

Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

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Beethoven: Complete Piano Concertos
Rudolf Buchbinder, pianist and conductor
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
Sony Classical

It's a curious thing, but I'd never paid any attention to Rudolf Buchbinder in all my years as a reviewer. The Austrian pianist who made his first international tour as far back as 1965 seemed to have gotten lost in the forest of outstanding young keyboard artists that have emerged in the past 40 or so years. It is just possible, too, that he did not shoot up at first like a skyrocket but grew slowly and steadily in his technique and grasp of musical values over the intervening decades. Now, as a trio of Sony recordings (Schubert, Mozart, Beethoven) and a marvelous cycle of the Beethoven piano sonatas on the RCA label bear witness – all released in the past 2-3 years – “Rudi,” as his friends call him, is at the height of his powers as an interpreter of music of the Viennese Classical Era.

His technique is awesome. Now at age 67, there seems to be nothing that he cannot coax from a Steinway piano in the way of expressive music. It is music that comes through to the listener as honest, straightforward, and compelling. Once you have heard the present 3-CD set of the Complete Piano Concertos 1-5, the performances will strike you as “inevitable,” in the best sense of the word. For me, they recalled treasured memories of Rudolf Serkin some fifty years ago (Heavens, was it *that* long?) The recordings, made before an audience in May 2011 in the Grösser Saal of the Musikverein, Vienna, are about as perfect as live recordings can be. Better than that, they are direct and compelling testaments to the heart and mind of a great composer.

In these recordings, Buchbinder's finger work is superb. He accomplishes the many re-positionings with ease, and his tone is always appropriate to the mood Beethoven wishes to evoke: light when lightness of touch is needed, but strong and forceful when real dramatic power is called for. That goes as much for the secondary passages as it does the main melodies. His touch in the repeated notes and sharply struck chords on the treble end of the keyboard calls for special attention. The sound tends to be clangorous in the *forte* sections, but has an enchantingly soft, delicate sound, like the beautiful tinkling of



Bach: Inventions and Sinfonias
Simone Dinnerstein, piano
Sony Classical

American pianist Simone Dinnerstein explores J.S. Bach's Inventions and Sinfonias, BWV 772-801 with poetry allied with probity in this, her latest release on the Sony Classical label. That is appropriate, as Bach wrote these pieces as an “Upright Guide” (*Aufrichtige Anleitung*) for music students who desired to advance in keyboard technique. The Inventions were devoted to developing and sustaining two obbligato voices. The Sinfonias extended this preoccupation to three obbligato voices. Bach stressed cantabile (songlike) phrasing in all these pieces as a means of gaining “a strong foretaste of composition.”

The old boy was as good as his word. His Inventions and Sinfonias have been used as learning material by generations of keyboard students down to the present day. Ironically, that's just the problem. Too often, people associate them with dry pedagogical instruction, which was *not* their original intention. As Dinnerstein expresses it, in her own words as well as by her performances, “These small masterpieces have snippets of dances in them, laments and celebrations, simplicity and complexity. They describe a whole world of musical possibility.” As such they deserve all the poetry a performing artist can invest in them. The rewards are great, as Simone shows us with her even-tempered probing in the interest of uncovering ever greater expressive beauties.

The two groups of 15 Sinfonias and 15 Inventions are arranged by ascending key in the eight major and seven minor keys that were customarily employed by composers until fairly recent times: C-c-D-d-E_b-E-e-F-f-G-g-A-a-B_b-b. In the Inventions, Bach typically keeps the emotional associations that 18th century theorists assigned to the various major keys (sunlight, simple happiness, a forthright

small bells, in the quieter passages that help to illuminate Beethoven, man and composer, in his pensive moments.

In these five concertos, Beethoven established the Classical-Romantic style for all time. We typically have an elaborate opening movement, involving the development and recapping of several themes loaded with strongly stated, portentous material, a shorter slow movement, usually marked Largo or Adagio and filled with introspective material that gets right to the heart of the matter, and a rousing finale in rondo form. Just listen to the strong, simple chords stated by the piano in its extended introduction in the opening Allegro moderato of Concerto No. 4 in G Major, the restless accompaniments, the sensational forte when the orchestra finally asserts itself, and the way great ideas grow from seemingly unpromising material, and you will hear Buchbinder's Beethoven at its best.

