political and religious influences as well as his profound admiration of Handel.

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## ENSEMBLE — TRADITIONAL SETTINGS



Tosca jumps — no bounce! Sonya Yoncheva in the title role of Puccini's *Tosca* at New York Metropolitan Opera. Photo © 2017 Ken Howard

**Maria Nockin:** The Metropolitan Opera's new *Tosca* has been feted as a major success both in the opera house and on the screen. On Saturday 27 January 2018, it was broadcast in high definition to more than 2,000 movie theaters in 73 countries. The following Wednesday I saw the encore performance at the AMC Desert Ridge Theater in Phoenix, Arizona. Much has been said about the original cast of singers and conductor who were replaced, but once the performance began all thoughts of seeing substitutes were totally banished. So were all memories of the previous production.

Sir David McVicar's new production is a traditional *Tosca*, which follows the libretto accurately and does not try to add a modern point of view to the story. What McVicar achieves is a tight drama that keeps the audience members sitting up straight in undiluted attention. John Macfarlane's set for Act I showed the inside of the visually opulent Church of St Andrea della Valle from an angle, however, and it did little to throw the sound into the auditorium. He gave us traditional versions of Scarpia's elegant apartment with its adjoining torture chamber for Act II and the busy open roof of the well known Castel Sant'Angelo for Act III.



Those traditional settings helped the singing actors give a riveting performance of Sardou's dramatic tale. I've seen a great many *Toscas* but never one with better stage action than this. Kudos to McVicar and Movement Director Leah Hausman. Surprisingly, both Bulgarian soprano Sonya Yoncheva and Italian tenor Vittorio Grigolo had never before sung the roles of Tosca and Cavaradossi. After these fine Met performances, I'm sure they will sing many more of them in the years to come. [READ MORE ...](#)

Maria Nockin also reviews the high definition transmission from New York Metropolitan Opera of Bartlett Sher's production of Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*:

On 10 February 2018, the Metropolitan Opera transmitted Bartlett Sher's production of Gaetano Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore* (The Elixir of Love) to cinemas in more than seventy countries around the world. The sets by Michael Yeargan were serviceable and gave the impression of farmland outside a small town in Italy. Catherine Zuber's finely detailed costumes were not overly colorful, but they underscored the impression of rural Italy in generations past. The soldiers' shiny black helmets were particularly attention-getting. Sher furnished a production that held tightly to the intentions of the librettist and did not add a 21st century directorial concept. Since this was the eighth performance of *L'Elisir* this season, it is no wonder it was not totally sold out despite an excellent cast.

South African soprano Pretty Yende was a perfect Adina in every way. She had the energy to push the story forward at a brisk pace and the vocal agility to hit all the right notes while playing physical games and leaping around crates as she sang. Like Leoncavallo's Nedda, she used a horsewhip to discourage a man who harassed her. In *Elisir*, she put the overly amorous Sergeant Belcore in his place. Although she was not truly enamored of the army officer, she used him to make Nemorino jealous. It was only in Act II, when Nemorino paid attention to Giannetta, that Adina realized she really loved him. Best of all, Yende's ploy of playing hard to get looked and sounded wonderful to the huge HD audience in the movie theaters. In April and May, she will assume a more difficult role, that of Lucia di Lammermoor at the Met. [READ MORE ...](#)

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A scene from Marco Tutino's *Miseria e Nobilità* in Genoa. Photo © 2018 Bepi Caroli

**Giuseppe Pennisi:** On 23 February 2018 in Genoa, the elegant and very modern Teatro Carlo Felice hosted the world premiere of *Miseria e Nobilità* (Poverty and Aristocracy) by Marco Tutino, to a libretto by Fabio Ceresa and Luca Rossi, based on a farce by Edoardo Scarpetta. The performance would have astonished those who think that lyric theatre is a museum piece and that contemporary opera is for a few listeners. The theatre was filled to the hilt. When the curtain fell after two and a half hours (including an intermission), the audience burst into ten minutes of standing ovation for the company, the librettists and the composer.

