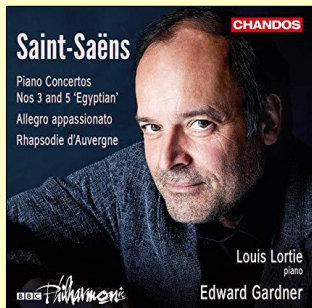


Phil's Classical Reviews

Atlanta Audio Club

April, 2020

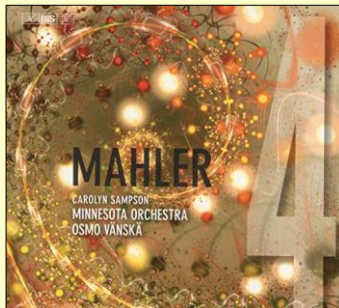


Saint-Saëns: Piano Concertos 3 & 5, "Egyptian," Rhapsodie d'Auvergne
Louis Lortie, BBC Philharmonic
(Chandos)

Camiile Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) was one of the longest lived of history's great composers. A child prodigy who played his first public concert of piano concertos by Mozart and Beethoven at the age of 11 and gave a last recital of his own piano works just two months before his death at the age of 86, he was renowned particularly for his ability to sight-read¹ and improvise on the organ. A man of many interests who was absorbed in such diverse fields as astronomy, botany and literature, he played most musical instruments and is said to have been a genius with an IQ. above 160.

Saint-Saëns published some 169 opus numbers during his career. Of these, he is best remembered today for his "Organ" Symphony (No. 3), his tone poems *Danse macabre* and *Omphale's Spining Wheel*, his opera *Samson et Delila*, his three violin concertos, and his suite *Carnival of the Animals*. His work allied German technical thoroughness with a typical French passion for color and wit, qualities which make him a very easy composer for listeners to enjoy.

Almost *too easy*, in fact, so that the young upstart Claude Debussy was prone to picture Saint-Saëns as a dotard who outlived his usefulness to



Mahler: Symphony No. 4
Osmo Vänskä conducts the
Minnesota Orchestra
(Bis)

Osmo Vänskä studied conducting at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Finland, went on to work with many of the world's great orchestras, and has been music director of the Minnesota Orchestra since 2003. He brings every bit of that experience to the podium in his current projected cycle of all the nine symphonies of Gustav Mahler, of which No. 4 in G Major is the fifth and latest release.

In many ways, this may be the most difficult task he has encountered yet, as the Mahler Fourth has been so long-beloved that we are in danger of taking it for granted as listeners. There are a bewildering number of incidents and instrumental solos to cue in this work which is scored for a large orchestra, but in which the texture is remarkably light for long stretches, making the tutti climaxes all the more effective.

This is the last of the "Wunderhorn" Symphonies, so-called because Mahler took much of his inspiration from an early 19th century collection of folk poetry, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (Youth's Magic Horn). Many of the texts are informed by a naïve yet knowing folk wisdom that is at odds with the sophisticated musical means that Mahler employs to illuminate them.



Italian Guitar Concertos
Emanuele Segre, guitar;
orchestra conducted by Carlo
Boccadoro (Delos)

Guitarist Emanuele Segre, a native of Milan, is in the spotlight in a program of concertos by Italian composers from Vivaldi to the present day. Accompanied by the Orchestra I Pomeriggi Musicali under Carlo Boccadoro, Segre delivers a lineup of choice musical treasures. One of them will be *very familiar* to lovers of the classics, but most will be new and intriguing experiences. There is enough variety here to satisfy most listeners' tastes.

We begin with *Aria for Guitar and String Orchestra in F-sharp minor* from the *Cantata Cessate, omai cessate*, RV384, by Antonio Vivaldi. The guitar part was arranged by Segre himself from the contralto aria "*Ah, ch'infelice sempre*," and seems perfectly idiomatic in its new guise: sad, pensive, and filled with emotions of regret and longing for which harpsichord accompaniment by Angela Lazzaroni serves to fill in the spare harmonies.

Next, we have one of the world's Vivaldi favorites, the *Concerto in D Major*, RV 93. Originally written for lute or theorbo, it is most commonly heard, as it is here, in the version for guitar. We have alert tempi and characteristic Vivaldi ritornellos in the opening *Allegro*, plus a fast dance-

¹ Including the score of a whole Wagnerian opera, a feat that astonished Wagner himself!

