



Rozhdestvensky and Ramsey — Issue 123 1 July 2018

SPONSORED FEATURE — MIRIAN CONTI TALKS TO ANDREW SCHARTMANN

Andrew Schartmann: Argentinian-American pianist Mirian Conti has built a career on the music of non-canonical composers. That's not to say she's ill-versed in the classics — far from it, in fact, as countless glowing reviews can attest. But even though Conti is equally at home in Chopin as she is in Halffter, she is first and foremost a champion of lesser-known pieces, both old and new.

Conti's passion for new music found voice most recently in a recording of fellow Argentinian Lalo Schifrin's complete works for solo piano.

Despite being a prolific composer, both in jazz and in film, Schifrin isn't exactly a household name. His music, however, is known by millions of people all across the globe. In particular, his theme for the *Mission: Impossible* TV series is one of the great earworms of the twentieth century, and arguably the most recognizable piece ever written in 5/4 time. In Conti's view:

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Lalo's Mission Impossible are the two themes in the whole world that everybody recognizes. I can't think of any other themes of just a few short notes that are universally known. It's amazing when you think about it.

Of course, there is much more to Schifrin's *oeuvre* than this catchy tune in 5/4, as Conti makes clear:

I want everyone to know about this man's incredible talents and the diversity of his music. The way he weaves together different styles — classical, jazz, film, Argentinian folk — is unique and second to none.

Conti's deep appreciation for Schifrin's music, and her masterful grasp of its stylistic inheritances, stems from a relationship with the composer that reaches back more than twenty-five years. In 1992, the Steinway Foundation commissioned Schifrin to write a piano concerto — his second — which was eventually premiered by Christina Ortiz at the Kennedy Center, with Mstislav Rostropovich conducting the National Symphony Orchestra. Leading up to the event, Steinway recruited Conti to perform parts of the concerto at a press conference. Upon hearing her play, Schifrin was so impressed that he invited her to premiere the work in Los Angeles under his baton.



Lalo Schifrin (left) with Mirian Conti after their 1993 Los Angeles performance

Conti has remained close to his music ever since, citing Schifrin's sense of rhythm and melody, as well as his knack for idiomatic piano writing, as features that have kept her interested:

When I played the concerto, I could tell that the writing came from a pianist. He knows how to play, and that makes it comfortable for pianists. He is also able to transition between so many different styles with ease. It never sounds forced or unnatural.

Her love for his music notwithstanding, for the better part of twenty years, Conti experienced Schifrin's work largely from a listener's perspective. Schifrin had been productive as a composer, to be sure, but until recently, he had written very little for solo piano. All of that changed in 2016, when Conti decided to visit Schifrin during a trip to Los Angeles ... [READ MORE ...](#)

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CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — ROZHDESTVENSKY AND RAMSEY

Two very different men passed away last month, at a similar age, both leaving their very considerable mark on the classical music world.



Gennadi Rozhdestvensky
(1931-2018)

Russian conductor and pianist Gennady Rozhdestvensky was born Gennady Nikolayevich Anosov in Moscow on 4 May 1931 into a musical family — his father was the conductor Nikolai Anosov and his mother the soprano Natalya Rozhdestvenskaya. He studied conducting with his father at the Moscow Conservatory, and piano with Lev Oborin.

He quickly established a reputation as a conductor after conducting Tchaikovsky's *The Sleeping Beauty* at the Bolshoi, aged twenty. He went on to give first performances of many Soviet composers' works, and also gave the first Russian performance of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the first performance in the west of Shostakovich's Symphony No 4

(at the 1962 Edinburgh Festival).

He was the first Soviet conductor to work as a principal orchestral conductor in the west, and managed to conduct music by composers who were unpopular in the Soviet Union — Hindemith, Poulenc and Shostakovich, for example. He was well-known for his interpretations of Gubaidulina, Prokofiev and Schnittke, but also performed and recorded all the Vaughan Williams symphonies in Leningrad.

Orchestras he worked with included the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra (principal conductor, 1964-70), the BBC Symphony Orchestra (chief conductor, 1978-81), the USSR Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra (1983-91) and the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra (1992-95).

After a career lasting more than half a century, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, who was much honoured internationally, including by France, Japan, Sweden and the UK, died on 16 June 2018, aged eighty-seven.

In complete contrast, working mostly behind the scenes, English music publisher, journalist, editor and organist Basil Ramsey was born in Chelmsford on 26 April 1929. He was Director of Publications at Novello and co (now part of Music Sales), and later ran his own publishing business, Basil Ramsey Publisher of Music.



Basil Ramsey (1931-2018)

He edited various publications, including *The Musical Times*, *Music and Musicians* and *Choir and Organ*, and he was also founding editor of this online magazine. In these various positions, he inspired many composers and music journalists.

Basil died in North Yorkshire on 13 June 2018, aged eighty-nine, following a long illness. You can read more about Basil later in this newsletter.

We also mark the passing of Bo Nilsson, Ed Simons, Xiomara Alfaro, Barry McDaniel, Andrew Massey and Rosa Briceño Ortiz.

In other news, the NYC Electroacoustic Music Festival takes place later this month (16-22 July 2018), and SOMM announces a new recording of choral music by Richard Rodney Bennett, including eleven first recordings. [READ OUR LATEST NEWS ...](#)

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE — THE ADVANTAGES OF AGE WHEN LEARNING PIANO

Gloria DeVidas Kirchheimer: '*Boogie-Voogie*?' My piano teacher recoiled in horror. 'Was ist das, "*Boogie Voogie*"?' I was thirteen and she was forty-something and Viennese. We had worked together for four years and with my adolescence came more homework and a desire to abandon scales and Beethoven — how I loathed Elise for whom he'd written that piece — and a longing to actually enjoy playing the piano. My way seemed clear. Mrs Bernard shook her great mane of russet hair and grudgingly allowed me to buy a book of basic boogie pieces by Stuff Smith which I still have. She valiantly humored me as we spent part of my lesson learning these jazzy pieces but her heart was not in it. By then I think we both knew that our days together were numbered. It was shortly after I quit taking lessons that she disappeared — her husband had called to ask if we might have any idea of where she might have gone. He intimated that she was undergoing a difficult menopause. Perhaps she just wanted out of the marriage, unless students like me were driving her mad with our unreasonable demands that went counter to all she held dear.

