



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

*La petite mort – Issue 120, 1 April 2018*

**CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS – MESSA ALTA SINFONICA**

Young Japanese pianist Shota Ezaki (born 1992) is working on a typeset edition of the *Variations and Fugue on Dies Irae* (KSS41, 1923-26) by English composer Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (1892-1988), and this edition should be complete towards the end of 2018. This is presumably quite a task, since there are 201 pages of manuscript, and the performance duration is approximately 220 minutes. The work, which has never been performed or recorded, is dedicated to Ferruccio Busoni, and its full title is *Variazioni e fuga triplice sopra Dies iræ per pianoforte*.

Ezaki has several works by Ronald Stevenson in his repertoire, including the monumental *Passacaglia on DSCH*. He has also been performing the *Vocalise-Reminiscenza* by Alistair Hinton, Curator of the Sorabji Archive. There were two recent performances of this work in Belgium, and Ezaki plans to include it in his 5 August 2018 Tokyo recital.

Another Sorabji composition, *Messa Alta Sinfonica* (KSS84, 1955-61), a large-scale seven-movement work for orchestra, organ, eight soloists and chorus, is the composer's longest in terms of page count — 1,001 pages of manuscript, and has an approximate duration of 320 minutes. François Fabre began making a typeset edition of this piece in December 2004, completed it in the Summer of 2016, and this new edition has now been available since November 2017. The new edition apparently also has 1,001 pages, and this is significant since the Middle Eastern folk tales comprising *One Thousand and One Nights* are part of the composer's heritage.

Sorabji was born in Essex to a Zoroastrian Parsi father and an English mother. He spent most of his life in England, and was a friend of Peter Warlock. A small private income allowed him to devote his life to composition.

Shota Ezaki - Piano Recital 江崎昭汰 ピアノリサイタル  
**The composer-pianists Vol. II**  
コンポーザー・ピアニストたちの世界 第2弾



Alistair Hinton (\*1950)  
Vocalise-Reminiscenza, Op. 29 [Japan Premiere]

アリスター・ヒント  
回想のヴォーカリーズ 作品29 [日本初演]



Sophie-Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatté (1901-1974)  
Piano Sonata No. 6, E. 130 "Drei Klavierstücke"

ソフィー＝カルメン・エックハルト＝グラマッテ  
ピアノソナタ 第6番 "3つのピアノ小品"



Shota Ezaki (\*1992)  
Passacaglia for piano [World Premiere]

江崎 昭汰  
ピアノのためのパッサカリア [世界初演]



Ronald Stevenson (1928-2015)  
Le festin d'Alkan [Japan Public Premiere]

ロナルド・スティーヴンソン  
アルカンの饗宴 [日本公開初演]



Ronn Yedidia (\*1960)  
Piano Sonata No. 5 [World Premiere]

ロン・イエディディア  
ピアノソナタ 第5番 [世界初演]

2018年8月5日(日曜日) 紀尾井町サロンホール

開場：12時15分  
開演：12時45分

入場料：3000円 全80席(全席自由)

会場住所：東京都千代田区紀尾井町3-29 紀尾井町アークビル1F  
チケットに関するお問い合わせ：wshocon00@gmail.com (江崎)

写真提供 (The photos were provided by) :  
Alistair Hinton  
The Eckhardt-Gramatté Foundation  
Ronald Stevenson Society  
Ronn Yedidia



Wissam Boustany

The Pro Youth Philharmonia (PYP) launches its inaugural tour on 13-15 April 2018. Brainchild of acclaimed charismatic international flautist Wissam Boustany, PYP will offer audiences a chance to experience the unique concept of a training orchestra for emerging young professional musicians aged 22 to 32. The inaugural three-city tour will feature repertoire that will challenge and inspire the musicians and their audiences, opening with James MacMillan's arrestingly dark memorial to Isobel Gowdie, followed by Sergei Prokofiev's hypnotic and mischievous Violin Concerto No 2 and ending with Béla Bartók's titanic virtuosic orchestral showpiece, the Concerto for Orchestra, which showcases individual instruments within the orchestra.

**Cadogan Hall, London Friday 13 April 2018, 7.30pm**  
**Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford, Saturday 14 April, 7:30pm**  
**Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent, Sunday 15 April. 3pm**

Central to PYP's mission is Boustany's *Method Called Love*, which lies at the heart of the orchestra's reason for existence, providing the nucleus for training young musicians, inspiring audiences and an extensive educational outreach programme, teaching children how to integrate love on their journey through life. PYP's dynamic educational outreach projects will include Art/Poetry Competitions, in which the winning painting is used as artwork for PYP's concert posters and the winning poem is read in concerts. There will also be an Emerging Musician Programme for a very promising A-level instrumentalist to join PYP for rehearsals and a concert.

