

Phil's Classical Reviews

Atlanta Audio Club

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Shchedrin: Carmen Suite +
Respighi: Pines of Rome – Mariss
Jansons, Bavarian Radio
Symphony Orchestra
(BR-Klassik)



“Romance” – Valentina Nafornta.
Soprano; Keri-Lynn Wilson,
Munich Radio Symphony Orchestra
(Outhere Music)



“Light and Darkness,”
works by Franz Liszt
Martina Filjak, piano
(Profil)

In live 2017-2019 recordings made in the Munich Philharmonic in Gasteig and the Herkulesaal of the Residenz, Munich, Mariss Jansons scores two more hits in his tenure at the podium of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. They are, respectively, the Carmen Suite by Russian composer Rodion Shchedrin and Ottorino Respighi's *Pini di Roma* (Pines of Rome). They make an interesting pair, the Shchedrin almost as controversial today as when it was premiered in 1967, and the Respighi one of the composer's most enduringly popular works.

Shchedrin's Carmen Suite after Georges Bizet is heard here in the version for string orchestra and percussion which, with a little bit of tweaking, would serve as the score of the Carmen ballet which he wrote as a showpiece for his wife, sensational prima ballerina Maya Plisetskaya. Even if one disregards the scandal occasioned by Maya's lean figure scantily clad and bare-legged in the title role, the music itself caused a raging controversy. It was too steamily erotic for many balletgoers and critics in what was then the Soviet Union, and it came within an ace of being banned altogether.¹

Valentina Nafornta, another rising star in the operatic firmament, is a native of Glodeni in Moldova, a republic situated between Romania and Ukraine, and is known in her homeland as “the nightingale.” We discover how apt that appellation is in her new release “Romance,” a co-production of Outhere Music France and BR Klassik (Germany). From the evidence of this album, she is someone of whom we'll be hearing a lot in the near future.

The program of operatic arias and songs starts off with five Mozart selections that reveal the range of her tessitura and her ability to visualize a role and convey it to us, even in the setting of a recording studio. We begin with Zerlina's aria *Vedrai, carino* (You'll see, darling) from *Don Giovanni*, in which the flirtatious chamber maid calms her (justifiably) jealous lover Masetto by telling him she has a remedy for him that no apothecary can match! Susanna's recitative and aria *Giunse alfin... Deh vieni, non tardar* (At last the moment is near... Come now, delay not) from *The Marriage of Figaro*, captures the emotions with which she eagerly anticipates the moment when she can throw off her disguise and be reconciled with her beloved Figaro

Martina Filjak, gifted and insightful pianist of Croatian origin who now considers Berlin her home base, gained considerable fame in 2009 when she won the Cleveland International Piano Competition, and is currently pursuing a busy career on three continents. She is said to speak seven languages fluently. One of them, from the evidence of her latest CD, “Light and Darkness,” must surely be Lisztian.

Many of the piano works on the present program were written by Liszt during a time of revolutionary upheaval. That most of the nationalist revolutions in Prague, Budapest, Warsaw, and elsewhere, were brutally suppressed by authoritarian regimes did not dim their influence on the arts, and music was no exception. The bold spirit of change was in the air, and Liszt had caught it.

In the present recital, that fervent spirit is reflected most clearly in *Ballade No. 2 in B Minor* (1853) in bold textures and tonal progressions heard over roiling chromatic figurations. English writer Sacheverell Sitwell later described it as “concerned less with personal suffering than with great happenings on the epic scale, barbarian invasions, cities in flames, tragedies of public, more than private import.” That certainly characterizes the more impassioned moments, but it fails to include the

¹ Which, happily, it was not, thanks to the intervention of Dmitri Shostakovich at the Ministry of Culture.

Erotic? The claim is undeniably true. Shchedrin himself stated that he was not content with merely paying "obsequious homage to the genius of Bizet but instead attempting to tackle it in a creative way." A discretely erotic element is definitely present in Bizet's music, and Shchedrin emphasized it in his scoring for string orchestra, with all the varieties of dark and shadow that the strings allow – and no woodwinds, which might have seemed frivolous in terms of his conception. In addition, he made fantastically imaginative use of a percussion section more extensive and varied than anything Bizet might have had at his disposal.