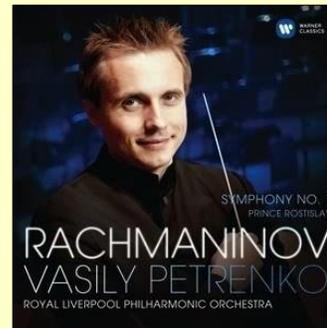


Britten: Works for String Orchestra
Camerata Nordica
Bis Records (Hybrid SACD)

The Camerata Nordica of Sweden, directed by Norwegian violinist Terje Tønnesen, shows itself one of Scandinavia's finest string ensembles in a program honoring the centenary of English composer Benjamin Britten (1913-1976). Their dark, many-layered string tone and unflinching pursuit of perfection in the way of precise intonation and rigorous exploration of Britten's harmonic and contrapuntal complexities reveal the Camerata to be ideal interpreters of his music. This is also an extraordinarily well-filled CD. At a playing time of 81:04, the program does not seem tedious, and even includes a recording premiere.

The string orchestra was an ideal medium for Britten. The influence of his mentor Frank Bridge informs most of the music on this program, and not just the Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Op. 10 that the 24-year old composer dedicated to his teacher. It is well that it leads off the program, as it is the most difficult work of all. The work begins like the most stirring call to attention, and includes a very rigorous fugue in its final variation. The ten variations were intended to illustrate various aspects of Bridge's character as man, composer, and teacher. Curiously, this is not very euphonious music, and it takes a lot out of the listener. We are even invited to participate in a game of "name that composer" in Variations 4, 6, and 7, where Britten seems to take a passing nod at Rossini, Ravel and Stravinsky in "Aria Italiana," "Wiener Walzer," and "Moto perpetuo," respectively. The Rossini nod is the sole light-hearted variation in a work that impresses by its relentless

and active personality spontaneous love, boldness, etc.) and their corresponding minor keys (shadows, sadness, melancholy reflection, a contemplative personality, reticence, disappointment in matters of the heart). These distinctions break down in the Sinfonias, as in the contemplative Sinfonia in E_b and its extroverted E minor counterpart. But then, you can play "drop the needle" on any track in this program with the confidence of being enchanted. Never have "learning pieces" sounded so persuasive or so beautiful.



Rachmaninov: Symphony No. 1
Vasily Petrenko, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic
Warner Classics

Saint Petersburg, Russia native Vasily Petrenko has been principal conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra since the 2006-2007 season. The degree to which he has made his mark on this fine British orchestra shows in his latest recording of Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 1 in D minor. This work was a failure, for reasons not entirely musical, at its premiere in 1897, and was put aside by its composer and never revived. The rumor that Rachmaninov had burned the score proved to be false, but he took no great pains to preserve it either, and it did not receive its second performance until 1945, two years after his death. Since then, the work has slowly gained a lasting place in the standard repertoire as several generations of conductors and their audiences have come to understand it better.

The emotional density of the First Symphony is largely to blame for its slow reception. At first listening, there seems a lot to wade through. Though written in the four movements typical of the standard classical symphony, its adherence to sonata-allegro form is obscured by the fact that it is more conspicuously *cyclic*. Its themes are derived from two basic sources: (1) a note cell preceded by a *grupetto*, a group of grace notes played together that are added to the melody, and (2) a theme derived from *Dies irae* (Day of Wrath) the medieval plainchant for the dead that was to become Rachmaninov's personal motto. This gives the symphony a high degree of unity, although it may seem formless in classical terms upon first hearing.

seriousness, epitomized by the dismal grimness of Variation 8, "Funeral March." Despite Britten's avowed intention in writing this work, dead seriousness rather than affection seems to be the dominant impression, at least in the present account.

A Simple Symphony, Op. 4 is a lot easier for the first-time listener to love. The 20-year old Britten dedicated the work to a Mrs. Lincoln Sutton, who had been his childhood viola teacher and he included in it no fewer than eight of his favorite tunes from those years. The whimsical titles of its movements (Boisterous Bourée, Playful Pizzicato, Sentimental Sarabande, and Frolicsome Finale) and its very happy prevalent mood belie the contrapuntal difficulties Britten addresses here.

