

Phil's Classical Reviews

Atlanta Audio Club

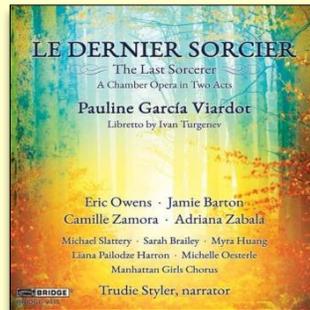
May, 2019



"Edge of Youth," music of Enescu, Mazzoli, Britten, Visconti, G. Prokofiev - Janet Sung, violin; William Wolfram, piano (Sono Luminus)

Janet Sung, assisted by pianist William Wolfram, gives an intriguing, technically awesome, and frequently moving program of works by two great 20th century composers and three up-coming contemporaries. The music is often very demanding, for artists and listeners alike. Writes Sung: "Each of these works are dramatic, visceral, even ethereal and otherworldly. Some also have moments of soaring lyricism and intimacy."

The New York City native who studied privately with Joseph Gingold for ten years and then at the Juilliard School really knows her stuff when it comes to violin technique. That's important because the challenges the present program makes can be fiendish. *Impressions d'enfance* (Childhood Impressions) by Georges Enescu, for example, uses sounds and imagery to relive the experiences of a wide-eyed child through the course of a day, connecting them in a dreamlike sequence. We have memories of a gypsy fiddler, an aged beggar, a flowing brooklet, the chirping sounds of crickets, a caged songbird and a cuckoo, moonlight shining through window curtains, a storm gathering at night, and finally a sunrise. Sung evokes all of these with a variety of atmospheric techniques that include high-on-the-bridge bowings and pointillistic scrapings. The rapport of



Le Dernier Sorcier, chamber opera in 2 acts by Pauline Garcia Viardot, with vocalists, piano accompanists, and the Manhattan Girls' Chorus (Bridge Records)

Le Dernier Sorcier (The Last Sorcerer) has waited a long time, more than 150 years in fact, for the first professional performance of the original score by Pauline Garcia Viardot. The composer was a famous soprano for whom roles were written by some of the great French operatic composers of the day. An intimate of the leading musical and literary figures, she was a fixture in the most fashionable mid-nineteenth century Paris salons.

Her admirers included the Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev, who wrote the libretto for *The Last Sorcerer*. The tale concerns the once-powerful sorcerer Krakamiche who seeks to recover his lost powers by perusing Merlin's book of sorcery, and whose very presence in the woods is odious to the fairies, mischievous sprites who love to tease and torment him, even to the extent of spinning him like a top.

Krakamiche has a fair daughter, Stella. She, in turn, is wooed by Lelio, a king's son, who is given a magic flower by the Queen of the Fairies that will render him invisible. With this device, he is able to be privy to Stella's thoughts of love and married bliss until, at the moment of truth, he drops the flower and reveals his feeling for her. At the end, Lelio and Stella are to be wed, Krakamiche goes off to live with them in their castle beyond the



French Cello Concertos: Saint-Saëns, Lalo, Massenet, etc Hee-Young Lim, cello; Scott Yoo, London Symphony Orchestra (Sony Classical)

Korean cellist Hee-Young Lim gives us accounts of French cello concertos and encores that fit hand-in-glove with her basic instinct as a performing artist, in particular her love of carressing the deeply expressive melodies and flowing passages that suit the capabilities of her instrument so perfectly. Lim confesses that the choice of the repertoire heard in this recording was all the more congenial to her for her debut recording because it was close to her and felt "right" more than did the big concertos (Dvorak, Elgar, Schumann) that she might otherwise have chosen.

Revealingly, she admits the joy she feels in playing Concerto No 1 in A minor by Camille Saint-Saëns because it takes the cello across its range from very low to very high. In particular, "It's very satisfying and special to show the very lowest register of the cello, which I love and you don't get to do that often!" One of the most demanding and deeply satisfying works in the repertoire, it is in three tightly structured sections, so that its movements flow without a break, "like one 17-minute breath" (actually, 19:49 in the present account). There does not seem to be a superfluous note or gesture anywhere in a work where melodies and counter-melodies seem to flow with complete spontaneity as cello and orchestra call and answer each

her violin and Wolfram's piano is just what Enescu, who was himself renowned as a performer on both instruments, calls for.

