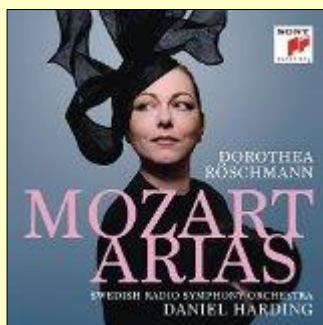


Phil's Classical Reviews

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"Mozart Arias" - Dorothea Röschmann, soprano, with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra under Daniel Harding (Sony Classical)

German soprano Dorothea Röschmann is a native of Flensburg in Schleswig-Holstein, and she studied in Hamburg at the Hochschule für Theater und Musik. She first gained international prominence at the 1995 Salzburg Festival in the role of Susannah in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*. We never talk about a lady's age in this column (particularly a singer's), but Röschmann has been around long enough to acquire an enviable reputation as an opera singer and a soloist in choral works. Here, she returns to the scene of the crime, singing choice arias by some of Mozart's most sorely-conflicted heroines.

They do not include Susannah this time, as her voice has sufficiently matured with experience to qualify her as an ideal interpreter of Susannah's fellow love-conspirator, the Contessa Almaviva, in *Dove sono il bel momenti* (Where are the golden moments of tranquility and pleasure?) Evidently, they have flown, and the Contessa has exchanged costumes with her maid so that both, in disguise, may win back their wayward husbands. It is a bittersweet, poignant moment, and Röschmann's voice soars to the heights, securely and seamlessly, as she captures its requisite emotion.

Röschmann also gives superior accounts of the Contessa's other famous aria, *Porgi amor, qualche ristoro* (Grant, love, relief to that sorrow) and Donna Elvira's aria *Mi tradi, quell'alma ingrata* (That ungrateful man betrayed me) as she confesses to herself that she still feels love and pity for the title character in *Don Giovanni*, just before the scene in which the profligate Don will be carried off to Hell by a swarm of demons. (That's the way these things happen, folks!)

Some of the arias heard on this CD reflect the over-the-top extravagant emotions of old-fashioned Metastasio-style heroines. (Booklet annotator Dieter Borchmeyer describes such heroines as "rabid women" and "anachronistic figures from a bygone world of emotions"



"The Captive Nightingale," German romantic rarities Elena Xanthoudakis, soprano; Jason Xanthoudakis, clarinet; and Clemens Leske, piano (Signum Classics)

Elena Xanthoudakis has come a long way since her early years in the "Victorian Alps" region of Australia. Now located in England with London for her home base, she is much in demand in opera house and recital hall. These recordings of romantic rarities for soprano, clarinet, and piano are not new, but were actually made in Sydney and released by Move Records in 2010, before she relocated to London.

That little deception aside, it is nice that the Aussies haven't kept this treasure of an album to themselves, and it is now available to a larger audience through the present Signum release. The genre itself has basically disappeared, though the combination of voice, clarinet, and piano had a lot to say for itself in helping create the ethos of early German romanticism. Xanthoudakis is a lyric coloratura soprano, a voice often used for its lovely decorative qualities. Where the voice leaves off, the clarinet takes us all the way down to the warm depths of its chalumeau register. And the piano supports all this florid lyricism and is often instrumental in creating the setting for a song long before the voice is first heard (Franz Schubert's *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*, *The Shepherd on the Rock*, is a good example) as well as extending the mood of the song after its last measures have died away. All of which is very German romantic.

The beautiful tone and smooth, easy technique cultivated by Xanthoudakis and her brother Jason on clarinet are perfectly complimented by Clemens Leske's piano. Both performances and sound recordings have a nice balance and a sense of spaciousness. That's important in light of the poetic texts, which typically proclaim the beauty and freedom of the out-of-doors. With the exception of Franz Schubert, all of the composers in this recital are scarcely familiar names: Andreas Späth, Konradin Kreutzer, Heinrich Proch, Johann Wenzel Kalliwoda, Franz Lachner, Johann Sobeck, and Peter von Lindpaintner. The texts are typically full of images of

(which tells me that he has probably never been married!) A good example is Vitellia's aria *Ecco il Punto* (The hour has come) as she envisions pitiless death advancing towards her in *La Clemenza di Tito*.