For years thereafter I would flip through my old music books, attempting to play some of those 'easy' or edited pieces, many of them inscribed with comments in her angular handwriting at the top of the page: 'Excellent!' 'Very good.' But more importantly I recalled how she would lift my hands off the keyboard and look at me soulfully. '*Du musst* with feeling play this piece. It is about suffering. Technique will come.'

How long, oh Lord, would that take? The day would be a long time coming. Someday, I told myself, I will study the piano again, seriously. My old childhood piano, an ancient Steinway upright with claw feet was a constant reminder. Occasionally I'd go back to some of the easier classical pieces, but always with frustration. I even found myself skulking around flea markets and street fairs looking for music. I'd bring it home, patch it up with scotch tape, pick out a chord or two and put it on the shelf with other relics of its kind.

And then one day, when I was already a grandmother, the sign appeared. Taped to my building's bulletin board was a note from a neighbor: 'Thinking of resuming piano lessons or starting from scratch? Come for a free consultation.' For me this was like a sign from heaven. I knew this neighbor but in the way of longtime neighbors in a large building, I didn't know everything about her, only that Julie was an accomplished pianist, a graduate of a prestigious New York music school, an experienced teacher. But was it too late for me? My memory wasn't as sharp as it used to be. And wasn't that arthritis creeping into my fingers? Nonetheless, I knew that if I ignored the message I would regret it for the rest of my life. And so, I made an appointment.



A manuscript from c 1737 of J S Bach's Prelude No 1 in C from The 48

From the start, my lessons were a joyful collaboration. Gone were the pressures of childhood to practice, practice, to struggle through scales and exercises. No. We cut to the chase, and went directly to pieces written by the great composers — some of them actually geared to my level of incompetence! When Julie suggested that I try 'this easy Bach prelude', I felt that I was being initiated into one of the great mysteries of life, like Pamino in *The Magic Flute* who must pass through many trials before emerging triumphant.

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ENSEMBLE — BOUNDLESS ENERGY

Anett Fodor: János Balázs's opening concert focussed on four Hungarian composers — Liszt, Vecsey, Cziffra and Bartók. In my opinion, considerable knowledge, mental and physical stamina plus a great deal of courage were needed to perform these extremely difficult works in succession.

Whilst listening to Balázs's interpretation, I was absolutely convinced that he was not just a run-of-the-mill musician. He is a pianist who lives and breathes his interpretations, not only with his two hands, but with his body and soul. His flawless, sharply-honed technique enabled masterful performances of Liszt's second and sixth *Hungarian Rhapsodies*. Cziffra's three transcriptions from Ferenc Vecsey's *La Valse Triste*, Johannes Brahms' sixth *Hungarian Dance* and Johann Strauss' *Blue Danube Waltz* were interpreted with the greatest ease, appearing effortless!



János Balázs

In the middle of the recital, there was only a brief pause for the soloist during which the Cziffra Festival Chamber Orchestra performed Béla Bartók's *Romanian Folk Dances*. The leader of the orchestra, Péter Mező, directed the performance. The young orchestra members really shone, illustrating that many of the musicians are award and competition winners in their own right.

The audience was immensely impressed. Listening to Bartók's music with such excellent performers proved how artistic creativity can grow and enhance sound quality as it did in their outstanding ensemble performance. [READ MORE ...](#)

Mike Wheeler: The latest orchestral season at Nottingham's Royal Concert Hall went out on a high, with Mahler's 'Resurrection' Symphony. (Nottingham, UK, 16 June 2018.)

Jamie Phillips, a former Assistant Conductor with the Hallé Orchestra, rejoined his former colleagues for an account of Mahler's colossal vision that, instead of just piling one sensation on top of another (though there were plenty of those), went for the long view.



Jamie Phillips

The clarity and incisiveness of the swirling cellos and basses at the start set the tone for the orchestral sound throughout the performance. Among the many ear-catching moments, I don't think I've been so aware before of the striking sonority of cor anglais and bass clarinet in octaves, about eight minutes in. The passages of stillness — oases of Mahlerian nature music — offset some frantic wild moments. The coda was genuinely creepy in its effect, Phillips side-stepping the temptation to rush the falling chromatic scale at the end.

The second movement, benefiting from the same transparent string tone as the first, had just enough rhythmic weight to make it feel like a real country dance, in contrast to the trio sections, which were properly nervy and fidgety. A brisk performance of the scherzo culminated in an electrifying outburst at the end, from the ashes of which came mezzo Claudia Huckle's simplicity and directness in the setting of 'O Röschen rot'. She used her dark, rich tone to make her opening words more urgent appeal than sorrowful confiding.

Then it was into that vast fresco of a finale. It would be so easy for it to sound episodic, but this performance, unhurried but kept on the move, had us on tenterhooks, waiting for what was going to happen next. The panicky second march's abrupt collapse felt like the ground opening beneath our feet, while the off-stage brass a little later cackled like a band of Elgarian demons. [READ MORE ...](#)

Mike also listens to the G-Mizz percussion duo, to Curran Doherty and Edward Turner, to Hannah Gobbett and Hugh Morris, and to Katie Gilbert and Esther Beard.

