

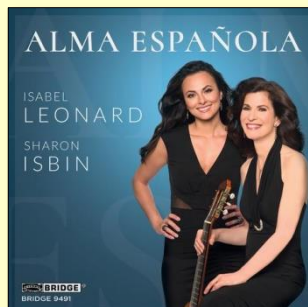


Schubert: Impromptus, Op. 90 + Schubert-Liszt: Four Song Transcriptions, Liszt: Venezia e Napoli – Mona Asuka, piano (Oehms Classics)

The German-Japanese pianist Mona Asuka shows an amazing maturity for one so young in this program of Schubert and Liszt interpretations. The *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* praised her at the time of her debut at the 2008 Ruhr Piano Festival for her “keen sense of what lies between the notes.” That is a something more to be felt than it is a matter you can describe objectively. It goes beyond the technical virtuosity required to play all the notes according to the composer’s markings, and even beyond the many subtle variations in tempo and dynamic shadings required by both Schubert and Liszt. You have to make these works plausible to yourself and your listener. It is as the American pianist Simone Dinnerstein hinted in her album *Something Almost Being Said*: “Bach and Schubert, to my ears, share a distinctive quality. Their non-vocal music has a powerful narrative, a vocal element... as though they might at any moment burst suddenly into speech” (see my *Classical Reviews*, Feb. 2012).

The word *impromptu* implies an inspired improvisation, something one might just toss off without reflection, on the spur of the moment. Schubert’s Four Impromptus, Op. 90, D.899 are much more than this. Each is a fully formed piece, capable of standing on its own merits. They are not trifles, nor are they an implied sonata in four movements, though they might seem superficially to answer the requirements of opening movement, scherzo, slow movement, and rousing finale (and were, in fact, hawked by Schubert’s publisher as such). Think of Chopin’s Four Ballades and you will have a clearer picture of Schubert’s intention.

The subdued mood with which No. 1 in C minor opens is laden with much inward pain, like a slow march to the scaffold, though the tension gradually resolves into tranquility and the piece ends in a softly radiant C major. In No. 2 in E-flat, the B section makes a dramatic entrance following the long skeins of songlike triplets that introduced the piece. Much rhythmically off-beat



“Alma Española,” Spanish songs and guitar pieces – Isabel Leonard and Sharon Isbin (Bridge Records)

In *Alma Española*, soprano Isabel Leonard and guitarist Sharon Isbin, two American ladies I’ve reviewed separately and with pleasure in the past, combine their artistry in a rich selection of songs and guitar pieces that get to the very soul of Spain, hence the album’s title.

Leonard, born in New York City of American and Argentine parents, is a lyric mezzo-soprano whose clarity in the upper range is matched by the depths of passion, in the best Spanish style, that she is able to convey in her mezzo range. She shows all these vocal qualities, plus a flair for the dramatic, in Manuel de Falla’s Seven Spanish Popular Songs (*Siete canciones populares españolas*) which range from the tenderness of the mother’s song to her sleeping child in *Nana* (Lullaby) to the furious invective of a spurned lover in *Polo*: “Love be damned, damned, / and damn him who made me understand it! ; *Ay!*”

That passionate outburst notwithstanding, many of these Spanish lyrics derive their emotional strength from understatement. A good example is Falla’s *El paño moruno* (The Moorish cloth) in which the unadorned simplicity of the words (On the fine cloth in the store / a stain has fallen; / It sells at a lesser price / because it has lost its value. ; *Ay!*) conceals the fact that the poem is about a woman who has been dishonored. In these Falla songs, Isbin’s guitar arrangements of existing versions by composer/guitarists Miguel Llobet and Emilio Pujol add immensely to our pleasure. The close mutual sympathy of Isabel Leonard and Sharon Isbin is perhaps most evident in their performance of Agustín Lara’s *Granada*. We have heard this chestnut so often in over-the-top renditions by operatic tenors accompanied by full orchestras, that it has overstayed its welcome. The present account by singer and guitarist lends a new, fresh perspective to this song.