In this, one of Mozart's most challenging soprano arias, this artist's voice soars to the heights of fear and the depths of despair, plunging way down into the deeper half of her impressive tessitura. In this aria, as in the Contessa's *Dove sono*, some listeners have detected a slight edge as Röschmann's voice creeps into its highest register. To my ears, it sounds like a faintly metallic vibration in a slightly overloaded microphone. It does not, I am happy to say, diminish our pleasure in hearing her seamlessly beautiful voice and flawless intonation.



Mendelssohn: Violin Concerto; Midsummer Night's Dream: Overture and Incidental Music - Jennifer Pike, violin; Edward Gardner, City of Birmingham Symphony (Chandos) Hybrid SACD in 24 bit/96 kHz, 5.0 Surround

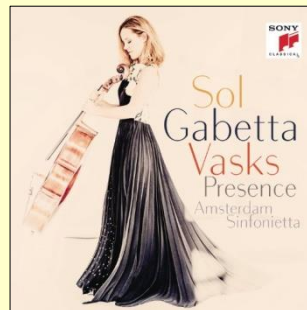
This Chandos release is actually Vol. 4 in the series "Mendelssohn in Birmingham." Commemorating the English city and music festival where the composer enjoyed some of his greatest successes between 1837 and 1847. Almost 200 years later, Mendelssohn still makes news, and conductor Edward Gardner and the CBSO are in fine mettle to proclaim it. Even better, their rapport with soloist Jennifer Pike is apparent from the opening bars of the great Violin Concerto in E minor.

Pike starts off slowly and quietly, somewhat subdued in fact, in the opening measures, playing the bravura tune that is soon taken up by the orchestra. I was at first taken aback by her approach, before I realized on subsequent listening how she was making her way through one of the most carefully plotted opening

shining valleys seen from mountain heights, flowing brooks, and forlorn milkmaids. Many contain a strong sense of homesickness for one's alpine homeland, usually Switzerland. This longing reaches its poignant peak in Proch's *Die gefangene Nachtigall* (The Captive Nightingale) which gives the album its title.

Two songs in this program clearly stand out. First, Schubert's *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*, which unfolds leisurely in three sections, from nostalgic loneliness to despair and finally, a sense of hopefulness at the coming of spring as the shepherd prepares to embark on his travels and be reunited with his beloved. In what is really a scena rather than a simple lied or aria, all three voices, soprano, clarinet, and piano, share a responsibility for its success.

The other standout is Lindtpainter's much lesser-known *Der Hirt und das Meerweib* (The Shepherd and the Mermaid). The emotion rises to unsuspected heights when the mermaid declares her passion for the hapless mortal: [translated] "Sling your arms around me / Handsome shepherd, come to me! / My lips should kiss you, / fiery glowing, on and on! / O come, to me! Down to me! / Now you are mine!" We have traveled in realms of folklore before, so we know the fate awaiting a mortal who falls in love with a supernatural creature. (How long can he hold his breath?)



"Presence," music for cello and orchestra by Pēteris Vasks – Sol Gabetta, cello; Amsterdam Sinfonietta directed by Candida Thompson (Sony Classical)

Sol Gabetta, born in 1981 in Cordoba, Argentina of French and Russian lineage, now makes her home in Switzerland, from which she launches her busy international career as cellist. She shows off all her musical talents (including one that may surprise you) in this new Sony release of music by a Latvian composer whose music possesses a distinct character of its own, reflecting the mind and personality of its creator.

Pēteris Vasks (b. 1946) is a personal revelation to me. I'd begun to lose hope that I'd ever see a composer emerge in the post-WWII era who could communicate as simply and directly with his audience as Vasks does, without pretense or sterile pre-compositional forms. But Vasks is, thankfully, the real thing: a composer for whom the man and his music merge, as Gabetta observes so perceptively, "to create a single entity."

movements in the literature. There is a fine moment when the music modulates into a tranquil second subject in G major in which her playing shows great warmth and unforced beauty.

