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Richard **Bradshaw** *& the* **COC:** *Home* **AT**

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The COC Ring: clockwise from top left: Das Rheingold (Robert Pomakov and Phillip Ens as the giants Fasolt and Fafner), Die Walküre (The Valkyries and Susan Bullock as Brunnhilde in a ring of

aw

LAST

Company turns
the Four Seasons



fire), Siegfried (Christian Franz as Siegfried), *Götterdämmerung* (Mats Almgren as Hagen and his men), Canadian Opera Company, 2006, photo: Michael Cooper.

HANGING ON THE WALL OF THE CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY RECEPTION AREA IS A LARGE, FRAMED PICTURE OF THE FOUR SEASONS CENTRE, COC's new home, in the form of a completed jigsaw puzzle. The symbolism is unmistakable. After over three decades of hopes and dreams, and twists and turns to rival the most improbable of opera plots, the COC has finally 'pulled it together' with a new house.

On September 12, the first opera performance of *Das Rheingold* takes place, as the COC celebrates the occasion with three full Ring Cycles. Wagnerians everywhere will gather in Toronto for three weeks of festivities that include seminars, screenings and exhibitions plus twelve performances featuring some of the best Canadian and international talent. The Company and the city will also be under the scrutiny of an international media contingent, as the Music Critics Association of North America will be in town for its annual meeting. Finally opera in Toronto is having its moment in the sun.

The man responsible for putting the puzzle together is Richard Bradshaw. A transplanted Brit with dry wit and an understated, urbane manner, Bradshaw is a persuasive man, whether it's getting potential donors to loosen the purse strings, or being 'front man' with the media. The journey hasn't been easy. Opera endures more than its share of caricatures – a corpulent Brünnhilde in helmet and breastplate comes to mind. The public sees the art form as the elitist plaything for the well-heeled. Through ticket promotions that cater to the twenty-something crowd, and adopting a company ethos that favours cutting-edge productions and radical reinterpretations of the classics, Bradshaw and company have succeeded in changing public perception. The simulcast of the June Gala at Nathan Philips Square drew several thousand for a free evening of opera *al fresco*. Ticket sales have been brisk, and the proverbial sea of grey audience heads is increasingly peppered by fresh young faces.

Why did Bradshaw succeed while all previous attempts at a new house ended in failure? "We got lucky this time – everything came together," says 62-year-old Bradshaw. When he first arrived in 1989 as principal conductor, it was in the dying days of the Bay-Wellesley opera house project. The cost ballooned to a staggering \$300 million, untenable in an era of runaway inflation and imminent recession. The Company management at the time insisted that it was either that or nothing, and the project collapsed.

By 1994, Bradshaw had taken over as general director and kept the flame alive, even with the negativity around him. "I was convinced we were going to have an opera house, even though we didn't have a site. I can truthfully say that I never believed – or I never *allowed* myself to believe, that it wouldn't happen, because it all seemed so possible."

A big part of Bradshaw's success was due to his vision; his conviction that the opera house was doable. "I am very devoted to Canada and to Toronto, but the problem was persuading Toronto to wake up to what is possible. We have such a cornucopia of talent. A number of people came to me and said, 'I don't go to the opera and I don't go to the symphony, but we need this and I'm going to back it.'"

Bradshaw animatedly relates a now-famous story he previously told on CBC. He went with the proverbial cap in hand to see a financial leader who said "Yes, yes, I'll give you this much." Bradshaw replied, "No, that won't do." The man went around the site with his number 2, came back and said, "Yes, it's fabulous, but Richard wants an awful lot of money...you know I don't go to the opera and I don't go to the symphony. I'm not much of an arts person. I have always given to hospitals..." His number 2 chose the right moment and said, "Funny – I don't much like going to the hospital either." End of story. They got the money! "You remember back in 1989, the outcry around Bob Rae was 'Bread not Circuses'? It has taken some time to create the vision that we are not the circus, we are the bread!"

Obviously there has been change in the way opera is perceived in Canada's biggest city. In 1989, Bradshaw was in charge of the education program. "We have to do *real* education where children are in this building and we're in the schools, where the children actually think opera is something they want to be part of. This is going to take root fifteen years down the road.

"I was just at this incredible summer camp, where the children created their own, 43-minute Ring. "O hehrstes Wunder" was sung to a freedom song they made up. Those kids don't see us as irrelevant or elitist. They see this as a perfectly normal part of life."

Has the opera house turned out the way Bradshaw wanted? "I thought if we get 85% of what we were dreaming of, we've got a great house. We've got 100% plus." According to Bradshaw, everything was predicated on the acoustics. Architect Jack Diamond couldn't do a thing unless the acoustician said OK. After a year the house had to be redesigned because the acoustician wasn't happy. "It was a very expensive moment," recalls Bradshaw. "I always believed that 15% [of a great house] is black magic, although acoustics is a very precise science now. The acoustician who did Glynebourne came to the acoustical testing and said it is probably one of the greatest acoustics in the world. The sound has enormous clarity but it has *bloom*!"

Now liberated from the cramped pit at the Hummingbird Centre, the musicians are thrilled to

THE MAKING OF A WAGNER CONDUCTOR

Richard Bradshaw shares his thoughts on conducting Wagner

TMS: Is this your first Ring as a conductor?

RB: Yes, as a cycle. I have done the individual operas. It's not the first Ring I've prepared. I was very involved in putting on the first Ring in San Francisco, with Nicholas Lehnhoff and Edo de Waart. Although it was beautifully designed by John Conklin, it was not entirely a success... It was interesting to pull it together because Edo had never conducted any of the Ring.

So would you say the Ring is the Mount Everest for conductors?

Yes, for any opera company. I don't find it technically a challenge, but a challenge in terms of "the big picture", how one paces it. A lifetime of living with it helps, and I have lived with it close to 50 years now.

Who do you admire as Wagner conductors?

The person who influenced me most was Furtwängler. Goodall also influenced me. He used to claim me as a nephew, which isn't quite true. Andrew Porter rang me one day and said, 'You didn't tell me you were related to Goodall!' I didn't tell him because I am only very distantly so. I learned so much from Goodall. He was a very great Wagnerian. And then there are the recordings I remember but haven't heard for years like Fricsay doing *Die Walküre*. That's completely opposite Goodall very fast and tempestuous. More recently, I have come to admire Boulez very much. His recent *Parsifal* in Bayreuth was incredible.



I find Boulez's Ring fast and rather unromantic...

Perhaps one thing that is deeply wrong with Wagner conducting over the last 25 years is that everything should now be massive and slow. It's exactly against what Wagner had said. I read and reread what he wrote on conducting. He goes on and on about why when he conducts it takes 12 minutes and when others conduct it takes 20 minutes. "Why is my Rheingold this long, and the Kapellmeister here takes three hours?" This is slightly ironic since Simon Rattle took slightly more than three hours recently in Aix-en-Provence. When Wagner says *etwas langsamer* – 'somewhat slower', they all go enormously slower, while I think all he wanted was just some slight adjustments. If anything, I now take less time to 'smell the roses' – I try to see the bigger picture. In my younger days as a conductor, I was very taken by the 'five-star moments'. Nowadays I think much more about the long, long space of time... and if people are kind enough to say my Wagner never seems long, then I am very glad.

- Joseph K. So

be in the new space, but it also means having to meet the challenge of the new hall. "We've got this incredible blessing which we now have to learn to use," says Bradshaw. "At the gala concert, there's one famously scrappy passage in the introduction to "Dich, teure Halle". We worked and worked on it...we would have gotten away with it somewhere else, but in the new hall, it was not acceptable, because we have to be so precise now!" During the Ring rehearsals, Bradshaw is often outside the pit early on to listen for the right brass balance. The trombones that play absolutely at the top of their range at the Hummingbird have to think quite differently. Sometimes, the sound can be too alive, but that may be remedied with acoustical panels.

What about the aesthetics of the house? Several influential writers including Christopher Hume have panned the architecture, citing its uninviting southern and eastern exteriors. But to my eyes, the Four Seasons Centre is quintessentially Canadian in an ostentatious and unflashy sort of way – a matter of function and substance over glitz and glamour. The interior has clean lines, neutral colours, and the auditorium itself managed to achieve a certain understated elegance.

"It's an intimate house. I wanted a horseshoe, because for 400 years, the horseshoe worked." But the problem of a horseshoe is that there are restricted view seats, in boxes for example. Diamond eliminated restricted view seats brilliantly.

There are also movable seats in boxes, which however must be handled carefully when people move too much. "We had a computer model and set nine objects on different places onstage. If you couldn't see eight, we cancelled the seat" explains Bradshaw.

While there were no acoustical compromises, due to budget constraints, some of the stage technology present in modern houses is missing. Bradshaw is unapologetic in this regard, "What we've really built is a first-rate house in terms of the quality of technology, but it's a 19th-century house." Ropes are pulled, stairs are used to get to the fly tower and a turntable will be brought in when funds become available.

One thing which has raised very little controversy is the lack of super-titles [translations] in the backs of seats. This was Bradshaw's decision. "It's fine if you are sitting in a seat at the Met.," explains the general director. "The problem is in the boxes. I was in the centre box at La Scala when they were doing *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Russell Braun was singing, and the director quite understandably had the titles turned off during the orchestral interludes. So you had this going on and off, on and off – it looked like Broadway at rush hour! However, I don't think everyone should agree with me forever, and when another general director appears, if he agrees, he can put it in."

To choose to open a new house with the monumental Ring Cycle, the Mount Everest of operas, is a sure sign of an opera company's confidence and maturity. It is interesting to note that because the Ring schedule was pushed later due to unforeseen circumstances, the decision was more or less made by default. Bradshaw revealed that he would have had Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, a co-production with English National Opera, to open the house, with the Ring to come later in the season.

"The pressure of starting the season with the Ring is very great. However, because of things getting later, I realized it will come at exactly the time of the opening, and I thought – why not."

Bradshaw plays his cards close to his vest, only revealing that future seasons will bring more Wagner – certainly *Tristan*, *Parsifal*, and *Meistersinger*. "I'd like to look at some Berlioz, and then some big pieces I am not going to reveal. I can't until I have some idea what my funding is going to be. I am trying to finalize 2008-9 at the moment, and I have no idea what I am going to get from the Canada Council, and I can't ask the board to approve a deficit of this much, you know. There is a real funding crisis."

So amidst all the euphoria surrounding the new house, the inevitable funding issue is never far away. Money that was promised by several levels of government in the past did not materialize, monies needed for pro-

ductions like *War and Peace*. “[It was] a triumph at ENO, and we’re going to put 40 Canadians in it. We’ve bought into it already, and it is on the list coming up, but it’s very, very expensive. The time has to come when the government must say, ‘we are going to do what we promised,’” explains Bradshaw, who can barely conceal his sense of frustration. “If you go back to 1997 when we did our first business plan, I was told by the Canada Council and the then Deputy of the Department of Heritage what to put in the budget, but I never got that money.” The same happened in 2003.

Later a move was made to cultivate what the last deputy, Alex Himmelfarb, who then went to Privy Council, called the “jewels in the crown.” That was accepted by the Canada Council board itself, and the project qualified for extraordinary support. “For the 50th anniversary of the Canada Council, we were going to get this money for the Ring. I don’t have it, and the Ring is next month...,” says Bradshaw.

Would the smaller capacity of the new house and more performances mean a larger deficit and higher ticket prices? The answer is – it depends. “Running the new house with union labour – not for a road house but for an opera house – means we are operating in an economical manner that we hadn’t been able to. If you look at the seat prices – the expensive seats are extremely expensive, but they always go first. After the Ring, we’ll have 120 seats at \$20 every night. Prices in the middle are calibrated up. I would like the middle seats to be cheaper, and if Canada Council and the Canadian Heritage give me money, I can squeeze that down. People are willing to pay a bit more money because in the new house there are no bad seats. But it worries me that people are so stretched to do all the things we are asking them that I don’t think we can push it much further.”

It is symbolic that the main lobby area of the Four Seasons Centre is called The City Room, signifying the Company’s embracing of the general public. Plans for the inaugural season include 100 free concerts in the amphitheatre (named by the board after Bradshaw), a virtuoso piano series, a vocal series, celebrations of Shostakovich and Mozart, but also “world music”; nine different kinds of drumming from different cultures.



The Four Seasons Centre

Can anyone rent the house? “Because of the Ring, we are in the house 51 out of 52 weeks, so the only thing you can get it for is a *bar mitzvah*! After that, we got a lot of people who want it,” says Bradshaw. With excellent acoustics, the new house may even become a recital venue of choice, but Bradshaw is cool to the idea of competing with the neighboring Roy Thomson Hall. “The essential thing is that we build an opera house. Let’s try to increase the amount of opera first and foremost. Then we have the ballet, and then any spare weeks can go.”

There is no question that with the new house, it will be easier to attract good singers who had stayed away in the past. Famous artists like Teresa Stratas and Jon Vickers refused to sing in Toronto at least partly due to the unsuitable venue. It is too late for them now, but the new house should bode well for future stars. But money is still an issue. “I was talking about a singer this morning I have a sponsor for 2008-9. If I didn’t have a sponsor, I couldn’t even begin to think of it, and that’s dangerous, because once someone else knows we pay this amount, then everything gets calibrated up. Our top-fee singers at the moment are Canadian, but they are still not earning what they are earning elsewhere.”

