

Phil's Classical Reviews

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Bruckner: Symphony No. 3 in D Minor
Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Orchestre Métropolitain
ATMA Classique

Yannick Nézet-Séguin leads l'Orchestre Métropolitain of Montreal in a performance of Anton Bruckner's Third Symphony that, for me, laps the competition. In fact, it's the first really convincing account of this work I've ever heard. Not that there are no problems inherent in this large scale work that gives an impression of episodic unevenness due to the fact that massive climaxes alternate so often with moments of bliss that it is hard for the listener to follow the general outline. That is particularly true in the opening movement where the composer lays out three themes for development instead of the usual two. Bruckner's use of general pauses and a heightened duple-triple (2+3) rhythm adds further peril for any conductor who lacks the long experience Nézet-Séguin has had with this composer.

On the other hand, Bruckner was utterly true to the rules he set for himself in this, his breakthrough symphony, the only exception being the delayed recapitulation in the opening movement, which however allows him to retrace for us the mood and formal design of the exposition. The scoring is also beautifully and cleanly laid-out, a feature that Nézet-Séguin is keen to stress in the present recording. There is no fuzziness in the orchestral playing or in the tempi this conductor chooses. This orchestra possesses the requisite dark string sound that works so well when playing Bruckner.

Bruckner's orchestration is fairly standard, the only luxuries which he permitted himself being the four horns, three trumpets and three trombones. All of these are employed to optimal effect in the calmer moments of pure religious-like lyricism that crop up between the build-up to the various climaxes and in the triumphant brass chorales ("triumphant" being a tame word in view of the resoundingly affirmative music we actually hear).

That opening movement, marked *Gemäßigt, Misterioso* (Moderate, Mysterious) is possibly the most front-loaded of all Bruckner's symphonies due to its absolute embarrassment of riches, a plethora of material that



Prokofiev: Suite from Romeo and Juliet
Riccardo Muti, Chicago Symphony Orchestra
CSO Resound

In recordings made in Orchestral Hall at Symphony Center on October 3, 5, 8, and 11, 2013 and released on the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's in-house label, music director Riccardo Muti conducts the CSO in a very flavorful and atmospheric account of a suite of ten numbers from Prokofiev's masterwork, the Romeo and Juliet ballet. The recordings produced by David Frost and engineered by Tim Martyn, Charlie Post, and Shawn Murphy capture the color and excitement of a work that was so epoch-making in its day that the Kirov had to coin a new word to describe it: "*drambalet*," or dramatized ballet.

The suite heard here consists of ten selections: Montagues and Capulets – Juliet the Young Girl – Madrigal – Minuet – Masks – Romeo and Juliet – Death of Tybalt – Friar Laurence – Romeo and Juliet before Parting – Romeo at Juliet's Tomb. As opposed to Suites 1-3 which the wily Prokofiev arranged for orchestra to promote his ballet and insure its ultimate success over the "modernist" charges of his enemies, *this* particular suite gives the listener more of the sweep and dramatic content of the story. From the doom-laden opening for heavy strings and brass depicting the strife between the two rival families to the final fate of Shakespeare's "star-crossed" lovers at Juliet's tomb, we are continually aware of the dark undercurrent of the story in spite of its lighter moments – mostly in the Madrigal/Minuet/Masks sequence at the Feast at the Capulets.

I hadn't realized, until I took a close look at Prokofiev's instrumentation, just how thickly populated it is with reeds. One is more immediately aware of the contributions of the afore-mentioned massive strings and brass in moments of tragic foreboding, the stunning percussion underscoring Tybalt's death agonies, and the beautiful flute solo that helps create an indelible portrait of Juliet the Young Girl, skittish, experiencing life and yearning for new experiences – all conveyed with an innocence that seems the more poignant in view of what we know will be her fate. But the reeds

includes brief quotations from Wagner and Bruckner's own *Miserere* from his Mass in D minor. The present performance lays it all before us in a clear, plausible way that gives point to the cascading arpeggios in the upper strings at the very opening and the lovely horn melody later in the same movement. Between a really beautiful Adagio with subtle shifts in tempo and a colossal finale, we are given a finely etched, irresistible Scherzo with a gorgeous melody for the violas.