In this movement, and elsewhere throughout the concerto, violinist and conductor pace themselves optimally so that they don't get ahead of themselves in the fast passages and build the music nicely through a number of fine-edged tempo changes and rhythmic shifts. As even a first-time listener will observe, this work is intended to be performed as a continuous whole with the transitions between movements taken *attacca*. Jennifer Pike does a fine job in this regard, especially in the 14-bar transition from the Andante with its lovely melody, reminiscent of Mendelssohn's Songs without Words, to the extremely active and effervescent Allegretto finale. The concerto begins, unusually, with the entrance of the solo violin, which plays almost continually in every movement. More than that, the soloist often takes the lead over the orchestra in the frequent tempo changes and thematic shifts, requiring Pike to be continually on her alert. This is a nicely conceived and well-executed performance, which deserves a hearing, even in view of the enormous competition (with more than 200 available versions, this is Mendelssohn's most-recorded work of all).

Gardner and the CBSO have a grand time with the Overture and Incidental Music for A Midsummer Night's Dream. The Overture (1826, an astonishing creation by the then-17 year old composer) is a striking assemblage of instrumental effects ranging from the scampering of light fairy feet to the braying of Nick Bottom (following his literal "translation" into an ass). We are given the entire Incidental Music here, not just the Scherzo, Intermezzo, Nocturne and Wedding March in the popular suite, so that we get to hear such benignly neglected numbers as the incantation song "Ye Spotted Snakes" (here featuring sopranos Rhian Lois and Keri Fuge). In all, this is a very affectionate account of some of Mendelssohn's best-loved music.

With the utter simplicity of the tools he uses and the long lines of his music and the length of time it takes to fully develop, he may seem at first like some latter-day Sibelius – but with a difference. He can be sad but never despondent. His musical thoughts can soar, but never into the realm of empty euphoria. Much of the down-to-earth quality in man and music was the result of his early experience in Latvia, then part of the Soviet Union. Because the Soviet bureaucrats then had a repressive policy against Baptists, he was denied admission to conservatory in his native country and had to further his education in neighboring Lithuania.

The very personal cantilena in the voice of the cello in *Musique du Soir* for Cello and Organ may be taken as a reflection of the late 1980's and the desire for freedom from artificially imposed restraints and barriers between people that has been a consistent thread in Vasks' music to the present day. One can hear it in the rich, warm harmony that develops between the voices of Sol Gabetta's cello and the organ, played here by her mother, Irene Timacheff-Gabetta.

The major work on the program is Vasks' Cello Concerto No. 2, subtitled "Presence." It is in three movements. First, a slow Andante cantabile preceded by a cadenza (as if to acknowledge the old gag that "Life is uncertain, so play your cadenzas first.") Then, an intense and agitated Allegro moderato, in which the music typically builds to frenzied pitch, followed by an abrupt silence (in which the unwary home listener will be in a panic to rush to his system and check the settings) before proceeding on a slightly different tack. At the 10:00 mark, the cello plunges downward in a seamless swoop of oh, about twenty or thirty octaves (I exaggerate, of course, but this descent, superbly executed here by Gabetta, is really spectacular!)

In the Adagio finale, a slow stepwise ascent that may recall Samuel Barber's famous Adagio, the music takes on a new dimension when we suddenly hear Sol's voice in a wordless vocalise. It makes for a stunning surprise that enriches the harmony even as it leaves the impression of earth and heaven reunited – a common idea in the music of a composer who envisions a better world for all humanity.

The last work on the program, *Grāmata čellam* (The Book for Cello Solo) is a favorite of Sol Gabetta, particularly the last movement, *pianissimo* (and, yes, she gets to vocalise here, too, and very memorably). This work is in two movements, one agitated and the other peaceful, as if to emphasize Pēteris Vasks' contention that we can each of us choose what triumphs in the end: aggression or tranquility.