But there are lots of singers Bradshaw believes will come, people like Dmitri Hvorostovsky. “He’s a friend; we’ve worked together elsewhere. He is *dying* to sing in the new house. He was not keen to sing a role I offered him in the Hummingbird – he wanted to wait for the new house.”

What advice would he give to someone wanting to build an opera house? After a surprisingly lengthy pause, Bradshaw replies, “You have to have a very clear idea what it is you want. Don’t try to make it an all-purpose hall. Get a great acoustician – start with that. And in the end, you’ve also got to realize the next five years of your life is gone! But it’s been a great privilege and great fun – now I want to go back to being a conductor.” ■

Honours for Richard Bradshaw:

- 2006 Governor General’s Performing Arts Award (NAC Award)
- The new house’s amphitheatre is named after Richard Bradshaw

COC’S FIRST RING CYCLE: A BRIEF RETROSPECTIVE

At 7:30 Sunday evening, as the final strains of the sublime Immolation Scene faded away, a collective roar of approval erupted in the auditorium of the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. The first cycle of the COC Ring is now had become history, and indeed there was every cause for jubilation – the company has just tackled the monumental *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, as the first production to open the new house. Its triumph was witnessed by the international press and a sophisticated audience of Ring cognoscenti from near and far. The incredibly enthusiastic reception at the end of *Götterdämmerung* was unlike anything I had witnessed with this company. The cue for autographs in the lobby afterwards was interminable, and the CBC interview with Richard Bradshaw from above took on rock star dimensions. A few detractors notwithstanding, it is fair to say that the first-ever Canadian Ring was indeed a ringing success, pun intended.

It wasn’t smooth sailing all the way. Even before a note had sounded, headgod Pavlo Hunka had withdrawn. Wotan in *Das Rheingold* was successfully assumed by Canadian baritone John Fanning, who had a personal triumph in his role debut. The *Walküre* Wotan and the *Siegfried* Wanderer were taken by Peteris Eglitis, who acquitted himself honourably. Another complication arose when Judit Nemeth (Fricka) couldn’t sing after an emergency wisdom tooth extraction. Mezzo Mary Philips deputized capably. The ingenious stage design and the theatricality of the direction by Michael Levine in *Rheingold* won kudos. The main glory of *Die Walküre* was the radiant Sieglinde of Canadian soprano Adrienne Pieczonka, partnered by the stentorian-toned Clifton Forbis (Siegmund). As Brünnhilde, British soprano Susan Bullock impressed with her uncommon lyricism and vulnerability. She and Eglitis in Act Three brought tears to one’s eyes in Act Three.

For sheer inventiveness and originality, *Siegfried* was the crowning glory of this Ring. The “thought bubble” in Act One and the change of perspective in Act Two were brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed. The dragon, the forging of *Nothing*, and the magic fire were all done with people power, not

machines – a rarity in an age of increasingly techno-dependent Rings. In Christian Franz, we had a Siegfried of experience and stamina – he remained remarkably fresh in the final scene, after almost five hours of singing the most demanding tenor role in all of opera. He and Susan Bullock had great chemistry. Robert Künzli gave Mime a legitimate tenor of excellent quality. Aesthetically *Götterdämmerung* stood out as the darkest of the four operas in this production. Act Two was dominated by the galvanic Hagen of Mats Almgren and the magnificent men’s chorus. Bullock found the *Götterdämmerung* Brünnhilde congenial, giving one of the most memorable performances in the annals of the COC. The re-staged Immolation Scene, while not entirely satisfactory, gave the work the proper cathartic moment.

Perhaps the greatest accolades should go to the COC orchestra, under the baton of Richard Bradshaw. Liberated from the acoustically disastrous Hummingbird Centre, the orchestra sounds terrific in the new space. The sound has both warmth and fullness, as well as the requisite clarity. Even from the vantage point of the left orchestra box, the sound is surprisingly well balanced. In the quiet moments, one can hear every pianissimo in the quiet moments; and in the climactic ones moments, the power and sweep of the music are fully realized. Bradshaw deserves full credit for his well paced and highly nuanced, well paced conducting. There were the occasional slip-ups, particularly in the brass section in *Die Walküre*. Given that none of the musicians had ever played in a full Ring cycle until now, they did exemplary work this week.

No Ring production can please everyone – Wagnerites are notorious for having diverse opinions. That’s par for the course! There was some booing of the production team, particularly after *Die Walküre* and to a lesser extent *Götterdämmerung*. I have attended enough Rings over the years to realize that it only means the COC has arrived. No important Ring production should be without a boo or two – Wagnerites are a passionate lot! The COC put on a full calendar of Ring activities to keep us all occupied throughout the week, and the CBC programming during the first cycle could not be bettered. Two more cycles run until October 1. Info: www.coc.ca ■ - Joseph K. So



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THE MULTI-TALENTED MEXICAN TENOR MAKES HIS CANADIAN DEBUT WITH THE VANCOUVER RECITAL SOCIETY

Joseph So

Prolific cartoonist, practical joker, professional clown, congenial colleague, serious musician? Yes, Rolando Villazón is all those things and more. At 34, the Mexican tenor is one hot ticket. He is, as they say, the “real thing”, a golden voice that recalls a young Plácido Domingo (who happens to be his countryman and mentor), and a superb musician possessing a well-honed dramatic sense and a delightfully irrepressible personality.

North American audiences had their first taste of Villazón in 2001, in a PBS telecast of *La Bohème* from New York City Opera. His Rodolfo was a felicitous combination of youthful ardor, emotional depth, and a voice of clarion beauty and suppleness. It is an instantly recognizable sound, with a tinge of the baritone timbre, yet the “money notes” are free and easy, and he reaches them with taste and elegance. The vocal production is even at all dynamic levels, from the softest *mezza voce* to ringing high Bs and Cs. More importantly, with his ability to make each one in the audience believe he is singing to him or her alone, he is the envy of many singers.

In the intervening years, Villazón has scaled new heights with debuts in Rome, Munich, Berlin, Vienna, Paris, Covent Garden, and the Met. His appearance last summer at the Salzburg Festival opposite the Russian bombshell Anna Netrebko in *La Traviata* created a media sensation. On opening night, fans waved thousands of Euros in front of the theatre, desperate for a ticket. CDs and DVDs of the live performance made the top ten in pop charts. His three critically acclaimed solo recital albums for Virgin Classics have sold in the six figures, a rarity since the heyday of The Three Tenors. In the 2005-06 season, Villazón sings no less than fifty evenings of opera in seven roles – Romeo, Rodolfo, Nemorino, Edgardo, Duke, Werther,

and Lensky; all staples of the Romantic tenor repertoire. In between, he squeezes in two dozen concerts and recitals, including two Verdi Requiems and an appearance at the high-profile World Cup Concert Extravaganza hosted by Domingo.

His hectic schedule included an August 1st performance at the Orange Festival, singing Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, telecast on French TV. Villazón poured out his customary burnished tones in “Tombe, degli avi miei”, the first aria in his suicide scene. His partner, Italian soprano Patrizia Ciofi, was a most affecting Lucia. “I am very happy to sing with Patrizia,” says Villazón. “I knew her from a concert we did in Japan last September, and from the recording of Monteverdi’s opera we have just done for Virgin Classics.” They have excellent chemistry onstage, and their duet “Verranno a te sull’aure” drew waves of ovations.

Villazón’s appearance in Vancouver is a real coup for VRS Artistic Director Leila Getz, considered by many to be the most knowledgeable and respected impresario in Canada. She somehow managed to snare the tenor for his first recital in the country before anyone else – no easy feat. “It has taken years,” explains Getz, “long before Rolando became famous. It requires the utmost patience and the most dogged chasing.”

Villazón has been in Canada only once before on vacation as a child. “I am happy to go to Canada and I hope you will enjoy my recital. I will go with all my energy to give and to sing, but also to see the country, walk the streets, get to meet people, to get closer to the culture which I’ve always been attracted to.”

His Vancouver recital is the second stop on a five-recital tour this fall, sprinkled between performances of *La Traviata* and *La Bohème* in Los Angeles and New York. The program is still in the planning stages, but it looks like it won’t be operatic arias, with the possible exception of some encores. “I’m putting together the program now. I will sing some Schumann, some

Saint-Saëns..." The Schumann will be the well known *Dichterliebe*, which he previously sang in a recital at the Metropolitan Museum in New York last February. Also on the program are the Petrarch Sonnets by Liszt. These high-lying pieces are as operatic as they come. Accompanying him will be pianist/baritone Arturo Nieto.

His teacher of many years, Nieto figured prominently in the tenor's development. It was by chance that Nieto was in the audience when 17 year-old Villazón appeared in a school concert. He heard the tenor sing some popular pieces like *Yesterday* and *The Impossible Dream*. Afterwards, the baritone offered to teach the youngster how to sing properly.

Villazón was all of eight when he fell in love with classical music. He uncovered a recording of Tchaikovsky's violin concerto in a dusty box at home. His first exposure to opera was fittingly the voice of his idol, Domingo. "It's thanks to him that I came to opera. One day my father played me a crossover recording Plácido made with John Denver, *Perhaps Love*, and I was blown away by his voice. After that I wanted to know all about him, so I started listening to his opera recordings. Besides, people say our voices are quite similar. In a way, I am very proud to be considered one of his 'heirs'."

The road to a singing career has been an unusually circuitous one for Villazón. Growing up, he dabbled in acting and singing, considered becoming a history teacher, and even contemplated entering priesthood. He met his wife Lucia at 16 and now lives in Paris with their two children.

When he was 19, he spent time in a mission living with indigenous Indians. He moonlighted as a clown, working children's parties every weekend for a year to earn some money. His acting and clowning go a long way to explain his trademark physicality onstage. Unlike actors, singers are often uncomfortable with their bodies. Not Villazón – physical comedy holds no terror for him. His feet have the typical "turnout" of a dancer, and



the way he moves onstage reflects it. As Nemorino in a telecast of *L'elisir d'amore* on Austrian TV last year, he delighted the Viennese audience singing and juggling oranges at the same time. His "Una furtiva lagrima" has a strong emotional core, as if coming from the depth of his soul. It was because of such remarkable vocalism that the ovations wouldn't stop, with cries of *bis* from the galleries. Visibly moved, Villazón sang it again, even more beautifully the second time.

Anyone who has heard him live is struck by his high energy, "take-no-prisoners" style music that just pours out of him. Does he sometimes worry about giving too much and saving his voice? "I have to make sure my voice is in good condition so I can give all I want to give to the audience. Onstage I have to control my voice, but I love to be 100% the character I play." Interestingly, he does not have a voice teacher now. "But you still study and still learn every day,

even vocally, from your partners, conductors, and even from the public. Indeed I found out the best teacher you have is the stage and yourself!"

The tenor made big news recently when Universal announced that he'll be a "Yellow Label Artist", signed to a contract with Deutsche Grammophon to begin mid-2007. But Villazón stresses that there are still more projects to come with EMI's Virgin Classics, the label so instrumental in building his career. He recently finished a *zarzuela* album conducted by Domingo, and – in his first foray into early music – Monteverdi's *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* with Emmanuelle Haïm conducting. Would he consider singing opera in the new opera house in Toronto? "Of course I would love to sing in the new opera house in Toronto. The only problem is that my diary is practically fully booked up until 2010!"

Rolando Villazón, tenor; Arturo Nieto, piano; Vancouver Recital Society. Tuesday, October 3, 8:00 p.m. Orpheum Theatre. For tickets, call (604) 602-0363, or e-mail <boxoffice@vanrecital.com>. ■

The Essential Rolando Villazón: selected discography

RECITALS

The three recital discs Rolando Villazón made with Virgin Classics were instrumental in establishing the singer in the eyes of the public. The first two won major awards, including the German Echo Award and the British Gramophone Award, and the most recent disc with Michel Plasson at the podium is every bit as good. The Special Edition of Opera Recital (2006) includes a DVD of the rehearsal, and it is well worth the few extra dollars. It shows the tenor in action – a mercurial personality that can go from fooling around to being totally serious, with the most soulful sounds pouring out of him. It will likely win its share of best vocal-recordings prizes of 2006.

Italian Opera Arias (2004)

Münchener Rundfunkorchester, Marcello Viotti, conductor (Virgin Classics)

Gounod and Massenet Arias (2005)

Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Evelino Pidò, conductor (Virgin Classics)

Opera Recital (2006)

Münchener Rundfunkorchester, Michel Plasson, conductor (Virgin Classics)

OPERAS

If there is a void in Villazón's discography, it is in complete operas. So far, only two with him in a lead role are available commercially. The live performance of *La Traviata* from Salzburg opposite Russian diva Anna Netrebko on DG has become a best seller – the two burn up the stage, even if the production itself may not be to everyone's taste. His passionate *Don Carlo* from a live performance with the Nederlandse Opera is available on DVD from Opus Arte. It features a strong cast, particularly the searing Eboli of Violeta Urmana, and to a lesser extent Dwayne Croft (Rodrigo) and Amanda Roocroft (Elizabeth). As for the staging, Willi Decker's work is very original. There is a third, that of *Romeo y Julieta*, opposite Basque soprano Ainhoa Arteta, in a live performance from Oviedo, issued by Radio Television Espanola. It is not widely available. The other complete opera recordings have Villazón in supporting roles, such as the Sailor in both *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die fliegende Holländer*. He brings his unique and refreshingly different Latin timbre to these roles.