Charlotte Penton-Smith has recently been appointed to the newly-created post of Chief Executive of The Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain. She has been Secretary of the RSM since 2013. Her new position reflects the important strategic role she plays with the Governors in developing the Society to meet today's challenges. With a rapidly expanding membership base and a new office in London's Fitzroy Square, the RSM is well placed to capitalise on the traditions established by Handel and its other founders, whilst harnessing the opportunities of the twenty-first century.

Prior to working at the RSM, Charlotte Penton-Smith was Chief Executive of Future Talent and OperaGenesis Administrator at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; her career began at Aldeburgh Music (now Snape Maltings) as Britten-Pears Programme Assistant and then Masterclass Co-ordinator.



Charlotte Penton-Smith

As a result of Charlotte Penton-Smith's promotion, the RSM is now seeking a Membership Secretary to join its small team.

RSM Chairman, Fiona Grant, said:

'The Governors are delighted that Charlotte has agreed to assume this important new role. We particularly value her vision, energy and commitment to ensuring the RSM meets its objectives of relieving poverty and sickness among professional musicians in the most effective way.'

The Royal Society of Musicians was established as the *Fund for Decay'd Musicians* in 1738 by Handel, William Boyce and Edward Purcell, amongst others. It received its Royal Charter from George III in 1790. Membership is open to all professional musicians. The charity's objects remain unchanged since the eighteenth century: the relief of poverty and sickness among professional musicians and their dependants.



Mottola Guitar Festival, 7-15 July 2018

can be found online via the link on the poster above.

Finland's International Uno Klami Composition Competition began in 2004 and takes place every five years. It is being held for the fourth time in 2018-2019. The Jury consists of Finland's Kalevi Aho and Magnus Lindberg, and Estonia's Erkki-Sven Tüür, three of the greatest composers and most influential musical figures of their generation. The conductor member of the Jury is Olari Elts (Estonia), Artistic Advisor of the Kymi Sinfonietta.

The competition has no age limit, but participation is limited to those from a list of European countries (which includes the Nordic countries and EU member states). Works entered for the competition must not have been previously published or performed, and

The 26th Mottola Guitar Festival will take place in the City of Mottola, province of Taranto, in the Apulia region of south east Italy, from 7-15 July 2018 — competitions and concerts for a full summer of music.

There are two competitions — the 24th International Competition of Guitar, 12-15 July 2018 and the 24th International Competition 'Young Guitarists', 14 and 15 July 2018. There are also masterclasses from 7-15 July, and an exhibition of luthiers making guitars or similar instruments, open to Italian and foreign luthiers, on 14 and 15 July. In the case of both competitions, the masterclasses and the exhibition, registration forms and enrollment must be presented by 20 June 2018.

Full details of the competitions, masterclasses, exhibition and concerts

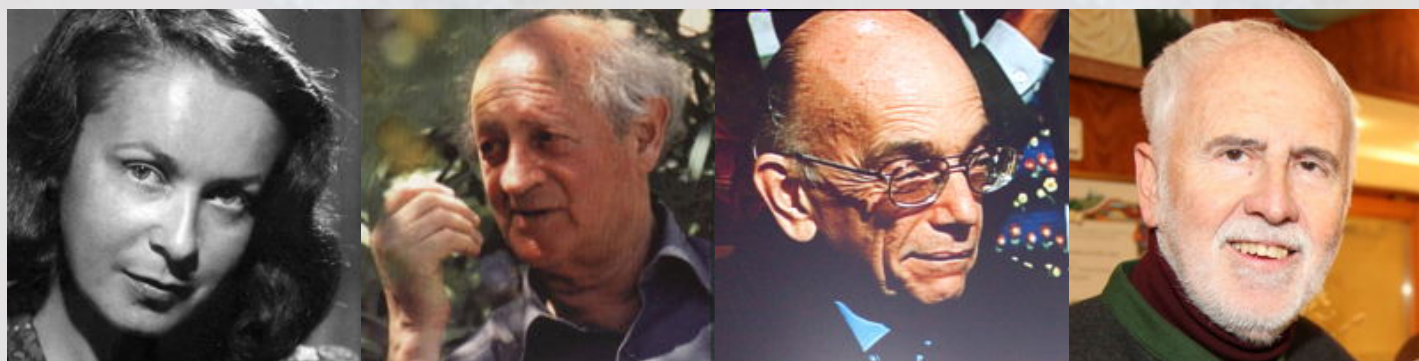
must last between 15 and 30 minutes. They must be sent to the Competition Office postmarked not later than 3 December 2018. First, second and third prizes of, respectively, 11,000, 9,000 and 7,000 Euros, will be awarded. The Jury may, if it wishes, divide the prizes in some other way.



#### Uuno Klami Composition Competition

In early spring 2019 the Jury will select at least three but not more than five of the anonymous entries for the finals. These will be performed at concerts in Kouvola and Kotka in the Autumn 2019 season by the Kymi Sinfonietta, one of the finest Finnish orchestras. The Jury chooses the winners only after hearing the final concerts and their rehearsals. The composers of these entries will be invited to be closely involved in the rehearsing of their works and to thus acquire valuable international contacts and networks that may have far-reaching consequences for their future careers. For many composers, success in the Klami Competition has indeed meant a decisive boost in their careers.