If this Bruckner Third sounds better than any other recorded version I have heard, there's a reason. It uses the 1977 Leopold Nowak edition that was based on the dedication copy Bruckner presented in 1873 to his idol Richard Wagner as a token of esteem, and not on any of the five other versions that have accumulated over time. The "Wagner" version, as it is commonly called, has the most consistent drive and vitality. At 2,056 bars, the Third is Bruckner's longest symphonic score, even though there are several others with longer durations (66:50 in the present performance). The difference is due to the generally brisk tempos Bruckner called for, and which Nézet-Seguin employs.



"Strings in Swingtime," Jerome Kern Song Arrangements; 8 Popular Songs for String Quartet Philharmonic Chamber Soloists Bridge Records

"What nice-looking people they are!" my wife exclaimed when she first gazed upon the booklet cover of this new Bridge Records release. I don't think she meant "nice-looking" in the usual sense, but was referring to their happy expressions. And as a sometime camera bug, I can attest that happiness is always photogenic. The reason for the prevalent mood of the four people depicted here isn't hard to surmise. It's the music, and I think you will find it contagious, too.

The musicians – from L to R, violinist Na Sun, cellist Qiang Tu, violist Katherine Greene, and violinist Anna Rabinova – all members of the New York Philharmonic, are collectively known as the Philharmonic Chamber Soloists when they give concerts on their own. When the program includes string quartet arrangements of 1930's and 40's songs by Jerome Kern and other great figures in what has come to be called "The Great American Songbook," the happiness is hard to contain. It spills over in the course of stylish performances of Kern songs as arranged by his back-then associate Charles Miller. "The Song is You," "Once in a Blue

make their impact, too, as commentators on the story: a pair of oboes, an English horn, 2 soprano clarinets, an E-flat clarinet, a bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, a contra-bassoon, and, very significantly, a tenor saxophone whose unique dark timbre makes a telling impact in the key moments.

This is not your usual ballet suite. It is a symphonic suite, resonant of the ballet and capturing its essence in symphonies terms. For a score of this magnitude, it is an advantage to have a long-established symphony orchestra with abundant resources such as the Chicago possesses to convey its full impact to us.



"Broadway-Lafayette," Concertos by Ravel, Gershwin, and Philip Lasser – Simone Dinnerstein, piano Kristjan Järvi, MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra Sony

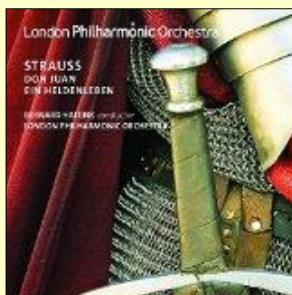
Simone Dinnerstein has done it again! This time, she has recorded two jazz-influenced 20th century classics, together with a work by an actual, living composer that already seems destined to become a 21st century classic and does not appear shabby in company with the works of acknowledged greatness on either side of it in the program. And she does it once again with her customary nuanced detail that does not get in the way of the flow patterns and pungent rhythms in the music.

As the album title implies, "Broadway-Lafayette" is a tribute to American and French musical styles and the subtle ways they influenced each other. Maurice Ravel's Piano Concerto in G (1929-1931) was inspired by the distinctive harmonies and rhythms of the American jazz idiom that was then the rage on both sides of the Atlantic. One impression you get from Dinnerstein's superbly articulated performance, backed by the sterling support she gets from the MDR Leipzig, is the feeling of steely modernism that Ravel injected into this work. From the wicked snap of the orchestral whip on the opening page, we are exposed to two very dissimilar moods in this opening movement. First, the sound of the machine age, for which Ravel made devilishly incisive use of an unusually large array of percussion instruments for a normal-sized orchestra: timpani, triangle, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum, tamtam, woodblock, and the afore-mentioned whip. This is contrasted by the blues idiom, first in an eerie, dreamlike statement from the piano, then in a warm, rich, broadly stated melody that stays with us long after we have heard it. The Adagio, with its seemingly

Moon," "All the Things you are," "The Way You Look Tonight," "Smoke Gets in Your eyes," and "Bill" speak for themselves, with the eloquence of the emotion that inspired the original songs.

These are not simple straightforward arrangements. The afore-mentioned "Smoke Gets in Your eyes," for instance, is prefaced by a quote from "Yesterdays," which Kern also wrote for the musical *Roberta*. For me, it conjured up the memory of the 1937 Hollywood version in which Irene Dunne sings "Yesterdays," with its incredibly poignant beauty, to Madame Roberta, the title character, as she drifts away peacefully into her final sleep, caressed by the song – one of the truly great moments in motion pictures.