Giuseppe Pennisi: Four sold-out performances in Ravenna's lovely and elegant nineteenth century Teatro Alighieri; several bouts of open stage applause; ovations at the end of each performance — these are some indications of the success of Opera North's production, jointly with Welsh National Opera, of Cole Porter's *Kiss me Kate* at the 2018 Ravenna Festival, which is the Italian equivalent of the Austrian Summer Salzburg Festival. This year, it spans the period 1 June to 22 July, with several performances each day and evening. It is mostly dedicated to concerts, ballet and plays. Ravenna has a Spring opera season and a two week opera festival in November. This summer, Opera North is in very good company in Ravenna: the other opera in the program is Verdi's *Macbeth* conducted by no less than Riccardo Muti with orchestra, chorus and soloists of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, one of the oldest and most appreciated Italian classical music festivals.



A scene from Opera North's *Kiss me Kate* at the Ravenna Festival. Photo © 2018 Silvia Lelli

Kiss me Kate was staged on 7 to 9 June 2018; I attended the first performance. In parallel, there was a concert by the St Petersburg Mariinsky Orchestra conducted by Valery Gergiev, as well as a concert of Italian ancient music performed by one of the best known ensembles, Voces Suaves ... They were high quality competition but the Teatro Alighieri was filled to the hilt.

Opera North came to Ravenna in full strength: two hundred professionals — eighteen soloists, understudies, chorus, dancers, technicians, stage-hands as well as sets and costumes. *Kiss me Kate* is known in Italy mostly through the 1953 film often shown on television channels. This is the first time it has been performed live. And of course it was in English, with Italian supertitles. [READ MORE ...](#)

Giuseppe was also at *La bohème* in Rome and *Don Carlo* in Bologna, and also experienced *The Endless Darkness of Light*, Adriano Guarnieri's new opera at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino :

An essential ingredient of any festival is a world premiere or the rediscovery of a forgotten but important work from the past. This year, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino [Florence, Italy] has both. The rediscovery is *La Dafne* by Marco da Gagliano, a prominent composer of Florentine baroque music who, like Roman and Bolognese baroque music, almost disappeared as the decades and centuries passed. This work will be unveiled on 25 June 2018 in the Buontalenti Grotto in the Boboli Gardens.



Livia Rado, Fulvio Cauteruccio and Gregory Bonfatti in Adriano Guarnieri's *Infinita Tenebra di Luce*.
Photo © 2018 Simone Donati / TerraProject

The world premiere is *Infinita Tenebra di Luce* (The Endless Darkness of Light) by Adriano Guarnieri, a composer we discussed in the context of operas he presented at the Spoleto and Ravenna Festivals — read **An Imperial Festival, 11 June 2015**. Guarnieri's opera, or rather 'lyric action', as he calls it, had its premiere in the small Teatro Goldoni — 350 seats including boxes and upper tier — an eighteenth century jewel with perfect acoustics, on 3 June 2018. I was in the audience.

Guarnieri's operas have a feature: they do not deal with plots but with spiritual and religious themes. There are no characters but sounds, voices, stage sets, videos and, in some of them, live electronic music. Written over the last fifteen years, his trilogy on the apocalypse, purgatory and the road to paradise consists of *Pietra di diaspro* (2005), *Tenebrae* (2010) and *L'Amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle* (2015).

Infinita Tenebra di Luce is also a spiritual work. The 'lyric action' has, in fact, no action, but music lovers know that Richard Wagner called *Tristan und Isolde*, his opera where the action is either in the heads of the characters or off stage, an *Aktion* in three acts. Guarnieri's 'lyric action' is largely inspired by a book by the Italian philosopher Massimo Cacciari, *L'Angelo Necessario*, where the author, a self-declared atheist, purports that angels are needed because they break the darkness in which we all live. Cacciari's book is a deep analysis of theology — not only Christian, but also Jewish and Persian religions, as well a study of literature such as Rainer Maria Rilke's *Poems to the Night*.

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Keith Bramich: Latvian soprano Kristine Opolais recently pulled out of Covent Garden's new production of Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin* in order to ensure full recovery from a routine medical procedure. Opolais and Andris Nelsons, who's conducting *Lohengrin* in London, divorced earlier this year, but the statements issued at the time made it clear that they both looked forward to continuing their artistic relationship together.



Jennifer Davis

Royal Opera's rather surprising replacement damsel-in-distress, Elsa von Brabant, was young Irish soprano Jennifer Davis, a member of the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme, who only previously sang smaller parts for London's major opera house, but who has received good reviews elsewhere — as Donna Anna for Opera North recently, for example. And, at least on Sunday 10 June 2018 in London, Davis' singing and acting

were superb, right from her first appearance, one hand at a time, as she emerged slowly

through a trapdoor on the stage floor to face (in this production) a firing squad — a performance likely to be a turning point in her career.

Alongside Davis, as her mysterious and unknown saviour Lohengrin, was creamy-voiced top German tenor Klaus Florian Vogt who made the switch, early in his career, from French horn to voice. Vogt has been singing the role since 2002, on most of the world's top opera stages, including New York and Vienna. In a moment of sheer joy, Davis and Vogt leapt off the back of the stage together as Act I ends.

But unfortunately they have to cope with the bad guys — American soprano Christine Goerke as Ortrud the witch and German baritone Thomas J Mayer as her husband, Friedrich von Telramund. Ortrud has removed Elsa's brother Gottfried, by turning him into a swan, and they're both determined to gain Brabant's throne by discrediting Elsa and Lohengrin. And these baddies were also extremely good value, Goerke particularly, producing some powerful moments such as, during their banishment after Lohengrin's rescue of Elsa, Goerke's taunting of her husband on the word 'God' near the start of Act II, after Telramund points the finger at her as the architect of his downfall. [READ MORE ...](#)

