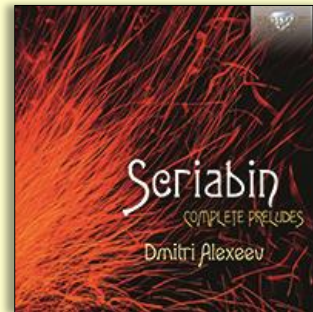




Shostakovich: Symphonies Nos. 9 & 10  
Emil Tabakov, Bulgarian National Radio Symphony  
Orchestra (Gega New)

This is the second chance I've had to review an installment in the Shostakovich cycle by Emil Tabakov and the Bulgarian National RSO. What I said in November 2016 about their account of Symphony No. 11, "1905," commemorating the slaughter of unarmed protestors in the square before the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, still holds: namely, "the incredible conviction and searing intensity they invest in what is a truly great performance." In fact, it goes double because we have here two great symphonies, the composer's Ninth and Tenth.

They couldn't have been more different. Symphony No. 9 in E-flat, Op. 70, was a product of 1945. The variety of moods, beginning with a light-hearted, insouciant parody march featuring a solo trumpet in the opening movement, was definitely not what was expected of Shostakovich, following as it did right after the end of what Russians know as the "Great Patriotic War" in which so many had suffered and perished. As he recounted in his memoirs, written by Solomon Volkov and published as *Testimony*, it earned him the ire of the Soviet musical establishment, and even Stalin himself, because there was "no chorus, no soloists, and no apotheosis." The levity in this symphony is just what we might have expected in the exhilaration one might feel when a long, devastating war has finally come to an end. And it is also true that the composer was often at his worst when writing big symphonies along ideological lines with over-trained orchestrations (witness his 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>, glorifying Lenin and the 1917 Revolution). But the animus over the reception of the Ninth Symphony persisted for a number of years. Only in more recent times have audiences come to appreciate its inspired mixture of the playful and the grotesque and its economical scoring that includes the capacity of the bassoon for both humor and pathos as it leads the way into the frenetic rondo-sonata finale. Tabakov brings out all of this to perfection in the present performance.



Scriabin: Complete Preludes  
Dmitri Alexeev, piano  
(Brilliant Classics 2-CD set)

Russian pianist Dmitri Alexeev has come out with the Complete Preludes – 90 in all – of Alexander Scriabin. These preludes, representing all three major periods of Scriabin's development, are important because they reveal the composer's ongoing quest, amounting to an obsession, for ever more expressive harmonies. That included his "mystery chord," so well-publicized by his later biographers, which made its first appearance almost subliminally in Opus 37, No. 2 in F sharp.

Much of Scriabin's activity in this sphere of endeavor was fueled by his publisher and patron Mitrofan Belyayev, who in November 1895 challenged him with a bet that he would be unable to complete a full set of 48 preludes by the following April. In the event, Scriabin, who typically worked intuitively rather than according to a schedule, fell two preludes short, with 46 pieces that were later published as Opp. 11, 13, 15, 16 and 17.

In more recent times musical humorist "P.D.Q. Bach" wrote an outrageous spoof titled *The Short-Tempered Clavier*, Preludes and Fugues in all the Major and Minor Keys except for the Really Hard Ones." Scriabin, who it seems had already planned a double cycle of preludes in a tradition going back to J. S. Bach, was not daunted by those "hard" keys. B Major, a key seldom used by composers for orchestrated works because its five sharps are inimical to wind instruments, occurs on five occasions, and G-flat, with its daunting array of sharps and flats, occurs twice. D-flat, which fits well under the hands of virtuoso pianists because it allows for fast passagework, occurs five times. F-sharp, little-used in music because of the six sharps in its key signature. Is used on no fewer than five occasions. E-flat minor and D-flat minor occur on three occasions each.

