

## Phil's Classical Reviews

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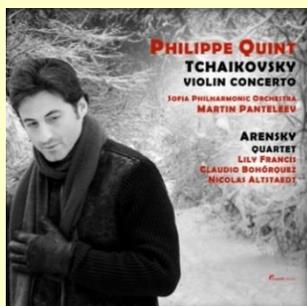


Turina: Canto a Sevilla, La Procepción del Rocio, Danzas Gitanas, Rapsodia Sinfónica – Juanjo Mena, BBC Philharmonic (Chandos)

Juanjo Mena (b.1965), the Spanish-born chief conductor of the BBC Philharmonic, leads that orchestra in a finely detailed program of the luminous and often rhapsodic music of Joaquín Turina (1882-1949). Following earlier releases with the BBC of Turina's Danzas Fantásticas and music by Falla and Montsalvatge it consolidates Mena's position as a foremost interpreter of the music of his native country.

As a young composer, Turina had yet to learn the truism that one must be thoroughly local and regional before striving to be universal. It was impressed upon him in Paris in 1907, upon the premiere of his Opus 1, a piano quintet in the French style that was reminiscent of his teacher Gabriel Faure. The lesson was stressed by no less a figure than Isaac Albeniz. That elder statesman of Spanish music promised to use his influence to have the work published in exchange for Turina's solemn vow never to write music like that again! The argument was hard to resist: why compose French music when he had such an enormous wealth of folk music in his native region of Andalusia and home city of Seville.

Turina took the advice to heart. After conferring with Debussy and Ravel, two Frenchmen who'd had some little experience taking the Spanish ethos in music considerably beyond the simple folklore level, he began



Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto, Op. 35  
Arensky: Quartet No. 2  
Philippe Quint, violin, with the Sofia Philharmonic under Martin Paneleev (Avanti Classic)

In this CD, even more so than in his earlier Avanti release of Bruch and Mendelssohn concertos, Philippe Quint seems like a man out of time. It is no mistake that the Tchaikovsky Violin Concertos on my own listening shelf – Heifetz, Milstein, Oistrakh, Kogan – were all products of an earlier era. The musical culture has moved on in the decades since then, and not in ways favorable to the heart-on-sleeve, emotionally charged ethos that was prevalent at the time.

That Quint is a throw-back to that era is evident in the bold way he takes on the challenges of the music and takes them big. In his hands, the composer's grand gestures in the outer movements are grand indeed, filled with generous measures of poetry, passion, and virtuosic flair. But the St. Petersburg, Russia native can also focus down on the quiet, intimate moments in the Canzonetta. This recording features two finales, Tchaikovsky's original version and Leopold Auer's scaled-down finale, each with its own cadenza.

Violist Lily Francis and cellists Claudio Bohorquez and Nicolas Altstaedt join Quint in the companion work, Quartet No. 2 in A minor by Anton Arensky. The unusual scoring gives added gravitas to the outer movements of a work written in memory of Tchaikovsky, in which the prevalent mood is deeply elegiac and



Bruch + Prokofiev: Violin Concertos  
Guro Kleven Hagen, violin  
Bjarte Egset, Oslo Philharmonic (Simax)

There's a generation of fine young violinists on the rise in Norway in recent years. None are more outstanding than the slim maiden with the large brown eyes on the cover of this latest release from Simax, Norway's premiere classical label. And she coaxes a gracefully beautiful, slender tone from her violin, an historical instrument known as the "Kreisler-Bergonzi," in the best-loved concertos of Max Bruch and Sergei Prokofiev.

Violin Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 63, first up in the program, is a typical work of the mature Prokofiev, having been premiered in December, 1935 and thus contemporary with his revisions of the ballet Romeo and Juliet. Like the ballet, it has a distinctive combinative of strikingly different elements: extroverted, stirring, grotesque, and surprisingly lyrical. The meditative second theme in the opening movement and the lovely melody of the slow movement will recall elements in the ballet for Prokofiev aficionados, particularly "Juliet, the Young Girl."

Many years' familiarity with Jascha Heifetz' classic RCA account of this work led me, inevitably, to expect the older violinist's fatter tone and more overtly emotional approach in the Andante, which caused many listeners to weep openly when he performed it for the first time in New York. Don't expect that here, but Kleven Hagen's slightly more

tapping the rich motherload of his own heritage as he developed his mature style as a composer. That included such deeply atmospheric works as Danzas Gitanas (Gypsy Dances) and Rapsodia Sinfónica, both heard in the present program. The latter features pianist Martin Roscoe in deep communion with Turina's beautifully transparent symphonic scoring.

