

Another Dozen Obscure Favorites by Andrew Hartman

In my previous article entitled "[A Dozen Obscure Favorites](#)" I changed my prior focus on a single composer to one that highlighted individual works from many different composers. Since that piece could understandably only scratch the surface of an enormous reservoir of worthy but obscure works, I felt a sequel might be in order. So here we go with another dozen obscure favorites that I hope will give readers much pleasure upon making their acquaintance. As before, my criteria is that they be pieces that once heard are not likely to be forgotten, and are in my subjective opinion worthy of joining the mainstream repertory.

Joseph-Hector Fiocco – Missa Solemnis

The Flemish composer Joseph-Hector Fiocco (1703-1741) was certainly the finest Belgian composer of the high Baroque era. He was born and died in Brussels but spent six years working in Antwerp. All of his musical posts were associated with the church, hence the majority of his compositions are sacred vocal works. Fiocco was the son of the Italian composer Pietro Antonio Fiocco, who settled in Belgium in his late twenties. Among Joseph's instrumental compositions are two books of brilliant harpsichord pieces recorded superbly by Ton Koopman on the Astrée label. If the reader has any interest in Baroque harpsichord music I urge them to seek out these recordings which are marvelous in every way. Fiocco's greatest work is undoubtedly his Missa Solemnis. This is a grand statement, lasting over an hour and featuring full orchestra with prominent trumpet parts, and four soloists (soprano, counter-tenor, tenor and bass). Although recordings of Fiocco's works are thin on the ground, we are fortunate to have three recordings of this work, testimony to its great worth. Indeed, after listening to this work several times I would say it is not only one of the greatest Masses of the Baroque era, it is one of the greatest works of the Baroque era in any form. If it had Handel's name on it the piece would be world famous.

The Missa Solemnis begins dramatically with an explosive statement of the words Kyrie Eleison complete with soaring trumpets, timpani and chorus, repeated three times then concluded with the word Eleison. This sequence is repeated several times as if to emphasize the majesty of the Lord's mercy. The Christe Eleison is much gentler, almost sorrowful, and is sung by the soprano. Fiocco is differentiating the majesty of the Lord from the sorrows of Christ. The joyful Kyrie Eleison returns but in a contrapuntal form, not simply reprising the opening as many composers do with this section of the Mass.

The Gloria opens with a blaze of trumpets as the chorus sings Et in Terra Pax. This leads into an upwardly striding melody and a duet for the soprano and counter-tenor in the Laudamus Te. At one point the two sing in canon. The Domine Deus brings in the bass backed by the chorus in a serenely flowing melody. For the Qui Tollis, Fiocco gives us a triumphant trumpet-driven chorus that builds to great power. This is quite different from most composers' settings who typically have an introspective section here as the supplicant begs for the Lord to hear their prayers. It is an example of Fiocco's optimistic and joyful outlook that time and again he writes confident or triumphant music for sections of the Mass for which most composers write sorrowful or humble pieces. The Quoniam section brings a very Handelian melody featuring all of the soloists interweaving their voices in an ever changing pattern as they affirm the holiness of the Lord. The Gloria ends with a suitably glorious Amen.

The lengthy Credo which lasts almost half an hour begins with a hugely affirmative chorus declaring their unshakeable belief in one God. For the Credo in Unum Dominum, the belief in Christ, a duet for the tenor and counter-tenor opens the section. The bass then takes over with a virtuosic aria accompanied only by strings. The soprano, tenor and counter-tenor then sing a trio before the trumpets and chorus return to

sing of the salvation Christ brings. The Et Incarnatus Est is a prayerful and beautiful chorus as the Virgin Mary is contemplated. A lengthy instrumental section for lower strings leads to a sorrowful aria for the bass in the Crucifixus. As one would expect, trumpets blaze in the Et Resurrexit and the chorus enthusiastically gives the good word. The tenor and counter-tenor then sing a beautiful duet describing Christ's ascent into heaven. The trumpets launch a melody in their highest range to describe Christ's glorious return, then turn more subdued as his judgment of mankind is contemplated. The chorus and soloists come together to proclaim that Christ's kingdom will have no end. For the Credo in Sanctum section the tenor and counter-tenor alternate in a confident, striding theme as they display their virtuosity. The soprano joins in, then the chorus takes us through the confident expectation of the resurrection of the dead and the life to come and ends the magnificent Credo section with a joyous Amen. The shifting moods of this section of the Mass give Fiocco the opportunity to display a kaleidoscopic palette of emotions that paints the words to great effect.

The Sanctus begins with a cheerful melody on the trumpets then the chorus brings us an exciting passage as Fiocco declares his Hosannas in the Highest. A consoling theme accompanies the counter-tenor's aria in the Benedictus and the trumpets reprise the Osanna section.

The Agnus Dei begins with a gentle melody as Fiocco breaks his choir into individual sections singing different lines. The bass then has a duet with the trumpet celebrating the taking away of the sins of the world. The Miserere once again shows Fiocco's view that Christ will show mercy to us as it is positively cheerful. The Mass ends jubilantly with the Dona Nobis Pacem as the composer is certain that Christ will grant all true believers peace.

My recording of this masterpiece is on the Erato label and has conductor Gery Lemaire with the Orchestra de Liège, Maurice André on trumpet and soloists Liane Jaspers, Roland Butkens, Jules Bastin and Louis Devos. Mr. Devos conducted the work himself on a second Erato recording several years later.

