

Chopin: The Late Mazurkas
Todd Crow, piano
(MSR Classics)



Chopin: Piano Concertos 1 & 2
Charles Richard-Hamelin, piano; Kent Nagano
conducts l'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal
(Analekta)

Frédéric Chopin had a special fondness for the Mazurka, a Polish folk dance that made its way to the towns and cities, where it was regularized to make it easier to grasp for people who had not grown up in peasant villages where it was more or less second nature as part of their heritage. The lively, tricky little dance gave Chopin endless opportunities to explore everything he wanted to say rhythmically, harmonically, and contrapuntally. It is no coincidence that he composed Mazurkas throughout his career, from his early years to the last decade of his life.

The artist, English pianist Todd Crow, has had six previous releases on MSR Classics. In two of them (*BBC Recordings*, Vols.1-2) he revealed himself to be very much a thinking man's pianist in his programming of variations by Schumann, Brahms and Dvorak. In the present Mazurkas, he once again shows his passion for exploring a piece of music on all fronts, bringing out all the harmonic and contrapuntal riches, gorgeous chromaticism, and quirky rhythms and counter-rhythms that make these pieces the marvels that they are. He does so in an honest manner, eschewing all superficial showiness, so that Chopin is able to speak for himself, personally and eloquently.

Most of the Mazurkas heard here were products of the seven summers Chopin spent at George Sand's country home in Nohant in a remote corner of France in 1839 and 1841-1846. Here he enjoyed the opportunity to convalesce from illness, free from financial worries and the distractions that one would encounter in a major musical capital, and he had the leisure to be creative. The results shine forth abundantly from every page in the Mazurkas from these years.

These are the Mazurkas Chopin published as Op. 41, 50, 56, 59, and 63, plus the two Mazurkas in A minor and G minor from Op. 67 and a Mazurka in F minor, Op. posthumous, that was literally discovered at his

It's a curious thing, but I can't remember the last time I reviewed either of the two piano concertos of Frédéric Chopin. That paucity doesn't reflect my veneration for these works, going 'way back. Are concert pianists not programming them as often as before? Certainly, the two Chopin concertos require the special sensibility and nuanced approach that Canadian pianist Charles Richard-Hamelin brings to the present performances, in close rapport with Kent Nagano and the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal. But there's more...

Basically, Chopin's approach to the piano concerto was different from what they tell you in the books about a sonata-form composition for soloist and orchestra with all its expositions and developments, its bold contrasts and resolutions – rather like Hegelian logic, as a matter of fact. Without chucking out sonata-form altogether, Chopin created structures that are lighter, freer, and more flexible, in keeping with the lyrical sentiments he had in mind. Some observers have made the mistake of imagining Chopin wasn't an accomplished orchestrator. Nothing could be farther from the truth. He understood the principles well enough to write beautifully chaste orchestrations, without a single superfluous note or phrase – "elegant," in the sense a mathematician would use the word. This is basically melody and accompaniment of the highest order, *bel canto* writing of the sort Chopin learned from a close study of Vincenzo Bellini, his favorite operatic composer. In Chopin's scores, the interplay of piano and orchestra becomes a thing of beauty.

Both Chopin concertos are constructed along similar lines. First, there are extensive orchestral introductions in the spirit of Beethoven's last concertos, but with the important difference that the piano does not take up the theme just stated by the orchestra but expands on its own fresh material with great rhythmical freedom while the orchestra discretely retires until its services are

deathbed. Many of these, particularly Op.50, No. 1, Op 56, Nos. 1 and 3, and all of Op. 59, are among the most harmonically innovative of all Chopin's works. Though there is nothing that says any of these Mazurkas need be performed together in recital, you can play any of opus numbers 50-63 as a very satisfying set of three. In mood, they range all the way from light and exhilarating to Opus 50, No. 3 with its impassioned development section and a chromaticism that seems to anticipate Wagner. The second of the posthumous mazurkas in A minor is remarkable for the depth of its melancholy affect, a characteristic it shares in lesser degree with quite a few items in the present program.