In addition to her vocal prowess, Leonard is given the opportunity to display her skill in narration in the passages that are intended to be recited over the music

motion is a feature of this piece. The languid spaciousness of No. 3 in G-flat major, its melody taken from a song in Schubert's *Rosamunde*, calls for fine distinctions among half-lights and shy lights, of subtle colorings and textures where the hands may be required to unexpectedly change roles. Cascading arpeggios and murmuring chords create piano issues of another kind in No. 4 in A-flat major.

The four Schubert songs heard here in Franz Liszt transcriptions include *Auf dem Wasser zu singen*, *Du bist die Ruh*, *Ständchen*, and *Der Wanderer* – all familiar favorites of lieder aficionados. More than just simple transcriptions, they bring together singing voice and accompaniment. Liszt's "reimaginings," as we might term them today, are infused with zestful (and surprisingly chaste) virtuosity while preserving the spirit that animated the original songs.

Liszt conceived the triptych *Venezia e Napoli* (Venice and Naples) as a postlude to his popular collection *Years of Pilgrimage, Part II: Italy*. It had a long gestation period, between 1838 and 1861, when it was published, which probably accounts for its elaborate textures. The opening piece, *Gondoliera*, is characterized by chains of brilliant demisemiquavers (which is just a high-hat word for 16th notes) though *Canzone*, the middle item in the triptych, actually feels more like a barcarole or Venetian gondolier's song than its predecessor, due to its gently rocking rhythms. No. 3, *Tarantella*, contrasts a very tender love song in its middle section to the stirring rhythms in the outer sections of the similarly-named dance, which originated in the Late Middle Ages as a charm to ward off the Black Death.



"Boyd meets Girl." Rupert Boyd, guitar; and Laura Metcalf, cello, play music old and contemporary (Dorian Sono Luminus)

Guitarist Rupert Boyd and cellist Laura Metcalf, natives of Australia and the U.S. respectively, are now an old married couple living in New York, their base of operations for busy international careers. In a delightful (and very intriguing) recital, they give us a flavorful menu of duos for their instruments. They play with sensual beauty and with such a sense of fun that you really get the feeling of exciting new territory that is just in the process of being explored.

in such a song as Federico Garcia Lorca's *Los mozos de Monléon* (The Lads of Monléon). With its matter-of-fact description of the death of a bullfighter, it says much more to us than a more impassioned treatment would have done. (Manuel Sanchez called to the bull; / he should never have done so, / ay, ay.) The mood carries through the final pages, from the simple poignancy of the dying man's request for a priest (who arrives too late to hear his confession) to the laconic declaration of the men who bring his body by ox-cart to his mother, in a plainness that makes his death seem all the more tragic: "Here is your son, / as you asked. / Ay, ay.)

On her own, Isbin performs several solo pieces: Francisco Tarrega's *Capricho arabe*, with its strong Moorish flavor, and Enrique Granados' hauntingly beautiful *Danza española No. 5* with the graceful lilt of its melody and suspended cadences that capture the soul of the piece. She is perhaps at her very best in the Joaquin Rodrigo song *Aranjuez me pensée*, to a text by the composer's wife Victoria Kamhi that seems like a tender love song. Here Isbin plays the well-loved melody of the Adagio from *Concierto de Aranjuez* while Leonard's voice drifts slowly and nostalgically above it, recounting the "happy days when we were both twenty."

Finally, we have two Cuba-flavored songs by the Catalan composer Xavier Montsalvatge: an energetic, even breathtaking *Canto negro* (Black Dance) and *Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito* (Lullaby for a little black baby) in which the dreamlike beauty of the song evokes a mother's loving description of her sleeping child: "Coconut head, my little coffee bean / with pretty freckles and large eyes / like two windows looking into the sea."