Michael Haydn – Symphony # 29 in C Major

Michael Haydn (1737-1806) was born at Rohrau, Austria and followed in his famous brother Joseph Haydn's footsteps by journeying to Vienna to join St. Stephen's Cathedral as a boy soprano. When his voice broke he eventually accepted a position at Grosswardein as Kapellmeister but stayed there for only a short time. In 1762 Haydn accepted the position of Kapellmeister to the Archbishop of Salzburg and Concertmaster of his orchestra. He remained in these positions for the rest of his life, composing hundreds of works including over forty symphonies, chamber music, serenades, concertos and a host of sacred works. During his lifetime Michael Haydn's church music was considered by many to be superior to his brother's. Even Joseph Haydn held this view despite his justifiable pride in his own Masses and other sacred works. As the most outstanding composer in Salzburg, Haydn understandably came to know Mozart well and the young composer not only became Michael Haydn's good friend, but was greatly influenced by the elder composer's music. While the Mozart biographical literature devotes many pages to the influence of Joseph Haydn on Mozart, citing Mozart's dedication of six string quartets to Joseph in the mid 1780s, it is Michael Haydn who had the far greater influence on Mozart's music, a fact that is often not acknowledged by Mozart biographers. Mozart's spurious "Symphony # 37" actually turned out to be Haydn's Symphony # 25 with a slow introduction added by Mozart, and the younger composer wrote two duets under Michael Haydn's name to help the latter fulfill a commission when he was too ill to compose. More importantly, several of Mozart's supreme masterpieces are unthinkable in their final form without the prior musical example of Michael Haydn's compositions. The two most famous instances are Mozart's Requiem, patterned after Haydn's Requiem for the Archbishop Sigismundo, and the finale of Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony, patterned after the finale of Haydn's Symphony #29 in C.

Haydn's Symphony # 29 was part of a set of three that he published in 1784. It is a grand work lasting nearly thirty minutes, and unlike many mature classical era symphonies it dispenses with the minuet and contains only three movements. Mozart also followed this example in his "Prague" symphony a couple of years later. The opening Allegro begins with a two part theme, with the "A" section consisting of a *grazioso* melody and the "B" section transitioning to a martial four-note motif which will dominate the movement. A legato second theme arrives for strings then the martial "B" section returns. This theme is then developed fully as Haydn deconstructs the melody and puts it back together. The full opening theme is then repeated as is the second legato motif, before the martial melody returns once more to powerfully close the movement. A tender melody opens the Andante middle movement. Soon, brass and woodwinds add color to the orchestration. Suddenly a robust interlude ensues, complete with pounding timpani. Haydn's use of such a middle section within his slow movement recalls the minuet and trio format of the typical dance movement, thus combining the contrast and interest of such a movement with the normally uniform tempo of a symphony's slow movement. The opening theme returns then a minor key episode with chugging strings, brass flourishes, and timpani leads us back to the tender melody in a slightly altered guise. Throughout this movement and indeed the entire symphony, Haydn keeps us guessing with interesting variations from standard classical era symphonic templates. The Allegro Molto finale is a contrapuntal tour de force. Haydn had previously written complex contrapuntal finales (most noticeably in his Symphony #23) but this movement tops them all. Music-lovers will immediately recognize entire phrases from Mozart's "Jupiter" symphony finale in Haydn's finale, and it is safe to assume that the younger composer was attempting to top his friend by elaborating on his example. Scholars have often pointed to Mozart's exposure to the works of Bach in Baron Von Swieten's library as the inspiration for his famous finale, but a listen to Haydn's Symphony # 29 will reveal the true inspiration for that transcendent work.

Michael Haydn was a brilliant composer and it is unfortunate that his music has been overshadowed by his more famous brother. Joseph Haydn was without doubt one of the greatest composers of all time, but Michael Haydn certainly kept up his end of the greatest pair of musical brothers in classical music history. My recording of this wonderful piece is on Vox and features the Bournemouth Sinfonietta under Harold Farberman.

Pavel Vranicky – Symphony in D Major op. 52

The Czech composer Pavel Vranicky (1756-1808) was perhaps the most gifted of the many Czech composers who came to Vienna in the late 18th century seeking opportunity. His career moved from success to success and he earned the respect and trust of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, no small accomplishment particularly from the last two composers who were often critical of rivals. After moving to Vienna he established himself as the premier conductor in the Austrian capital, becoming the director of both court theaters by 1790. Haydn entrusted him with conducting "The Creation" and Beethoven asked him to conduct his first symphony. Vranicky was also a marvelous composer. He wrote dozens of symphonies and string quartets in a style reminiscent of Haydn, and also wrote many successful singspiels. His opera "Oberon" inspired Schikaneder to compose the libretto to "The Magic Flute". I have collected every piece by Pavel Vranicky that I could find and I have yet to be disappointed by any of them. His large unrecorded oeuvre would make for ripe territory for an enterprising label looking for quality premiere recordings. I hope that CPO, Naxos or one of the smaller labels will fill the gap.

Vranicky's Symphony in D Major op. 52 is characteristic of the composer's mature style. It immediately brings to mind one of Haydn's "Paris" or "London" symphonies with its stately, beautiful Adagio Maestoso introduction to the opening Allegro. The laughing opening theme which dominates the entire movement commences at the two and one half minute mark and is full of high spirits. It is developed at some length then repeated. Vranicky then plays with the laughing rhythm in a more serious exploration

of the theme before bringing back the lighthearted mood. The lengthy Adagio which is nearly fifteen minutes long is the emotional heart of the work. Time seems to be suspended as the noble theme unwinds. There is a hint of the Mozart of the mature symphonies about this Adagio as Vranicky explores minor key episodes and varies the mood from meditative to tragic. One is put in mind of the slow introduction to the “Prague” symphony’s opening movement. As the movement progresses the music becomes more dramatic and intense, pointing towards Beethoven.

In the stately Menuetto with its insistent rhythm we are back in the world of Haydn, the master of the symphonic Minuet. The sprightly trio is punctuated by trumpet calls. The Vivace Assai finale is reminiscent of Haydn’s quicksilver, cheerful finales. Scurrying strings drive us along as Vranicky whips up the excitement with a brilliant development which brings back the laughing theme of the opening movement but in a new guise.

This is a marvelous work that will delight any lover of the classical era in Vienna. It should take its place alongside the mature symphonies of Haydn and Mozart. My recording features Bohumil Gregor conducting the Dvorak Chamber Orchestra on a Supraphon disk.