Dissolve, O My Heart by Missy Mazzoli (b.1980) was originally inspired by J.S. Bach's Partita in D minor (the one with the famous Chaconne), and may be thought of as Bach seen through the lens of contemporary music. Mazzoli talks of an "off-kilter series of chords that doubles back on itself, collapses, and ultimately dissolves in a torrent of fast passages," and implies that the climax of this piece calls for "slightly deranged" and aggressive bowing, an amenity Janet Sung is well equipped to provide.

Benjamin Britten's Suite for Violin and Piano, Op. 6, is characterized by the wit and humor the composer in his early 20's invested in it, including a parody of a march, a movement in perpetual motion marked *con fuoco* (with fire) and a waltz, by turns languid and frenetic. By way of contrast, Britten invests the fourth movement, Lullaby, with music of deep feeling and tranquility, a change of pace Sung and Wolfram are quick to recognize and exploit.

Rave-Up by Dan Visconti (b.1982) is imbued with the manic energy and improvisational spirit of rock music, with some influence of blues and folk, all wound up with the groove-driven sound of the electric guitar. More a display of reckless energy than purely musical qualities, it requires the sort of pyrotechnics that Sung and her partner are well equipped to give it.

Finally, Sleeveles Scherzo for solo violin by Gabriel Prokofiev (b.1975) is described by its composer as "slightly schizophrenic" because of its mood swings from sadness to excitement, joy, curiosity, and anxiety. By turns manic, dreamy, and surreal, it all ends in an edgy resolution that may be a kind of acceptance after all. Janet Sung encompasses all of these moods with a seamless technique that is truly impressive.

forest, and all principal characters live happily ever after. That includes Krakamiche's servant Perlimpinpin, once a proud giant, but who, sharing his master's sad fate, has been reduced to the stature of a dwarf! The four sing a final unaccompanied quartet, "*Adieu, témoins de ma misère*" (Farewell, witnesses of my misfortune) and depart, leaving the forest to the fairy-sized miscreants and their queen.

Camille Zamora, the soprano who sings the role of Stella, also wrote the program notes and the English narration linking the vocal numbers. In a bit of hyperbole, she describes the chamber opera as being "centered on themes of power and progress, gender and equality, and the restoration of natural order in an ever-changing world – a feminist eco-fable in operatic form." That assessment may be politically correct in terms of today's world, touching on all the bases, but it is really making too much of what is, after all, merely a pleasant trifle.

Fine performances by bass-baritone Eric Owens (Krakamiche), mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton (the Queen), mezzo-soprano Adriana Zabala (Lelio), tenor Michael Slattery (Perlimpinpin), soprano Sarah Bailey (the impish fairy Verveine), and Zamora herself (Stella) help to put over a rather improbable story which is rendered more palatable by its graceful and well-supported vocal parts (Being one of the leading sopranos of her day, Garcia Viardot knew something about that subject.)

Good support is given here by the Manhattan Girls' Chorus under founder / director Michelle Oesterle, pianists Liana Pailodze Harron and Myra Huang, and narrator Trudie Styler.

other playfully. Right from the orchestra's opening chord, says Lim, "you feel that a storm is coming, and then by contrast the second theme is so peaceful, so tranquil." There is a rightness about this work that Lim recognizes and captures so well for us, even in the middle movement which begins and ends turbulently, with a major surprise in the very middle in the form of a classical minuet of the greatest charm and elegance.

Edouard Lalo's Concerto in D minor is more discursive and episodic than the Saint-Saëns, almost as if its three movements were meant to stand alone as concert pieces. Highly intense and virtuosic, with Spanish rhythms that remind us of Lalo's more famous *Symphonie Espagnole* for violin and orchestra, it demands a lot from the artist in the way of fast, aggressive arpeggios and relentless sixteenth notes in the opening movement. Lim handles the challenges in this work, from the strong masculine theme in the opening movement that reminds her of soldiers marching to the fast scale passage and a sensational C-sharp trill at the very end, with deceptive ease and a beautiful singing tone.