French music. (We gather the two composers were not overly fond of each other. For his part, Saint-Saëns had things to say about Debussy's lack of formal restraint.)

In the interest of setting the record straight, French-Canadian pianist Louis Lortie, with strong support from the BBC Philharmonic under Edward Gardner, presents two of the composer's Piano Concertos, No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 29, and No. 5 in F Major, Op. 103, the "Egyptian," together with two shorter works for piano and orchestra, Rhapsodie d'Auvergne, Op. 73, and Allegro appassionato, Op. 70. These works reflect the composer's expressed admiration for Wagner's color and excitement, tempering it with a typical French passion for clarity, polish, and elegance.

These last-named qualities are most important in the two piano concertos, where Saint-Saëns pays his respect to sonata form but develops his material more freely in the manner of a fantasia. The opening movements of both concertos reflect this: No. 3 with no less than ten identifiable sections, and No. 5 with eleven. In No. 3, a strikingly "modern" idea, possibly influenced by Liszt, is his penchant for straying from the expected key sequence in the opening and landing on the "wrong" key of E major in the slow movement. Quite apart from that, this movement is filled with much sensual beauty, and is succeeded by a rambunctious finale with lots of humor.

Piano Concerto No.5, the so-called "Egyptian," takes its name from the fact that the final two movements were written during the composer's visit to Egypt in the winter of 1895 and the spring of 1896. They have an exotic quality reminiscent of that land, particularly the second, an Andante evocative of the night and a love song he heard sung by Nubian boatmen on the Nile.

Rhapsodie d'Auvergne recaptures some of the same wealth of musical charm in an otherwise hilly and impoverished region of France that Marie-Joseph Canteloube was to tap

That is particularly true of the text he uses in the final movement, *Das himmlische Leben* (The Heavenly Life), a child's imagining of the joys of the blessed souls in Paradise. Here Mahler instructs the soprano soloist to sing with "serene, childlike expression, completely without parody" and calls for the orchestra to accompany her "as discretely as possible." That is a lot to ask of a vocalist, but Carolyn Sampson carries it off with a lovely transparency, lending credibility to the childlike faith expressed in the text. That faith would seem to recall the words of the Savior, "Except you become as one of these, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

The opening movement, marked *Bedächtig, nicht eilen*, takes the listener off guard in that it begins without an introduction in the midst of something that seems like a cross between a march and a jolly sleighride (with actual sleighbells!), later proliferating an abundance of themes, including a merry trumpet fanfare. Springing as it does unexpectedly on the listener, it seems as if Mahler were starting with the scherzo first. (One wonders if the musicians at Mahler's first rehearsal thought someone had played a practical joke on them when they opened their scores?)

The actual scherzo is the second movement, marked "In *gemächlicher Bewegung. Ohne Hast*" (leisurely moving, without haste). We hear the ear-catching sounds of a solo violin tuned in scordatura and coming over like a cross between a devil's fiddle and the sound of a rural musician. More mischievous than frightening, a Ländler in all but name, it would recall for children in German-speaking countries the character of Freund Hein, a skeletal figure in storybook illustrations whose playing creates a mood of peace and cheerfulness as we await the journey to Heaven. The third and most complex movement is a 23-minute Adagio marked *Ruhevoll* (Peaceful), in which happiness is tempered by sadness and regret for leaving the earthly life one has known. It ends in a stunning fanfare which Mahler calls the *Kleine Appell* (muster or roll call).

like finale in 6/8 in the manner of a Tarantella. The heart is the central Lento, with its sublimely beautiful melody over soft accompaniment by strings and harpsichord. Here it is taken unusually slowly, emphasizing a poignant, contemplative mood that comes across very well in the present performance.

The rather short-lived but prolific Mauro Giuliani (1781-1829) is heard from next in a delicious Gran Quintetto, Op. 65. The concert-going public may not have heard of Giuliani, but his is a name to conjure with among aficionados of the guitar. In three movements, a pithy Introduction, an imaginative *Tema e variazioni* on a simple theme with lots of rhythm, and a vivacious Polonaise, it wears its virtuosity lightly for the sake of the general impression.

We conclude with two new works by contemporary Italian composers, here receiving their world premiere recordings. First, *The Black Owl* by Giovanni Sollima (b.1962) begins with a brief introduction based on eerie harmonics, giving way to repetitions that include enough chord changes to stop just this side of Minimalism. This is followed by exhilarating virtuoso passages and then by denser material of the greatest variety. We end in wispy textures, dark-sounding harmonies, and a guitar cadenza in widely-spaced chords that reinforce the image of the strange nocturnal creature of the title.

