

Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

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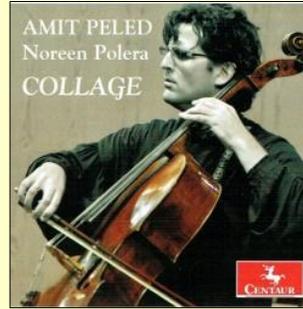


“Prayer,” music of Bloch, Shostakovich, and Casals
Sol Gabetta, cello
Amsterdam Sinfonietta, Candida Thompson
Orchestre National de Lyons, Leonard Slatkin
Cello Ensemble Amsterdam Sinfonietta (Sony)

Sol Gabetta, the deceptively fragile-looking cellist with the broad, expansive tone, gives some of the finest performances of her career in “Prayer,” a program of very soulful music, mostly inspired by Jewish folk and liturgical traditions. She coaxes sounds from her instrument, a 1759 Guadagnini, that capture all the passion and drama of the human voice. In addition, the support she gets from the orchestras from Lyons and Amsterdam and the perfect spot-on sonic assistance she receives from the recording booth makes this CD my early choice for recording honors in the engineering as well as performance categories.

This young artist, born 1981 in Villa Maria, Cordoba, Argentina of French and Russian ancestry, gives her all in a program of works by Ernest Bloch and Dmitri Shostakovich, with Pablo Casals’ hauntingly beautiful Song of the Birds (*El Cant dels Ocells*) as an encore. We begin with three pieces from Bloch’s suite From Jewish Life: *Prayer, Supplication, and Jewish song*, followed by the *Nigun*, a rhapsodic and charismatic improvisation from the Baal Shem Suite, which was inspired by the ecstatic celebrations of the Hassidic Jews. *Meditation Hébraïque*, dedicated to Pablo Casals, concludes the first part of the program, which would seem on first hearing to be the main course of the album but, in retrospect, appears to be a good earnest of things to come.

Dmitri Shostakovich was not a Jew, but many of his colleagues were, and he resented the treatment meted out to them by the Stalinist authorities, which subjected them to being removed from teaching chairs, having their compositions proscribed, and in general being denied a voice in contemporary music. He objected, as far as he dared without attracting the attention of the KGB and placing himself in peril, by incorporating elements of Jewish music into his own compositions. Such are the four arrangements for cello from the vocal



“Collage,” works for cello and piano by
Rachmaninoff, Tsintsadze, Popper
Amit Peled, cello; Noreen Cassidy-Polera, piano
(Centaur Records)

In keeping with his own philosophy “start off with a big steak, and finish with dessert and a strawberry on top,” Israeli-American cellist Amit Peled offers us a real feast on this CD. The “steak” is obviously Sergei Rachmaninoff’s Sonata in G minor for Cello and Piano, Op. 19. Written in four movements, it has the breadth and the wealth of musical ideas worthy of a great symphony. Rachmaninoff, in fact, didn’t like to hear people refer to it as a “cello sonata” because both instruments are equal partners. It certainly seems that way in the present performance by Peled and his partner Noreen Cassidy-Polera.

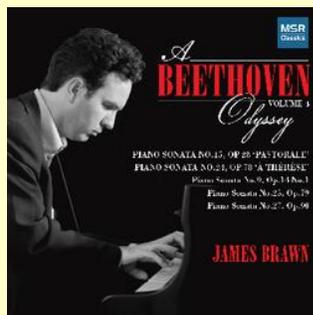
As did Chopin, Rachmaninoff eschewed writing works for violin and piano; consequently, his sole sonata for melody instrument and piano involved the cello, an instrument that give him the big *cantabile* phrasing and sustained bloom he desired. Typically, the piano first states the themes which the cello discourses on with magnificent eloquence, while the piano weaves enchanting arpeggios and cascading chords around it. The piano also waxes rhapsodically in moments when the cello is silent.