The latter half of the CD is given to Eight Popular Songs for String Quartet, arranged by Wladimir Selinsky for his radio program "Strings in Swingtime" (hence the title of the present CD). They include three songs by Duke Ellington – Solitude, Mood Indigo, and Sophisticated Lady – plus "So Rare" (Jerry Herst), "Apple Blossoms" (Joe Venuti), "Blues Serenade" (Frank Signorelli), "Honeysuckle Rose" (Fats Waller), and "Sweet Sue" (Victor Young). The Philharmonic Chamber Soloists are joined by three distinguished colleagues from the NYPO, Nancy Allen (harp), David Grossman (bass), and Erik Charlston (vibraphone) whenever a song requires some additional color or texture or a walking bass line. The encore track at the end is a Paul Schwartz arrangement of Jerome Kern's "Long Ago and Far Away," deepening the prevalent mood of nostalgia for an era in which classical musicians could still be moved and inspired by the popular music of the day.



Strauss: Don Juan, Ein Heldenleben
Bernard Haitink, London Philharmonic Orchestra
LPO

These appropriately stirring accounts of two of the most popular tone poems of Richard Strauss were recorded live by Bernard Haitink and the London Philharmonic and now appear in beautifully processed form on the orchestra's in-house label. Don Juan was recorded on 3 December 1992 at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall and Ein Heldenleben on 29 August 1986 at the Royal Albert Hall. The remasterings were processed ADD and AAD, respectively. The sound is substantial, the performances are nicely detailed, and the two recordings are balanced very nicely. Beyond that, I am not sufficiently acquainted with the competition to say

effortless, serene melody ("It nearly killed me!" Ravel remarked in later years) is followed by a snappy finale in which Dinnerstein is more than equal to the demands of the extremely fast and difficult passagework.

"The Circle and the Child," Piano Concerto by Philip Lasser (b.1963) is up next. Dinnerstein's fellow New Yorker, product of a French mother and an American father, reveals influences from both sides of his heritage (He studied and lived in Paris for a number of years as well as at Harvard, Columbia and the Juilliard School, where he currently teaches.) This concerto, whose title refers to the circles of awareness into which our lives evolve as we move through childhood, partakes of the harmonic richness of Debussy impressionism. It is also infused with the spirit of a Bach chorale, *Ihr Gerstirn, ihr hohen Lüfte* (You stars in heaven, you vaulted sky), echoes of which emanate throughout the work. Lasser likens the unusual structure of this work to a journey in which piano and orchestra travel together, with the latter serving as a hologram for the former instead of playing the role of an adversary or a foil as usually occurs in a concerto. The demanding piano part, heard almost continuously throughout the score, engages the artist from the very beginning. This work was composed for Ms. Dinnerstein, who premiered it with the Atlanta Symphony in October, 2013. "I can only hope," she says, "that audiences will find it as extraordinary as I do." No problem, Simone: this one is a winner!

Finally we arrive at George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. And what can we add concerning a work so infectious that many listeners will hear it in their sleep long after first being exposed to it? Even more than the Ravel, which it influenced, Gershwin's "Jazz Concerto" captured the soul of 1920's jazz, all the more pointedly because it is infused with the sad, deeply nostalgic mood of the blues. Contemporary critics were quick to gig the composer for just pasting melodic segments together in forming this work (ignoring, of course, the obvious fact that it is titled a rhapsody, a music genre that does not need to follow the classical rules for a concerto). In any event, the various melodies segue and meld together beautifully in performance, as they do here with the close integration of Dinnerstein's piano and a versatile orchestra under the baton of Kristjan Järvi. Most crucially, Dinnerstein has a solid grasp of the piano styles required for this work, from "song plucker" to "stride," and her nuanced performance captures every change in mood in a very rich and evocative score. Though not as brass and percussion laden as the Ravel concerto, Gershwin's score makes for telling contributions from these sections, most spectacularly in the crash cymbal at the climax of the work when that wonderful big theme we heard earlier makes a final glorious reappearance.

whether or not Haitink and the LPO derive more out of their accounts of these two perennially popular works than others have done before them.