There follow two works with solo viola added to the orchestra: *Lachrymae* and Two Portraits, both featuring the distinguished viola of Catherine Bullock. The former is a set of intricately interrelated variations on a song, or rather two songs, by the Elizabethan composer John Dowland, "If my complaints could passions move" and "Flow, my tears." Again, this is the sort of Britten one instinctively admires rather than loves, though the final variation in which the emphasis moves from Dowland-alluding Britten to Britten-inflected Dowland seems more straightforward and more satisfying. The second of the Two Portraits winds down at the end until the viola falls silent and the conclusion ends in a hushed double bass. Here, I find the dynamics distracting: if you have set your volume gain low enough to avoid being blown away by the forte passages in the program, the end of this piece seems to incorporate 30-45 seconds of total silence, which I'm sure was not intended.

Finally, *Elegy* (1928) is such an engaging work we marvel that it hasn't been recorded before. Hopefully, we won't have to wait for another Britten centennial to hear it again. Characterized by a bold style reflecting urgency and intensity rather than the sorrowful reflection that its title implies, it was begun by the 15-year old composer during his first year under Bridge's tutelage. Even at so early an age, Britten was no mere child prodigy. The work shows a mature grasp of counterpoint and fugue, right down to a point at its climax in which each of the 22 players has a separate part. Tønnesen and the Camerata Nordica, who premiered this work at the 2013 BBC Proms as well as making its premiere recording, give it their very best.



Janacek: String Quartets 1 & 2
Arcadia Quartet
Orchid Classics

In the world of chamber music, it's difficult to find a parallel to

At its premiere, Rachmaninoff's conservatory professors Anton Arensky and Sergei Tanayev found the symphony lacking in originality and character. The latter termed its melodies "flabby" and "colorless." (You will wonder what those two distinguished men of music were thinking of when you experience the drama of Rachmaninoff's music!) There is some justification for the charge of "forced climaxes" (as in the sudden *fortissimo* with prominent brass that heralds the reappearance of the initial theme in the first movement), but those of us who are tuned in to the noticeably depressive-manic quality (in *that* order) in the composer's personality and his music can easily forgive it.

In approaching this rather problematical symphony, Vasily Petrenko has studied it thoroughly, lightening the thickness of the orchestration in places and building carefully toward the climaxes for best effect. The string sound of the RLPO has depth and flexibility, particularly in the layered passages, and it conveys real symphonic drama when reinforced with the brass and percussion. The brief solo violin passage in a gypsy scale is very effective in the second movement, as are the muted horns and the swelling tones in the strings in the slow movement, a touching *Larghetto*. The finale, marked *Allegro con fuoco*, is festive and menacing in turns, with softly syncopated rhythms creating a feeling of restless onward movement all the way to the end. There is even a tam-tam whack to add to the excitement. Anguished struggle contending with relentless fate, typically for Rachmaninov, makes for a winning combination.

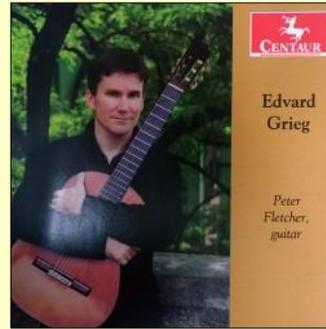
As a 15-minute extra, we are given Rachmaninov's early symphonic poem *Prince Rostislav* (1891). Already, as Petrenko shows us, the 18 year old composer was using the orchestra in original ways for greater expression. The story is that of a slain prince of medieval Russia lying at rest in a river bed, his flowing locks caressed by water nymphs, as he struggles in vain to call out to his wife and kinsmen. The music reaches a climax, and then changes very effectively to a mood of quiet resignation as the poem ends.

the two string quartets of Leoš Janáček (1854-1928). Both are as emotionally charged as music can be, being essentially autobiographical in nature, especially as they relate to the composer's twenty-year affair with his much younger student Kamila Stösslová. The First, subtitled *The Kreutzer Sonata*, is more oblique, referring to Leo Tolstoy's lured tale of sexual desire, jealousy, and murder. In the Second, inspired by passages in Janáček's own love letters to Kamila, the reference is more directly personal.

Both quartets are also very dense thematically and texturally, with a boundaries-pushing emotional expression that belies the fact that they are in more or less regular sonata form – and even mock at that fact. The writing in both quartets is clearly driven by coiled motivic cells, and there is some evidence of cyclic form in Janáček's finales, where he brings in references to earlier material as a means of wrapping up two packages that we experience as tightly packed bombshells. An obsessive motto in the opening movement of Quartet No. 1 in E minor gives way in the second movement to folk-like material whose expressive beauty is undercut by a persistent trill in the cello and considerable intrusive use of *sul ponticello* bowing on the high point of the bridge by the higher strings, an eerie sound like that of rodents scurrying over a stone floor strewn with broken glass. The striking expressive power of Janáček's writing is further demonstrated by placing the theme in canon and at a very fast tempo in the third movement.