The rest is a matter of personal taste, and one might legitimately argue that Shchedrin goes too far in this or that instance. The overall effectiveness cannot be denied, beginning with the inspiration to invoke Carmen's Habañera theme in the distant sound of soft bells in the brief introduction to the suite, and concluding with the fantastic employment of such percussion instruments as marimba, bongos, guiros and tom-toms in the Allegro finale, with the Habañera theme once again entrusted to the bells, heard now over pizzicato strings. Always, Shchedrin keeps in mind the idea of the instability of the passion of love in Carmen's tale of desire and sudden death in the bull ring: "*L'amour est un oiseau rebelle!*" (Love is a rebellious bird that no one can tame).

Once more, Jansons and the Bavarian RSO score impressively in Pines of Rome, capturing every nuance of mood and flavor in Respighi's enduring declaration of love to the Eternal City. Orchestral textures are all-important here, beginning with children scampering around playing games with the Pines of the Villa Borghese as a backdrop. We conclude with Pines of the Appian Way, beginning in sighs emanating from the morning mist and a crescendo, gradually building in intensity and power, as a phantom legion of Roman soldiers are on the march once again to the evocative sounds of

on their nuptial day.

The next two Mozart selections are more serious in character. They are two arias from Idomeneo in which the Trojan princess Ilia, held captive on the island of Crete, laments the father and brothers whom she never expects to see again (*Padre, germani, addio!*) and struggles with her own ambivalent feelings at the prospect of marriage with the Cretan prince Idamante, her country's enemy whom she secretly loves (*Zeffiretti lusinghieri*, Caressing Zephyrs). The charming aria *Ruhe sanft, mein holdes Leben* (Gently rest, my dearest love), from the fragmentary opera *Zaïde*, is charming in the simplicity of the maiden's wish that the gift of her portrait may inspire in her beloved dreams of love, leading to the real thing!

Tchaikovsky's deeply moving song Romance is the lament of a young woman whose parents have condemned her to a loveless marriage with a rich old man: "Was I not a blade of grass in the field ... They took me and cut me down, / Dried me in the sun." Movingly conveyed to us by Nafornita's artistry, it is a major highlight of the program.

Next, we have the incredibly beautiful "Song to the Moon" from Dvořák's opera *Rusalka*, in which the heroine, a water nymph who has fallen in love with a mortal prince whom she has saved from drowning, prays that she may be allowed to take human form, not knowing the tragic consequences that will befall her.

Tchaikovsky again, in an arioso from the opera *Iolanta*, in which the heroine of the title, a princess, blind from birth, resolves to acquire her sight in order to save the life of the one she loves. Nafornita's grasp of the psychological dimension in the role, which she recently sang at the Opéra National de Paris, is essential to her realizing the depths of *Iolanta's* urgent question "Why, until now, have I not shed tears, not known feelings of longing or sorrow?"

quieter mood of a search for peace and certainty that we find at the end of the piece.

We find a deeply personal side of this composer in the religion-inspired works in the middle of the program. In his personal life, Liszt sometimes affected wearing priestly garments and he was later to take religious orders, but the quest was always sincere enough. We find it embodied in his Harmonies poétiques et religieuses in the *Miserere* after Palestrina, and also in the incredibly beautiful *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude* (Blessing of God in the solitude), which evokes the peace and certitude he had most urgently sought in the Ballade.

Deux Légendes (Two Legends) reflect another aspect of Liszt's spirituality. The first recalls the Sermon to the Birds in the Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi, in which the persistent twittering of the avian creatures, expressed in the form of trills, arpeggios, and chromatic figurations, is countenanced by the plain, simple expostulations of the saint, swelling at last to a sublime synthesis with the voices of the birds. The second Legend is that of St. Francis of Paola, who was said to walk dryshod across the Straits of Messina. Figurations portraying the agitation of the rolling waves are succeeded at the end by a mood of peace and gratitude.

Finally, we have two paraphrases by Liszt intended as homage to Gaetano Donizetti. The first is an operatic paraphrase, representing a genre that seems to have died out but was popular in a day before 78 RPM recordings on wax cylinders and electrical transcriptions brought the music of the opera right into people's homes. The subject of the first paraphrase is the well-known vocal sextet from *Lucia di Lammermoor*, one of opera's greatest hits.

The second. March for the Sultan, originated in a time when Abdul Medjid-Khan, Sultan of Constantinople, engaged Donizetti to reorganize his court orchestra along strictly western lines. As we hear in the Lisztian paraphrase, there still remained a memory of the old-fashioned Janissary music the Sultan had sought to suppress. (I guess you could take revolutionary zeal in music just so far!)

such antique instruments as shawms and *buccine*, the latter reproduced here by a scoring for six flugelhorns.

