

Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

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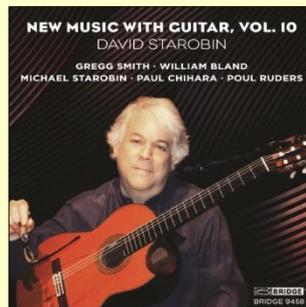


Sibelius: Symphony No. 2, Karelia Suite, Finlandia
Mariss Jansons, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra
(BR-Klassik)

Mariss Jansons, chief conductor of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (*Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks*) leads that famed ensemble in stirring performances of three favorite works by Jean Sibelius. With the big, robust sound he draws from the orchestra, particularly the dark-sounding cellos and basses and the double-sized percussion battery, the first thing you will notice is the very full sound of this performance and recording. It may, in fact, sound like an exercise in the Art of Coarse Conducting until you take a closer look at the details, and then you realize how seamless, and how passionate, Jansons' vision of Sibelius really is.

Sibelius is a fascinating figure in that, alone of all his contemporaries in a period in which there was ongoing conflict between advocates of "program" music (music that tells a story) and "pure" symphonic music, he was the only one who did both convincingly. The key to this seeming anomaly lies in the fact that he based his music on strong human emotions and passions, sometimes smoldering but always ready to burst into flame. Though he has often been portrayed as a poet of nature, he never created a landscape that was not seen through the mind of a human observer. And even his tone poems that drew inspiration from the Finnish folk-epic, the Kalevala, are never "Mickey Mouse" music (as they used to call it in Hollywood) in which every action always has a musical correlative.

As a fellow Balt who was born in Riga, Latvia and studied conducting as Yevgeny Mravinsky's assistant in what is now St. Petersburg, Russia, Jansons has seen all the vistas that more or less unconsciously formed the background of Sibelius' music: the cold, pale sunlight, the surf breaking on rocky shores, the great forests of fir trees. And that helps him divine the large outlines of the works on this program and the slow curves they follow in their development. In these interpretations, he is keenly aware of how *emotion* in



New Music with Guitar, Vol. 10
David Starobin, guitar, and other artists
Bridge Records

David Starobin is one busy dude. Almost from the moment he founded Bridge Records in 1981, he has had a passion for the "New Music with Guitar" series, stretching listeners' ears and expanding the repertoire for guitar and for 20th/21st Century music in general. As a recitalist, composer, and co-founder (with Jason Vieaux) of the guitar program at the Curtis Institute, he moves in wide circles, making contacts and enduring friendships with other musicians. His wife Becky has been president of Bridge Records since 2007. In addition to the works the Starobins have commissioned over the years, I suspect that David has also been a very active *agent provocateur* for new compositions.

In a very diverse program of music for the guitar and its friends, David's instrument appears in a variety of guises: as co-recitalist with pianist Vasily Primakov in Variations on a Theme by Carl Nielsen, by William Bland (b.1947), as accompanist for soprano Rosalind Rees in Steps by Gregg Smith (b.1931) and baritone Patrick Mason in Four Stevens by his brother Michael Starobin (b.1956), and as a chamber music partner with Moses Pogossian, violin, and Paul Coletti, viola, in The Girl from Yerevan by Paul Chihara (b.1938). David relinquishes the guitar role to Robert Belinić and takes the podium himself as conductor in the aria "Oh Mother" by Poul Ruders (b.1949). Other artists heard here are soprano Camille Zamora, violinists Giovanni Andrea Zanon and Jee Yoon Kim, violist Thomas Howerton, and cellist Blake-Anthony Johnson.

I'm happy to report that all our composers are alive and kicking at this posting. That includes Gregg Smith (yes, *the* Gregg Smith) who founded his Singers as far back as 1955. Maybe writing music as audacious and saucy as Steps (1975), based on the poem by Frank O'Hara, helps to keep one eternally youthful. Rosalind Rees is positively radiant leaping and swooping her way through Smith's tricky rhythms that serve to replicate the mood of O'Hara's madcap paean to New York on a

Sibelius' music, more than key-resolution, determines the color, the specific orchestration, and even the contours of the form itself. He builds his climaxes as superbly as any Sibelian I can recall hearing.

That climax-building is vital enough in Finlandia, which builds through several stages of lowering menace and turbulence until a calm settles over the orchestra, and then the serenely beautiful hymn-like melody that all the world loves arises slowly, confidently, and with utter naturalness. The Karelia Suite is, by its nature, more expansive and effusive, the unifying link being the jaunty march-like theme first sounded in the opening Intermezzo and recurring again like a welcome friend in the *Alla marcia* finale.