Verdi: La Traviata (2005)

Wiener Philharmoniker, Carlo Rizzi, conductor (DG)

Verdi: Don Carlo (2005)

Nederlandse Opera, Riccardo Chailly (Opus Arte)

Berlioz: La révolution grecque (2003)

Orchestre Nationale du Capitole de Toulouse, Michael Plasson, conductor (EMI Classics)

Die fliegende Holländer (2002)

Staatskapelle Berlin, Daniel Barenboim, conductor (Teldec)

Tristan und Isolde (2005)

Orchestra of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Antonio Pappano, conductor (EMI Classics)

Romeo y Julieta (2002)

Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias, Reynald Giovaninetti, conductor (Radio Televisión Española)

FUTURE PROJECTS

For Virgin Classics, the tenor has recorded a disc of *zarzuelas* conducted by Domingo, to be released in February 2007. Also awaiting release is his first "Early Music" disc, that of Monteverdi's *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, conducted by Emmanuelle Haïm. Also in the cards on Virgin are several as yet unspecified DVDs. When his contract for DG begins, the tenor will record the complete *La Bohème*, a solo recital and a duet album with Anna Netrebko. ■



LÉOPOLD SIMONEAU (Saint-Flavien, May 3, 1916 – Victoria, August 24, 2006)

Canadian tenor Léopold Simoneau passed away on August 24 in Victoria, British Columbia, where he and his wife, soprano Pierrette Alarie, had lived since 1982. He was 90 years old.

First recognized as a Mozart specialist in the early 50s, Simoneau went on to become one of the most prestigious singers of his time. He was a frequent guest at the festivals of Aix-en-Provence

and Glyndebourne, and his travels at the end of his career took him to London, Buenos Aires, Salzburg, Edinburgh and many other great cities.

At the Festival du XXe siècle, held in Paris in 1952, Simoneau took part in an historic production of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, conducted by the composer and narrated by Jean Cocteau. The next year he sang the title role in *Don Giovanni* at La Scala, under the baton of Herbert von Karajan. He also sang with Maria Callas (*La Traviata* at the Lyric Opera in Chicago) and performed a recital with Glenn Gould (Stratford Festival, 1962).

He made his Metropolitan Opera debut in the role of Don Ottavio, on October 18, 1963. This role became his calling card, and he performed it 185 times during his career. He won numerous prizes and awards, and was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1971. His last public appearance was on November 24, 1970, in a performance of *Messiah* with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra.



Elisabeth Schwarzkopf (Jarocin, Germany, December 9, 1915 – Schruns, Austria, August 3, 2006)

Renowned soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf passed away on August 3, at the age of 88, in her home in Austria.

The German-born singer, who became a naturalized British citizen in 1953, was famous for her starring roles in Mozart (Elvira in *Don Giovanni*) and Richard Strauss (the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*) operas. Von Karajan, with whom she

collaborated, once described her as "probably the greatest singer in Europe".

Her international career began in 1947, with a tour of the great European and American concert halls. Her last operatic performance was in the Brussels Opera production of *Der Rosenkavalier* in December, 1970, but she continued to present lieder recitals and to give master classes in New York and Austria. In 1992, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II.

John Weinzwieg (Toronto, March 11, 1913 – Toronto, August 24, 2006)

Dubbed "the dean of Canadian composers", John Weinzwieg passed away in Toronto on August 24, at the age of 93.

A complete musician, Weinzwieg spent his teens playing the mandolin, tuba, piano, tenor saxophone and upright bass, often performing at events



Photo: Walter Curtin - 1974

with his younger brother Morris. At 19, he turned to composition, and enrolled at the University of Toronto. He also studied conducting at the Toronto Conservatory of Music (now the Royal Conservatory of Music), during which time he founded and conducted the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

He continued his studies at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, where he discovered the 20th-century music of Stravinsky and Berg. His first work, *Suite no. 1* for piano, became, in

1939, the first Canadian composition to incorporate serialist techniques. However, his greatest achievement for Canadian music was his founding, in 1951, with his former students Samuel Dolin and Harry Somers, of the Canadian League of Composers (CLComp), over which he presided from its founding until 1957, and then again from 1959 to 1963. His work with CLComp largely contributed to the creation, in 1959, of the Canadian Music Centre. He was also president of the Composers, Authors and Publishers Association of Canada (now known as SOCAN) from 1973 to 1975.

Weinzwieg was a professor of music at the University of Toronto from 1952 to 1978, and his pupils include such groundbreakers as Bruce Mather, R. Murray Schafer, Robert Aitken and Brian Cherney. He was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1974, and among his many other tributes he received the SOCAN life-achievement award in 2004.



James Tenney (Silver City, August 10, 1934 – Valencia, August 24, 2006)

Contemporary American composer James Tenney passed away in Valencia, California, on August 24, at the age of 72.

A collaborator with practically all of the great names in experimental music (Harry Partch, Edgard Varèse, Steve Reich, Philip Glass, John Cage, Carl Ruggles among others), Tenney founded his own ensemble, the Tone Roads Chamber Ensemble, in New York in 1963. He also served as its conductor and principal pianist. An eternal curiosity for discovering new

sounds fuelled his composing, and his works investigated in novel ways the properties of sound and its perception.

While he is often claimed by Americans to be the archetype of the "ruggedly individual American artist" (as stated by the LA Times), his appointment to Toronto's York University in 1976 made him a leading figure on the Canadian music scene, where he helped gather greater public support for experimental music in Canada. He stayed at York until he returned to California in 2000.

Lorraine Hunt-Lieberson

(San Francisco, March 1, 1954 – Santa Fe, July 3, 2006)

Lorraine Hunt-Lieberson, a much acclaimed American vocalist, passed away in early July this summer, after suffering from breast cancer. She was 52. Originally from the San Francisco Bay area, Hunt-Lieberson began her



works by Chopin and Shostakovich. An honorary member of the *Concours International du piano du xx^e Siècle in Orléans*, Rawitz had been invited to give masterclasses in various prestigious music festivals and had toured Europe, Japan and the Americas, both as soloist and chamber musician.

Eva Knardahl (Oslo, Norway, May 10, 1927 – Oslo, September 3, 2006)



Photo: Bjørn Stigurdson NTB / Scanpix

musical training as a violist, before focusing on voice and eventually, opera. A graduate of San Jose State University, she also studied at the Boston Conservatory, and worked as a freelance musician until Peter Sellars cast her as Sesto in Händel's *Giulio Cesare*. This career breakthrough was followed by performances with the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, the Opera de Paris, the San Francisco Symphony, the Netherlands Opera and the Metropolitan Opera, to name a few. Throughout her career, she demonstrated great interest towards lesser known operas and lieder. Her recordings of Bach Cantatas have done extremely well with both audiences and critics. Her most famous performances include Phaedra in Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*, Myrtle Wilson in John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby*, as well as the *Neruda Songs*, poems set to music by her husband, composer Peter Lieberman. She will be remembered as a highly versatile musician with a uniquely beautiful voice.

Benjamin Rawitz (Haifa, Israel, 1946 – Brussels, Belgium, August 29, 2006)



Israel-born pianist Benjamin Rawitz passed away tragically at the end of August in his Brussels home, where he had been residing for several years. A graduate of Tel-Aviv University and the Brussels

Royal Conservatory of Music, Rawitz had received such distinguished prizes as the Geneva Conservatory *Prix de virtuosité*, the Zurich Mozart-Preis and the Barcelona Premio-Albeniz. Some of his teachers include Ilona Vincze, Eduardo del Pueyo, Peter Feuchtwanger and Louis Hiltbrand. He is best remembered for his recordings of cello and piano sonatas by Saint-Saëns with cellist Luc Tooten, Schubert sonatinas for violin and piano with Janos Maté, and solo

number of concerts to Grieg. Of a warm and easy-going nature, she was much appreciated in her country and abroad, and her name is well-known even to non-classical audiences in Norway. In the later years of her life, Eva Knardahl was named first Professor of Chamber Music at the Norwegian State Academy of Music.

Astrid Varnay (Stockholm, Sweden, April 25, 1918 – Munich, Germany, Sept. 4, 2006)



Swedish-American singer Astrid Varnay died earlier this month at the age of 88. She is well known for having made her debut at the Metropolitan Opera in a nationally broadcast performance as *Sieglinde* in *Die Walküre*, for which she had not even rehearsed, as she was filling in for Lotte Lehmann. She became famous at once and her career was launched. Up to 1956, she gave about 200 performances with the Metropolitan Opera, working with singing coach Hermann Weigert, whom she eventually married. Varnay is also remembered for her part in the world-premiere of Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Island of God*, in 1942. At the peak of her career, in the 1950's, she was invited to perform at the London Covent Garden Opera and at Bavaria's Bayreuth Festival. Varnay settled in Munich in 1955, and pursued an admirable career on European stages for several years. She returned to the Metropolitan Opera only in 1974, to take on the part of Kostelnicka in Janacek's *Jenufa*. Her very final performance at the Met took place in December 1979, when she sang Kurt Weill's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, as Leocadia Begbick. After that point, Varnay was seldom seen on stage, mainly in Germany. ■

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More cracks opening in the SHOSTAKOVICH CODE

from the files of The Lebrecht Weekly • lebrecht.scena.org

Norman Lebrecht

The centennial year of Dmitri Shostakovich, who was born in St Petersburg on 25 September 1906, has yielded a rush of fresh perspectives – far more than the concurrent avalanche of Mozart 250th events which has merely rewrapped the same old marzipan balls for gullible consumption.

Six new books on Mozart have failed to elicit one unknown fact of any consequence, and the laying out of all 22 operas at Salzburg last month merely confirms the gulf of genius that separates the three Da Ponte scripts – *Figaro*, *Così*, and *Don Giovanni* – from the next rung of *Idomeneo*, *Clemenza* and the *Magic Flute*; and beyond them lies a wilderness of dreary plots and musical polyfiller. Any latecomer who mistakes *Zaide* for *Zauberflöte* is going to get locked in for an interminable stretch at upwards of 200 Euros a seat. Shostakovich, in polar contrast, has preserved his mystery and redoubled his appeal. His inner mind has resisted scholarly penetration, along with the secrets of his marital and extra-marital lives. There is no new biography coming up and the heat has gone out of the historians' row as to whether he was a cowed follower of Soviet doctrine or a subversive dissident.

The last of his three wives, Irina, lives on in Moscow, as does his arch tormentor Tikhon Khrennikov, who, as secretary of the Composers Union, enforced Stalin's decrees and kept Shostakovich in fear of his life. Khrennikov turned 93 this summer and his Moscow birthday concert drew a packed house of nostalgists clanking with Stalin medals. So long as these leftovers live on, the full truth about Dmitri Shostakovich will remain inaccessible, despite his rising popularity.

A few sheets of unpublished music have been released for the centenary, some songs and suites that the widow Irina gave to Thomas Sanderling, son of one of Shostakovich's favourite conductors, to record on two Deutsche Grammophon CDs. The songs conform slavishly to the heroic Russian style and the suites are stitch-ups of film scores that lose impetus and theme development the moment a director shouts 'Cut!'. Not much enlightenment there.

It would, however, be a mistake to dismiss the film music of Shostakovich as lightly as one would the current Hollywood mush, for the composer had an early emotional investment in the genre. He earned his first kopecks as a teenaged cinema pianist and in his 20s saw film as the most important contemporary art form. In a 1929 article he promised to eliminate the bungling and the inartistic from Soviet film by composing what he called 'special music' and his work on Grigori Kozintsev's *New Babylon* that year is strikingly colourful and original.

In 1936 his idealism was crushed during Stalin's first crackdown, which killed off several of his film partners. His later soundtracks were undertaken either to feed his family when he was under a political cloud or, on Khrennikov's orders, as propaganda tracks for such epics as *The Fall of Berlin*. Only near the end of his life, in 1971, did Shostakovich risk dissidence in film with a score for Kozintsev's *King Lear* – played by the BBC Philharmonic on Chandos – that sneers at the hapless gerontocrat, an inference that many Russians instantly applied to the doddering Brezhnev regime. What enabled Shostakovich to function under tyranny was his method of conveying ulterior meaning through a shade of instrumentation, a convoluted chord or the insertion of his own musical initials (D, E-flat, C, B), allowing musicians to play his work as social commentary in ways that audiences grasped and the authorities were powerless to suppress. Mstislav Rostropovich, an intimate friend, describes the 15 symphonies as a covert

history of Soviet Russia and the 15 string quartets as a coded account of his own sufferings. Mariss Jansons, whose father Arvid worked with Shostakovich in Leningrad, grew up 'surrounded by people who explained what was behind the notes. It was ... a statement against the regime'.

Jansons has just released a centennial symphonic box on EMI in which he teases out unuttered meaning by means of tiny shifts in tempo and dynamics, avoiding the over-emphasis on rude bassoons and cackling flutes that can make a Shostakovich symphony sound like bad stand-up comedy in the hands of an ill-informed conductor. Jansons' daring and seminal interpretation deliver the sixth and bleakest of the symphonies as a work of pure beauty, its despair and frustration seeping irresistibly like steam through holes in the surface. It is a completely different way of presenting Shostakovich, overriding some of the composer's strict tempo and dynamic markings in the score to reveal the inner truth, one that weakens in the late symphonies as the Stalinist tyranny recedes.