You remember the melodies, first and foremost, because of Peled’s treatment of them. He takes his time to give them the breadth and expansiveness they require. In common with many great Jewish string artists we have heard in the past, he can make his instrument, in this case Pablo Casals’ famous Goffriller that was passed down to him by the great Spanish cellist’s widow, sing with the warmth and feeling of a human voice. You can perform the sonata in as little as 30 minutes: the broader tempi chosen by Peled and his partner make this work seem just right at a timing of 36:57.

The Lento opening of the first movement, sad and pensive, gathers momentum in the ensuing Allegro moderato. The second movement, Allegro

cycle From Jewish Folk Poetry: *Lullaby, A Warning, The Song of Misery, and The Young Girl's Song*. They capture a variety of moods, which appealed to a composer who always claimed to be attracted by “a jolly song with sad intonations.”

The main course of the feast is Bloch's *Schelomo*, subtitled “Hebraic Rhapsody for Cello and Orchestra.” There is simply nothing quite like it in the literature, as the cello represents the various dark meditations of the Biblical King Solomon, the distractions of power-lust and sensuality, and conflicts of his own troubled mind, culminating in orchestral climaxes of almost unbearable intensity in the second and final sections. Here, Gabetta's tone is vibrant, rich, and broad enough to drive a truck through the score. In the course of the 22-minute work, Solomon rejects the siren call of the flesh as well as the stirring liturgical call of the shofar (represented here by the bassoon) and concludes sadly, “All is vanity.” It ends in quiet and dark despair. Said Bloch, “This is my only work that culminates in total negation – but the subject demanded it.” The present performance and recording do full justice to it.



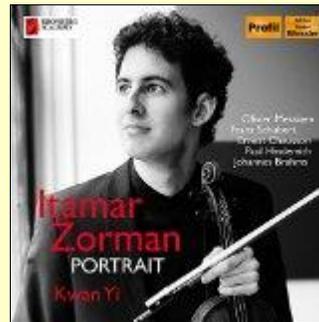
“A Beethoven Odyssey,” Volume 4
James Brawn, piano
MSR Classics

In this, the fourth volume in his survey entitled “A Beethoven Odyssey,” pianist James Brawn explores some of the composer's most genial moments. His own odyssey through life has taken him from England where he was born to New Zealand and Australia where he spent his formative years and received much of his early musical education, and then to London where he completed his studies at the Royal Academy of Music. He now resides amid the picturesque rolling landscape of the Cotswolds. That last biographical note seems appropriate in terms of the genial tone of this particular Beethoven recital.

As Brawn explains it, the home keys of the five sonatas heard in the present recording occur very satisfactorily in a sort of cycle: the “spirited” key of E major in Sonata 9, a life-affirming D major in 15, the “divine” key of F-sharp minor in 24, nicknamed “à Thérèse,” an exuberant G major in 25, and a return to E major in 27, the heading of whose first movement Brawn takes as a metaphor for the entire program. Beethoven marked it *Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und*

scherzando, has one of those big, warm Rachmaninoff melodies as a contrast to the menacing staccato phrasings of the opening section. The Andante has an even more memorable songlike melody for the cello, one worthy of the Second Piano Concerto which Rachmaninoff had premiered only five weeks earlier (his home must have been so filled with great melodies in those days, you had to watch where you walked or sat). The finale, *Allegro molto*, concludes the work in grand style with luxuriant exchanges between both instruments.

The “dessert” follows, in the form of a marvelous suite by Georgian composer Sulkhan Tsintsadze (1925-1991) entitled *Five Pieces on Folk Themes* for Cello and Piano. It uses the same kinds of poignant melodies and rousing Georgian dances as had inspired Aram Khachaturian's ballet *Gayaneh*. The “strawberry” is the *Tarantelle*, Op. 33 by 19th century Austrian virtuoso David Popper, an exciting work that is propelled ever onward by its own momentum but is not lacking in elegant flourishes.