The major work on the program, Symphony No. 2 in D, is the more difficult to conduct because you have to sustain its emotions over very long gestation periods. Jansons is very much aware of the importance of the three-note kernel in the opening Allegretto, a motif that recurs in different guises in the Scherzo and again, triumphantly, as only Sibelius can fully define that word, in the overwhelming build-up to a final burst of life-affirmation in the finale. That are a few landmines scattered along the path from opening to conclusion, most notable in the way the scherzo begins with a stuttering burst of quarter-notes, from which we find a blessed respite in the pastoral mood of the trio section with its ravishing oboe solo. From darkly brooding to heroically triumphant, this symphony has an enormous emotional range, and Jansons is right on top of it all.



Mozart: Violin Concertos 3-4-5
Henning Kraggerud, New Norwegian Chamber Orchestra (Naxos)

Norwegian violinist Henning Kraggerud once again shows us the quick responsiveness, the flair, and the pronounced feeling for a cantabile passage that he displayed several years ago in an a program of Grieg sonatas-turned-into-concertos (see Phil's Classical Reviews for July, 2013). This time, there's even more opportunity for that flair I just mentioned because the subject is Mozart. In his Violin Concertos 3, 4, and 5 "Amadeus" shows us that he didn't stop writing opera buffa just because he didn't have a stage and singers. He couldn't stop: it was in his blood.

One example, among many, of Mozart's penchant for

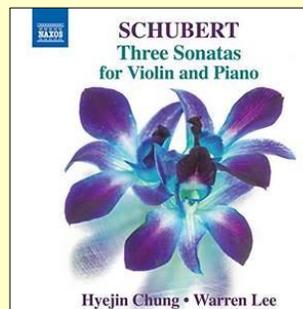
sunny morning – lyrics that somehow end up conveying a mood of intimacy: "oh god it's wonderful / to get out of bed / and drink too much coffee / and smoke too many cigarettes / and love you so much".

William Bland's variations on Carl Nielsen's song "*Underlige Aftenlufte*" (Strange and Wondrous Evening Breezes) are a brilliant set of transformations that employ rich harmonies, including the guitar harmonics against upper-register arpeggios in the piano in the 3rd variation. At one point, a serious variation is followed by a jaunty waltz, the insouciance of which is still subject to a tidal pull from its predecessor.

Michael Starobin's Four Stevens is based on poems by Wallace Stevens making references to the seasons of the year, hence the implied allusion in the title. Patrick Mason, accompanied by David Starobin, does a fine job interpreting lyrics by a poet whose metaphysical complexities make him an extremely difficult subject: "For the listener, who listens in the snow, / And, nothing himself, beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" (The Snow Man).

Paul Chihara, prolific Japanese-American composer who has composed music in virtually every genre, is particularly adept at writing for strings. A violist himself, he has always shown a feeling for inner harmonies, as he does in *The Girl from Yerevan* (2014). Here he combines color and feeling in a work that shows Armenian and Bossa Nova influences (hence the allusion in the title to "The Girl from Ipanema").

Finally, Poul Ruder's "Oh Mother" from the opera *The thirteenth Child*, to a text by Becky and David Starobin, stands out by itself as a poignant attempt to recall the past and learn from a mother's love. Camille Zamora sings this little gem of an aria with deep feeling.



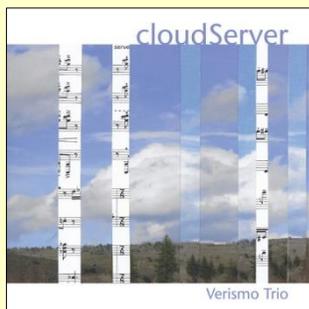
Schubert: 3 Sonatas for Violin & Piano
Hyejin Chung, violin; Warren Lee, piano (Naxos)

Hyejin Kim, Korea-born violinist who studied with Takako Nishizaki and later with S. I. Kravchenko at the Moscow State Conservatory, now combines an active career as a performer with teaching advanced students at the Nishizaki Violin School in Hong Kong. Together with pianist Warren Lee, she explores the abundant beauties of Franz Schubert's first three violin sonatas

the operatic occurs in the Adagio of Concerto No. 3 in G, K216, where the melody allows Kraggerud to show his love of gorgeous cantilena. Here, the violin, having concluded in A, plays the melody again in A-sharp and then briefly switches to B minor, a rather tragic key, before it modulates back to A major. In the Rondeau finale of the same concerto, the full-bodied, festive music for soloist and orchestra ends suddenly, and we are left with a lonely oboe solo at the very end, giving the music the appearance of fading into nothingness.