Valery Gergiev, at the opposite extreme, takes every emphasis in the score as written, drawing out shrieks of pain and ribald mirth in performances of high voltage on a Philips set. Gergiev celebrates Shostakovich as a Soviet hero, albeit one who admits the system's flaws and iniquities. It is a definition that involves a tortuous ambivalence towards the past, cherishing cultural triumphs while regretting the oppression that produced them, very much the present line of Vladimir Putin's Kremlin.

The official line came unstuck for Gergiev this summer when he brought Soviet-style productions of Shostakovich operas and ballets to the Coliseum and received a critical drubbing and public frost. The losses from his season are privately estimated at half a million pounds (to be borne by the Russian taxpayer) but far worse is the damage to Gergiev's Kirov company, which was made to seem antedeluvian.

Meanwhile, at Covent Garden, the Bolshoi was brilliantly dancing the third and last of Shostakovich's ballets, withdrawn after threats in Pravda in February 1936 and not revived until 2003. *The Bright Stream* depicts a harvest festival on a collective farm, enlivened by the visit of an arts ensemble. Much of the story is low farce, the deluding of elderly lotharios by male dancers in drag and shaggy dogs that ride bicycles. What riled Pravda was its lack of folk tunes and a wanton 'unrealism', the failure to depict every muddy farmhand as a lion of Soviet labour.

Seen here and now, *The Bright Stream* is a revelation on several levels. The music fizzles with nervous energy, the choreography is genuinely witty even if the story seems to accept that forced collectivisation was a jolly good thing. Or does it? By early 1936 many Muscovites had heard of the murders, the deportations and the famine that resulted from Stalin's land grab. They knew what went on and they could hear the midnight knocks at the door. The kolkhoz was hardly the stuff of light entertainment. Yet the public response was immediately enthusiastic, suggesting that Muscovites perceived an element of satire in the ballet and welcomed it as a relief from lying propaganda and mounting terror.

Or did they? No one dared record a private opinion. There is no documented evidence. All that is known is that Shostakovich was declared an enemy of the people early that year and was forced to recant in the *Fifth Symphony* – subtitled 'a Soviet artist's response to just criticism'. Jansons turns the triumphant finale of that symphony into an ominous danse macabre. The truth is told in the music. All you have to do is listen closely. ■

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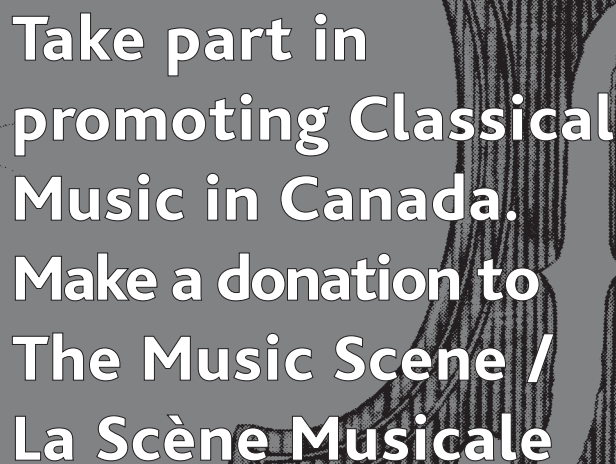
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Marc Chénard
National Jazz Editor

ABOUT A DECADE AGO, much was made of the fact that jazz was marking its one-hundredth anniversary. Although no one has succeeded in pinpointing its exact birth date, the United States Congress marked the occasion by passing a resolution declaring jazz a “national treasure.” While it sounds nice on paper, this declaration was but a belated recognition of an artistic expression that has received more respect in the rest of the world than it has in its own birthplace. Despite all the debates surrounding its origins, all agree it is a child of the last century.

Historically, jazz coincides with the rise of the motion picture and the development of the phonographic record. More specifically, this African-American art form is the first to owe its existence to records. In the past, music was either transmitted orally (and aurally), like folklore, or through written scores. In the latter case, music required interpreters to make it intelligible to audiences, and live performances were the only way to ensure transmission. Nowadays, with audio and visual recordings amply documenting events, past and present, live shows are no longer the only way of reaching audiences. In fact, there are many music fans who are content listening to their collections at home, and considering the price of today’s tickets, there is much motivation to do so.

Unlike classical music, jazz guaranteed its future via the recorded medium. More than one generation of players learned their craft by doggedly trying to replicate by ear the sounds coming out of their turntable speakers, risking the wear and tear of surfaces by dropping the needle over and over again on certain parts of the record. For decades, the works of some of the music’s greatest composers could not be found in printed form, and only in the last fifteen years or so has it become possible to find pieces by Mingus, Monk, Coltrane and Davis, and even more obscure ones like Herbie Nichols in printed form. Equally interesting are the growing numbers of books with solo transcriptions by all of the greats, where ad lib improvisations are fixed on the page like through-composed works.

Today, the quantity of aural documents is overwhelming. With the constant changes in technology and the relative ease in producing and distributing one’s own music, out goes the impera-

tive of having to write down the music in the traditional manner. This has led to an enthusiastic reaffirmation of the oldest musical practice of them all: improvisation. Once frowned upon or outright disapproved of in Western music, improvisation is now the key driving force in 21st century music. Now that works do not need to be premeditated before their realization, music can be produced in a more expedient fashion, i.e. extemporaneously. More and more, the roles of composer and performer are being blurred into one, and the dichotomy between the two that became firmly entrenched in the 19th century is now unravelling.

THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

As marvellous as recordings are in preserving the past, their weight creates a burden on those wanting to contribute to the present. The founding fathers of the art form, Armstrong, Ellington, Hawkins, Tatum and the like were the lucky ones, for they were inventing something from scratch. As their successors added their own contributions, the monument has turned into a musical Tower of Babel, even more so considering its modern global scope.

Given the current glut of music on the market, fans are confronted by a bewildering choice that is frequently dictated by mere financial considerations. The tons of re-issues selling at budget prices, a good number of which have stood the test of time, make them more affordable options than the more expensive new releases by lesser-known artists with less-proven track records. Notwithstanding the truckloads of new releases, the CD era has been a real bonanza for re-issues, some of which have definite value while a good number are re-packaged offerings with “bonus” tracks that resemble scrapings from the barrel more than worthy phonographic finds.

During the youthful exuberance of its first half-century, the jazz world was intent on building its legacy rather than rehashing it. When Fantasy Records started its “twofer” LP series in the 1970’s, history finally caught up with the music, a trend which grew during the ensuing years and was made all the more enticing with the switch-over to CDs. Now in its second century, jazz is being chased by its past, making its reckoning with the present increasingly crucial if it is to survive as more than repertory art, but as one capable of maintaining its creative edge. ■

OFF THE RECORD

Marc Chénard, Felix Hamel, Paul Serralheiro

(1) Thelonious Monk with John Coltrane: *The Complete 1957 Riverside Recordings*

Riverside RCD2-30027-2

★★★★☆

(2) Thelonious Monk: *In Philadelphia 1960 with Steve Lacy*

Rare Live Recordings RLR 88623

★★★★☆

At a time when the so-called “Majors” appear to be losing interest in documenting today’s creative jazz musicians, it is only natural that re-issues would occupy a large share of the market. While no one would contest the fact that such important labels as Blue Note, Verve and Columbia have released numerous invaluable items, they have transgressed in their overemphasizing great historical figures at the expense of today’s musicians. Most jazz record buyers will by now likely be familiar with such marketing statements as: “Collector’s edition”, “Newly re-mastered in 24-bit sound”; “Expanded edition with bonus alternate takes”; and “Digipack with restored cover art.” To wit, there are the campaigns to promote new books or DVDs, or releases that become events in and of themselves:

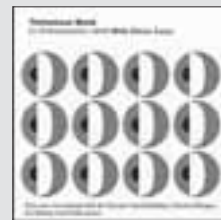
(1) One can’t help wondering if last year’s *Thelonious Monk Quartet with John Coltrane at Carnegie Hall* (Blue Note) wasn’t the main incen-

tive to release this set, *The Complete 1957 Riverside Recordings*. The fact is, any Monk devotee likely has most of the material on this recent two-CD set, which collects tracks and alternate takes from *Thelonious Himself*, *Monk’s Music* and *Thelonious Monk with John Coltrane*, three 1957 classics that rightly belong in any jazz library. However, it still makes an attractive package for the newcomer, and puts into perspective the Monk/Coltrane collaboration, which was unfortunately short-lived and insufficiently documented despite the fact that it produced some of the finest jazz ever recorded. Essential tracks here include the trio “Monk’s Mood” (from the otherwise solo *Thelonious Himself* session), five septet versions of “Crepuscle with Nellie”, a couple of takes of “Well You Needn’t” (which also featured Coleman Hawkins), and the only studio recordings by the full quartet: “Ruby, My Dear”, “Nuttty,” and “Tinkle, Tinkle.” In addition, there are insightful liner notes by the producer of the original recordings, Orrin Keepnews.

(2) The second item, a collection of rare and mostly bootleg-quality tracks, illustrates another aspect of the re-issue phenomenon. The Monk specialist



will find much to enjoy here, starting with three tracks from a short-lived line-up from 1960 that had Steve Lacy augmenting the regular quartet of Monk, Charlie Rouse, John Ore and Roy Haynes.



Given Lacy’s lifelong commitment to Monk’s music, this is an especially welcome addition to his discography, even if he is heard only briefly on two of the three tracks (the closing announcements of the radio program drown his contribution to “Rhythm A Ning”). The rest of this disc consists of other rare live recordings, including a larger band version of “Blue Monk” and a couple of quartet numbers (the liner notes indicate 1957, but based on the personnel, this reviewer is inclined to place the recording date at around 1959 or 1960), three tunes from a 1948 broadcast, two rare recordings of a Monk group backing a crooner in 1950, and an abysmal recording of a 1955 appearance on the Steve Allen Show with the all-star band of Art Farmer, Hank Mobley, Art Blakey and Charles Mingus (the latter, unfortunately inaudible). Not recommended for the casual listener or newcomer (who should start with the Riverside set), this re-issue is nevertheless an important addition to any Monk or Lacy collection. **FH ■**

Steve Lacy and John Heward: *Recessional (For Oliver Johnson)*

Mode Records AVANT 04

★★★★☆

A year before his untimely death in June of 2004, soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy honoured a long-time commitment to his friend John Heward—a Montreal visual artist



and drummer—by playing an impromptu duo performance. As stated by the latter in the liner notes to this recently issued side, they had talked about doing this for years, and Lacy’s return to the US in 2002 helped make it happen. While Lacy’s music hinged on his highly individualistic pieces for medium-sized ensembles (at least during his later years), this performance harkens back to the days when he engaged in small-group musical impromptus. This recording is focused on the instrumentalist, and a unique one too, given his inimitable sound and fearless streak in coaxing squawking duck calls to dead-on altissimo whistles on his horn. Some may quibble at the duration (only 38 minutes), but let’s remember that this is a bare-bones duo and, more importantly, that it was at this time that Lacy’s health was starting to fail.

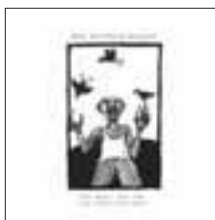
While played without interruption, three track divisions are provided. Save for a Lacy piece heard at the end—which gives its title to this side—and aside from a couple of Monk tune quotes (what else!) surfacing in the second piece, the music is music of the moment. Bereft of pretence and underscored by mutual respect from the players, the music bears the imprint of Lacy’s circumspect approach, whereas Heward colours the proceedings with cymbal splashes and painterly drum strokes. Though this may not be one of the more essential items in Lacy’s extended discography, fans of the departed master will find it worth their while to track it down via the label’s web-site (www.moderecords.com). **MC**

Ben Goldberg Quintet: *The Door, the Hat, the Chair, the Fact*

Cryptogramophone CG126

★★★★☆

Bay area clarinetist Ben Goldberg offers a project inspired by, and attributed to, Steve Lacy. With searching angularity and playful traipsing through 12 tones, even suggesting the notes in between, all five musi-



cians are of one mind. Drummer Ches Smith provides an elastic treatment of time and does wonders with brushes, while bassist Devin Hoff flowingly stitches the loose fabric, and likewise violinist Carla Kihlstedt and tenor saxophonist Rob Sudduth, who both share a common musical purpose here. The music has a relaxed, loping feel that we often wish for in jazz, along with much melodic meaning—a quality not always easy to define but immediately recognizable when heard. All of this stems from the sincere intention of paying homage to Lacy, the composer and improviser, giving us many aesthetic experiences of the highest order. At once sensual, intellectual and spiritual, the music is wise to the world with its truths—alluded to in the disc’s title, but also in the individual tunes such as the up-tempo swing of “Song and Dance,” which contains a honking and soulful sax solo. This is sinuously inquisitive music, notably in Goldberg’s melismatic clarinet meandering in “I before E before I,” and in the violinist’s enchanted vocalizing of the poem “Facts.” Elsewhere, “Learned from Susan Stewart” has some lyrical turns of phrase reminiscent of Kenny Wheeler’s themes and of Lacy’s musical journeys. All told, the music shines through so convincingly because of its acoustic clarity, where the instruments’ sounds are so well-defined both in the mix and mic setup. **PS ■**

Vancouver Mainstreaming

(1) Linton Garner Trio: *Quiet Nights*

Cellar Live CL11702

★★★★☆☆

(2) Bill Coon and Oliver Gannon:

Two Much Guitar

Cellar Live CL121905

★★★★☆☆

(1) These two discs show off the mainstream scene in Vancouver. The first one, by pianist Linton Garner, happens to be his last disc, and only his second one as a leader, one which proves to be the testament to his artistry. Deceased in 2003, Linton was the elder brother of the more famous Erroll, the renowned stylist and composer ("Misty"). Despite an impressive resume which included a stint in Billy Eckstein's legendary bebop big band, the elder Garner is lesser known, albeit a talented and inspired, soloist. The music performed here in his adopted home of Vancouver, where he settled in 1974, is in keeping with the setting: the Cellar Club, a nightclub where people not only come to listen, but also to eat and talk. Its intimacy is well suited to the nature of the playing, with its romantic, eloquent and poetic qualities that are food for both head and heart. The trio swaggers through old staples like "Days of Wine and Roses," "All the Things You Are," "Corcovado," and "Just Friends." All but one tune, the pianist's "Blues for Jimmy Q," are well-worn jazz pieces. Throughout, Linton handles the material masterfully, along with appropriate, well-versed contributions by suave tenor sax player Ross Taggart and bassist Russ Botten.