In the end, Scriabin abandoned tonality altogether. There are no key attributions for any of his last eight published preludes, consisting of Op. 59. No. 2, the two Preludes, Op. 67, and the five of Op. 74, the last-named of which are given only expressive markings

Shostakovich waited almost a decade before he premiered his next symphony (significantly *after* Stalin's death), and it was recognized as a masterpiece almost from the moment of its December 1953 premiere by Yevgeny Mravinsky and the Leningrad Philharmonic. With its wide emotional and dynamic range, beginning in shadows and ending in an electrifying finale, the music of Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Op. 93 is always on the move, always tightly constructed and firmly anchored as it moves from one gripping moment to the next. The dynamics increase and then noticeably lessen in long, slow arches as the music moves from one superbly terraced climax to the next and then recedes. In the present recording, the lower strings are exceptionally well-defined as they both lead the way and underscore the movement of the orchestra in its slow descents and upward climbs.

A lovely clarinet tune in the opening movement, the beautiful horn solo in the third movement, and then the "admonishing finger" of the D-S-C-H motto based on an anagram of the composer's name serve to gradually dispel the fury of the scherzo, a musical portrait of Stalin's brutality painted in the coarsest, most monstrous colors imaginable. Those 4 minutes and 22 seconds of sheer musical terror are optimally captured in the present performance under Tabakov's baton.



Russian Cello Concertos: Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov – Li-Wei Qin, cello; Czech Chamber Philharmonic (Naxos)

Chinese cellist Li-Wei Qin shines in a program of Russian music for cello and orchestra that allows him ample scope to display both the warmth and the virtuosity of his style as well as the purely musical qualities inherent in the works by three Russian composers heard in this program. He is accompanied with discretion and taste by Michael Halász and the Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra of Pardubice.

First up is Tchaikovsky's Variations on a Rococo Theme in A Major, Op. 33, written during a very turbulent time in the composer's life, even by *his* standards. Significantly, it is a model of clarity and movement, with the cello supported tastefully by other instruments, particularly flute and horn. Qin has some of his finest moments in Variations III, a warm and deeply felt *Andante sostenuto*, and IV, an elegant *Andante grazioso* that is just as gracious as its marking implies. The transition between

(*contemplativ, drammatico, indécis*, etc.). These last preludes are among the strangest sounding of Scriabin's late works, with a compelling beauty that will haunt the listener. I was reminded of the incandescent harmonies in the composer's Poem of Fire.

The amazing thing about the Scriabin preludes, something that really comes across in Alexeev's interpretations, is their wonderful sensual beauty. It makes music written ostensibly to support a highly original musical theory stand up as attractive and listenable in its own right.



Sibelius: Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, En Saga Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Gothenburg Symphony (Alpha Classics)

Finnish conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali is a rather odd-looking fellow, as attested by his photos on the cover and inside of the attached booklet. On the other hand, there is nothing odd about his approach to Sibelius, which is patient and deeply insightful in a way that makes us wonder why we've seldom heard this composer interpreted with the sureness that Rouvali imparts to performances of the First Symphony and the tone poem En Saga.

Even the dramatic cueing gesture on the cover has its point in the fact that Sibelius thought in terms of thematic materials that tend to move at different speeds simultaneously, a curious trait that can be disconcerting to conductors who approach his symphonies for the first time. Where other composers think in terms of linear development and sonata-allegro form, basically a product of the German-speaking world that has more or less consciously remained the norm in western music for the past 250 years, Sibelius started off with instrumental timbre as the basis of his music. The slow curves of his developments seem to be based on human emotions, sometimes smoldering and at other moments bursting into flame, or on the natural changes that occur in the course of the seasons. These factors determine the colour, the orchestration, and the contours of his music in a major work such as the First Symphony.

Something else that isn't so apparent to the non-Finnish listener is the way in which Sibelius structures his cadences on the natural rhythmic patterns of the Finnish language, as found in folk singing going back to the runes and eddas of olden times, especially the "notes

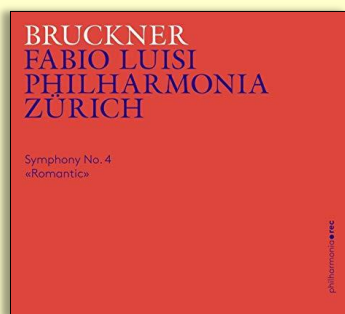
Variations VI, *Andante*, and VII, a finale marked *Allegro vivo* that affords Qin opportunity for technical brilliance, is nicely accomplished. In the last analysis, the performance strikes the desired balance between Rococo elegance and Russian moodiness that makes this work more memorable than a more overtly heart-on-sleeve account might have done.

Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov's poignant Serenade, Op. 37, says a lot in a short space of time (3:53). It features a well-supported melody of much persuasiveness.

Alexander Glazunov's well-crafted Concerto Ballata in C Major, the longest work in the present program (20:26) combines all the features of a concerto in one movement, placing the emphasis on the soloist's stamina and sure sense of timing in the transitions between sections. It begins with a noble Elgar-like melody in descending sequences by the cellist, answered by the orchestra with some agitation. Qin obviously enjoys the shapely and beautifully stated melodies in the *Tranquillo* and *Adagio quasi ballata* sections of this work, as well as the confident mien of the final scherzo-like section with its opportunity for double-stopping within the melody line.

Glazunov, always a first-rate craftsman, occasionally transcended that limited concept, as he did in the shorter pieces heard here, which include *Mélodie* and *Sérénade espagnole*, the last infused with an exhilarating Habañera rhythm, based on his youthful memories of a vacation in Spain. *Chant du ménestrel* (Troubadour Song), Op. 71, has a moody central melody for the cello over the accompaniment of harp and plucked strings.

The program concludes very handsomely with two Tchaikovsky selections, a romantically involved Pezzo capriccioso in B Minor, Op. 63, that transcends the notion of "caprice" implied by the title, and the hauntingly beautiful and nostalgic *Andante cantabile* from String Quartet No. 1, Op. 11, with the melody beautifully transcribed for the solo cello.



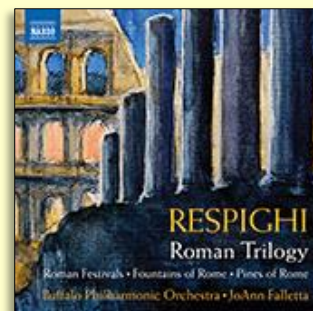
Bruckner: Symphony No. 4 in E-flat Major  
Fabio Luisi, Philharmonia Zürich  
(Accentus)

This account of Anton Bruckner's "Romantic" Symphony (No. 4 in E-flat) is distinguished for its high-energy playing, with special kudos for the horns on whom the

repeating themselves" that add a feeling of bravado and drama to the music of the Scherzo in the First Symphony. Part of this emphasis was nationalistic. It sprung from Sibelius' desire to create a truly Finnish music that would inspire his countrymen in a nation that was then submerged as a grand duchy of Czarist Russia. For Sibelius, who was of Swedish stock and not an ethnic Finn, it involved a lot of hard work and research in the field, that paid off handsomely in the First Symphony, in many ways his great break-through as a composer.

Another thing about Sibelius that Rouvali and the members of the excellent Gothenburg Symphony understand very well is the importance of instrumental timbres and degrees of velocity in determining the pathway of his music. That is apparent in the first movement (*Andante ma non troppo – Allegro energico*) which seemingly opens in the pre-dawn mist with a slow haunting clarinet solo that will appear in other guises throughout the symphony. The music gradually gains in rhythmic energy and velocity, in Sibelius' distinctive way of tricking us into believing the music is operating at one speed when it is actually locked into another. One striking moment in this movement occurs at about 7:30 when the orchestra, with the string section leading the way, seems to break forth like the final confirmation of a glorious nordic sunrise.

I will leave it to the listener to discover the other wonderful moments, of which there are many, in a work in which Sibelius first fully discovered himself as man, musician, and patriot. It was anticipated in some degree in the early 1890's in the 19-minute tone poem *En Saga* (a saga, or folk epic) of which he confided to a friend that "in no other work have I revealed myself so completely." Edgy, brooding, passionate and powerfully rhythmical, the music reflects the man who created it.