The title La Procesión del Rocio (literally, "Procession of the Dew") makes no sense unless we realize that La Rocio is the name of a famous monastery, to which the leading families of Seville would make an annual pilgrimage in flower-strewn open carriages, much like the Rose Parade in Pasadena (which it may well have inspired). The music is sunny and joyous, with moments of discretely ecstatic rapture.

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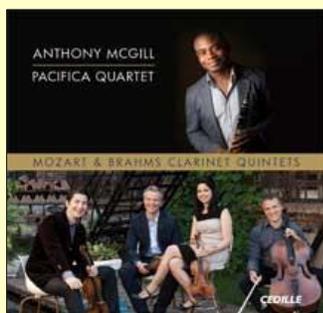
nostalgic. The slow movement, often performed by itself as Variations on a Theme of Tchaikovsky for string orchestra, is Arensky's finest work. Quint and friends do it full justice.

*Continued from previous column:*

The major work on the program is Canto a Sevilla (Song of Seville), Turina's deeply inspired homage to his native city. The poetic settings, sung with feeling and serene beauty by soprano Maria Espada, celebrate various aspects of the city: the joy of Holy Week, the pealing of the bells from La Giralda, the tower that dominates the skyline, the phantom of love that drifts through the dark streets at night, and the sparkling of sunlight on the bright waters of the city's many fountains. Truly, no composer ever celebrated his home town as eloquently as did Turina.

objective approach pays dividends, too, especially in terms of point-making. And her sharply struck pizzicato chords are simply stunning in the finale.

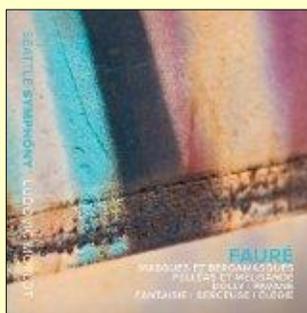
Kleven Hagen's account of Bruch's Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26, is if anything, even more convincing. She seems to be in her element in Bruch's vibrant score, in which an incredible outpouring of lyricism transpires in the course of only 22 minutes. That lyricism is especially noticeable in, but not confined to, the gorgeous opertic-like melody of the Adagio movement, which follows its predecessor without missing a beat. The irresistible Hungarian dance-like finale finds soloist and orchestra racing towards an exhilarating finish, with a sensational virtoso display by Kleven Hagen en route.



Mozart + Brahms: Clarinet Quintets – Anthony McGill, clarinet; Pacifica String Quartet (Cedille Records)

The Pacifica String Quartet, consisting of Simin Ganatra and Sibbi Bernhardsson, violins; Masumi Per Rostad, viola; and Brandon Vamos, cello, celebrate their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in collaboration with the eloquent clarinet artistry of Anthony McGill, in smoothly articulated accounts of the Mozart and Brahms quintets that often belie the intense preparation that went into these performances.

That is particularly true of the Mozart Quintet in A major, K581, with its sunny disposition and unfailing good spirits in the outer movements and the Menuetto and Trio. The clarinet leads the way, sometimes usurping



Fauré: Masques et Bergamasques, Pelléas et Mélisande, Berceuse, Élégie, Pavane, Dolly Suite Ludovic Morlot, Seattle Symphony (Seattle Symphony Media)

The fourth release by Ludovic Morlot and the Seattle Symphony Orchestra on its own in-house label is worth adding to your CD shelf for several reasons. First, it is a rare inclusive program of all the most significant symphonic music by Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924), one of the most superb stylists among French composers. It includes three compositions for melody instrument and piano that are heard here in attractive settings with the orchestra. Most important, Morlot gets beneath the shimmering surface of the score time and again, revealing the musical substance of works that too many interpreters seem to dismiss as merely pretty.



Fantasias & Fugues," Music for harp by Bach, Kimbell, Parish-Alvars, Renié, Turina - Katrina Szederkényi, (MSR Classics)

Katrina Szederkényi, born in Canada and educated in Vienna and Frankfurt, has come out with a gorgeous-sounding, consistently pleasing recital of works from Bach to the present that show off all the finer qualities of her instrument.

The harp, one of the oldest musical instruments, has been modified over the centuries in ways that expanded its capabilities. It was limited to the notes of one scale prior to 1810, when the French instrument maker Érard added pedals to allow it to play all the notes of the chromatic scale. The modern concert harp, with its 47 strings, seven pedals, and broad sounding board is very impressive

the role of the first violin, with its gorgeous, long-breathed melodies and virtuoso runs in the opening movement. They are paralleled by the upward scale runs by the first violin and an important solo passage by the cello in conjunction with the clarinet in the Larghetto. That movement is one of Mozart's marvels, a nocturne in all but name. The deep compass and serenity of its melody will stay with the listener for a long time afterwards. The Minuet has two trios, the first for strings alone, the second a charming duet for clarinet and violin, The ebullient finale, a set of variations that sound deceptively as if it just sat down and wrote itself, ends the work on a cheerful note. As is usual with perfect-sounding performances, a lot of dedicated application went into this one.

