

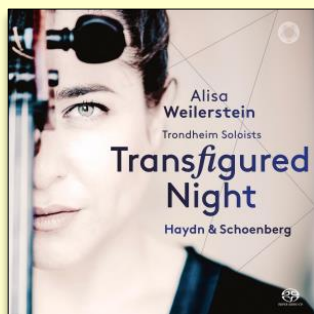
Phil's Classical Reviews

"Girls at Play"

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Schoenberg: *Transfigured Night* + Haydn: Cello Concertos – Alisa Weilerstein, cellist; Trondheim Soloists (Pentatone SACD, DSD)

I remember Alisa Weilerstein well from when she was a member of the well-known Weilerstein family piano trio. Now the American cellist has made an international name for herself as a soloist. Among other distinctions here and abroad, she was invited to the White House to give a performance for President and Mrs. Obama. On the present Pentatone CD, she fulfills a long-cherished ambition to record three works of the standard repertoire with artists for whom she has a warm regard, the Trondheim Soloists of Norway under the direction of concertmaster Geir Inge Lotsberg. "It wasn't until last September," she recounts, "when I first had the opportunity to collaborate with these artists, that I knew I had found the ideal partners for an album of this scope and intensity."

We have here Franz Joseph Haydn's two authentic cello concertos, in D Major (1783) and C Major (1761), the latter not rediscovered and added to the canon of his works until 200 years later. Both concerti make technical and musical demands of the performer, plus a good deal of give-and-take with the ensemble. Both reveal the influence of Haydn's Italian predecessors, particularly in the baroque-style *ritornelli* of the C major's closing Allegro and the lyrical quality of the central Adagio of the D Major. That is appropriate, as the Italians first took the cello out of the continuo and made it a solo instrument, teaching it how to sing. Through Haydn, this gracious style was passed on to Viennese Classicism.

The D Major Concerto reveals, among other things, Haydn's fondness for what were then considered distant modulations, often of ravishing beauty. Unusually, the opening Allegro, longer than the other two movements combined, is composed in a symphonic style that still



Dvořák: Cello Concerto & Other Works
Kate Dillingham, cello; Anthony Armore, Brno Philharmonic (Affetto)

English cellist Kate Dillingham, whom I've had occasion to praise for her previous performance of the three gamba sonatas of J.S. Bach in an arrangement for cello (*Classical Reviews*, July 2016), really outdoes herself in a very impressive account of Antonin Dvořák's Cello Concerto in B Minor, Op. 104, the crown jewel in the repertoire for cello and orchestra. The beautiful dark singing tone she coaxes from her instrument is perfectly suited to the warmth and range of feeling the composer invested in this particular work.

The Cello Concerto, written in 1894-1895, meant a great deal to Dvořák, who was able to express his feelings of homesickness and longing for his homeland and the friends and family he missed while on his sojourn in America. His correspondence reveals his immense satisfaction with this work in which he was able to avoid the problems of form and balance that had plagued his earlier concertos for piano and violin.¹ Critics had branded the former as "a concerto for a pianist with two right hands," while the principal knock against the latter has always been its excessive repetitions and the thick orchestrations through which the violin has to fight to be heard. Of Dvořák's ability to write spontaneous, appealing melodies, there was never any doubt.

In the Cello Concerto in B Minor, deeply touching expression and litheness of form all came together for the first time. There is an incredible wealth of melodic beauty in this work, including the slow, brooding opening melody, first heard in the clarinet and later punctuated by the lower strings and the flute, which the cello discourses upon and develops on its way to full symphonic bloom. Kate Dillingham obviously relishes this melody, as she does the second theme, which is one of the most

¹ Credit must be given to his acquaintance in New York with fellow composer Victor Herbert, whose two cello concertos, which he studied intensively, are models of the form (See *Classical Reviews* for June 2016).

allows the soloist plenty of elbow room. The deeply expressive beauty of Haydn's writing in the Adagio allows Weilerstein the chance to distinguish herself, and she takes full advantage of it. A cheerfully rollicking finale ends things on an affirmative note.