Respighi: Roman Trilogy  
JoAnn Falletta, Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra  
(Naxos)

JoAnn Falletta, at the helm of the Buffalo Philharmonic, gives us smoothly accomplished, thoroughly nuanced accounts of the well-loved Fountains of Rome and Pines of Rome by Ottorino Respighi, with the less-often performed Roman Festivals (*Feste romane*) included to complete a Roman Trilogy. It all makes for a superb listening experience of a composer whose tonal palette,

composer's demands are frequently extreme. It is the horns that ring out the sensational call at the very opening of the work that will be heard from again in a majestic peroration in the finale. They are first heard over shimmering *ppp* strings in a movement marked *Bewegt, nicht zu schnell* (stirring, not too fast). Then Bruckner introduces the second thematic complex in rising two-plus-three figures that have since been so closely associated with his name as to constitute a virtual signature.

This was, in fact, Bruckner's first truly successful symphony after a handful of more-or-less unsuccessful attempts, and he made the most of it. It is on the long side at 77 and 1/2 minutes, but never boring, owing in part to the composer's descriptive markings of *Bewegt* in the opening movement, scherzo, and finale, and the fact that he varies his material from one movement to the next just enough to constantly engage and keep our interest. The first movement, for instance, takes a break from music imbued with the sheer power and grandeur of nature to introduce a pleasant interlude with woodland bird-calls in the violins.

The second movement, Andante quasi Allegretto, has a cello cantilena, a quiet chorale, and a lovely melody in the violas to provide a respite from the dominant impression of powerful natural forces. The Scherzo in 2/4 time, with its thrilling hunting-calls in two-plus-three rhythms, gives way to a section characterized by the funeral impression created by heavy brass and eerie figurations. Then a magical Ländler and Trio are thrown in for contrast and relief. The finale opens in an ominous B-flat minor with a falling three-note figure, then brings back that old two-plus-three note pattern that we experienced earlier. It ends in a stirring coda led by the horns, striding toward a majestic peroration.

If you think, from the preceding brief description, that the Bruckner Fourth demands an immense amount of stamina from both conductor and orchestra, you are absolutely right. More significantly, the prevalence of almost-obsessive repetitions and loud dynamics requires the deft hand in the contrasted quiet passages that Fabio Luisi, General Music Director of the Zürich Opera House, of which the Philharmonia Zürich is the resident orchestra, is able to give it. That's important because Bruckner's Fourth, at first hearing, may give the impression of being the least-nuanced of all the world's great symphonies. It is therefore vital to bring out the quieter, sun-dappled impressions of a gentler nature as a much-needed contrast to the brassy, stirring music in the main sections.

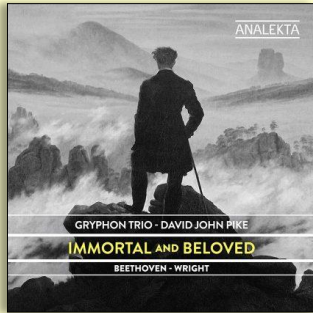
Keep an eye and ear out for Luisi, who is the Music Director-designate of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra beginning 2020. The present CD makes for a very attractive calling card for this maestro.

ranging from subtle shades of earth colours to shimmering fluorescent timbres, has been unmatched by any composer since his time. Each of the three works in the Roman Trilogy (a popular concept, not a title that Respighi actually applied to them) is comprised of four tableaux that are highly pictorial, highly dramatic, or both. Just in case his audiences didn't get the allusions, he appended narrative descriptions or commentary to each of the tableaux.

**Roman Festivals** (1928), first up on the program, leads off with *Circus Maximus*, a visceral, if rather heavy-handed, account of the bloody sports of ancient Rome, with a hymn of Christian martyrs striving to make itself heard over the howling of wild beasts and the roar of the crowd (more wild beasts). *Jubilee* imagines devout pilgrims praying and chanting, with the Dies irae, the prayer for the dead, transformed into a hymn of praise as they approach the Holy City. *October Festival* celebrates the wine harvest, its merry-making suggested by a highly imaginative variety of instruments (including sleighbells!) and a quiet romantic serenade on the mandolin at the very end. Finally, *Epiphany* is a miracle of kaleidoscopic orchestration depicting crowds jostling one another as they hasten to see and hear the festivities (with fireworks) in the Piazza Navona).