In between, we have Pines near a Catacomb, where Respighi evokes the fervor of the early Christians in the archaic sound of a Gregorian-inspired hymn in fifths with overlapping phrases, and Pines of the Janiculum, utilizing a haunting clarinet melody and soft strings to evoke mist and moonlight seen through the pines on the famous hill of that name. All of this is performed here under Jansons' baton, where feeling is judiciously allied with restraint for best effect.

Tchaikovsky's Prelude to *Iolanta* follows, and then we have two beautiful love songs and a waltz fantasy with flowing wordless vocalise for soprano voice, all by contemporary Moldovan composer Eugen Doda. Nafornita responds to the folk-tinged emotion of these songs in a way that she herself describes: "Whenever I sing his melodies, I feel I am at home!" The song titles may be translated "If I only knew your name I would not know anything else" and "Your beloved gaze."

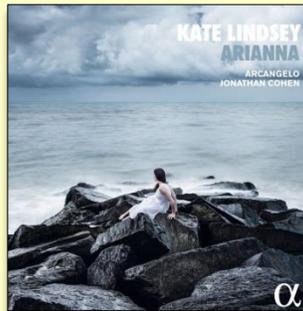
In this, as in the Lucia paraphrase, Liszt eschewed literal transcription in favor of a more imaginative approach that stimulated his creative faculties. Martina Filjak captures the vital spirit of both paraphrases, as she does that of all the works in a thrilling recital.



"Concurrence," music by composers from Iceland Daniel Bjarnason, Iceland Symphony (Sono Luminus)

"Concurrence" is the second release in a series introducing the music of contemporary Icelandic composers to the world. We also get to hear stunning performances by the Iceland Symphony Orchestra under its principal guest conductor Daniel Bjarnason. This ensemble of about 70 pieces play with an excellence and a range of sounds one might expect from a more famous orchestra. The sound quality in both standard CD and Blu-Ray in surround sound audio captures an immense wealth and variety of sounds with an impressive dynamic range. And the acoustics of these recordings, made in the ultra-modern Harpa Concert Hall in Reykjavik, are superb.

I don't really know how to begin to characterize the program itself. It might be described as three



"Arianna" cantatas by A. Scarlatti, Handel, Haydn - Kate Lindsey, soprano; Arcangelo directed by Jonathan Cohen (Alpha Classics)

"Arianna" was my introduction to the sensational voice of American mezzo-soprano Kate Lindsey, and was she a discovery! The native of Richmond, Virginia has really seen her career as an operatic singer take off. The present CD, a co-production of Alpha Classics and Outhere Music France, is actually her second for Alpha, the first being "Thousands of Miles", a program of Kurt Weill songs in collaboration with jazz pianist Baptiste Trotignon.

Her latest release, made with the chamber ensemble Arcangelo, now celebrating their 10th anniversary under founder Jonathan Cohen, gives her the opportunity to display her glorious voice in a program of solo cantatas in the Italian style by Scarlatti, Handel, and Haydn. All are based on the Greek legend of Ariadne (Arianna) who helped the hero Theseus find and kill the



Ravel: La Valse, Rapsodie Espagnole + Attahir: Ad-Dhohr – Alexandre Bloch, Orchestre National de Lille (Alpha Classics)

French conductor Alexandre Bloch, Music Director of the Orchestre National de Lille since 2016, directs that orchestra in an intriguing program that has two of Maurice Ravel's best-known and most highly evocative orchestral works as bookends surrounding a new work, Ad-Dhohr by Benjamin Attahir (b.1987) which succeeds in engaging the listener even as it leaves some tantalizing questions unanswered.

Why the pairing of ostensibly incompatible works by these two composers? Quite apart from the fact that the Orchestre National de Lille commissioned the work and first performed it in 2017, Ad-Dhohr may be said to share a common cultural aesthetic with the Ravel works in a number of ways – clarity of timbres, transparent writing, exciting rhythms, luminous colors, and a typically French passion for exacting details. The title

symphonic poems and a piano concerto by contemporary Icelandic composers, all relatively young: Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, Haukur Tómasson, María Huld Markan Sigfusdóttir, and Páll Ragnar Pálsson. Their music, in various ways experimental, seems to evoke the larger forces of nature and the cosmos, in ways that earnestly seek to transcend merely “mood” music.