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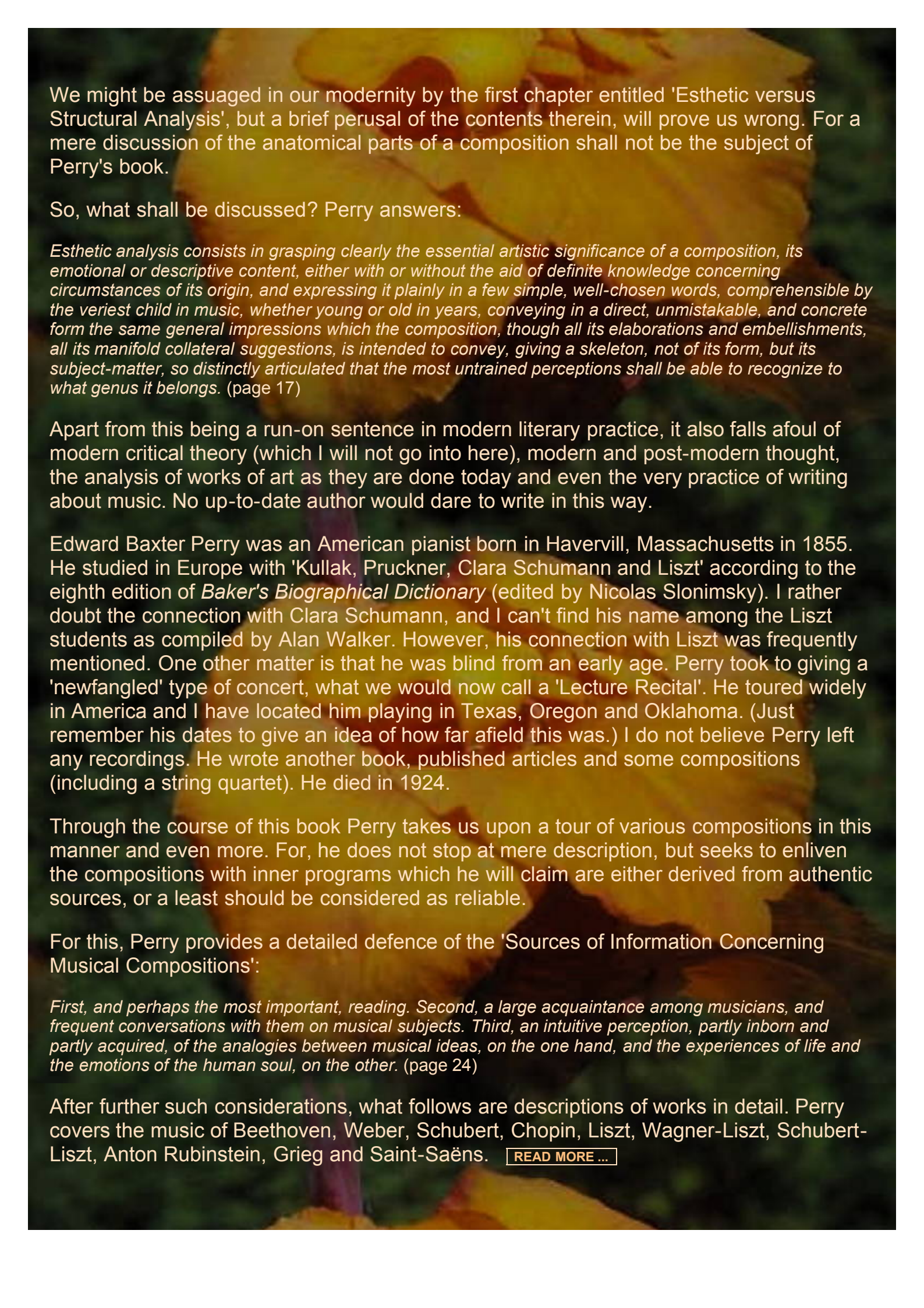
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SOMEWHAT DELAYED REVIEWS — A MEMORY THREAD



Endre Anaru: It must be hard to tell just how far we have moved from the nineteenth century in our outlook. But, for a book of musical analysis to begin with a poem entitled *My Keys* — see the end of this essay for the text of the poem, followed by a second entitled *Only an Interpreter* — might in this case set us thinking that the distance is vast.



We might be assuaged in our modernity by the first chapter entitled 'Esthetic versus Structural Analysis', but a brief perusal of the contents therein, will prove us wrong. For a mere discussion of the anatomical parts of a composition shall not be the subject of Perry's book.

So, what shall be discussed? Perry answers:

Esthetic analysis consists in grasping clearly the essential artistic significance of a composition, its emotional or descriptive content, either with or without the aid of definite knowledge concerning circumstances of its origin, and expressing it plainly in a few simple, well-chosen words, comprehensible by the veriest child in music, whether young or old in years, conveying in a direct, unmistakable, and concrete form the same general impressions which the composition, though all its elaborations and embellishments, all its manifold collateral suggestions, is intended to convey, giving a skeleton, not of its form, but its subject-matter, so distinctly articulated that the most untrained perceptions shall be able to recognize to what genus it belongs. (page 17)

Apart from this being a run-on sentence in modern literary practice, it also falls afoul of modern critical theory (which I will not go into here), modern and post-modern thought, the analysis of works of art as they are done today and even the very practice of writing about music. No up-to-date author would dare to write in this way.

Edward Baxter Perry was an American pianist born in Havervill, Massachusetts in 1855. He studied in Europe with 'Kullak, Pruckner, Clara Schumann and Liszt' according to the eighth edition of *Baker's Biographical Dictionary* (edited by Nicolas Slonimsky). I rather doubt the connection with Clara Schumann, and I can't find his name among the Liszt students as compiled by Alan Walker. However, his connection with Liszt was frequently mentioned. One other matter is that he was blind from an early age. Perry took to giving a 'newfangled' type of concert, what we would now call a 'Lecture Recital'. He toured widely in America and I have located him playing in Texas, Oregon and Oklahoma. (Just remember his dates to give an idea of how far afield this was.) I do not believe Perry left any recordings. He wrote another book, published articles and some compositions (including a string quartet). He died in 1924.

Through the course of this book Perry takes us upon a tour of various compositions in this manner and even more. For, he does not stop at mere description, but seeks to enliven the compositions with inner programs which he will claim are either derived from authentic sources, or a least should be considered as reliable.