The competition's aim is to enrich and diversify the repertoire scored specifically for an orchestra of sinfonietta size, and to discover and promote contemporary European music and composition under the name of the Finnish composer Uuno Klami (1900-1961).



Livia Rév

Nikolai Kaufmann

José Antonio Abreu

Jesús López Cobos

We mark the passing of Livia Rév, Nikolai Kaufmann, José Antonio Abreu, Dejan Bravničar, Dilbar Abdurahmonova, Ariel Bybee, Irwin Hoffman, Otomar Kvěch, Olly Wilson, Ivan Davis, Milko Kelemen, Kjerstin Dellert, Mykhaylo Chemberzhi and Jesús López Cobos. [READ OUR LATEST NEWS ...](#)

## SNAPSHOT — AKI YLI-SALOMÄKI



Aki Yli-Salomäki. Photo © 2010 Susanna Välimäki

Finnish composer Aki Yli-Salomäki was born in 1972 in Tampere. He studied composition with Harri Vuori at the University of Helsinki.

His music has been described as 'deep northern' slow-listening music manifested by grand sonority and soaring melodic arcs. It is immersed in moods, colours, wide open landscapes and strong contrasts between darkness and light, embracing post-minimalism, choral music and new mysticism.

He has written mainly orchestral works and concertos, but smaller character pieces are also an important part of his *oeuvre*. His music has been performed in Asia, Europe, Russia, and both North and South America.

Further information: [www.akiylisalomaki.com](http://www.akiylisalomaki.com)

## CD SPOTLIGHT — MOON VIEWING / LULLABY FOR MY FAVORITE INSOMNIAC



**Anett Fodor:** Peter Garland's *Moon Viewing Music* is not merely a set of — as he modestly depicts them — inscrutable stillness studies. Indeed, they hide subtle and quiet emotions, but the word *studies* hardly reflects the value of Garland's music. The set is much more than a serial of 'simple exercises' — it is a cycle of six meditative, simple and pure 21st-century music pieces.

It is the cold beauty of winter which inspired the American composer Garland (born 1952). He writes that he composed the cycle in the winter when the moon 'shines on a landscape of trees stripped of their leaves and of white snow that amplifies and reflects the moonlight, often creating an eerie sense of daylight — further reinforced by the shadows cast on the snow.

There is also a special silence of the extreme cold and the absence of animal, bird and insect sounds.'

... but how can a composer express the quiet realm of chilly winter nights through sounds? How can music convey the view of a dumb barren landscape? How can stillness and immobility be communicated by two percussion instruments? Can silence be felt with sounds at all? (*Peter Garland: Moon Viewing Music*, Cold Blue Music CB0052)

[READ MORE ...](#)

**Anett Fodor**, in her first two reviews for *M&V*, also listens to J S Bach keyboard works, played by Simone Leitão: I have listened to myriads of the various keyboard pieces of Johann Sebastian Bach (1665-1750), as I have long been an aficionado of his music. So, being a great fan, I could hardly wait to listen to Simone Leitão's sixteen tracks of Bach's music.

Simone Leitão is a Brazilian pianist (born 1970). After completing her studies in Brazil, she continued her musical education in Norway and the US. She has often performed as both chamber musician and soloist all over the world.

Today many pianists play Bach and his contemporaries' music preposterously fast. They often forget some quintessential things: the *Presto* and *Allegro* markings had different, slower, meanings in baroque music than ensuing styles, and this music should always be pulsating, for example. Furthermore, these two elements are inextricably intertwined with each other — in other words both are equally important.

In Leitão's excellent interpretations the *tempi* are well-chosen and the perceptible pulsations highlight the multi-layered, contrapuntal texture of the pieces — they are truly performed in an authentic baroque manner. (*Bach — Simone Leitão*, MSR Classics MS 1665) [READ MORE ...](#)



'Simone Leitão plays with a sharply honed, flawless technique and her sense of style is highly refined.'



'... this shallow programme lacks any lucid direction or musical focus.'

The late **Howard Smith**: If I was called upon to describe the sixteen items on this CD in just one word — without hesitation I'd choose 'Nebulous'.

On this showing, a little of New York's Ahn Trio — three picture perfect American-Korean belles: Lucia Ahn (piano), Angella Ahn (violin) and Maria Ahn (cello) — goes a long way.

Admittedly, in (irrelevant) non-musical respects, they have come a long way. Their portfolio reveals the following — Lucia and Maria are twins and in 2003, together with Angella, they were selected by *People Magazine* as three of

the '50 Most Beautiful People'. (Whether that was in NYC or the Solar System isn't entirely clear.)

Beyond that they have featured in *Vogue*, *GQ* (Gentlemen's Quarterly) and in ads for *GAP Brands Inc* — ie *gap.com*, *oldnavy.com*, *pipertime.com* and *BananaRepublic.com*), and for Anne Klein (1923-1974), American fashion designer.