It is easy enough to surmise the isolation and unique environment of sea, sky, landscape and climate as influences in the music of these young Icelanders, but that isn't the only story here. Thorvaldsdóttir's *Metacosmos*, for instance, is described by its composer as “an ecosystem of materials that are carried from one performer, or performers, to the next in the process of the work.” Essentially, it is about connections that bind us together in space and time. [For an analogy, we might consider the Scherzando, *Giuoco della coppie* (Game of Couples) in Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra - Phil]

Tómasson's Piano Concerto No. 2 is a curious work that seems to camp almost exclusively on the extreme treble end of the keyboard for all its tinkly, widely spaced tones and clusters. The piano is constantly in conversation with choruses of its other instrumental counterparts, instead of being a lone voice among the masses. Sigfusdóttir's *Oceans*, by contrast, works its effects slowly by means of contrasts of tones and timbres, of cinematic swells and eerie suspensions. There is emotion at work in the composer's unique vision, whether human or inhuman depending on the individual listener's perception.

Finally, Pálsson's *Quake* is a frightening work, filled with tectonic shudders and jolts, amounting at

Minotaur, a monster with the body of a man and the head of a bull, providing him with a thread to unravel in order to find his way out of the Labyrinth (you remember the story!) But her love for Theseus did not have a happy ending, for the ingrate sailed away, abandoning her on the island of Naxos.

That is where the legend begins in all three accounts that we find here. An abandoned woman of proud spirit provided composers with abundant opportunities for a highly dramatic portrayal of the heroine, her mind rushing to extremes of anguish, despair, and frustration, at last finding solace in hope for her lover's return, a renewal of her vows of eternal fidelity, or at least the firm resolve to persist in love, come what may.

That's the heady stuff the dramatic cantatas of the Italian Baroque were made of, and our three composers, each in his own way, created an indelible psychological portrait of the forsaken Ariadne.

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725), earliest of the three, capitalized on his heroine's violent shifts of mood in his *L'Arriana* (*Ebra d'amor fuggia*, “Drunk with love, she fled her father's home.” Such violent beginnings seldom have happy endings, and the cantata ends with the heroine calling on the gods of the sea to destroy her faithless lover in a highly dramatic vocal line set against leaps of wide intervals in the violin, ending at last in the apotheosis of a truly magic arioso. Earlier, we witness a different kind of mood in Arianna's tender aria “*Stringa si dolcenedo ardente amore*” (Let a sweet knot bid our burning love, nor let cruel jealousy ever melt it.” Lindsey's performance captures well these psychological extremes.

George Frideric Handel studied in Rome in his early twenties and

itself refers to a prayer in the Salah, the cycle of daily prayer recitations in the Muslim faith. For Attahir, who is presumably a Muslim himself, the wail of the solo instrument, reminiscent of a peak moment in the prayer cycle, has a strong nostalgic quality.

Attahir didn't want to trust this haunting evocation to just any old instrument. He had the inspiration to bring back the serpent, a decidedly odd-looking and odd-sounding instrument that had its heyday in the first half of the 18th Century.²



Wass ist das?

In resurrecting the serpent, an instrument that hadn't been heard in the past two centuries, Attahir exploits its timbre, which possesses a vocal quality similar to that of the human voice. In the second half of what is a single continuous movement, the instrument, played with real virtuosity by Patrick Wibart, engages in some delicious call-and-response dialogue with the two orchestral horns, evoking the relation of the Muezzin and the faithful in the daily prayer recitations.

Ravel's *La Valse*, which opens the program, is generally considered to be a sardonic backward glance from the vantage point of 1920 to the opulent and ultimately doomed world that ended with the fall of European empires at the end of WW1. As we hear very decidedly in the present performance, the waltz music evokes a glittering ballroom filled with the swirling forms of dancers, becoming ever faster and more unstable, ending in as sensational an exhibition of de-construction as we are likely to hear in all of music.

² Even then, it must have been used mostly for special effects that required its curious timbre, rather than as a melody instrument. George Frideric Handel seems to have encountered it for the first time during an early visit to England, when he had to inquire just what sort of instrument it was? Upon being informed by his hosts, he reportedly shook his head, “That is not the serpent that beguiled Eve!”

times to sheer panic and tumult amid a general atmosphere of mysterious forces as the composer puts his harmonic patterns together intuitively rather than analytically. Is this a frightening world of nature-in-itself, or is the intellect of an actual human observer at work here?