(2) The same kind of language pervades the CD by plectrists Gannon and Coon, ably supported by bassist Darren Radtke and drummer Dave Robbins. Originally from Montreal, Coon has established himself as an important mainstream voice on the West Coast scene. For his part, Gannon has been around the block many times, a fact reflected in his self-assured playing. The focus is on the voluble variations, and the guitarists deliver articulate melodic overlays on the changes of tunes like Parker's "Chi Chi" and Tadd Dameron's "If You Could See Me Now," as well as on the two originals, one each by Coon and Gannon. Despite some predictable turns of phrase, the music mainly unfolds in interesting ways as one is privy to two important Canadian guitar voices engaged in eloquent conversations. PS



Toronto Ad Lib

(1) David Braid – Phil Nimmons: *Beginnings*

Nimmons'n'music Ltd. NNB 1105

★★★★☆☆

(2) Mirobolous String Trio:

Scratching the Surface

Anaglyph Records ANG242601

★★★★☆☆

(1) One of the beauties inherent in improvised music is the ability to rally performers of any stylistic, generational or cultural stripe for the sole purpose of making music. While this is not a given proposition in itself, it can yield some remarkable results, as is the case for this recording. Two years ago, clarinetist Phil Nimmons, Canada's "dean" of jazz musicians, and aged 81 at the time, shared the spotlight with pianist David Braid, who was then barely 30. They took to the stage without rehearsals, set program nor pieces to play on. Throughout their seven spontaneously-created pieces (quixotically entitled, "Ayy / Bee / Cee / Dee / Eeh / Eff / Gee"), the duo demonstrates an uncanny sense of empathy. The mood ranges from wistful and ballad-like (the first and third tracks) to bluesy in the second track, although unexpectedly veering off into a furious exchange carrying over into the next cut. Despite the imperfect sound (the clarinet being more distant than the piano), this outing led them across Canada for this summer's jazz fest tour. Based on this sterling debut, we look forward to hearing more from these timeless musicians, as in a promised follow-up recording.



(2) Unlike the previous offering, this debut recording of the Mirobolous String Trio is clearly focused on composition. Seven pieces are performed in this concise 45-minute side, five of them credited to bassist Bret Higgings, the other two by cellist Monica Fedrigo, the group rounded off by violinist Bogdan Djakic. This instrumentation was a featur of the remarkable Arcado String Trio in the nineties, but these Toronto players do not have the same panache as their musical predecessors. Like most string bands, the music here swings lightly, with plenty of pizzicatos and ostinato patterns to set up grooves. To its credit, the ensemble offers a varied program, the opening, "Diaphanous Charms," with definite klezmer shadings, followed by a blues-tinged "Begin," leading into a slightly more abstract-sounding "Hell's Backbone," and so on. Although there are occasional intonation problems (always a risk in string ensembles), the listening experience is an pleasant one overall. MC



Montreal Newcomers

Berthiaume, Donato, Tanguay: *Ellen's Bar*

Ambiances Magnétiques AM 152 CD

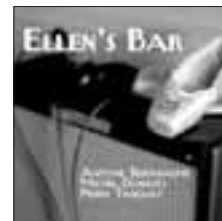
★★★★☆☆

Chet Doxas Quartet: *Sidewalk Etiquette*

Justin Time

★★★★☆☆

(1) After two decades at the forefront of Montreal's musique actuelle scene, Ambiances Magnétiques, with its jazz series of recent vintage, is on the verge of becoming Quebec's top contemporary jazz label. For his third offering with them, guitarist Antoine Berthiaume romps through nine of his pieces with stellar band mates—veteran bassist Michel Donato and label regular Pierre Tanguay on drums—who each contribute a piece of their own. While his previous projects were definitely experimental (he recorded with Derek Bailey and Fred Frith), this newest side is in the lineage of jazz guitar trios led by the likes of Pat Metheny and John Abercrombie. Of the pieces, Tanguay's calypso, "La Betterave" (to which only Sonny Rollins's tenor is missing) offers a nice change of pace in a resolutely modern set. Berthiaume shows exceptional command, playing in an intricate, yet fluid style. His sidemen, who really need no introduction, are perfect foils for the leader, providing a flexible interplay throughout the hour-long side. An impressive effort!



(2) Montreal saxophonist Chet Doxas is one of the city's busiest, young musicians. First noticed in a trio called ByProduct (with brother Jim on drums and Zack Lober on bass), the group released an eponymously-titled album in 2002. The aforementioned are joined here by pianist John Roney in a new Justin Time release comprised of six post-bop originals (five by the leader, plus one Lober composition), and two covers, Joe Zawinul's "Forlorn," and Coltrane's "Moment's Notice". Highlighted are the tributes to two of the young saxophonist's avowed influences, Jimmy Giuffre and Wayne Shorter (the latter for whom this band opened at the most recent Montreal Jazz Festival). The second track, entitled "Unsung (for Jimmy Giuffre)," is an 11-minute exploration of a theme penned by Carla Bley ("Jesus Maria") but long associated with the clarinetist/composer. Elsewhere, the classic "Nefertiti" seeps into the other tribute piece of this disc, "Long for Shorter." Though more daring would have been welcomed, Doxas displays an exceptional technique throughout this solid debut of his. FH ■



PREVIEWS



Adrienne Pieczonka



Krisztina Szabo



Measha Brueggergosman

Photo: Lorne Bridgman

SOUTHERN ONTARIO VOCAL PREVIEW (FALL 2006)

Joseph So

Undoubtedly the biggest draw of the fall season is Wagner's Ring Cycle, which marks the opening of Toronto's Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts. This is the first time the four operas of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* will be presented in the format of a 'cycle' – in the span of one week. Three of the four in the tetralogy have already been staged in the Hummingbird Centre, with *Das Rheingold* as the only 'new' production. Canadian soprano Frances Ginzer shares the role of Brünnhilde with British soprano Susan Bullock. German tenor Christian Franz once again takes on Siegfried, arguably the most demanding tenor role in opera. British-Ukrainian baritone Pavlo Hunka, a frequent guest at the COC and an excellent Hunding two seasons back, had been cast as Wotan, however has had to withdraw due to diabetes. Canadian bass Phillip Ens takes on Hunding as well as the giant Fafner. His brother Fasolt is Canadian bass Robert Pomakov. Fresh from her triumph as Sieglinde in Bayreuth, Canadian soprano **Adrienne Pieczonka** reprises the role, opposite the Siegmund of American tenor Clifton Forbis. Swedish bass Mats Almgren returns as the evil Hagen. For additional cast information and tickets, go to www.ringcycle.ca (416) 363-8231, Cycle One: Sept. 12 – 17; Cycle Two: Sept. 19 – 24; Cycle Three: Sept. 26 – Oct. 1.

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This being a Mozart year, all three local companies are featuring his operas. The COC's regular season starts with *Così fan tutte* in a Canadian ensemble cast of Joni Henson (Fiordiligi), **Krisztina Szabo** (Dorabella), Shannon Mercer

(Despina), Michael Colvin (Ferrando), and Russell Braun (Guglielmo). (Oct. 17 – Nov. 5). A few blocks away at the Elgin Theatre, Opera Atelier starts its season with Mozart's *The Magic Flute* sung in English. It features a contingent of OA regulars, including Colin Ainsworth, Carla Huhtanen, Gerald Issac, Olivier Laquerre, and Jennie Such (Nov. 17 – 25). (416) 872-5555 or www.ticketmaster.ca. Down the QEW is Opera Ontario's *Don Giovanni*, with two performances at Hamilton Place (Oct. 19 and 21) and two at the Centre in the Square in Kitchener (Oct. 27 and 29). Among the cast are Daniel Okulitch in the title role, Lyne Fortin as Donna Anna, and Sally Dibblee as Donna Elvira.

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Opera in Concert's fall lineup includes Puccini's *La Rondine* (Oct. 1), and Poulenc's *Les Dialogues des Carmélites* (Nov. 19). The biggest casting coup at OIC is the first-ever Blane by soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian, who is slated to sing this role later in the season with the Chicago Lyric Opera. The Puccini piece features soprano Arlene Alvarado and tenor Kurt Lehmann. Alvarado, who performed an excellent Gretel last year for Opera York – her voice is more substantial than your typical Gretel – should make an interesting Magda. If you prefer lighter fare, OIC's sister company, Toronto Operetta Theatre, puts on three performances of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* (Oct. 27 – 29). All shows are at the Jane Mallett Theatre. For tickets, call (416) 366-7723 or 1-800-708-6754. For more information, visit www.operainconcert.com and www.torontooperetta.com

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On the concert stage, the Roy Thomson Hall vocal series begins with soprano **Adrienne Pieczonka**, in a program of Schubert, Strauss and Kurt Weill, called "Women's Lives, Loves and Losses". The Toronto Symphony kicks off the season with Beethoven's 9th (Sept. 27, 28) featuring a top-

notch quartet of soloists: soprano **Measha Brueggergosman**, mezzo Susan Platts, tenor Michael Colvin, and baritone Brett Polegato. Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* will be an additional item on the program for Sept. 27. On October 25, 26 and 28, Helmuth Rilling leads a quartet of soloists (as yet unannounced at press time) in Mozart's *Mass in C Minor*. At press time, only subscriptions are available at TSO Customer Service Centre at (416) 598-3375, Monday to Friday from 9 to 5. Single tickets will be available at a later date. For the serious voice fans, University of Toronto Faculty of Music has a number of events that will prove interesting. Soprano Adrienne Pieczonka is giving a master class on October 17 at 12:10 p.m. in Walter Hall. Swedish baritone Håkan Hagegård will give two, November 21, 12:10 p.m. (opera) and November 22 (Lieder) at 7:30 p.m., also at Walter Hall. Former COC general director Lotfi Mansouri gives a masterclass on operatic literature on October 26, 11:30 am at the Tole Room. All classes are free!

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For a different multimedia treat, tenor Richard Margison will join the National Ballet at the Four Seasons Centre for the first time in a performance of Sir Kenneth MacMillan's abstract 1965 choreography of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. November 22-26. www.ballet.ca

TORONTO AREA INSTRUMENTAL PREVIEW

Claire Blaustein

"Autumn is once again upon us, and with the crisp air and turning leaves come the inevitable back-to-school preparations. While for many of us the days of new professors, books, and friends are long past, these scholastic memories can be relived through the fall concert seasons of your



I Furiosi Ensemble



Jeanne Lamon



Pinchas Zukerman

favourite GTA musical ensembles."

An educational institution is the best place to start for some musical learning, and so we turn to the Royal Conservatory of Music (416.408.2824, ext. 321 – www.rcmusic.ca). They are doing a series called "Music In Exile" – a full weekend that will explore the work of composers exiled by the Nazi regime. There will be lectures by musicologists and scholars, as well as performances by the Artists of the Royal Conservatory, with pieces by Heinrich Kaminiski, Alexander Zemlinsky, Kurt Weill, Karl Weigl, and others. (October 14-15).

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The **I Furiosi Ensemble** (www.ifuriosi.com), which always gets extra credit for creativity in concert conceptualization, presents "I'll Be Watching You" on November 10. An exploration of stalkers, "before harassment laws had been conceived," should produce some surprising musical results.

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For a cram session, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (416.593.4828 – www.tso.on.ca) is offering a blast of Beethoven – all 9 of his symphonies, along with the Violin Concerto, performed by Joshua Bell, the Piano Concerto No. 3, with soloist Leif Ove Andsnes – and a handful of Mahler's vocal works, including *Kindertotenlieder*, just to stretch musical brains a *little* bit further. All of this is part of the Raymond James Beethoven Festival, beginning September 20 with the Opening Night Gala, and running until October 8th.