In 1987 *TIME Magazine* featured them in a cover story dealing with what it chose to call 'Asian-American Whiz Kids'.

The Ahn Sisters dice with disaster in attempting to dismantle barriers between art forms, an avenue littered with failures — blending their work with that of dancers, pop singers, DJs, photographers, rappers *et al*.

Throughout this latest CD, titled *Lullaby for my Favourite Insomniac*, I'm reminded of a frequently-used expression my schoolmates and I once bandied around: 'Much of a muchness'.

As for the contents of the sleeve notes, they're strikingly like a fashion spread. But what of the music ?

Lucia's limpid keyboard is permitted a decorative clarity and keen prominence while Angella and Maria's strings are too frequently engineered into a diffuse and subordinate role.

(*Ahn Trio — Lullaby for my favorite insomniac*, Sony BMG 88697-27208-2) [READ MORE ...](#)

**Howard Smith** (writing back in 2008) was much more impressed by the music of Russian composer German Germanovich Galynin:

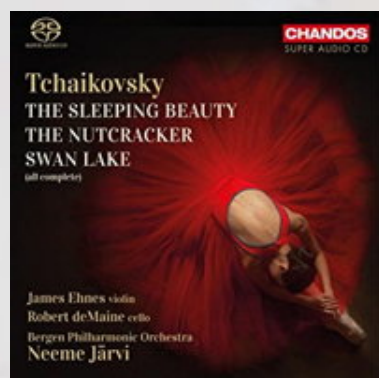
On first hearing this disc of piano music by Herman Galynin (1922-1966), three words sprang to mind immediately: invigorating, infectious and irresistible.

Whichever way you look at it these first Galynin recordings from Toccata Classics are appealing, arresting, audacious, and thoroughly admirable.

Pianist Olga Solovieva blasts into the works with an imperious, crystalline authority that serves it to perfection. Indeed she's no newcomer to Galynin's music. (*Herman Galynin Piano Music Volume One*, Toccata Classics TOCC 0076) [READ MORE ...](#)



'How judiciously this pianist measures the weight and mood of each item within her entire programme.'



'Järvi always maintains the right lightness ...'

**Stephen Francis Vasta:** Some decades ago, I attended an Edinburgh Festival concert at the Usher Hall, with Neeme Järvi conducting the not-yet-Royal Scottish National Orchestra in a program of Scottish-related works — *Oberon* overture, *Hebrides*, and such. Along with the sheer *frisson* of visiting a Festival event, I was curious about the conductor, whose Prokofiev and Shostakovich cycles had initiated what would become his long-running series of recordings for Chandos. At first, I was impressed by Järvi's appealing, unforced musicality, and by the warm sound of the orchestra. As the concert proceeded, however, nothing seemed to cut a particularly distinctive profile — that natural musicality began to seem generic, as did the all-purpose, thickish sonority. Nonetheless, I looked forward to hearing what Järvi would do with the three big Tchaikovsky ballets, the sort of juicy Romantic music for which he'd have an affinity.

*The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake* readings display parallel strengths. *Tempi* are generally brisk, conforming to ballet preferences — you can't slow down a grand *jeté* to land later. Most of the numerous waltzes go with a graceful lift; that in *Swan Lake's* Act I *Pas de deux* (disc 1, track 11) has a heartier swing, and that score's rousing, buoyant *Mazurka* (disc 2, track 20), though not an actual waltz, similarly benefits. The conductor



underlines the distinctive character of the various episodes.

In *Sleeping Beauty*, there's a proud swagger to the Prologue's *Scène dansante* (disc 1, track 2) and the coda of the Act III *Pas de deux* (disc 2, track 32); both grandeur and gravitas in the *Danse des duchesses* (disc 1, track 25). The Act III opening (disc 2, track 10) is at once festive and skittering. (*Tchaikovsky: The Sleeping Beauty; The Nutcracker; Swan Lake (all complete)*, Chandos CHSA 5204(5)) [READ MORE ...](#)

**Geoff Pearce:** I once played in a performance of J S Bach's *St John Passion*, and have a great recording that I purchased back in the early 1980s with Harnoncourt directing his Concentus Musicus Wien and the Vienna Boys Choir, and using soloists drawn from The Vienna Boys choir for the high solo parts.

This new set from Mainz, conducted by Ralf Otto, is different in quite a number of ways. Perhaps most importantly, the last version completed in Bach's lifetime (most likely in 1749) was used, in comparison to my Harnoncourt recording which I think uses an earlier edition. The structure of this new recording is a bit tighter, and the length of the performance is shorter. Also, the new recording doesn't use boys' voices for the upper choral voices or for the treble or alto soloists. The overall pace is somewhat brisker in this new version, and I am not always convinced that this is a good thing. Generally it is completely satisfactory, but on a couple of tracks I think the overall pace is too fast.



'All in all, this is a fine set ...'