These four young composers all seem to have pieces of the answer as to “whither goest” the new music of our time. Are the received notions of accompanied melodies and sonata-allegro form dead today, and if so what will composers find to replace them in order to give form and plausibility to larger works of music? Perhaps some future Icelandic Sibelius will arise one day and make the answer immediately apparent.

scored his earliest successes as the composer of Italian operas. That may come as a surprise to readers who know him chiefly for his oratorios and other choral and vocal works in English. The Italian influence, together with his own innate feeling for lyricism and knack for shaping the contours of a well-made vocal line, are to be found in the solo cantata, *Ah crudel, nel pianto mio*. It begins with a striking melody for the oboe, the plangent sound of which comes to epitomize the heroine’s indignation at her abandonment.

Ariadne’s opening aria, *Ah crudel*, soon changes to a mood of despair and then the resolve to persist in her love for Theseus. In the middle of the cantata we are given a lovely

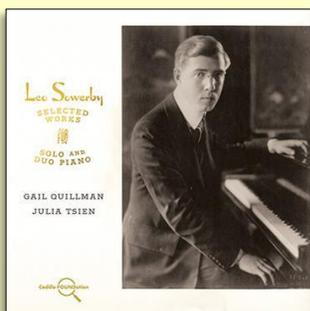
Rapsodie espagnole, which concludes the program, is a bold evocation of Spain in four stunningly scored movements. Prélude à la nuit (Prelude to the night) starts *pppp* (softer than a whisper) and never rises above a mezzo-forte. This movement is remarkable for its diaphanous textures. The distinctive rhythms of the Malagueña are conveyed to us very well, as is the sensual quality of a Habañera that never quite loses its languorous aspect. The finale, FERIA, is a picture of a festival day that unfolds in blazes of glory surrounding a quiet central episode that features a haunting melody spun by the English horn and subtly decorated by the clarinet. In a most transparently scored work, the musicians function as an ensemble and are also heard in frequent solos, a fact that undoubtedly accounts for much of its popularity among orchestral players.

Continued Below

pastoral interlude in the form of an accompanied recitative depicting an Arcadian shepherd caring for his flock in the presence of a sudden thunderstorm. The parallels with Ariadne’s psychological state are made obvious by her aria: “Hope commands me to consider your cruel acts as trophies of my constancy, // And tells me, “Suffer, O heart, for later when you are happy your sorrows shall be joys.”

I’d never previously encountered Joseph Haydn’s cantata *Arianna a Naxos*, though the high quality of his workmanship argues a worthy place for it beside the more famous works in this program. In Haydn’s cantata, Ariadne is awakened by the rising sun and soon gives out with her aria “*Dove sei, mio bel tesoro?*” (Where are you, my fair treasure?), its harmonic uncertainty reflecting her own state of mind. Later, upward-moving musical phrases and turbulent wave-like motifs accompany her climb to a promontory to gain a better view of the restless sea. There, she spies Theseus’ ship sailing away and calls on the gods to punish him, ending in a furious rage in a minor key and a longing for death, all of which Kate Lindsey conveys to us superbly.

None of these three cantatas has a “happy ending” (unless you take self-righteous indignation, scorn and anger for happiness, as many people do). That fortuitous ending would have to wait for the Ariadne legend in Ovid’s *Heroides*. And *that* is another story...



Leo Sowerby: Selected works for Solo and Duo Piano
Gail Quillman, Julia Tsien
(Cedille)



Schumann: “Myrthen”
Camilla Tilling, soprano; Christian Gerhaher, baritone; Gerold Huber piano (Sony Classical)



Bach: Sonatas & Partitas for Solo Violin, BWV 1001-1006
Tomás Cotik, violinist
(Centaur)

Gail Quillman, pianist and educator who spent her entire career in the

Myrthen, Op. 25, takes its name from the old German custom of

In his first essay of the complete solo sonatas and partitas of J.S. Bach,

Chicago area before retiring in 2015, started the Leo Sowerby Foundation in 1989 to preserve the memory of her mentor. These recordings by Quillman and her own student Julia Tsien reveal an all-but-forgotten figure in American music. Intelligent, affectionate, and deeply insightful accounts, they convey the essence of the composer and his music.