“Itamar Zorman Portrait,” music of Messiaen, Schubert, Chausson, Hindemith, Brahms – With Kwan Yi, piano (Profil)

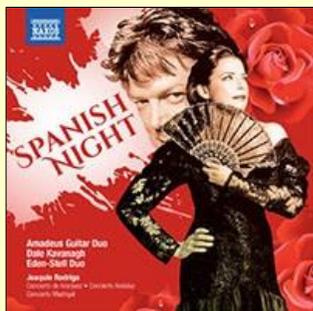
Certainly, few violinists have trained as long and as diligently for greatness as has Itamar Zorman. The young Tel Aviv native (b.1985) has performance degrees from the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, the Manhattan School of Music and the Juilliard School, and he is currently studying under Christian Tetzlaff at the Kronberg Academy in the German state of Hesse. His approach to the music he plays is both intelligent and passionate, and he invests it with one of the most beautiful violin tones I've heard from an upcoming artist in decades. I've previously reviewed him once before in August, 2012 in a recital by a group of engaging young artists who constitute the Israeli Chamber Project (Azica Records). The present CD is evidently his debut as a soloist in the spotlight, and it's a good one!

With the very capable assistance of pianist Kwan Yi, Zorman tackles a diverse program of romantic and modern works. Olivier Messiaen is first up in the program, and Zorman and Yi invest his *Thème et Variations* with more passion and energy than I can recall hearing from a composer who is better known

Ausdruck (with liveliness and with feeling and expression throughout).

Of course, every single movement in every sonata in this recital does not fit this description. Beethoven always invested his sonatas with a good deal of contrast and variety of mood and tempo, and the five sonatas in this program are no exception. Nevertheless, the moments of poignancy and tristesse are comparatively rare here, and nowhere does he descend into a sense of the tragic. Brawn is cognizant of the moods throughout the recital, and his even-tempered approach allows him to discern the subtleties of rhythm (another Beethoven specialty) to complete satisfaction.

A good example of what we've been talking about is Sonata No. 15 in D, the so-called "Pastoral." That nickname was not Beethoven's own, but that of his publisher, and the bucolic appellation really describes only the opening Allegro with its simple, bouncy melody over a monotone "timpanic" bass and the sprited Rondo finale whose bass line reminds some listeners of a rustic gigue and others of a bagpipes. The composer, knowing the excesses of his fellow pianists marked the latter "*ma non troppo*" (but not too much), the first time he had ever used that qualification. The Andante, with its decidedly non-military march tempo in playful 16th note triplets and the rather frenetic, humorous Scherzo that follows it, do not fit in with the notion of a leisurely walk in the country, but they do show Beethoven's predilection for variety in his sonatas. James Brawn is keen on *that*, too.



"Spanish Night," Concertos for Guitar by Rodrigo Dale Kavanagh, Amadeus Guitar Duo, Eden-Stelle Duo (Naxos)

As you can gather from the booklet cover, Canadian guitarist Dale Kavanagh really pours herself into the role when it comes to the music of Spanish composer Joaquin Rodrigo (1901-1999). Together with her German concert partner Thomas Kirchhoff, they are known as the Amadeus Guitar Duo. On the present CD, enthusiastically supported by the Internationale-Philharmonie under Horst-Hans Backer, they give a generous program of music for guitar and orchestra by a composer who celebrated in his music the good and beautiful things of life – specifically, Spanish life.

From the evidence of his music, Rodrigo must have

for his cool lyricism, the product of his fascination for various forms of mysticism. Franz Schubert's Rondo in B minor, D.895, sometimes known (appropriately) as "*Rondo brillant*," is up next, and our artists make much of its portentous introduction, the seriousness of which proves to be a gag as it soon erupts into a vivacious rondo with a catchy theme that comes back at us with a fresh new face every time. As Schubert *will* be Schubert, it also has a brief mood of melancholy to offset its harmonic richness and general exuberance.