The first of these is the bright and cheerful aria 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls', which I feel is unnecessarily hurried.

Some of the choruses, especially the more stormy ones, could also benefit from a slightly more relaxed tempo. A classic example of this is the chorus 'Lasset uns den nicht zerteilen', taken at such breathtaking speed that one can not help but be impressed with how the orchestra and chorus cope with it, but I think it could really benefit from being given a little more breadth.

I do love the treatment of the chorales and most of the choruses though. (*J S Bach: St John Passion*, Naxos 8.573817-18) [READ MORE ...](#)



'... a great disc of unfamiliar music, well played and directed ...'

Geoff also listens to wind music by Frank Martin (*Frank Martin: Music for Winds*, MSR Classics MS 1602) and to symphonies by German composer Johann Brandl: I had never heard of this German composer, and there is very little about him on the internet. Johann Evangelist Brandl (1760-1837) was highly regarded by his contemporaries, but time, alas, has not treated him kindly, so I was pleased to see this disc presenting two of his symphonies and some comprehensive CD booklet biographical notes.

The disc starts with the last symphony Brandl wrote, Op 25 in D major. Published in 1803, it has four movements.

The first movement starts with a brief slow introduction in D minor that has some interesting harmonic progressions, reminding me of Rossini. A jaunty D major theme enters at the beginning of the *Presto* section. One can certainly hear the classical period in this music but it also looks forward to composers like Weber and his contemporaries. This bright, cheerful music, with some dramatic cadences and modulations, makes delightful listening.

Interestingly, the second movement, in B minor, is a rondo, and intersperses a sombre minor key with a happier major one. It is not unlike the opening of the slow movement of Haydn's *Surprise Symphony*, albeit in a minor key. There is grace and poise in this music, which looks backwards with affection. Brandl writes with colour and imagination in his instrumentation, especially for the woodwind. (*Johann Brandl: Symphonies Opp 12 and 25, cpo 555 157-2*) [READ MORE ...](#)

**Gerald Fenech:** Nikolai Medtner was born on 5 January 1880 in Russia. His mother's ancestry hailed back to Germany and Sweden, while his father Karl's is believed to have had its roots in Denmark. The family moved to Russia via what is now Estonia, where Karl became a director of a lace factory in Moscow. The family had an avid passion for both German and Russian culture, and the Medtner household read Goethe alongside Pushkin and played Beethoven alongside Tchaikovsky.

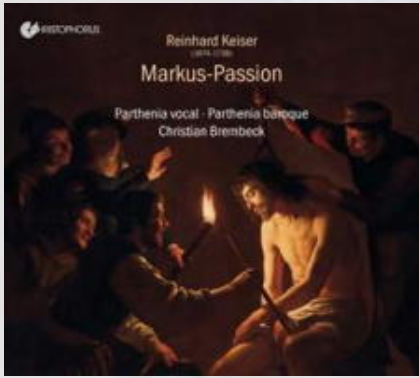
Nikolai was the youngest of five surviving children, among whom one brother, Emil, had an almost Svengalian influence over him which was to last until Emil's death in 1936. An early colleague described the composer as delicate, shy and with a sensitive lofty soul which hindered his practicality in life.

Exiled by the Revolution in 1921 he remained heavily dependent upon his heroic wife Anna, with whom he migrated to Germany and France and finally, in 1935, after a myriad of vicissitudes, to England. He died in 1951 and is buried in Hendon Cemetery.

Medtner's fame rests mainly on his piano works of which he composed many — pieces that testify not only to his incomparable skills as a pianist, but also to his unique ability to compose for the instrument. But piano music apart, Medtner also wrote a considerable number of songs that exemplify his dual German/Russian heritage, manifest in his devotion to both Goethe and Pushkin. He wrote some 100 pieces in the genre in which his paradoxical nature is an integral part of this repertoire. Indeed, at one moment he is the self-proclaimed defiant conservative, and at the next he becomes the agent of modernism. Still, his songs are some of the most beautiful creations in Russian twentieth century music, encapsulating the whole spectrum of human emotions in music that is, for the most part, simple, yet reaches the deepest regions of the soul. (*Medtner Songs*, Delphian *DCD34177*) [READ MORE ...](#)



'This fine set includes 54 songs, so there are riches aplenty for one to savour and enjoy.'



'Christian Brembeck and his team deliver a performance brimming with vibrant imagery and committed, stylish singing while adhering to Keiser's wishes by moving from verse to verse with effortless purpose.'

Gerald also listens to two passions, by Orlande de Lassus (*Lassus: St Matthew Passion*, Naxos 8.573840) and Reinhard Keiser: Contemporaries describe Keiser as an unsteady and restless soul full of pride and impulsiveness. On the other hand he was greatly admired for his natural gifts of easy invention and splendidly melodic inspirations which contribute immensely to the vivid expressiveness of his creations.