Both performances *do*, undeniably, sound impressive on their own merits. Don Juan (1889) was inspired by the legend of Don Juan Tenorio, 17th century Spanish libertine whose very name has become synonymous with womanizing on a grand scale. I hadn't listened to Strauss' tone poem or researched its antecedents in so long that I initially thought the work had been inspired by the "other" Don Juan, namely Don John of Austria, who commanded the allied coalition that beat the Turks decisively at the Battle of Lepanto, 1571.

I could be excused for my confusion (which even some historians have made on occasion) by the fact that the opening is so tempestuously bombastic that there seems to be a battle of *some* kind going on. Stunning performances by expanded woodwind and brass sections add to the impression of youthful exuberance and excitement. When the initial bombast has died down, it is succeeded by a soaring romantic theme that has become emblematic of this work, and which requires virtuosic playing by the entire brass section and particularly the four horns. (Strauss delighted in watching his hornists turn blue in the face at this moment!) Who needs war, the composer seems to ask us, when we have love conquests such as these?

Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life), premiered in 1899, was Strauss' summing up of his great cycle of tone poems and the artistic ideals that had driven his career up to this point, as well as a wicked rebuke to his critics. It called for an even larger orchestra than had Don Juan, consisting of piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, 2 soprano clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 3 trumpets in B-flat and 2 in E-flat, 3 trombones, tenor tuba, tuba, tympani, bass drum, snare drum, tenor drum, tam-tam, cymbals, 2 harps and a large string section, in addition to a prominent solo violin. Strauss makes stunning use of all these resources in surprisingly delicately scored moments as well as climactic ones, as part of a sweeping survey of the hero's life and strivings in six sections: "The Hero – The Hero's Adversaries – The Hero's Companion – The Hero in Battle – The Hero's Works of Peace – The Hero's Retirement from this World and Consummation."

There are clear hints that Strauss intended A Hero's Life to be autobiographical: the hero's adversaries are obviously critics (lots of cacophony here), and the hero's companion was modeled on his relationship with his wife, the soprano Pauline de Ahna (which was evidently very tempestuous as well as passionate). The hero's works of peace include numerous quotations from his earlier tone poems, and the final section may, in part, reflect his renunciation of the symphonic poem in favor of a commitment to his new consuming love, the opera. The autobiographical element has historically led many Strauss detractors to view Heldenleben as an



"Russian Recital," Prokofiev: Piano Sonata No. 6
Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition; Shostakovich:
Prelude and Fugue – Jorge Federico Osorio, piano
Cedille Records

Jorge Federico Osorio, world-concertizing Mexican pianist who now makes his home in Highland Park, IL, shows once again the prowess that has made him one of the most widely sought-after pianists on the planet. In a program of works by Prokofiev, Shostakovich, and Mussorgsky he sublimates his impressive technique to intelligent interpretations of some of the greatest works to have come out of Russia.

He begins with Prokofiev's *very* challenging Sonata No. 6 in A major, Op. 82, which is considered, along with opus numbers 83-84, one of the composer's three "War Sonatas." It nevertheless shows Prokofiev proclivities that were already much in evidence before WWII: his powerful rhythms, dissonance, tonal ambiguity, and a melting lyricism that is all the more welcome for being unexpected. The motto in the opening movement is set in parallel major and minor thirds, making for increased dissonance and delaying our recognition of the key signature. Staccato chords dominate the scherzo, and are succeeded in the slow movement by a surprisingly romantic waltz marked *lentissimo* ("very slowly" or "as slowly as possible"). Clashing dissonances mark a spirited finale in which the composer recalls music from the opening. Throughout the sonata, Osorio exerts admirable control over material that often threatens to spin off into chaos.

We're given another side of Prokofiev in "Romeo and Juliet before Parting," the most poignant of the Ten Pieces the composer arranged from the famous ballet. This is a long scene, and Osorio manages its elements of tenderness, gentle pathos, and emotion that is at first understated and then blooms into towering lyricism, with masterful timing and beautiful defined feeling. It is followed in the program by the Prelude and Fugue in D minor, the last item in Dmitri Shostakovich's Opus 87, which was inspired by J. S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, and which closes the circle of fifths on which the work is based. Powerful left-hand octaves, a slow unfolding of the majestic design, and an intelligent use of folk-like material, culminating in a mighty fugue in four voices, draw on Osorio's well-developed powers of concentration and phrasing.