Schubert: Arias & Overtures – Daniel Behle, tenor; Michi Gaigg conducting L'Orfeo Baroque Orchestra (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi)

There's a story behind this program of "Schubert Arias & Overtures." Schubert's German operas or *singspiels*, to give them their more proper name, were his bid for the immediate fame and recognition he craved, something that could come most quickly and lucratively in the opera house. That it was ultimately doomed to frustration, either because he was never able to get a decent libretto to work with or because his vocal genius was simply lyrical rather than operatic, remains open to question. The fact is, the arias heard on the present

With one exception, all the items heard here are transcriptions. That's to be expected in a repertoire in the process of growing. When you hear artists like Rupert and Laura playing together, with the alertness of plucked guitar strings set against the warm, resonant sound of the cello, the combination seems like a "natural," a phenomenon whose time has arrived. We begin with *Reflexiones* No. 6 by Jaime Zenamon (b.1953). It is in three movements, a flowing *Fluido*, a deeply plaintive *Doloroso* resonant of the folk culture of Zenamon's native Bolivia, and a lively *Vivissimo*. An old favorite, Gabriel Fauré's hauntingly beautiful Pavane, shines anew in a transcription by Boyd and Metcalf that they feel Fauré himself would have written had he composed it for cello and guitar. J.S. Bach's Two-Part Inventions in F, G, and E major reveal our artists in the spirit of sophisticated playfulness that Bach encourages.

Arafura Arioso by Australian composer Ross Edwards (b.1943) evokes the natural beauty of the Arafura Sea and the sparsely inhabited Northern Territory, a quality born of sunlight and vast expanses. Allegretto Comodo, the opening movement of Sonata for Cello and Guitar by Radamès Gnattali (1906-1988), captures the spirit and the rhythms of the *choro*, the street music of his native Brazil. *Café 1930* by Argentine composer Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) pays similar tribute to music that originated in the streets and bordellos of Buenos Aires, at a time when it was becoming more refined, romantic, and socially acceptable.

Seven Popular Spanish Songs by Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) has often been transcribed, a tribute to its great appeal. The haunting beauty of the central episode in *Asturiana* and the tender emotion of the lullaby *Nana* are just two highlights in a memorable work. I'm less sanguine about *Spiegel im Spiegel* by Arvo Pärt (b.1935), with its minimalist effect of rising and falling scales that mirror one another, set against a series of exhalations in the cello that almost-but-not-quite condense into a melody. The performance, nonetheless, produces a delicate color in the cello, here played at violin pitch, and we can well believe Laura's assertion that live audiences have often been deeply moved by this piece. Michael Jackson's song "Human Nature," which resonates with our artists as a love song to their adopted home, New York City itself, concludes the program.

program are much less well-known than his art songs, or *lieder*, dating from the same period.

Putting it into an historical context, Schubert was attempting to establish himself as an operatic composer at a time when there was much debate in musical circles as to whether or not the German language itself was a fit vehicle for opera. (This was just before the rise of Richard Wagner, whose German operas removed all doubt on the subject.) The best German writers of the day were writing poetry, not operatic librettos, and so the field was left largely to hacks and amateurs. These literary drudges were clearly inferior to poets like Goethe, Heine, Rückert, Schlegel, or even a figure such as Wilhelm Müller, whose sometimes maudlin verse was at least alive with feelings and pictorial details that lent themselves ideally to the texts of *lieder*. The fact helps explain why Schubert's songs have far more universal appeal today than his operas.

Even if you are a devoted buff, you may attend the opera for many years (even in German-speaking countries) and never once hear the likes of *Der Zauberharfe*, *Claudine von Villa Bella*, *Die Freunde von Salamanka*, *Adrast*, *Lazarus*, *Alfonso und Estrella*, *Fierrebras*, or *Das Zauberglöckchen*, from which the arias on the present program are taken. They are meant to be delivered in a heightened declamatory style that many listeners will find alien to their expectations. With his high tenor that relies on an edgy vibrato instead of a smooth legato to reach the higher notes, soloist Daniel Behle doesn't help matters. Ultimately, much rests on whether or not you tend to like tenors in German opera. I don't, others may.