French composer Ernest Chausson is represented by his *Poème* in its alternative version for violin and piano. Written for no less a figure than the great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe, it features sinuous double-stop passages in the exposition (Ysaÿe later "fessed up" and admitted he had inscribed them over Chausson's manuscript). They have challenged violinists ever since. With its concerto-like brilliance, brooding intensity, and frequent changes in tempo markings, this work has become a perennial favorite among violinists. Zorman performs it here with all the considerable flair it requires.

Zorman next has the spotlight all to himself in Paul Hindemith's Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 31, No. 1, in which he brings out the feeling underneath the placid formal surface. He is especially impressive in the fourth movement, *Intermezzo: Lied*, which contrasts with the bustle of the concluding *Prestissimo*. Johannes Brahms' Sonata in D minor, Op. 108, concludes the program. Zorman and Kwan Yi have got its number as they realize its richness of feeling, its symphonic scope, and its frequent exchange of melody and accompaniment between the players – truly a sonata for violin *and* piano.



Schubert: Sonatas for Violin and Piano, D.384, 385, 408 – Tomas Cotik, violin; Lin Tao, piano (Centaur)

Tomas Cotik, native Argentinian whose international career is on the rise in the U.S., Canada, and Germany, brings a beautifully expressive sound to a delightful program of three sonatas by Franz Schubert. He is joined here by his frequent concert partner, Chinese-American pianist Tao Lin, who adds his keen intelligence and musical insight into the equation, making the present CD one you will want to listen to often.

been among the happiest of men. He was *that* despite the fact that he lost virtually all his eyesight due to an attack of diphtheria at the age of three. But he was happily married for more than sixty years to his fellow music student Victoria Kamhi, a descendant of Sephardic Jews from Turkey, and he often referred to the sounds of their grandchildren at play as “the most beautiful music in the world.” Further, he compensated for his loss of sight by developing an uncanny sensitivity to the sounds of the natural world, especially nocturnal sounds, that was rivaled only by Bela Bartok.

All that, plus an atmosphere that was quintessentially Spanish and could be mistaken for no other, suffuses the three major works on this program: *Concierto de Aranjuez*, with Kavanagh as soloist; *Concierto Andaluz for Four Guitars and Orchestra* in which the Amadeus Guitar Duo are joined by Mark Eden and Christopher Stell; and *Concierto Madrigal*, in which Kavanagh and Kirchhoff are the soloists. The performances have a vivacity that makes even as oft-performed a favorite as the *Aranjuez* an easy choice to recommend. The opening of this concerto, evocative of the sound of castanets and marked by irresistible vigor and a jauntily relentless pace, is succeeded by the *Adagio*, which contains what may well be the world’s most enduringly popular melody. First stated by the haunting sound of the *cor anglais*, it is then taken up and embellished with arabesques by the guitar, which explores it in dialog with other instruments – bassoon, oboe, and horn. The finale is a courtly dance in alternating double and triple time that keeps our soloist ever alert in her fingertips.

Though the *Aranjuez* is by far Rodrigo’s most popular work, the other works on the program have something to say, too. *Concierto Andaluz* develops among similar lines to the *Aranjuez*, including an *Adagio* that is hardly less memorable, set to the sensational sounds of four guitars. *Concierto Madrigal*, despite its title, is not a concerto but a suite in ten movements that convey the color and variety of Spain itself. The *Fandango*, *Arietta*, and *Zapateado* (a dance traditionally done in wooden shoes) are the heart of the matter.



Beethoven: Piano concerto no. 4 in major, Op. 58
+ Cadenzas by 11 composer-pianists
Jerome Lowenthal, piano (LP Classics)

Jerome Lowenthal, American pianist who studied piano in his native Philadelphia with Olga Samaroff (Mrs.

These three violin and piano sonatas were penned by Schubert in March and April, 1816, when he was just nineteen years of age. They were not published in his lifetime, but only eight years after his death, when the publisher advertised them as “sonatinas,” no doubt in the interest of appealing to the amateur trade. Since then, critics have often downplayed their importance, damning them with faint praise. The note to these works on the Arkivmusic.com website is typical: “Though they do not rank among Schubert’s finest works they offer interesting insights into his complex musical character.”