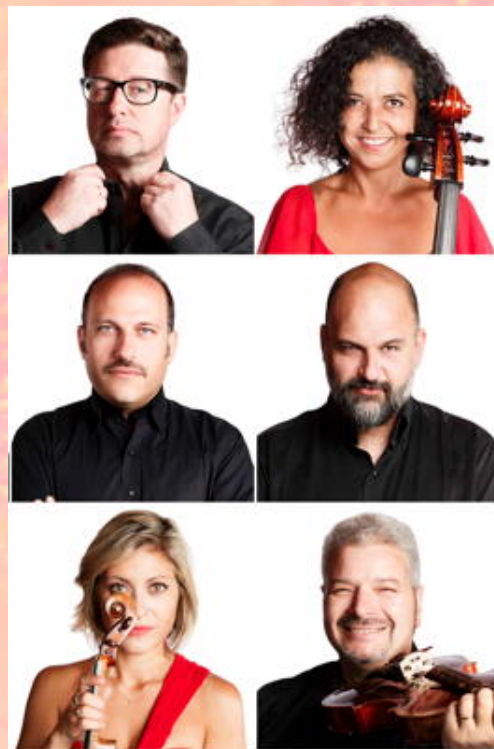
Tutino is a contemporary composer more performed abroad than in Italy. He has also had the experience of being the Superintendent of Teatro Comunale di Bologna and receiving commissions from San Francisco Opera. As a consequence, he is aware that complex and costly opera productions cannot be for a few selected listeners. In his works, the orchestral score is quite elaborate and very personal but the careful listener can feel musical telepathy with Puccini, Kornold and Strauss because of the care that the orchestra, although powerful, should never overwhelm the voices so that every single word can be fully understood. There are almost no single musical numbers but declamation that slides into arioso and twice into soprano arias.

*Miseria e Nobilità* is broadly based on Scarpetta's very hilarious play which also became a very popular movie in the nineteen fifties, still often shown on Italian television; the play itself dates from 1887. However, the Tutino opera borrows only one element of the play: a poor fellow dresses up as an aristocrat to go to dinner with a wealthy bourgeois so that the upstart rich entrepreneur would let his daughter marry a young man, but the real aristocrat — father of the young man — arrives during supper and a series of intrigues



follows until the happy end. [READ MORE ...](#)

I seldom deal here with chamber music, but this concert was really special. The Sestetto Stradivari — David Romano and Marlène Prodigio, violins, Raffaele Mallozzi and David Bursack, violas, and Diego Romano and Sara Genile playing cellos — is a well established ensemble on the Italian musical scene. The six instrumentalists are all members of the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, an institution where musicians are hired based on very difficult and competitive auditions. They formed an ensemble in 2001 when, at Rome's Castel Sant'Angelo, an international exhibition was held on the art of string instruments. The group has produced several CDs, one of which, featuring sextets by Tchaikovsky and Schoenberg, has been shortlisted for a Grammy Award. The ensemble has made extensive concert tours in Argentina, Brazil and China, and is thus known and appreciated in various countries.



Sestetto Stradivari, whose Rome concert was reviewed by Giuseppe Pennisi. Photo © 2017 Musacchio & Ianniello

The 21 February 2018 concert in the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia's Sala Sinopoli was particularly interesting. The first part included two pieces by Richard Strauss; the sextet which introduced his opera *Capriccio* and the tone poem *Metamorphosen*. The second part consisted of Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night). They come from different periods and ages of the two composers. The Strauss pieces were composed, respectively, in 1942 and 1945, when the composer was old, had suffered quite a lot during World War II, during which he had witnessed the collapse of his world, both artistic and human. The Schoenberg tone poem was written when the composer was twenty-five years old, before he theorized and experimented with the twelve note row system. The unifying link is that they are all late romantic soothing works, ideal for meditation. [READ MORE ...](#)

Giuseppe Pennisi was also in Florence for Donizetti's *La favorite*, in Venice for Carnival, reviewing two French operettas, and back in Rome for a new production of Bellini's *La Sonnambula*, Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, Lisa Batiashvili's performance of Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No 2 and to sample a series marking the one hundredth anniversary of Debussy's death.