The afore-mentioned "deathbed" Mazurka in F minor calls for special comment. As a close inspection of the manuscript page, included here as cover art for the present CD booklet, reveals, this is a piece that requires some reconstruction. That is particularly true of the F major middle section that was once considered indecipherable. Todd Crow performs the reconstruction of this mazurka by Kingsley Day, employing his best qualities as a keyboard artist to bring out its essential character: slow, subdued, almost morbid, but suffused with a discreet spiritual beauty



Schumann: Fantasie in C, Kreisleriana, Kinderszenen - Marc Ponthus, piano (Bridge Records)

French pianist Marc Ponthus, to paraphrase a cigarette ad of yesteryear, is very much a thinking man's pianist with a feeling man's taste. Earlier in his career, he would raise eyebrows – in the interest of stretching the ears of listeners and critics – by programming his recitals with pairings of Bach's Goldberg Variations or Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata with the likes of such modern contemporaries as Iannis Xenakis or Pierre Boulez. In the current phase of his career, he has settled down to the business of exploring Robert Schumann, very much a kindred spirit from the Romantic Era. In the process, he asks himself just what it is that still gives Schumann's piano music the power to get under our skins today?

Schumann was different, you see. He may well have been the most "romantic" of the romantics in the ways he made the strange and implausible seem exciting and mind-expanding, and still strike us as both plausible and

required once again. The piano's discourse in the opening movement of both concertos is intimate rather than heroic, exhibiting great metrical and rhythmic freedom, and Chopin's embellishments are delicate and tastefully applied. The second movements of both concertos are marked, respectively, *Larghetto* and *Romance-Larghetto*. The moods are tenderly expressed in No. 1 with ornamentation suggesting *bel canto*, while No. 2 is more like a romance or meditation with the impression of gentle melancholy.

The finales of both concertos are very infectious Polish national dances: a delightfully syncopated Krakowiak in No. 1 and a Mazurka in No. 2 that makes much of the accentuation of second or third beats while the violins play *col legno battuto*, striking the strings with the wooden edge of the bow. How popular were they? We are told that a contemporary of Chopin's made arrangements of dances in both finales as waltzes and mazurkas that were all the rage in the cafes of Warsaw.

In these performances, Richard-Hamelin and Nagano render both Chopin concertos with such freshness and breathtakingly lithe phrasing that they seem a virtual revelation. Highly recommended.



"Ascent," music of Schumann, Shostakovich, Waxman, Bowen, Assad, Knox - Matthew Lipman, viola; Henry Kramer. Piano (Cedille)

Chicago native and violist Matthew Lipman shines in *Ascent*, his first solo album and one that reveals the promise he holds for a great future. Significantly, it begins and ends with works entitled "fantasy" that allow him considerable scope to display his abundant skills, both technical and musical.

What is a "fantasy" (or phantasy)? The term has meant many things, but essentially it is a work in which the composer relaxes a bit from strict form and allows his thoughts to change from moment to moment. York Bowen (1884-1961), sometimes described as the "English Rachmaninoff," is heard from first in *Phantasy* for Violin and Piano, Op. 54, a single-movement work comprising three sections of different characters, rhythms, and moods. By turns ruminative, effervescent, and soaring, it concludes with a warm, expressive melody for viola over a gently pulsating accompaniment by the piano in which Lipman and his partner, pianist

deeply satisfying. Things like the way his phrase structures and textures push unrestrained across bar lines and harmonic definitions. "As in some of Beethoven's late writing," observes Ponthus, "there is a strong anticipation of something not yet clarified, a desire that cannot yet take its shape, but its need is strongly felt and formulated." The tension between sonata-elements and Schumann's very personal syntax makes its presence felt throughout the present recital, but especially in the two major fantasia-like works, the Fantasy in C Major, Op. 17, and the even curiously Kreisleriana. Op. 15.

Ponthus speaks of how the Trill structures, typically in downward motion, contribute greatly to the dramatic sense of forward flow in the opening movement of the Fantasy in C. He conveys the slowly coalescing cosmos of feeling in this movement, marked *Durchaus fantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen* (thoroughly fantastic and sorrowfully laden) so skillfully that we can excuse Schumann the indiscretion of his thumping fortes or the almost inaudible repeated notes at the very end. Ponthus takes the liberty of connecting the middle movement, a march with stunning syncopations, to the finale (which is logically the middle movement that Schumann has displaced to the very end) by means of a short improvised bridge, something which seems quite plausible to me. In most of the interpretations I have heard, this finale, in which Schumann enriches the harmony to the point that we have the impression of viewing a night sky filled with stars, seems a non-sequitur after the stirring march. Not so in *this* performance.