Who was Leo Sowerby (1895-1968) and why haven't we heard more about him? The native of Grand Rapids, Michigan first attracted attention as a piano prodigy before he went on to further his education. He was to become the first American recipient of the Prix de Rome and the winner of several Pulitzer Prizes in music.

From time to time, he studied, or rather engaged in lively discussions about music, with Percy Grainger, who introduced him to the music of Frederick Delius. This was only one aspect of Sowerby's many-faceted style as composer which included a thorough grounding in counterpoint and an enduring interest in jazz. He was very prolific, with more than five hundred(!) compositions, including nine symphonies, a dozen tone poems and overtures, numerous organ and choral works, and countless songs and sonatas.

A homebody who lived his life in the Midwest and didn't travel abroad in his mature years, he nevertheless enjoyed the moral encouragement of a few important figures including Frederick Stock, the conductor of the Chicago Symphony, and the great English organist E. Power Biggs, and he toured the Midwest in 1924 with Paul Whiteman and his jazz band.

Three Summer Beach Sketches for solo piano, entitled "Light," "Water," and "Sand," are conveyed to us in their essence by Gail Quillman's artistry. "Sand," in particular, has a pensive, subdued affect, as if to say our footsteps in the sands of time are destined to be blown away by the wind. Suite for Piano – Four Hands is played here in a setting for two pianos that gives our artists

weaving branches of the Myrtle into a garand for a young bride. Though it was released in four parts as a publisher's convention, Schumann considered Myrthen all one cycle. Significantly, he wrote it in a torrent of activity in his "lieder year," from February, 1840 to January, 1841, that witnessed cycles based on poetry by Heinrich Heine, Julius Kerner and Joseph von Eichendorff among others, 140 songs in all.

The outpouring of song at this time in Schumann's life was no coincidence. It reflects his love for Clara Wieck and joy at the prospect of their upcoming marriage after the last legal obstacle to their union had been cleared following an adamant opposition by her father that had lasted for some years. One of the 26 songs, *Hauptmanns Weib* (Captain's Lady) seems to allude to Schumann's glee at this time of triumph: (translated) "When the vanquished foe / sues for peace and quiet, / to the shades we'll go, / and in love enjoy it."

As opposed to his other lieder cycles, all based on single poets, nine different poets are represented in *Myrthen*, the most notable being Heine, Friedrich Rückert, and the Scottish poet Robert Burns. The uneven style and quality of the 26 poems, seeming at first like a bridal bouquet of miscellaneous flowers, is at first confusing. Only upon repeated listenings does a formal structure, based on the contents of the poems in question and their relation to one another, slowly begin to assert itself.

Some of these songs have become Schumann standards that you are more likely to hear performed singly in lieder recitals than you are the Myrthen as a whole. Rückert's *Widmung* (Dedication), sung here by soprano Camilla Tilling, leads off the program with a clear message that serves as a recurring emblem in the cycle itself: "You my soul, you my heart, / you my bliss, O you my pain / you my world in which I live, / my heaven you, in which I soar." *Die Lotosblume* (Lotus Flower) by Heine conveys the fragility of a young woman's love:

Tomás Cotik approaches the daunting task with his customary verve and keenness of articulation. The Argentine-born violinist who has spent some time in the U.S, teaching at universities in Florida, Texas, and most recently Oregon, where these recordings were made at Portland State University, utilizes a violin with softer strings than are commonly in use today, plus a baroque bow of unspecified age and lineage.

This bow was evidently curved in order for the "delicate nuances to be realized naturally at the beginning and ending of each stroke, for effortless chord playing 'around the curves,' for strings to be enjoyed in low, open positions and to be changed mid-phrase seamlessly." (I quote from the excellent annotation by musicologist Frank Cooper).

Cotik endeavors to bring about all these features, much as he did in his account for Centaur Records of Sonata No. 3 in C Major, BWV 1006 (See my *Classical Reviews*, August, 2015). At the time, he stated, of the curved bow, in particular, that "[it] helped me avoid wrong accents in this repertoire" and permitted "a lighter sound, quicker, more flowing tempi, and lively articulations."

That is true, but the livelier articulations of which Cotik speaks reach a limit of smoothness when this artist is transiting between voices in the fugues of all three sonatas. In these moments I detect a certain awkwardness in the way of forced elisions from one voice to another that I do not find in Cotik's other phrasings. Granted, fugal writing is not perfectly intuitive in a five-string melody instrument, and every artist of the bow who attempts these fugal passages must endeavor to find his own solutions.