Next up, **Fountains of Rome** (1916) begins with *The Fountain of Valle Giulia at Dawn*, hazily evocative of that moment of the day, with softly expressive writing for oboe and cello. *The Triton Fountain at Morning* bustles with the depiction of the frenzied dancing of amorous naiads and tritons, with sensational opening horn fanfares and shrill upper woodwinds. *The Trevi Fountain at Noon*, with its expanding sonic waves leading to a splendid climax involving organ and tuned percussion, imagines Neptune's chariot drawn by sea-horses. The work ends nostalgically with *The Villa Medici Fountain at Sunset* with an interlude for harp, celesta, piccolo and strings. Gradually thinning textures allow us to hear the soft sounds of distant bells, twittering birds, and rustling leaves.

**Pines of Rome** (1924), my personal favorite, begins with *Pines near the Villa Borghese*, which describes children playing the Italian equivalent of "Ring 'round the Rosy," marching like soldiers or "twittering and shrieking like swallows at evening." *Pines near a Catacomb* is deeply atmospheric, with a sound rising from the depths like a chant for (or rather, of) the dead. The mood of *Pines of the Janiculum* is solemn and mysterious with the moon seen behind a row of pines atop the high promontory where, formerly, traitors to the state were hurled to their deaths on the rocks below. A Nightingale sings a ghostly song (for which Falletta, after Respighi's suggestion, uses an actual recording of the songbird). Finally, *Pines of the Appian Way* conjures up past glory in the march of a Roman legion, the sound increasing to a magnificent climax.



Beethoven: “Immortal and Beloved,” performed by the Gryphon Trio with David John Pike, baritone (Analekta)

“Immortal and Beloved” is a thoughtfully conceived concept album devoted to Beethoven’s life and his greatest love, concluding with as beautiful and gracious a performance of the “Archduke” Trio as I’ve ever heard on record. David John Pike, Canadian-born baritone now based in Luxembourg, gives a splendid account of himself in the vocal recital part of the program, consisting of Beethoven’s song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* (To the Distant Beloved), Op. 98, and an inspired 2012 setting by Canadian composer James Wright of *Briefe an die unsterbliche Geliebte* (Letters to the Immortal Beloved). The last-named consists of three passionate love letters Beethoven penned to the Countess Josephine von Brunswick, who was almost certainly the “Immortal Beloved” of the title. He wrote them during a siege of serious illness in 1812, and they came to light only at his deathbed fifteen years later.

Beethoven’s love for the Countess, and the affection she may have had for him, could not have found fruition in marriage, of course, due to the great difference in their social status. Both the *Ferne Geliebte* song cycle and Wright’s setting of the Immortal Beloved letters provide living evidence of his undying affection for her, the former in evocations of love through the beauties of nature: a peaceful valley where he first met her, then clouds drifting in a blue sky, a brook, and the fresh beauties of spring that provide solace to his mind. Near the end of the Immortal Beloved Letters, we have a quotation of the melody of the *Andante favori*, the original slow movement of the “Waldstein” Sonata that Beethoven removed and replaced with another, ostensibly because it was too long, but also, I suspect, because its radiant warmth and great beauty drew attention away from the other movements. In the present context, the melody reveals itself to be a palpable love sentiment.

Davis John Pike renders both the *Ferne Geliebte* cycle and the Love Letters with the requisite amount of tastefully nuanced feeling to make them memorable. In particular, this is the first really convincing account I have heard of *An die ferne Geliebte*.

The latter half of the program is given to Beethoven’s Piano Trio in B-flat, Op. 97, the “Archduke.” The



Liszt: Transcendental Etudes, La Legierezza, Rigoletto Paraphrase – Boris Giltburg, piano (Naxos)

The parade of great new Liszt recordings we’ve heard over the past several years continues, and this new release by Boris Giltburg may be the best yet. The moscow-born pianist who now lives in Tel Aviv shows us his best stuff in a program that really demands it. He cultivates a firm, full tone, even in the quickest transitional passages, and his expressive range includes a true legato. He is adept at the extremes of emotion and sound that make his Liszt etudes so very effective, and he applies his ability to effortlessly mold the contours of a perfectly shaped arching structure with a naturally flowing, deeply felt melody, as he does here in *La Legierezza* (Lightness) from the 3 Concert Etudes.