Kreisleriana seems to have less coherence than the Fantasy in C, and perhaps for this reason Schumann termed its eight sections "fantasies," rather than movements. The second and the most romantic (and longest at 7:21) has a novella-like breadth that would suggest a love story to some observers. Ponthus speaks of how, in the third and fifth pieces, "the manner in which one articulates the rhythmic cells reveals the nature and definition of these cells, which in turn defines the whole of these pieces." For many listeners, the last piece, marked *Schnell und spielend* (fast and playful) will be the favorite. Schumann used this energizing music again in the finale of his "Spring" Symphony.

That leaves the delightful *Kinderszenen* (Scenes from Childhood). Lest we take this often-performed suite of character pieces or miniatures for granted (which is something Ponthus would never permit us to do), the pianist continually reminds us of how their characters lie in the musical syntax itself, and that these little pieces constitute as great an achievement in their own right as the Fantasy or Kreisleriana. Listening to his accounts, I was struck by the lightness and the liveness of Schumann's up-and-down rhythms, so evocative of childhood itself. Even the almost overly-familiar *Traumerei* (Dreaming), which is often played out of context as one of the favorite encore-pieces on the

Henry Kramer, show a confident, seamless rapport. It makes us marvel that we haven't heard more of this composer's music.

Metamorphose by Clarice Assad (b.1978) jazz vocalist, pianist, composer, and daughter of Sergio Assad, is a very personal work for Matthew Lipman, who requested it from its composer as a memorial for his mother. It is in two movements, *Crisálidas* (Crysalis) and *Dança des Barboletas* (Dance of the Butterfly) describing with restraint, deep feeling, and iridescent color the process of grieving for a loss and the transformation that comes when one accepts suffering as part of the process of rebirth.

Robert Schumann's four charming *Märchenbilder* (Fairy Tale Pictures), Op. 113, pose challenges of a different sort for Lipman and Kramer, who must be ever alert for changes in mood and character. The expressive markings are their best guide: *Nicht Schnell* (not fast), *Lebhaft* (lively), *Rasch* (sudden, or impulsive), and *Langsam, mit melancholischem Ausdruck* (slow, with melancholy expression). The galloping dotted rhythm in the piano and double-stopped chords in the viola are the most remarkable features of the second movement, while the fourth and last is distinguished for its deep feeling and incredible beauty.

I wish I could say the same for *Fuga Libre* by Garth Knox (b.1956), a work infused with the composer's admiration for such figures as Kurtág, Boulez, Ligeti, and Stockhausen, all of whom were lauded excessively by the avant-garde 50 or more years ago. Lipman and his partner do a commendable job realizing the spikey, angular chords, sagging tones and corruscating harmonies of a work that I personally find rather ugly.

Impromptu, Op. 33 (1931) by Dmitri Shostakovich, here given its world premiere recording, is an intriguing miniature that says a lot, rhythmically and expressively, in just under two minutes. The composer dedicated the manuscript of this long-lost gem to Alexander Ryvkin, the violist of the Glazunov String Quartet, and it bears evidence of his fascination with the plaintive folk melodies and lively dances of the Russian Jews. Note the great spiccato bowing by Lipman in the last section!

Finally, we have Carmen Fantasie by famed Hollywood composer Franz Waxman, based on themes from Georges Bizet's opera and premiered in the 1947 film *Humoresque* starring Joan Crawford and John Garfield. It was meant to be performed by the great violinist Jascha Heifetz, but when contractual issues intervened, it was recorded for the soundtrack by the then-26 year old Isaac Stern. More than just a stunning showpiece, it is a true fantasia of real imagination, involving such elements of Bizet's score as Carmen's "*L'amour est un oiseau rebelle*" (Love is a wild bird) and *Danse bohème* (gypsy dance), but happily not the *Toréador* chorus, which would have been out of place in an intimately passionate and tender fantasy such as this. It seems appropriate Matthew Lipman should premiere the first

planet, finds its own proper place and perspective in Ponthus' sensitive interpretation.