Next, we are treated to *Dulcis Memoria II* by Carlo Boccadoro (b.1963), a work of considerable range of feeling with an intricate and challenging solo part in off-rhythm accents for the guitar. The general mood of the opening is that of introspection, sadness and regret, which persists through the first half of the work. At length, the guitar works its way through the dissonant haze and emerges with a quiet, beautiful cadenza affirming the memory of a happier time that is now lost. Blue harmonies underscore the sombre mood evoked by the guitar.

into for his Songs of the Auvergne, with a piquant oboe melody rising amid the piano's florid decorations. Allegro Appassionato is scarcely a profound work but captivates the listener by its sheer fun, exhilarating measures, and bold key changes.

Vänskä does a magnificent job of pacing the orchestra through many changes of mood and key in a very lengthy movement, and he does this absolutely without hurry.

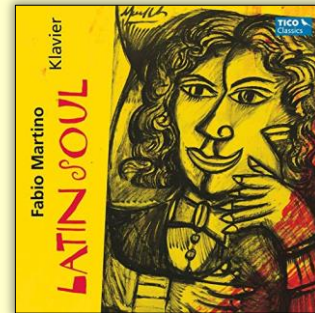
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That prepares us for the fourth movement finale which springs into being without a break. This is the setting of "Das himmlische Leben" I mentioned earlier. In this child's view of Heaven, roast suckling pigs hurry past with knife and fork conveniently stuck in their backs, angels gather in threesomes to sing a *capella* trios, and there is no end of dancing and merrymaking, with the caveat (Mahler being himself) that a lamb was sacrificed to make it all possible.

This beautifully engineered hybrid CD/SACD was recorded in DSD. Even at an overall timing of 59:58 it does not seem so very long, thanks to the superb pacing Vänskä gives this score.

From Tico Classics, in a stunning co-production with Southwest German Broadcasting, we are treated to the music of four composers from Brazil and Argentina who were influenced by the rich, diverse culture of their respective homelands. This album makes for a particularly auspicious introduction to the young Brazilian pianist Fabio Martino, who appears to be a teenager and whose keyboard prowess is astonishing for one of his years.

That artistry is absolutely essential for *this* particular program, as all four composers take their native folk culture to a higher level of artistic daring, one that demands what Franz Liszt (another of Martino's heroes) might have described as a "transcendental" technique had he lived into the 20th Century



"Latin Soul": music of Villa-Lobos, Ginastera, Guastavino, Guarnieri - Fabio Martino, piano (Tico Classics)

That includes the grand-daddy of them all, Brazil's Heitor Villa-Lobos, whose *Ciclo Brasileiro* (Brazilian Cycle) begins with an ostinato in sixteenth notes in the right hand evoking a peasant sowing seed while the left hand plays dreamlike chords of undisturbed serenity reminiscent of the folk culture of the interior of Brazil. It is followed by *Impressões seresteiras* (Impressions of a serenade) with its characteristic tremolos, arpeggios and jumps. *Festa no Sertão* (Fête in the Highlands), like other selections in the present program, requires an unusual independence of the pianist's hands. It bathes the listener in a kaleidoscope of colors in the outer sections while the central part is given over to flowing lyricism. *Dança do Índio branco* (Dance of the White Indian) is even more intricate in its drumlike rhythms and its use of alternating hands, performed almost exclusively on the white keys.

Alma brasileira (Soul of Brazil), an enduringly popular piece in Villa-Lobos' series of Choros portraying the diverse strains in the psyche and musical culture of the people of Brazil, maintains sharply angular syncopations in the left hand while the right plays calm, elegant triplets as a prelude to a very attractive melody, even for this composer.