Cotik favors quick, lively tempi in the fast moments throughout the sonatas and partitas, and he applies them consistently in order to give his interpretations an attractive verve, as for example in the Presto finale of Sonata No. 1 and the final movement of Partita No. 1, *Tempo di Borea* (in the time of a Bourée) where it has a whirlwind intensity. His pacing is right on the money in the famous Chaconne in Partita No. 3, where the moment of repose that occurs just past the mid-

greater individual freedom to negotiate the keyboard and the pedals. Movements are titled *Softly and Very Quietly*, *With verve (fugue)*, *Slowly, with moderate movement*, and *Fast and Glittering*. Quillman and Tsien take these titles as guides to affect as well as tempo, particularly the third in which that “moderate movement” steals upon the listener almost imperceptibly.

Passacaglia, Interlude and Fugue is laid out in three well-defined sections of which the Interlude serves as an eloquent intermediary between the two outer sections. As he did in the second movement of the Suite for Piano, Sowerby demonstrates his thoroughgoing knowledge of the principles of fugue as something to heighten the interest of performer and listener alike, rather than as a merely academic exercise. Quillman’s performance makes us marvel all the more that it can be encompassed by just two hands. Prelude (for two pianos), written a year later than Passacaglia, continues its introspective vein.

The program concludes with a jaunty Fisherman’s Tune that must have delighted Percy Grainger and a curiously titled Synconata that plays like a symphonic movement or the curtain-raiser for a larger work. Quillman and Tsien play all these two-piano works with much relish.

Sowerby’s music gradually became forgotten in the decades following his decision in 1927 to forsake the concert hall and its potential for critical and audience acclaim for the quieter career of a church musician. Performances such as we have on the present album may help to set the record straight.

“The moon is her paramour. / He wakes her with his light / and amiably she unveils / her innocent flower-like face.”

Heine’s *Du bist wie eine Blume* (You are like a flower) further explores the tenderness of love passion: “I feel I should lay / my hands on your head / and pray that God may keep you / so lovely, so pure and beautiful.” One of Robert Burns’ best-known poems is set as *Hochländers Abschied* (The Highlander’s Farewell): “My heart’s in the Highlands, my heart is not here, / my heart’s in the Highlands, a-chasing the deer.” Opposed to its supremely masculine expression of joy in one’s sense of freedom to fare abroad are the numerous widow’s laments and longings of maidens and young brides for “*the bonnie lad that’s far awa’*,” usually derived more or less directly by Burns from Scottish folk songs and freely translated into German verse.

In this program, the songs are pretty evenly distributed between soprano Camilla Tilling and baritone Christian Gerhaher, with pianist Gerold Huber as the accompanist. I find the results somewhat uneven. A few of the songs seem rushed for no particular purpose and in places where a broadening of the tempo would have yielded better results. The diction of both singers is unexceptional, and it sometimes makes it hard to follow the words of a song even with the German text and English translation provided in the booklet. On the positive side, both singers show sensitivity to nuances in the poetic texts, and Gerhaher’s essay in the booklet “Kaleidoscope of a Marriage” provides much insight into the composer’s intentions.

point (5:41 in this account) never fails to raise goose bumps in this listener.

I find his tempo a little too brisk in the Siciliana of Sonata No. 1 where it should possess more of a stately, swaying character. The Allemande in Partita No. 2 is, happily, more vigorous and energetic than we commonly expect of this venerable old dance form. In Partita No. 3, all of the musical forms following the Prelude – the Loure, Gavotte en Rondeau (which in our day has taken on the reputation of one of “Bach’s greatest hits”), Minuets I and II, Bourée and Gigue – were of dance origin and are given a real feeling of intimacy in this particular performance.

Though he takes appropriately slow, deliberate tempi in such movements as the Grave of Sonata No. 2 and the very affecting Largo of Sonata No. 3, Cotik opts for remarkably quick tempi in most of the faster movements in all six works. His total time for the entire album of sonatas and partitas clocks in at a very quick 118:33. Compare this with 145:41 for Mark Kaplan (Bridge) to get an idea of just *how* brisk.

As a final heads-up: Tomás Cotik is the sort of persistent artist who will be continually engaged with these six Himalayas of the violinist’s art all his career. So don’t expect these readings to be his last word on the subject!