Beethoven: Violin Sonatas 6, 7, 8
Andrew Wan, violin; Charles Richard-Hamelin, piano
(Analekta)

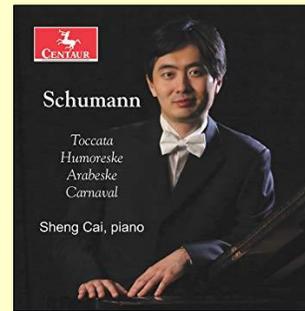
Andrew Wan and Charles Richard-Hamelin, two of Canada's best soloists, give outstanding performances of Beethoven's Sonatas for Violin and Piano, Nos. 6, 7, & 8, Op. 30. The warmth and conviction they invest in these accounts of three of the composer's most under-performed sonatas really helped to establish in my mind their true significance in Beethoven's development as man and composer.

1802 was a critical year for Ludwig Van Beethoven. The nerve deafness he had first begun to experience as early as 1794 had increased to the point where it threatened to end his career in music, particularly as a conductor and a collaborator with other musicians. He instinctively avoided being drawn into conversations for fear others would discover his secret. Dancing, which had been his favorite form of social recreation, as it was then for most people in Europe and America, was closed to him by his inability to hear beats and tempos.

At the advice of his physician, he isolated himself in the solitude of the remote village of Heiligenstadt from late April until the fall of that year. The well-known "Heiligenstadt Testament" was his personal account of coming to grips with his affliction and all that it implied, and his resolution to persist in his career in music against all odds. The three Opus 30 sonatas may be considered the musical response to the same crisis. Significantly, these works were path-breaking in the relationship of the two instruments, which took violin and piano considerably beyond the stage of mere melody and accompaniment.

Sonata No. 1 in A major is today one of the most neglected of Beethoven's violin sonatas, but it was an ideal choice to open the Opus 30 set because it serves as an exemplar of the composer's struggles and triumphs. His first audiences probably found its contrasts of sadness and optimism difficult to grasp, as well as the new relationship of the violin and piano as equals. From the opening movement, the parts are so skilfully interleaved that it is hard to speak of primary

recording for viola, as he is likely, unless fate decrees otherwise, to gain renown as a Heifetz or Stern of his own instrument. He's that good.



Schumann: Toccata, Arabeske, Humoreske,
Carnaval – Sheng Cai, piano
(Centaur)

China-born Canadian pianist Sheng Cai gives a sterling account of himself, and appears to enjoy his work immensely, in a Schumann recital that helps to clarify the composer's position as a romantic's romantic who loved to push the boundaries of the classical tradition a little further with each new opus. In addition, all of the works on the program contain technical difficulties that clearly enhance Cai's zest for performing them.

The Toccata in C, Op. 7, and the Arabeske, Op. 18, are both good examples of what I mean. The former is, as advertised, one of the most challenging pieces of its kind in the repertoire, what with its oscillating note pairs, rapid-fire right hand octaves, repeated 16th notes requiring quick finger changes, and Paganini-like contrasts of legato and staccato. The Arabeske, true to its name, is a highly plausible, easily grasped rondo whose recurring main theme is gracefully decorated by whimsical grace notes in a gently rhapsodic and poetic vein. All of that made it in its day ideal domestic music, with no disparagement intended.

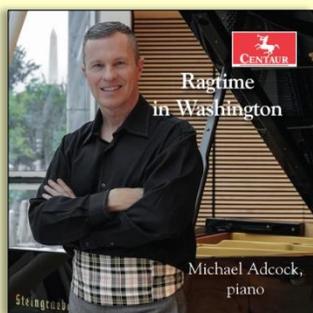
Humoreske in B-flat, Op. 20, belies its name, which suggests a mere trifle, both in terms of its duration (here 26:29), its structure consisting of six connected movements and up to 20 sections in all, and its shifting kaleidoscope of moods, leading from one to the next. Those moods can be either cheerful, witty, or, as is quite often the case, melancholy, reflecting the vicissitudes of human life (the like of which Schumann himself knew all too well!) Typically, shorter sections are subsumed into larger ones, though with a vague sense of déjà vu rather than the usual process of recapitulation. Schumann was moving from the ethos of the Classical Era into something like the complexity of modern life, rendering this work more problematical and difficult to comprehend until fairly recent times.