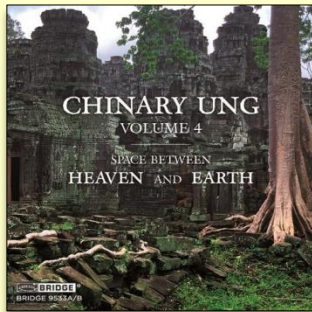
The Danzas Argentinas of Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983) reflect the composer's preoccupation with what he termed "objective nationalism," combining vigorous, often hypnotic, dance forms with contemporary European influences. All are written in the 6/8 time signature that one often finds in South American music. *Danza del viejo boyero* (Dance of the Old Herdsman), for instance, has the left hand playing only the black keys while the right plays only the white keys in syncopated and unpredictable rhythms. At 1:35, it is the shortest piece on the program (even in Argentina, old herdsman need to take a break occasionally!) *Danza de la moza donosa* (Dance of the Beautiful Maiden) is haunting in its tonal beauty, while *Danza del gaucho matrero* (Dance of the Outlaw Cowboy) is furiously rhythmic and energetic, as befits its subject.

Carlos Guastavino (1912-2000) represents the purely nationalistic and folkloric element in Argentine music intended for immediate consumption ("I refuse to compose music as if it were only there to be discovered and understood by coming generations"). Even here, we have decided complexities in his *Ballecito* (Little Dance) which features a twofold time signature of 6/8 and 3/4, producing a strikingly persuasive interlocking rhythm. His *Sonatina* in G Minor contrasts the smoothness and poetry of its two opening movements with vigorous rhythms, polyrhythms, and rich harmonies in the third.

Four intriguing dances by Camargo Guarnieri (1907-1993) involve dissonant chords, irregular rhythms and

aggressive accents, inspired by the folk culture of the interior of Brazil. *Dança Selvagem* (Savage Dance), for instance, has a central section with a 3/4 signature for the right hand and 2/4 for the left hand, resulting in complex polyrhythms. Other pieces by Guarneri (*Dança Negra*, *Dança Brasileira*, and *Lundu*) reflect his preoccupation with the powerful, dark, and moody strains of music that had its ultimate origin in the vastness of the African continent.

In the last analysis, Latin Soul is a fantastic release by young Fabio Martino and an earnest of things to come. At the present time, he is the object of an amazing amount of promotion by the star-making machinery in classical music. Let us hope it will not ruin him, as it has others. May he instead nurture the wonderful expressive beauty and virtuosity he shows here, that it may serve him well over a long and rewarding career!



Chinary Ung: Vol.4, "Space between Heaven and Earth" (Bridge Records)



"The Classical Style: II" Susan Merdinger, piano (Sheridan Music Studio)



"The Art of Carol Lieberman,; Volume 2: Modern Violin" (Centaur Records)

Chinary Ung (b.1942) is altogether remarkable, having been trained in western classical music but with deepest roots in his Cambodian heritage. He is at pains to preserve that heritage, which was left in tatters more than a half-century ago by the genocidal campaigns of the Khmer Rouge. As a humanitarian, he is a cultural leader and an educator with a deep sense of social responsibility.

All of which is easy enough for us to understand and empathize with. What is not so easy for western listeners to comprehend is his music, which does not correspond to our usual notion of theme-development-recapitulation. You don't have to be an academic to comprehend this sort of dynamic: by our experience as listeners, from the simplest pop song in ABA form, we are more or less unconsciously aware of it – and have the uncomfortable feeling something is "wrong" when it is absent in music.

Ung, by contrast, thinks formally in terms of a seamless structure of "spirals," with the additional concept of the "Aura" as the symbol of enlightenment in Buddhist philosophy. At some point, Ung, who had hitherto been basically a modernist and was influenced by his mentor George Crumb, started thinking of the

The Classical Style: II is the eagerly-awaited follow-up to an earlier release of a similarly titled album that I reviewed in February, 2014. What I said then about Susan Merdinger's grasp of Classical form and its influence on the expression we hear in the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven goes double for this new release. Again, we find the elements of elegance, restraint, and formal structure making for very satisfying works that will still resonate with pianists and listeners today.

We begin with Franz Josef Haydn's Sonata No. 40 in G Major. It is in two movements, the first of which, an Allegretto aptly described *innocente*, consists of a set of variations though not explicitly labeled as such. Haydn establishes the vivacious theme firmly in our minds and then repeats it before he proceeds to ring up variations on it by subtle changes in tempo, rhythm, syncopation and chord structure, which Merdinger infuses with all available alacrity. A short, lively Presto in the form of a rondo further enhances a program-opener that is calculated to energize performer and audience alike.