Osorio concludes with a masterful account of

act of monumental egotism. A more moderate view is that he was preoccupied with two important subjects that defined his career: the conflict between the inner and the public man, and the joys of domestic love.



"Together," Music for Harp and Guitar
Yolanda Kondonassis, harp; Jason Vieaux, guitar
Azica Records

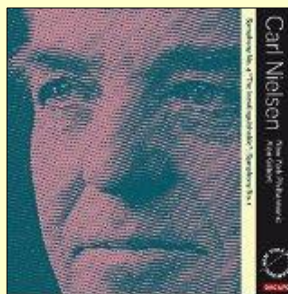
The very congenial timbres of harp and guitar come together in a program of modern works that are as mentally engaging as they are pleasant to listen to. Several, in fact, were composed expressly for the performers on this CD, harpist Yolanda Kondonassis and guitarist Jason Vieaux. As two of the most sought-after artists of the present generation, they have commissioned, among others, Gary Shocker's "Hypnotized," celebrating the delicious interplay and variety of sounds and moods that can be conjured up by both instruments, and Keith Fitch's aptly-named "Knock on Wood," in which "YK," as her fans refer to her, is sometimes called upon to rap upon the sounding board of her harp. In fact, both artists spend a good deal of time rapping, tapping, and drumming on the wooden cases of their instruments, adding pungent accents to the delicious sounds that we traditionally associate with both: the strummed chords and vocal expressiveness of the guitar and the symphonic range, sweeping glissandi and arpeggiated chords of the harp.

The program begins with "Suite Magica" by Buenos Aires native Maximo Diego Pujol (b.1957, a work that breathes the spirit of Argentine folk dances –Valse, Tango, and Candombe – as it deftly employs the conversational style that Vieaux and Kondonassis revel in with obvious delight. "Fantasia," a highly imaginative work by the Catalan composer Xavier Montsalvatge (1912-2002), explores a small world of atmospheres and tone colors in its three movements whose titles provide clear indications as to style and character: *Ciaroscuro* (light and shade), *Cadential*, and *Brasilado*.

A change of pace is provided by Shocker's "Hypnotized," in which the composer delights in the unexpected as he admits being intrigued by the back-and-forth possibilities for dialog between "one instrument that is capable of using vibrato and one that is not." The results are mesmerizing as each of the five movements flows easily and persuasively into the next. Fitch also admits to the fascination of contrasted sounds and timbres, from "wet" (resonant) to "dry"

Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* in which he unveils before us the fantastic design and incredible variety of moods and deep, rich, orchestral-like hues that characterize this masterwork. Under this pianist's hands, we are aware of the imaginative harmonies, powerful and varied rhythms, and broad range of subjects that must have made Mussorgsky's masterpiece almost incomprehensible to a musical world that was not prepared to receive it. In particular, Mussorgsky often wickedly juxtaposes the ridiculous and the sublime – the lightweight pastel of "Tuileries" with the slow, plodding, toil-bleared progress of a team of oxen in "Bydlo," for example, or the way the caricatures of haggling housewives in "Limoges, the Market Place" is brought back to earth by the stunning finality of death in "Catacombs," often requiring the pianist to pass *attacca* from one piece to the next for a more vivid contrast of moods.

The troubadour's song in "*Il vecchio castello*" (The Old Castle) is poignantly rendered here as a quiet lament for the vanished glories of the past, and "*Cum mortuis in lingua morta*" (with the dead in a dead language) is as solemnly beautiful in Osorio's rendering as I have ever heard it. On the other hand, the disjunctive rhythms and general ferocity in the awesome "Hut on Fowl's Legs" (Baba Yaga), together with its eerie tremolos in 16th-note triplets, requires the technical skill of the master pianist, and Osorio supplies this, too. The finale, "The Great Gate of Kiev," comes across here in all its sonorous majesty.



Nielsen: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 4, "Inextinguishable"
Alan Gilbert, New York Philharmonic
Dacapo

In a solid display of international cooperation, the New York Philharmonic under music director Alan Gilbert gives a powerful, scintillating account of two symphonies by Danish composer Carl Nielsen (1865-1931) recorded and released by Denmark's top class label, Dacapo. Recorded live in Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, New York 12-15 March 2014 in the DXD (Digital eXtreme Definition) audio format, 352.8 kHz, 24-bits, the dynamic range and presence of these recordings is so startling that the home listener has the feeling of actually being in the hall and feeling the vibrations of sound sweep over him, bathing his senses. And the NYPO are in their very best form, reminding us once again what a world-class orchestra this is.