From the long-sustained note at the very opening, we know we are in for something special in Haydn's C Major Concerto. Thereafter, we have rich chords that engage all four melody strings, passages in the cello's uppermost range, rapid repeated notes, and quick changes of registration, allowing our artist full opportunity to display her virtuosity. The Adagio is a heavenly cantilena in the manner of an operatic aria, and the cheerful finale has the cellist playing running passages in the high register, alternating from low to high so that it seems like two instruments in duet. We even have two choice cadenzas here, for the opening Moderato and the Adagio, instead of merely one. Marvelous!

As we know, Arnold Schoenberg took the the poem *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night) by his contemporary Richard Dehmel as the inspiration for his his 1899 work for string sextet of the same title. The poem begins "Two people are walking together through a bare, cold wood." It ends "Two people walk on through the high, bright night." In between occurs the slow, gradual transformation, the "transfiguration" implied in the title.

Continued below ===>

The woman in the poem confesses to her male companion that she is with child by a loveless liaison with a stranger she had previously known at a time when she despaired of finding love. The man forgives and comforts her, saying that her unborn child will be his, and their love will be made more perfect, even as the bright moonlight and starry sky transfigure the earth. The place in the score in which this actually happens, when the texture lightens and the harmony becomes really brilliant and translucent, is one of the great moments in music, and is beautifully captured here. The final section of Transfigured Night ends gently in dazzling, ecstatic radiance, and then a slow, measured fade-out at the end with a stirring in the strings that is evocative of the fluttering of wings heralding a new day. Schoenberg's music is richly chromatic, though it is decidedly *not* the twelve-tone serialism which was yet to come in his career (so we can say we were thrilled and moved by this work without having to kid ourselves!)

The music heard in this recording is the first string orchestra version of Transfigured Night in its 1943 revision. It was particularly satisfying to Schoenberg in its synthesis of chamber music and tone poem. Alisa's cello is heard in several places, most significantly in Part 4, an Adagio corresponding to the fourth stanza of the poem. It is the moment when Schoenberg introduces the theme of Transfiguration, calling for the incredible warmth that only a solo instrument, particularly a cello, can impart. Otherwise, there are no cadenzas and no resemblance to the traditional role of the cello in a concerto, which this work is certainly not. Transfigured Night is simply the sort of thing you have to do in music, not for applause or fame as a soloist, but simply for the love of the art itself and the chance to make wonderful music with your peers.

gorgeous in the entire literature. Throughout this work, there are numerous moments in which the cello discourses eloquently in dialogue with other instruments. Kate does some of her best work in these moments, during which the orchestration lightens imperceptibly, allowing us to optimally relish the wealth of details, including enough melodies to furnish several whole concertos.

She scores equally high marks in the wonderful Adagio when the cello sings over counter-melodies in the woodwinds and pulsating rhythms in the strings. It gets even more heart-stopping in the middle of the movement when Dvořák quotes the melody of one of his most poignant songs, "Let Me Alone," which held a personal meaning for him. In the finale, Dillingham relishes the rich, intricate passagework in the cello part, as well as the buoyant harmonies she is called-upon to create in partnership with the orchestra. The tempo slows towards the end and then finishes, dramatically and resolutely, with a sensational fortissimo for the whole ensemble.

The concerto is preceded in the program by two ear-catching short works. First, the tone poem *Silent Woods*, Op. 68/5, for cello and orchestra, in which Kate is able to display her penchant for lyricism in dialogue with the winds. Then, in the infectious, folk-inflected *Rondo in G Minor*, Op. 94, her cello is able to show an equal versatility when it comes to dancing!



“Sisters in Song “
Alyson Cambridge and Nicole Cabell
(Cedille)

Sopranos Alyson Cambridge and Nicole Cabell, close friends, take time out from their busy careers as operatic singers to record a program of duets and songs that is close to their hearts. Cabell, a lyric soprano, was honored as the 2005 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World. She has shown the versatility to handle roles as diverse in their demands as Mimi, Violetta, Pamina, Juliette, and Countess Almaviva. Cambridge, whose career has shown a decided cross-over tendency from lyric opera to jazz and Broadway, has been described as a rich lyric-spinto soprano. Her operatic roles have included *Madama Butterfly*, *Mimi*, and *Donna Elvira*, among others. Appearing together for the first time on record, they describe their album as a “dream project that’s uniquely us,” reflecting the proud multi-ethnic heritages of both singers.