Quartet No. 2, subtitled *Intimate Letters*, is more electrically charged than its predecessor, if such a thing were possible. The folk-tinged melody for the viola in movement 1 and the lilting dance-like episode in 2 are contrasted by very discordant material, more spirited and even rougher, as if to emphasize the uneven course of a love affair. The third movement is even more energetic, but with an extended slow episode that sounds like a lullaby. More anguish plus high-profile rhythms characterize the powerful finale.

The difficulties are great for the performers – in this instance, the excellent Arcadia Quartet from Rumania, consisting of Ana Török and Răsvan Dumitru, violins; Traian Boală, viola; and Zsolt Török, cello – but the payback for realizing them as well as the Arcadia do in the present recording is also great. These are sensational performances, in which the quartet members show the cohesion, timing, and strong musicianship, individually as well as collectively, that are needed to put these Janáček masterworks across. Performances are captured in optimal sound on Orchid Classics, a relatively new (since 2010) label from the United Kingdom that appears committed to giving greater exposure to exciting young artists, of which the Arcadia Quartet, who now consider Norfolk, England their home base, are a shining example.

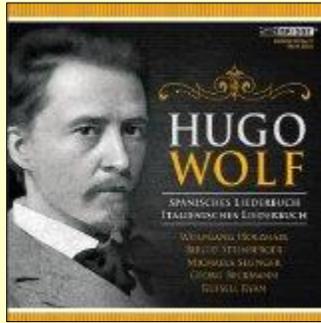


Grieg: Arrangements for Guitar
Peter Fletcher, guitar
Centaur Records

American guitarist Peter Fletcher shows a fine sensitivity to nuance and mood playing his own arrangements of pieces by Edvard Grieg (1843-1907). The program consists of Books I and IX of the Norwegian composer's Lyric Pieces, plus an assorted selection of arrangements from other works, such as the Sarabande from the Holberg Suite and Solveig's Song from the *Peer Gynt* Music. All have been selected with care, revealing Grieg as perhaps the greatest master of that distinctive product of the Romantic era, the brief and pithy "character piece."

Here we have Grieg at his best, ranging from folk-like simplicity and directness of expression (Folk Melody, Cradle Song) to stirring nationalism (Norwegian Melody, Sailors' song) and poignant evocative beauty (Evening in the Mountains, Grandmother's Minuet). Despite Fletcher's avowed aim of focusing on "piano music that I feel sits well on the guitar," not all of the pieces chosen fit the criterion equally well. He himself admits to resolving the homophonic complexities of three of the Lyric Pieces (Arietta, At Your Feet, Valse mélancolique) by donning a pair of headphones and over-dubbing the primo part with a secondo. It works nicely, creating the illusion of a single guitar rather than a duet.

The program begins with the Arietta in Lyric Pieces, Book I and ends with *Efterklang*, "Remembrances," the last piece in Book X. This is a very satisfying close, as the two pieces share the same main melody, with the difference that the latter has a lighter texture, allowing for the sort of soft, warm coloration that one can do so well on a guitar. Without over-doing it in the least, this is just what nostalgia does to our memories, hence the aptness of the title "Remembrances."

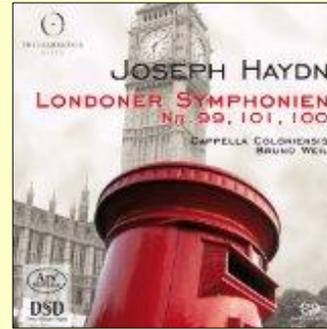


Wolf: Spanish & Italian Songbooks
Steinberger, Selinger, Holzmaier, Ryan, Beckmann
Bridge Records

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903) had a miserable life married by disappointment in love, the gnawing suspicion that he was fated to be a minor figure because he mostly composed songs rather than works in the larger forms, and finally the mental illness that shortened his life. Half the critics in Vienna disliked him because of his scathing criticism of Brahms. As a Wagner-influenced composer who was nevertheless only able to write one (not very successful) opera, he was in a bad spot.