Curiously, in a program of the "unknown" Schubert, the first item up is one of the composer's very best-known pieces, the Overture to *Die Zauberharfe* (The Magic Harp). He himself prized it so much that he reused it in the Incidental Music to Rosamunde that we all know and love. Under Michi Gaigg's direction, this always-welcome showpiece makes its usual favorable impression.



“Remix,” Bach Transcriptions
Tanya Gabrielian, piano
(MSR Classics)

Tanya Gabrielian is phenomenal. Not only are her Bach performances on the present CD supremely beautiful and inspired, getting to the inner truth of these transcriptions by famous keyboard masters. She is also a photogenic beauty herself. With her dark almond eyes and slender features, you might try for a long time and never guess her country of origin.ⁱⁱ And the tonal beauty she derives from her instrument, a Shigeru Kawai EX #94 will cause pianists everywhere to flock to their nearest Kawai dealer for a test drive.

It's noteworthy that Bach never seems to have performed his Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin as such in public but always played them in harpsichord arrangements, even though he was one of the few great composers who excelled equally on both keyboard and violin. As Gabrielian's performances of transcriptions by such eminent figures such as Alexander Siloti, Camille Saint-Saëns and Leopold Godowsky reveal, there is much to be said for the practice.

It often seems to me that violinists struggle to make these works palatable to audiences as “real” music, as opposed to strictly theoretical works. The very striking drop in tone and intensity midway through the Chaconne from Partita No. 2 (trans. Alexander Siloti), the shift in tempo at the 8:53 mark and the change to the minor at 11:07 in the present recording are all easier to realize on the piano than the violin, allowing the artist greater freedom to concentrate on expression. And the sensational bariolage between the pianist's hands at 12:50 (which is realized on the violin by rapid alternations between static and changing notes) comes across as smooth as quicksilver in Tanya Gabrielian's performance, though without the shimmering effect that is only possible in the string version.

Sonata No. 3, BWV 1005, is heard in arrangements by three different composers. First, the Adagio, in Bach's own version, is rendered by Gabrielian in an account emphasizing all its glorious harmonic intricacies, its dotted rhythms and unhurried flow. Both of the middle movements are transcriptions by Saint-Saëns: a robust fugue and a Largo that serves to provide refreshment by its sheer beauty and simplicity. The Allegro assai, in a transcription by Arturo Cardelus, plays up its crackling



Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra, Music for Strings,
Percussion and Celesta – Rafael Kubelik, Seiji Ozawa,
Boston Symphony Orchestra (PentaTone SACD)

Superior performances of two of Hungarian composer Béla Bartók's best-known works, his Music for Strings, Percussion & Celesta (1937) and his Concerto for Orchestra (1943) see the light of day once again in impeccable offerings as part of Pentatone's Remastered Classics series of hybrid SACD's. As with other entries in this series, the analog tapes were originally made by Deutsche Grammophon for a line of multi-channel LP's that was clearly ahead of the playback technology of the 1970's. Now they have been processed for SACD by having the analog machines directly connected to state-of-the-art DSD analog-to-digital converters without the intervention of mixing consoles or any special equipment that would have adversely influenced the sound.

The result is clear audiophile-class sound, beautifully engineered to reproduce all the fine details in two works in which nuance is of the essence. Given the expert direction of the Boston Symphony Orchestraⁱⁱⁱ by Rafael Kubelik (Concerto) and Seiji Ozawa (Music for Strings), these performances are irresistible.

Interestingly, Bartók set himself disparate tasks in these two works. In the Concerto, he wrote a work in five contrasted movements that make much use of the Hungarian folk idiom. True to its name, it is not a symphony, but a real “concerto for orchestra” – and we do mean *all* the orchestra. Sooner or later, almost every instrument in every family of the orchestra has something fetching and vital to say (making this work a favorite with symphonic musicians). It begins with an evocation of the night as only Bartók, with his keen sense of hearing where nocturnal sounds were concerned, could evoke it. Divided strings, a superbly managed crescendo/decrescendo, and a richly chromatic fugue add character to this opening movement.