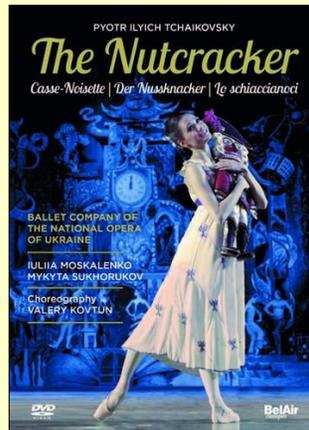
Darius Milhaud's many-layered Cello Concerto No. 1, Op. 136, initially seems to hew to traditional lines but soon gives way to a sense of barely contained wildness and themes that seem almost to free-associate. From the tension at the very opening, we move to jazz-inflected music that recalls Paris in the 1920's and 30's. The slow movement, *Grave*, lives up to its name: dark, melancholy and menacing, as if the music were trying to shake off a bad memory. The last movement, *Joyeux*, is unexpectedly festive, though with nagging dissonances.

For encores, we have Jacques Offenbach's *Les Larmes de Jacqueline* which appropriately contains "tears" in its harmonies, and an exalted account of Jules Massenet's enduringly popular *Meditation* from *Thais*. Both are well-suited to Lim's deep feeling and love of melody.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's ballet the Nutcracker lives once again, in 16/9 Full HD color image, PCM stereo and 5.1 Dolby Digital sound. Gloriously subtle staging by Mariia Levytska and lighting by Igor Samarets work together to achieve incredibly smooth scene changes that do not disrupt the flow of the ballet for even an instant. That's important because there's a lot going on in this new staging of Tchaikovsky's enduring favorite that must flow without interruption and with the exceptional smoothness it receives here.

A lot has happened to the scenario by Marius Petipa after the original story by ETA Hoffmann since The Nutcracker premiered in 1892. One important change that has been ongoing since American ballerina Gelsey Kirkland made a sensation in the part of Clara opposite Mikhail Baryshnikov in 1977 has been the tendency to build up the importance of the role. That trend reaches its apex in the present performance by the Ballet Company of the Ukraine National Opera in choreography superbly designed and directed by Valery Kovtun.

Here, the young girl Clara is not just an observer of romantic love and its fruition in the adult world, but she participates actively in the love story in her imagination. In fact, she takes over the basic dance repertoire of the Sugar Plum Fairy, who was courted by the Nutcracker Prince in the original scenario but is here reduced to a minor figure. Clara becomes the love interest of the Prince, if only in a dream from which she emerges at the end of the ballet, asleep in her father's arms on the return home from the Christmas party with which the story began.



Tchaikovsky: The Nutcracker, Complete Ballet – Iuliia Moskalenko, Mykyta Sukhorukov, Ballet Company of the National Opera of Ukraine, conducted by Oleksiy Baklan (BelAir Classiques DVD)

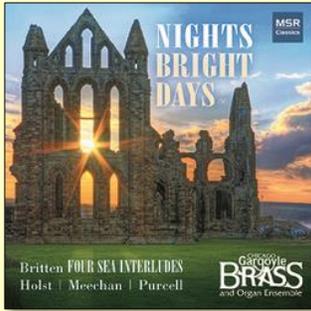
True to the original scenario, Clara receives the decidedly odd present of a grotesque-looking nutcracker dressed in a soldier's garb at the Christmas party. Later that night, as she is menaced by the Mouse King and his horde of sinister rodents, the Nutcracker springs into action and drives the attackers off at the cost of his own life. Clara's love for the Nutcracker causes him to come to life again in his true natural form as a tall, handsome prince who had been imprisoned by a witch in the shape of the afore-said cracker of nuts and is now released.

At this point, we are treated to the gloriously exultant music from the "Forest of Fir Trees in Winter" tableau originally intended, together with the Waltz of the Snowflakes, as an entre-acte between Acts 1 and 2.