I beg to differ. As high-spirited works, they are undeniably *gemütlich* in many ways. There is also much zestful virtuosity in these three Sonatas, D384 in D major, D385 in A minor, and D408 in G minor – and not just in the violin part. All three possess the remarkable lyricism that reminds us that Schubert was the first great master of the German *lied*, or art song. A less obvious characteristic of these works, for those who are willing to take the trouble to listen for it, is a discordant note of urgency, such as we hear in the strident opening of the A minor sonata, with its angular *sturm-und-drang* theme in the violin over pounding chords in the piano. Even its third movement is brusquer and more urgent than any Minuet has a right to be. There is also a note of gentle melancholy in the lovey melodies in the slow movements of this sonata and the one in G minor.

So, there is more to this music than mere entertainment. That helps make Schubert’s music stand out from that of his post-Congress of Vienna contemporaries. In fact, I find these modest works more interesting than the symphonies the composer had produced up to this time in his career. Tomas Cotik, who did his doctoral research on the interpretation of Schubert’s sonatas, applies his customary warmth to the task in these recordings, for which Tao Lin once again proves the ideal partner.



Haydn: The Seven Last Words
Attacca String Quartet
(Azica Records)

They are not your typical quartet. Comprised of Amy Schroeder and Keiko Tokunaga, violins; Luke Fleming, viola; and Andrew Yee, cello, they got

Leopold Stokowski), in New York with William Kapell and Edward Steuermann, and in Paris with Alfred Cortot, goes back a long way in his career as a performing artist. He has had an equally distinguished career as a teacher, particularly at the Juilliard School since 1991 and at the Music Academy of the West for 39 summers. Considering the mileage on this artist, his fluency, sureness of touch, insight into the aesthetic and cultural values in the music he performs, and the poetic sensibility he applies to a given score, seem in no way diminished by the years. At the age of 83, he remains an eternally youthful performer.

All these qualities, and more, come to the fore in as fine an account as you will ever hear of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto. From the beginning, Beethoven's contemporaries must have realized there was something extraordinary, and extraordinarily daunting, about this work. The *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of May, 1809 described it as "the most admirable, singular, artistic and complex Beethoven concerto ever." With its restless triplet accompaniments, its frequent strettis between upper and lower voices, and its wide dynamic range, it was simply more than the flashy virtuosi of the day were accustomed to handling.

For his part, Beethoven didn't trust his fellow pianists, either. He took the extraordinary measure, for his day, of writing the first and third movement cadenzas in full, as a way of saying "don't mess up my material with your glass chandelier pianistics!" If that were so, his fears were groundless. Following Beethoven's own 1807 premiere of this concerto, no one else was inclined to take up the challenge for almost thirty years until Mendelssohn championed it in 1836. Since then, it has found a secure place in the repertoire of every Beethoven interpreter. Curiously, it has also become a lightning rod for composer/pianists who have been challenged to write their *own* cadenzas as a way of expressing their views on this masterpiece.

Accordingly, Lowenthal gives us cadenzas by no fewer than 10 other figures who have succumbed over the past two centuries to the temptation to participate with Beethoven on his unique voyage of discovery. They are as follows: Clara Schumann, Anton Rubinstein, Hans von Bülow, Johannes Brahms, Camille Saint-Saëns, Ferruccio Busoni, Leopold Godowsky, Ernst von Dohnányi, Nicolai Medtner, and, by special invitation, Lowenthal's own contemporary Frederic Rzewski. The cadenzas range from Clara Schumann's delicate poetic sensibility to Rubinstein's magisterial take on Beethoven and the powerfully charged energy of Busoni's individualism.