Mozart's Sonata in C Major, K.521, up next, is written for one piano, four hands. Susan Merdinger is partnered

I wouldn't have believed it – not from the evidence of the present CD – but this is the first time in 38 years as a classical reviewer that I can recall hearing *anything* by the great American violinist Carol Lieberman. In a field of endeavor that sometimes seems as much show biz as it is music, she is an anomaly, a world-class artist with a bold, distinctive sound who has chosen to shun the limelight that would reasonably have been hers. She has focused instead on a less glamorous but immensely satisfying career as a violinist's violinist, a teacher, a concertmaster, and a champion of lesser-known works, both as a soloist and a chamber musician.

The music has always been the thing for Carol Lieberman, ever since she began taking the subway from her home in the Bronx to study at the Manhattan School of Music on a full scholarship at the age of eight (!) In her long career she has performed everywhere, even on occasion (anticipating Yo Yo Ma) taking her violin to the streets to play for the people. And, oh yes, she was also a pioneer in the baroque violin revival.

The present program is mostly filled with great music that you've probably never heard. (Face it, dear reader,

intimacy and inherent humanity of the human voice. He then began to incorporate singing, chanting, and other vocal manifestations into his music.

That vocal emphasis extends into the extravagant non-western way he deploys western musical instruments (flute, oboe, clarinet, violin, viola, cello, and double bass) in such a work as *Spiral XII: Space between Heaven and Earth* (2008). Here, the role of the percussion is involved in the essence of the music, in a way that makes extreme demands on the performers. Additionally, Ung's music is deeply involved with such Asian features as modal and microtonal composition, use of drones, and an approach to musical time that is decidedly odd by western standards.

I've endeavored to describe what Chinary Ung's music is "like" in language so simple to comprehend that it may run the risk of seeming imbecilic. Suffice it to say, this is unlike any other music you are likely to have heard, but it does achieve an emotive effect by accumulation. The program is arranged in the following order: *Singing inside Aura* (2013), *Spiral IV: Nimitta* (2012), *Spiral I* (1987), *Therigatha inside Aura* (2018), *Spiral XII: Space between Heaven and Earth* (2008), roughly in a sequence of increasing complexity.

For the last-named work, thirteen verses are given in the program booklet in Khmer and Pali script with English translations. But as *Spiral XII* is presented here in a single 39-minute track without any further breakdown, it is impossible for the non-Cambodian listener to know just what verse he is in. Ultimately, the last two verses of *Spiral XII* end in the honest realization that the total Enlightenment of the Buddhist tradition is beyond the reach of the average person: "I don't wish to be reborn in any realm of the gods. I must rid myself of worries, that's all . . . I got rid of my passion and anger. Having found the base of a tree, I settled into a peaceful meditation, thinking "What great bliss!"

here by her husband Steven Greene in a work considerably above the "for amateurs" intention of most such works in Mozart's day. As a tip-off, this sonata requires a high level of proficiency from both partners in an opening *Allegro* movement worthy of a concerto.

The slow movement, an *Andante* that becomes somewhat quicker and more intense in the middle section, further increases the resemblance of this work to a piano concerto. The finale, as Merdinger aptly observes, challenges both performers in the proximity of its part writing and the need to coordinate the closely linked passagework almost as if there were just one pianist instead of two. The opera-like drama and triumphant ending of this movement remind us this work was composed in the years between the premieres of *Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*.

Finally, Beethoven's *Sonata No. 11* in B-flat Major, Op. 22, is a work that has been belatedly attracting more champions in recent years. For one thing, it is difficult to play, requiring the really accomplished left-hand technique Merdinger applies here. For another, this was a "grand sonata" in four movements, which gives it something of the breadth and scope of a symphony. The opening *Allegro*, aptly described *con brio*, begins with brilliant Mannheim rocket effects, moving on to orchestral-like colors in the development.

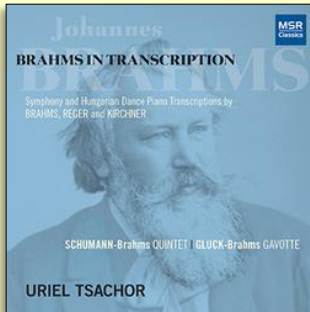
The slow movement, an *Adagio* titled *con molto espressione* (and how!), uses a gently lyrical melody with unusual harmonic modulations and two-note sighing phrases, set over a sensational throbbing heartbeat in the left hand, to create a sense of pathos. (In moments like this, one might almost believe this is a duo, and not a solo sonata.) The *Minuet*, with a *Trio* in the minor key, makes surprising use of tremolo and crescendo in a dance form where one doesn't expect it. The finale, an *Allegretto* in the form of a *Rondo*, alternates peace and serenity with *sturm und drang*, eventually giving way to a lyrical cantabile and then big bravura chords at the very end.

you haven't lined up the likes of Ernst von Dohnányi, Elliott Carter, Alan Hovhaness, Walter Piston, and Olivier Messiaen for this evening's classical listening session, though all would have plenty of advocates for inclusion in a list of history's 100 greatest composers.)