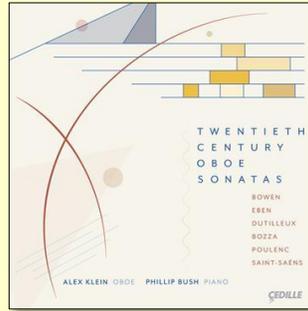
Here it is danced as a pas de deux, in celebration of Clara's deliverance from her attackers and the Prince's regaining of his human form. The clash of percussion at its climax thus seems eminently appropriate.

Upon his return to his own kingdom, the Prince and Clara are menaced once again by the (incongruous?) re-appearance of the Mouse King and his grisly rat-inue, only this time the Prince gains the upper hand and runs the villain through. They are then entertained by the Prince's subjects with the same familiar divertissement of national dances - Spanish, Chinese, Indian, and so forth - that have become a standard concert favorite as the heart of Nutcracker Suite No. 1. The Trepak becomes a Ukrainian folk dance by a man and woman in festive peasant costumes, and there is a short suite of waltzes for two French couples.

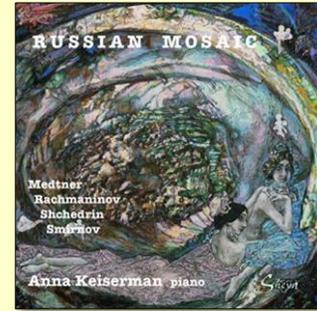
Clara then dances the Waltz of the Sugar Plum Fairy, and the festivities are climaxed by her final pas de deux with the Prince, which is the apotheosis of their mutual love. For encores, we are given another pas de deux plus solo dances by the principals (Iuliia Moskalenko and Mykyta Sukhorukov), both of whom impress with their marvelous control and athleticism which will astonish even seasoned balletomanes. Her sensational leaps and his seemingly effortless lifts of her call for special attention. We are then given encores by the supporting couples from the divertissement. All this takes about a quarter of an hour to carry off, but with dancing of this calibre, who's watching the clock? Certainly not the audience whose enthusiastic applause includes the rhythmic clapping that Europeans accord their special favorites.



“Nights Bright Days,” music by Britten, Holst, Meechan, Purcell
Gargoyle Brass and Organ
(MSR Classics)



Twentieth Century Oboe Sonatas:
Bowen, Eben, Dutilleux, Bozza,
Poulenc, Saint-Saëns – Alex Klein,
oboe; Phillip Bush, piano (Cedille)



Russian Mosaic: Piano works by
Rachmaninov, Medtner, Shchedrin
& Smirnov - Anna Keiserman
(Sheva)

What I said in October, 2015 about the awesome performances and demonstration-class recorded sound of the Chicago Gargoyle Brass and Organ Ensemble’s earlier album *Flourishes, Tales and Symphonies* still goes in their latest release, *Nights Bright Days*. Under the direction of conductor Stephen Squires, and including the Oriana Singers and City Voices of Chicago under artistic director William Chin in *Love Songs* by Peter Meechan, we have here a fabric of sounds and hues that can be nothing short of ravishing in their beauty

The program of music by English composers starts off with an arrangement of the Symphony and opening chorus from Henry Purcell’s *Birthday Ode for Queen Mary*, “Come, Ye Sons of Art.” Purcell’s best qualities are all here, including the charming melodies, infectious rhythms, and lithe, flexible lines that the composer commanded with such endless versatility. The present reconstruction of the symphony adds a vigorous Allegro in 9/8 as a bridge to the Ode, in keeping with its mood of joyful celebration.

Peter Meechan (b.1980) composed *Love Songs* (2016) as a handsome setting of four of Shakespeare’s Sonnets that constitute a journey through the various phases of life and love. We are given settings of Sonnets 71 (*No longer mourn for me when I am dead*), 147 (*My love is as a fever, longing still*), 43 (*When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see*), and 116 (*Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments*).

Alex Klein, world-famous American musician of Brazilian origin, was principal oboe with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 1995 to 2004. He feels a special affection for “the best music an oboe player can play,” six examples of which are found in the present program. These six sonatas for oboe and piano are especially meaningful for Klein because he had to leave the CSO due to complications arising from a condition known as Musician’s Focal Dystonia. Slowly and courageously he relearned how to play his instrument so that he was able to successfully audition for his former position in 2016.