At last we come to Carnaval, a collection of deftly defined character pieces that is perhaps the all-time favorite of Schumann's major piano works. (I myself

and secondary themes, melody and accompaniment. The home listener may even find it difficult to recall, a few minutes later, which instrument first took up a particular theme. In the slow movement, *Adagio molto espressivo*, a pattern of dotted rhythms in the piano's left hand subtly underscores the lovely cantilena in the violin. The finale is a set of variations in which bouncy rhythms based on dotted-eighth sixteenth patterns and scalar motifs in the piano support the melodies to perfection as the work itself, which began in initial pensiveness, ends in a decidedly positive mood.

Sonata No. 2 in C minor, by way of contrast, is the most tempestuous and heroic of the set, in other words what we usually think of as "typically Beethoven." The opening movement, *Allegro con brio*, has those Beethoven characteristics that we know and love in its alternating octaves, fortissimo chords in both hands of the piano, high-profile dynamic contrasts, and virtuosic flourishes by both instruments. The tender melody in the slow movement, *Adagio cantabile*, and a really quirky Scherzo add variety to a work that concludes with a Finale that opens ominously and concludes with a tempestuous coda.

Sonata No. 3 in G major is the most playful of the three sonatas, largely due to the terrific rhythmic energy and folksy character of the *Allegro vivace* finale, creating a mood that makes us wonder just *what* the composer is going to spring on us next. It is preceded by an opening movement characterized by a Haydnesque joke concerning which instrument gets the final word and a lyrical *Tempo di minuetto* that comes across as both gracious and bittersweet. That all makes for a satisfying conclusion to a nicely-balanced set.



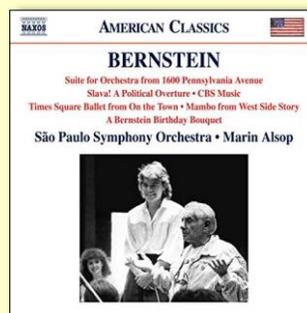
"Ragtime in Washington"
Michael Adcock, piano
(Centaur)

Michael Adcock lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, and is on the faculty of the Washington Conservatory of Music in Bethesda, MD. This is the second time I've had the pleasure to review this engaging young artist of the keyboard (see Phil's Reviews, August, 2017) and I like his style better with every fresh audition.

"Ragtime in Washington" is both nostalgic and affectionate as it strolls through an American musical genre that was very popular in its heyday from about

have reviewed it on this website on no fewer than six occasions from February 2012 to the present.) One factor in its enduring popularity was the guessing game Schumann presented to his listeners concerning his own life and loves, culminating in the triumph, in a grand march against the contemporary musical mossbacks, or "Philistines," of his aspirations for the new music of his day. All of that requires the warmth of feeling and skill in characterization that Sheng Cai possesses in abundant measure.

Of particular interest for Schumann's biographers and their reading public are the pieces reflecting his passionate love for his future wife, the pianist Clara Wieck, whose father adamantly opposed their union for more than three years. *Chiarina* (i.e., Clara) is a portrait of the young lady herself at piano practice, infused with an incredible warmth that must have really alarmed Clara's father, the musical pedagogue Friedrich Wieck (always assuming he had the wit to detect it in the first place). There is even the obligatory "other woman" in this story (*Estrella*) and, when the dust has settled, a reconciliation of true lovers and the pledge of a tender love vow (*Aveu*). Add in Schumann's tributes in passing to Chopin and Paganini, two composers for whom he felt the deepest admiration, a colorful masked ball based on characters from the Comedia dell'arte, and the final triumphal march, and you have a work of considerable range and variety in which an inspired artist such as Sheng Cai can find a really refreshing workout for body and soul.