For this, Perry provides a detailed defence of the 'Sources of Information Concerning Musical Compositions':

First, and perhaps the most important, reading. Second, a large acquaintance among musicians, and frequent conversations with them on musical subjects. Third, an intuitive perception, partly inborn and partly acquired, of the analogies between musical ideas, on the one hand, and the experiences of life and the emotions of the human soul, on the other. (page 24)

After further such considerations, what follows are descriptions of works in detail. Perry covers the music of Beethoven, Weber, Schubert, Chopin, Liszt, Wagner-Liszt, Schubert-Liszt, Anton Rubinstein, Grieg and Saint-Saëns. [READ MORE ...](#)

CD SPOTLIGHT — COLOURFUL PERFORMANCE



'Vladislav Sulimsky sings with feeling in a compact, reasonably firm baritone ...'

Stephen Francis Vasta: This is a major program, although its declension precisely reverses what you'd expect.

If you think you know *Night on Bald Mountain*, brace yourself. Mussorgsky's original version, presented here, is an altogether different animal from the popular Rimsky-Korsakov edition. The phrase structures are irregular, the harmonies more elaborately dissonant, the timbral contrasts starker.

The passage at 2:49 isn't even in Rimsky; when we do return to familiar themes and motifs at 4:46, they're worked out and developed in unfamiliar ways. All this goes to show that Rimsky, far from merely 'cleaning up' the original score or polishing its orchestration, performed a full-scale recomposition on Mussorgsky's themes — the 'dawn' coda, which isn't here, is apparently completely his — and repackaged them into a more conventional structure. Mussorgsky's own supposedly 'primitive' harmonies won't disturb modern ears, and his orchestral effects sound far more finished than generations of commentary had suggested!

Kitajenko — I'm following the album's transliteration of the performers' names, though I've reverted to the standard English renderings of composers and scores — leads a vigorous, colourful performance. In the second theme, he gets a slightly, and appropriately, shaggy edge to the string tone, no mean feat with the Cologne ensemble; in fact, the entire performance expertly balances rough vitality and tonal polish.

The broad musical and dramatic gestures of the *Songs and Dances of Death* make the cycle an apt candidate for orchestral performance. No one arrangement has become standard, so orchestrators can make choices without reacting to others 'in their ear' — as happens with Ravel's version of *Pictures at an Exhibition* — and, over time, various people have tried their hand at it, including Edison Denisov here. [READ MORE ...](#)

Geoff Pearce: Until receiving this MSR Classics disc I was quite unaware of these songs, and what a delight I had on listening to them. Two very fine artists are presented to us — baritone Krzysztof Biernacki and pianist Michael Baron. This is a superb partnership and I recommend the CD to anyone who would like a recording of songs seldom heard or recorded. The works are presented chronologically, providing a fascinating journey into the evolving compositional style of Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937).

The first six, settings from 1902 of poems by Kazimierz Tetmajer (1865-1940), are representative of one of the major themes of 'Young Poland' — an escape from the brutalities of modern life and a yearning for death.



'... a fascinating journey into the evolving compositional style of Karol Szymanowski ...'

The musical style is lyrical, at times reminding me of Rachmaninov and even Tchaikovsky. Biernacki's baritone voice is warm and vibrant — the vibrato pleasing and never intrusive. Baron is a master in his partnership, coming to the fore when needed, and supporting at other times, as required. I particularly like his use of the sustaining pedal, at times creating a deliberate wash of sound which really suits the music of some of these settings.

The single song *The Swan*, Op 7 (1904), dedicated to the composer's mother, reinforces the theme of escape or freedom, and is probably my favourite here. This fine *Lied* could almost have been penned by Hugo Wolf because of its concentrated expressive intensity. It is firmly Slavic in character, however, and is very evocative and finely crafted.

Polish poet, gnostic and playwright Tadeusz Miciński (1873-1918) became Szymanowski's life-long friend. These stylish chromatic Miciński settings, the composer's Op 11 (1904-5), are in a subtly different world to the previous songs. Stylistically they're even more reminiscent of late romantic composers such as Richard Strauss and Hugo Wolf, with each of the four contrasting settings reflecting the subject of each poem.

The five songs comprising Opus 13 (1905-7) are altogether different stylistically — the texture is denser and the melody and harmonies create a feeling of tonal ambiguity. These are settings of German poets Richard Dehmel, Friedrich Bodenstedt and Otto Bierbaum. The second song, 'The Christ Child's Lullaby', is a real delight and quite different to the other four. [READ MORE ...](#)

Geoff also listens to piano music played by Jenny Q Chai :



'The pianist is assured, exciting to listen to and totally compelling.'

(S)yn(e)sth(e)te is a disc created to explain the relationship between sound and colour. Some people experience the phenomenon of synesthesia — an involuntary connection between senses. The sound to colour variety is termed chromesthesia, and famous composer examples are Bliss, Scriabin and Messiaen. Personally, I have not experienced this, but I have a few friends who do. Whilst most of us cannot see colours in music, some pieces of music or chord progressions may remind us of a colour. At least this is true in my case.

The first work on the disc is entitled *Blue Inscription* (2010), by Scott Wollschleger (born 1980). This piece is cool in character, and contrasts tension with release of that tension. This is achieved dynamically and harmonically, as well as with the use of a two note repeated chord pattern, which is present for a considerable amount of time. This builds tension, but when that pattern is broken, the tension is released, rather akin to the device known as a pedal point.

The second track, a Claude Debussy *étude* entitled *Pour les quarts*, has a delicate beauty. Full of contrasting textures and silences, it would be a challenge to perform, but here Jenny Q Chai interprets it exquisitely.

Another Debussy piece, *Pour les huit doigts*, is very short, at under two minutes. Like a toccata, it is full of dazzling runs. Here again, Chai reveals herself as a master of interpretation and the possessor of a formidable technique.