Szymanowski: Piano Sonata No. 1; Mazurkas
Sang Mi Chung, piano
(Centaur Records)

Seoul, South Korea native Sang Mi Chung has toured extensively in the United States, Europe, and Asia as recitalist, soloist with orchestra, and chamber musician. She now lives in the U.S., where she studied as a scholarship student at the Juilliard School. A Steinway Artist, she records exclusively for release by Centaur Records. This is her fifth album.

Earlier in her career, she got a boost from the late New York Times critic Harold Schonberg, who proclaimed that she had everything, “technique, talent, and real personality.” That sort of boost is important in this instance, as I sometimes get the idea that Chung doesn’t know how good she really is. Without sacrificing any of the above adjectives, this artist knows instinctively how to sublimate her own personality so that her Haydn, Mendelssohn, Chopin and Beethoven sound like themselves, in all their splendor.

That brings us to Polish composer Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937), who is perhaps the most difficult of all for a pianist to characterize. Szymanowski was the most prominent figure in an early 20th century movement in the arts known as Young Poland, which favored decadence, neo-romanticism, impressionism, symbolism, and art nouveau. This composer found inspiration in both Chopin and Scriabin, though as he developed he was closer to the latter in rejecting the framework beneath the luminous tonality he sought. He was also an advocate of a free love that transcended the boundaries of nation, race, and gender and looked forward to a humanity united by the religion of Eros.

A complex guy, this. When interpreting Szymanowski, the artist must have a fine grasp of the patterns of tension and release in his music, of the moments of greater and lesser emotion, of passion versus mere charming endearment. Sang Mi Chung possesses all these insights and, in addition, a feeling for the texture and flow of the music. She shows these qualities in the 14 Mazurkas she has selected from Szymanowski’s Op. 50 (1925). Szymanowski’s mazurkas make use of the various rhythms found in Polish folk music, in a style of his own that can be both rhapsodic and measured. The slower mazurkas often have a contrasted middle section that is more energetic, and



“Spain,” music of Falla, Debussy
Vanessa Perez, piano
(Steinway & Sons)

Venezuelan-American pianist Vanessa Perez has come a long way since she made her debut in Caracas at the age of 11, playing the Grieg Piano Concerto. Since leaving her native land, she has studied in London at the Royal Academy of Music, in Italy, and in the United States, where she completed her graduate studies at Yale University under Peter Frankel. She has performed in the U.S., Latin America, and Europe. In New York City the Steinway Artist has played in venues ranging from The Blue Note to Carnegie Hall.

I’ve reviewed this engaging artist once before, in her Chopin Preludes (see *Phil’s Classical Reviews*, June 2012), at which time she remarked, “I wanted the music to sound organic and real, above all. I didn’t want pretty. I wanted honest.” That comment goes double for the present program of music by Spanish composer Manuel de Falla and his French contemporary Claude Debussy. All the pieces are inspired by the land and culture of Spain. The Falla pieces are mostly drawn from his ballets *El Amor brujo* (Love the Sorcerer) and *El Sombrero de tres picos* (The Three-Cornered Hat) and the two Spanish Dances from his opera *La Vida breve* (The Short Life). I don’t know who made the present arrangements for piano (probably Peres herself), but they are luminously beautiful, particularly in the way she plays them, and provide a finer focus into the music.

El Amor brujo is the most compelling of all. Elements of love passion, the supernatural, and longing for release compete in Falla’s vivid tale of a gypsy woman trying to break free from the ghost of her dead lover and find fulfillment in a new love. The most spectacular numbers – Dance of Terror, The Ghost, and Ritual Fire Dance – deal with this struggle. My personal favorite is “Pantomime,” with a lilting melody that seems to soar effortlessly into a realm beyond pain, sorrow, and corrosive passion. Ms. Pérez does some of her best work in the under-performed *Fantasia bética*, which celebrates the natural beauty and folk culture of Falla’s beloved province of Andalusia (known in Roman times as *Baetica*), particularly in the ways it evokes the beautiful sounds of plucked strings.