Music critics consider the *St Mark Passion* as a forerunner to the Bach masterpieces in the same genre, so it is no wonder the master was greatly impressed by Keiser's works. Probably dating from 1717, the *St Mark Passion* is one of the high points in Keiser's output, and with its enormous dramatically tonal and melodic diversity, it gives the impression of being more complex and extensive than it

really is from its relatively simple orchestral structure.

An important feature of the work is also the compositional attention given to the text, which, for Keiser, was highly essential to the spiritual balance of the message. (*Keiser: Markus-Passion — Parthenia baroque*, Christophorus CHR 77421) [READ MORE ...](#)

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## M&V'S VERY FIRST ASK ALICE COLUMN

Exactly fifteen years ago today, we published Alice McVeigh's **very first classical music agony aunt column**, *Ask Alice*. This first column, on 1 April 2003, is the only *Ask Alice* episode not to have been published on a Friday.

It began with Alice's answer to a young man torn between a career as a professional bassoonist and a career in the armed forces: 'As for the downside, ie wars, well, if you had any innate distaste for being shot at I can't think you'd have picked such a risky instrument in the first place.'

Although correspondence has gone a little quiet just lately, Alice is still waiting anxiously in the wings for questions from musicians with problems ... you can submit a question **here**.



Alice McVeigh in 2003

## ENSEMBLE — TIME-TRAVELLING, PUNCH-AND-JUDY, ROCK-'N-ROLL MOZART



Publicity image for Opera North's 'Don Giovanni'

**Mike Wheeler:** First seen in 2012, Alessandro Talevi's time-travelling, Punch-and-Judy, rock-'n'-roll production of *Don Giovanni* for Opera North has been back on the road. (Theatre Royal, Nottingham, UK, 16 March 2018.)

The different elements stirred into the mix, instead of fighting each other and/or the opera itself, only added to the music-hall and panto flavour, and even suggested pre-echoes of, say, Beckett or Pirandello. They highlighted, even more than the first time round, just how modern the opera's dramatic structure is, as the action spirals into greater and greater

absurdity. In the Act 2 sextet, as the characters look for a way out of their situation, doors appear to open and close mysteriously, manipulated by Giovanni, like a malevolent Prospero, unseen by the other characters, above the rear of the set — 'six characters in search of an exit', as the number could have been headed.

Two of the cast were returning to their original roles. William Dazeley's Giovanni was just as comic this time round, but also darker and more dangerous, the smarminess of 'Là ci darem la mano' given its flipside in a hair-raisingly reckless 'Già la mensa è preparata'. This in turn reflected a more even balance, this time, in the tone of the production as a whole. Elizabeth Atherton's Donna Elvira now seemed to be less resilient, more of a tragic moth to a flame. During the recitative to 'Mi tradi quell'anima ingrata' she took off her curly blonde wig, and turned into a pitiable inmate of Hogarth's Bedlam. [READ MORE ...](#)

Mike was also in Nottingham for Opera North's productions of Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*: Where was I? ... Oh yes, Puccini and I don't get on. Well now we've fallen out big-time, and I'm in no hurry to repair the breach.

Don't get me wrong — Opera North did a superb job with *Madama Butterfly*. (Theatre Royal, Nottingham, UK, 13 March 2018.) Tim Albery's production made good use of Hildegard Bechtler's uncluttered set of moveable screens. (Presumably the distant view of Mount Fuji was merely symbolic, given that it is geographically impossible from Nagasaki.)

But what a queasily nasty tale this is. You could, I suppose, read it as a condemnation of some Western attitudes to Eastern cultures, and some male attitudes to women, but somehow I don't believe any of that was on Puccini's agenda. What we're left with is the composer at his cynical, manipulative worst. Sorry, but I find his whole mentality utterly repulsive. [READ MORE ...](#)

Mike listens to music for choir and saxophone, and to Rimsky-Korsakov, Sibelius, Dvořák and Tchaikovsky from Derby Concert Orchestra, and was impressed by Beethoven and Tchaikovsky from Pavel Kolesnikov, Vassily Sinaisky and the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, and by Frank Zielhorst's first official concert as Principal Conductor of Sinfonia Viva: *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* is a tribute to Britten's early composition teacher, and it was a nice idea to have the orchestra's string principals play the theme in question — the second of Bridge's *Three Idylls* — beforehand. But placing it ahead of the advertised opener, the ballet music from Mozart's *Idomeneo*, with no prior explanation, must have left a lot of listeners rather puzzled.

The Britten itself, though, got a dazzling performance — muscular in the fanfare-like introduction, dizzily swooping and diving in 'Aria Italiana', with a relish for the dry wit of 'Bourée Classique', a sense of fragility at the end of 'Wiener Waltzer'. The neat dovetailing as the single line of 'Moto Perpetuo' was handed on from one section of the orchestra to the next was impressive. A powerfully weighty 'Funeral March' was followed by a suitably enigmatic account of 'Chant'. Nervy excitement in the culminating fugue gave way to a



Frank Zielhorst. Photo © Nigel Apperley

hauntingly withdrawn ending.