Concerto No. 4 in D, K218 affords Kraggerud another fine opportunity to display his beautiful cantilena in the slow movement, *Andante cantabile*, and to play an ear-catching drone bass to an unexpected dance that suddenly breaks out in the orchestra in the course of the Rondeau finale. And Concerto No. 5 in A, K219 bursts with off-the-wall delights that include a short but memorable *Adagio dolce* for the violin in the course of the opening movement and an episode of "Turkish" music (then all the rage in Vienna) that occurs in the context of another brisk Rondeau finale.

The opening Allegro of this work has the expressive marking *aperto* to indicate that it should be played broader and livelier than would usually be the case – a request by Mozart that Kraggerud and the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra are happy to oblige. My only criticism of these performances is that soloist and orchestra tend to favor unusually brisk tempi in the opening and closing movements, particularly in K218-K219. But that's flyspecks in view of the abundant features there are to enjoy in all these recordings. Nice, bright sound (kudos to producer Sean Lewis and an old pro, engineer Mike Hatch, in the sound booth) does its part in bringing out all the many beauties.



"cloudServer," new music for flute, saxophone, & piano – Verismo Trio (ACA Digital)

The Verismo Trio, consisting of Nicole Riner, flute; Scott Turpen, saxophones; and Theresa Bogard, piano, presents a marvelously varied and engaging program of new works by seven composers, none of whom currently has an end date by his/her name. Recorded by ACA's fine recording team (Fyodor Cherniavsky, producer; Tommy Joe Anderson, engineer; Fred Horton, digital editor) this is a great-sounding album that should make a few friends for the new music of our day.

in approaches ranging from light-hearted to stirring and dramatic, depending on the material.

These three sonatas for violin and piano were written in the spring of 1816, but were published posthumously as Schubert's Op. 137 in 1836 by Diabelli, who cannily re-titled them "sonatinas" with an eye to the amateur market. The somewhat misleading idea was that they would be easy to play. Certainly, there's a spontaneous flow of lyricism in these works that might create that deceptive impression. (Even today, there is the lingering suspicion among contemporary critics and composers that melody that springs forth so naturally must be the product of an inspired tunesmith, and not a "serious" composer.)

To be sure, the first in the set, D.384 in D major, might correspond to that notion of "easiness" because of the innocent charm of its opening melody, though the fact that it is heard in unison between the violin and the piano, with the left hand doubling the theme at the octave, should have alerted amateurs that there is more here than meets the ear. The vivacious finale of this work bears more than a casual resemblance to the scherzo of Schubert's famous "Trout" Quintet. Schubert also initiates a procedure that he will develop further in the other sonatas, that of alternating melody and accompaniment between the two instruments. He does this so skillfully (as Chung and Lee demonstrate in the present performances) that the listener is not at first aware of it, having been thoroughly enchanted. That, more than anything else, would seem to warrant their description as "sonatas for violin and piano," rather than simply "sonatinas."

Elsewhere, Chung and her partner employ a close rapport, with varied textures and a nice sense of the specific gravity of each moment in all three sonatas. Pounding chords in the piano and wide-spaced intervals in both instruments in the opening Allegro moderato of D.385 in A minor are contrasted by the gentle Mozartean charm of its Andante. K.408 in G minor likewise opens with a bold declaration for the violin and octaves in both hands in the piano. The calm, reflective beauty of the Andante is contrasted by its central section, which may remind listeners of Schubert's stirring setting of Goethe's "*Erkönig*" the previous year –providing yet another reason why Chung and Lee do not take these works by a 19-year old composer for granted.

As tour guides, we are given thoughtful annotation by the composers themselves, discussing their aims. Portland, Oregon resident Dave Deason's Trio for flute, soprano sax, and piano has three pieces in a jazz-flavored style: Moderately, Bossa Nova ("sandwiched between two halves of a mournful and lyrical Ballad") and Driving – which the Verismo Trio take with such energy it promises to go into overdrive. New York-based composer Sunny Knable's Glassworks (2012-2014) is a lighthearted 75th birthday tribute to Philip Glass. The variety in this five-movement work is encapsulated in the titles: "Glass Half Full," "Glass Half Empty," "Hour Glass," "Looking Glass," and "Shatter Glass." The difference in mood between the buoyant "Half Full" and the dismal "Half Empty" seems to recall an old adage about the optimist and the pessimist.

Marilyn Shrude's Notturmo: In Memoriam Toru Takemitsu (1996) for flute, alto sax, and piano, is an eloquent memorial to the well-loved Japanese composer. Without quoting any of his themes, Shrude, who has been on the faculty of Bowling Green State University since 1977, pays her subject the honor of writing music in his distinctive gesture and hamony, including well-spaced chords and single notes that add drama and mystery to a dignified elegy. Spiritual Mountain (2014) by Croatian composer Ivan Božičević is a highly-imaginative three-movement work that takes inspiration from the traditional Korean melody "Sangryeongsan." The composer sees it as an allegory for a basic need of our own time in its progress from frenzied activity (*Energico*) to a state of calmness, mental freedom, and balance (*Fluente*).