We start with two Dohnányi works, in both of which the warmth of Lieberman's instrument really makes its presence felt. First, the *Sonata for Violin and Piano in C-sharp minor*, Op. 21, where her partner is pianist Lois Shapiro. The slow movement, *Allegro ma con tenderezza* (with tenderness) certainly lives up to its description. Likewise, the *Serenade for String Trio in C Major*, Op. 10, allows Lieberman to make her points in collaboration with violist Marcus Thompson and cellist David Finch, first with a lean tone that admirably reinforces the other string textures in the stirring *Marcia*, and later with the incredible warmth she expresses in the *Romanza* and in the highly imaginative *Tema con variazione*.

Riconoscenza (Remembrance) for Solo violin by Elliott Carter has Lieberman clearly in the spotlight in the composer's handsome tribute to a fellow musician. Hovhaness' *Duet for Violin and Harpsichord*, Op. 122, in which she is partnered by Mark Kroll, is a more problematical work for a composer whose eastern influences are usually easier to enjoy. It is in three very diverse movements, *Prelude*, *Haiku*, and *Aria*, which require multiple auditions for the listener to assimilate. And Piston's *Sonatina for Violin and Harpsichord*, also with Kroll, lets us hear another, highly expressive, dimension in a composer whose name has often been associated with audacious modern rhythms. The descriptive adjectives in the titles of its movements (*leggiero*, *espressivo*, and *vivo*) provide interpretive clues.

Finally, we have three movements from Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, entitled "Vocalise for the Angel who announces the End of Time," "Dance of Fury for the Seven Trumpets," and "Praise for the Immortality of Jesus." Lieberman is joined here by Geoffrey Bursleson,

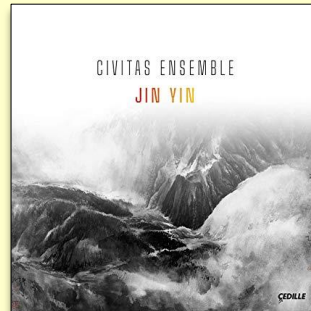


Brahms Symphony & Hungarian Dance Transcriptions
Uriel Tsachor, piano
(MSR Classics)

Uriel Tsachor was given the name of an Archangel by his parents when he entered this world. And he is surely on the side of the angels in this album, giving world recording premieres of priceless transcriptions of Brahms symphonic movements and Hungarian dances by his contemporaries Max Reger (1873-1916) and Theodor Kirchner (1820-1903) respectively, plus other pieces transcribed by Brahms himself. Tsachor goes about his tasks with patience, deep insight, and an awareness of the poetic qualities in music that wasn't always necessarily intended for public consumption.

The not-necessarily-for-consumption items I spoke of are the Five Slow Movements from the Symphonies that Reger delivered to the publisher Simrock in January, 1915, and which were published after his untimely death in 1916. The movements in question are the Andante sostenuto from Symphony No. 1, Adagio non troppo from No. 2, Andante and Poco Allegretto from No. 3, and Andante moderato from No. 4. Reger's assessment that these movements were "utterly playable" in these arrangements for piano is true enough, but it isn't the whole story.

There is no question that Max Reger was the ideal man for the task, as he knew more about counterpoint,



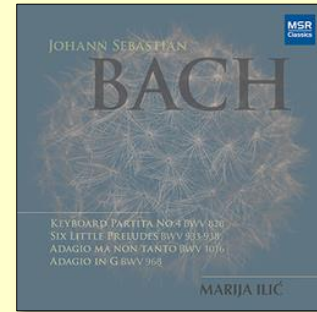
"Jin Yin"
Chicago Civitas Ensemble
(Cedille)

The Civitas Ensemble of Chicago, whose founding members are Yuan-Ching Yu (violin); Kenneth Olsen (cello), Winston Choi (piano), and Lawrie Bloom (bass clarinet), join forces with Chinese instrumentalists and composers, many of whom have lived and worked in Chicago and have roots in their country of origin, to produce a smartly executed and intriguing program of new works that look both East and West.