George Chadwick – Symphony # 2 in B Flat

George Chadwick (1854-1931) was perhaps the finest composer of the Second New England School, which also featured John Knowles Paine, Amy Beach, Edward MacDowell, Arthur Foote and Horatio Parker. These Boston-based composers, along with New York’s George Frederick Bristow (whom I have discussed in a [previous article](#)), were America’s first professionally trained classical composers whose works could stand alongside their European counterparts. After studying locally for some years, Chadwick journeyed to Europe in his early twenties to further his studies with some of the most respected pedagogues of the time. In Leipzig he studied with Carl Reinecke and Salomon Jadassohn. He then travelled to Munich to study under Joseph Rheinberger. He also visited Paris. After a three year residence in Europe Chadwick returned to Boston where he began a flourishing career as a teacher, organist, conductor and composer. His energy and sense of humor made him a favored teacher among the younger set of composers, and he managed to secure performances of several of his works with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Chadwick’s Symphony # 2 premiered in 1886 and was one of the finest American symphonies of the era. It is a grand four movement work lasting approximately forty minutes and mixes the influence of Chadwick’s European teachers with his own distinctive American personality. Some commentators have noticed an affinity to Dvořák’s “New World Symphony”, however that masterpiece premiered nearly a decade after Chadwick’s work.

The symphony’s broad opening movement begins with a slow introduction featuring a lonely horn-call played twice. This motif in various guises will be integral to the entire symphony, appearing in three of the four movements. The orchestra joins in and the introduction builds, then wanes in power. The allegro section of the movement features a theme drawn from the opening horn-call motif. A bustling second theme follows before a return of the first melody. A lengthy development section ensues as the theme is worked out in various permutations until a triumphant restatement of the original theme is heard. A more lyrical theme with brass and woodwind obbligato follows, then a forceful ending worthy of Beethoven ends this powerful movement. After such a serious opening, Chadwick surprises us with a cheeky scherzo as the second movement. The composer’s sense of humor comes to the fore here. One contemporary critic wrote that the piece “positively winks at you”. The winds open with a sly melody that is picked up by the full orchestra. The theme is tossed back and forth between winds, brass and

strings as it bubbles along in the highest spirits. Suddenly with a wink and a smile, the movement comes to a humorous close. This movement was encored at its premiere.

Switching gears again, Chadwick opens his Largo with a minor key statement of the horn motif from the opening movement. A somber melody for strings follows, using the same rhythmic pattern as the symphony's unifying theme. The music of Dvořák comes to mind here. A livelier middle section follows before the somber theme returns, now in the guise of a funeral march. The theme gradually softens to a bucolic ending. The lively Allegro finale bursts forth with a jolly rhythm and brass fanfares. The horn-call motif has metamorphosed into an upwardly thrusting triumphant theme. The melody is heard in various rhythms, then a Dvořákian episode for winds follows. The opening motif is repeated as is the theme for winds, then Chadwick roars to a climax with raucous brass and galloping strings. Finally a triumphant statement of the horn call theme for full orchestra leads to the dramatic conclusion.

Chadwick's Symphony # 2 can fully stand alongside the best symphonies from Europe in the 1880s. The craftsmanship he picked up from his great teachers is combined with his uniquely American personality to form a memorable piece of music. This symphony should be much better known and more frequently programmed. It would make a welcome change from the oft programmed war horses of the late romantic era. My recording of the Chadwick symphony # 2 is on the New World Records label and features the Albany Symphony Orchestra conducted by Julius Hegyi.

Asger Hamerik – Requiem in A Major op. 34

Asger Hamerik (1843-1923) was born near Copenhagen in the spring of 1843. His precocious musical talent was obvious to his father who acquiesced in Asger's desire to pursue a career in the field he loved. The young composer studied in his teens with the two greatest Danish composers of the era, J.P.E. Hartmann and Niels Gade, the latter of which became a lifelong friend. At the age of nineteen Hamerik journeyed to Germany for further instruction, studying under Hans von Bülow in Berlin. The 1864 war between Germany and Denmark caused Hamerik to leave Berlin and move to Paris where he studied with Berlioz. The ailing French master became attached to his young pupil and not only taught him music but gave him lessons in French. Berlioz was to have a lasting influence on Hamerik's music. The peripatetic composer next journeyed to Vienna where he received an offer from the American consul to take over the directorship of the Peabody Institute in Baltimore. Hamerik was uncertain whether to accept, as he feared the United States was too much of a cultural backwater at that time, but eventually he agreed to the post and relocated to America in 1871. For the next twenty-seven years he stayed at the Peabody Institute, bringing it to its loftiest reputation in its history. Hamerik also found time to compose and indeed wrote almost all of his greatest works during his American period, including seven symphonies, five orchestral suites and his Requiem. This crowning achievement of his American period was premiered to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the Peabody Institute and was greeted with rave reviews. Three years later, Hamerik and his American wife, the pianist Margaret Williams, left Baltimore for good and settled in Copenhagen. After leaving America, Hamerik composed little in his last two decades and his music gradually faded from view. A composer caught between two countries, like Bortkiewicz and Nowowiejski, his legacy was not fully claimed by either the Danes or the Americans, leaving his music in a cultural no-man's-land from which it has only recently returned thanks to fine recordings of his major works.

Hamerik's Requiem is scored for alto, chorus and orchestra and is broken into five movements. The first movement combines the Requiem and Kyrie sections of the Mass. A slow somber theme for strings alone opens the piece. It gradually swells in volume then subsides. The male chorus intones the opening words of the text a cappella then the women's voices join with the orchestra. The women and men trade

phrases with growing power then combine in another section for voices alone. A hushed repetition of the opening *Requiem Aeternam* leads to the *Kyrie Eleison* section which is intoned by the lower voices.

The *Dies Irae* opens with a brighter palette including brass and winds and the tempo picks up. Once again the men and women trade phrases. Suddenly a series of trumpet fanfares usher in the *Tuba Mirum* section as Hamerik literally sounds the trumpets of judgment day. At *Rex Tremendae* the trumpets return to show God's awful majesty. At the *Recordare* the alto soloist makes her first appearance beseeching gentle Jesus to intercede for the sinner. After the agitated chorus intones the *Ingemisco*, the alto returns to pray for Mary's help in a gentle *arioso*. As she prays for a place "at Thy right hand", a brief *cadenza* for alto and violin is heard. The chorus returns for the *Confutatis Maledictis* as the horror of the flames of the damned is heard. Hamerik then gives us a beautiful, gentle, ethereal theme for women's chorus and orchestra to reverently end the section.