Torschlusspanik (2013) for flute, soprano sax, and piano by LA-based composer Jason V. Barabba derives its title from an old German word describing the panic that set in when the castle gates were closed and one was left outside, exposed to danger. In modern times, it might be a metaphor for the anxiety one feels when time is passing and one's life goals are unfulfilled. Barabba uses fluctuations between a steady 4/4 meter and an irregular 7/8 to create a sense of unease amid virtuoso writing for all three instruments. At the end, he asks us to decide for ourselves if the flute makes it through the gates in time?

The high level of virtuosity for all members of the trio continues in Trio # 1 for Flute, Alto Saxophone, and Piano (2009) by Minnesota composer Russell Peterson. The second movement, in which sax and flute imitate a Middle Eastern instrument called a *duduk* and "the piano begins a 'groovy' vamp in 7/4" (Peterson) is particularly fascinating. The finale, building on the saxophone's double-high F, finishes in "a blaze of 16th notes to the end."

Finally, Nebraska composer John Emerson describes the title of his cloudServer for flute, alto saxophone and piano from the digital storage of adjacent data files of different lengths and his speculation of what would happen if you structured music in the same way with



"French Reflections," music by Fauré, Caplet, Tournier, Debussy, Mantovani, Schoeller – Sivan Magen, harp (Linn Records) SACD

I first reviewed harpist Sivan Magen in "Opus 1," an imaginative program in which he collaborated with other members of the Israeli Chamber Project (Azica Records, see my *Classical Reviews* for August 2012). I recall being impressed with his fast pedalling and sure registration changes in addition to his ability as an skilled arranger. Since then, the Jerusalem native has moved to New York City and conducted master classes in his instrument in the U.S., the U.K., Finland, Taiwan, and elsewhere, even as his reputation as a harpist with a demon technique has continued to grow.

The present CD allows Magen lots of opportunity to display his talents in a program that tastefully mixes in arrangements of charming pieces by Debussy and Fauré as a balance to works by lesser-known French composers that are distinguished by their ever-increasing technical demands in the interest of virtuosity and expressiveness. Spurred by new advances in harp design, early 20th century French composers occupied themselves with sonority, resonance, imagery, and exotic modes. And as Magen puts it, what instrument was better suited to explore those new realms than the harp?

The bookends of the program are pieces by Fauré: *Une châtelaine en sa tour*, a forlorn-sounding work based on ever more plaintive harmonies (perhaps a lament for losses suffered in the Great War?) and a rather extroverted Impromptu, Op. 86, written as a concourse piece. One can divine this purpose from its virtuosic use of harmonics, glissandi, cross fingerings and rich arpeggios.

André Caplet, composer-arranger, conductor and close associate of Debussy, is heard from next, in the form of a Divertissement whose two movements, marked *à la Française* and *à l'espagnole*, are audacious send-ups of national styles that involve such features as jewel-like harmonics, scalar motifs taken at dizzy speed, and pedal glissandi. The French piece is more brilliant, the Spanish rather more languid and passionate. *Esstal* by Philippe Schoeller (b.1957) is an avant-garde work which its composer describes as "visited by archaic accents." Says Schoeller, "I imagine a harp, peaceful and yet still menacing." My impression of this austere

multiple layered patterns of different lengths? Happily, Emerson, who is an Episcopal priest and has founded his own publishing company, whimsically named barefootPriestmusicPublishing, writes music that is compelling on more than just an intellectual level, as you can judge for yourself.

So here you have it, seven contemporary composers, each with something vital to say, presented to us with supreme artistry by the Verismo Trio in optimal sound that allows them all to shine. I know ACA Digital is a small label, but the people who give out the annual awards in the category of new music recordings shouldn't ignore this one!



"Listening to Memories," Bach: Aria + pieces by Chopin, Brahms, and Joplin – William Ransom, piano (ACA Digital)

William Ransom, professor of piano at Emory University in Atlanta and founder and artistic director of the Emory Chamber Music Society among his other achievements, is usually cited by critics for either of two aspects of his ability as a pianist: (a) his technical brilliance and (b) his ability to make the instrument sing. I would opt for (b), as his lyricism was the first thing that struck me before I began to delve into the technical aspects. As a matter of fact, Ransom's artistry in this respect reminded me of lines from the American poet E. E. Cummings; "since feeling is first / who pays any attention / to the syntax of things / will never wholly kiss you."