Karakurenai (Crimson) for prepared piano by Andy Akiho (born 1979) is a fascinating little piece because of its plucked and ringing sound effects, and because it can be played by one or more players. It has an off-kilter type of syncopated rhythm, and rising and falling melodic figures. At times it reminds me of Japanese music, but I also feel an African influence. It is performed with assurance and a clear understanding of what this music is about. [READ MORE ...](#)

Gerald Fenech: Giacomo Meyerbeer's case is indeed extremely strange, and that is putting it mildly. Born in Germany in the year Mozart died, 1791, he went to Italy to learn the art of opera, after which his career flourished in France, where he became one of the main protagonists of 'grand opera'.

Born into a family of well-to-do Jewish industrialists, Jakob Meyer Beer revealed a talent for music at a very early age. He began his musical career as one of the numerous child prodigies of the day, debuting as a pianist at the age of nine and, when still very young, he felt a strong attraction to the stage. On the suggestion of the famous Antonio Salieri, Meyerbeer decided to move to Italy and try to forge a living as an opera composer. Between 1817 and 1824 he wrote six works in the genre and also changed his name to the one by which he is known today. Soon after his stay in Italy he moved to France where his star rose with such works as *Les Huguenots*, *Dinorah*, *Le Prophete* and his swan song, *L'Africaine*. He died in 1864 without seeing this last work performed.

His operas, particularly those composed in France, are huge in scope and pageantry, and they provide a stirring night's entertainment full of great and often thrilling music. He was extremely popular in his day but, yes, tragically, after his death his operas fell into oblivion, and it was quite a rarity when one of them appeared on stage. Fortunately, from the 1950s and more so in this century, Meyerbeer has started to enjoy a 'renaissance', and thanks to several recordings, audiences are starting once more to experience the beauty of these superbly crafted stage-works.

Premiered at La Scala in Milan on 14 November 1820, *Margherita d'Anjou* dates from the composer's apprenticeship years in Italy. The libretto is by the famous Felice Romani, and the story unfolds against the background of the War of the Roses, fought in England between 1455 and 1485 between two branches of the Plantagenets. [READ MORE ...](#)



'Fabio Luisi marshalls his forces with aplomb, and his commitment to the work keeps the music moving along with verve and enthusiasm ...'

Gerald also listens to music by Saint-Saëns and Kodály, both on Naxos :



'... memorably performed
and recorded ...'

Together with Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály is regarded as one of the foundation rocks of Hungarian folk music. Born in 1882 into a working-class family, Zoltán's parents were both amateur musicians. Apart from his love for music, the young boy displayed a keen interest in languages and literature. In turn he studied germinal links between speech and music, and he soon became an avid collector of folk-tales, dances and tunes. He studied at the Paris Conservatoire, where he was bowled over by Debussy's impressionistic scores, and on his return home, he was soon etching out his own tone-paintings.

From about 1906 onwards Kodály and Bartók joined forces and embarked on a mission to visit every tiny corner of their native Hungary in order to audition, notate and index every specimen of Hungarian folk-music they could lay their hands on. Sometimes even an Edison wax roll was used, recording what seemed to fit the bill. Fortunately, the riches from those efforts are now available in published collections. The reason for all this research was that both composers were strongly aware of the influence of folk-tunes on the world of serious music.

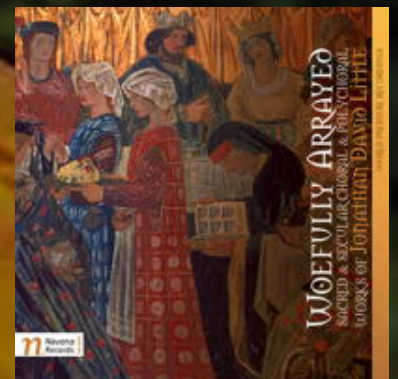
This issue of Kodály's most popular orchestral works is a fine example of the composer's ability to write exciting symphonic pieces steeped in the folkloristic flavour of his country, and grouping his four best-known pieces on one disc is certainly a very welcome plus. The 1933 *Dances of Galánta*, a small village between Vienna and Budapest, were inspired by the memory of Bohemian gypsy troupes that took residence in the village.

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Keith Bramich: *Woefully Arrayed*, written in 2016 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the National Boys Choir of Australia, sets, quietly and reflectively, three verses of words on a Lenten theme, attributed to the English poet John Skelton (c1463-1529), a tutor to Henry VIII and (possibly) self-appointed poet laureate. Beginning the work, and returning in an increasingly embellished, strong and celebratory form after each verse, providing contrast, is a refrain which sets these Skelton words:

*Wofully araide,
My blode, man,
For thee ran,
It may not be naide;
My body blo and wanne,
Wofully araide.*

The setting uses Venetian polychoral-style techniques, including spatial effects, plus multiple choral lines and *divisi*.



'... Australian music
with a difference.'

In an interesting and extended CD booklet essay, *Polychorality: Some Observations*, Hugh Keyte notes that we have much still to learn about the lost spatial techniques of polychoral composers, and refers to the music here as 'practical experiments' which provide 'a most enterprising way forward'. Diagrams in the CD booklet show the physical layout of singers for each piece.

To give you some idea of the scale, a full performance of this slow, trance-like work runs for twenty-five minutes, and the first three refrains each run for about two-and-a-half minutes, whilst the final refrain continues for nearly five minutes. Although contemporary music, this sounds, in many aspects, like something from the sixteenth century, and for modern ears, this can require a rather special kind of listening. [READ MORE ...](#)

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YOUTHFUL HILARITY — COMEDY IN VERDI'S 'UN GIORNO DI REGNO'

George Colerick: Whilst still only twenty-one, Rossini had adapted Beaumarchais' comedy *The Barber of Seville* to make a historic opera. Its success was related to a lively plot with two young would-be lovers outwitting foolish opposition from an elderly Pantaloone character. It was essentially an Italian Harlequinade, a spirit that had passed into musical comedy-farce, *opera buffa*. In *The Barber*, it was spiced with such diversions as a graphic presentation of a rumour and singing lesson given by a young lover incognito.