**Mike Wheeler:** I can't imagine why Mendelssohn's overture *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* isn't played more often, but it was good to have the Hallé Orchestra and conductor Karina Canellakis to remind us just what a superb piece it is. (Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, UK, 18 February 2018.)

The accents that tug discreetly at the becalmed opening were given just enough weight to suggest the energised music to come. The control of pace in the build-up to the quick section was matched by a care over balance that characterised the whole concert.





On the left, Karina Canellakis. Photo © Mathias Bothor. To her right, Viviane Hagner. Photo © Timm Kölln

In Brahms' Violin Concerto, soloist Viviane Hagner made a strong first entry, joining orchestra and conductor in keeping a firm, steady grip on the music's ebb and flow as it moved between the big-boned and the intimate. I have heard performances of the first movement that become so laid-back in places that there is hardly anywhere to go in the second, but here only the passage following the cadenza seemed a bit too relaxed.

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Joshua Bell



Mike Wheeler is also impressed by young pianists Lara Melda and Dina Duisen, by Czech conductor Tomáš Netopil, stepping in to conduct the Czech Philharmonic, and by Vivaldi (with Bartók pizzicato gun shots), Edgar Meyer and Beethoven from Joshua Bell and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields:

The Academy of St Martin in the Fields is not so much an orchestra, more a super-sized chamber ensemble. In a vivid account of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, Musical Director Joshua Bell was standing at the front but otherwise very much first among equals. (Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, UK, 24 January 2018.) In the first movement of Spring, he exchanged fresh, lively birdsong with the first and second violin principals, and supplied some discreet ornamentation for the dozing goatherd in an agreeably somnolent second movement, though the solo viola's barking dog could have dug into the string a little more. The country-dance finale was nicely bouncy, and had John Constable at the harpsichord scattering notes like falling cherry blossom.

Summer began in appropriately sultry fashion (and right on cue there was a wafting breeze from the hall's air conditioning), but then came distant thunder so furious that you wondered what would happen when the storm actually arrived. After a twitchy second movement, the finale was delivered with a savagery to equal any bunch of operatic Furies.

Bell allowed himself the occasional slide in Autumn's boozy harvest knees-up, which sank into a marvellously somnolent middle movement, before a sturdy hunting finale. The *Bartók pizzicato* gun shots — strings snapping against fingerboards — were definitely not what Vivaldi asked for — they're not even marked as ordinary *pizzicato* — but they were effective as a one-off, ricocheting around the band. [READ MORE ...](#)

Mike also listens to Haydn, Britten and Schubert from the Alke String Quartet, *Mathematical Advantage* — Sinfonia Viva's annual schools residency, and to Vivaldi, Bach and Handel from The Sixteen.

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## CD SPOTLIGHT — A MAGNIFICENT PROJECT



'... a band of obviously first-rate musicians, informed conducting from Engeset, and excellent recording ...'

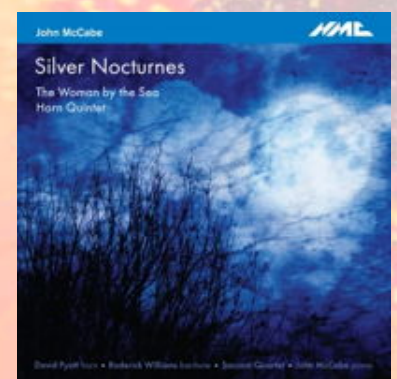
**Paul Sarcich:** This is the first of a projected three disc set of Grainger's complete music for wind band, being undertaken by the Band of the Royal Norwegian Navy under Bjarte Engeset. Engeset's notes make clear that much thought and preparation has gone into the enterprise, ensuring that the non-standard instruments that Grainger often asks for — Swiss hand bells, tin whistles, bass saxophone, steel marimbaphone and others — have been sourced and used. In keeping with Grainger's concepts of 'elastic scoring' and his habit of 'dishing up' the same piece for all sorts of instrumental combinations, the Norwegians have not hesitated to adapt and add where they have deemed appropriate. The disc boasts two world premiere recordings and one world premiere of Grainger's original scoring.