Leonard Bernstein: A Birthday Bouquet
Marin Alsop, São Paulo Symphony Orchestra
(Naxos)

There's a lot of vibrant music here, including several world recording premieres, all in a CD that clocks in at just 53:46. With the exception of the *Mambo* from West Side Story and the *Times Square Ballet* from On the Town, most of the music heard on this program will be unfamiliar, even to longtime Bernstein fans. In this instance, the lack of familiarity adds to our pleasure. As a student of Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990), conductor Marin Alsop has been actively concerned with various tributes as part of the 100th Anniversary Celebration for

1905-1917, just before it would be eclipsed by jazz and the blues. In its beginnings, it flourished in saloons and houses of ill repute, but trained musicians often made “novelty” arrangements in ragtime for good amateur pianists of well-known classical tunes. The word “rag” itself probably derived from the use of “ragged” rhythms, meaning that the even note values were frequently dotted or “swung.”

As what was originally saloon music moved into high-society dance halls, the “classical,” written-down form of ragtime began to emerge. Its first important figure was the immortal Scott Joplin (1868-1917) who merged African-American rhythms and American folk songs with European notions of harmony and structure. Adcock plays three Joplin selections in this recital: *Bethena* (A Concert Waltz) in 3/4 time with seemingly incongruous ragtime rhythms that still seem to fit in nicely, *Palm Leaf Rag*, and *Solace*, a “consolation” rag. Stride, that is ragtime in the “stride” style of piano playing made famous by New York City artists like Eubie Blake and Lucky Roberts, was but one of the directions taken by the rags. (For more on stride style, see the review of “Gershwin Plus” in my March, 2012 *Classical Reviews*.)

As Joplin explained it, his aim in raising the rag genre itself from the low-down Mississippi Valley culture of its origin to the level of high-brow musical entertainment was to write music along classical lines that would have “a weird and intoxicating effect on the listener.” Others followed the door he opened. On this program we have such examples as *Red Pepper Rag*, a New York “novelty rag” by Henry Lodge, *Rialto Ripples*, another “novelty” co-written by George Gershwin and Will Donaldson, *Grandpa’s Spells* by Jelly Roll Morton, and *Old Tom-Cat on the Keys* by Bob Zurke, the last-named played in a “swing” style.

The ragtime revival that climaxed in the 1970’s was led by serious classical composers such as William Albright (*Sleepwalker’s Shuffle*), William Bolcom (*Incinerator Rag*, *Brooklyn Dodge*, *Last Rag*, *Fields of Flowers*), and John Musto (*Recollections* and *In Stride*, the last-named a tribute to Fats Waller marked *Tempo di soft-shoe*). All are rendered by Adcock with affection and an unflinching sense of style and fun. We even have, in a piece by Thomas Benjamin entitled *That Old Second-Viennese-School Rag*, a wicked send-up of Schoenberg and his followers that spoofs the unlovely dissonances you inevitably get from a strict adherence to the now-defunct style of 12-tone serialism.

the composer, and the performances you hear on this CD carry an aura of authenticity.

Let’s dispense with the familiar right away. The *Mambo* from *West Side Story* (1957) is one of several high-energy dances the two rival gangs, the Jets and the Sharks, perform in the gym in a display of one-upmanship, supported in the music by syncopated rhythms and non-stop percussion that underscore the dramatic tensions in the story. *Times Square Ballet*, one of Three Dance Episodes from *On The Town* (1944), is by contrast, more sophisticated and blues-y, with up-beat rhythms that fit the setting as three wide-eyed sailors on shore leave make the scene in the big town.

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue was a troubled show that closed only four days after its opening in May, 1976. It seems to have been a kind of “You Are There” piece chronicling 100 years of the American Presidency. The story, which unfolded as a play within a play with actors occasionally stepping out of character and talking directly to the audience, didn’t work, but the music did. The score is *echt*-Bernstein, with elements of ballad, march, chorale, and even a gavotte reminiscent of Prokofiev. For an October, 1977 tribute to the great Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich on the occasion of his inaugural concert as music director of the National Symphony Orchestra, Bernstein pulled two excerpts out of this music. The new piece, entitled *Slava!* (“Glory” in Russian) ended in a quote from the Coronation Scene from *Boris Godunov* with the players shouting “Slava” at the very end. [This was an in-joke, as Rostropovich was known as “Slava” to his many friends.] Also for Columbia, Bernstein wrote a number of title pieces for CBS, of which “Quiet Music” and “Chorale” are heard here in their recording premieres.