(articulate), including a walking bass in the harp and a bell-like passage in harmonics. Technical terms aside, the new works by Shocker and Fitch have a lot of variety and are sheer fun for the listener as well as the performers. Both receive world premiere recordings on this Cd.

With his distinctive syntheses of folk and popular music styles from all over the world (especially the cultures of the East) and the counterpoint and fugue he learned from his study of J. S. Bach, late American composer Alan Hovhaness (1911-2000) remains a constant source of inspiration for rising composers and a cult figure for listeners who crave something different in music. All these elements, and more, come together in "Spirit of Trees," his 1983 sonata for Harp and Guitar, which incorporates the mysticism and modal tonalities of Asia in a deceptively freestyle manner in which time seems suspended. The resources of Kondonassis' harp and Vieaux's guitar are challenged and exploited in a hauntingly beautiful work.



Mahler: Symphony No. 5
Gerard Schwarz, The Colburn Orchestra
Yarlung Records

Gerard Schwarz guest conducts the Colburn Orchestra in a stunning performance, backed up by audiophile class sonics, of Gustav Mahler's Fifth Symphony. First, a note about the orchestra itself is in order. This is the orchestra of the Colburn Conservatory of Music in downtown Los Angeles, a fact which doesn't begin to tell the story. The conservatory itself was founded as recently as 2003 by Richard Colburn, who envisioned building a student orchestra as fine "as any orchestra on the planet," and, with music director Yehuda Gilad, set out to make the dream a reality.

If you get the idea that there is some serious Southern California money behind the Colburn Conservatory and its Orchestra, which performs in the glittering expanses of the nearby Ambassador Auditorium where the present recording was made in December, 2011, you are right. That it was well spent is demonstrated by the professional competence of the student musicians, some 89 of whom are listed in the booklet credits. The numbers are appropriate, as Mahler's Fifth calls for a large orchestra with quadruple winds, including six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, tympani, three other drums, metal and wood percussion, harp, and strings. Mahler actually scored this work rather

On the program are Symphonies No. 1 in G minor and No. 4, "The Inextinguishable." The fourth symphony is not given a key signature, for the good reason that it is a prime example of Nielsen's passion for "progressive tonality," which means the work ends on a different key than it began, usually the result of a profound struggle that runs the length of the entire work. The journey from harmonic ambiguity at the beginning to a stable key at the end can make for a very satisfying way to end a symphony. In fact, the harmonic odyssey is the main reason for the symphony, not just the means to an end.

In that respect, Nielsen might very well have listed his Symphony No. 1 without a key signature, as it begins in G minor only to be exposed, almost from the beginning, to shearing forces that pull at it like a rip tide in the direction of C major. This was an exceedingly mature first symphony for the 27 year old composer, reflecting his experience as an orchestral musician and his awareness of everything an orchestra can do. It is scored for a conventionally sized orchestra, but in other respects there is nothing conventional about it at all. From the beginning, Nielsen showed his predilection for Danish folk music as a source of inspiration. If his melodies seem rough-hewn, so were the folk tunes themselves. Even this early in his symphonic cycle, Nielsen was very much his own man.

At the head of the program we have Symphony No. 4, "The Inextinguishable." so-called by Nielsen himself because it embodies the indomitable urge to life. When I first heard this work almost fifty years ago it struck me as being unlike anything I'd ever heard before. The passage of time has not dimmed this impression. Powerful, virtuosic playing by every chair of the New York Philharmonic brings out the salient points of this work. Leonard Bernstein, who introduced American audiences to Nielsen more than 30 years after his death, summed up these qualities up as "'his rough charm, his swing, his drive, his rhythmic surprises, his strange power of harmonic and tonal relationships, and especially his constant unpredictability."

