

Giacomo PUCCINI (1858-1924)

Turandot, Opera in three acts (1925-26). Act 3 by Alfano with finale composed by Hao Weiya.

Princess Turandot, Sun Xiuwei (sop); Prince Calaf, Dai Yuqiang (ten); Liu, Yao Hong (sop); Timur, Tian Haojiang (bass); Emperor Altoum, Liu Naiqi (ten); Ping, Liu Songhu (bar); Pong, Chen Yong (ten); Pang, Li Xiang (ten)

China National Centre for the Performing Arts Chorus and Orchestra/Daniel Oren

rec. live, China National Centre for the Performing Arts, Beijing, October 2013

Director, Chen Xinyi. Set Designer, Gao Guangjian. Costumes, Mo Xiaomin. Lighting by Vladimir Lukasevich

Directed for TV and Video by Tiziano Mancini

Picture format: NTSC 16:9 Colour. Sound formats, PCM Stereo / Dolby Digital 5.1 / DTS 5.1

Subtitles, English, German, Italian, Simplified Chinese (opera + bonus), Korean (opera only)

ACCENTUS MUSIC DVD 20338 [140 mins]

It seems to be raining recordings of *Turandot* at the moment; this is the second of three issued this year. The first, already reviewed and in process of publication on this site, is the performance from La Scala in 2015, its selling point being that it includes the act three completion by Luciano Berio rather than the standard one by Alfano. In that performance the modernistic production, by Nikolaus Lehnhoff, is second hand, having been first seen at the Dutch National Opera in 2002. A further recording has also emerged from Dynamic with Daniella Dessi in the eponymous role and Mario Malagnini as her suitor, again with the usual Alfano completion. It was recorded at Italy's delightful Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa in December 2012 (DVD33764). There may yet be another recording to come in the not too distant future, derived from the January 30th 2016 transmission, in HD, from the Metropolitan Opera, New York, of Franco Zeffirelli's famed opulent staging. This staging has previously been recorded on film with an all-star cast of Éva Marton and Plácido Domingo in the leading roles in a 1988 4:3 format (DG. DVD 073-058-9).

In Britain, live performances of *Turandot* are relatively uncommon, if my long opera going experience is anything to go by; perhaps the challenge to producers of limited budgets for any worthwhile staging is too much, along with the requirement of big-voiced singers in the two main roles. In China itself, what was described as a Gold Medal *Turandot* staging and performance was given in Beijing's so called Forbidden City by a celebrated Italian cast in 1998 ([see description](#)). Meanwhile the presence of soloists from China in the cast lists in opera houses worldwide indicate increasing interest in European Opera, as distinct from the native genre, in the country itself. In this 2013 performance, staged in the then recently built spectacular China National Centre for the Performing Arts, Beijing, the powers that be have gone the whole way to seemingly outdo that 1998 staging in a no cost limitation, multi-tiered spectacular, with colourful costumes and performed by an all indigenous cast.

On the musical side none of the principals lets the side down. Dai Yuqiang as Calaf could bring a little more animation to his upright acted interpretation, whilst his lyric toned tenor rises to every vocal challenge, including the concluding high note in *Nessun Dorma*, without transposition down by a semi tone or more, as was not uncommon among certain Italianate tenors in some concert performances. (CH. 24). In the title role Sun Xiuwei is vocally stretched once or twice and could be a little warmer of tone, although she acts her part well. The Liu of Yao Hong is rather too warm and womanly in vocal tone, compared with what is usual for the role. She is certainly not helped in her acted portrayal by her hairstyle. Tian Haojiang is sonorous as Emperor Altoum and acts well whilst Ping, Pong and Pang, in their opulent costumes, are excellent in their acted and sung assumptions.

On the rostrum Daniel Oren, who had earlier taken the Musical Directorship at Guangzhou, brought dynamic climaxes and drama where appropriate, whilst doing justice to Puccini and Alfano. As to the

contribution to the finale of Hao Weiya, it is hardly noticeable. The sound is warm and a little reverberant with the video director not overdoing the close-ups. The bonus, titled *The making of Turandot*, is brief but informative. The booklet has Chapter listings, timings and total time as well as all participant soloists and staging biographies, the latter in English and Chinese. Regrettably Chapters and timings are not available as the DVD plays, as is usual.

Robert J Farr

Alexander SCRIBIN (1872-1915)

Piano sonata No. 1 in F minor Op. 6 (1892) [22:25]

Piano sonata No. 2 in G sharp minor 'Sonata Fantasy' Op 19 [12:17]

Piano sonata No. 3 in F sharp minor Op 23 (1897-8) [19:39]

Piano sonata No. 4 in F sharp major Op 30 (1903) [9:43]

Piano sonata No. 5 Op 53 (1907) [12:12]

Piano sonata No. 6 Op 62 (1911) [12:59]

Piano sonata No. 7 'White mass' Op 64 (1911) [12:39]

Piano sonata No. 8 Op 66 (1913) [15:18]

Piano sonata No. 9 'Black mass' Op 68 (1913) [8:19]

Piano sonata No. 10 Op 70 (1913) [12:32]

Fantasy Op 28 (1900) [9:34]

Garrick Ohlsson (piano)

rec. August 2014, April/May 2015, Theatre C, SUNY College, Purchase, New York

BRIDGE B9468A/B [76:23 + 71:23]

Scriabin's ten piano sonatas form the backbone of his musical life, as Beethoven's thirty two did of his, though I dare say neither composer would be pleased by the comparison. Like Beethoven's, Scriabin's fall into three periods. The first three find him continuing the massive pianism of the Russian tradition, alleviated by a hefty dose of Chopin. A sudden change comes over him in the fourth and fifth sonatas, which are fully characteristic of his mature work. The last five also form a group on their own, in his most advanced idiom.