The 12 Transcendental Études (*Études d'exécution transcendante*), S139 (1852) are essential to an understanding of Franz Liszt and the goals for which he strived. That these pieces pushed against the limits of the keyboard is true enough, but the deeper significance of the title has to do with the challenges they pose for the pianist, involving such transcendent difficulties that the very process of coming to grips with them would enable one’s own pianism to transcend its previous limits. Make no mistake: this is a matter of more than “technique” as the term is generally understood. A complete integration of technique and musicality was the goal, so that the pianist’s approach to a new work of music would be more or less intuitive.

As Giltburg puts it in his program notes, “The technique has become an inseparable part of the whole, rather than an obstacle to be overcome in order to gain access to the music.” This view places *passagework* (briefly, what a pianist is playing when he/she is not addressing an actual theme) in a new light: “the passagework is the music itself, the building material from which the image behind the notes is created.”

It’s not surprising that Giltburg is so well-attuned to the visual and kinetic elements in these Transcendental Etudes, as Liszt’s musical world view encompassed the visual arts as well. That includes the visceral element in such instances as the chromatic scales simulating the howling of the wind in *Chasse-neige* (Snowstorm) or the stampede of alternating octaves in *Wilde Jagd* (Ghostly Huntsman). Giltburg also cites the “detaché and

nickname derives from the fact that it was dedicated to the young Archduke Rudolf of Austria, Beethoven's friend and patron, and many interpretations of this popular work have taken their cue from it and given the opening movement a grand, regal air. But it is nobility of feeling, more than a little suggestive of tender emotion and flowing songfulness, that eventually wins out.

That is certainly the case in the performance by the Gryphon Trio, comprised of Annalee Patipatanakoon, violin; Roman Borys, cello; and James Parker, piano. Here, nobility is present in the opening movement, but it is understated in favor of the supremely lyrical main theme, first introduced by the piano just before the strings enter after the cadence and engage in a little duet that falls back gracefully into the main theme. In this movement everything is under superb control. Songfulness, not the high drama we usually associate with Beethoven, is the order of the day.

The second movement is a light-hearted Scherzo that nonetheless possesses a strange, mysterious beauty in the trio section. The slow movement, *Andante cantabile*, is a set of variations on a serious theme whose simplicity permits the noticeable flavor of a love sentiment. (In the present account by the Gryphon Trio, this romantic feeling is more pronounced than I can recall in performances by other ensembles.) The drawn-out final cadence of this movement leads without a break into the finale, a rollicking rondo calculated to leave participants and listeners alike in good spirits.

staccato" of the Will-o'-the-wisps in Etude 5 (*Feux follets*) and the "finger-bound legato" that helps create the impression of an undulating and slowly-changing landscape in Etude 3 (*Paysage*). The most stirring of the etudes is No. 4 in D Minor, *Mazeppa*, recounting the legend of the Cossack hero who was tied to the back of a wild horse by his enemies and left to die from exposure as it galloped across the plains. His tale of sorrow and triumph is portrayed in vicious arpeggio whiplashes, frequent alterations and hand-crossings, right down to soft chords suggesting the heartbeats of the dying hero. "The ascending thirds in the middle voices of *Mazeppa*," says Giltburg, "are perhaps the most difficult challenge in the entire cycle."

Concert Paraphrase on Verdi's *Rigoletto*, first up on the program, takes its inspiration from the moonlit scene in the opera in which Rigoletto and Gilda witness the Duke's infidelity in a clandestine tryst with Maddalena. Rather than just a potpourri of themes from the opera, it is a stand-alone concert piece that combines four voices and accompaniment in an ideally balanced scene that Giltburg rightly regards as a seamless integration of musicality and technique. As such, it is a perfect introduction to Liszt's approach to the piano.