Debussy, who was Falla’s close friend and mentor, is

the trick here is to lead into this section in a way that doesn't seem too obvious or mannered.

Ms. Chung is very adept at doing just that, a quality that is also reflected in her performance of the early Sonata No. 1 in C minor, Op. 8 (1904). It is basically late romantic in style. The first movement is dramatic and episodic, while the Adagio is mostly soft and lyrical with a couple of Agitated pages for contrast. The Minuet is a courtly and endearing miniature, and the finale has a portentous introduction followed by a very demanding fugue which holds no terrors for Ms. Chung.



Brahms: Klavierstücke, Op. 76; Rhapsodies, Op. 79; Intermezzi, Op. 116 + Bach-Brahms: Chaconne
Anna Vinnitskaya, piano
(Alpha Classics)

Anna Vinnitskaya, who grew up in Novorossiysk on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, has come a long way in the world. All the way to Brussels, where she won the first prize at the Queen Elisabeth of Belgium Piano Competition (2007), and to Hamburg, where she was appointed the youngest-ever Professor of Piano at the Musikhochschule in 2009. In this, her fifth CD, she moves beyond the Russian repertoire to embrace the world of Johannes Brahms. The results are as inspiring as they are sensational.

Brahms' arrangement of J. S. Bach's great Chaconne in D minor for solo violin gets a treatment from Vinnitskaya that reveals what a remarkable concept this work is. On one instrument with just four strings, Bach created a fabulous world of music, and the magic is, if anything, even more evident in Brahms' version. Perhaps because Brahms listed it as a "study for left hand," this version has gotten scant attention from pianists until just recently. This is only the second time I've encountered it as a reviewer; you would probably have never heard it in a lifetime of concert-going and home listening. I personally like it better than the more famous and virtuosic piano arrangement by Ferruccio Busoni because it gets you closer to the shapely contours of the music. Vinnitskaya particularly loves the Brahms version because "On the piano you can actually see the notes – the keys are right in front of you. On the violin you have to find them first."

represented by three pieces inspired by Spain. Of "*La soirée dans Grenade*" (Evening Stroll in Grenada), Falla observed that, without actually using a single folkloric theme, Debussy had conveyed Spain in the most minute details. "*La puerta del vino*" (The Wine Gate), said to have been inspired by a postcard from Falla, depicts the picturesque portal through which the wine was delivered to the Alhambra. In *Linderaja*, the name of the name of a beautiful gem of a garden surrounded by a courtyard on the south side of the Alhambra, Perez is joined in a piano duet by fellow pianist Stephen Buck (also heard in Falla's Spanish Dance No. 2). The exalted music making depicts the exquisite beauty and deep sense of peace that many visitors have remarked of this spot.



Brahms: Double Concerto, Op. 102; Symphony No. 4
Amanda Forsyth, cello; Pinchas Zukerman, violin and conductor, Canada National Arts Centre Orchestra
(Analekta)

Amanda Forsyth is a fast-rising star among cellists, for reasons that we hear clearly in the present recording of Brahms' Double Concerto for Violin and Cello in A minor, Op. 102. Here, the Juno award laureate, playing a 1699 cello by Carlo Giuseppe Testore, displays an exceptionally rich, full tone and the wide range called for by the demands of a work in which her instrument is an equal partner with the violin in every way.

Amanda lives in Ottawa with her world-renowned husband Pinchas Zukerman, who is her partner in the Double Concerto. Their voices are perfectly matched for a work in which they are asked to perform side by side, often independently, and then, in the Andante movement, together in the breathless intimacy of what seems like an instrumental love duet. From the forte pronouncement by the orchestra that arrests our attention at the very opening, we know we are in for an exceptionally robust recorded performance.