The second movement is a very playful scherzando titled *Giuoco della coppie* (Game of Pairs). It is in five sections, each with a different pair of instruments playing together in different intervals: bassoons, oboes, clarinets, flutes, and muted trumpets, while a side drum taps out an insistent rhythm at the beginning and end of the movement. The slow movement, *Elegia* (Elegy) conjures up another evocation of the night, this one curiously disturbing and unreal, with the tones of the xylophone

passagework and dancelike nature.

Tanya is temperamentally disposed to make the most of the Andante from Violin Sonata No. 2, in another Siloti transcription that emphasizes its serene progress and steady rhythmic pulse, plus an aria-like melody that soars peacefully over the harmonic accompaniment. Cello Suite No. 2 in D minor is heard in a masterful transcription by Leopold Godowsky that underscores the darker implications that lie in wait for the unsuspecting performer in its Prelude and Sarabande, and even casting its shadow on the usually genial Allemande. Tanya's serene, unhurried approach really brings out the lustre in these dark pearls. Her Minuets I & II are measured and gracious with a steady pulse, and her rippling account of the Gigue is lusty and life-affirming, bringing this suite to a resounding close.



Ravel: *Daphnis et Chloe*, *Pavane*, *Barque sur l'océan*
Gustavo Gimeno, Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra
(Pentatone SACD)

Spanish music director Gustavo Gimeno delivers another finely honed performance with the Luxembourg Philharmonic. I reviewed with pleasure their account of the Shostakovich First Symphony in my July column. The differences between that work and the present subject, which is Marice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe*, a ballet inspired by a tale from Greek antiquity, could not have been greater. Here, the effectiveness of the music derives from its transformations of various leitmotives, its textures ranging from diaphanous to thicker but expertly laid-on, its supple, lithe rhythms, and a tonal palette that is constantly changing in form and color.

featured prominently. The fourth movement is an "interrupted intermezzo" challenging in its rhythmic complexity, in which ten different pitches are required of the tympani in the course of a mere 20 seconds. Bartók makes humorous use of a melody from Franz Lehar's *Merry Widow* (one which that had recently been parodied by Shostakovich in his own "Leningrad" Symphony), only to have it interrupted by wickedly sensational glissandi in the trombones and woodwinds. The finale is based on a whirling perpetual-motion theme with dance-like episodes and fugato fireworks. It comes across as a spirited affirmation of life, as well as an aerobic workout for the entire orchestra.

Bartók set himself a different sort of task in *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* – namely, of stripping the orchestra down to its barest essentials by eliminating the woodwinds and brass and relying on the strings and percussion for the expressive beauty of the work. "Percussion" is used in a broader than usual sense that involves not only the customary percussion instruments, but also the piano, used here strictly for percussion (no soft pedal permitted!) and the shimmering tones of the celesta, an instrument Tchaikovsky had introduced in his *Nutcracker* ballet and which always needs to be used as discretely as Bartók does here because its unusual tone is such an attention-grabber. The exceptionally rich sound created here by two antiphonal string orchestras, separated by a battery of tuned and untuned percussion instruments, evokes in modern terms the sound world of the Baroque concerto grosso.



"Melody for Love" – Olga Senderskaya, soprano, with
Bella Steinbuck, piano; Lenny Sendersky, clarinet
(MSR Classics)

This is the debut album of soprano Olga Senderskaya. A great deal of care and preparation has obviously gone into this program which demands much of the singer, not only in terms of her vocal range but especially in respect to her ability to characterize each song, capturing the emotion, the essential human experience, in a lyric poem that may last but a couple of minutes. Much is demanded of the singer in these miniature musical masterworks, and in Senderskaya they find an ideal vocalist to bring out all their hidden beauties.