Garrick Ohlsson is a pianist I have admired since his recording of the immense Busoni Piano Concerto (Telarc CD 80207). He has also recorded the whole of Chopin (now on Hyperion CDS44351/66 or separate discs) and so has both the power and the delicacy needed for Scriabin. He has recently recorded the Scriabin *Poèmes* for Hyperion, which have been well received ([review](#) [review](#)) and previously recorded the *Études* (Bridge 9287). He is therefore well equipped to tackle the sonatas.

Sonata No. 1 is a big Lisztian work in four movements. Even here you can hear some of the traits which would characterize the mature composer: polyrhythms, a skipping figure (a dotted triplet) in the right hand and a flowing bass line. The slow movement has some delicate writing and is followed by a forceful rather Chopinesque scherzo. The finale is even more Chopinesque, a funeral march – Scriabin thought he had permanently injured a hand. Fortunately he recovered.

He took five years to write Sonata No. 2, titled Sonata-Fantasy. This is in two movements and already you can hear him reducing the weight of some of the writing and introducing a new mood: the second movement is a furious presto, in triple time such as he often used, with something of the air of the finale of Chopin's B flat minor sonata.

Sonata No. 3 is the last work in four movements but uses themes across all the movements in the cyclic manner of Liszt or Franck. Particularly notable is a passage in the slow movement in which a theme in the middle register is accompanied by both filigree work above and a plunging bass below, a texture he liked and was to use frequently.

Between this and Sonata No. 4 came the Fantasy Op 28 which is included in this programme. It sounds like a movement from an abandoned sonata, in an idiom the composer was leaving behind. Indeed Scriabin forgot that he had written it. It is vigorous but adds nothing new.

With Sonata No. 4 we come to the mature idiom. Forceful writing is reserved for the end of the second of the two movements. The first is gentle, with many grace notes, ornaments and trills. It flowers into a classic example of the three part texture I mentioned. The second movement is a fast dance with a chordal theme, a joyful movement which rises to a huge climax.

The celebrated Sonata No. 5 was written in a few days just after the orchestral *Poem of Ecstasy*. It is in the one movement form he was to use thereafter for all his sonatas. After the opening like a rocket taking off it alternates yearning passages, marked *languido*, with a fast dance like that of Sonata No. 4. Another theme is characteristic: a sonorous three note summons to attention like a horn call. It all builds to a huge climax and then takes off again into the sky.

The last five sonatas were all written within two years. They form a group in which Scriabin's typical pianistic devices are fully deployed. As well as those I have mentioned, there is the fondness for chords in fourths, the complicated polyrhythms which are not meant to be performed metronomically but have the effect of moving the music forward in waves, the snatching bass line, highly chromatic treble themes over a small compass, an increasing use of trills – Sonata No. 10 is dominated by them – and an often enormously complicated texture which has to be notated on three or four staves. Key signatures are abandoned; the harmony becomes very strange indeed and creates a haunting atmosphere. This does create a problem for the composer since with the abandonment of traditional harmony also goes the usual tonal relationships of sonata form. For this reason the works are all relatively short.

Another feature is not directly apparent to the listener but really strikes the performer – or the score reader – Scriabin's performance directions. From Sonata No. 5 onwards they become increasingly personal: that work begins *allegro impetuosos con stravaganza* and towards the end we have *con luminosità* and *estatico*. Later on he turned to French – the second language for Russians at the time – and we find *souffle mystérieux*; *onde caressante*; *le rêve prend forme (clarté, douceur, pureté)*; *ailé*; *tourbillonnant*; these are all from Sonata No. 6. My favourite is from Sonata No. 9: *avec une douceur de plus en plus caressante et empoisonnée*. His former teacher Taneyev said to Scriabin: 'You are the first composer who, instead of indicating the tempi, writes praise of his compositions'. I take the point, but I find phrases like these both accurate and evocative.

This highly distinctive idiom is immediately recognizable. Liszt's first *Mephisto waltz*, particularly its middle section, perhaps anticipates it. And Scriabin was to exert a wide influence: there are Scriabinesque passages in early Stravinsky and Bartók, also in Szymanowski and even in Messiaen.

To all this Ohlsson is a reliable guide. He has power and a commendable grasp of structure, so that Sonata No. 7, for example, comes out as a more Beethovenian work than usual. He can also be graceful and delicate: the three part passages in Sonata No. 4 and elsewhere come out with the right kind of glitter and sparkle. He even manages to hold together Sonata No. 8, the longest and arguably the weakest of the last five: it is rather repetitive, not only of its own themes but of some from the other sonatas. And of course Ohlsson is not short of speed when it is needed. There are many other recordings of these sonatas. For some years the benchmark has been Marc-André Hamelin's 1995 set on Hyperion CDA67131/2. I dare say it was because they already had this set on their books that Ohlsson's has not appeared on this label. Compared to Ohlsson Hamelin is more perfumed and poetic in the quiet passages and, though he has no lack of power, Ohlsson is possibly more forceful in the vigorous ones. The result, to my ears, is that Hamelin excels in the later works, which are also the finer, while Ohlsson makes a very good case for the earlier ones. When I compared their versions of the Busoni concerto I preferred Ohlsson and for the same reasons that I prefer Hamelin here.

Ohlsson's Bösendorfer is a mighty instrument and the recording, though generally adequate, can sound a bit congested at the climaxes. The sleevenote, in English only, gives useful background. These are plainer readings than those of Hamelin and some may prefer them for that reason.

Stephen Barber

Leopold KOŽELUCH (1747-1818)

Symphonies - Volume 1

Symphony in A major, PosK I:7 [20:23]

Symphony in C major, PosK I:6 [20:53]

Symphony in D major, PosK I:3 [18:04]

Symphony in G minor, PosK I:5 [17:16]

Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice/Marek Štilec

rec. February 2016, The House of Music, Pardubice, Czech Republic

NAXOS 8.573627 [76:55]

Piano Concerto No. 1 in F major (1784) [27:00]

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat major (1785) [25:06]

Piano Concerto No. 6 in C major (1786) [23:33]

London Mozart Players/Howard Shelley (piano)

rec. December 2015, St Silas the Martyr, Kentish Town, London

Reviewed as CD quality download (16bit/44kHz FLAC) from [Hyperion](#)

HYPERION CDA68154 [75:41]

There were a number of Bohemian composers working in Vienna towards the end of the eighteenth century, Gluck and Vaňhal being the best known, but at that time Leopold Koželuch was also highly respected. Like so many composers of that era, his music has been largely forgotten because of the gigantic shadows cast by Mozart and Haydn.