The *Offertorium* is an impassioned yet sorrowful aria for the alto solo, praying to Jesus for salvation. Hamerik captures the humility, fear and uncertainty that the prayer will be heard. Trumpet fanfares bring in the *Sanctus*, then the women's chorus begins a fugue and is soon joined by the male voices. The fugue becomes more impassioned as the chorus sings the *Benedictus*. The trumpets return once more for a triumphant *Hosanna in Excelsis*. The *Agnus Dei* begins quietly with the alto solo's tender prayer to the Lamb of God to give rest to the soul of the departed. The male voices return in doleful fashion to begin the restatement of the *Requiem Aeternam*. At the words *Et Lux Perpetua* the brighter women's chorus returns shining the way forward towards the light. The alto quietly sings one last time for eternal peace and the chorus intones a hushed *Amen* to end the work on a reverent and humble note.

Hamerik's *Requiem* is a fine piece, showing the influence of Berlioz as well as his German and Danish teachers. My recording features Ole Schmidt conducting the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra and Choir with Minna Nyhus as the soloist. It is on the [Kontrapunkt](#) label. There is also a fine recording conducted by Thomas Dausgaard on [Da Capo](#).

Francisco Tarrega – "Recuerdos de la Alhambra"

The Spanish guitar virtuoso and composer Francisco Tarrega (1852-1909) is one of the towering figures in the history of the classical guitar. Through his expansion of guitar technique and his myriad guitar transcriptions of the works of the giants of classical music he helped lead a renaissance in the popularity of the guitar. In 1896 while in Granada he wrote the work "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" which went on to become his most famous piece. It can certainly be argued that "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" is not an "obscure" piece among both guitarists and audiences well versed in the classical guitar repertory. Indeed it could be said that "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" is to romantic era classical guitar what "Scotland the Brave" is to bagpipers! However there are many classical music enthusiasts to whom the guitar repertory is an undiscovered country. I have been an avid classical music lover for over four decades yet I only first heard this piece within the last ten years. Hence I beg the reader's pardon if I stretch the definition of obscure to include this piece in this collection. I recently attended a party at which the host hired a wonderful classical guitarist to entertain his guests. I asked the guitarist to play "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" because I wanted to see how this fantastically difficult piece was played with just ten fingers. As I watched in admiration the guitarist played a perfect tremolo accompaniment with three fingers of one hand while playing the melody with the thumb of the same hand. Such virtuosity inspires awe.

"Recuerdos de la Alhambra" is a musical gem lasting just over four minutes. It consists of a beautiful, soulful melody played tremolo over a hypnotic softly repetitive accompaniment. The main theme is like a gently flowing river, subtly changing with each iteration. In the final minute the soaring aspect of the melody is downplayed as the theme comes home to rest. The pathos, beauty and hypnotic nature of this

piece guarantees that once heard it will never be forgotten. In a brief span of time Tarrega conjures a lost world as the listener contemplates the beauties and the ghosts of the Alhambra.

My recording has Norbert Kraft playing on a [Naxos](#) disk that also includes works by Sor and Aguado.

Josef Rheinberger – The Star of Bethlehem op. 164

Josef Rheinberger (1839–1901) was born in Vaduz, Liechtenstein, the son of the Principality's State Treasurer. At the age of twelve he went to study at the Munich Conservatory. Shortly after graduating he became a professor there and remained in Munich for most of the rest of his life, composing and teaching. Rheinberger became a noted pedagogue whose students included George Chadwick, Frederick Converse, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Engelbert Humperdinck, Horatio Parker, Ludwig Thuille and Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari. He was also a prolific composer who worked in all genres. He is best known for his organ works which include twenty sonatas. These are outstanding works, yet I feel his best music is to be found in his choral works and his chamber music.

Rheinberger's Christmas Cantata "The Star of Bethlehem" is perhaps his greatest work in any form. I have loved this piece since I first heard it many years ago and to this day I listen to it every holiday season. The libretto was written by the composer's talented wife, Fanny von Hofnaas, a fine poet who wrote the words to several works by her husband. Hofnaas did a marvelous job with the lyrics, freely adapting key elements of the Christmas story from the Gospels, to create a work brimming with childlike wonder, expectation, joy and faith. She perfectly captured the spirit of Christmas and her libretto obviously inspired Rheinberger. After the composer had finished the work, Hofnaas fell desperately ill. Her last wish was to see the bound score of the cantata and follow along with it as her husband played it on the piano. This wish was granted on Christmas Eve 1892. Fanny von Hofnaas died on New Year's Eve and the distraught composer could never again bear to hear this work which was so special to them both.

"The Star of Bethlehem" is in nine parts and takes about forty-eight minutes to perform. The first section is called "Expectation". It captures the hushed expectation of the earth as it awaits the divine light that foretells the coming of Jesus. The stars, the trees and flowers, the streams, the wind are all waiting for the miraculous sign. A gentle drum-roll opens the movement which features a serenely beautiful melody as the chorus sings with wonder of the coming revelation. On the words "light is streaming" the upwardly soaring theme begins to rise to a sustained high note of joy for the chorus. Earth opens itself to receive the heavenly blessing. The second section is "The Shepherds". The woodwinds play a lovely melody of grace and delicacy. The shepherds pray to the Lord to "Guard Us". The soprano floats over the gentle chorus imploring protection. The shepherds remember what happened to the sinners who forsook the Lord's path, how the floods destroyed them. They pray for the Lord's mercy and love for his people. The soprano warbles like an angel over the hushed chorus in one of the many sublime moments of the cantata.