The program opens with Jacques Offenbach’s famous Barcarolle from *Tales of Hoffmann*, a tribute to the radiant beauty of the night that allows a wonderful opportunity for the singers to meld their voices together, ending in cries of ecstasy: “*Nuit d’amour, ô, nuit d’amour! Ah!*” *The magic continues in Léo Delibes’ Flower Duet from Lakmé*. In this scene in which *Lakmé* and her servant Mallika prepare to bathe in a stream scented by the fragrance of jasmine and roses growing on the banks, the sheer sensual beauty of the duet is a match for anything in French opera, including the wonderful Bell Song from *Lakmé* itself. Evening Prayer from Engelbert Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel* makes for a nice transition in the program in its purity based on simple faith as Gretel reminds her brother to say his prayers, for, as all good children know, [translated] “When at night I go to sleep, fourteen angels watch do keep.”

The duet “*Ah, guarda sorella*” (Ah tell me sister, if one could ever find a nobler face, a sweeter mouth) occurs in the scene in Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* when the sisters Fiordiligi and Dorabella are happily gushing over their impending marriages to Ferrando and Guglielmo. (This being opera buffa, things won’t quite turn out as expected!) The trio “*Soave sia il vento*” (May the wind be gentle) from the same opera finds the sisters and the philosopher Don Alfonso bidding farewell to Ferrando and Guglielmo in gently lilting rhythms and rapturously elongated phrases as the fiancés feign departing on a sea voyage. Alyson Cambridge and Nicole Cabell are joined here, in one of the most delightful



Humoresques by Dvořák, Reger, Rachmaninoff,
Schumann – Daria Rabotkina, piano
(MSR Classics)

Daria Rabotkina, born into a family of musicians in Kazan, Russia, studied at the Kazan State Conservatory and at the Mannes College of Music in New York under the tutelage of Vladimir Feltsman. She received a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Eastman School of Music and is currently an associate professor of piano at Texas State University while pursuing a career as a performing artist.

The mischievous smile on Daria’s face on the booklet cover is an indication of the sinfully delicious pleasures to be enjoyed in the present CD. As she explains, the name “humoresque” does not imply a form with given rules and conventions. The word connotes wit, humor, and even coziness. Perhaps “whimsical” is the best description of this curious genre that enabled four composers as diverse as Schumann, Dvořák, Reger, and Rachmaninoff to express their own personal peculiarities. The very lack of predictability is a trait that helps lend charm to the humoresque.

Antonin Dvořák, first up in the program, is represented by his Eight Humoresques, Op. 101. That he himself did not consider them trifles is shown by the fact that he suspended work on his last two string quartets to write these delightful miniatures. Dvořák uses ABA form, 2/4 time, and a reiterated tempo of 72 beats to the minute to unite pieces of diverse character, mood, and nuance. The gently rocking No. VII, “Poco lento grazioso,” is the most famous, partly because of the accidental resemblance of its second melody to Stephen Collins Foster’s “Swanee River,” but it is not for that reason the best of the set. No. VIII, “Poco andante,” is notable for the mood of sadness, perhaps the result of homesickness, with which it opens before giving way to more stirring material.

Max Reger’s 5 Humoresques, Op. 20, pose problems of a different sort. As Rabotkina puts it, they “exhibit a frenetic humor and are filled with rhythmical and dynamic volatility.” Like certain kinds of confections, these pieces typically contain a moment of lyricism and tenderness in the middle between hard exteriors. The latter will test any pianist’s mettle. These pieces alternate between virtuosic outbursts and contrapuntal

trios you are likely encounter in any opera of this genre, by baritone Will Liverman. And the Lake Forest Symphony under Vladimir Kulenovic (a presence throughout the program) lends discretely unobtrusive but telling support to the lilting voices of the singers.

A fascinating selection of songs follows in the second half of the program. Composer Joe Clark is crucially important here in the role of the arranger, traditionally the unsung hero in a recital of this sort, of a varied selection that includes Fernando Obradors' *Del Cabello más Sutil*, Gabriel Fauré's *Claire de Lune*, the folksong "Black is the Color of my True Love's Hair" and Charles Gounod's *Ave Maria*, after J. S. Bach. Winners all, in arrangements that allow both Alyson and Nicole to register their distinctive styles and vocal color to best advantage.