Of course, a pianist, any pianist, is not simply an inspired fool improvising at the keyboard. Painfully acquired technique, honed by many hours of practice, underlies the final product that gives so much delight to us listeners. In fact, it was a technical issue in the opening item on the program, the "Aria" from J. S. Bach's Goldberg Variations, that first piqued my interest. It had to do with Bach's ornamentations. Conceived in the French style, they are supposed to be part of the melody, but in the opening measures Ransom breaks a mordent into its component notes, then does the same with a descending phrase. Is this artist just getting warmed up, I wondered, or does he simply hear these things differently from other pianists? I didn't find this "quirk," if indeed it was, to be a problem in the half-dozen Chopin pieces that make up the main course in the present program. My guess is that

work marked by widely-spaced notes and occasional knocking on the soundboard of the harp, is somewhat different. Where Schoeller envisions enchantment, my personal response is that it sounds like music to contemplate suicide.

I found Sonatine by Marcel Tournier (1879-1951) a more engaging work. In three movements, titled *Allègrement*, *Calme et expressif*, and *Fièvreusement* (feverishly) it combines color, discrete sensuality, and, in the finale, bold arpeggio figures that add excitement.

The most familiar pieces on the program are two of Debussy's *Estampes* (1903): *La soiree dans Grenade* and *Jardins sur la pluie*. Both are highly evocative: the warmth of a Spanish night with the strumming of guitars in the former, and the splashing of raindrops on windowpanes and the descending sheets of rainfall that are characteristic of a cloudburst in Normandy. The arrangements, presumably Sivan's own, make a worthy comparison with Debussy's piano originals.

Tocar by Bruno Mantovani (b.1974), as its name suggests, explores a wide variety of touch-play sensations. To quote the booklet notes, "Mantovani utilizes a breath-taking spectrum of attacks and techniques: furious scalic motives, nail sounds, *bisbigliandi*, and sudden, shrill *fortes* which makes [it] a testament to the harp's more virile characteristics." As Magen presents it, Tocar is actually more euphonious than we might have expected, given the strangeness of many of its sounds. (By the way, *bisbigliandi*, Italian for "whisperings", are light, murmuring sounds produced on the harp by a fingered tremolo.)



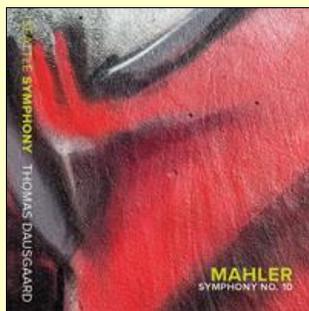
Mozart: Sonatas and Variations for Piano and Violin Jacques Israelievitch, violin; Christina Petrowska Quilico, piano (Fleur de Son)

This is Volume 1 in a series of Mozart works for piano and violin. Sadly, it must also be a memorial to the late violinist Jacques Israelievitch, who died of lung cancer last September 5th, less than two months after he and pianist Christina Petrowska Quilico completed the ambitious recording project. That the French-born Canadian violinist persisted in this endeavor in his final illness would be remarkable enough; what is amazing is that there is absolutely no evidence of infirmity in his performances, so full of the rhythms and colors of life, taut and firm, and always endowed with the warmth

Ransom was exercising poetic license to add a touch of drama to this piece, the lead-in to a set of variations that, as written, are more intellectually engaging than soothing.

The other thing of interest in Ransom's carefully compiled program is that all the selections are intended as tributes to people who have been important figures in his life and are now gone, "at least physically." In a curious way, he seems to choose music that suits the personality and the memories (hence the title of the album). To cite only one example, his tribute to his "Cousin Betsy," whom he describes as "flamboyantly eccentric" and "delightfully outrageous, with incredible style," seems justified by his selection of Chopin's Polonaise in A-flat major, Op. 53, a grand, expansive work that seems to utilize all the resources of the keyboard in its widely spaced and broken chords, rapid scalar passages in octaves, ascending chromatic fourths, and really fast arpeggios. Ransom pulls it all off with such style that it certainly lives up to its nickname of the "Heroic" Polonaise.

That's just one highlight in a program that is simply loaded with great music for the piano. As I've hinted, the Chopin pieces are of prime interest. Besides the Polonaise, they include Scherzo No. 1 in B minor, Op. 20, which ties in with my own memories of my mother, who loved to play it in spite of its formidable difficulties. We also have the Mazurka in A minor, Op. 17, No. 4; Ballade No. 3 in A-flat major, Op. 47; Waltz in D-flat major, Op. 64, No. 1; and Fantaisie-Impromptu in C-sharp minor, Op. 66, in a rich variety of Chopin favorites. (The back of my hand to those pianists who, even today, try to play the so-called "Minute" Waltz in just 60 seconds, which is technically possible but artistically most undesirable. Ransom is no such fool, and he employs enough of the tempo variations known as "rubato" to make a charming trifle very persuasive.) Other pieces on the recital are Scott Joplin's "solace" Mexican Serenade and Johannes Brahms' haunting Intermezzo in A major, Op. 118, No. 2.