The Bumper Baby Crop of 1685:  
Handel (1685-1759), Bach (1685-1750) and Scarlatti (1685-1757)



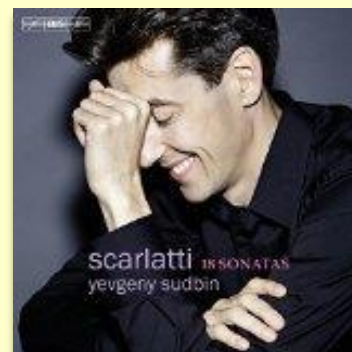
"Mio Caro Händel." Simone Kermes, soprano; with the Amici Veneziani (Sony Classical)

"Handel is the greatest composer ever to have lived. I would bare my head and kneel beside his grave." So said Beethoven of George Frideric Handel. Simone Kermes, the vocal artist heard from on the present album, would most likely



J. S. Bach: Goldberg Variations  
Repast Baroque Ensemble  
(MSR Classics)

Repast does it again! The New York City-based ensemble made Bach's A Musical Offering the centerpiece of their very first concert in 2004, and now they return to the scene of the crime with an infectious account of the Goldberg Variations, BWV 988.



Scarlatti: 18 Sonatas  
Yevgeny Sudbin, piano  
(Bis hybrid SACD, Surround)

Yevgeny Sudbin, a native of St. Petersburg, Russia who has lived in the UK since 1997, does a fabulous job playing his own arrangements of 18 keyboard sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757). Did I say "arrangements"? As Sudbin explains in his program notes, it isn't simply a

agree with him, judging from the tone of the imaginary epistles she writes to him as program annotation for *Mio Caro Händel*. She rightly thanks him for opening the world of the classics to her, and in particular the rich trove of operatic arias she has made her chosen field.

The native of Leipzig, Germany especially credits Handel for having written music perfectly suited to her voice. "No effort is required," she observes. "Quite the opposite: in my throat I can always feel a sense of well-being and flexibility. Your music keeps the voice young, dear Georg Friedrich!"

In a program of well-chosen arias from opera and oratorio, Kermes, essentially a dramatic coloratura, applies her voice, notable for its flexible, smooth legato throughout her tessitura plus an element of lyrical melancholy, to good use when depicting the sorrows and passions of Handel's heroines. Her Cleopatra in the aria *Piango la sorte mia* from Giulio Cesare voices the unquenchable desire to lament her bitter fate as long as she has breath, and, once she is dead, to haunt night and day the tyrant who has brought it about. A great aria, it is matched by Medea's *Moriro, ma vendicata* (Avenged shall I die) from Teseo, in which she expresses the sentiment that "Before I die I shall see my rival cut down and slain, alongside the faithless man who has cruelly insulted me [i.e., Theseus]." Never has the evil pleasure of vengeance been better expressed in music.

Another aria requiring both an impressive vocal and emotional range is Almirena's *Lascia ch'io pianga* (Allow me to weep) from Rinaldo, in which she adds "Let my tears shatter the chains of my torment, if only for pity's sake." This aria, distinguished for its nobility and its psychological reality, is Kermes' personal favorite. She always sings it last in her recitals.

Supported by Amici Veneziani, the first-class baroque ensemble that she founded in 2017, Kermes pours more of her unique legato, with its

True to their name, they serve up a delicious repast that makes a case for performing the Variations *en concert*, as the French would say, instead of on keyboard the way we usually hear them.

The present members, consisting of Amelia Roosevelt, violin and viola; Emi Ferguson, flute; Katie Rietman, cello and piccolo cello; Stephanie Corwin, bassoon; and Gabe Shuford, harpsichord, play authentic baroque instruments or expertly crafted replicas of the same. I won't bore you by listing their pedigrees (which are listed in the booklet annotation anyway), but only say that the timbres of all these instruments are fresh and very attractive, enhancing the invigorating interaction of the players in the various solos, duets, and ensembles where they occur.

In particular, the members of Repast employed a most unusual, and democratic, way of assigning *which* instruments to *what* parts. "Our work on the project began in the same way it does in all our new repertoire," recounts Roosevelt in her booklet notes, "by singing through the score. This process helped us hear which variations sounded 'flute-like' or which ones seemed more like arias for the violin."