Finally, we have a selection of African-American Spirituals in arrangements by Joe Clark. These great old songs have a special meaning for both our sopranos, and they put heart and soul into them: "There is a Balm in Gilead," "Oh, what a Beautiful City!" "Ain't That Good News," "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" and "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." In happier times, before our country got to be so politically divided that people are starting to call it The *dis*-United States, these were songs that would resonate with, and give comfort to, all Americans regardless of race, color, or national origin. Hopefully, their spirit has not been lost.

[By the way, the really upbeat Spiritual "Ain't That Good News" took a new lease on life in 1964 when the great popular vocalist Sam Cooke recorded it as the title track of the last album he recorded before his untimely death. More resonance]

seriousness. The rule of the day is to expect the unexpected. Bar lines are no restraint to this composer. Finger-breaking gymnastics, as in No. 3 which starts off in relatively even waltz-like measures before tumbling over its own feet, pose a challenge to the pianist's artistry that Daria obviously accepts with relish!

Sergei Rachmaninoff's sole Humoresque was part of his early *Morceaux de concert*, Op. 10. A highly nuanced work, it reflects the penchant of the genre for a lyrical middle section surrounded by rambunctious companions for bookends. It also contains the element of surprise at the end in the form of what Rabotkina terms "unabashed percussive hullabaloo."

We encounter the unexpected once more in Robert Schumann's Humoresque, Op. 20 of 1839, the work that started off the genre. While humoresques are typically short character pieces (as witness all of the above), Schumann's is a major work that clocks in at 28:14 in the present performance. It seems that Schumann subsumed the shorter piece into a larger form reflecting the complexity of human life. "What would normally develop and conclude," observes Daria, "now nests and continues." Gradually, several large sections emerge and can begin to be divided further, though "with a vague sense of déjà vu" rather than the usual process of recapitulation.

I seem to hear hear, in passing, echoes of pieces such as the dreamy "Evenings" (*Des Abends*) and the knuckle-busting "Tangled Dreams" (*Traumes Wirren*) from Schumann's earlier *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12. Frequent changes of mood and the necessity for re-positionings are only a few of the challenges in this work. The most critical may well occur in the division marked *Einfach und Zart* (Simple and Tender) in the middle section of which fast-running notes evolve into fast-running octaves with an added contrapuntal voice. Keeping the larger structure in mind while one relishes the delicious details requires the insight of as accomplished an artist as Rabotkina. The result is as satisfying an account as I have heard of this work.



“American Vistas”
Concordia String Trio
(Centaur)

The Concordia String Trio consists of violinist Marcia Henry Liebenow, violist Leslie Parna, and cellist Karen Becker. Though they don't neglect the standard repertoire, they have made a special niche for themselves in newly discovered or lesser-known works by famous composers. They are *truly* great, as we hear in this CD, when performing modern and contemporary works in need of more public exposure. These ladies are well-suited for the task by virtue of the exceptionally rich tones and unique blends they employ in the service of new and innovative music.

When I said “new,” I was fudging a bit in the instance of Walter Piston (1894-1976), whose Three Counterpoints (1973) involve the use of independent melodic lines interwoven among the three instruments. Piston's passion for clean textures in the resulting counterpoint makes his music always clear and incisive. The unsettling mood is another matter: when my oldest son was a pre-schooler, he might have described the *Adagio sereno* of this work as “music that misses its mother.”

Alan Hovhaness (1911-2000) was a prolific, many-sided figure whose influences included Bach, New England psalmody, ancient mysticism, and the music of non-western cultures. He carried the last-named interest to the extent of marrying a Japanese woman who helped him cultivate the traditional classical music of her country. The influence is clear in Hovhaness' Trio, Op. 201 (1962) in the opening section in pizzicato strums by violin and cello that accompany the expressive, chant-like melody in the viola. Elsewhere, the composer calls for a technique he called “spirit murmur,” in which the players are invited to improvise freely within defined limits of pitch, dynamics, and rhythm. Here, the Concordia Trio employ their well-known feeling for tonal beauty in order to make more palatable music that isn't exactly the most accessible to the average listener.

Finally, a living composer! Leonard Mark Lewis (b.1973) calls forth challenges of a different kind in Berceuse (2002) in which an oscillating figure at the opening is the basis for the entire work, occurring in various permutations, building up to “a glorious peak” (Lewis). The Concordia Trio bring both lyricism and discipline into play in order to put this work over as desired.