Rossini had a unique talent for extending jokes in musical terms. In *Cinderella*, the girl's family face the world astounded by her elevation to Princess, and in *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, the entire Turkish Court is outwitted by one woman. With all the characters on stage deluded or in a state of total confusion, the translating with clarity into an ensemble for upwards of six singers was a heavy challenge. Rossini often rose to it, creating breathtaking musical climaxes and some of the funniest scenes in all opera.



Chaliapin, Labinsky, Lossky, Caracas and Nezhdanoff — participants in Chaliapin's 1913 Bolshoi production of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in Moscow

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) greatly admired Rossini but, planning his own career in the late 1830s, had no wish to emulate what in other hands could have turned complexity into a farrago. He also perceived that with Rossini retired, the comic genre was in decline and he should be looking for serious, tragic themes. He could not have predicted that after many years, he would develop to great effect his own style of musical humour.



Melchiorre Delfico's caricature of Verdi confronting the Naples censor when preparing *Un ballo in maschera*

He found the proffered *libretti* weak and hidebound, so very reluctantly he agreed to write as his second opera, *King for a Day*. The plot was comic but trifling, just enough to provide a setting for four lead singers to fit the roles of two couples overcoming love difficulties. Each had a solo aria, with a slow section leading to a fast-paced climax (*cabaletta*) and duets for two sets of lovers.

In conventional pattern, the action opens with two comic basses, each a *basso buffo*, celebrating with chorus an intended marriage. In a later scene, they quarrel when one reneges on this. It is speculative that Verdi realized he had two vivacious tunes at hand with broad appeal, somewhat in the Rossini manner. These could climax two amusing episodes in the plot, otherwise he might have rejected the whole project. The overture is a model of youthful hilarity. [READ MORE ...](#)

FROM HEAVEN WINGING — REMEMBERING BASIL RAMSEY

Keith Bramich: It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Basil Ramsey, the founding editor of this online magazine, aged eighty-nine. His daughter wrote to me [on 14 June 2018] with the news that he had died peacefully, at home in North Yorkshire, following a long illness, on the morning of Wednesday 13 June 2018.

Basil was an organist, music journalist and editor with many many years' experience of writing about music, both in general terms, and about church and organ music in particular.

He was born in Chelmsford, Essex on 26 April 1929, grew up in London, was evacuated to a farm in Hertfordshire during the war, met his future wife at Christchurch, Highbury, and after the birth of the first of three children, moved to Rayleigh, near Southend. He was organist of two churches in London — St Luke's Old Street, and then St Giles, Cripplegate. Basil began his publishing career at Novello & Co, now part of the Music Sales organisation, literally working his way up the promotional ladder from tea boy to Director of Publications, with responsibility for taking on new Novello house composers, giving him an enviable collection of composer friends, including Charles Camilleri, Peter Dickinson, Bernard Herrmann, John Joubert and John McCabe. Eventually he branched out on his own, initially with his friend Benny Herrmann, as Basil Ramsey Publisher of Music, but got into difficulties when Herrmann died suddenly.

Basil had a parallel career in music journalism, editing a series of high profile publications including the *Musical Times*, *Music and Musicians*, and *Choir and Organ*. One thing I discovered whilst writing this tribute is that Basil was also a composer/arranger: he was credited for a Christmas carol, *From Heaven Winging*, which appears on several CDs.

In 1996 two tragic events changed Basil's life completely. His wife died, and he had a serious stroke, which left him unable to walk, wheelchair-bound and living alone. For a while he remained editor of *Choir and Organ*, communicating with his team by fax, phone and post. Once a month, the editorial team, based in Harrow in North London, visited Basil near Southend, on the north bank of the Thames Estuary, for editorial planning meetings. But Basil felt that it was unfair to ask the team to work remotely, and to make this long journey every month, and he resigned at around the time that he turned seventy.



Basil Ramsey at his computer in 1998. Photo © 1998 Keith Bramich

Any other man would have retired at this point, but Basil, confined to home, looked to the internet for a new way to reach out to those interested in classical music, and this striving for connections was phenomenally successful and wide-ranging, with information coming back from Australia, Canada, China, Germany, Malta, New Zealand and the USA. A mutual friend, the English composer Adrian Williams, introduced Basil and I, and we began to work on various internet music projects together. It was a good match because I was working with the internet and wanting to move towards classical music. After working on a couple of smaller projects — **I have been there — A stroke patient offers help to others**, and the **Basil Ramsey Programme Note Library**, we both came to the conclusion that we wanted to run an online magazine, and, following three months' of planning, *Music & Vision Magazine* was born on 1 January 1999, nearly twenty years ago. '... we have faith in this unique venture', Basil wrote, in his introduction to *M&V* in December 1998, 'as people everywhere, and from every strata of society, come within the power and influence of good music.'

Whilst I used my programming skills to make an online magazine which updated itself every day at midnight GMT, Basil wrote to his enviable list of writers and other contacts, asking for new writing, so that we had something every day, from high profile authors including, in these early days, Robert Anderson, Peter Dale, Peter Dickinson, Roderic Dunnett, Trevor Hold, Robert Hugill, Wilfrid Mellers, Malcolm Miller, Bill Newman, Ates Orga, Jennifer Paull, Shirley Ratcliffe, Gordon Rumson, Howard Smith, Patric Standford, Gillian Weir and of course Basil himself.

In 1999 the internet was something new: most of our material for publication arrived by fax and post. Optical character recognition wasn't advanced enough to convert these paper documents into text, and so Basil typed out almost all of them into his desktop computer, slowly and laboriously, using just one finger, and then emailed them to me for publication. Basil's former magazine colleagues in Harrow were amazed to see Basil's own writing appearing on their screens, with coloured backgrounds and images, several days a week.