The third section is "The Appearance of the Angel". The soprano sings to the shepherds that the Lord has heard their pleas and that she brings them tidings of great joy. In Bethlehem Christ the Lord has been born and they are to seek him in a manger. The chorus sings jubilantly "Hallelujah, Glory to God in the Highest and peace on earth, goodwill towards men." The fourth section continues without a break and is entitled "Bethlehem". The bass narrator tells how the shepherds flocked to Bethlehem and reverently approached the Christ child. "Christ is Lord" sings the soloist as the "expectation" motif briefly reappears. The chorus returns for "The Shepherds at the Manger" as they sing of the miracle of the birth of the long promised savior. All their desires are fulfilled by God's gracious gift. Here Rheinberger quotes themes from earlier movements as the worshippers relate the story of how the angel came to them,

what she told them, and how they found the child in the manger. The next section is “The Star”. To a dramatic theme in the lower strings the chorus sings of how the storm clouds and whirling winds were stilled as the three wise men followed the star. They travel from the far eastern lands to see the King of Judah and adore him. They follow the star to Jerusalem then lose sight of it and despair. Suddenly the star appears over Bethlehem and falls to earth, guiding the wise men to Jesus. The chorus jubilantly gives thanks for this wondrous vision. A flute solo introduces the “Adoration of the Wise Men” as a reduced chorus sings of the three gifts. The frankincense ascends like their prayers to the Savior, the bitter Myrrh is a sign of the bitterness Jesus will endure on earth, the gold is pure like their love of the Christ child.

The next section is “Mary”. As the wise men depart, the soprano sings of the thoughts and prayers of Mary. She understands she has been blest to give birth to the savior. Her soul flies up to heaven as the soloist soars to a sustained high note. She looks at her baby and sees his gaze deeper than the sea, and his rosy smile. She strokes him tenderly and rocks him to sleep. This section was Fanny von Hofnaas’ favorite section of her libretto. Perhaps the maternal sentiments particularly resonated with her as she and Josef were not blessed with children of their own. The final section is “Fulfillment” It begins with the theme from “Expectation” and the material from that glorious opening chorus is repeated along with the opening words from that section. A final fugal section for the chorus summarizes the true meaning of Christmas: “Rejoice O World, Over Death Victorious, Redeemed in Christ, To Life all glorious, Hallelujah.” The cantata ends with a triumphant section for the chorus and in a brilliant touch, Rheinberger ends with a stunning reprise of the four-note soaring motif that opened the work.

The “Star of Bethlehem” is one of the greatest choral works of the late 19th century and is perhaps the quintessential distillation in music of the meaning of Christmas and the emotions it evokes. It should be widely performed, particularly by those choral societies who may not have the time or resources to perform much lengthier works such as Handel’s “Messiah” or Bach’s “Christmas Oratorio”. The first and best recording is from 1968 featuring Robert Heger conducting the Graunke Symphony Orchestra with soloists Rita Streich and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. It is available on the Carus label.

Feliks Nowowiejski – Quo Vadis op. 30

Feliks Nowowiejski (1877-1946) was born in the Warmia region of what was then East Prussia but is now part of Poland. His father had Polish ancestry and was a Polish nationalist, while his mother was German. Thus, while Feliks considered himself ethnically Polish, he spoke German and looked towards Germany for his higher education. He went to study in Berlin and soon joined the class of Max Bruch. His oratorio “[The Return of the Prodigal Son](#)” won the Meyerbeer Prize and Nowowiejski used the prize money for a cultural tour of Europe to expand his musical horizons. On this tour he had memorable meetings with Mahler, Saint-Saëns and Dvořák among others. He won another Meyerbeer prize for his Symphony # 1 and continued his studies with Bruch. In 1907 he composed what would be his most popular work, the oratorio “Quo Vadis” based on the book by Henryk Sienkiewicz. He revised the work in 1909 and in this version it was performed around the world in over one hundred and fifty cities in the succeeding thirty years. The composer moved back to Poland but his German language and education led to hostility at the outbreak of World War I so he returned to Germany where he served in the Prussian military. After the war Nowowiejski unequivocally made his Polish leanings clear and returned to Poland for good. This caused a break with Bruch and his German friends and led to a sharp decline in performances of his music. Caught between two countries and not fully trusted by nationalists in either, Nowowiejski suffered a similar fate to Sergei Bortkiewicz who was caught between his Russian ethnicity and German leanings. This undeniably affected the popularity of his music.

Nowowiejski wrote in all genres but was particularly known for his choral works and organ works. He also wrote some fine ballet music, several symphonies and many songs. “Quo Vadis” is a grand dramatic

oratorio lasting ninety minutes and scored for soloists, chorus, orchestra and organ. The original libretto was in German, the composer's favored language at the time of its composition. The piece is divided into five sections. The first section is "The Fire of Rome". The impressive beginning with its dramatic orchestral introduction takes us right into the middle of the raging fire as the chorus enters with a powerful statement of their terror as the flames engulf the city. Two motifs are heard here, one a pompous, barbaric military fanfare portraying the power of Nero's empire, the other a subtler motif portraying the persecuted Christians. The second section is "The Roman Forum" as the Christians, who have been blamed for the fire by the Emperor, are to be publicly sacrificed. The piece opens with the impressive March of the Praetorians which anticipates (as much of this score does) the Hollywood epic biblical movie scores of decades later. The first appearance of the bass soloist ensues, with the Roman Prefect singing "Hail from Divine Nero" as he stirs up the crowd against the Christians with a powerful soliloquy answered by the chorus. The crowd roars for the guilty to face their punishment. The section ends with the chorus portraying the bloodthirsty mob calling for "cristianos ad leones."

After the thunderous opening two sections we are transported by Nowowiejski to a completely different place and atmosphere in section three, "The Catacombs". An ethereal beginning leads to the apostle Peter, sung by the baritone soloist, calling his Christian brethren to praise the Lord. The faithful sing their hymn of praise a cappella. The composer then brings in the organ to add a powerful touch to the prayers. Trumpet fanfares and a rushing string motif usher in Peter's brief and sad arioso "the tyrants threaten". Ligia, one of the faithful, stoutly responds in the aria "we are prepared in the name of Jesus." The composer joins the strings with powerful brass chords to build the drama. Ligia grows more passionate in her declaration then is joined by the chorus in a swelling climax highlighting the unshakeable faith of the Christians. Peter sings that as the shepherd of Christ he cannot leave his flock, but Ligia pleads with him in the aria "Thou Lord, a victim of Rome's tyrant" to leave Rome for his personal safety. This beautiful piece is the centerpiece of "The Catacombs" in its operatic outpouring of emotion. The chorus seconds Ligia's plea as Peter at first refuses to hear of leaving his flock. Ligia grows more passionate and is joined by the full chorus imploring Peter to reconsider. Peter is finally convinced, singing "Methinks that God through you hath spoken." The chorus responds with "The Lord be with thee and protect thee" as section three closes. This chorus brings shimmering harps and soaring violins as the composer portrays the divine spirit that animates the faithful followers. For the devout Nowowiejski, "The Catacombs" is the musical and spiritual heart of "Quo Vadis".