One who has been through the experiences that Alex Klein has is not likely to take success for granted, particularly given his awareness that “I now have more years behind than in front.” It makes the performances on this release, so beautifully crafted by Klein and pianist Phillip Bush, the more treasurable. They are captured optimally by the efforts of producer James Ginsburg, sound engineer Bill Maylone, and editor Jeanne Velonis, names I’ve often had occasion to recognize in this column, at the performance studio of WFMT Chicago.

The program begins with Sonata, Op. 85 by British composer York Bowen (1884-1961), a work notable for its graceful and fluid writing and particularly for the natural ebb and flow of his melodies. As program annotator Leon Shernoff observes, “they seem to repeat, waxing and

It’s a long way from Ekaterinburg to New York, but Russian émigré Anna Keiserman has made the uprooting and replanting in American soil just fine. And her insights into the four masters of Russian piano music we have here bring them to instant, vibrant life before our very ears.

Sergei Rachmaninov’s *Études-tableaux*, Op. 33, leads off the program in splendid style. The ostinato rhythm driving the opening Étude in F minor has a powerful sweep that compels our attention, particularly given the very full tone and vital energy that Keiserman brings forth from her instrument. One imagines something between a Cossack march and a coronation. Étude No. 2 in C major in 12/8 time has a melody that flows over its unusual rhythm like a conversation, though it is also quite possible to visualize a dismal landscape with clouds, rain and lightning, and with songs asking unanswered, and ultimately unanswerable, questions.

Well, you kind of get the idea. Rachmaninov’s music in these études is so powerfully evocative, even though he himself did not assign descriptive titles or programs to any of them, that it invites us to participate in our imagination. In this program Keiserman restores Études 3-5 which the composer left out of the original publication. No. 3 seems to be a descent into gloom after a gradual brightening following the clouds and rain of No. 2, and No. 4 the dramatization of an old Russian liturgical chant. No. 5 appears to evoke a numbing snowstorm with

This is Shakespeare at his most pungent, in poetry that Meehan takes to represent four phases of the love experience: Lost Love, Love's Betrayal, Love's Dream, and Love's Ideal. The varied settings for brass quintet, speaker, organ, and choir depend on the individual needs of the poem, with the well-modulated voice of narrator Kevin Gudahl being particularly distinguished as the means of bringing out the essential character of each sonnet.

Next, we are given Craig Garner's arrangement for brass and organ of Song Without Words: "I love my Love" from Gustav Holst's Suite No. 2 for military band, an enduring concert favorite reflecting the composer's abiding interest in English folk song.

Lastly, we have extremely intelligent and poignant arrangements for brass quintet, organ, timpani and percussion of the enduringly popular Four Sea Interludes from Benjamin Britten's opera Peter Grimes. The Passacaglia interlude between the first two scenes of Act II is added here as a very satisfying conclusion to a suite that is characterized by the feelings of repressed sexual desire, guilt, impending fate, and atonement by drowning that make Britten's opera the compelling tale that it is.

In *Dawn*, Britten's bare melodic line evokes pale morning sunlight, while sombre brass harmonies add a disturbing element to the music. *Sunday Morning* evokes the sound of church bells, although jagged rhythms soon become dominant, undermining the mood of peace that one usually associates with this particular subject. *Moonlight* is quiet and slow-moving, with the intrusion of staccato figures that stab the listener like splinters of light. Finally, *Storm* is filled with mounting elemental fury, violent conflicts in brass and organ, and sensational percussion that include some really fear-inspiring timpani wallops.

The happy inspiration to follow the Four Sea Interludes with the rarely programmed Passacaglia permits it to serve as the final commentary on a tale of tragic implications. The

waning, until they build up enough momentum to overflow their boundaries and pour onward to the next part of the piece." Oboe Sonata, Op. 1 by Czech composer Petr Eben (1929-2007) is in three movements: an energetic Militare, a Pastorale that opens and closes with a sad harmony, and a finale entitled *Ballabile* that reflects the fullness of life, even to the extent of rowdiness.