John Harbison (b.1936) wrote his Trio Sonata (1994) for



“Ninna Nanna,” Lullabies by Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, Puccini, Falla, etc. – Letizia Calandra
(Brilliant Classics)

Letizia Calandra, a native of Rome, has already built up an enviable reputation at home and abroad for the beauty of her voice. The soprano who obtained a diploma in singing from the Santa Cecilia Conservatory in her native city specializes in classical song and early beauties of Neapolitan song, a genre that has flourished from the 16th and 17th centuries up to the present day. She is a true lyric soprano with enough of a lower range to provide warmth and depth to songs that go right to the heart of the listener.

So, what is the significance of *Ninna Nanna*, the title of this album? The name corresponds to the German *wiegenlied* and the English *lullaby* as a species of song that probably originated long before history as a means of calming restless infants, allowing both mother and child to reach a centered state of mind as the evening shadows grow longer and the hour for sleep approaches. For that reason, lullabies usually embody the warm feeling of a mother for her child – though not always, as some of the specimens Letizia has chosen for the present program will bear witness.

The earliest example in a far-ranging program of songs is “*Hor ch'e tempo di dormire*,” Tis now the time for sleeping (1639), a strongly cadenced canzonetta by Tarquinio Merula that already shows the warmth of feeling in the genre. Three songs by the Monaco-born Vincenzo Davico show the lightness of touch of a born miniaturist. We have French lullabies by the likes of Darius Milhaud (“*Dors, dors, dors*” from *Chants populaires hébraïques*) and Cecile Chaminade (“*Viens près de moi*,” Come close to me), the latter permeated with maternal love. Manuel de Falla's *Nana* from Seven Poplar Spanish songs, here known as “*Duèrmete, nino, duerme*,” Sleep, little one, sleep, allows Letizia to bring out the special tenderness of the song. In all these pieces, she displays the warmth of feeling peculiar to the genre as well as an understanding of the nuances of other languages.

We also have three memorable examples of German *wiegenlied*. Johannes Brahms' “*Guten abend gute nacht*,” known to all the world as Brahms' Lullaby, is easily the most famous, with no fewer than 182 current

string trio, later adapting it for keyboard and various woodwinds. Contrapuntal complexity is the rule of the day in a work in which two of the instruments are often paired, with the third voice following slightly after them or in contrary motion.

Seven Paragraphs (1925) by Henry Cowell 1897-1965) are terse character pieces, many of them less than a minute's duration. Several movements exhibit hymn-like, lyrical qualities. One is imitative, another canonic in form. No. 2 has the character of a march with a busted mainspring, while No. 4 is a scherzo that scurries along in 16th notes for all three voices. The tendency in these "paragraphs" is to break off, like thoughts that tantalizingly invite someone to conclude them.

Finally, David J. Colson (b.1957) subtitled his String Trio No. 1 "Zazen" to reflect his abiding love of Buddhism, which he finds a very poetic and evocative religion and treasures for its "marvelous simplicity and practicality." For many people (myself included) that is an acquired taste, but you sort of get what he means. Movements I (Now there is time) and V (Stand still, stand still) seem to best embody his belief, while Nos. II (Rain) and IV (A Forest of Clouds) call forth, and receive from the Concordia, impressively massive string harmonies that must simply be heard to be believed.



"Canyon songs: Art, Nature, Devotion." Music written & arranged for solo horn – Johanna Lundy, French horn (MSR Classics)

Johanna Lundy is one busy gal. Besides being principal horn of the Tucson Symphony, a position she has held since 2006, the graduate of both the Oberlin and New England conservatories has been very active in music festivals and guest appearances with numerous American orchestras. She is currently associate professor of horn at the Fed Cox School of Music, University of Arizona.

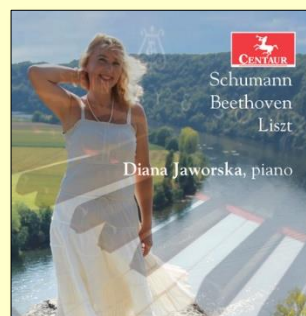
A program such as "Canyon Songs" is dear to her heart because it allows her to communicate and share experiences with her audiences in a special way that is usually denied an orchestral horn player. The current recording project, which has been fifteen years in the making, includes an interactive multimedia component which you may view on her website at www.tucsonhorn.com

The works in this program were specially selected to explore the horn's surprising range of timbres and depth of sound and its ability to express "emotions, stories, and

listings in Arkivmusic.com. Making it sound as fresh and lovely as Letizia does here is no small task. Franz Schubert's *Wiegenlied* Op. 98, No.2, "*Schlafe, schlafe*," (Sleep, sleep) has the feeling and melodic clarity we associate with this composer, and a gently rocking rhythm besides. "*Schlafe, schlafe, holder süsser Knabe*," (Sleep, sleep, beloved sweet child) by Max Reger comes as a surprise from this particular composer. Its gentle lines and soft hues would seem to contradict Reger's reputation for extreme chromaticism and very elaborate chords, but so it does.