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And because everyone needs a little partying to balance out the study, there is a celebration with Tafelmusik (416.964.6337 – www.tafelmusik.org) to look forward to Music director **Jeanne Lamon** is celebrating her 25th anniversary leading Tafelmusik, with a concert collaboration of the acclaimed Tafelmusik orchestra with Montreal's Arion Baroque Orchestra. They'll be featuring Ms. Lamon as soloist in one of Vivaldi's works for two orchestras, as well as playing works by Handel and Bach. Sure to be quite the bash. (September 27-28, October 1)

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In a more collegiate-activist twist, the Taliskers Players (416.466.1800 – www.taliskerplayers.ca) mark a protest for peace with their "Rumours of Peace" con-

cert November 9. The music will present a variety of impressions of war and conflict, and expresses hope for peace to come at last. In our conflict-driven age, there is always room for a little reflection.

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The trees may be fading, but the music is as new as the first buds of spring. "Generation 2006" will bring four new Canadian works by young composers to Toronto as part of a bi-yearly workshop. The concert is being sponsored by The New Music Concerts (416.961.9594 – www.newmusicconcerts.com) in conjunction with Music Gallery and performed by l'Ensemble contemporain de Montreal (October 15).

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The New Music Concerts will have another opportunity for Canadian premieres in a concert November 5 by the Slowind Woodwind Quintet which will feature several pieces written exclusively for the ensemble, including a theatrical work by Jürg Wyttenbach.

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Music TORONTO (416.366.7723 – www.music-toronto.com) will be presenting their artists-in-residence, the Gryphon Trio, on October 10 at the St. Lawrence Center for the Arts. They'll be presenting a world premiere by Canadian composer Kelly Marie Murphy, as well as trios by Mozart and Schumann. The group is scheduled to release a Mozart CD in the fall.

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For a concert that won't put a strain on the pocketbook - the Toronto Arts Center (416.733.9388 – www.tocentre.com) presents flautist Samantha Chang in recital. She'll be joined by a host of guests - Ellen Meyer, piano; Jessica Jia, violin; Ping Zhang, viola; James Xia, cello; and a small orchestra. Featured will be the Mozart *Flute Quartet in D, K.285*, the Reinecke *Concerto for Flute in D* and works by Taffanel, Tan, Boehm & Karg-Elér (September 29th).

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The deluge of Mozart-inspired programming appears to be drawing to a close, and will be followed closely by a celebration of very different – the 100th birthday of the Dmitri Shostakovich. While there is no dorm mother to bring in cupcakes, The Off Centre Music Salon (416.466.1870 – www.off-centremusic.com) celebrates the life of this enigmatic figure with a single-afternoon festival – a

three-hour theatrical, musical event on November 5th. It is the salon's first *Concertplus* presentation, and brings a cast from St. Petersburg, singers from the Mariinsky (Kirov) Theatre, as well as violinist Michail Gantvarg, cellist Sergei Roldugin, and pianists Inna Perkis and Boris Zarankin.

OTTAWA FALL PREVIEW

Natasha Gauthier

The Conservatives, the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois may be duking it out in the House of Commons, but down the street at the National Arts Centre, peace and harmony appear to have been restored. Thanks to mediation, the NAC Orchestra and artistic director Pinchas "bad apples" **Zukerman** have kissed and made up and everyone says they're looking forward to putting differences behind them and getting on with the show. Meanwhile, the city's other purveyors of fine music are also gearing up for a busy season.

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September

Sept. 26, cellist Yo-Yo Ma and pianist Emanuel Ax perform an all-Beethoven program, including three of the cello sonatas. The pair sticks around for the following evening, when *le tout* Ottawa breaks out their tuxes and gowns for the sold-out 10th anniversary NAC Gala. Sharing the billing with Ma, Ax and Zukerman are violinists Gil Shaham and Natalie MacMaster.

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Ax appears again with the NACO the following week – Sept. 29-30 he plays Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 17*. Zukerman also conducts the *Marriage of Figaro Overture* and *Brahms' Symphony No. 2*.

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October

By October, some of Ottawa's other classical denizens start coming back from their summer hiatus. Oct. 3, the Ottawa Symphony presents "Music from the New World", including Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, Ives' *Putnam's Camp, Redding, Connecticut* (from *Three Places in New England*) and Dvorák's *Symphony No. 9*. Music Director David Currie conducts.

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Zukerman's back Oct. 4-5, performing Schubert's *Trout Quintet* with the orchestra's top string



Boris Brott



Daniel Taylor



Jean-Marie Zeitouni

players and guest pianist Yuja Wang. The 18-year-old Wang, who wowed Ottawa last year when she filled in for Radu Lupu at the last minute, will also play Prokofiev's *Piano Concerto No. 3*, while Zukerman conducts Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture*. Wang is the featured artist in an Aber Diamond Debut Series recital Oct. 6, when she'll perform works by Haydn, Chopin, Behr-Rachmaninov, Granados and Ravel.

⋮

Oct. 7, the NACO and conductor **Boris Brott** present a young persons' concert built around the theme of celebrations. Juno Award-winning singer Kiran Ahluwalia will be their special guest. That same evening the Cathedral Arts concert series holds a gala fundraiser with 1 musici de Montréal.

⋮

All Hungary, all the time! First the Orion String Quartet performs all six Bartók quartets on two evenings of Oct. 16-17. Then Franz-Paul Decker conducts the NACO in a program that's heavy on Bartók and Kodaly, Oct. 18-19. Violinist Barnabás Kelemen is the guest soloist.

⋮

For nine years, the Gatineau Sacred Music Festival has brought intriguing and inspiring, old and new liturgical music to the National Capital Region. This year's edition runs Oct. 22-29. Guest artists include countertenor Matthew White, Helsinki's Cantores Minores choir, the People's Gospel Choir of Montreal, and the Boni Pueri youth choir from Prague. Visit www.sacree.qc.ca for the full festival program and schedule.

⋮

Oct. 27, the Thirteen Strings chamber orchestra is joined by Christopher Millard, the NACO's new principal bassoon. Guest conductor Grant Cooper leads the musicians in works by Locatelli, Vivaldi and Shostakovich, among others.

⋮

November

The winds blow colder in November, but that's when things start to heat up on the concert scene. Nov. 8-9, Zukerman performs Mozart's *Violin Concert No. 3* and conducts the NACO in Haydn's *Symphony No. 99* and, in a nod to CanCon, Jacques Hétu's *Symphony no. 3*.

⋮

Remember, remember... Nov. 11, when the

Cathedral Arts series presents Toronto's Nathaniel Dett Chorale, billed as "Canada's first professional choir dedicated to Afrocentric music." Nov. 13, David Currie conducts the Ottawa Symphony and the Ottawa Choral Society in Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem*. Soprano Monica Whicher and baritone Peter McGillivray are the soloists. Whicher also performs Richard Strauss' *Four Last Songs*.

⋮

The Ottawa Bach Choir presents its first concert of the season Nov. 24. The program highlights masterpieces of the Italian (or Italianate) Baroque, including Handel's glittering *Dixit Dominus*, with soprano Gillian Keith, countertenor **Daniel Taylor** and the Theatre of Early Music. Also featured is Bach's great double choir motet, *Der Geist hilft*. Music director Lisette Canton conducts.

⋮

One of the first concerts of "seasonal music" takes place Nov. 26, when the Cantata Singers of Ottawa and new conductor Michael Zaugg perform a selection of Christmas compositions from Latin America. The concert is repeated Dec. 3. The NACO, the Canadian Brass and guest conductor Alain Trudel continue the festive theme Nov. 30 and Dec. 2.

⋮

December

Thirteen Strings presents their annual Christmas Candlelight evenings Dec. 4-5. This year, their special guest is the rising young Quebec soprano Hélène Guilmette, making her Ottawa debut. Likeable Quebec conductor **Jean-Marie Zeitouni** and the Seventeen Voyces choir complete the picture.

⋮

Dec. 13, Lisette Canton conducts the Ottawa Bach Choir and harpist Caroline Leonardelli in Britten's *Ceremony of Carols* and other seasonal music.

⋮

Attention-grabbing Montreal violinist Karen Gomyo and her 1714 Stradivarius appear with the NACO Dec. 14-15. Gomyo plays Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*; Andrew Litton also conducts Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* and *Spanish Airs* by José Evangelista. Canadian-American lyric soprano Erin Wall is the special guest of Cathedral Arts on Dec. 16.

⋮

You know your Christmas shopping days are numbered when Handel's *Messiah* is on at the NACO. This year's performances, Dec. 18-19, feature soprano Janice Chandler-Eteme, mezzo Anita Krause, tenor Frédéric Antoun, bass Gary Relyea, the Cantata Singers of Ottawa and the Opera Lyr Chorus. David Lockington conducts.

⋮

The Ottawa Chamber Music Society holds its annual musical Christmas bash Dec. 18. Local musicians perform works by Wagner (the chamber transcription of the *Siegfried Idyll*), Glazunov, Berlioz, Bach, Handel, Tchaikovsky and more.

⋮

The fall season ends as it begins: with the NACO. The orchestra presents its annual family carol sing-along Dec. 22 with conductor Frank McNamara. ■



Ottawa Bach Choir
2006-2007 SEASON
 Lisette Canton, Founder & Artistic Director

A Taste of the Italian Baroque
 Friday • November 24 • 2006 • 8:00 pm
 St. Matthew's Church, 130 Glebe, Ottawa
 with Gillian Keith, Soprano
 Daniel Taylor, Countertenor
 and the Theatre of Early Music

A Christmas Story
 Wednesday • December 13 • 2006 • 8:00 pm
 Fourth Avenue Baptist Church, Bank & Fourth, Ottawa
 with harpist, Caroline Leonardelli

Westminster Mass
 Saturday • March 17 • 2007 • 7:00 pm
 Dominion-Chalmers United Church, 355 Cooper at O'Connor, Ottawa
 Sunday • March 18 • 2007 • 7:30 pm
 Christ Church Cathedral, Montreal
 with Musica Orbium, Patrick Wedd, Director

European Extravaganza
 Friday • May 25 • 2007 • 8:00 pm
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GUIDE TO MUSIC COMPETITIONS



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www.bisqc.ca
Dates: August 28 - September 2, 2007
Ages: under 35
Deadline: March 1, 2007
Instruments: string quartet

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T: 405.589.5621x202 • F: 450.589.2910
sinfonia@sinfonia-lanaudiere.org
www.sinfonia-lanaudiere.org
Dates: November 11, 2006
Ages: 16 and younger / 17 to 24
Deadline: Septembre 29, 2006
Instruments: all orchestral instruments, piano and choral

Candidates must present a movement from a work by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or Leopold Mozart with orchestral accompaniment. For singers, operatic excerpts are acceptable.

\$4,000 in prizes, and the opportunity for winners to perform as a soloist with La Sinfonia de Lanaudière in the Classical Series of concerts December 9, 2006, at the Théâtre du Vieux-Terrebonne and December 10, 2006, at the Théâtre Hector-Charland in L'Assomption.

The competition is for young Canadian musicians and landed immigrants aged 24 and younger.

The inscription form must be submitted no later than September 29, 2006.

Candidates will be contacted by telephone no later than October 15, 2006.

Canadian Music Competition

1450 City Councillors, Suite 220
Montreal, QC H3A 2E6
T: 514.284.5398 • F: 514.284.6828
info@cmcnational.com
www.cmcnational.com
Dates: March to June
Ages: 7 to 30
Deadline: November 22 2006
Instruments: all

Canadian Music Competition strives to support young musician to develop a high level of excellence. Through a specific programme, it invites musicians to meet its standards of achievement and performance. Competitors participate at the local level and then move on to the provincial and to the national finals.

Eckhardt-Gramatté National Music Competition

QE II Music Bldg, Brandon University
270 18th St Brandon MB R7A 6A9
T: 204.728.8212 • F: 204.728.6839
eckhardt@brandonu.ca
www.brandonu.ca/egre
Dates: May 4-6, 2007
Deadline: Oct 20, 2006
Ages: 18-30
Instrument: Piano

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Rue Aux Laines 20
B-1000 Brussels
Belgium
T: 32 2 213 40 50
F: 32 2 514 32 97
Email: info@qeimc.be
www.qeimc.be
Dates: May 6 - June 2, 2007
Ages: 27 years - Candidates must have been born after January 15, 1980
Deadline: January 15, 2007
Instrument: piano

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Competition, the Queen Elisabeth Competition very quickly became one of the leading international competitions for violinists, pianists, composers and, since 1988, singers. Taking place in Brussels, the Queen Elisabeth Competition owes its reputation to its extremely strict regulations, but also to its outstanding juries composed of performers and educators of international renown.

The Queen Elisabeth Competition aims above all to assist young talented musicians to launch an international career by offering them the opportunity to perform for radio and television, by developing contacts and networks that can lead to concerts all over the world.

Laureates of the competition over the past fifty years include Leon Fleisher, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Jaime Laredo, Gidon Kremer, Mitsuko Uchida, Vadim Repin, Frank Braley, Cristina Gallardo-Domás and, more recently, Nikolaj Znaider, Marie-Nicole Lemieux, Severin von Eckardstein, Sergey Khachatryan and Yossif Ivanov.