The Mozart got an alert, vigorous account, fitting its origins as the celebratory conclusion of his first truly great opera. Elegant, athletic, graceful, the performance emphasised the music's sheer danceability. [READ MORE ...](#)

**Maria Nockin:** While staging Gioachino Rossini's *Semiramide* at the Metropolitan Opera, John Copley was abruptly fired when a chorister complained about his telling an off-color joke. It was a shock, but these are times of cultural change, so Copley returned to England and other job offers. The Met continued to rehearse the *bel canto* opera with Stage Director Ray Rallo and presented it to the world in HD on Saturday 10 March 2018. I saw the encore at the Desert Ridge AMC Theatre in Phoenix, AZ, on the following Wednesday.

*Semiramide* is the ultimate in *bel canto*. It has a complex plot that is rarely more than loosely acted because the singers are fully engaged in the creation of an entire world of gorgeous sound. Copley's production is full of eye candy, however, and John Conklin's sets were colorful, massive, multi-level constructions that emphasized Babylon's state of decay with cracked tiles and broken steps. John Froelich's clever lighting helped make the ghostly apparitions seem real.

Michael Stennett's jewel colored costumes looked dashing on most of the men, especially Ildar Abdrazakov as the bare chested Assur, but did little to flatter Semiramide or make Arsace seem masculine. Although I applaud Director Rallo for not interrupting the singing, I don't understand why Elisabeth DeShong as Arsace and Abdrazakov as Assur sang the duet in which they called each other names and threatened death, standing relatively still on opposite sides of the stage. HD Director Barbara Willis Sweete did not miss the opportunity to get closeups of their faces and show the audience what it takes to produce *bel canto* singing. Willis Sweete gave the movie theater audience myriad closeups and many shots of individual singers. It was shots of the entire stage that were hard to find.

Justly world-famous for her ability to sing this kind of bravura music, Angela Meade was a hard working Semiramide whose coloratura runs sparkled like jewels even though an occasional high note missed its mark. Elisabeth DeShong sang Semiramide's opposite number, Arsace, who starts out as her lover and ends up as her son. It's that kind of story! DeShong is a vocal wonder who has been at the Met for years but never seen by the HD audiences in this kind of role. In this opera she sang like a true star. When she sang with Meade, her sound had a noble quality with enough heft to contend with the soprano's volume. DeShong's voice isn't huge, but her coloratura is clear and her low tones were magnificently resonant.

Javier Camarena sang his arias with confident solid, polished rapid coloratura and clear, accurate top notes. Although neither DeShong nor Camarena was dramatically compelling, I doubt if anyone in the audience cared. They came for spectacular singing and that is what they got. Another wonderful voice on that stage was that of Ryan Speedo Green as Idreno. He has a rich sound complete with deep, dark earthy tones that demand attention. [READ MORE ...](#)

Maria was more positive about Metropolitan Opera's earlier broadcast of their revival of Franco Zeffirelli's production of Puccini's *La bohème*: Stage Director Gregory Keller gave us a realistic interpretation of the libretto that was in keeping with Zeffirelli's magnificently detailed sets. The first and fourth acts took place in a seemingly frigid attic room that almost made onlookers shiver with the characters. Act II took place at the Momus sidewalk cafe located on a busy Paris street.



Act II of Puccini's *La bohème* at New York Metropolitan Opera. Photo © 2014 Ken Howard

Act III showed an area around the city gate on a snowy morning. Peter J Hall's colorful costumes placed the action firmly at the turn of the twentieth century. Fabiano and Yoncheva made a delightful pair of lovers and the intertwining of their voices in the music of the first act was pure joy.

The bi-level set for the second act provided adequate space for the joyous outdoor Christmas Eve scene, which featured hundreds of choristers and supers as celebrating Parisians — a perfect setting for Susanna Phillips' grand entrance as the flirtatious Musetta. She sang her waltz song with inviting, dulcet tones, all the time trying to rekindle the interest of Marcello, her former lover. When she pretended her shoe was pinching her foot, she pulled her skirt above her knee. Then, to Alcindoro's embarrassment and the amusement of the audience, she asked him to help her remove her shoe. With Phillips and Plishka, the scene was priceless.

Despite Musetta's flighty personality, Marcello, sung by baritone Lukas Meachem, still loved her and was happy to take her into his arms. Puccini never gave the lovesick Marcello an aria but Meachem had some beautifully lyric moments in Act III. Alexey

Lavrov was a gregarious Schaunard and Paul Plishka made the most of his two character roles, Benoit, the ineffectual landlord, and Alcindoro, the rich and once dignified old man who gave up a great deal to have a beautiful young woman on his arm. Matthew Rose was a commanding and sonorous Colline. His 'Overcoat Aria' was truly touching. Together, these artists evoked great depth of emotion with their ability to color their tones and act with their voices. [READ MORE ...](#)

**Giuseppe Pennisi:** This latest production of *Der fliegende Holländer* was presented in two parts: the first encompassed Act I, while Act II and the short Act III made up the second part. I would have preferred an unbroken performance without intermission, as Wagner desired — he included orchestral interludes for the scene changes.