The Grand Piano label has done most in recent times to return his name to the listening public's attention, with nine releases of his keyboard sonatas: the most recent reviewed on this site was [Volume 6](#) last year. Now within the space of a few months, we have two releases presenting some of his eleven symphonies and twenty-two piano concertos. The former have not been entirely ignored: there was one volume on Chandos's admirable *Contemporaries of Mozart* series, as well as one on Elatus by Concerto Köln; each has one work in common with this new Naxos release. The concertos are scarcer: only one previous release (Oehms), sadly with two of the works in common.

With music of this era, you are rarely in for a surprise. The style was very consistent across the continent, and few composers beyond the big two produced works that have lasting appeal and a distinctive sound. I can report that Koželuch fits into the "no surprise" category, but there is no doubting his skills. These works are definitely at the finer end of the scale, approaching the greats at his best – the two C major works – and always graceful and effortlessly pleasing.

Performances on both recordings are all one could hope for. I compared the D major symphony which is in common between this recording and the Chandos, and found little difference, except that a harpsichord is employed, quite subtly, in the Czech orchestra as a "rhythm instrument"; I don't think it's appropriate to call it a basso continuo, given the era. In the concerto comparison, the differences are more clear cut. Howard Shelley has a much richer acoustic, and a far warmer-sounding piano than the Oehms recording. He also adopts somewhat faster tempos, especially in the Andante middle movement, whilst still sounding urbane and refined.

Production values are excellent in both of these recordings. The booklet notes from Hyperion are always exceptional; these are no different. If I was asked to recommend just one of these two recordings, I would suggest that the concertos have the better music overall. However, one might also consider the Naxos price advantage, and the fact that the C major symphony is the best of the seven works by some distance.

David Barker

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Józef NOWAKOWSKI (1800-1865)

Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op.17 (1853) [36:48]

Józef KROGULSKI (1815-1842)

Piano Octet in D minor, Op.6 (1834) [24:34]

Nelson Goerner (piano); Lena Neudauer (violin); Erzhan Kulibaev (violin); Katarzyna Budnik-Gałązka (viola); Marcin Zdunik (cello); Sławomir Rozlach (double bass); Jan Krzeszowiec (flute); Radosław Soroka (clarinet)

rec. June 2014 Witold Lutosławski Concert Studio of Polish Radio, Warsaw

FRYDERYK CHOPIN INSTITUTE NIFCCD105 [61:25]

As one of perhaps many people who try to fall asleep to the accompaniment of their bedside radio, I often wake in the morning and firstly scan the play-list from midnight. As a mild insomniac, it gives me some indication of how well, or patchily, I have slept, depending on what I can remember having heard through the night.

I can't remember the exact time during the night, but somehow I caught the opening of the first work on this CD, and was absolutely enthralled, simply forcing myself to stay awake for the hour or so, though certainly little hardship at all, given the piece's tunefulness, and immediate attraction. Rather like the guy who, in the TV advert of many years hence, was so impressed with the quality of a particular electric-razor, that he went out and bought the company, I contacted The Fryderyk Chopin Institute in Warsaw, and a CD was soon winging its way to me.

It's actually part of the 'Music of Chopin's Time' series, which, according to the Institute, aims to restore 'beautiful works from Chopin's era in interpretations by artists with an interest in rediscovering lost beauty'.

The exceedingly comprehensive sleeve-notes give sufficient background information on the composers, and it is also good to see that Marcin Gmys's original Polish text has been translated into real English by John Comber. It's also particularly helpful that these notes are separated into clear paragraphs, each one focussing on a specific movement, or work in general, rather than having to wade through often close print to find things, often exacerbated further by discussing works in non-track order on some CDs.

Nowakowski's E flat major Quintet of 1833, considered lost for decades until the parts were rediscovered in 2003, is actually his second, but his first has been completely lost without trace. The E flat Quintet has the same instrumentation as Hummel's Op 87 Quintet (and in the same key), as well as Schubert's *Trout* Quintet – where, instead of the more usual piano plus string quartet format, the double bass is favoured instead of one of the violins. This, of course, opens up a wider sound-palette, especially when the bass plays pizzicato. The opening Allegro vivace starts in typical business-like fashion, with little phrases and figurations along the way that might well have come straight from the pen of the young Chopin (1810-1849). Things proceed much according to plan until – just before the two-minute mark – Nowakowski introduces his lyrical second subject, and which the booklet describes as 'one of the most beautiful in the whole of the 19th-century Polish chamber literature'. Usually this type of claim appears on CDs of neglected composers, whose works have been promoted by a devotee, and who then needs some apparent justification for unearthing that particular composer. However, in Nowakowski's case – even mindful that Chopin's chamber-music contribution was relatively small, with just three works for cello and piano, an early Piano Trio, and a number of Polish songs – there is, I feel, still significant justification for this, while acknowledging the subjective nature of such a statement. The ensuing Allegro vivace in C minor is a rapid one-in-a-bar Scherzo, and full of the fire that this key seems to produce from many a composer, Beethoven

in particular. The gentle Trio, in A flat major, opens with another glorious melody given out by the piano, who has been fairly extensively-taxed in the Scherzo proper – apparently Nowakowski was an accomplished pianist, and Chopin took a keen interest in the composer's music. The Scherzo reprises, where again the piano has much of the action, though certainly not exclusively so. The Romance that follows is the slow movement and again the composer returns to the Trio's key of A flat – which, apparently, in the music of the time, was often associated with eroticism. The piano's opening gambit strongly hints at the melody of Chopin's famous E flat Nocturne, Op.9 No.2, but then very much goes its own charming way – another real gem of a movement. The rustic opening fifths of the sonata-rondo Finale lead into yet another superb movement, where Schubert probably springs to mind first, though the piano-writing equally is reminiscent of Chopin at times, too. Nowakowski shows himself the consummate master, totally able to integrate contrapuntal sections towards the close, or seamlessly to swap his strings and piano from solo to accompanying mode respectively, as the music rushes headlong towards its brilliant dénouement.