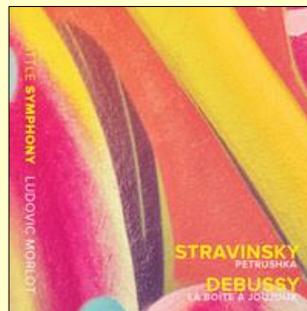
Mahler: Symphony No. 10 – Thomas Dausgaard, Seattle Symphony Orchestra (Seattle Symphony Media)

Copenhagen native Thomas Dausgaard, who is now principal guest conductor of the Seattle Symphony, uses the ample resources of that orchestra to good

that Mozart requires. Petrowska Quilico proves the ideal partner for him, in recordings made in the Tribute Communities Recital Hall at York University in Toronto.

In this first volume in the series, we have a selection of Mozart's richest and most persuasive sonatas: K.380 in E-flat major, K.454 in B-flat major, and K.526 in A major. Chronologically, they are a study in the development of the genre, from what is basically a piano sonata with violin accompaniment to one in which the violin has clearly achieved an equal partnership. The slow movements, in particular, contain some of Mozart's most beautiful melodies. They are also different kinds of melodies. The Andante of K.380 has a haunting quality that is enhanced by chromatic inflections. The slow movement of K.454 is another Andante, but with more of the feeling of an Adagio, and the violin now is entrusted with the prominent melody. Bold chromatic modulations add to its intriguing beauty. In K.526, the most mature sonata Mozart ever wrote, the slow movement, likewise an Andante, has an extended development, which was rare for the period. It even modulates for a while into A minor with no apparent hurry to end on the major key, traditionally the signal for the finale to begin. Mozart was evidently taken with the beguiling melody and in no haste to return to the main event.

Israelievitch and Petrowska Quilico obviously enjoy the wealth of melody and the increasingly rich chromatic harmonies in these three works, so reminiscent in many ways of his writing in the operas with which they were contemporary, from Abduction from the Seraglio to The Marriage of Figaro. The joy of music making is evident in every single measure. Highly recommended. (If this CD doesn't win one of Canada's Juno Awards next April, there's no justice.)



Stravinsky: Petrushka + Debussy; La Boîte a Joujoux Ludovic Morlot, Seattle Symphony Orchestra (Seattle Symphony Media)

Ludovic Morlot has done it again. A year ago, he raised eyebrows by programming Edgard Varèse's eternally avant-garde *Amérique* with Antonin Dvořák's "New World" Symphony. Now he shows his imaginative program-making again by placing Igor Stravinsky's ballet Petrushka together with Claude Debussy's under-performed entertainment La Boîte a Joujoux (The Toy Box). In a sense, they are a more natural

effect in Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 10. The sound of a large body of about 60 strings encompasses the range of color and texture the score demands, and Dausgaard employs a judicious use of portamenti (slides between notes on the fingerboard) to meet its expressive needs. The vital solos on instruments as varied as tuba, trombone, and bass drum are recorded with the greatest clarity.

As you may know, Mahler did not live to finish the symphony. At his death in 1911, only the opening Adagio movement was complete in full score. He left behind 72 pages in full score, 50 pages in short score, and 44 pages of preliminary drafts, sketches and inserts – enough clues for a knowledgeable scholar to complete the work along Mahler's lines - allowing for the fact that Mahler was always prone to revising a finished score. The editions by Deryck Cooke (used here) and Clinton Carpenter are the leading contenders for a "complete" performance version. However, many maestros still perform only the Adagio, which does in fact stand up very well by itself as a symphonic poem.

The other thing you need to know about the Tenth is that, in many ways, it was Mahler's most personal symphony, the one in which he most bares his soul. At the height of his success as a conductor, as he was finishing a very successful season with the New York Philharmonic and preparing to take it on tour, he received two stunning blows: a diagnosis of his heart condition, which was to prove fatal, and the chance discovery of his wife's infidelity. Either revelation, for one of Mahler's morbid sensibility, would have had a profound effect. It is no mistake that there is a dire mood throughout this work that is at war with other passages expressing the joy of life. Thus, the folk-inspired dance in Scherzo I is countered by the very sinister mood of the following Allegretto, titled Purgatorio, with its muffled drum beats and manic alternation between bleak and carefree moods. The finale, marked slow and severe (*Langsam, schwer*), takes its time (22:26 in the present performance) to resolve the emotional weight of the symphony, ending peacefully at the very last.

pairing than the *Varèse / Dvořák*, as both deal with the passion of love-longing among subjects that are not quite in the human realm but push its limits.