Two lullabies of very different character by Anna Filippone del Bono, a native of the Abruzzi, call for special attention. "*Ninna nanna del grillo*" (1934) was written on the birth of her grandson and reflects the tenderness she felt. The earlier "*Ninna nanna di guerra*," lullaby of war (1916) is a more austere piece in which instrumental and vocal lines are deliberately kept separate, creating a mood of unease, and the text reflects the tragedy of the First World War in its feelings of sadness and genuine, even shocking, anger at the sufferings the war brought about.

Throughout all the program, Letizia Calandra interprets the various songs with intelligence and sensitivity.



Schumann: Carnival; Beethoven: Sonata No. 23, "Appassionata;" Liszt: Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12 Diana Jaworska, piano (Centaur)

Diana Jaworska is temperamentally inclined to "take it big," both in terms of the impressive sound she brings forth from her instrument and also the way she meets the technical challenges of the most difficult music without flinching. The graduate of the Cracow Academy of Music in her native Poland now lives in Southern France, where she combines teaching, making recordings, and pursuing an active concert career at home and abroad.

The present program, recorded in 1997 at the Studio of Recording, Cracow, is Jaworska's first release on the American label Centaur, and wow, is it an outstanding caling-card! Quite apart from the technical and interpretive problems one encounters here, it is a challenge to perform thrice-familiar all-time favorites by Schumann, Beethoven and Liszt and make them sound fresh as new paint. This artist does just that.

landscapes” (Lundy). We begin with one of the most technically difficult selections of them all, “Interstellar Call” from *Des canyons aux étoiles* (From the canyons to the stars), written by French composer Olivier Messiaen to commemorate the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence and the natural beauty of the places he visited with his wife in the American west: Bryce Canyon, Cedar Breaks, and Zion Park. Quite apart from the spiritual beauty Messiaen derived from his experience of nature’s masterworks, this 5^{1/2} minute piece is frightfully difficult. Its requirements of the performer, which Lundy takes in stride, include flutter-tonguing, closed notes, glissandos, and faint oscillations made with the keys half-closed. All are in the interest of communicating through interstellar space, which Messiaen sees as impossible, at least through scientific means.²

Special features of this program are new works by three Arizona composers: Jay Vosk, Dan Coleman, and Pamela Decker. Vosk (b.1948) draws on the 19th century Strauss-like romanticism that informs the horn’s traditional nature and then develops his four Fantasy Pieces (2016) along his own fascination with the beauty of the Sonoran Desert. Coleman (b.1972) begins Night Storm (2017) with a powerful exclamation, later punctuated with dream-like themes, bursts of intensity, and long-sustained notes ending in the deepest tones of which the horn is capable, to convey his subject, which was inspired by Walt Whitman’s “Proud Music of the Storm.” Decker (b. 1955) signs in with her “Canyon Songs,” in its 2017 arrangement for horn and string trio. Meditative and peaceful, it celebrates the natural beauty and wonder of Creation.

J. S. Bach’s Partita in A minor, BWV 1013 is heard here in Johanna Lundy’s own adaptation of an arrangement by Michel Rondeau. This work was originally written by Bach as a display piece for the traverse flute. The fully chromatic modern horn is equal to all its harmonic requirements, even if the horn is by nature a somewhat slower instrument than the flute. Lundy does her best work with the deeply affecting Sarabande, which is the emotional heart of the work.

Concert Étude (2000) by Finnish composer/conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen commemorates his early waldhorn (valveless horn) studies with his mentor, Holger Fransman. The piece aims at combining technical virtuosity with playful rhythms and melodies. *Laudatio* (1966) by the late German hornist and composer Bernhard Kroll was inspired by the 4th century hymn *Te Deum Laudamus* and strives to capture the full range of emotions in the Latin text.