The partner-work is Krogulski's four-movement Octet which was written in 1834, when its composer-pianist was a mere nineteen – he died even younger than Chopin, and also from tuberculosis. It would appear to be modelled on Hummel's Septet in D minor, which both Chopin and Liszt numbered among the great masterpieces of the time, though with slightly different scoring, and, of course, one extra player. But the two works both share an extremely challenging piano part – and the same key nevertheless.

A mysterious short Adagio introduction precedes the cheery Allegro, which opens almost like Mozart, and in the tonic major (D). Much of the brilliant writing sees instruments paired in scales a third or sixth apart, to great effect. There is a very truncated development section of less than thirty bars in total, before a standard recapitulation follows. However, shortly before the end, Krogulski breaks off, while in full flow, for a short reprise of part of the opening introduction, though this is short-lived, and the tempo resumes as it reaches its joyful conclusion, with a short coda where the piano, in octaves, over sustained lines from some of the other instruments, and a pizzicato cello-part, produces a delightfully- compelling effect. The expansive Adagio slow movement opens briefly without the piano, but soon creates the aura of a John Field nocturne. Krogulski gives the cello a chance to shine, before the music turns somewhat more dramatic, with a section which, with its tremolando strings, doesn't fail to recall the 'recitative' from the second movement of Chopin's F minor Piano Concerto. The calm of the opening then returns. The third movement – a Minuetto, but marked Più Presto, and more in the manner of a faster Scherzo – is modelled on its equivalent in Hummel's Septet, and similarly presents a happy and contented Trio in the major key, framed by two mischievous outer sections in the minor. The Finale – again in the tonic major – is marked *À la Bohémienne [sic]*, and soon launches into a section that, with its drone fifths, and piano – both hands playing two octaves apart – very much exudes a rural, gypsy-like polka-feel, with the piano kept exceedingly busy throughout. But again, as before, Krogulski is not averse to bringing matters to a temporary halt as happens here in the development section, where the strong rise and fall of the chromatic scales suggest, perhaps a passing stormy wind, over which the opening theme picks up again, and the movement races once more to an impressively-built-up climax and final close.

There is such youthful spontaneity in the outstanding playing heard here, especially from Argentinian pianist Nelson Goerner, and the recording and overall presentation are equally as superb. Nowakowski and Krogulski are barely-known, even in their native Poland, but, on the evidence of the two works recorded here, they deserve far greater recognition in the field of chamber-music, not only in their native land, but internationally. This CD must rank as probably the most enjoyable chamber-music offering, as well as the most fascinating and entertaining find I have come across, for some considerable time.

Philip R Buttall

Heartfelt – Romantic Works for Horn

Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Horn Trio, Op. 40 (1865) [29:03]

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Adagio and Allegro, Op. 70 (1849) [8:47]

Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Auf dem Strom, D. 943 (1828)** [9:52]

Karl PLISS (1902-1979)

Tre pezzi in forma di Sonata [25:07]

Rob van de Laar (French horn), Thomas Beijer (piano), Mathieu van Bellen (violin), Karin Strobos (mezzo-soprano)

rec. June 2016, Galaxy Studio, Mol, Belgium.

CHALLENGE CLASSICS CC72745 [72:35]

With its reflective nature, related to Brahms's childhood and the passing of his mother in 1865, the *Horn Trio Op. 40* is one of his more accessible chamber works. This setting is a tricky one to get right in recordings, but the Challenge engineers capture the horn's warm expressiveness and its rhythmic attack in the *Scherzo* and *Finale* without disadvantage to Mathieu van Bellen's violin. If anything, the piano could be a bit more present; its lower depth seems a touch too far away at times. Whatever the recording plusses and possible minuses (such things are of course subjective questions), this is a very fine performance indeed, with plenty of life and vibrancy. Despite the "Heartfelt" title to this release, the performance is relatively reserved and blessedly free of histrionics. The crucial *Adagio mesto* has plenty of mournful mood. Even so, it looks towards wide landscapes and blue skies rather than dealing with too much inner turmoil. This is certainly present here and there—kept nicely in proportion and more of a troubled memory than a rending of garments. The *Finale* is virtuoso but suitably disciplined and well under control by all players.

There are of course numerous recordings of the Brahms *Horn Trio* around. Decca Eloquence has Günter Högner ([review](#)), arguably more heart-on-sleeve in general than Rob van de Laar but comparable in many ways. The BIS label ([review](#)) balances Marie-Luise Neunecker's horn further away than either of these, possibly even a bit too much, but giving more weight to the violin sound, which can be an issue. It also throws up another point, the frequent coupling with Ligeti's *Horn Trio* which, while a great piece, may not be everyone's cup of tea. Other contemporary horn trios are available.

The valve horn we know today was a new invention when Schumann wrote his *Adagio and Allegro*. It seems he was a little too ambitious with the instrument, as the piece is still considered one of the most demanding. Rob van der Laar deals with the extremes of range and melodic leaps and bounds effectively while not making things sound too easy. Thomas Beijer's piano playing also deserves a mention, though again he seems just a tad too far away for genuine dialogue.

Schubert's *Auf dem Strom*, from his miraculous final year of life, marked the first anniversary of Beethoven's death. The text is a poem by Ludwig Rellstab that depicts "a farewell to a beloved as she crosses the river through death's dark veil". Karin Strobos sings this beautifully and with plenty of drama, though with quite an operatic projection that gives little opportunity for real differentiation within the text. This is not printed in the booklet.