Sonata for Oboe and Piano by Henri Dutilleux (1916-2013) is a many-sided work variously characterized by deceptively naïve melodies, Bartok-like games with repeated cells over a frequently percussive piano part, and abrupt key changes. Klein personally considers the Dutilleux, like the Sonata for Oboe and Piano, FP185 by Francis Poulenc (1889-1963), "impossible" because their composers call for things that "cannot be done" in the way of dynamics, expression, and technique. Then, he proceeds to do them. The task is especially daunting in the instance of the Poulenc, which pays Stravinsky the honor of duplicating the main theme of his Violin Concerto, right down to its steady 8th-note accompaniment and underlying harmony. Otherwise, it has Poulenc's usual manic traits, from anger in the energetic second movement to the calm impression of monks intoning plainchant in the third, with the tolling of a gigantic bell suggested by the piano.

Eugène Bozza (1905-1991) recalls a pastoral setting in his Sonata for Oboe and Piano. In the opening movement, stacks of fifths in the piano, sounding like distant bells in a vast landscape, allow Klein the freedom to float over the harmonies which he obviously finds quite congenial. The lassitude imparted by Bozza's use of extended binary form helps create the impression of a shepherd on a warm, lazy summer day. Finally, Sonata for Oboe and Piano, Op. 166 by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1931) is a work of infinite variety, dating from the very last year of a long creative life. There is some evidence of the neo-baroque, particularly in the second movement, *Sicilienne*, coexisting with the composer's late 19th century

gusts of shrieking wind, and No. 6, with its rapid passages made up of 16th notes, the bustling atmosphere of a Russian country fair.

Keiserman deftly underscores the somberness of No.7 in G minor, which quotes the tragic final bars of Chopin's Ballade in the same key. No. 8 in C-sharp minor and with duplicated octaves is a wide-ranging, incessant battle among three different thematic elements that Keiserman puts across with deceptive ease and composure. It also invites imagery, in this instance relating to some unspecified conflict of unimaginable proportions.

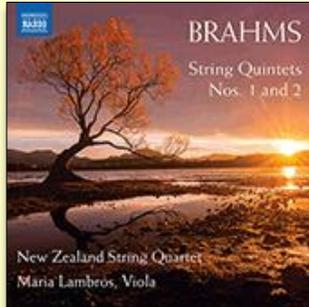
Nikolai Medtner's Sonata in G minor, Op. 22 follows next, and Keiserman makes a persuasive case for the greatness of vision of a composer for whom I'd previously found little occasion to feel warmth. As the pianist explains it, Medtner was a different kind of composer, one for whom a melody was intuitively acquired rather than invented. Harmony, for this composer, had a special relationship to form in ways that could not have been predicted. This particular sonata is a highly integrated work in a single movement with a fast-slow-fast design. Its central section, marked *Andante lugubre*, mediates between livelier outer sections, creating tensions which Keiserman resolves here to complete satisfaction.

There follow two living composers, Rodion Shchedrin (b.1932) and Grigory Smirnov (b.1982). *A la Albéniz* is Shchedrin's homage to the style of the Spanish composer with its distinctive rhythms and guitar-like sonorities, while *Troika* is, as its name suggests, a set of three, either a three-horse team pulling a sleigh or a lively folk dance of a man and two women. *2-Part Invention* and *Basso Ostinato* both reflect Shchedrin's ongoing preoccupation with rhythm and the resolving of the conflicts of form and chaos. Smirnov's *Elegy* (2014) seems to me to recall an earlier Russian fascination with orientalism, which in those times referred to the highly evocative, haunting music of the Muslim tribes of the Caucasus.

arrangements and performances in this recording are in fact so inspired that it made a deeper impression on me than any of the orchestral versions I'd previously heard.

romantic style. At the risk of seeming "radical," Klein opts to take the tempi faster than is usually done, as indicated by Saint-Saëns, who tended to be a no-boundaries composer himself in such matters.

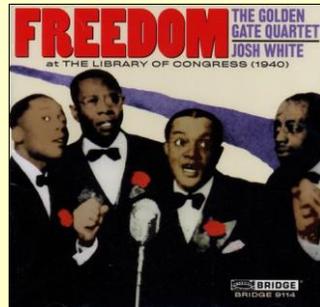
Keiserman applies her notable brilliance to create the strongest impressions of both composers.