The NYPO delivers all these features of the Fourth Symphony, and more, in the course of a maelstrom of activity that finally plays out to great satisfaction with the triumphant re-emergence of the "Inextinguishable" theme at the conclusion of the work. Along the way we encounter what for many listeners will be the most remarkable feature of the finale, the "dueling" tympani, positioned at either extreme of the orchestra and seemingly in the grip of a dire struggle. The pacing is also very smart through the entire symphony, thanks to Gilbert's solid preparation, especially in matters of tempo that can unnerve many an unwary conductor.

economically compared with the gargantuan forces required for some of his other symphonies, with the idea that he would always have the right instruments available for what he had to say. In some moments, particularly in the spacious Adagietto, scored for strings alone, we even have the impression of a chamber music-like texture.

As Schwarz conducts this work with his customarily perfect sense of timing, he lays its fascinating five-movement structure out for our appreciation. Mahler himself claimed to have written the first two movements “backwards,” with the “Trauermarsch,” a funeral march in slowly and carefully measured time, preceding the second movement, marked “*Stürmisch bewegt, mit größter Vehemenz*” (stormily moved, with the greatest vehemence). The emotional character of the Funeral March is underscored by Mahler’s affective marking “*Streng. Wie ein Kondukt*” (Powerful, like a bolt of lightning). The two movements are related in that they share some common themes and follow without a break, so that Mahler designated them together as Part I of the symphony.

Part II is the Scherzo movement, marked “*Kräftig, nicht zu schnell*” (Vigorously, not too fast). This is no simple scherzo, but a 17-minute movement that contains a lot of variety in a structure that has both rondo and sonata-form elements. It also features eloquent and moving French horn and trombone solos, played here by Johanna Yarbrough and Paul Jenkins respectively, in which the instrument (especially the horn) seems to be separated spatially from the rest of the orchestra and virtually sitting in the listener’s lap. Whether you like this procedure or not depends on your individual taste. I should mention that the 15 ips analog tape used in the recording imparts a real vividness to the sonic image.

If the manic Scherzo is the symphony’s cornerstone, establishing D major as the focal key of a work that is ostensibly in C sharp minor, the Adagietto is its emotional heart, with its long, sad melody that many listeners identify with love, loss, and heartbreak. Mahler and Schwarz take us on a giddy ride in the finale, a Rondo marked both “*giocoso*” (playful) and “*frisch*” (fresh) which includes no fewer than four fugal episodes and a chorale before a final dash to the finish line.

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technique, given its formidable structure, its build-ups to the various climaxes, its quasi-fugal writing in the finale, and the way its four movements dovetail without a break. And of course, as Gornostaeva shows us, the lyricism in this work is immense. For an encore, she gives us Schumann’s wonderful “*Aufschwung*” (Soaring) from the Fantasy Pieces, Op. 12, the perfect ending to a soul-satisfying program.



Discovering a Legend: 5,” Vera Gornostaeva, piano, plays Schumann / Liszt / Schubert LPO Classics

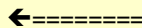
World recognition came late for Vera Gornostaeva. The Russian pianist, who was a pupil of Heinrich Neuhaus and was herself a professor at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, ran afoul of the Soviet authorities for her political and religious views. Consequently, she was denied permission to travel abroad, which stifled her international fame for a number of years. Only after the breakup of the Soviet Union have world audiences had the chance to experience the gracious artistry that was previously known only to audiences in Moscow and the provincial cities and towns of Russia.

How lucky those provincial Russkies were becomes quite apparent in these live recordings, made in the Small Hall and Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory in 1968 and 1979 and released by LP Classics. The program begins with Robert Schumann’s well-loved *Kinderszenen* (Scenes from Childhood). This is an ideal place to start because it allows us to experience a nuanced approach to a set of character pieces depicting a child at play, listening to tales of foreign lands and people, and drifting into sleep, sometimes blissful (*Traümerei* – Dreaming, *Kind in Einschlummern* – Child Falling Asleep) and at other times filled with troubling nightmares (*Fürchtenmachen* – Frightening). All are suffused with this artist’s characteristic warmth.

Franz Liszt’s engaging *Valse Oubliée* (forgotten waltz) No. 1 is succeeded by his *Funerailles* (funeral ode) with its sudden left-hand tremolos and ostinato octaves in the bass, running passagework building up to the most powerful climax imaginable (with only a forlorn melody encountered along the way for solace) and, at last, ending suddenly and quietly. The virtuosity required of the pianist is obvious, but Gornostaeva supplies the most vital element of all with her fine poetic sensitivity.