Karl Pilss may be a new name to many, though he is known amongst brass players as the composer of concertos and ensembles for brass instruments. The *Tre pezzi in forma di Sonata* is written in a late Romantic style with fine lyricism, nicely effective harmonies and a delightfully bouncy *Rondo alla caccia* finale, though I suspect this will not be a piece that lives in the memory for long after it has been heard.

This is a rarely recorded work, however, and would be a useful addition to any horn player's duo repertoire.

If you are looking for a good recording of the Brahms *Horn Trio* and like the idea of it appearing amongst other Romantic repertoire, especially the Schumann *Adagio and Allegro*, then this release should have plenty of appeal.

Dominy Clements

A Great Primadonna - Volume 1: Liederkonzert

Siv Wennberg (soprano)

Jan Eyron (piano)

rec. July 1986 at Riddarhuset, Stockholm

Sung texts with English translations enclosed

STERLING CDA 1689-2 [63:42]

Swedish soprano Siv Wennberg, who originally trained as a concert pianist, had an important international career in the 1970s and -80s, primarily in dramatic roles but she was also a devoted recitalist and often sang Nordic romances and German Lieder, not least Richard Strauss. I had the good fortune to hear her at the very beginning. I even believe I witnessed her debut at the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm in the role of Berta in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. But very soon she was entrusted with principal parts and her first Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* was a sensation. The big opera houses were eager to book her and within a couple of years she got a recording contract with EMI. This, unfortunately, only resulted in two recordings: an LP with Nordic songs, where she was accompanied by Geoffrey Parsons and a complete recording of Wagner's early opera *Rienzi*, conducted by Heinrich Hollreiser and with singers like René Kollo and Theo Adam. At long last she has now been the subject of an extended series of CDs under the header "A Great Primadonna". It is the Swedish company Sterling, who have dug deep in radio archives and other sources and come up with an impressive lot of recorded material that shows the breadth of her repertoire. Besides various concerts and recitals there are also three complete operas. In due time I will discuss most of these issues. The present disc is the first instalment and it is a rather unfortunate start, for certain reasons.

It is a live song recital recorded by a visitor with presumably rather simple equipment. The recording is rather distant, there is some kind of background hiss, there is disturbing echo, the piano tone is very metallic but the worst thing is that the singer's voice seems unfocused and sometimes out of tune. This latter remark seems almost unbelievable for a singer with perfect pitch but I experience something similar to the Doppler effect, i.e. "an increase (or decrease) in the frequency of sound, light, or other waves as the source and observer move towards (or away from) each other. The effect causes the sudden change in pitch noticeable in a passing siren ..." to quote the encyclopaedia. What I experience is not as drastic as the Doppler effect but the pitch wavers slightly. I can't explain why but I must report what I hear.

But I hear other things as well. I hear a big and beautiful voice which can expand almost limitlessly but can also scale down to superb pianissimo. I hear a singer who doesn't just sing the notes but also understands and can express the words and their meaning. I hear a pianist who knows the repertoire and listens to the singer's intentions. Jan Eyron's hallmark was always a total identification with the music and with the singer he formed a duo with. No glaring piano in the world can hide that. I also hear an enthusiastic audience shouting 'Bravo!' as a further confirmation of the artists' achievements.

The programme is full of gems. Mozart's *Abendempfindung* is uncommonly powerful but this is also a valid way of approaching the song. *Auf Flügeln des Gesanges* is sung with great warmth and beauty. In the three Schubert songs Wennberg is rather restrained and the nocturnal feeling of the holy night that the first two describe is sensitively delineated. The Nordic songs – Stenhammar, Grieg and Alfvén – are certainly sung from the heart, and finally come four encores with a dramatic, glorious *Schlagende Herzen* by Richard Strauss, Grieg's *Et håb* and Peterson-Berger's humorous Bjørnson setting *Solen skinner vakkert om kvelden* and at last the two say goodbye with *Zueignung*, simple and moving.

The recording leaves a lot to be desired but there is so much here that is so exquisitely done and I only regret that I hear that wavering pitch. Hopefully others don't hear it.

Göran Forsling

Track Listing

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756 – 1791)

1. *Abendempfindung* K523 [5:07]

Felix MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY (1809 – 1847)

2. *Suleika*, Op. 34:4 [3:18]

3. *Auf Flügeln des Gesanges* [2:54]

Franz SCHUBERT (1797 – 1828)

4. *Nacht und Träume* [4:07]

5. *Nachtstück* [5:14]

6. *Ave Maria* [6:31]

Wilhelm STENHAMMAR (1871 – 1927)

7. *I skogen* [2:28]

Edvard GRIEG (1843 – 1907)

8. *Solveigs sang* [4:56]

9. *Vuggesang* [4:01]

10. *Prinsessen* [4:03]

11. *Jeg elsker dig* [3:34]

Hugo ALFVÉN (1872 – 1960)

12. *Skogen sover* [3:09]

13. *Jag längtar dig* [2:13]

Richard STRAUSS (1864 – 1949)

14. *Schlagende Herzen* [2:17]

Edvard GRIEG

15. *Et håb* [2:02]

Wilhelm PETERSON-BERGER (1867 – 1942)

16. *Solen skinner vakkert om kvaelden* [1:47]

Richard STRAUSS

17. *Zueignung* [2:31]

Nicola LeFANU (b. 1947)

Invisible pieces (1986) [15.46]

Trio 2: Song for Peter (1983) [18.28]

David LUMSDAINE (b. 1931)

fire in leaf and grass (1991) [2.16]

Mandala 3 (1978) [39.43]

+Sarah Leonard (soprano), Gemini/Ian Mitchell (clarinet and director)

rec. St Paul's Church, Finchley, London, September 1995; All Saints' Church, East Finchley, London, August/October 2015

MÉTIER MSV 28565 [76.34]

This disc enterprisingly combines two pieces by Thea Musgrave's daughter Nicola LeFanu with two by her husband David Lumsdaine – a welcome juxtaposition even if the music of the two composers is not conspicuously similar in style. It also combines the fruits of recording sessions held in the summer and autumn of 2015 with an earlier recording made twenty years beforehand but which is only now receiving its first release. Although the players in both sessions are identified as Gemini, the only performer in common between 1995 and 2015 is Ian Mitchell, clarinettist and director of the ensemble; the string players are entirely different.