Brahms: String Quintets, Opp. 88, 111 - New Zealand String Quartet, Maria Lambros, viola (Naxos)

The New Zealand String Quartet, now comprised of Helene Pohl, violin I; Monique Lapins, violin II; Gillian Ansell, viola; and Rolf Gjeltzen, cello, are joined by violist Maria Lambros for yet another distinguished album in their Brahms series. This time they explore the structural intricacies and sensual beauties – and not necessarily in that order – of the composer's two String Quintets. As it was with Mozart, Brahms opted for two violas instead of two cellos in scoring his quintets, a procedure that tends to enhance the beauty of the inner voices, making each of these works sound more like chamber music than they do a string serenade.

Quintet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 111, is heard first in the program. The precision of Brahms' expressive markings – *Allegro non troppo ma con brio* for the opening movement, *Vivace ma non troppo presto* for the finale – shows his passion for getting the emotive affect just right in this work. There is plenty of opportunity for spontaneous music making, from the call to adventure in a rippling cascade of 16th notes and a multi-octave theme, first heard in the cello in the opening movement, all the way through to a finale characterized by the gypsy flavor of a very energetic Hungarian czardas. In between, the slow movement

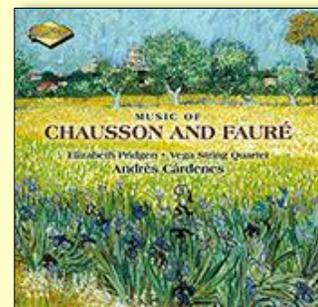


"Freedom," The Golden Gate Quartet and Josh White at the Library of Congress (1940) (Bridge Records)

What a great surprise (and a wonderful ear-opener) this CD is! The recording documents a remarkable event for its time, a 1940 festival held at the Library of Congress to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery and also "the contribution of the American Negro to American culture." Seventy-five more years plus some small change later, its spoken commentary and songs bring up issues and timeless truths that we need to take to heart today in an America where freedom and democracy still leave something to be desired.

The 59-minute program falls into three parts: Negro Spirituals (Freedom, Noah, O Mary Don't You Weep), Blues and Ballads (Poor Lazarus, John Henry, Silicosis Blues), and Reels and Work Songs (Old Dan Tucker, Mr. Rabbit Your Ear's Mighty Long, Run Sinner Run). In the last part there's an electrifying dramatization of a day in a railroad worker's camp in which narrator Alan Lomax and the Golden Gate Quartet recreate the work of laying down the rails, spiking them, lining them up, and tamping down the gravel so that the rails run true, all activities with their own unique traditional songs.

The recording is distinguished by the



Chausson & Fauré: Music Andrés Cárdenes, violin; Elizabeth Pridgen, piano; Vega String Quartet (Artek)

They say you have to take the French as you find them. That is not just a *bon mot* when it comes to music, as French composers in modern times have been notorious for going their own way, paying lip service to received notions of sonata form when it suited them, but infusing it with a veturesome spirit, especially when it came to matters of harmony, that was all their own.

That is nowhere truer than in the case of Concert in D Major for Violin, Piano, and String Quartet by Ernest Chausson. As an examination of the composer's manuscripts reveals, he sketched all of his principal themes at the same time, which is not surprising when you consider the cyclic integration he made of his material. It was not a concerto in the 19th century sense, but a concerted chamber work in the spirit (if not in the manner) of 18th century masters like Couperin and Rameau. It has been described as a friendly competition among heterogeneous elements consisting of a violin, a piano, and a string quartet. In its scoring, it ranges all the way from a piano solo to a violin sonata, a string quartet / quintet, and a piano sextet.

That suits all the artists in the present recording, violinist Andrés Cárdenes, pianist Elizabeth Pridgen, and the members of the Vega String

features free variations on the opening material, while the third movement, *Un poco allegretto*, opens in a melancholy-sounding G Minor, the mood of which is dispelled by the G Major trio section. In general, this quintet contains a greater portion of pure happiness than we might have expected from an ostensibly serious work, earning for it the nickname one sometimes hears of the "Prater," after Vienna's famous amusement park with the big ferris wheel.