Mostly, they look eastward, affirming elements in traditional Chinese music and culture that seem strange to western ears but must be taken on their own terms in order for American listeners to better understand them. A good example is Five Elements by Zhou Long, a work whose musical substance is shaped by a cosmology of the natural elements.

As you may recall, the alchemists of Medieval times postulated four elements of Air, Earth, Fire, and Water. The Chinese equivalent was a little different. It consisted of five elements: Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth, with interrelationships based on the release of energy and its transformation into a perfect, ideal balance. For example (I quote from the program notes on *Fire* by Zhou Long), "the aggressive creative energy of wood matures into the flourishing 'full Yang' energy of Fire.

piano; Bruce Creditor, clarinet; and David Finch, cello. The fervent commitment they all invest in the composer's music brings out its strong declamation and incredible spiritual beauty.



Bach: Partita No. 4, Six Little Preludes, 2 Adagios
Marija Ilić, piano
(MSR Classics)

Serbia native Marija Ilić studied at the Belgrade Music Academy in her hometown and the Mannes College of Music in New York. She received her doctorate in piano performance from Rutgers University where her doctoral topic was Bach's Art of the Fugue. Her subsequent experience in Europe and the United States as a soloist and a duo-recital partner with Milica Jelača Jovanović has further broadened her musical outlook and prepared her for the wonderfully expressive pianist, particularly as an interpreter of J.S. Bach, that she is today. Unusually for a concert pianist, she is also said to be a gifted performer on the harpsichord.

It all fits in. This is an artist who is temperamentally inclined to study the details of a work carefully and then put them together to build a great edifice. The present recital is a good example. We begin with the Adagio from Sonata No. 3 in E Major for violin and harpsichord. BWV 1016, in which the keyboard part was originally written in an obbligato style that made it an equal partner with the violin. Ilić admits a special fondness for this movement because of its "irresistible romanticism, pathos, and sadness."

Next, we have Six Little Preludes, in moods ranging from light and

fugue, and the resulting harmony than any composer living, matters that are essential in understanding Brahms. But what was his intended audience? As Uriel Tsachor shows us, these transcriptions are both beautifully expressive and idiomatic when interpreted by a professional or highly skilled amateur pianist, but were they necessarily intended as *hausmusik*? My guess is that they served another, more vital, function as an invaluable aid to a conductor who might be studying the scores, particularly for the first time. In that case, he would want to understand the finer details of the music before taking it into the lively give-and-take of a first rehearsal.

Of course, as Tsachor's accounts of these transcriptions make clear, they can stand up on their own as "real" music that is highly listenable and enjoyable, given the right interpreter. Just attend to the deeply poetic beauty of the Andante moderato from the Fourth Symphony, and you will hear what I mean.

Problems of a different sort beset Brahms when Simrock asked for solo piano transcriptions of his first set of Hungarian Dances. There has always been a ready-made market for these highly accessible dances, which are still frequently heard in arrangements for violin and piano and for orchestra in addition to the original version for piano four-hands. But, as Brahms remonstrated to his publisher, these dances had been performed with the greatest artistic freedom and enjoyed by audiences for some years, so that "what has been played so long and wildly is inconvenient to write down." Nevertheless, Brahms stuck grimly to the task, with a success that you may hear for yourself in his highly listenable piano transcriptions of Dances 1 and 7. The program also includes three fine transcriptions for solo piano by Theodor Kirchner of Nos. 15-17 from the second set of Hungarian Dances, the great beauty of which is all the more remarkable when you consider their complex contrapuntal structures that were more suitable for the original 4-hands version.

This movement contains consistent rhythmic drumming with energetic figures played by the ensemble."

You follow that? Not as well as if you had been brought up in the ancient culture of China, perhaps, but the idea eventually occurs to the western listener that there is a principle of transformation through patterns of change wrought by release of energy, cooling at last into a perfect balance or stasis, represented best by the cool tone color of Water and the vastness and stability of Earth.

One other thing that may take some adjusting-to by the western listener is the role of a variety of percussion instruments to help generate the impulse for a given work of music and move it right along. Traditional Chinese classical music is based on tones, but does not possess a western-type theory of harmony to provide for orderly key changes. To western ears, Chinese music may jump from one tone to another with alarming suddenness!