It is unclear why the 1995 recording, a clearly professional effort produced by Chris de Souza, should have waited so long for commercial release. *Invisible places* is effectively a clarinet quintet in sixteen short movements (separately tracked here) which, Nicola LeFanu informs us in her booklet note, derives from Italo Calvino's *Invisible cities*: "seek and learn to recognise who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not of the inferno, then make them endure, give them space." (It reads more poetically in Italian.) The notion of constructing a large structure – and *Invisible places* is nearly twenty minutes long – from a collection of smaller fragments is not unfamiliar nowadays, but the results can be disconcertingly disjointed; and it is a tribute to the composer's skill that, despite plenty of contrast between sections, they do cohere into an evolutionary pattern which lead finally to a peaceful conclusion of some emotional warmth. Playing and recording are immaculate.

David Lumsdaine's short setting of *fire in leaf and grass* (why the 'trendy' avoidance of capital letters? – the poet does not seem to regard himself as being of the school of cummings) makes a pleasant pendant to the closing bars of *Invisible places*. It is a straightforward setting of an atmospheric poem, and Sarah Leonard and Ian Mitchell combine felicitously to present this engaging miniature with affection.

Nicola LeFanu's much more extended *Song for Peter* is, on the other hand, a much tougher nut to crack, combining as it does elements of a song cycle with those of a formal trio for three instruments (including the voice). The texts are drawn from disparate sources – Emily Dickinson, Anton Chekhov and Ted Hughes – extracted and combined by the composer to surround a complete setting of *There will come soft rains* by First World war pacifist poet Sarah Teasdale. The threads that bind these disparate elements together, the composer informs us, are "perennial thoughts about time and mortality." It must be said that Sarah Leonard, a soprano who has devoted her career over many years to the praiseworthy promotion of contemporary music, fails most of the time to get the meaning of the texts across; the vocal lines, with their wide range, cannot be easy to make comprehensible, and the printed texts included in the booklet are absolutely indispensable here. Ian Mitchell, switching here between clarinet and bass clarinet, and cellist Sophie Harris, contribute fully to the balance of the trio, and the engineers have clearly taken care not to emphasise the vocal line to the detriment of the instrumentalists; but the result unfortunately does not communicate the clearly heartfelt intentions of the chosen texts in an ideal manner.

The final track on this CD is by far the most substantial (nearly forty minutes) and consists of a complete performance of David Lumsdaine's *Mandala 3*. This is based in part on the composer's earlier piano piece *Ruhe sanfte, sanfte ruh'*, the only item on this disc which has been previously available on record. It is, as the earlier title implies, a rumination on the final chorus from Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, and indeed the first four minutes of the score consist of an arrangement of that chorus for a quintet of flute, clarinet, viola, cello and piano. This is interrupted shortly before its conclusion by a ten-minute 'sonata' in binary form which combines elements from the Bach score with "references to other music". This sort of montage can be dangerous territory for composers, especially when the quotations and references assume a greater prominence than the original music which surrounds them; but here the only obvious citation I detected was the repetition of the strummed *pizzicato* chords which introduce the scherzo in Elgar's *Cello Concerto* – and these indeed could be regarded in their turn as a cross-reference back to Elgar's own imitation of classical models. At the end of this 'sonata' the music then quotes from the earlier piano meditation before launching into a discursive 'fantasia', twenty-five minutes long, which thoroughly explores the ramifications of Bach's imagination and then begins to make points of its own. The playing here is superlative, but I must admit that the Chinese gong sounded very clangorous in *forte* passages. Surely a larger, deeper and more resonant instrument would have been more effective; as Cecil Forsyth acerbically observed in his textbook on *Orchestration*, "the instrument has associations with the dinner table."

That minor cavil aside, I find it difficult to imagine that this music could be better performed than here. I should perhaps mention that I met the young Ian Mitchell in London in the 1970s when he gave the première of the *Bass Clarinet Sonata* by my friend John Jordan (a work with a particularly beautiful slow movement which really should be commercially recorded) as part of a recital with Anthony Green, which also included the same pianist in my own *Saxophone Sonata*. Anthony Green in turn was the teacher of Aleksander Szram, who takes the solo part in *Mandala 3* on this disc, and makes a heartfelt impression as he plumbs the depth of despair in the work. The booklet notes, running to a full 24 pages of material, are extensive and informative, but are in English only. All the recordings, like the performances themselves, are clear and present.

Paul Corfield Godfrey

Ronald STEVENSON (1928-2015)**Piano Music - Volume Two**

Three Scots Fairy Tales (1967) [3:15]

A Carlyle Suite (1995) [20:18]

Rory Dall Morison's Harp Book (1978) [17:04]

Three Scottish Ballads (1973) [9:48]

Frank MERRICK (1886-1981)

Hebridean Seascape (c.1935) transcr. Ronald Stevenson, 1986 [13:05]

Savourna STEVENSON

Lament for a Blind Harper, transcr. Ronald Stevenson, 1986 [3:01]

Christopher Guild (piano)

rec. June [2016?], Turner Sims Concert Hall, Southampton

TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0388 [66:37]

The second volume of Toccata's series devoted to Ronald Stevenson's piano music investigates folklore and lightly varnished pedagogic pieces. That said, the disc opens with the thirteen-minute span of *Hebridean Seascape*, Stevenson's arrangement of the central movement – called just *Seascape* – from Frank Merrick's Piano Concerto No.2, composed around 1935. It was the long-lived Merrick – born in 1886, he died in 1981 – who suggested that Stevenson undertake the arrangement for solo piano and Stevenson premiered his work at the Purcell Room in London in the centenary year of Merrick's birth. Merrick enshrined a Skye fisherwoman's chant in the movement, hence Stevenson's modification of the movement name, and there are stirring melodies, both heartfelt and turbulent, to engross the ear throughout. The rolled chords and swell as well as the songful cries incarnate Stevenson's excellent transcription; it's useful to listen to the original version, which can be found on the LP Merrick made of this work. It's been uploaded to YouTube as well.