Truly, this performance is as compelling as any I've heard on record. The two soloists interact with each other and the orchestra, and in the rising passages near the end of the movement, as a united solo unit. The effect is magnificent. Brahms even calls for his soloists to play in octaves and, on stunning occasions in both the Allegro and the finale, on all four stopped strings, creating the illusion of no fewer than eight melody voices! The lyricism in the Andante is rapturous

That, according to Vinnitskaya, accounts for much of the tension for the violinist that the pianist lacks when approaching the same music. To compensate, Brahms insured tension would be present in his piano version by casting it for the left hand only. As Vinnitskaya observes, you can play this version with both hands, but the inner tension is missing. The artist (who, by the way, *is* left-handed) says the recording engineer kept looking at her during the session to make sure she wasn't cheating! No problem: Vinnitskaya's performance is keenly attuned to Bach's strong cadences, florid arpeggios, tasteful decorations, and carefully structured build-ups. Even little nuances, such as the imitation of a posthorn we hear at one point, come across beautifully.

The other works on the program basically reveal the late Brahms as the complete master of the short piano piece. These are not simple character pieces, exploring an easily identifiable mood with no changes in harmony or mood. Nor can they be considered items in a piano "cycle." On the contrary, each of the Klavierstücke, Op. 76 and the Intermezzi, Op. 116 is a self-contained miniature masterwork. As Vinnitskaya explains, "The older he got, the less musical time he needed to express himself: it's the pure concentrated essence of music."

Ignoring the 2 Rhapsodies, Op. 79 (but don't *you* do that!) the piano pieces fall into two basic classifications: deep, ruminative, occasionally sad and always lyrical intermezzi and vigorously robust and often humorous capriccios. For space limitations, Op. 76 will suffice. The tumultuous first capriccio offers little respite until we reach the coda. The second capriccio captures the carefree spirit of Hungarian dance music. There follow two intermezzi, the first astonishingly beautiful in a mid-summer mood, the second delicately textured in a way that recalls the far away and long ago. The next capriccio is a tricky affair that reveals Brahms' fascination with the conflicts between duple and triple rhythms within a 6/8 time signature. Two last intermezzi, redolent with charm and filled with longing, respectively, are succeeded by the rapturous excitement of the final capriccio. Brahms wisely did not assign characteristic titles to any of these pieces, and so the artist is free to interpret them in terms of his or her own associations. "I like that," says Vinnitskaya!

and uplifting without being cloying, and it gives Forsyth and Zukerman plenty of opportunity to savor some really great melodies. The finale, *Vivace non troppo*, is of Hungarian inspiration, with high rhythms that compel the best of soloists and orchestra. At one point the cello part is actually higher than the violin. Both instruments join in a spirited rush to the finish line before the final orchestral cadence calls "time." The usual reason we do not hear this attractive work more often, namely the difficulty of finding equally brilliant matched soloists, clearly does not apply here.

In the companion work, Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98, Zukerman shows himself to be the complete musician as he directs the NAC Orchestra in a highly nuanced performance that does not neglect the shapely contours or the high sense of drama in this work. From the very opening in descending thirds (duh-DUM, da-DEE, duh-DUM, da-DEE) we have the fundamental duality that makes for conflict as well as the fragmented motif from which everything in this movement will evolve. Zukerman takes the slow movement in a way that stresses its grandeur and its different kind of melodic beauty, of peace won through experience rather than simple happiness, which confused Brahms' contemporaries who mistakenly heard it as "joyless." Those tumbling measures in the Allegro giocoso, the only true symphonic scherzo that Brahms ever wrote, are right on the money with their infectious spirit. And Zukerman shows a masterful hand in the way the finale, based on an old Baroque variation technique known as a *passacaglia*, develops stage by stage, without ignoring Brahms' qualifying adjectives *energico e appassionato*. It is certainly "energetic and passionate" here, making this easily one of the best Brahms Fourth I've ever heard. Full-bodied sound, as in the Double Concerto, makes this album easy to recommend.