Grainger was a fully-paid up eccentric in most aspects of life, so it is hardly surprising that his music displays moments of off-the-wallness, and few other composers of his era would have gone along with his assertion about the wind band: 'As a vehicle of deeply emotional expression it seems to me unrivalled'. He treated the wind band with a seriousness that few other composers were to do for a long time to come, thus leaving a unique repertoire for it. That seriousness is matched by the way the Norwegians have carried out the task of recording it.

Engeset's notes even go so far as to bring up what he calls the 'potentially embarrassing for us Norwegians' issue of Grainger's now troublesome ideas about Aryanism and his almost pathological focus on the Nordic, but also notes many contradictory aspects of Grainger's personal makeup and his expressed ideas. None of which stands in the way of the music, but it does show the deep awareness of Grainger and his output that is evidenced by this recording. (*Percy Grainger: Complete Music for Wind Band: 1*, Naxos 8.573679) [READ MORE ...](#)

**Geoff Pearce:** John McCabe's music is mostly new to me. I heard, many years ago, a concert he gave of Haydn piano sonatas, and was aware he was a composer, but the only work of his I have previously heard is a Dance Prelude written for Jennifer Paull, the extraordinary oboe d'amore specialist, and have a recording of her playing it with the composer at the piano.

In *The Woman by the Sea* (2001), the composer plays the piano and is accompanied by the excellent young Sacconi Quartet. This work was evidently inspired by *Sansho Daya*, a film of Kenji Mizoguchi from 1954, which tells of the enforced separation of a woman from her children by slavers. When old, blind and crippled, she is eventually reunited with her son. The performance, by both pianist and quartet, is excellent and compelling. This fascinating piece is sometimes sorrowful and slow, and at other times quite frenetic and angry, and



'This is a fantastic disc, both for the performances and also for this largely unfamiliar music.'



there is never a dull moment. At times the music, more because of texture than melodically, reminds one of Bartók. There is a structure and the programme notes are excellent in explaining the philosophy behind the writing of this work. The final slow section is particularly beautiful, and the work reaches a very satisfying emotional conclusion.

*Silver Nocturnes* (String Quartet No 6, 2011), which also includes a baritone voice, starts with a postlude — a setting from Act II, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's *Richard the Second*, with words spoken by John of Gaunt. Both the words and music are sombre, a little reminiscent of the atmosphere created in some of the Britten *Nocturnes*. This is beautifully played and sung, setting the standard for what is to follow. (*John McCabe: Silver Nocturnes*, NMC Recordings *NMC D230*) [READ MORE ...](#)

**Gerald Fenech** listens to piano music by two obscure English composers on Toccata Classics — Harold Truscott (*TOCC 0252*) and William Hurlstone (*TOCC 0289*).

The late **Howard Smith** listened to the American Horn Quartet (*Myths and Legends — American Horn Quartet*, MSR Classics *MS 1268*) and to unconventional concertos by Mark Armanini (*Rain in the forest — concertos by Mark Armanini*, Centrediscs *CMCCD 13108*).

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## CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — OBITUARIES

*I neither shout nor do not shout,  
something shouts for me.* — Juan Hidalgo Codorniu

We mark the passing of Juan Hidalgo Codorniu, Beebe Freitas, Heli Lääts, Gian Paolo Mele, László Melis, Paul Danblon and Alan Stout. [READ OUR LATEST NEWS ...](#)

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