The Rzewski is the most extraordinary of all, a far-ranging 11-minute fantasy that takes the structure of Beethoven's opening movement apart and then puts it back together again in time for the pianist to rejoin the orchestra at the end. In the process, he breaks up the composer's sophisticated harmonies like a refracting mirror breaking up a solar spectrum into sharp

themselves organized as the Attacca String Quartet while at the Juilliard School in 2003 and made their professional debut four years later. Since, they have won prizes and been named artists in residence at various music institutions. But the thing you *really* need to know about them is that they have a positive "Jones" for the music of Franz Josef Haydn.

The Father of the String Quartet exerts an unusual fascination for this ensemble, and they explore his quartet music with utter dedication, reflected in earnest scholarship allied with a sensitivity to feeling and nuance that is rare in performers this young. Their latest endeavor is the present Azica Records offering of Haydn's Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross. This is a daunting undertaking from more than one point of view. Not only is it a very long work, but Haydn was under the additional constraint, by the terms of its commission, to write a work for orchestra that would consist of seven slow movements, each a meditation on one of the Seven Last Words of Christ. The work soon became so popular he was obliged to prepare piano four-hands and string quartet versions for home use, and eventually an oratorio on the same subject.

The problem for performers is that the quartet version seems to have been a rush job. Haydn (or a collaborator) merely transferred the first and second violin, viola, and cello parts from the orchestra to the string quartet without making any alterations, and ignoring the fact that the orchestral version uses a bass to provide the lower octave when the violas and cellos are playing in unison. Also, the wind parts were completely left out of consideration.

In preparing a new version for string quartet, cellist Andrew Yee reasoned correctly that the oratorio version of The Seven Last Words, written ten years after the original, represented Haydn's final thoughts on the subject and that it is, demonstrably, the most distinguished version of the four. He followed it as a guideline in enlarging the harmony, changing octaves to avoid unisons, and discretely adding double stops to individual parts – all in a vein that one feels would have pleased Haydn immensely.

The end result was the exquisite version we hear in the present performance. The expressive beauty of Haydn's writing comes through on every page, from the stern Introduction with its mood of darkness and sorrow to the serene consolation and indescribable bliss of the settings for the final words "It is finished" and "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." It concludes with a sensational simulation of the earthquake that rent the veil of the Temple at the very end, a hair-raising finish summoning all the violence and terror Haydn could muster (in what was apparently music history's first triple fortissimo). The sensitivity to nuance and warmth of feeling manifested in this performance by the Attacca Quartet move it right to the head of the competition.

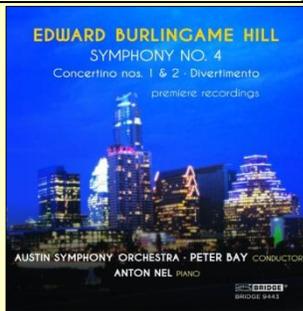
fragments of light. All this with the incredible style of a modern composer whose own piano technique has been described as “granitically overpowering.” The results are not terribly euphonious and not to every listener’s taste, but they are undeniably compelling.

So is the program of cadenzas by other composers that fill up most of the program. They will undoubtedly hold more interest for scholars and performers than they will the general listener, who may wish to content himself to

Continued from the previous column:

Beethoven’s original concerto with his own cadenzas on tracks 1-5 of Disc 1. Happily, the present 2-CD digipak is specially priced to make it attractive to the non-specialist. If you have a programmable DVD player, you can use your remote to listen to the basic concerto with any choice of cadenzas you desire. So there really is something for everyone here!

To be continued in column on right ==>



Edward Burlingame Hill: Symphony No.4, Divertimento, 2 Concertinos for Piano and Orchestra
Aton Nel, piano; Peter Bay, Austin Symphony (Bridge Records)

If you’d never heard of Edward Burlingame Hill (1872-1960), don’t feel bad. I hadn’t either, until just recently. He was one of what has been called a “lost generation” of American figures, though he was no means lacking in influence. He taught many of the upcoming American composers during his long tenure (1908-1940) as a professor at Harvard, where he himself had studied under John Knowles Paine. From Paine, a notable musical conservative, Hill derived his considerable knowledge of counterpoint and fugue, which he wears lightly in his Symphony No. 4 in E-flat major (1940-1941). But he was also more adventurous than his mentor in his musical interests, which included the French music of the impressionists and neo-classicists which he encountered during his travels and made known to his contemporaries in his book *Modern French Music* (1924).