In *Petrushka*, the three characters – the sad clown *Petrushka*, a *Ballerina* with whom he is hopelessly in love, and his deadly rival, the *Moor* – are all life-size puppets. Their counterparts in *The Toy Box* are *The Little Soldier*, a pretty *Doll* whom he is in love with, and his rival, the bully *Punchinello*. The fact that *Petrushka* ends in tragedy and sudden death and *The Toy Box* in the peaceful resignation of married life, should not obscure the similarities between two works that are crammed with lush harmonies, unexpected insertions of new material, and a gently pervading sense of absurdist irony resulting from the fact that human conflicts are being enacted by dolls and puppets. To add to the piquancy of *The Toy Box*, Debussy even quotes slyly from other works, such as the *Soldiers' Chorus* from Gounod's *Faust* and "Gollywog's Cakewalk" from his own suite *The Children's Corner*.

Considering the lush scoring, the shimmering textures, the imaginative non-traditional harmonies used by both composers, and the many solo moments scattered throughout both works, it is a good thing that the members of the *Seattle Symphony* are used to taking solos as well as melding into the orchestral blend. Both scores feature a prominent role for the piano (here played by Kimberly Russ) as well as added flute, clarinet, horn, trombone and tuba players and additional percussionists. Even small details, such as the sinister bassoon that seems to tread mockingly behind *Petrushka's* cortège in the final scene at the *Shrovetide Fair*, are well defined in live performances that convey a real sense of spontaneity.



The Audio Video Club of Atlanta is pleased to welcome pianist and Steinway Artist Susan Merdinger as our guest columnist. Susan is well-known in piano circles as a concert artist who has given a wide variety of solo recital programs, chamber music and duo-piano recitals, and concerts with orchestras in venues in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and Europe. Among her many other activities, she is founder and artistic director of the *Sheridan Music Studio*, Highland Park, Illinois, and founder of *Pianissimo!* Which is billed as "Chicago's premiere piano ensemble." As teacher and lecturer and as a champion of upcoming artists' careers, she approaches her work with the same enthusiasm she displays on the concert stage.

Susan is the author of both the CD reviews below, in which her insights as a professional musician are most welcome. Readers are cordially invited to visit her website at www.susamerdinger.org



“Colors,” music of Vitali, Janáček, Prokofiev, Beethoven, Debussy – Jessica Lee, violin; Reiko Uchida, piano (Azica Records)

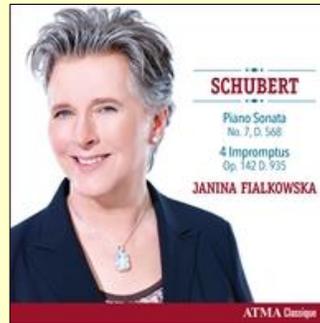
The new CD, Colors, by violinist Jessica Lee with pianist Reiko Uchida, lives up to its name in every sense of the word. While it is common to associate musical sounds (frequency of vibrations) with color (frequency of light), in this CD one gets more than just color – there seems to be a dramatic sense of exoticism and prayer-like reflection which transports the listener to distant places and times.

In the Vitali Chaconne, one is immediately stuck by the sheer beauty of Ms. Lee’s violin tone, a rich vibrato enhanced by the excellent recording quality and superbly balanced by thoughtful and supportive piano playing by Ms. Uchida. This work, like a set of variations, allows the violinist to demonstrate a variety of technique, but maintains a lyrical quality throughout.

The Sonata by Leos Janáček is a four-movement work which displays even more color from both instruments – shimmering piano figuration in the second movement Ballade and fourth movement Adagio, with the exotic harmonies and the most sensuous, smooth-as-silk double stops I have heard in the third movement Allegretto, allowing the listener to be transported to another world. The fourth movement is prayer-like and reflective, opening with the piano providing a lyrical, choral-styled theme with the violin interjecting some impetuous motivic fragments, which provide a contrast to the sense of calm, only later to be joined later by a more lyrical outpouring from the violin.

Prokofiev’s Five Melodies, transcribed from actual songs he wrote, provides more opportunities for Ms. Lee’s display of gorgeous tone and sensuous lyricism, beautifully matched by the sensitive phrasing and lovely tone in Ms. Uchida’s pianism.