Basil was very proud of *Music & Vision*, and kept up the daily work on the magazine until 2006, when his health began to decline. Basil has been a generous colleague, a good friend, and a successful teacher: he trained his editorial apprentice well, and I've been able to keep things going here since then.

I'll leave the last words to Basil himself ... one of his *Editorial Musings*, on the subject of organ playing, first published here in 1999 ... followed by a selection of tributes from some of his colleagues.

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Need concert notes?



You never know

Basil Ramsey muses on organ playing


There remains a gulf between organs, those who play them, and the general musical public. Having experienced a lifetime of a personal love-hate relationship with this most mysterious of instruments, I find myself stuck rigid on the halfway spot of indecisiveness.

Whatever criticism may be hurled at church organists, their devotion to the task of accompanying Sunday services and taking a weeknight choir rehearsal is a matter for praise, often a thankless task in difficult circumstances. Not unknown in some churches is the extreme nightmare of an unregulated organ heading for the knacker's yard, a choir of two boys and a girl, a hooty alto, bleating tenor, and two tremulous basses. A laugh? Try it.

Yet there are churches with a dedicated musician performing quiet miracles, keeping standards at a respectable level by his own mix of enthusiasm and knowledge, and using every harrowing experience as a challenge to convert weaknesses into strength.

To me, the trouble with taking the musical standards of the concert hall to meet the organ - except in the hands of some fine players worldwide - comes





to pieces in the fact that organ playing is a challenging art requiring exceptional command of the instrument before any thought of musical interpretation can be considered. Its limitations in certain respects demand more of the player than any other instrument, with the possible exception of the bagpipes. (But there you sense that challenge is the name of the game.)

I heard an organ recital a fortnight ago by a fine and experienced player in touch with his packed-out cathedral equipped with a good amplification system for his commentary on the music, and a large video screen showing his handling of the programme at the console.

The whole evening slipped into the pleasure of a musical experience for these reasons: masterful technique, interpretative ability, exceptional control of the means to an end, and music of quality with a few lightweight titbits slipped in to provide relaxation.

I remember a notable French organist playing in the same cathedral several years back. He thundered into his programme with Bach's 'Wedge' Prelude and Fugue in E minor - a mighty piece of musical architecture - with no regard for the audience's generally untutored ear or the futility of serving the main course before an appetiser. The playing was generally apoplectic, so the organ's easy descent into musical banality became evident. I returned home saddened that the instrument's weaknesses had been so shamelessly exploited.

On the other hand, I have permanently stored in my mind's slim treasure trove a performance of Bach's majestic Prelude and Fugue in E flat by a continental recitalist whose playing was of superlative quality, thereby gently lifting the audience into another dimension of musical existence. Nothing can describe this when it happens, and it is best left inside us to mature and remain as a yardstick for the occasion when something else miraculously happens.

The organ is as capable of transmutation as any other instrument in the hands of an inspired performer. If your experiences of the organ have previously left you cold, persist and you may be astonished at what is possible.

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TRIBUTES FROM COLLEAGUES

So sorry to hear this news — **Shirley Ratcliffe**

I am very sorry indeed to receive this news — the greatest thing we can do for him is to keep going. — **Jennifer Paull**

He was a remarkably generous man who cherished his composers in ways that have virtually died out these days. — **Peter Dickinson**

Sad news indeed. My condolences to his friends, family and colleagues.
— **Mike Wheeler**

I'm so sorry to hear about this. — **Anna Franco**

I am so sorry to hear the news about Basil. Typically, he gave me great encouragement when I was just starting out on my reviewing career ... It was deeply imaginative of him to embark on a classical music website before almost anyone had thought of the idea. He was a pioneer, and a truly wise one.
— **Roderic Dunnett**

What an interesting life and legacy. — **Anna Joubert**

I am eternally grateful that Mr Ramsey had the notion of creating a classical music e-zine, and that together you allowed me to be a part of it ... I valued that experience more than you will ever know — especially the opportunity to go to Bantry in 2007. It was one of the absolute highlights of my life. — **Kelly Ferjutz**

Please accept my deepest condolences on the loss of a brilliant friend and colleague.
— **Halida Dinova**

I read the sad news. Please accept my deepest sympathy. — **Anett Fodor**

Basil used to say to me that he believed in the spiritual power of music to communicate. A simple truth simply expressed, but one which stays in the memory, which gets to the heart of the matter. I recall appreciatively our editorial phone calls and his calm, reassuring voice, and for me he was a much-valued mentor, offering advice about writing, generous in his deadlines and word lengths, a friendly presence at the end of the editorial chain, for whom one could therefore feel comfortable to write. For a young critic (as I was in the 1990s), it was just what was needed.

His own credentials were always notable — a notable life in music, both creative and involved with dissemination, publishing and editing, and then at the helm of MT and The Organ. The shift to the online medium was exciting and admirable. Basil, with the help of Keith's computing expertise, was at the forefront of the digital era, M&V being one of the very first if not 'the' first classical music online magazines, and certainly the first daily one. It felt exciting to be involved, as it potentially could reach a wide readership and space was no issue. Basil encouraged my early pieces even offering to type the odd one up.

When Keith took editorial command Basil was always there in the background, responding positively to ideas for reviews, interviews and articles. Later he was less closely involved but I like to think he was still enjoying reading the fruits of his brainchild. I extend my sincere sympathies to his family, for he will be keenly missed. I personally shall remember Basil fondly for his warmth, his encouragement and his holding to basic artistic beliefs which I and many others could tune into, the intrinsic meaning and value of music and the art of communication. — **Malcolm Miller**

LINKS TO ALL BASIL RAMSEY'S MUSIC & VISION ARTICLES

This newsletter is a monthly taster for our high quality and colourful online classical music magazine, published every day since January 1999. Founded by the late Basil Ramsey and current editor Keith Bramich.

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The editorial and advertising copy deadlines for our August 2018 newsletter are both Friday 27 July 2018. **Details here.**

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