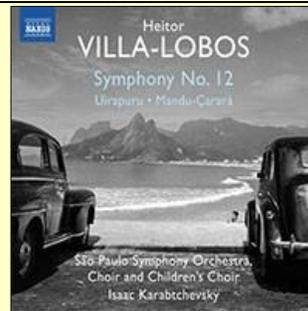
From the evidence of the Fourth Symphony, Hill understood how to use the orchestra for best effect, making discrete use of the bassoon and other woodwinds for expressive



Standford: Symphony No. 1, “Seasons” + Cello Concerto, The Naiades – Raphael Wallfisch, cello; David Lloyd-Jones, Royal Scottish National Orchestra (Naxos)

The late Patric Stanford (1939-2014) toiled long in the fields of Orpheus, with surprisingly fruitful results. For most of his career, he combined teaching at the Guildhall school of Music in London where he succeeded his mentor Edmund Rubbra as principal composition professor, with writing music. On the evidence of the present CD, the results were remarkably fresh and far less academic than you might have thought.

Stanford’s official first symphony, after several misfires, was the glorious 1972 work we hear on this disc, subtitled “The Seasons.” You can forget about the Seasons of all other composers from Vivaldi to Tchaikovsky: this one is different. Instead of pictorialism, we have mood, created by the composer’s masterful grasp of nuances in color, texture, and rhythm, and with little in the way of might be conventionally termed “melody.” It grew out of a work for strings that had been intended as a memorial to Sir John Barbirolli, one of the heroes of Stanford’s youth.



Villa-Lobos: Urupurú, Symphony No. 12, Mandu-Carará – Isaac Karabtschevsky, Sao Paulo Symphony Orchestra, Choir and Children’s Choir (Naxos)

The joy of discovery and the sheer fun we derive from the music of Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1957) never seem to end. The Brazilian composer who singly-handedly lifted the music of his land to the level of international significance, was as prolific as he was original in his fusion of Brazilian popular and folk music, including music of the native Amerindians, with classical European forms going back as far as J. S. Bach (hence the name “*Bachianas Brasileiras*” for nine of his highly diverse compositions).

He typically composed music in a white heat of inspiration and found it easier to write an entirely new composition than revise an existing one. Also, he sometimes misplaced a score (his Fifth Symphony of 1920, “*La Paz*,” has seemingly been lost forever). His manuscripts continue to bedevil editors with their apparent errors, usually indicating passages that have been deemed either difficult or impossible to play, but can sometimes be reconciled with Villa-Lobos’ own recordings.

In the present Naxos release, Isaac

purposes while cultivating an attractively layered string sound. Since Hill wrote the work in the period leading up to the entrance of the United States into World War II, we might expect a certain martial energy and force, but such is not the case. He *does* stream a transformed version of “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee” in the opening movement, but it never emerges into full-blown Kate Smith intensity. Instead, we have an opening tremolo in the strings, presaging a continuous development in which a pensive mood predominates. It seems to appeal to a summoning-up of courage that the composer perhaps felt Americans would need in the days ahead.

The calm second movement is a freely handled passacaglia with an intimate melody in the English horn that keeps coming back at us as the music ranges from grandiosity to intimacy. The final movement, a hybrid of rondo and variation form that Beethoven would have approved, is lighter than its predecessors and is filled with high spirits and bouncy syncopations. As accessible as this work is, it is nothing short of astonishing to realize that it was never performed in Hill’s lifetime. In fact, it had to wait until 31 May, 2013 when Peter Bay conducted the Austin Symphony, augmented to 89 members for its world premiere performance, to be heard by *any* audience anywhere – 72 years after its completion!