Brahms' Quintet in B minor, Op.115, is the moodier of the two works, though the outward form is similar. As opposed to the brisk moderate time they apply for the most part in the Mozart, McGill and the Pacifica take their time with Brahms (37:36) in order to derive maximum emotive and expressive power. From the very opening of the work, it's clear that the clarinet will spend most of its time interacting with the strings and interweaving its melodies with theirs in ways that will continually surprise and delight us. The high-water mark is clearly the slow movement, a dark-hued Adagio in which the clarinet percolates through the string textures and rises to a pitch of high emotion before subsiding at the end. More dark hues color the usually positive Scherzo, though the clarinet provides some relief with an uplifting melody. In the finale, marked "with motion," it partners with each of the strings in turn in a set of five upbeat variations.

Well, there is a lot of surface appeal in Fauré's music. But even in such a work as *Masques et Bergamasques*, there is poetic truth below the seemingly trivial *Commedia*-style dalliance that reminds us of the lines in Paul Verlaine's *Clair de Lune*: "Your soul is a choice landscape / Where roam charming maskers and bergamaskers / Playing the lute and dancing and almost / Sad beneath their fanciful disguises."

Other composers (notably Debussy and Schoenberg) have attempted to do justice to Maurice Maeterlinck's symbolist play *Pelléas et Mélisande*, but only Fauré was able to capture the tragedy underlying "The Death of Mélisande." Contrast it to the sunny, effervescent charm of "Sicilienne" with its sparkling writing for the solo flute. Speaking of which, we have the skills of Seattle Symphony members Demarre McGill, flute; Alexander Velinzon, violin; and Efe Baltacıgil, cello, respectively, showcased in three of Fauré's most famous lyrical pieces: *Fantaisie*, *Berceuse*, and *Élégie*. The last-named, a tribute in memory of the dead, is remarkable for the upswelling of pent-up emotion near the end.

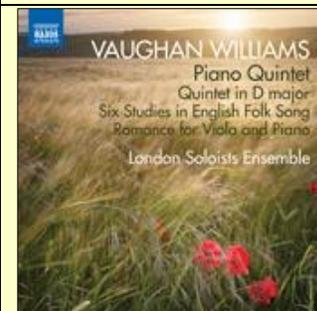
That leaves the Dolly Suite. In six movements, it reflects an usentimental view of the world as seen, not by an adult, but through the eyes of an actual child – in this case, Héléne, known as "Dolly," the daughter of the singer Emma Bardac with whom Fauré had an affair lasting several years. We can see the child at play in the vibrantly lively "Kitty waltz," and walking through an enchanting garden in "Le Jardin de Dolly." "Le pas Espagnole" is filled with sharply struck accents, a dance in the true Spanish style.

indeed, and can play sweeping glissandi as either scales or chords, depending on the pedal settings.

Those glissandi and the pleasant haze of sound they produce. are, in fact, the first thing the average listener thinks of when the subject of the harp is mentioned. We hear them right at the beginning of the opening section of J. S. Bach's Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, BWV 903. They engage our attention immediately with their whirling arepeggiated figurations for which the harp, though not the original instrument Bach had in mind, seems ideally suited today. In the Fugue, precise articulation of notes for which the harp is also well-equipped, and which Szederkényi realizes so beautifully, make the subjects stand out in high resolution.

*Toccata y Fuga – Ciclo Pianistico* (1928) by Spanish composer Joaquin Turina likewise employs counterpoint and fugue, but here the learned techniques are worn lightly in ways that allow the sensual charm of the composer's Andalusian folk-inspired idiom to weave its magic on the listener through the delicate harmonies in the music. A different sort of effect is used in *Ballade Artique* (2003) by Canadian composer Michael Kimbell to capture the atmosphere of the far north and the seriousness of an Inuit legend of an old woman's curse on a hunter who refused to share his caribou kill with his starving fellow men.

Elsewhere on the program, the rich scalar passages, brilliant glissandi, and glowing chords of the Italian Fantasy of Elias Parish-Alvars (1808-1849) and the galloping rhythms of *Legende* by Henriette Renié (1875-1956) give Szederkényi plenty of opportunity to show her virtuosity.