Concours Musical International de Montréal

305, Mont-Royal Est
Montreal, QC H2T 1P8
T: 514.845.4108 • F: 514.845.8241
info@concoursmontreal.ca
www.concoursmontreal.ca
Dates: May 22 to June 1 2007
Ages: 33 or less
Deadline: December 15, 2006
Instrument: choral

Presented in partnership with Jeunesses Musicales du Canada, the CMIM is for

young artists from all countries planning a professional career. Each edition involves three levels of selection: preliminary (after an audio recording), semi-final and final. This annual contest incorporates alternatively three disciplines - choral, violin and piano - and choral music will return in two years.

4th Paganini Moscow International Violin Competition

20 Daev per.
Moscow, Russia, 107045
T: +7 495 204 8239 • F: 7 495 204 8239
info@violin-fund.ru
violin-fund.ru
Dates: November 20-December 1
Deadline: November 1
Ages: 16+
Instrument: violin

First Prize: \$25,000 + a statuette Paganini holding a violin; Second Prize: \$12,000; Third Prize: \$8,000. No admission fee is required. Other detailed information as well as the Competition Program is on violin-fund.ru

NEXT GUIDE

December 2006

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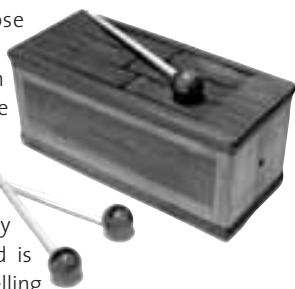


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REVIEWS

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★★★★★ A must!
★★★★☆ Excellent
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★★★☆☆ ... Good
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REVIEWERS

WSH W.S. Habington
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ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Beethoven

Fidelio

Waltraud Meier, Plácido Domingo, Soile Isokoski, Werner Gura, Falke Struckmann, Rene Pape, Kwangchul Youn; Staatskapelle Berlin, Daniel Barenboim, conductor

Warner Classics 3984 25249-2 (2 CDs; 157 min 50 s)

★★★★☆ \$\$\$\$

Recorded in 1999 and previously released on Teldec, this *Fidelio* is now reincarnated on Warner Classics. Its chief interest is Plácido Domingo as Florestan, a role that he has never sung onstage. The high tessitura in the great scene 'Gott! – Welch Dunkel hier!' was beyond him even in 1999. But in the studio, with the benefits of retakes and perhaps some engineering wizardry, he makes a totally convincing Florestan, his unidiomatic German notwithstanding. Waltraud Meier (Leonore) is in reliable voice though sounding short-breathed in 'Abscheulicher'. Soile Isokoski's luminous soprano raises the soubrette Marzelline to new heights. She is well partnered by Werner Gura (Jacquino) while Struckmann as Rocco sounds a little old and wobbly. On the other hand, Kwangchul Youn's bass is spectacular as Ferrando. Most of all, this set benefits from the conducting of Barenboim, leading the Berliner Staatskapelle in a marvelous reading of the score. The booklet has an essay by the late academic Edward Said, who was professor of



comparative literature at Columbia. Perhaps not in the same league as many great recordings of the past – how do you beat the likes of Klemperer and Karajan or Vickers and Ludwig? – but it is one of the better contemporary versions.

Joseph K. So

Symphonic Dances

Bernstein: Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*; Rachmaninov: Symphonic Dances, Gabriella Len Frank: Three Latin American Dances

Utah Symphony/Keith Lockhart

Reference Recordings RR-105 (73 min 16 s)

★★★★☆ \$\$\$\$

Audiophiles should be delighted by the recent return of Reference Recordings to the marketplace. The Reference trademark has been a byword for excellence in sound reproduction. This disc is encoded for High Definition Compatible Digital (HDCD) playback ensuring high quality in all CD players and enhanced sonics (comparable to SACD stereo) if the deck is equipped with a HDCD chip and given decent amplification. Keith O. Johnson's engineering yields a remarkably life-like, full-impact recording.

Keith Lockhart's natural gift for the music of Leonard Bernstein is stunningly evident in the performance of the dances from *West Side Story*. The orchestra is also impressive in the Rachmaninov *Symphonic Dances*. These standards flank the real gem of the album, *Three Latin American Dances* (16'25") by Gabriela Lena Frank (b. 1972). Lockhart led the Utah Symphony in the world première performance in April 2004, two days before this recording was made. Frank orchestrates vividly and there are strong affinities with the liveliest music of Bernstein. We will hear more of her.

W. S. Habington

Shostakovich

Works for Violin

Violin Concerto N° 1, Violin Sonata: Leila Josefowicz (violin), John Novacek (piano), City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra/Sakari Oramo

Warner Classics 2564-62997-2 (67 min 22 s)

★★★★☆ \$\$\$\$

The Shostakovich centennial has inspired a number of fine new recordings of his orchestral works and this is one of the most impressive.



In the live concert recording of the concerto, Leila Josefowicz gives us the performance of a lifetime. The CBSO under Oramo are congruently supercharged in this highly communicative music and the result is an account that can stand with the best. One normally expects David Oistrakh, to whom the violin concertos and sonata were dedicated, to possess the enabling instinct tempered by hard-ship and the experience of Stalinist terror for these pieces. Although Josefowicz was raised in Toronto, where life is usually better than in 1940s Soviet Union, she has somehow blended extraordinary insight with supreme virtuosity to generate what we need to hear today. The sonata was recorded in the studio and it is the perfect *envoi* to the flailing irony of the concerto's final passages. Pianist John Novacek demonstrates complete affinity with Josefowicz in this profoundly moving piece. Sadly, the effect is somewhat diminished by the unedited the applause.

WSH

Felix Weingartner: Orchestral Works

Lustige Overture, Symphony No 3:

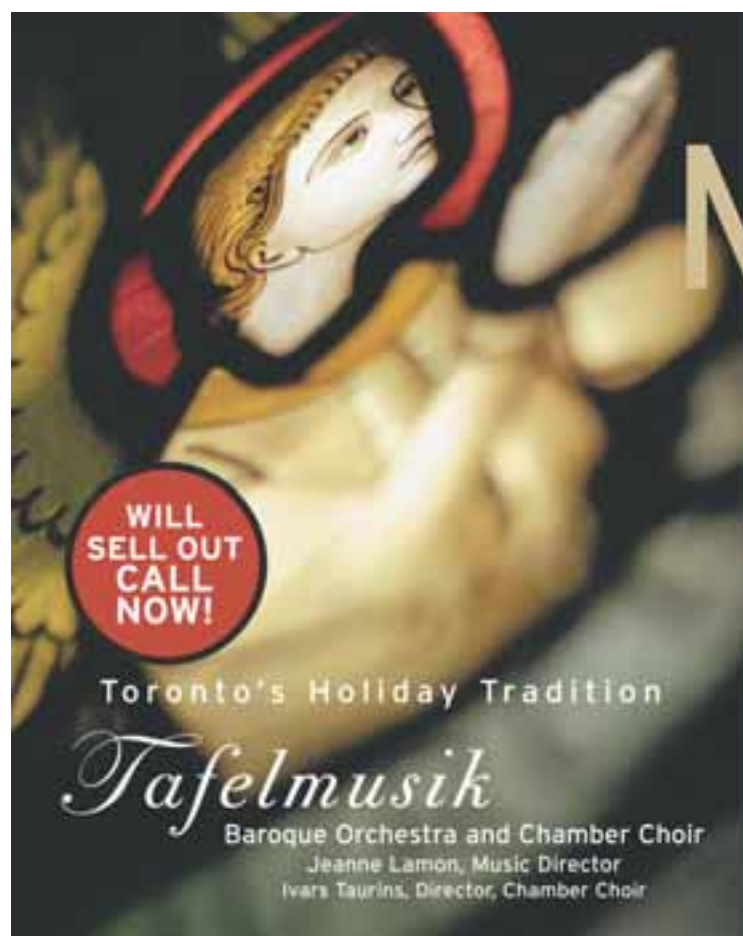
Basel Symphony Orchestra/Marko Letonja

CPO 777 100-2 Hybrid SACD (75 min 47 s)

★★★☆☆ \$\$\$\$

This is the fourth volume in CPO's continuing survey of the orchestral works of Felix Weingartner (1863-1942). The composer was a prominent and much traveled conductor. In 1908, he succeeded Gustav Mahler at the Vienna Court Opera and was immediately beset by controversy. His Third Symphony was composed in 1909 at the height of the opera house turmoil. Weingartner's great strength as an orchestral conductor was fidelity to the score and his own compositions reveal influences from all of the major German composers of the 19th century, Mahler excepted. But this symphony is not merely derivative – Weingartner was born on the coast of Dalmatia and there is a transparent warmth in this music which was uncommon beyond the northern slopes of the Alps. This contributes to an impression of almost Debussian sinuousness and helps to suppress the suspicion that, at 65 minutes, Weingartner's ambition exceeded his creative means. A good performance from Letonja and the Basel S. O. In less caring hands, the adagio third movement might have seemed slab-sided indeed. The overture is a worthwhile coupling.

WSH



Messiah

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Le Cid, Manon, Herodiade, La Vierge
Measha Brueggergosman, soprano
Quebec Symphony Orchestra,
Yoav Talmi, conductor
CBC Records SMCD 5236 (71 min 9 s)

★★★★☆ \$\$\$

This Berlioz-Massenet disc, the second solo album by Measha Brueggergosman was recorded in September 2004. For some reason, it has taken a full two years for it to be released, but it was well worth the wait. *Les Nuits d'été* by Berlioz is tailor-made for the soprano. Her extraordinarily rich, gleaming tone is shown to advantage here, well supported by the Quebec Symphony Orchestra under the knowing baton of Yoav Talmi. His tempi are on the slow side – sometimes excessively so, but they do allow the singer time to spin out her lines effortlessly. My favourites on the disc are the Massenet arias from *Manon*, *Le Cid* and *Herodiade*. This repertoire requires a voice of opulence, one with a rich middle register, and a seamless legato. "Pleurez, pleurez mes yeux" is particularly fine, one of the best I have heard. The same applies to "Il est doux, il est bon." Her singing brings out the perfumed, sensual quality of the score. Occasionally, a high note can be slightly under the pitch, but it is a minor blemish. Included on the disc are orchestral interludes from *Werther* and *Herodiade*, with an exquisite violin solo by Catherine Dallaire. The disc also contains a rarity, *La Vierge*, a short oratorio in four parts, two of which, "Le Dernier Sommeil de la Vierge" and "L'Extase de la Vierge" are included here. While this early work doesn't have quite the melodic inspiration of Massenet's later masterpieces, it is still well worth a listen. Like her first disc, *So Much to Tell*, there is a surprise 'hidden track' of a spiritual at the very end of this recital. Highly recommended for fans of Brueggergosman.

JKS

Stetsenko

The Art Songs

Pavlo Hunka, Russell Braun, Benjamin Butterfield
Albert Krywolt, piano: Roman Borys, cello
Musica Leopold www.musicaeopolis.com
(2 CDs; 110 min 44 s)

★★★★☆

This collection of forty-two songs on two CDs by Kyrylo Stetsenko is the brainchild of bass-baritone Pavlo Hunka. Born in England to a Ukrainian father and an English mother, Hunka has chosen Canada, with its large Ukrainian

community, to launch the Art Songs project. It marks the first in a series documenting unrecorded Ukrainian classical songs by eleven composers. The launch was to coincide with Hunka's appearance as Wotan and Don Alfonso with the COC, but alas, illness (diabetes) has forced his withdrawal. Recorded at the Glenn Gould studio in 2005, it also features tenor Benjamin Butterfield, baritone Russell Braun, cellist Roman Borys and pianist Albert Krywolt. Born in 1882 in Kvitky, the Ukraine, Stetsenko was a composer, conductor, teacher and community activist. He composed liturgical works, several operas, and scores for plays. His musical language is singularly rich in melodic inspiration, easily accessible to anyone hearing the songs for the first time. With many written in the minor key, often full of sadness and longing, these songs are reminiscent of those by Tchaikovsky – the opening measures of "Don't Laugh" recalls *Yvgeni Onegin*. Indeed, the subject matters are no different from the typical classical song tradition anywhere – themes of love, lost love, joy, nature, death, and hope. The piano writing tends to be uncomplicated, its purpose being to support the voice rather than as instrumental showpieces. Almost all the songs are solo pieces, many sung by Hunka himself, with significant contributions by Braun and Butterfield. However wonderful they are, one misses the presence of a female voice. The two-disc set is in a DVD-sized package, with copious documentation on the composer, soloists, and session photos. Also included are two thick booklets of texts and translations in English, German, French, and Ukrainian. It is Hunka's intention to go on tour with these songs, introducing them in schools and concert halls. The CD set will be available for sale at large record stores, the COC opera store, and directly at www.musicaeopolis.com

JKS

DVD

Five Days in September:

The Rebirth of an Orchestra

Director: Barbara Willis Sweete

Rhombus Media 29982 08768 (72 min)

Sound 5.0

★★★★☆ \$\$\$

This is an interesting and encouraging film, which documents the opening of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra's 2005 concert season – the first under the direction of Maestro Peter Oundjian. It was shot as a highbrow version of 'reality' television with the camera as a silent observer seemingly in every nook and cranny of Roy Thomson Hall and ably

directed by Barbara Willis Sweete. Without such capable direction, the end result might have been a pale and unfunny replica of Ricky Gervais in *The Office*. The central profile is of Peter Oundjian, who emerges as a serious musician and a tremendously likeable guy; a family guy who just happens to be able to fill concert halls with appreciative audiences. Oundjian disdains neckties and likes to conduct in a crisply pressed shirt (which he irons himself). He also displays remarkable dedication in undertaking a grueling schedule of promotional events.