The other works heard in this program – a flirtatious Divertimento for Piano and Orchestra (1927) and two Concertinos for Piano and Orchestra (1931 and 1938-39) were likewise never recorded for posterity until Bay and the Austin, with pianist Anton Nel as distinguished collaborator, performed them at the Long Center for the Performing Arts, 10-11 January, 2014. Happily, the performances are all sufficiently infectious to render a true account of a composer who proves easy to get to know and love.

Much of this earlier music is found in “Summer,” where expansive warmth in the strings and a scintillating percussion create feelings of optimism, as befit the subject. It is preceded by a remarkably robust “Spring,” which trips in on steady drum beats, bursting with energy. “Autumn” is the most detailed movement in terms of the moods and images conveyed: in the composer’s own words, “English autumnal mist, weak sunlight shimmering on beads of rain covering vast spider webs, the sighing of falling leaves, and evening lamplight reflected from damp pavements.” “Winter” is a vigorous struggle against cold blasts of wind and weather, incorporating a brass chorale that Stanford had originally written for his oratorio *Christus Requiem*, and ending triumphantly on an E-flat harmony.

The Cello Concerto (1974) is built around the theme of the fifth movement, *Ihr habt nur Traurigkeit* (Now you have only sorrow) from Brahms’ German Requiem. The composer merges it subtly into the body of the work, with the cellist weaving “a determined expanded melody line, and then later a gentler, broadly ascending phrase” (Stanford). The central movement is a scherzo that allows Stanford to meet one of his favorite challenges, which is to keep the pulse steady while the momentum goes airborne.

Prelude to a Fantasy, subtitled “The Naiades,” evokes those sprightly water nymphs of Greek mythology who had the vital task of keeping the sources of flowing water pure, in streams, fountains, springs, lakes, and rivers. Like the mythological creatures it describes, Stanford’s music is continually on the move, “ever dancing and restless like children,” with no temptation to lapse into dreamy reflection. The way he streams the flutes and other woodwinds into a continuous fabric of sound is particularly remarkable. A happy discovery, this CD program – all the pleasanter for being unexpected.

Karabtchevsky conducts the Sao Paulo Symphony and choirs in a diverse program that illustrates the many sides of a figure who once said of himself, “I do not use folklore, I am the folklore.” The earliest work, *Uirapurú* (1917) is of balletic inspiration, using folklore-like elements and vivid orchestration to tell the story of an Indian huntress who kills an enchanted bird which turns into Uirapurú, the god of love. Highly evocative of the sounds of the Amazon forest creatures at night, it remains one of Villa-Lobos’ most popular works.

Symphony No. 12, with which Villa-Lobos celebrated his 70th birthday, was written at a time when avant-garde composers were writing a lot of serial compositions, musique concrète, and electronic works, most of which have since fallen into well-deserved oblivion. Never one to flow with the stream, Villa-Lobos continued to reassert the vitality of classical forms throughout this era in his symphonies and string quartets. With this recording, Karabtchevsky reaches the midpoint in his cycle of the composer’s dozen symphonies, which vary greatly in scoring and purpose. This one is economically constructed. The form serves to highlight the vivacity of the material, in particular the humor and brilliance of the Scherzo.

The 1940 cantata for chorus and children’s choir *Mandu-Cará* is as enticing as it is obscure. A work written ostensibly to entertain children, it transcends that modest purpose. Villa-Lobos put together several native legends to create a story of children who have been abandoned in the forest in order to meet the god of the dance Mandu-Cará. They do, but not before they are menaced by the man-eating demon Curupira. The music, contrasting adult voices and orchestra with the sounds of a children’s choir, makes sensational use of onomatopoeia, simultaneous layers of sound, staccato phrasings and obsessive repetitions. This work is a spell-binder to the very end. Let’s hope the present recording makes many new friends for it!