<p>Respighi: The Birds, Botticelli Pictures, Suite in G – Salvatore di Vittorio, Chamber Orchestra of New York (Naxos)</p> <p>Palermo native Salvatore di Vittorio directs the Chamber Orchestra of New York in a program that has to qualify as one of the year's most pleasant surprises. Vittorio, who founded the European-style young professionals' orchestra in 2006, and who divides his time between NYC and Sicily, makes no bones about his commitment to the music of Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936) or the marked influence of that figure on his outlook as a composer. (His own Third Symphony is called "Temples of Sicily," a subtitle that would have appealed greatly to his famous predecessor.)</p> <p>These are vibrant performances of some of Respighi's most attractive music, and that is saying a lot for <i>this</i> composer. Respighi, who studied with Rimsky-Korsakov for five months during an early sojourn in Russia as an orchestral musician, made imaginative use of tone color, textures, and harmony the way other composers might use thematic development and counterpoint, as key structural elements. In The Birds and Botticelli Triptych, the best-known works in the present program, he took his melodies basically from composers from the Renaissance through the Baroque, though what he did with them went far beyond simple imitation.</p> <p>Botticelli Triptych was inspired by three famous works in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, by Renaissance painter Sandro Botticelli. A rapturous <i>La Primavera</i> captures all the invigorating excitement that Italians typically feel at the arrival of Spring. (We should remember that the Winter, characterized in many places by depressingly overcast days and freezing rain, is not the happiest season to be in Italy.) "Adoration of the Magi," evoking the deep beauty and mystery of the Holy Night, makes use of the timeless seasonal melody "Veni, Emmanuel" (O come, o come, Emmanuel). "The Birth of Venus" is a miracle of diaphanous harmony and subtle colors,</p>	<p>"An American Tour," Schoenfeld, Auerbach, Cheny Yi, Newman – Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio (Bridge Records)</p> <p>Pianist Yael Weiss, violinist Mark Kaplan, and cellist Clancy Newman, playing together as the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio, leave their distinctive mark on everything they perform. That includes the present album of intriguing 21<sup>st</sup> century works by Lera Auerbach, Chen Yi, Paul Schoenfeld, and Newman himself. If you'd thought the new music of our time didn't have any interest for you, this Bridge Records offering just might change your mind. World-class sonic support, of the quality for which Bridge has become famous, helps place these stunning performances in a fine perspective.</p> <p>Schoenfeld, first up on the program, is represented by his Four Music Videos (2000). The title came about through Schoenfeld's conversations with the three young women who comprise the Ahn Trio. They were flabberghasted to discover that the composer, who still does not own a television, was blissfully unaware of just what the term "music video" meant. There's nothing benighted about Schoenfeld's music, however, inspired as it is by the ethos of 50's rock (Little Richard), contemporary Bossa Nova and Samba of the Afro-Brazilian Batuque folk culture, and Hollywood film scores. With its shifting colors and textures, this music plays to the W-K-N Trio's strengths, allowing them to give the impression of a much larger group than just three pieces.</p> <p>Clancy Newman took as his starting point in Juxt-Opposition (2010) a chance reading about certain trees that sprout new branches a golden angle (137.508 degrees) away from the previous branch, to provide maximum light exposure. Invoking the intervals found in Fibonacci numbers, he plotted the results as points on a perimeter, and was continually surprised by the periodic repetition of similar events. If this seems arcane to the point of sterility, the music we hear in Newman's work certainly is <i>not!</i> A chorale, a rock 'n' roll riff, and a rustic fiddling tune</p>	<p>Vaughn Williams: Piano Quintet, Quintet for Clarinet, Horn and Piano Trio – London Soloists (Naxos)</p> <p>The London Soloists, consisting of Lorraine McAslan, violin; Sarah-Jane Bradley, viola; Karine Georgian, cello; John Lenehan, piano; and Anthony Pike, clarinet, with Chris West, double bass, and Tim Jackson, French horn, give very affectionate and deeply felt performances of chamber music by Ralph Vaughn Williams (1872-1958). That includes two major works that weren't recorded or performed regularly until very recent years.</p> <p>The "unknown" Vaughn Williams? The notion seems odd considering the long attention audiences and the recording media have given this composer for many years. Yet both his Quintet in D for Violin, Cello, Clarinet, Horn, and Piano (1898) and his Piano Quintet in C minor (1903, rev. 1904-1905) were seldom revived during VW's lifetime. Further, they had an embargo placed on them for many years by his widow, Ursula Vaughn Williams (1911-2007) for reasons I have not been able to discover, and were not heard again until near the end of her long life.