We are talking, most specifically, of an essential quality in the species of Russian art song known as the

We get the Ravel touch in the first dozen measures as we hear the shimmering sounds of muted strings, a harp arpeggio suavely blending chords from the chorus, and a soft flute solo answered by natural notes from the horn. In time, this becomes a motif, representing Ravel's two lovers, the shepherd Daphnis and the shepherdess Chloe. From the conductor's perspective, there is an immense amount of cueing to be done here, given a very large orchestra and the continual transformations in form, texture, dynamics and instrumentation that we have all through the ballet.

That includes an SATB chorus intoning wordless vowel sounds. It adds immensely to the flow and plasticity of the orchestration as a whole. We hear it throughout the ballet, but most effectively in the warlike revels of the lawless brigands who abduct Chloe (*Danse guerrière*) in Part II, the plaintive supplication of the nymphs and shepherds to Pan to intervene and bring about her safe return, and the awesome moment when the god of living creatures does so in no ambiguous terms. A high point in the orchestration occurs in *Lever du jour* in Part III as the chorus and all the instruments of the orchestra combine in the most incredibly scored page in all of music, describing the rapture of every living creature to the reawakening of dawn.

My only complaint here is the intrusiveness of the wind machine we hear in Scene 7 (Track 8) when Ravel attempts to convey the loneliness and desolation felt by Daphnis at the loss of his beloved Chloe. As a non-instrumental sound that tends to get an undue amount of attention, it needs to be handled gently if at all. Such gizmos seldom work. (We wonder why the composer, who got such great mileage from his chorus elsewhere in the ballet, didn't see fit to entrust the mood of this moment to the voices?)

Une barque sur l'océan (a sailing ship on the ocean) explores all the moods and motions of its subject the ocean, whose dazzling and calm surface conceals fearful depths in which many lives lie buried. The interplay of timbres, rhythms and coruscating tone colors creates a vivid impression of the watery element in a very short time (here, 8:56).

Finally, we are given a fine performance of Pavane for a Dead Princess, inspired by a Velasquez painting of a little *infanta* at play in the court of 17th century Spain, surrounded by attending maids, a jester, and a dog. Ravel was reportedly struck by the sobering thought that this solemn-looking child had been dead for three centuries. Slow, elegant strains and subtle dissonances creep in unobtrusively under the stately rhythm of the Pavane, a courtly dance. It all bears out a mood of melancholy and nostalgia for a vanished past that is beautifully understated by Gimeno and the Luxembourg in the present performance.

"romance," of which half the items in this recital are examples. Mikhail Glinka, the father of Russian music, once said: "The people create the music. We composers only arrange it." That may have been a trifle modest of him, but the best Russian composers have seldom strayed far from poetry that has echoes of the deeply evocative qualities of folk music that we find in a verse such as "Tell me, what in the shade of the branches" (Tchaikovsky)^{iv}, or "Sing not to me, beautiful maiden" (Rachmaninov)^v, lyrics resonant with the beauty of the night and the tenderest of feelings. In songs such as these, Senderskaya lets the inherent emotion guide her as her voice soars with a beautiful bloom that never reveals the slightest strain or flaw.

Senderskaya shows her wide range as an interpretive artist in such wonderful songs by non-Russians as *Les Chemins de L'amour* (Francis Poulenc), *Del Cabello mas sutil* (Fernando Obradors), A Swan (Edvard Grieg), and Songs My Mother Taught Me (Dvořák). She brings out an especially deep-felt tenderness in the Hebrew lullaby *Layla, Layla* (Mordechai Zeira).

Lastly, Olga shows an surprising, and very welcome, affinity for popular song, especially the jazz-inflected variety. We hear it in the title song "Melody for Love" by her husband, jazz artist and composer Lenny Lendersky, and also in the all-but-forgotten gem "Let My Song Fill Your Heart" by Ernest Charles (1895-1984). And in the final number, George Gershwin's ever-popular "I Got Rhythm," she shows a knowing period vocal style harkening back to the jazz age, with husband Lenny emitting some cool vocalism of his own on soprano sax and pianist Bella Steinbuck really steppin' out in support of the singer. (Gershwin, if an awareness of worldly matters persists in the great beyond, must really be loving it!) It all adds up to a wonderful recording debut for a singer with the promise of a great future.