The fourth section is entitled "On the Appian Way". A instrumental introduction, heavy with foreboding, illustrates Peter's fearful nighttime passage on the famous Roman road as he seeks to escape the Romans' wrath. Peter sings the aria "Deep, deep dark night" as he proceeds through the darkness. Suddenly a bright light confronts the apostle and he sees Jesus before him. "Quo Vadis, Domine" he asks Jesus. Christ tells him that he is going to Rome to be crucified again since his apostle Peter is abandoning his people. The overawed and ashamed Peter declares "O Lord, look down on me reduced to dust." He declares "I'll go to Rome" though he knows he faces death there. The composer brings in a heroic motif to illustrate Peter's courage and determination with a powerful return of the organ highlighting the power of faith.

The fifth and final section of "Quo Vadis" is "Ruins of the Colosseum". This is a kind of epilogue to the story illustrating the eventual victory of Christianity over the pagan tyranny of Rome. The chorus sings a four part fifteen minute long *tour de force* including the sections "Glory, glory and praise be thine", "Praise and glory and thanks be unto you, the anointed", "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son" and "Amen." The oratorio ends with a magnificent fugue.

“Quo Vadis” is an astonishingly assured work for a young composer and reveals the influences Nowowiejski absorbed from Mahler, Dvořák, Bruch and Saint-Saëns. While most classical music fans will think of [Miklós Rózsa](#)’s famous score to the 1953 film when they hear the name “Quo Vadis”, it is Nowowiejski’s masterpiece that should in all justice first come to mind.

[recordings of the Nowowiejski “Quo Vadis” are available on [Dux](#) and [CPO](#)]

Albéric Magnard – Sonata for Cello and Piano op. 20

Albéric Magnard (1865-1914) was one of the most gifted of the French composers who flourished in the artistic golden age in France between the Franco-Prussian War and World War I. He was the son of Francis Magnard the popular author and editor of *Le Figaro* which, as is the case of most sons of famous and/or wealthy fathers, was a double-edged sword. Throughout his career he tried, not always successfully, to make his way solely on his own merit and means without his father’s help. Magnard studied with Théodore Dubois and Jules Massenet but his most influential teacher was Vincent D’Indy. These mentors gave the young composer a thorough grounding in the historical forms of classical music including fugue and chorale. Magnard’s music is intellectually rigorous and written with painstaking care. While some critics have compared his music to Bruckner’s, I do not see much resemblance. Magnard is his own man. The composer had an imperious personality and was disdainful of seeking easy publicity. He had a cynical view of human nature, amply illustrated by the subject matter of his opera “Guercoeur”. In this work, a beloved ruler dies in battle but convinces the Lord to return him to Earth to save his country. When the hero returns to Earth he finds his best friend has become his wife’s lover and his people have been corrupted and have forgotten him. Eventually he is killed by his own countrymen and returns disillusioned to Heaven. Magnard’s death at the hands of the invading German Army in World War I as he defended his estate made him something of a national hero and was illustrative of his personal strength of character and courage. Magnard’s best known works are the aforementioned “Guercoeur”, his opera “Berenice”, and his [four symphonies](#). All of them are marvelous works and well worth exploring. It is in his chamber music however that Magnard is most audacious and modern, particularly in his final chamber piece, written for cello and piano and premiered in 1911.

The sonata begins with a lyrical, singing melody for the cello over a serene piano accompaniment. This quickly gives way to a stormy rhythmical section led by the piano. The two contrasting themes play over each other as if a battle between good and evil is taking place. Suddenly a lengthy fugue breaks out, restoring order at least temporarily. The lyrical opening returns followed by the rhythmic theme and elements of the fugue. After a return of the jagged second theme the lyrical theme has the final word. The Scherzo begins attacca with a thumping theme in the piano. A brief lyrical trio section quickly gives way to the pounding opening theme which points forward to modernist composers like Stravinsky. The slow movement marked “Funèbre” continues without pause. This sad but noble song without words is the emotional core of the sonata. Magnard uses the singing tone of the cello to great effect as he builds the tension creating a movement of memorable power and emotion. This is one of the finest movements Magnard ever wrote. The busy finale returns to the jagged rhythms of the second theme of the first movement and despite some sublime lyrical passages gives an overall impression of restless energy. The sonata ends on an affirmative note, banishing the pathos of the “Funèbre.” Magnard’s sonata is surely one of the finest cello sonatas of its era and should certainly be in the repertoire of every cellist.

My recording of this wonderful work is on the Accord label and features Thomas Demenga on cello and Christoph Keller on piano.

Charles Tournemire – Symphony # 3 (Moscow)

Charles Tournemire (1870-1939) was born in Bordeaux. A precocious musical talent, he was appointed organist at the St. Pierre church in Bordeaux at the age of eleven. The family moved to Paris when Tournemire was sixteen, enabling him to study at the Paris Conservatory. There he studied under both César Franck and Charles-Marie Widor. Both men proved to be a lasting influence on the young composer. In 1898, Tournemire was appointed organist at St. Clotilde, replacing Gabriel Pierné and occupying the post once held by his revered teacher Franck. Tournemire held this post for the rest of his life. In his early maturity Tournemire focused on large-scale symphonies and operas. He wrote eight symphonies between 1900 and 1924, as well as the operas “The Song of the Siren”, “Chryseis” and “Nittetis.” Tournemire was a devout Catholic and nearly every piece he wrote in whatever genre has a religious aura about it. After the Great War and his wife’s death he increasingly turned to religious mysticism. He felt that all music should glorify God, and his compositions turned away from the secular genres of symphony and opera and concentrated on the organ and sacred choral works. In his later years he composed the mammoth organ cycle “L’Orgue Mystique” as well as a host of religious dramas including “The Apocalypse of Saint Jean”, “La Douleoureuse Passion du Christ”, “Il Poverello di Assisi”, “The Legend of Tristan” and the trilogy “Faust”-“Don Quichotte”-“Saint Francis of Assisi”.