Finally, Sea Eagle (1982) by the well-known British composer Sir Peter Maxwell Davies (1934-2016) celebrates the majestic beauty of the legendary bird that was re-introduced to a tiny island off the west coast of Scotland.³ A very audible intake of breath by the artist at the start of the finale, marked *Molto presto*, alerts us that there will be no breathing permitted for the next minute and a half!

Schumann’s Carnival is the first pony out of the starting gate. The technical problems we have here include big chordal passages, disjunctive rhythms, and the need for frequent hand re-positionings, even within the same short piece. The artist must be continually alert for sudden changes in mood, rate of flow, and texture. The work begins with a Prélude in which musical themes and phrases jostle one another like crowds at an actual carnival. The story consists of a number of short pieces of uneven length and texture in which intimate moments are interspersed with passages of intense excitement, culminating in a grand march with fleeting quotations from previous scenes, ending *Prestissimo*.

That textural unevenness reflects the nature of human life itself (especially *Schumann’s* life!) where moments of happiness and despair, striving for one’s ideals, falling short of them, and then beginning again with renewed determination, all are portrayed in the music. Schumann also presents us a number of acrostics, based on the letters A·E-flat·C·B (ASCH in German notation) which held personal meanings for him in terms of his life, loves, and artistic aspirations. There is a subtle carry-over of themes from previous movements that the pianist must be careful not to “telegraph,” for they must take the listener by surprise, as they do here. There are even allusions to other composers that Schumann admired – Chopin, Paganini, and Beethoven (and no fair peeking at the printed program!) Jaworska takes them all into account with style and bravura.

In the case of Beethoven’s Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57, the “Appassionata,” we’ve heard it all before: the startling changes in tone and dynamics, improvisational-sounding arpeggios, and a range that reaches down to the lowest F on the keyboard. Innovations like these shocked Beethoven’s contemporaries. Two hundred years’ familiarity by generations of pianists with this ambitious and extraordinarily intense work have not dimmed the shock we feel, for instance, when the laconic four-note drumbeat in the opening movement becomes a steady pulse of repeated notes in fast 12/8 time. Dramatic repetitions of the same four-note drumbeat trigger the recapitulation. Dotted rhythms in the beginning of the coda are carried from the depths to the heights, the music slows to Adagio, and then a fortissimo outburst of the same four-note figure in full chords cadences back into F minor. Then, the music rides on a wild fusillade of syncopated chords to a quiet, almost whispered close over deep tolling F’s.

And *that*, mind you, is only the opening movement! (Never take a masterwork for granted just because it’s in the standard repertoire.) The calm set of variations in the second movement, *Andante con moto*, ends in a

² I reviewed from *Des canyons aux étoiles* previously in the performance by Christoph Eschenbach and the London Philharmonic (see *Classical Reviews* for June, 2015).

³ Like our own Bald Eagle, it has a bad reputation among farmers as a killer of young lambs.

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startling fortissimo diminished seventh chord, seemingly the equivalent of a human shriek, and we are off to the races on a carpet of emphatically repeated six-note *gruppetti*. Jaworska obviously relishes this pulse-quickening finale as much as anything in the program. It is taken, as it should be, *attacca*, so that movements 2-3 are included in the same track of the program.

The perfect encore here is Franz Liszt's ever-popular Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12 in C-sharp minor, with its alternations of passionate slow moods and electrifyingly fast dances, the *lassan* and *friska* of the gypsy music we all know and love.



Martha Shaw

Martha Shaw is today one of America's most inspired and innovative choral directors. Following fifteen year's experience in the public schools, she received a Doctor of Musical Arts in Conducting from the University of South Carolina. She assumed her present position at Reinhardt College in Waleska, Cherokee County, Georgia in the fall of 2012. She has also been acclaimed as the founding director of



the Spivey Hall Children's Children's choir, and has been active as a clinician and a guest conductor throughout the United States.

Canciones de corazón (Songs from the Heart) Martha Shaw, Reinhardt University Chamber Singers (ACA Digital)

All of the above come into play in *Canciones de corazón*, with the Reinhardt University Chamber Singers and soloists. These are truly "songs from the heart." These choral settings emphasize the radiant beauty of massed and layered voices, rising to heights that incorporate a glorious bloom, or else plunge to the depths of sorrow as the texts require. She is particularly skillful in her handling of the trailing voices that do so much to reinforce the feeling in many of the songs. There seems to be no emotion that these settings cannot evoke or that Martha Shaw cannot bring forth out of her protégés.