What a glorious organ recital this is! Joby Bell, at the console of the Op. 29 by Paul Fritts and Company, puts all the impressive dynamics and all the wonderful harmonic color of a great organ on display for us. Given his marvelous execution and sense of timing – qualities at a premium in three works in which the transitions typically flow between movements or are taken without pause – the results are truly inspiring.

Sonata Eroica, Op. 94, by Joseph Jongen (1873-1953), a Belgian who is associated with the French Symphonic Style, reveals the composer's love for "terraced" dynamics across the organ. It is in a single movement encompassing the following sections: Introduction, Theme, Variations, Fugato, and Coda. Its single theme is described by Joby Bell as "a lovely melody with a provincial ambience, like an ancient carol; it begs to be sung to words." He does full credit to it, with unexpected warmth that I found all the more welcome because I had not previously experienced it in Jongen.

Next is a really delightful surprise: Johannes Brahms' Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24, heard in a superb transcription by Rachel Laurin that emphasizes all the greatness and far-ranging imagination in the original piano work in an undeniably organ-friendly setting that makes it seem the most natural – and wonderful – organ work imaginable. As Bell points out, with his performance as well as in his program notes, the work falls naturally into a series of small groups, or "suites." The music ranges from the lyrical to the dramatic, from a thudding ponderousness in Var. 13 to the light, airy, and happy moods in Variations 11 and 14. Many of the variations are characterized by a wonderful natural flow, exuding an irresistible charm which Bell expresses very well. Along the way, we are given glimpses into music's past: an early dance in consort style in Var. 19, a charming Musette in Var. 22. At various points we are reminded of the character of the original fanfare in Handel's keyboard suite in B-flat. Bell takes the transition from Var. 24 to the final fanfare, Var 25, with breath-taking dispatch and smoothness, leading us into the mighty fugue that concludes the work with an inescapable rightness.

Last on the program is Sonata on the Ninety-Fourth Psalm by the pitifully short-lived Julius Reubke (1834-1858). Though, as Bell observes, there is no attempt to illuminate verse-by-verse the psalm calling upon God to right the wrongs perpetrated upon the weak by the arrogant and powerful, there *is* an immense amount of anger, drama, and sheer drive in this 28-minute work that, played without a break, demands the utmost of the organist. The mood is essentially dark, coloring even the meditative Largetto and Adagio sections. There is a building momentum in the Allegro *con fuoco* (with fire) that would probably have struck contemporary audiences as sounding like a great steam locomotive gathering speed. For Reubke, who met his maker far sooner than most of us ever expect, the God of Psalm 94 was no benevolent old gray-haired gent 'way off in the clouds, but a god of wrath. The overwhelming power and drive in his music has made this work an enduring audience favorite and a challenge for generations of organists. At the end of a performance such as this, one would be tempted to turn to a fellow listener and ask, "Did you hear what I just heard?"



"Sonatas and Variations," music of Jongen, Brahms, Reubke - Joby Bell, Fritts Organ of St. Philip Presbyterian Church, Houston, TX (Centaur Records)

ⁱ This is the third time I've personally reviewed this work in an arrangement for cello and guitar, as well as in versions for violin and piano, cello and piano, guitar trio, and the original setting for voice and piano (*Phil*).

ⁱⁱ Surprise, it's our nation of nations, the United States! She currently resides in New York City. For more information on this artist, visit her website at www.tanyagabrielian.com

ⁱⁱⁱ The BSO, incidentally, successfully premiered the Concerto for Orchestra on December 1, 1944 under the baton of Serge Koussevitsky, who had commissioned the work.

^{iv} Tell me, what in the shade of the branches, / where nature relaxes / and the nightingale sings, / what is the song? // what is the secret obsession? / Say it, what is the word / familiar to all, but ever new? / Love, love, love! (F. Sollogub)

^v Sing not to me, beautiful maiden, / the sad songs of Georgia. / They remind me of another life / and a shore far distant. (A. Pushkin)