Then they worked out the fine details that allow the instruments to mesh with or compliment each other to near-perfection the way they do in the present performance. One could always quibble, of course, with their choices, and I have no doubt that the members of Repast will tweak this or that assignment from time to time in the course of interacting with a work of music that is more like an organic growth of nature than a photograph that has been fixed in a stop-bath.

The amazing thing about the Goldberg Variations is, you keep discovering things. Just listen to the blithe way flute, bassoon, and cello swing Variation 4. Repast found that a viola would add a more expansive lower range than the violin in Variation 6, for example, and that a pizzicato bass line for the cello in Variation 26 would ideally balance out the violin accompaniment.

matter of transferring the sonatas note-for-note from Scarlatti's own instrument, the harpsichord, to a modern piano like the Steinway he plays here. "The music *has* to be transformed and adjusted to the modern instrument," says Sudbin, "and one has to make conscious decisions about how to do this without distorting the original idea."

As the latest entrant in a two centuries-old quest by pianists and editors to achieve that goal and enshrine Scarlatti firmly in the piano repertoire, Sudbin's efforts are, to my mind, the most satisfactory to date. There is a great deal of variety in these pithy masterpieces, ranging from "head-spinning" dances (Sudbin's own expression) such as K9 in D minor, and K425 in G major to the genuine sadness of K32 in D minor. On the other hand, Sudbin identifies K69 in F minor and K213 in D minor as sonatas that transport us marvelously from the activity of everyday life into a realm "where expression comes from harmony rather than melody and is implied rather than explicit."

Sudbin's sensually beautiful tone captures such moments ideally. Other sonatas such as K141 in D minor, with its vibrant rhythms and key-rattling repeated notes, celebrate the noise and bustle of everyday life in Spain: the clicking of castanets, the strumming of guitars, the pulse-quickening dance rhythms, and the sound of muffled drums. Sudbin even claims to hear evocations of church bells and gunshots (K119 in D major), street cries and stamping of feet (K479 in D major), and distant trumpets (K159 in C major).

Finally, there are sonatas that call for extreme virtuosity or exude *bel canto* lyricism. Sudbin cites K29 in D major for its risk-taking (and wrist-breaking) scales across the keyboard as an example of the former, while the cantabile qualities of K208 in A major and K318 in the exotic key of F-sharp major speak for themselves. There is even a rare example of a fugue in K417 in D minor, which this artist considers one of Scarlatti's most taxing works because of its

pure and serene quality and perfect pitch control, into the selections from the oratorios that include the likes of "Author of Peace" from Saul and "My vengeance awakes me" from Athalia. And let us not neglect to mention her accounts of *Ombra mai fu* from the opera Serse, with its long, chastely decorated vocal line, and the equally sublime German aria *Süße Stille, sanfte Quelle* (Sweet silence, gentle source of untroubled serenity), treasurable jewels in their own right.

Few would argue with the suitability of the bassoon's melancholy timbre to open and close Variation 25, which has been famously termed the "Black Pearl" of the set. Repast made the happy discovery that the pathos of this particular variation would sound more vulnerable if they pushed the piccolo cello and the bassoon to the top of their ranges. Other movements, including the opening Aria, the closing Aria da capo, and Variations 5, 11, 14, 20, 23, 28, and 29, were left to the harpsichord, for which the 2-manual model made by William Dowd after a Francois-Etienne Blanchet original, proved ideal (and in fact essential, as you couldn't play the lively running passages for two voices on a single keyboard as well, if at all).

Fact is, all the members of Repast have the chance to bask in the sunlight sooner or later, even though the process of assigning parts had more to do with sound than simple equity of opportunity. The results speak for themselves, one glorious or deeply moving variation at a time.

By the way, this is the first time I've ever reviewed a concert version of the Goldbergs. In the past, I've been skeptical of such arrangements as the music seemed more idiomatic for the keyboard. With this album, Repast made a believer of me!

ever-increasing intensity.

Yevgeny Sudbin evidently does not intend to make Scarlatti his sole field of activity by any means, but he *could* if he wanted. Consider this: the 18 choice sonatas on the present disc represent barely 3 percent of all those Scarlatti penned – 555 at latest estimate, and counting!

**Note:** This review was previously posted on this website in my Springtime Baroque 2016 column.

*Phil*