That's important because many of the songs deal with the strange and wonderful border country where divine love and human love meet. These occasions are more frequent than you might think. We encounter them often in the first part of the program in "If Music Be the Food of Love" (David Dickau after Shakespeare), "Even When He is Silent" (Kim André Arnesen), "Where Your Bare Foot walks" (David N. Childs), "*Ubi caritas et amor*" (Maurice Duruflé), "Come Unto Me" (Cliff Duren), and "Wondrous Love" (Appalachian folk hymn arranged by Alice Parker and Robert Shaw). All of these songs have pointedly meaningful texts that are particularly relevant in our sadly divided world. Of Duruflé's *Ubi caritas*, a plangent re-setting of the traditional Gregorian antiphon with the harmonically rich, expressive sonorities of the French composer's own era, Shaw opines, "Perhaps no text is of greater need in today's world."

The middle part of the program is devoted to a really great discovery, *Romancero Gitano* (translated "Gypsy Ballads"), op. 152, by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968). A composer mostly noted for his solo guitar pieces, he outdid himself in these settings of seven lyric poems by the renowned Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca. These verses drip with the violent imagery of blood and passion that we associate with Lorca's strange, often nightmarish, world in which the voice of the guitar becomes a metaphor for a miasma of frustrated longings and unsatisfied desires that Lorca identified with the condition of his country. The instrument, which Lorca characterizes as a "heart wounded by five *espadas* (swordsmen, a rich metaphor that alludes both to the *torero* who confronts the bull in the Moment of Truth and the five strings of the guitar itself) cries with an insistent voice in these seven songs, stabbing at the heart of the listener like a knife. Another vivid metaphor, with both personal and national meanings, occurs during the *Saeta*, a

very emotional declaration of faith traditionally sung as a set piece in processions during Holy week and Corpus Christi. Here, the image of the “dark Christ” (*Cristo moreno*) is starkly depicted as an emblem of troubled times: “burned locks of hair, protruding cheekbones, and blank eyes.”

I hadn't intended to dwell at such length on Gypsy Ballads, but it is an important major work, equally as significant as Manuel de Falla's Seven Popular Spanish Songs (*Siete Canciones Populares Españolas*). As such, it deserves to be heard more often in performances filled with the vividness and conviction we experience here in this album. Martha Shaw's chorus and solo vocalists give boldly expressive performances of the stirring lyrics. In particular, they master the nuances of the Spanish language so well that they do not embarrass themselves at any point, and the emotion always rings true. Kudos are also due guitarist Matthew Anderson, whose instrument eloquently informs every one of these songs.

The last third of the program consists of two dreamy numbers from the Great American Songbook, “All the Things You Are” (Oscar Hammerstein II, Jerome Kern) and “Star Dust” (Hoagy Carmichael) and a deeply poignant Cuban love song, *Juramento (Bolero)* by Miguel Matamoros, here heard for perhaps the first time outside the composer's native land. It concludes with a real rouser, “The Ballad of the One-Armed Man” from Dear Appalachia: Songs from My Mountain Home (Timothy Michael Powell). In the song, a mountaineer is finally healed of his broken arm so that he can make enough money to buy a ring for his sweetheart, and then he is overcome by a new fear: “Lord, I pray before the wedding that you keep me holy / 'cause I'm bound to do some evil now my arm got free.” As so often in the human condition, it's better to laugh than cry.

Quite a varied program, this. We need to give special credit to piano accompanist Wanda Cantrell and the vocalists, Anne Beloncik Schantz (s), Rebecca Salter (s), Reverie Berger (m/s), Jonathan Parham (t), and Cory Schantz (bart), and to Savannah-based jazz artist Randall Reese, whose saxophone adds a welcome presence in his own arrangement of “Stardust.” Other artists who make their presence heard here include jazz bassist Neal Starkey, Nicolas Andre Deuson, (guitar/banjo), Frederick Alan Stein (tenor), Kinah Boto (drums), and Kenneth Lambert (fiddle/violin). And the guys in the sound booth for ACA Digital lend their usual yeoman support in the session recording and post-production. This is a winner all the way.