A Carlyle Suite was commissioned to celebrate the bicentenary of Thomas Carlyle's birth in 1995. It's a slightly strange piece in five movements. An Aubade is followed by a Souvenir de Salon in which Jane Carlyle listens to Chopin (there are some droll exchanges here) and then comes a theme – the theme is by Frederick the Great – and six variations. Each variation reflects a 'study in historical styles' where a French Overture is followed by Rococo Romantic, Impressionist, Expressionist and a Busoni-inspired New Classicism. These brief montage pictures last no more than two minutes. A brief Scherzo is followed by an equally brief Serenade - the latter revisiting the opening Aubade but now in the minor.

The brisk *Three Scots Fairy Tales* of 1967 are taut pieces of pedagogy introducing jig rhythms, impressionist hues and trace elements of Bartók's influence. The larger span of *Rory Dall Morison's Harp Book* comes from just over a decade later. This is a delightful set of eight pieces that embraces the quietly reflective as much as the harp-like bardic. Of sterner stuff is the set of *Three Scottish Ballads* from 1973. 'Lord Randal' is gruff and powerful but has a very vocalised line, with an appropriately grim dénouement. Taut compression is again the name of the game for 'The Downie Dens O'Yarrow' whilst the final piece, 'Newhaven Fishwife's Cry', dedicated to Stevenson's wife, offers more light-hearted and affirmative qualities after the unrelieved menace of the two earlier settings. This set contains unquestionably the best music in the disc. Before it ends however there is Stevenson's transcription of his harpist daughter Savourna's *Lament for a Blind Harper*, a tender and beautiful envoi recast for the left-hand alone.

Christopher Guild is the expert exponent and his booklet notes show a particularly perceptive awareness of Stevenson's writing and influences. With a well-judged concert hall acoustic this is another fine addition to the ever-expanding Stevenson discography.

Jonathan Woolf

George Frideric HANDEL (1685-1759)

Arias from *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, *Alcina*, *Theodora*, *Rodelinda*, *Agrippina*, *Rinaldo*

Henry PURCELL (1659-1695)

Aria, *When I am laid in earth* from *Dido and Aeneas*

Sonya Yoncheva (soprano)

Academia Montis Regalis/Alessandro de Marchi (director, harpsichord)

Karine Deshayes (mezzo-soprano: 5, 9)

rec. 2016 Academia Montis Regalis, Mondovi, Italy

Full Italian texts with English translations (No Purcell text provided)

SONY 88985302932 [63.45]

For her second solo album Bulgarian lyric soprano Sonya Yoncheva has turned to the Baroque, specifically to Handel opera and oratorio arias. Included as a bonus is an extra track 'When I am laid in earth' from Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas*. The release marks a sea change from Yoncheva's first album *Paris, mon amour* focused on the *Belle Époque* with arias from Gounod, Massenet, Messager, Lécocq and Verdi also on Sony.

Yoncheva initially came to international notice when she was awarded first prize in the 2010 edition of Plácido Domingo's prestigious Operalia competition at Teatro alla Scala, Milan. As of now, the soprano has already appeared at the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Royal Opera House, Bayerische Staatsoper, Berlin Staatsoper, Wiener Staatsoper and Opéra de Paris. Yoncheva made the headlines when in 2014 at short notice she replaced Kristine Opolais at the Met, who had withdrawn from Zeffirelli's *La bohème*, and learned the part of Mimì; all this just five weeks after giving birth to her first child. Now this summer Yoncheva is engaged to sing Mimì at La Scala, Milan. An alumna of William Christie's academy for young singers, Le Jardin des Voix, initially her career concentrated mainly on early repertory but since then early music roles have not been common in her repertoire although I notice that in 2016 Yoncheva sang the title role in Handel's *Alcina* at Opéra de Monte-Carlo and Opéra Royal de Versailles.

In warmly impressive voice and with steadfast concentration Yoncheva excels in these demanding Handel arias, displaying a variety of often complex emotional states. With remarkable characterisation throughout, her tuning, phrasing and strong projection are splendidly conveyed with good purity. Not surprisingly in the top register one senses that her voice wants to blossom out from the strain of maintaining a straight Baroque tone. My two standout performances are probably the two most celebrated arias. 'Ah! mio cor! schernito sei!' from *Alcina*, where the sorceress has been betrayed by knight Ruggiero and becomes angry and revengeful, which is sublimely conveyed by the soprano with a silky, fluid tone. From *Rinaldo*, abducted by Armida the sorceress, Almirena laments her destiny in the aria 'Lascia ch'io pianga' with lovely affecting singing, as Yoncheva displays her noticeably deep feeling for the text.

Mezzo-soprano Karine Deshayes joins Yoncheva for two of the arias. I especially enjoyed the duet 'To thee, thou glorious son of worth' from the dramatic oratorio *Theodora* where the lovers Theodora and Didymus, facing death, hope to meet in heaven. Sensitive and sensual the duo communicates the text with melancholy, providing an aching beauty. With Alessandro de Marchi directing from the harpsichord, fresh and alert period instrument ensemble Academia Montis Regalis using a moderate size section of ten strings plays with an impressive blend of style and expression.

Recorded at Academia Montis Regalis, Mondovi the engineering team for Sony provide appealing full, clear sound with immaculate balance. There is an informative essay in the booklet by Petya Ivanova which mentions all the Handel tracks but there is no biographical information about Sonya Yoncheva or the

orchestra and conductor. Gratifyingly the booklet contains full Italian texts with English translations for the Handel arias but curiously no text for the bonus Purcell aria.

