

the third person throughout and the action shifting rapidly between past and present. Benjamin's chromatic vocal writing is consistently mellifluous and his sensitive and radiant orchestration never fails to impress. Mehta's eerie male soprano perfectly conveys his otherworldly, angelic character, Purves' insightful interpretation lends an element of humanity to his nefarious character and Hannigan's moving portrayal of a woman coming to self-awareness is both vocally gorgeous and dramatically incisive.

In an age when contemporary British operas too often resort to shock-and-schlock tactics it is a pleasure to encounter such a concise and sophisticated jewel of an opera.

Daniel Foley

Editor's Note: Composer George Benjamin and soprano Barbara Hannigan will be the featured guests at all three concerts of next year's Toronto Symphony Orchestra New Creations Festival where an opera-in-concert version of *Written On Skin* will be performed with surtitles on March 7, 2015.

CLASSICAL AND BEYOND

Beethoven – Piano Sonatas Opp.22; 31/3; 101
Angela Hewitt
Hyperion CDA67974

It's no surprise that accomplished musicians develop such acute discernment of their composers' muses. One simply comes to expect that ongoing intimacy with the creative utterances of someone like Beethoven will produce a deep and evolving understanding of how the music must be played. It transcends academic debate and argument about historical authenticity. It's a conviction that doesn't waver. It's just "right."

Hewitt plays three sonatas which offer a historical progression clearly marked by Beethoven's evolving compositional form and musical language over 17 years. The unmistakable echoes of Haydn and Mozart, the classical turns of phrase and stylistic ornaments place the *Op.22* solidly at the end of the 18th century. But by the time we hear the *Op.101* there are serious rumblings in the depths and a hint of recklessness that we have come to recognize as the Beethoven of the fifth and ninth symphonies.

It must, however, be tempting to take the classical bait of the early work and play it as though we need to be reminded that Haydn and Mozart are standing behind us. Hewitt in fact does the opposite. With appropriate recognition of the classical architecture, Hewitt unleashes the spirit of the young Beethoven and shows us how the composer at mid-life has already seen his destiny. There is no mistaking the volcanic potential of



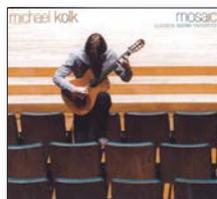
this pen when it meets manuscript. Major keys and scherzos notwithstanding, this young composer is already shaking his fist at the universe.

Alex Baran

Concert Note: Angela Hewitt is featured in Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto* with the Toronto Symphony on March 20 and 22 at Roy Thomson Hall.

Mosaic – Classical Guitar Favourites
Michael Kolk
ALMA ACD11232 (almarecords.com)

The Toronto-based classical guitarist Michael Kolk provides an absolute master class on his second solo CD, *Mosaic*, with an outstanding recital of short compositions and transcriptions that stretch from Bach to Leo Brouwer, and which beautifully illustrate the guitar's range.



In addition to the Bach *Prelude, Fugue and Allegro BWV998* there are two pieces by Albéniz, four by Tárrega, one by Giuliani and two by Brouwer, along with *Preludes Nos.2 & 5* by Villa-Lobos and Agustin Barrios Mangoré's *La Catedral*. Transcriptions of two Debussy pieces – *La fille aux cheveux de lin* and *Danseuses de Delphes* – complete a highly satisfying program.

Kolk's technical mastery and musical sensitivity are evident on every track, and are perfectly captured by the intimacy of the recording. The tone is sumptuous across the instrument, with a rich resonance in the lower register and clarity and warmth in the high register, where, in some hands, the guitar can tend to sound somewhat tight and thin. Not here, though! Intonation is faultless throughout; the use of vibrato is beautifully judged, and there is a virtual absence of left-hand finger noise.

The CD was recorded by producer Peter Capaldi and engineer John "Beetle" Bailey, at Glenn Gould Studio where Kolk said it was "so quiet it was almost alarming at first. Every nuance comes out..." And what nuances they are! This is playing and musicianship of the highest order, and an absolute must-buy CD for anybody who wants to hear just how wonderful guitar playing can be.

Terry Robbins

Concert Note: Michael Kolk is featured with the Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber Music Society on March 25 at 8:00pm in the KWCMS Music Room.

Liszt at the Opera
Louis Lortie
Chandos CHAN10793

Louis Lortie and Chandos records have put together a wonderful Juno-nominated CD of Liszt's opera transcriptions. Lortie dazzles us with smooth, elegant virtuosity in *O du mein*

holder abendstern (Tannhauser) and *Spinnerlied aus dem Fliegenden Hollander*.

His scales, arpeggios and trills shimmer and sparkle with a light, feathery touch. The speed and flourish

of his technique leave us breathless. The beautiful melodic lines are also performed with warm tone and sensitivity. His phrasing is sublime and his fingers sing out the arias.

What I really liked was the freedom with which he teased us with carefree cascades of orchestral sound. In the *Valse de L'opera Faust de Gounod* Lortie flirted with the music and the rhythms danced with devilish intricacy. His spectacular finger dexterity allows Lortie to play cleanly but with resonance. There is a natural flow that never overshadows the music but enhances it. He has immaculate control of dynamics and can perform pianissimos as gentle whispers and fortes like a full orchestra. His tone can be warm and gentle. The only minor moments of harsher tone were in two of the Wagner transcriptions. The *Overture to Tannhauser* and the *Prelude and Liebestod from Tristan und Isolde* are the only pieces in which I missed an actual orchestra. However, Louis Lortie is an extraordinary Liszt interpreter who definitely deserves that Juno nomination and a win for this CD.

The program notes are also excellent. They give a real insight into the era when opera transcriptions were numerous.

Christina Petrowska Quilico

Julius Isserlis – Piano Music
Sam Haywood
Hyperion CDA68025

The Isserlis family name is familiar to most by virtue of cellist Steven whose career has its own impressive discography. The music of his grandfather Julius is, however, a recent discovery and makes its first recorded appearance on this disc by pianist Sam Haywood.

Haywood is a long time friend of the Isserlis family. It was Haywood who found the manuscripts and early published music of Julius Isserlis among the family papers, and it was Haywood who set about editing, correcting and recording these works for Hyperion.

Born in 1888 in Moldova (then a part of Russia) Julius was a child prodigy who earned his admission to conservatories in Kiev and Moscow and the attention of the great musicians of the day such as Taneyev. The rise of Bolshevism and Nazism in Europe severely restricted career options for the young pianist and composer. He was fortunate to escape the continent with his family and settle in England where he spent the rest of his life