In my view, the main feature of the Santa Cecilia production was its choral approach. Under the leadership of Ciro Visco, the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia has a larger chorus than many opera houses. The choral interventions are a feature of this opera: the result is almost amplified and more dramatic than usual, especially in the first part of the third act. This does not mean that the singers and the orchestra, entrusted to the main guest conductor Mikko Franck, were not strong.



A scene from the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia's production of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* at the Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome on 26 March 2018. Photo © 2018 Musacchio & Ianniello

The singers were all of a high level. Matti Salminen deserves a special mention because at age 73, and after fifty-two years of career, he was a perfect Daland: sweet with his daughter Senta and imposing with the sailors of his boat.

Iain Paterson was the protagonist, ie the Dutchman; he is a veteran of the role who has sung in several major theatres and at the Bayreuth festival. Since his first 'entry aria', he



rendered a very introspective Dutchman with emphasis on his internal struggle as well as his strong desire for love and redemption.

His Senta was the American Amber Warner who sang the role recently at the Metropolitan Opera House; she is a powerful soprano with a huge volume and perfect phrasing.

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Giuseppe also reports on Poulenc in Bologna, Busoni and Puccini in Cagliari, Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale* and on Russian and Greek music in Rome: Constantinos Carydis (born in 1974) is a very well known and appreciated Greek conductor of both operatic and symphonic music with a varied international career. In July he will inaugurate the opera section of the Salzburg Summer Festival with a new production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. Nonetheless, he seldom performs in Rome; I can only remember three subscription performances in the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia's 2011 symphonic concert series. I remember his excellent performances at the Munich National Theater. In any event, he is one of the stars of the international conducting world.



Constantinos Carydis

Thus, there was a lot of interest in the concert he conducted at the Teatro dell'Opera on 23 March 2018. The orchestra seats and boxes were sold out, and there were also listeners in the upper tier. This was the third concert in the Teatro dell'Opera season. After a fourth concert, scheduled for 17 May 2018, the season will end. Teatro dell'Opera has had a significant reduction in subsidies from the Ministry of Culture. Thus, hard choices had to be made. There is a rationale in reducing the concert season of an institution which has opera and ballet as its primary mission, and in a city where the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia has a major symphonic season and there are also several other venues for instrumental and symphonic music. However, without the concert season, nobody

would have appreciated the extraordinary level reached by the Teatro dell'Opera Orchestra under Riccardo Muti, during the period 2011-2014, and Daniele Gatti as well as other world known conductors, more recently. No doubt many listeners will miss Teatro dell'Opera's well-focused concert series. [READ MORE ...](#)

**Giuseppe Pennisi:** The triptych includes three different modern ballets on music by Mozart, Ravel, Pärt, Bach and Crossman-Hecht, dealing largely and explicitly with sexual encounters between men and women. *Petite Mort* by Jiří Kylián (created in 1991) is a ballet configuration of an orgasm — this is the meaning of *la petite mort* in French. During two slow movements of well-known Mozart piano concertos, a couple lose control of themselves due to the intensity of their sexual act.

In the second ballet, *Walking Mad* by Johan Linger (2001), several men and women develop relationships around a mobile wall — an indication that they can have sex but never fully communicate. In the first part the music is *Bolero* by Ravel, but the slow and tender conclusion is Arvo Pärt's *Für Alina*.

The third ballet is a reduced version (but approved by the author) of *Artifact Suite*, created in 1984 by William Forsythe for the Frankfurt Ballet. The score is a combination of pieces by J S Bach (the Ciaccona in D minor) and by the modern German composer Eva Crossman-Hecht. There are only cursory references to sex. The main idea is to look at society as a whole through very complex combinations of acrobatic modern dance steps.

These three very intriguing and masterly danced ballets received accolades from the audience. Regretfully, even though this was a premiere and a subscription evening, a few rows of orchestra seats and several boxes were empty. This was due both to the novelty of the triptych and to a parallel international ballet festival organized, in the same period, at the Teatro Olimpico by the Accademia Filarmonica Romana. [READ MORE ...](#)



Sara Loro and Marco Marangio in Jiří Kylián's *Petite Mort*. Photo © 2018 Yasuko Kageyama

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## 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**.

## NEWSLETTER OPENING AND BACKGROUND IMAGES

This newsletter's opening image of the floods in Parnu, Estonia in January 2005, was taken by newsletter editor Keith Bramich, shortly before being rescued from a flooded hotel by the Estonian army.



We have over 1,000 background images, and feature a different one each day on our website. This newsletter's background image, showing a frog swimming in a lake in Romania, is by Adriana Șoaita, Viorel Anton, Barry Maufe and Keith Bramich, and dates from Summer 2000.

Today is All Fools' Day, when it is traditional for some publishers to include bogus items. Can you find any in the material above?

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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