History has a way of making amends to despised composers. Today we recognize the genius in the hundreds of *lieder* (art songs), exquisitely polished, psychologically and emotionally rich gems that give Wolf a unique place in music's pantheon. The 150th anniversary of his birth in 2010 spurred greater interest in this composer, as Austrian Radio and the Departure Centre for Creative Design in Vienna produced a recital series in which Wolf's songs were performed against visuals created by leading designers. Baritone Wolfgang Holzmaier was a driving force behind the ensuing recording project that united some of Austria and Germany's best vocalists and accompanists. One result was the present Bridge Records 3-CD release of the composer's masterworks, the Spanish and Italian Songbooks. Here, Holzmaier is joined by soprano Birgit Steinberger and pianist Georg Beckmann, both Germans; Austrian mezzo-soprano Michaela Selinger; and even one American, pianist Russell Ryan. They engage in superlative music-making in which the singers are all in tip-top voice and attuned to the nuances in Wolf's richly detailed songs and the accompanists are adept in the postludes that extend and echo the emotional issues in many of these songs.

Wolf used tonality to reinforce meaning. He frequently employed two different tonalities to depict a conflict or an ambiguity that is finally resolved at the end. That works very well in the 82 songs that comprise his *Spanisches Liederbuch* (1891) and his *Italienisches Liederbuch* (1892, 1896). Most of the songs deal with matters of the heart and the inability to find a happy resolution that often plagues a love affair when "he loves and she doesn't," or the reverse. They have all the banter, the coquetry, the intense yearning, the exalted passions and final despondency that love entails. This conflict is even present in some degree in the ten Spiritual Songs (*Geistliche lieder*) that conclude the Spanish Songbook, in the form of a sinner's anguish at the apparent loss of salvation.



Haydn: Symphonies 99-100-101
Bruno Weil, Capella Coloniensis
Ars Produktion (Hybrid SACD)

Bruno Weil, known here in North America for his splendid work with the Carmel (CA) Music Festival and the Tafelmusik Chamber Orchestra in Canada, takes his magisterial prowess as conductor to yet another setting in performances of three of Franz Josef Haydn's greatest symphonies with the Cappella Coloniensis of Germany. The three "London" Symphonies in the present program, Numbers 99-100-101, have never sounded more bracing and zestful than they do here. And the Direct Stream Digital (DSD) recording process serves this hybrid SACD very well.

Symphony No. 99 in E-flat major opens with an irresistibly vivacious full orchestral sweep that was unprecedented in Haydn (or anyone else). It is rivaled by the harmonically rich and deeply felt hymn-like melody of the Adagio movement. Symphony No. 101 in D major, the "Clock," takes its famous nickname from the steady metrical progress of the theme in the Andante, like the ticking of a clock gently supported by a swinging accompaniment. While you are being charmed by it, please take note of the way it starts off with an anacrusis that is not part of the regular meter: it seems that Leroy Anderson was not the first to set a "syncopated clock" to music. In both symphonies, Haydn typically kicks off his Minuet on the up-beat of the measure and ends with a Vivace finale in rondo form, both of which were calculated to increase the excitement for the listener.

Fine as the other performances are, the account of Symphony No. 100 in G major, the "Military," is the best of all. The most remarkable movement here is the Allegretto, in which a bugle call imitated by solo trumpet, lots of percussion of the sort used in Turkish military bands, and a tympani roll that was unprecedented in music, account for the nickname of the work. By contrast with the speeded-up Minuets of 99 and 100, the one here is in moderate time, more old-fashioned and aristocratic, though it seems unlikely Haydn's original audiences would have felt like getting up and dancing after the stunning march music they'd just heard!

It's all there for the informed ear. As Wolf says almost defiantly in the Italian Songbook, "Even small things can delight us; even small things can be precious." In "Auf dem grünen Balkon" (On the Green Balcony) he gives us a guitar-like swaying accompaniment of Spanish flavor. Likewise, in "Wie lange schön was immer mein Verlangen / Auch wäre doch ein Musikus mir gut!" (How long have I yearned: If only a musician loved me) we seem to hear the strains of a violin as an emblem for the maiden's ideal of dreamy bliss.