Scenes Through Window by Lu Pei, a composer who has spent some years in Chicago, took its initial inspiration from rap music that he heard on his car radio one fine day in 2004 when he was cruising through Chicago. Lu had the inspiration to combine the repetitions of rap with elements of the music of various ethnic minorities in south China, where the musicians both play and dance at festivals. The experience of viewing the beautiful scenery from the mountain-top home of a friend in Indiana helped inspire the rest of a heady east-west mixture that Lu originally scored for Chinese classical instruments (*erhu*, *pipa*) plus piano trio, and later made into the version for flute, B-clarinete, and piano trio that we have here..

"Night Thoughts" by Chen Yi was inspired by a poem of Li Bai (*a.k.a.* Li T'ai-Po) of the Tang Dynasty: "On Couch bright moon shone / Thought frost on ground foamed / Raised head facing bright moon / Lowered head dreaming my home." The setting captures two traits of this famous poet, striking imagery and emotion: in this case, deep nostalgia.

sparkling to dramatic and serious. Most are dances and are designed to teach compositional and keyboard techniques. Despite the title, they are far from simple little pieces!

The Adagio in G Major, BWV 968, adapted, probably by Bach, from his Solo Violin Sonata in C Major, BWV 1005, generates a decided element of drama in its running sixteenth notes and its expressive bass line in the harpsichord's lowest register. Angular, chromatic, and yet deeply satisfying, this re-imagined work is, in Ilić's view, "altogether more agitated, urgent, romantic and searching" than the original.

All of this which prepares us for the Keyboard Partita No. 4 in D Major, BWV 828. It is a work of the greatest range, both in its variety of moods and its overall dimensions. At almost 35 minutes in the present account, it easily occupies more than half the duration of the program. Presented in an exalted performance by Marija Ilić, this is a truly sumptuous work, beginning with the grandeur of its Overture in a dancing triple meter enlivened by the interplay of its three voices. It then continues on to an Allemande with a noticeable vocal quality, deeply meditative and offering solace and serenity. Ilić has a way with the right-hand phrases so that they seem almost endless in their apparent lack of urgency. All of which is decidedly uncharacteristic of such a stately old German dance.

There follow: a light, quick, joyous Courante, an Aria which, despite its name, is actually an elegant dance in a duple meter, a slow Sarabande in the form of a melody over a walking bass that unfolds under Ilić's hands like a duet or rather an intimate conversation between slowly moving dance partners, and a light, playful Minuet. It all ends in a Gigue in the form of an elaborate double fugue, adding a contrapuntal element to a dance form that is characteristically just an exercise in perpetual motion.

So, we have dance forms with the persuasiveness of arias, and an aria that is really a dance: what an unexpected package of treats!

Tsachor describes the transcription of the Scherzo from Robert Schumann's Piano Quintet in E-flat, Op. 44 as one in which Brahms was "careful not to change the musical elements of the original score, transcribing it faithfully while at the same time producing an idiomatically pianistic piece, highly virtuosic and difficult to perform." (That is, unless you possess the technical prowess of a Uriel Tsachor.) How it is even possible to transfer a movement for five instruments into a solo piano version without making it sound like a mere reduction is something of a mystery that you must hear for yourself!

Brahms' transcription of the softly tripping Gavotte from Iphigenia in Aulis by Willibald Gluck, completes the program. In the middle section, the pianist must employ a "three-hand technique" in order to realize the soft pizzicato-like textures that Brahms (and Tsachor) achieve – wizzardry all the more remarkable for being inobtrusive.

Vivian Fung's Bird Song for Violin and Piano (2012) is characterized by quick runs, intense rhythms, a semi-improvisational style during certain moments, and the charm of imitation bird calls at the opening and closing.

Finally, Emanations of Tara by Yao Chen has nothing whatsoever to do with Scarlett O'Hara and Gone with the Wind. The Tara of Chen's title is a female *bodhisattva* whose image struck the composer in the many statues and wall paintings of her that he encountered during a visit to Tibet. Possessed of compassion, she rescues all living beings from the eternal cycle of life, death and rebirth. Free-flowing and languorous, the music of Emanations exhibits no urgency and makes much play of light and shadow. Written for four players (the founders of Civitas) who interact with the pipa as a concertant soloist, it makes for another fruitful meeting of east and west.

So, what is "Jin Yin"? The word signifies gold and silver. It refers specifically to fine porcelain objects wrought with inlays of precious metals.