None of Tournemire’s large-scale dramatic vocal works have been recorded, a glaring gap in the history of French music in the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed there is probably no French composer of such quality who has suffered more neglect from the public and recording industry than Charles Tournemire. Fortunately we do have recordings of most of his organ works and his symphonies, and it is his third symphony, “Moscow” that will concern us here. The genesis of this piece was Tournemire’s journey to Russia in 1911 to help inaugurate a new organ built by his friend Charles Mutin, the successor to the legendary organ builder Cavallé-Coll. Tournemire was overwhelmed by the vast Russian plains, the majesty of the Kremlin, the Asiatic splendor of the Tsar’s court, and the devout religious fervor of a monastery he visited. He set to work on the symphony immediately upon his return to France, and it was premiered in 1913. Tournemire later wrote about the piece that “It exalts the greatness and poetry of the boundless plains and glorifies the idea of God so dear to the hearts of the Slav people.” The symphony has four movements and is divided into two distinct parts of two movements each. The first movement symbolizes the pagan Russia of pre-Christian days, as the people sacrifice to their gods. The second movement highlights the people’s singing and dancing as they grope their way from darkness to light. After a pause the third movement opens with a portrayal of the great bells of Moscow. Eventually this leads to the finale, a sublime evocation of the religious fervor of those who have found their way to the kingdom of Heaven.

The symphony opens with a hesitant, questing motif in the woodwinds, as of someone groping in the darkness, although it is the spiritual darkness of the people portrayed here. The music gradually grows more confident and assertive though it is still “dark.” The Impressionism of Debussy is an influence here. As the second movement begins Tournemire shifts to rhythmic phrases and a dance-like motif. A solo horn seems to call the people to celebrate and brass fanfares inaugurate the ceremony. This is no barbarian ritual however; no “Rite of Spring” (which horrified Tournemire). It is a civilized dance.

After a pause of a few seconds we hear the obsessively repeated bells of Moscow as the third movement begins. As the bells subside a beautiful chorale ensues portraying the holy nature of the Catholic worship ceremony as contrasted with the pagan. As the finale begins we hear a swelling theme growing in confidence which combines elements of the bells, the chorale theme, and the questing atmosphere of the symphony’s opening. Now the people have found the true faith. A growing ecstasy informs the music as the symphony ends on a reverent note of mystical transformation. The symphony # 3 is a refined piece totally freed from bombast or overstatement. As with all of Tournemire’s works it reflects the deep

faith and religious fervor of the composer. To those attuned to his idiom, it is an uplifting and sublime piece of music.

My recording is on the Auvidis/Valois label and features Pierre Bartholomée conducting the Liège Philharmonic Orchestra.

Hermann Suter – Le Laudi di San Francesco d’Assisi (Cantico del Sole)

Hermann Suter (1870-1926) was a Swiss composer and pedagogue. He studied under Hans Huber and Carl Reinecke in Germany, then spent his whole career in his homeland, first in Zurich, then in Basel. In the summer of 1923 at his vacation home in the Alps Suter composed this oratorio in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of the Basel Choral Society. It is scored for large orchestra, organ, four soloists, chorus and boys’ choir. For his inspiration Suter chose the Canticle of the Sun by Saint Francis of Assisi. In this pantheistic work, Saint Francis gives thanks for the Lord’s creation of the natural world and implores mankind to enjoy this precious gift. This was a marked departure from most Christian writers of the Middle Ages who highlighted the misery of life on earth and the hope for a better life in the world to come. This wholly affirmative text from such a revered figure as Saint Francis obviously struck a chord in Suter as he contemplated nature’s gifts from his summer Alpine retreat. The resulting work is not only Suter’s masterpiece, but one of the finest oratorios of the era.

Le Laudi is divided into nine sections. The first section begins with the tenor solo chanting an invocation, a cappella, which leads into the chorus praising the “Most high, omnipotent good Lord.” The tenor finishes his invocation and the orchestra begins with a stirring fugue sung by the boys’ choir with interjections by the tenor. “Praised be Thou, My Lord, with all thy creatures, above all brother sun who makes the day dawn and illuminates it, and he is beautiful and radiates with great splendor.” Suter’s music radiates the majesty of the sun with the cheerful children’s voices, full chorus and bright orchestral colors throughout this impressive opening movement. The second movement is in praise of the moon and stars. Suter presents us with a complete contrast to the first section with shimmering strings, gentle woodwinds and harp, as the soprano gently sings of how the Lord has shaped the stars and moon, making them “luminous and precious, and beautiful.” Eventually the other soloists enter, their vocal lines twining around each other, with brief phrases for the chorus, all in a hushed and reverent tone. It is a beautiful effect.

Shifting gears again, the third section begins the praises of the four elements, in this case the wind. The author praises “brother wind ... the air and the clouds and the serene and all kinds of weather, by which Thou givest sustenance to all thy creatures.” This section opens with an explosive orchestral outburst with choir in a quadruple fugue. After this stormy opening the weather subsides and the soloists sing the praises of the essential life giving gift of the wind which brings both storm and gentle breezes to the earth. The chorus returns to glorify the storms but the soloists have the last word as the movement ends on a pastoral note. Section four brings another contrast as the author praises the element of water. A gentle flowing theme like a peaceful brook runs through the entire movement as the soloists sing an idyllic quartet praising “sister water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste and pure.” Suter brings the woodwinds to the fore here and one is almost reminded at one point of the opening of Smetana’s “The Moldau”.

Section five continues the alternation of moods as the choir praises “brother fire, through whom Thou illumineest the night, and he is beautiful and jocund and robust and strong.” In this fiery movement (pun intended), the chorus sings over a powerful passacaglia theme in the bass punctuated by violin and flute arpeggios and brass fanfares. The movement builds to an impressive climax as Suter unleashes his full vocal and instrumental resources. In Section six Suter turns to the fourth element, “mother earth, who

sustains and governs and produces diverse fruits, with colored flowers and herbs.” The alto solo sings this beautiful, gentle, *adagio* aria which is the emotional highpoint of the work. Suter’s orchestration here is a model of delicacy.