Elsewhere, sound replicates meaning with a vengeance in a super-charged baritone song such as "Komm, so wie der Blitz uns rühret / den der Donner nicht verkündet, / bis er plötzlich sich entzündet / um den Schlag gedoppelt führet" (Come as the lightning strikes unannounced by thunder, until suddenly flashing, strikes a double blow). We can sense the passion in this song's rolling, seething umlauts! You can hear the wind in the trees in the hushed beauty of the spiritual song "Die ihr schwebet / Um diese Palmen / In Nacht und Wind / Ihr heiligen Engel, / Stille die Wipfel! / Es schlümmert mein Kind" (You who hover above these palms in night and wind, you holy angels, silence the treetops! My child is sleeping). There is even earthy humor in a song such as "Schweig einmal still" (Be silent for once) which concludes with the soprano voice rising on the word *Esels* in the verse "Der Ständchen eines Esels zög ich vor" (I'd prefer the serenade of a donkey), conveying to us the raucous sound of that much-maligned creature!



Mendelssohn: Piano Concertos 1 & 2, Symphony 1
Alon Goldstein, piano
Yoav Talmi, Israel Chamber Orchestra
Centaur Records

Israeli pianism Alon Goldstein, backed superbly by the Israel Chamber Orchestra under music director Yoav Talmi, gives performances of the two piano concertos of Felix Mendelssohn that will surely give other keyboard artists something to aim at for years to come. He is "right on" in matters of attack and articulation that are so vital when performing Mendelssohn. And he is well-attuned to the composer's painstaking efforts at utter perfection in matters of form, color, harmony, and compositional technique. Goldstein's own booklet annotation labors to identify the features in Piano Concertos Nos. 1 in G minor and 2 in D minor that qualify both as works of inspired greatness.

That assessment has not been universal, however, with the exception of the more intimately personal of his chamber works. Many would agree with the opinion of the critic H. L.



Grieg, Dohnányi, Chopin: Cello Sonatas
Ronald Leonard, Ya-Ting Chang
Centaur Records

Ronald Leonard, for many years principal cellist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, teams with pianist Ya-Ting Chang to successfully put across three challenging and rewarding works by Edvard Grieg, Ernst von Dohnányi, and Frédéric Chopin. In the process, they demonstrate a masterful control of chamber music style that often requires concerto-class prowess of its performers.

That goes double for Grieg's Sonata in A minor, Op. 36. Following a period when his artistic energies had been distracted by his conducting duties in Bergen and the necessity of writing new pieces for his *Peer Gynt* music, a project for which he felt a loss of enthusiasm, Grieg was determined to "find myself again" as a composer. He did it (*and how!*) in the present sonata, where the folk style material in which he continually traded in his music was subject to a greater intensity and deepening seriousness. We feel this in the opening *Allegro agitato*, where the sound is extremely rich without sacrificing any of the composer's trademark warmth and the music is distributed evenly between the performers. No mere "accompanied sonata," this! The cello's poignant melody in the *Andante molto tranquillo*, and the spirited participation by the piano as it initiates the dark-sounding folk dance in the finale, marked *Allegro molto e marcato*, afford both Leonard and Chang lots of opportunity to shine. The finale denouement of this movement is Grieg at his most charming.

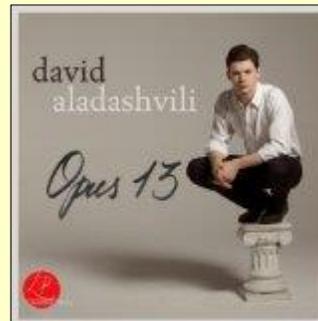
Followed by: Dohnányi's Sonata in B-flat major, Op. 8 and Chopin's meditative and deeply moving Etude in C-sharp minor, Op. 25, No. 7 in an inspired arrangement by Alexander Glazunov. The 22 year old Dohnányi shows a lot of Brahmsian influence in this work (and *hey*, why not? We all need role models, and who could ask for a better?) There's abundant lyricism in this engaging work, as well as dramatic unisons and bold writing encompassing the range of both instruments. The final movement is a theme-and-variation, another nod to Brahms. Expressive legato passages and

Mencken that, if Mendelssohn did not achieve true genius, he just missed it "by a hair." Both concertos reflect the composer's preoccupation with perfect form and economy, his quest for greater means of expressing color and character in music, his circumspect, self-contained and sometimes aloof personality, and his innate conservatism once he had mastered the formal issues. Certainly, Piano Concerto No. 1 makes a stunning impact on the listener on first hearing. The opening movement, *Allegro molto con fuoco* lives up to the qualifying adjective "with fire" by virtue of a tumultuous orchestral introduction to which the piano joins immediately. The soloist then proceeds to carry the ball very persuasively, to a degree you will seldom hear in the solo part of any concerto. After a brass fanfare near the end of the movement, the piano takes us to the very doorstep of the touchingly tender Andante movement. Controlled tumult reigns in the finale, a power-packed Presto marked *Molto allegro e vivace* that quotes several themes from the opening movement and lives up to its advertised vivacity.