“Incandescent,” piano recital
Catherine Lan, pianist
(Centaur Records)

I don't know what to make of Catherine Lan. This piano prodigy is billed as “Dr. Lan,” and holds a DMA from the University of Miami. She is currently on the faculty of Palm Beach Atlantic University and Broward College while pursuing a very active performance career. For all this, to judge from the images on her website, she appears to be scarcely out of her teens. Like so many artists' websites, her bio mainly deals with awards and achievements. We don't even know her country of origin or birth date. The earliest personal info deals with her international debut at the age of eight (maybe she was born onstage?)

In this, her maiden CD release, Lan plays a program that reflects the musical qualities she esteems most: color, tonal beauty, and *movement*. An ultimate example of the last-named element is Carl Maria von Weber's Rondo from Piano Sonata No. 1, a *Perpetuum Mobile* in which the pianist's right hand gets no rest at all during its four-minute duration until the triple-forte cadence at the very end brings matters to a sudden stop. J. S. Bach's Prelude and Fugue in A minor, BWV 894, which begins the program, is likewise an exercise in velocity with fast triplets and driving energy in both parts. Swirls of 32nd notes break out on four occasions in the Prelude. Uncharacteristically, Bach does not slow the tempo in order to bear down on his subjects in the Fugue, a procedure Lan finds congenial.

Her performance of Schumann's *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* (Carnival Jest from Vienna) captures its bewildering multiplicity of incidents in a way that makes it appear to be something more than merely a test-run for his more famous Carnival, which is usually the impression one gets in performances. The listener finds respite from the martial, boisterous, and humorous music in episodes such as the tender Romance and an Intermezzo in which a yearning melody is heard effectively over a foundation of roiling triplets.

Lan does some of her best work in the two Brahms selections. The Intermezzo, Op. 118, No. 2, has an unforgettable memory plus a key resolution that moves from an unsettling F-sharp minor to a serenely beautiful A major. The B-flat minor Intermezzo, Op. 117, No. 2 is a subtler piece in which a lot happens in just 4 ½



“Ludovico Einaudi: Portrait”
Angèle Dubeau, La Pietà
(Analekta)

Violinist and founder Angèle Dubeau leads her own chamber orchestra La Pietà in a program of select pieces by Italian composer Ludovico Einaudi (b. Turin, 1955). In case you haven't noticed, Einaudi may just be the most popular living composer in the world today. We are told that more than 100,000 people “danced the night away” listening to his music at a recent climax of the Festival La Notte della Taranta. This is one avant-gardist who does not disdain his audiences but clearly writes music that responds to an inmost need in many people today.

Einaudi, who has also enjoyed great success as a film and TV composer (*Doctor Zhivago*, 2006; *This is England*, 2006), writes easily accessible music characterized by luminous color, warmth, and transparency. You might term it “mood music,” but if so it is mood music of the highest order. As Angèle Dubeau and La Pietà show us, his effortlessly lyrical, instantly emotive music can be absolutely spellbinding. With evocative titles such as *Giorni dispari* (Vanished Days), *Fuori dalla notte* (Out in the Night), and *Divenire* (Becoming), these pieces are short, pithy and self-contained. One could not imagine them forming part of any major work of music, and indeed that is not the composer's intention. Not for Einaudi the preoccupation with form, thematic development, and key resolution that would be required to compose a symphony. The exquisitely refined mood piece is his specialty, and he does it supremely well. As I have had occasion to observe in my own household, this is music to help the most restless child drift into slumber.

That might seem like faint praise, but remember, this composer has never claimed to be another Wagner or Verdi. In performances marked by precise attack and ensemble playing and a luminous sound that may well have been enhanced by electronic mixing, Dubeau *et cie* do a commendable job conveying the essence of Ludovico Einaudi to us.

minutes. A halting melody is first heard over falling arpeggios before a sunnier, contrasted melody is heard in D-flat. The transformations in the initial melody are not easy to pick up because the rhythm changes, so it is to Lan's credit that she has the concentration to put this piece across so well.