Finally, we have excerpts from occasional music premiered on a gala occasion celebrating Bernstein’s 70th birthday in a Tanglewood concert by the Boston Symphony of August 25, 1988. A special highlight was the inclusion of A Bernstein Birthday Tribute, eight variations by composers who were friends and colleagues of “Lenny,” on the theme “New York, New York” from *On the Town*: Jacob Druckman, John Corigliano, Luciano Berio, Leon Kirchner, Lukas Foss, William Schuman, John Williams, and Toru Takemitsu. All paid homage to Bernstein while incorporating elements of their own individual styles. We have, for example, a miniature piano concerto with a jazzy feeling from Foss, who was a celebrated pianist as well as composer, electronic “whoopings” from Druckman, brassy quotations by Schuman and Corigliano from Aaron Copland’s *Fanfare for the Common Man*, and a quiet impressionistic variation by Takemitsu that is reminiscent of both Debussy and his own vital Japanese tradition.



“Mozart +” Olga Peretyatko, soprano; Sinfonieorchester Basel under Ivor Bolton (Sony Classical)

When I reviewed Olga Peretyatko's previous Sony release “Rossini” (*Stocking Stuffers*, 2015), I noted her remarkably wide range that embraces the lyric soprano as well as the coloratura. We get a good earful of the lyric side of her range in “Mozart +” an album that reveals her dramatic ability in her portrayal of the emotionally conflicted heroines in *Der Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *La Clemenza di Tito*. As a bonus, it also helps us place Mozart in the fast company of three contemporaries in the highly competitive world of 18th century opera.

The St. Petersburg, Russia native appears to good advantage in all the Mozart selections, beginning with

Konstanze's recitative *Welcher Wechsel herrscht in meiner Seele* (What a change has come over my heart) and her arias *Traurigkeit ward mir zum Lose* (Unhappiness has become my destiny) and *Martern aller Arten* (Tortures of all sorts may befall me) as the heroine awaits the arrival of her lover Belmont, who will free her from captivity by lecherous Turks. The Contessa's recitative *E Susanna non vien!* (Still Susanna does not come) and the following aria *Dove sono i bei momenti* (Where are the golden moments) serve to epitomize her mixed emotions as she is obliged to disguise herself as her maidservant in order to keep a rendezvous and win back the love of her philandering husband.

In *Don Giovanni*, Peretyatko has one of her best moments in *Or sai chi l'onore* (You know who sought to sully my honor), the stirring aria in which Donna Anna beseeches Don Ottavio to avenge her disgrace by slaying her would-be abductor Don Giovanni. The seamless lyric beauty of Vitellia's *Non piu di fiori* (Let Hymen no more descend to weave fair garlands) from *Il Clemenza di Tito*, with its instrumental accompaniment integrated superbly with the soprano aria, gives a clear indication of where Mozart's operatic genius would have taken him had he lived longer.

Interspersed in the program are selections from three of Mozart's contemporaries and rivals that show us how fierce the competition was in the opera world of his day, prompting him to pour some of his most inspired music into the genre. We hear first the three noble arias from *Antigona* by Tomasso Traetta (1727-1779) in which the legendary Greek heroine affirms her iron resolve to bury the body of her brother in defiance of the stern decree of the tyrant Creon: *Ombra cara amorosa* (Dear, loving shade), *Io resto sempre a piangere* (I shall weep for all eternity) and *Finito e il mio tormento* (My suffering is at an end).

Two “insertion arias” by Mozart, intended to compliment the range of the diva engaged for a revival of *Il burbero di buon cuore* (The Good-Hearted Lout) by Vincente Martin y Soler (1754-1806), *Chi sa, chi sa, qual sin* (Who knows what torment may afflict my beloved) and *Vado, ma dove?* (I shall go, but where?) seamlessly fit the style of Soler's own Act I aria, *Infelice ad ogni istante* (Beset by woe, I feel my anguish increase), a common practice of the day and a tribute of sorts to the mastery of the original composer. Finally, we have Rosina's cavatina, *Giusto ciel, chi cognoscete* (Righteous heaven, you who know my heart to be sincere) from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (The Barber of Seville) by Giovanni Paisiello (1740-1816), a bravura aria if ever there was. Peretyatko sings all these selections with the same honesty and warmth that she invests in the Mozart arias we know and love.