"It's the same, and yet not the same," Robert Schumann famously wrote of Piano Concerto No. 2 when comparing it to the first, a perception that has hurt its popularity down to the present day. The formal outlines are certainly much the same as in its predecessor, the virtuosic writing is arguably even more brilliant, and the lyricism of the melody in the Adagio, another Mendelssohn "song without words," speaks for itself. Even more than in the earlier concerto, Mendelssohn dovetails his endings to segue naturally into the succeeding movements, a device he frequently used (notably in his Violin Concerto) to enhance excitement and focus listener interest.

Symphony No. 1 in c minor, Op. 11 marked the 15 year old composer's coming of age. It is marvelously mature in its fine details for one so young, though its fame has been hurt by its resemblance to the 12 string symphonies that he wrote while learning his craft between the ages of 11 and 14. As heard here under Talmi's fine hand, it would seem to bear more listening before we decide its final place in Mendelssohn's works. The most effective movement is the energetic Minuet with its beautifully contrasted Trio. For its premiere in 1827, the composer, anxious to make an impression, substituted a "ringer" for this movement, the well-known Scherzo from his Octet. Personally, I feel the Minuet (which he published with the symphony) is the better choice, but Talmi has included the Scherzo for comparison listening. To hear this work as it sounded at its premiere, just program tracks 7-8-11-10.

mood changes in the Chopin Etude mark it as ideal for its arrangement for cello and piano. I don't have to tell you how beautifully Leonard and Chang perform it!



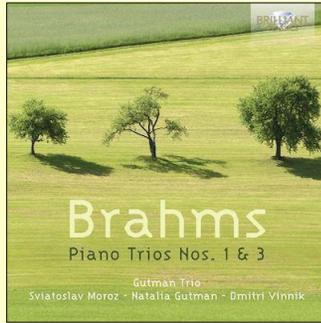
"Opus 13," Scriabin, Schumann, 13 others
David Aladashvili, piano
LP Classics

Tbilisi, Georgia native David Aladashvili studied piano at Juilliard under, among others, Jerome Lowenthal, and currently makes his home in New York. He shows the result of his tutelage, plus his own natural inclinations and feeling for style and texture, in "Opus 13," his first release on the LP Classics label. He also reveals his obsession (having been born on Friday the 13th April, 1990) with the number 13. The program includes Scriabin's 6 Preludes, Op. 13 and Schumann's Symphonic Etudes, Op 13, plus 13 compositions by 13 upcoming composers.

The prelude, as a genre redefined by Chopin, is essentially unfinished business, a beginning pregnant with intriguing possibilities for further development. Scriabin's early Opus 13 Preludes, in fact, reveal their indebtedness to Chopin, but with a difference in that he was obsessed with the dominant function and tone chords, particularly the 13th, in his quest for ever more expressive color.

Schumann gave the title "Symphonic Etudes" to his Opus 13 partly because a generation of keyboard wizards had given the word "variations" a bad name. The principle he employed here was not of variations on a theme, but rather upon previous variations, or more precisely, drawn from a musical cell, or cells. As a seemingly endless wealth of color and an exercise in blending, contrasting and superimposing timbres, Symphonic Etudes has long been considered one of the most difficult works in the repertoire. With his finely honed technique and his instinctive feeling for timing and proportion, Aladashvili puts this work across as well as I have ever heard it in my 30 years as a critic— and that's saying a lot!

The 13 new compositions, all by young composers born 1981-1991, show Aladashvili's championing



Brahms: Piano Trios Nos. 1 & 3
The Gutman Trio
Brilliant Classics

Natalia Gutman, student of Mstislav Rostropovich and one of the great cellists of the past half-century in her own right, is joined by violinist Sviatoslav Moroz and pianist Dmitri Vinnik in Brahms performances that compel our admiration by virtue of deep feeling, the cohesion of the artists, and a sense of style that goes far deeper than surface beauty. We feel that we have gotten to the very heart of Brahms in contrasted works representing his early and late styles.