The Beethoven Sonata No. 6 for Piano and Violin continues in the lyrical vein of the previous works – albeit this work comes strangely out of the chronological order one might expect. But it is a welcome stylistic contrast at this point in the CD, after the Janacek and Prokofiev, and yet oddly enough, it provides the same lyrical sensibilities of the previous works. The slow movement is performed in a loving



Schubert: Piano Sonata No. 7 D. 568
Four Impromptus Op. 142 D. 935
Janina Fialkowska, piano (ATMA Classique)

From the very first track of this extraordinary disc, one immediately senses the sound and interpretative qualities of a great artist- this being the 65 year old Canadian Pianist, Janina Fialkowska. The sound quality of the recording is clear and pure, but what strikes one most is the delicacy of touch and articulation, along with gorgeous phrasing that Fialkowska brings to this music of Schubert. Her playing and interpretation is primarily characterized by elegance and great attention to detail. Every phrase is carefully shaped and nuanced, balanced perfectly between both hands, and between the lyrical melodies and the occasional virtuosic passage work which come off effortlessly. This is Schubert playing of the highest order and a CD which is a must-have for any piano aficionado.

Schubert’s Sonata No. 7 opens the CD. The first movement is an Allegro moderato, taken at just the right tempo with all the touches of grace and lyricism one would expect from Schubert, but also with some lovely flashes of virtuosity, handled unflinchingly well by Ms. Fialkowska. The second movement, Andante molto, opens with a phrase which foreshadows the first movement of Schubert’s own Arpeggione Sonata, and then features a more dramatic contrasting section in which Fialkowska displays a little more muscle. In this movement, I completely appreciate the appropriate use of pedaling for color and sound, without the over-sonorous and muddy sound that some pianists might favor. The Menuetto is full of charm and grace, with short question-answer phrases, imbued with real sense of conversation by Ms. Fialkowska. The final movement also displays a lovely dance-like character and unusual harmonic colors, while retaining some Mozartian and at times Chopinesque qualities. It makes one wonder if Fialkowska, being a well-known Chopin interpreter, brings this special quality to all her playing - hence favoring, as the liner notes suggest, her affinity for performing works of Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, Liszt and Grieg.

The Impromptus which follow are performed in a similar vein, with great attention to detail and the rare ability to play the piano convincingly at both ends of the

and heartfelt manner, while the third-movement variations offer up the charm of the early Beethoven, also with the emphasis on lyricism and increased virtuosity in the piano part writing, performed expertly by Ms. Uchida.

This is not a particularly dramatic or virtuosic collection of violin and piano repertoire, but it shows off both musicians in a highly satisfying way. For example, the violin's high harmonics at the end of the fifth of the Prokofieff Melodies are played pristinely by Ms. Lee, and certainly require a musical and technical expertise of the highest caliber. The ensemble of Lee and Uchida is precise and intuitive. Their sounds are well matched and blended, and their interpretation of the works on this CD is entirely unified. Ms. Lee's violin tone and phrasing are extraordinarily beautiful, with a vibrato that is warm, full of color, and appropriately applied in each work. On a scale of pure listening beauty, I would give this CD a "10" for the exquisite tone, musicality, and sensitivity offered by both musicians. Keep in mind that the choice of repertoire on this CD does not provide opportunities for brilliant displays or electrifying performances, but it can be a nice compliment to a romantic candlelight dinner or a quiet and relaxing Sunday afternoon.

dynamic spectrum from pianissimo to fortissimo without resorting to harshness in tone or lacking in color or variety. Fialkowska's tone is always gorgeous, shimmery, bright when needed, and more full bodied when the music calls for it, though not as bold in sound as some other performers. This is indeed a very sophisticated performance, displaying great sensitivity and emotion.

The first Impromptu in F minor displays more outbursts and drama than in any of the sonata movements, while also possessing some of the most tender moments. Schubert employs much of the same techniques that Beethoven does when repeating musical material, always adding something new or varied to heighten the interest. While Schubert has often been criticized for being somewhat repetitive, one does not sense this at all while listening to Fialkowska's performance. The music holds one's interest from start to finish.

The second Impromptu in A-flat could have sounded a bit fuller bodied in the opening chords, and louder and more forceful forte chords would have been more characteristic of the dramatic impulse that Schubert was trying to achieve. There also could have been more weight to the shorter-valued notes, to provide a better sense of repose, while giving more weight to the inner voices of the chords would make for a more "choral" sound and less of the French- Chopinesque melody-dominant sound, which isn't quite as appropriate for this Impromptu as it is for the B-flat Impromptu which follows. Aside from this minor criticism, it is still a beautiful rendition of one of the more popular of these Impromptus.

Based on my impressions of this CD, I will definitely be listening to more of Fialkowska's performances and hope to hear her perform live someday. This Schubert performance compares favorably with those of Maria Joao Pires, but is of a completely different sound and style. While Pires offers more dynamic contrasts and a bolder sound with more reverb on her Deutsche Gramophone CD, there is a special tenderness and intimacy in this recording which is quite special. Strongly Recommended!