Finally, two pieces from the Goyescas of Spanish composer Enrique Granados allow Lan to savor her taste for harmonic riches. They are #4, "*Quejas, o La Maja y el Ruiseñor*" (Laments, or the maiden and the nightingale) and #1, "*Los Requeiebros*" (compliments, paid to a woman in courtship). Lan captures the languorous mode of the former very well. The moment when the nightingale's song breaks out is particularly opulent. And the essentially Spanish quality of the latter, together with its underlying earnestness, comes across very well. We get the feeling that Lan will be returning to Goyescas often, bringing fresh insights to it as her career develops.

Who is this guy?



He isn't a household name in the U.S. yet, but he *will* be! Check out the reviews of two Pentatone releases by this on-the-rise conductor when we post the May issue of Classical Reviews.

Mozart: Piano Concertos Nos. 17, 20, & 1
Ingrid Jacoby, piano; Sir Neville Marriner, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields (*ica* Classics)

I'd always thought of Ingrid Jacoby as European because of her long association with orchestras and conductors in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (Sir Neville Marriner, Sir Charles Mackerras, Lord Yehudi Menuhin, Jacek Kaspszyk). Turns out, she is a native of St. Louis, MO. Of interest is the fact that she is a direct descendant of Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia (1772-1806), war hero and an accomplished pianist to whom Beethoven dedicated his Third Piano Concerto.



I don't know how much credit to give to genetics, but Jacoby certainly shows a great deal of aristocratic poise and assurance in performing the Mozart piano concertos on this latest release in what appears to be an ongoing series with Marriner and the Academy of St. Martin's. For his part, Sir Neville displays an exceptionally firm hand with the score while still allowing the music to breathe comfortably. The ideal wedding of soloist and conductor makes this the best of the three *ica* classics releases thus far and an easy choice to recommend.

Not that everything is genial and easygoing in this program. Piano Concertos No. 17 in G major, K453, and No. 20 in D minor, K466 both have their moments of opera buffa drama in addition to the flowing lyricism of the sort one customarily associates with Mozart. No. 17 has long been a favorite for its poetic lyricism, its rhapsodic slow movement that is notable for the supremely subtle interplay, veering into high drama, among piano, strings, and woodwinds, and the spirited theme-and-variations of its finale.

What I just said about contrasted moods in the G major concerto goes double for No. 20 in D minor (which is significantly one of only two Mozart piano concertos in a minor key). Jacoby, in fact, justly calls it "a Romantic concerto before its time." The turbulence in the opening Allegro reminds us of a similar element in the opera *Don Giovanni*, on which Mozart was starting to work at the moment. No piano concerto had ever had as dark and tumultuous an opening, with its ominous rumblings in the bass and agitated syncopations in the upper strings. One of Mozart's greatest orchestral fortes is to be found here. The poignant piano theme stands out in stark beauty against this dark backdrop.

The slow movement, a Romanza filled with almost childlike beauty and tenderness, is interrupted midway through by a disturbing episode, not enough to derail the prevailing lyricism and the harmonious relations between soloist and orchestra, but still troubling. The Finale, starting with ascending arpeggios of the sort known as "Mannheim Rockets," is soon rocked by violent orchestral tuttis reminiscent of the opening movement. Following the cadenza, the cheerful aspect of the music reasserts itself, and things even take on a comic opera aspect with the melody underscored by a chuckling bassoon. The work ends with a lightly ascending arpeggio melody in the piano that dies out in a faint whisper at the end.

In this concerto, as throughout the program, Ingrid Jacoby has shown special care in her choice of cadenzas. Here, she rejects Beethoven's well-known specimens as telling us more about the Master of Bonn than they do Mozart, and uses her own instead, based on those of Paul Badura-Skoda with her own ideas included. They add a lot of character to this work, particularly the one in the third movement that sets us up for the remarkable change of pace that follows it.

Concerto No. 1 in F major, K37 is described as "a good learning curve" for the 11 year-old Mozart, who built his outer movements on originals by sturdy workaday composers named Raupach and Honauer, whom you have probably never heard of before this and are not likely to encounter again. The best movement is the central Andante, marked by innocent lyricism and a surprisingly accomplished cadenza for one so young.