Piano Trio No. 1 in B major, Op. 8 is more expansive in breadth and much longer (34:48 compared with 20:46) than its companion on this CD, Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101. As revised by the composer forty years later, it still reflects Brahms' youthful ardor in the surging emotion of its outer movements and the symphonic scope of its design. A luminous cello theme in the opening movement spreads to the other instruments, undergoing developments that enhance its richness. An exuberant Scherzo with a skipping minor theme is followed by a softly singing Adagio, mysterious, warm, and meditative. The powerful, sweeping finale is handled here by the Gutman Trio in a way that emphasizes its compelling rightness and feeling of inevitability.

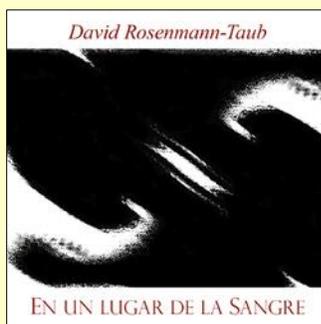
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of the rising lights of his generation. There's a lot of persuasive mystery, joy, sadness, pensiveness, darkness and light – and even one outbreak of outrageous humor - in these 13 selections, more than I could hope to convey in a short review. Just remember their names: Gity Razaz, Jules Matton, Simon Frisch, Paul Frucht, Matt Nakoa, Yuri Boguinia, David Hertzberg, Jan Stoneman, Aaron Severini, Yuri Bakker, Alexey Gorokholinsky, Braam van Eeden, and "W.D.A." (The pianist himself?). You are likely to find them often in future programs of contemporary music.

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Trio No. 3, though still on a symphonic scale, is noticeably tauter in expression than Brahms' much earlier work, with the terse phrases and sharply stated rhythms that call the listener to attention in the opening movement and the aggressiveness of its finale. In between, we have a surprisingly delicate scherzo movement and a lyrical Andante in which the piano comes to the fore. In the present performance, there is not a wasted note or gesture that does not contribute to the overall impression of controlled mastery.

These performances, optimally recorded in December, 2012 by Muzichi Studio, Kiev, Ukraine, are the first by the Gutman Trio to appear on Brilliant Classics. Founded as far back as 2000, these artists have waited until they achieved just the right ensemble for what they wanted to say in music. Luckily for us home listeners, their debut recording promises to be far from their last.



En un Lugar de la Sangre

Music and poetry spoken and performed by David Rosenmann-Taub
 MSR Classics

En un Lugar de la Sangre (In a Place of the Blood) is a paraphrase of the first line of Cervantes' Don Quixote, "*En un lugar de la Mancha*" (in a place of La Mancha). It serves to epitomize Santiago, Chile native David Rosenmann-Taub's purpose in exploring the mind and spirit of the creator of that universally acclaimed classic of Spanish literature. In the process, it also explores man's Quixotic destiny. That much is clear. Other elements are more ambiguous, even as the artist seeks to make his meanings more transparent for the listener by means of an aesthetic that regards the arts of poetry and music as essentially the same in purpose, "two painbrushes in the service of one artistic language."

Rosenmann-Taub is well equipped for the task, being as celebrated a pianist as he is a poet. He is also a visual artist, a fact that is reflected in his concern for the graphic qualities of sound in both music and poetry. There is no distinction between the purposes of the arts. It is this artist's contention that real poetry must have a regard for sonority, silence, and rhythm. Likewise, his preoccupation with approaching music from many angles, as sculpture in

sound. To these ends, his speaking voice is as precisely articulated and focused as his piano tones are beautifully and purposefully struck.

There is absolutely no fuzziness in *En un Lugar de la Sangre*, no word or musical note that does not serve a purpose, requiring resolute attention from the listener. Aside from the Dedication and Farewell, each poem in this work has its corresponding musical *cuadro* (image or tableau). The music is spare and linear to an extreme, freely mixing tonality and atonality. That spareness reflects a vision of life that is essentially pessimistic. This poet has a discordant way of jumping without warning from the intimate and commonplace to the cosmic, in a universe continually in the throes of creation and destruction (*translated*):

“To have does not entail boldness,
If the ground, groundless, keeps watch.”

“Living, you demand agony,
And the bone, fleshless, gets sharper.”

There seems to be a painful awareness of impermanence and absence in Rosenmann-Taub's words that his musical tones echo and extend. Despite his avowed purpose, he is not the easiest of creative artists for the average person to comprehend. To approach this native of a mineral-rich country, one must use care when extracting the ore.