Franz Schubert is represented by 17 Waltzes, compiled as a suite by Gornostaeva, and organized and performed with such intuitive naturalness that one waltz flows graciously into the next. The “Wanderer” Fantasy in C major, on the other hand, requires a transcendent

To be continued in the column on the left





Mozart: Complete Violin Concertos 1-5 + Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat for Violin & Viola, K364

Rachel Barton Pine, violin, with Matthew Lipman, viola (K364)

Sir Neville Marriner, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields

Avie Records

“In 2011, three weeks after the birth of my first child, I performed the complete Mozart five violin concertos in a single evening’s concert.... I have since had the opportunity to tour this program across the US.” I’ve been used to expecting the extraordinary from the red-haired Chicagoan whose zest for all things string ranges from caressing choice baroque, classical, and romantic repertoire on a 1742 Guarneri del Gesu to playing a mean five-string Viper in the thrash/doom metal band Earthen Grave. But this statement stopped me in my tracks.

Just imagine the stamina, the sheer powers of concentration, needed to perform all five concertos in the same concert. Even allowing for reasonably brisk tempi and time for re-tuning between concerti and the usual curtain calls (numerous in the case of an artist such as this), you couldn’t pull it off in less than two and a half hours. That Barton Pine states the feat so matter-of-factly astonishes me! Her rationale for this is interesting: “I found that practicing them as a cycle greatly deepened my relationship with them.” That relationship is much in evidence in zestful accounts of those same five Mozart violin concertos with Sir Neville Marriner and the Academy of St. Martin’s. Sir Neville is now in his 90th year, a fact that you would not surmise from these lithe, alert performances. RBP admits to being inspired by his “energy, focus, and commitment to every detail of the music.” Under his leadership, the ASMF play the crucial orchestral parts, which are in constant interaction with the soloist, with a freshness that might lead us to imagine incorrectly that they were encountering Mozart for the first time and it was love at first sight. At the other end of the age spectrum, 22-year old violist Matthew Lipman, here making his recording debut, fits in with Barton Pine’s artistic vision for the Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat, K364 as if they’d been partners for years. The recordings, produced at Air Lyndhurst Studios, London by Andrew Keener, one of the UK’s most seasoned sound booth veterans, sound absolutely wonderful in body and detail.

The astonishment doesn’t end here. It actually begins with the fact that Mozart may have penned all five concertos in 1775 (there are admittedly some problems in dating them), at which time he was still just 19 years of age. They bear a certain family resemblance: energetic openings in which the violin gets into action early-on; dreamy slow movements, marked Adagio or Andante cantabile, in which the violin leads the way in intimate discourse with the orchestra; and (in all except the first) spirited Rondo finales. The difference is in the details and in Mozart’s increasing grasp of his material. The Rondo finales of K216, K218, and K219, for example, feature a contrasted middle section of a different character, after which the soloist plays a cadenza-like flourish as a return to the rondo theme. It is a matter of record that Mozart left no written-out cadenzas for any of these concertos. In his day, the performer was more or less expected to extemporize his own as a way of showing off his technique and leaving his personal stamp on the concerto. Barton Pine has always opted to play her own cadenzas, as she does here. The one to the opening movement of Concerto No. 3, K216 is particularly brilliant in its sensational double-stopping while preserving the essential spirit of Mozart.

The Sinfonia Concertante, to my mind one of the most perfectly satisfying works of Mozart’s era (or any other), comes across in all its splendor in an extremely vibrant performance by all hands. The moment in the opening movement in which violin and viola emerge together out of the orchestral crescendo, like song sparrows rising from the morning mist, still gives me goose bumps every time I hear it. I could wish that Barton Pine and Lipman had taken it more slowly at first for greater effect, rather than up-tempo from the outset, but that is just critical flyspecks in view of the remarkable rapport both soloists exhibit. The music in this work is very rich harmonically, even for Mozart. Cognizant of the tendency for the violin to overwhelm the viola, the composer tuned the latter a semitone sharper than usual (a process known as *scordatura*) for greater brilliance and penetrating power, and he divided his violas to enrich the harmony. The slow movement is virtually an operatic duet between the two instruments (Mozart was at work on his harmonically rich opera *Idomeneo* at this time). The irrepressible finale, filled with high spirits and wicked little surprises, makes its wonted effect here.