Section seven deals with praise for the meek, who accept every tribulation and forgive every trespass and will be rewarded by the Lord in the life to come. This complex movement opens with the tenor solo and women’s choir gently singing the praises of the downtrodden. The music grows passionate as the suffering of the meek is portrayed, but the soprano enters gently reminding us of the ultimate rewards in store for those who endure earthly misery.

Section eight deals with “corporeal death, from whom no living man escapes.” A grim funeral march sung by the bass soloist portrays this inevitable reality. In the middle of this lengthy movement the chorus enters intoning in growing fearfulness “Woe to those who shall die in sin.” Brass fanfares and rumblings in the bass appear to portray the Last Judgment. Then the organ enters gently promising peace to the “blessed he, who finds himself in Thy holiest will, for second death cannot harm him.” Suter brings back the chorus for a reverent conclusion. The righteous are saved and at peace. In Section nine the composer brings back the boys’ choir to join the soloists and full chorus in a summing up of the litany of praises to the Lord (*Le Laudi*) that is the focal point of the work. The finale continues *attacca* from section eight with the boys’ choir singing “Praise and bless my Lord and thank him and serve him with great humility.” The chorus joyfully and triumphantly sing His praises as all join in a sublime “Amen”.

Suter’s “*Le Laudi*” is a beautiful, uplifting work that leaves the listener with the same kind of upbeat feeling as Haydn’s “*Creation*”. Both works share a quasi-religious, pantheistic joy, reverence and optimism that makes them immediately accessible to audiences. My recording of this lovely work is on the MGB label, conducted by Andras Ligeti.

Othmar Schoeck – “*Lebendig Begraben*” op. 40

The Swiss composer Othmar Schoeck (1886-1957) was one of the greatest composers of *lieder* in the first half of the twentieth century. While his contributions to opera and a handful of orchestral works are also of great interest, it is certainly in the field of the *lied* that his reputation rests. In 1927 at the height of his powers he undertook to set a song-cycle for baritone and orchestra based on a poem by his countryman Gottfried Keller entitled “*Lebendig Begraben*” or “*Buried Alive*”. Keller was a fascinating figure in 19th century Swiss letters. His semi-autobiographical novel “*Green Henry*” (which I highly recommend) was a great success in its final form issued in 1879, as were fifteen short stories issued in three groups of five tales each detailing bourgeois village life in Switzerland. [Delius’s opera “*A Village Romeo and Juliet*” derives its storyline from one of Keller’s stories] Keller also wrote poetry and it was his lengthy poem “*Buried Alive*” that captivated Schoeck and moved him to set it to music.

The fear of death and the mystery of what happens to the soul, or consciousness, immediately after death have preoccupied humanity since the dawn of time. Likewise, the fear of being mistaken for dead and buried alive is one that haunts some people. These are the fears and mysteries that Keller addresses in his eerie metaphysical masterpiece. The protagonist of the poem is a young man of indeterminate age who has died of an unnamed illness. While his body has died, leaving him beyond physical pain and suffering his consciousness lives on, flooding him with myriad thoughts and emotions. The poem begins with the rumbling of earth and rocks that the young man hears inside his casket as the grave is filled in by the gravediggers. As the mourners walk away he wonders if this is eternity. He does not feel his limbs but his calm soul has been set free to wander. The man wishes he could have one eternal thought that would illuminate the afterlife and pictures the priest calmly walking above in the graveyard while below a spiritual illumination, like lightning, is glowing under his feet. Perhaps this is the meaning of damnation,

to see the light only after being buried. The poet is then surprised by a renewed physical consciousness, his limbs twitch and his hands move. He imagines if he was buried in a place where hyenas live that they would dig up his shallow grave and he would throw down the beast and escape. Then he hears muffled voices above ground and knows it is the drunken sexton coming home from the tavern and being scolded by his wife. He cries out but no one hears him. He meditates on how the dead are forgotten and no one will ever hear him again. Suddenly he hears the church bell chime twelve times. He wonders if it is noon or midnight and pictures the differing pleasures of each. Sadly, the poet reflects that he doesn't even have a lost love to visit his grave and mourn him. He was too shy to tell the girl he loved what his feelings were and now it is too late. The poet then shifts his thoughts to nature and imagines the fir trees above. He remembers the first fir tree he saw, the Christmas tree in his house, and how it triggered a love of the forest. How he would visit a little Christmas tree farm near his home and how the small trees matched his small height as a boy. This pantheistic theme is developed at some length until his thoughts turn to a spring festival where he first saw the girl he came to love. His thoughts are interrupted by the next chiming of the church bell. It is only fifteen minutes past twelve and he is amazed at all he has thought and felt in such a short time. As the bell dies away the poet feels his consciousness ebbing. He is no longer afraid, he is ready to face eternity. He bids farewell to self, to life, to struggle, and is ready to face God.

Schoeck's song-cycle is divided into fourteen sections which flow continuously without a break. He uses a full orchestra including a range of percussion, piano, and even a wordless chorus in the final section. Throughout the work, recitative passages alternate with more lyrical sections, creating an ebb and flow. A kaleidoscope of emotions and scenes are brilliantly illustrated in the orchestra including the rage of the protagonist, the gentle reminiscence of his lost love, the innocence of his childhood memories, his sardonic humor at his situation, the pride in his homeland as he recalls a festival day, and his farewell to life as time and space dissolve into eternity. One of the reasons this work is not better known is its extreme difficulty for the performer. Not only must the artist sing for over forty-two minutes without a break, he must be able to use vocal inflection to portray nearly every emotion a human can feel. This is not a work that gives up all of its beauties in one listen. The best way to penetrate its depths and appreciate Schoeck's achievement is to follow the words closely as one listens to the piece. This will highlight the brilliant word-and mood- painting of the composer.

My recording has Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau at the height of his powers, with Fritz Rieger conducting the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Berlin. It was first issued in 1962 on Deutsche Grammophon, and reissued on CD on the Claves label in 1986. Fischer-Dieskau does an amazing job with this punishing cycle, capturing every emotional nuance. It would be hard to imagine the work better sung.

So there we have it, another dozen obscure favorites. Hopefully some of these works will be new to the reader and the discoveries will bring much enjoyment.