In the catalogue there are number of high quality albums of Handel soprano opera arias that I admire notably from Sandrine Piau/Christophe Rousset/Naïve, Renée Fleming/Harry Bicket/Decca, María Bayo/Skip Sempé/Naïve and Roberta Invernizzi/Fabio Ciofini/Glossa. Certainly Yoncheva's new album can be placed in that illustrious company. Strikingly performed and recorded Sonya Yoncheva's Handel album is a sheer delight.

Michael Cookson

Track Listing

George Frideric HANDEL (1685-1759)

1. Giulio Cesare in Egitto, HWV 17, Act II, Scene 8: Se pietà di me non senti [7.50]
2. Alcina, HWV 34, Act II, Scene 8: Ah! mio cor! schernito sei! [11.24]
3. Theodora, HWV 68, Act II, Scene 2: With darkness deep, as is my woe [4.13]
4. Alcina, HWV 34, Act I, Scene 15: Tornami a vagheggiar [4.50]
5. Rodelinda, regina de' Langobardi, HWV 19, Act II, Scene 7: Io t'abbraccio - Karine Deshayes (mezzo-soprano) [5.36]
6. Agrippina, HWV 6, Act II, Scene 13: Pensieri, voi mi tormentate! [6.38]
7. Giulio Cesare in Egitto, HWV 17, Act I, Scene 5: Non disperar, chi sa? [4.00]
8. Agrippina, HWV 6, Act II, Scene 21: Ogni vento ch'al porto lo spinga [4.49]
9. Theodora, HWV 68, Act II, Scene 5: To thee, thou glorious son of worth - Karine Deshayes (mezzo-soprano) [4.57]
10. Rinaldo, HWV 7, Act II, Scene 4: Lascia ch'io pianga [4.29]

Bonus track:

Henry PURCELL (1659-1695)

11. Dido and Aeneas, Z. 626, Act III: Thy hand, Belinda...When I am laid in earth [4.55]

How to Build an Orchestra

Thomas Hull, Ruth Rogers, Julian Lloyd-Webber and the Chipping Campden Festival Academy Orchestra

Filmed, edited and directed by Sheila Hayman

Filmed 2015

Region Code: All (PAL)

Picture format: 16:9

Sound: Dolby Digital 2.0

CHIPPING CAMPDEN MUSIC FESTIVAL CCMF004 DVD [47:00]

Chipping Campden is a lovely little town in the Gloucestershire part of the Cotswolds. Indeed, in appearance it is the quintessential Cotswold town or village. (The word Chipping is derived from an old English word denoting a market or marketplace.) The parish church of St James is a fine example of a medieval English wool church built, I believe, in the perpendicular style. The town has some 2,500 inhabitants and is a favourite tourist destination. Since 2002 it has played host to a music festival, held annually in May, and the majority of the concerts in this two-week festival are given in the airy, spacious setting of St James church.

The Festival was the brainchild of Charlie Bennett, who is still its Director and who appears in the film. In a relatively short period of time the Festival has become well respected on the British festival circuit. The renowned pianist, Paul Lewis is the Festival President and is far more than a figurehead: he performs there almost every year. Indeed, artists of the highest calibre are regularly engaged.

In 2008 the Festival took a major step by founding the Chipping Campden Festival Academy Orchestra. This ensemble comprises an equal number of experienced professional orchestral players and students; the latter are either very advanced students or recent graduates. This film, based around the 2015 Festival, explains how the Academy Orchestra works.

The orchestra is conducted each year by Thomas Hull and is led by his wife, Ruth Rogers, who is clearly a violinist of significant accomplishment: during part of the film we see her rehearsing and performing the Tchaikovsky concerto with the orchestra. Both of them are heavily involved in the London auditions for the student musicians, which take place in January. Later in the film we get some insights into how local residents rally round to make the festival happen each year, including offering accommodation to the visiting musicians. There's a strong community spirit in evidence: it's all very English – a comment I mean in the nicest possible way. One of the ladies who plays host to the young musicians makes a telling comment: "The Festival brings the village to life and fills the town with youth, noise and vibrancy."

There's quite a bit of footage shot at rehearsals during the week that the orchestra is in residence; the music on which they work includes Brahms (Symphony No 4), Dvořák (Symphony No 8) and Wagner (*Siegfried Idyll*). The rehearsals take place in the local primary school and there's a very nice scene when some of the children are allowed in to observe a rehearsal in progress: they're transfixed by the sights and sounds.

Julian Lloyd-Webber is the Festival's Patron of Education. As he explains, a key aim of the Academy Orchestra is to give the young players a strong insight into what it's like to be part of a professional orchestra; this is achieved through them sitting side by side with seasoned professionals, which is a great idea. As one of the players puts it, the result is a "marriage of experience and energy". It's evident that a lot of fun is had along the way – but a great deal of hard work also. Just as important is the mission to give the young players an insight into the social skills that are needed by orchestral musicians; it's essential that they are team members. There are some sequences towards the end of the film when we see the orchestra

in concert and the broad smiles all round at the end of the performances testify to the enjoyment and camaraderie that this week of intensive music-making in the Cotswolds engenders.

I've reviewed a number of concerts at the Festival over the years for MusicWeb International Seen and Heard. To my regret I've not so far taken in one of the Academy Orchestra concerts though reviews I've read by my late colleague, Roger Jones, have regularly attested to the high level of accomplishment. I'm looking forward to rectifying this omission in May at one of their two concerts. On that occasion they'll play Sibelius' Second Symphony and also accompany baritone Roderick Williams in his own orchestration of the Vaughan Williams song cycle *The House of Life*.

This film is nicely made and includes many fetching shots of the delightful environment of Chipping Campden itself. It's an attractive film, featuring good camera work and sound. I enjoyed it though I wonder how many times one would wish to view it. However, it's an enjoyable introduction both to the Festival itself and, above all, to its excellent resident orchestra.

The 2017 Chipping Campden Music Festival takes place between 14 and 27 May. For more information visit the Festival [website](#)

[John Quinn](#)