The opening theme in Quintet No. 1 in F Major, Op. 88 is so lovely and transparent it is hard to resist, while the second subject has the character of a Viennese waltz. Very early on, the first viola introduces a major-third relationship (main theme in F, secondary theme in A) that will dominate all three movements. The middle movement has features of both slow movement and scherzo, and the cross-play between the two gives the music considerable variety and flavor. The slow music in this movement resolves into something more positive, in accord with the general mood of the work. In this movement, all the players must be continually alert for sudden changes of tempo and character.

The finale, *Allegro energico*, opens with two dramatic chords, followed by a fugal subject taken from the opening movement. Despite its use of a learned procedure, it surprises us with its very energetic character. As we have heard before in Op. 111, this performance of Op. 88 leaves us with the impression that the New Zealanders have really enjoyed a zestful and highly varied musical experience.

presence of Josh White, whose mellow light baritone voice and virtuoso guitar play to perfection either solo or against the relatively close but nonetheless individualized blend of voices in the Golden Gate Quartet (Orlandus Wilson, Clyde Riddick, Henry Owens, and Willie Johnson) with their sharp, clear attacks, broad dynamic range, and sustained tones. You hear them to best effect in a song like "Trouble," a bold expose of the tribulations of a fugitive on the run whose very title could serve to epitomize the blues.

And come to think of it, *what* exactly, are the blues? In terms of form, the vocal genre is so simple it's beautiful, and you can do a lot with it: a three-line stanza in which the second line repeats the first, often with a small variation in text and music, and the third line is the "clincher" that completes the thought. Each line takes up four measures of music, so the classic blues is twelve bars, with a peculiar scalar structure and a tendency to flatted thirds and sevenths.

So much for form. What grabs the listener in the blues is its mood: deeply melancholy with a flavor all its own. In the course of his erudite spoken commentary, Sterling Brown characterizes the blues as "nothin' but a poor man's heart disease" and the song of "a good man way, way down." Without disparaging the Tin Pan Alley blues of Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin, Brown makes the distinction that in the Tin Pan Alley variety "the grief is feigned," and in the folk blues, "the *gairty* is feigned." The humor in the blues is typically wry, twisted, and ironic: "It was better yesterday, it may be better tomorrow, but there's not much we can say about today, can we?"¹

Quartet, just fine, for it gives them plenty of opportunity to display their versatility. Highly chromatic and expressive, the Concert typically moves slowly toward the final return to the home key in modal shifts and half-steps rather than the usual process of key modulations, and its themes seem to be endlessly self-generating. There are unusual and challenging rhythms in this work, including a lilting Sicilienne in dotted 6/8 time, and moods ranging from a desolate third movement marked *Grave* to an increasingly complex and vigorous finale marked *Très animé*.

The violin part is particularly memorable, from the lyrical outburst of the first theme in the opening movement to the soaring octaves in the second theme and the close interplay with the piano in many places throughout the work. That the violin was played at the work's premiere by the great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe may help to account for the complexity of the part, a challenge that obviously pleases Cárdenes.

Gabriel Fauré's Sonata No. 1 in A Major for Violin and Piano affords Cárdenes and pianist Elizabeth Pridgen plenty of opportunities to enjoy a lavish tonal palette, along with altered chords, enharmonic shifts, and a florid lyricism that just won't stop. Both instruments are full partners in this work that contains some of Fauré's choicest writing. Unusual time signatures (9/8 in an Andante that has characteristics of both a waltz and a barcarolle, and 2/8 in a Scherzo, marked *Allegro vivo*, that changes to a more regular and almost danceable 3/4 in the trio section) add flavor to a work of much expressive beauty.

¹ That humor, by the way, has probably been the cause of a lot of misunderstanding between the races. The black person typically laughs ironically when things don't turn out "the way they supposed to" because he knows 'way down deep that it wasn't meant to happen. In the same situation, the white person, laboring under the common delusion of perfectionism that has permeated modern American life from Dale Carnegie and Norman Vincent Peale to the Human Potential movement, may fail to see what's funny.