</p> <p>The Piano Quintet is the more serious of the two, despite the fact that it has the same unusual scoring (with double bass) as Schubert's more effervescent "Trout" Quintet. From its opening movement, we discover that Vaughn Williams' writing was of a piece, and he did not use one style for his symphonies and another for his chamber music. Indeed, it has a real symphonic breadth and depth, with dark, Brahmsian harmonies and quiet endings in all three movements. The most memorable moment occurs in the slow movement, where the central melody bears a striking resemblance to the composer's beautiful song "Silent Noon."</p> <p>The Quintet in D has a somewhat lighter texture owing to the presence of the clarinet and horn, and a lighter wit compared with the broader and darker humor of the Piano Quintet. The horn's beautiful falling phrase in</p>
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<p>celebrating Botticelli's depiction of Venus, goddess of love, rising from the waves off the Isle of Naxos.</p> <p>The Birds, a suite very much in the style of Respighi's Ancient Airs and Dances, makes use of Renaissance and Baroque pieces by Pasquini, Callot, Rameau, and our old friend "Anonymous" imitating the sounds of birds: dove, hen, nightingale, and cuckoo. The depiction of a Nightingale calling from the depths of a dark wood, is particularly evocative in its charm. It occurred barely two years after Respighi had seen fit to include a phonograph recording of an actual nightingale singing in the "Pines of the Janiculum" tableau of Pines of Rome. It makes you wonder what he might have done had he chosen to re-visit his earlier work and create the birdsong in purely musical terms.</p> <p>Two lesser-known but delectable works are the bookends of the program. The early Serenata for Small Orchestra (1904) imitates the sound of Renaissance guitar in a four-minute work of much persuasive charm. Suite in G major for Organ and Strings (1905) pays eloquent homage to Respighi's predecessors, particularly Bach, Corelli, and Frescobaldi, as the organ, played with power and probity by Kyler Brown, interacts with the string orchestra to create an abundance of deeply moving harmonies and textures.</p>	<p>keep our attention consistently engaged throughout the delightful 12-minute work.</p> <p>Chen Yi, born in China and for many years a distinguished professor of the Conservatory of Music and Dance at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, drew on her Cantonese heritage for the pitch materials she derived from the folk tunes "Summer Thunder," "Prancing Horses," and "Racing the Dragon Boat" when she composed Tunes from My Home (2008). She uses western-style counterpoint and fugue, in addition to distinctive Chinese rhythms, in the course of the three movements (Introduction, Nostalgia, Happiness) to create a work in which quiet lyricism and energetic affirmation occur in equal balance.</p> <p>"Do not be confined by what is on the page," Lera Auerbach cautioned the W-K-N Trio when they began to study her 2011 Triptych (Mirror with Three Faces). "Nothing should be conventional or normal... even the beautiful moments should have something 'off' about them – something that seems not quite right." The Russian-American composer proves true to her word in music that seems evocative of something on which we can't quite put our finger. Beautiful and familiar elements occur in strange guises, at times giving her music a positively nightmarish aspect. The second of five movements, entitled "First Unfolding (Left Interior Panel)," of only a minute's duration, seems to embody a startling revelation. The final moments of the 23-minute work, to me, seemed to evoke the Edgar Allan Poe of the novella Masque of the Red Death – though I should add, this was solely my impression, and does not imply any literary allusion on the composer's part.</p>	<p>the Andante, itself reminiscent of the slow movement in Brahms' Fourth Symphony and perhaps a tribute to the recently deceased composer, is repeated numerous times, creating a haunting effect. But the general impression given by the quintet is of elegant playfulness and vivacity, especially in the stomping folk dance rhythms in the finale, ending it on a positive, life-affirming note.</p> <p>A greater mystery surrounds the Romance for Viola and Piano, which may have been written for the great violist Lionel Tertis but was evidently never performed in Vaughn Williams' lifetime and was not premiered until 1962. It is astonishing that such an obviously attractive work that trades consistently on the viola's lyrical warmth escaped attention for so long.</p> <p>There's no mystery about Six Studies in English Folk Song for Clarinet and Piano (1926) which was well-received at the English Folk Dance Society Festival that year and has been popular ever since. Slow, delicious settings of "Lovely on the water," "Spurn Point," "Van Dieman's Land," "She Borrowed Her Mother's Gold," and "The Lady and the Dragon" are succeeded in the finale by a rousing, and obviously audience pleasing one of "As I Walked over London Bridge," which ends with comical abruptness at the end – another example of VW's famous broad humor.</p>
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