We get to see an impressive array of soloists: Emanuel Ax, Yo-Yo Ma and Renée Fleming. Their participation in the film is a value-added element.

The brief musical extracts from Beethoven, Rachmaninov, Chopin and Mahler are very impressive, and the orchestra is obviously in top form. Rumours of its demise, which seem to have inspired the subtitle, were obviously exaggerated. Out of the 150 hours of filming that went into the 72-minute running time, it is a pity that some of them could not have been spared to record an entire live musical performance. The fragments of Mahler's First Symphony, which we do get to hear, suggest an outstanding account, which should have been preserved.

WSH

Mozart

Die Entführung aus dem Serail

Soloists, Stuttgart Chorus, RSO Stuttgart/
Gianluigi Gelmetti

Stage Director: Michael Hampe

Video Director: Claus Viller

EuroArts 2055018 (156 min) Sound: 2.0 & 5.1

★★★★☆ \$\$\$

This 1991 performance of Mozart's *Singspiel* was recorded live at the Schwetzingen Festival. Michael Hampe directs an attractively staged production which can stand comparison with the finest available on DVD. The classic 1980 Karl Böhm film which was re-issued by DG last year (073 407-5) and Zubin Mehta's Florence production of 2002 (TDK DVUS-OPEADS) both have a loyal following. The Hampe/ Gelmetti collaboration is a legitimate contender for consideration because it is well endowed with Mozartian charm, good music and fine singing and it is refreshingly free of exaggerated buffoonery. As Martin Hengelbrock suggests in the booklet note, they achieve "... the 'golden

mean' between crude realism and pure aesthetics that Mozart always insisted on." Even the moments of uttered violence seem comical.

The singers are very good. Ruth Ann Swenson (Konstanze) delivers a highly charged *Martern aller Arten*. Hans Peter Blochwitz (Belmonte), Manfred Fink (Pedrillo) and Malin Hartelius (Blonde) turn in excellent performances while an incorrigible Kurt Rydl absolutely personifies Osmin, the fierce Turkish stereotype of Mozart's day. Rydl took the same role for Mehta at a somewhat lower voltage. Gianluigi Gelmetti is a seasoned conductor who has the full measure of the score. **WSH**

Verdi: *Aïda*

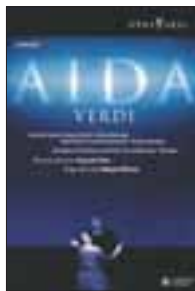
Norma Fantini, Marco Berti, Ildiko Komlosi, Mark Doss

Symphony Orchestra and Choir of La Monnaie, Kazushi Ono, conductor

Opus Arte DVD OA 0954 D (2 DVDs; 159 min)

★★★☆☆ \$\$\$\$

This *Aïda* is a typical example of "Regietheater" that is all the rage right now. The most distinctive feature of this performance is not the singers, conductor, or orchestra, but the stage design and direction of Robert Wilson. He is arguably the most original and controversial of opera directors today. His many productions, from the early *Einstein on the Beach* to the more recent *Parsifal*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Lohengrin*, and now *Aïda*, are characterized by a unique approach to light, colour, and movement, which Wilson combines to create productions that can be spectacularly beautiful and evocative. By the same token, his style serves as a straight jacket that often goes against the music and the text. Unfortunately this *Aïda* belongs to the latter category. The Wilson trademark of stiff poses and robotic – and glacially slow – movements rob the piece of its emotional core, indeed its humanity. The ballet simply does not work within the confines of Wilson's conception, and the choreography borders on the grotesque. Throughout the opera, *Aïda* and Radames never once looked at each other, never mind touched. Yes, visually it is beautiful, but is it *Aïda*? The singing is intermittently good and the orchestra plays superbly under the baton of Ono, who gets the most applause at the end. If you are a fan of Wilson's, you may want to get this. Otherwise, there are choices truer to the spirit of one of Verdi's greatest masterpieces. **JKS**



The La Scala Collection

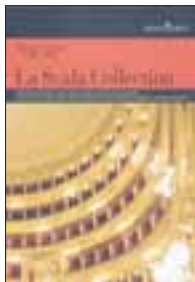
Adriana Lecouvreur, Attila, La donna del lago,

I vespri Siciliani, I due Foscari, Così fan tutte, Lo frate 'nnamorato, La Fanciulla del West, Guglielmo Tell, Don Giovanni, Lucia di Lammermoor (live performances ; various artists and conductors)

Opus Arte OA LS3000BD (12 DVDs, 30 h 32 min)

★★★★☆ \$\$\$\$

Though there are still four months to go before Christmas, this release has my vote as the ultimate Yuletide gift for the opera buff. In this beautifully packaged box set are eleven operas on twelve discs, all Teatro alla Scala telecasts on Italian television between 1988 and 1992. It should be noted that all were previously released individually at full price. These performances showcase most – but not all – of the best artists La Scala had to offer at the time. Regrettably no Pavarotti, the biggest star of Italian opera at the time; and Plácido Domingo is represented by a single *La Fanciulla del West*. One misses the truly gorgeous Zeffirelli productions of *La Bohème* and *La Traviata*, released commercially under other labels. Also missing are the Italian warhorses the likes of *Aïda*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*, shows that La Scala can do fabulously well. Instead, we have the relatively



obscure *La donna del lago* and *Lo frate 'nnamorato*. *Basta* – rather than dwelling on what is missing, I want to focus on what is here, and it is substantial. There are plenty of performances that give pleasure. Tops on the list are the aristocratic Don Giovanni of Thomas Allen, the plangent-voiced Dick Johnson of Plácido Domingo, and the lovely Adriana Lecouvreur of Mirella Freni, caught in her late prime. Also prominently featured is American soprano Cheryl Studer, who did some of her best work at La Scala before her all-too-early vocal decline. Her Elena in *Vespri* and Mathilde in the rare *Guglielmo Tell* show her at her considerable best. Also caught at her best is soprano June Anderson, in another Rossini rarity, *La donna del lago*. Partnering her are fellow American tenors Rockwell Blake, who doesn't have the most ingratiating tone, but what coloratura! Another American, Chris Merritt, was more controversial in *bel canto*. He has since abandoned this repertoire for character tenor roles and contemporary opera.

Seven of the eleven operas in the collection are conducted by its then music director, Riccardo Muti, with two by the octogenarian Gianandrea Gavazzeni, and one each by Lorin Maazel and Stefano Ranzani. In terms of production values, La Scala is sort of the Italian counterpart of the Met – rather old-fashioned in approach and super-lavish in execution, made possible by its huge, state-subsidized resources. The most 'adventurous' strokes are the occasional abstractly painted scenery or slide projections of mountains and streams in *Guglielmo Tell*. With the exception of *Tell*, each opera fits onto a single disc. As a result, something has to give. The menu options are minimal – only English subtitles and absolutely no bonus material. There is no DTS Surround Sound, something we spoiled armchair opera goers have come to expect. The colours are less vibrant and the picture quality not as sharp, which I suspect is the result of some digital compression. To fit the three-and-a-half hour *Così fan tutte* onto a single disc, it is slightly cut. Some recitatives, the duet "Al fato da legge quegli occhi" and the aria



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'Ah lo veggio quell' anima bella' are omitted. A curiosity – all La Scala telecasts from this period are devoid of solo curtain calls, possibly due to the tendency of merciless booing of certain artists by the infamous La Scala *loggionisti*. Kudos to Opus Arte for including the libretti, albeit in Italian only. I can heartily recommend this release, if you don't have some of the operas already in your collection. **JKS**

Verdi

La Traviata

A. Netrebko, R. Villazón, T. Hampson;
Wiener Philharmoniker/Carlo Rizzi
Deutsche Grammophon DVD 00440 073 4189
(132 min)

★★★★☆ \$\$\$ (standard)
\$\$\$\$ (premium)

Arguably the hottest operatic couple today, soprano Anna Netrebko and tenor Rolando Villazón together on the same stage virtually guarantee a full house. The media had a field day in summer 2005 when fans at the Salzburg Festival were spotted waving two thousand euros in front of the theatre, trying to buy tickets to the sold-out premiere. DG issued the performance on CD within months, and it made the top ten pop charts in Europe, an extraordinary feat in classical opera. Now we have the DVD release, in two versions no less. The 'standard' version has the opera only, but for a few extra loonies, fans can buy the two-disc 'premium edition' containing a 40-minute documentary with rehearsal footage and interviews of the singers and the creative team, plus an introduction to the opera – in German – by



Villazón. It is worth the extra money.

Director Willy Decker's work is typically modernist, seriously pared down, and full of symbolisms. The semi-circular stage is almost bare. Time is represented by a huge clock with arms that speed up and slow down. It doubles as the gambling table in Act 3. There are a few sofas, red in Act 1 and covered with floral throws for the Act-two garden scene. Doctor Grenvil graduates from *comprimario* status to the "angel of death", hovering around throughout the opera. The guests in Act 1 are all in ties and dark suits – even Flora is one of the boys. This modern updating will not please everyone, but on balance I find it interesting. The principals basically carried the show, with the best singing from Villazón as a passionate Alfredo. Unlike the CD, he omits the high C in 'De' miei bollenti spiriti'. Netrebko's Violetta is made more enjoyable by her personal beauty. She sings well, although sans E-flat at the end of 'Sempre libera'. Her laboured breathing is exaggerated by the close miking. As Germont *père*, Thomas Hampson tries hard but he is not a true Verdi baritone, sounding frayed in the dramatic moments. The rest of the cast are competent but not more. Carlo Rizzi is singer-friendly and his tempo is fast. The Vienna Philharmonic sounds fine, but the chorus had trouble keeping up with the orchestra in Act 1. **JKS**

Richard Wagner: Der Ring des Nibelungen

Das Rheingold: Soloists, Residentie Orchestra, The Hague

Opus Arte OA 0946 (206 min - 2 DVDs)

★★★★☆ \$\$\$

Die Walküre: Soloists, Netherlands

Philharmonic Orchestra

Opus Arte OA 0947 (260 min - 3 DVDs)

★★★★☆ \$\$\$

Siegfried: Soloists,

Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra

Opus Arte OA 0948 (273 min - 3 DVDs)

★★★★☆ \$\$\$

Götterdämmerung: Soloists, Netherlands

Philharmonic Orchestra, Chorus

Opus Arte OA 0949 (269 min - 3 DVDs)

★★★★☆ \$\$\$

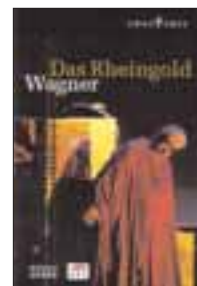
Conducted by Hartmut Haenchen

Stage Director: Pierre Audi

Video Directors: Misjel

Vermeiren, Hans Hulscher

Opus Arte have been doing a brisk trade in raiding the television archives on three continents to stock their growing catalogue of opera on DVD. This Netherlands Opera production of Wagner's great operatic cycle was filmed live in Amsterdam in 1999. As a modern interpretation, its release collided head-on with the continuing issue on DVD of the 1991 Barenboim / Kupfer version from Bayreuth and Kupfer's 2004 Barcelona remake (Opus Arte's Ring for 2005). With three other sets on the market, how can such extravagance be justified? Very easily, in fact, because of the startling originality of Audi's concept. This is a Ring cycle of awe-some visual impact and remarkable intimacy. The director and dramaturgy expert Klaus Bertisch transforms woolly mythical characters into convincing surrogates for the human condition. These performances surpass Kupfer II and



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can stand as viable, if more costly, alternatives to the consummate grandeur of Daniel Barenboim's music making with superlative casts (from Warner Classics).



The sets (George Tsypin), costumes (Eiko Ishioka) and lighting (Wolfgang Göbbel) generously support the proposition of opera as the ultimate art. Stage surfaces and backdrops are clad in various forms of appropriately flame resistant sheet metal. With essentially one set for each opera and austere props, the shifting tectonic plates of Rheingold and the arena-like expanse for Götterdämmerung with sweep-around staircase are the most impressive. Placement of the orchestra pit within the stage surface has attracted much equivocal comment. For the home viewer it is not a significant issue because of the predominance of camera close-ups. The down-stage centre placement of the orchestras with wrap-around aprons used for Rheingold and Götterdämmerung are the most effective.

Conductor Hartmut Haenchen's great achievements are in overcoming the disadvantage of using three orchestras and incorporating the latest amendments to the critical edition of the scores. He favours brisk tempos and never lets the music go off the boil at the big moments. Haenchen's style of conducting Wagner is similar to that of Pierre Boulez (from Bayreuth on DG) with somewhat more heft.

The vocal performances are generally excellent. John Bröcheler is a commanding Wotan without the feral intensity of John Tomlinson (for Barenboim). Bröcheler's gives us a deity that will age under the burden of his sins and visibly decay before the curtain falls on Siegfried. Anne Gjevang's portrayal of Erda is astonishing, surely the best presented in this medium. Gjevang returns for a similarly distinguished account of the pleading Valkyrie Waltraute in Götterdämmerung. While Kurt Rydl's voice may not be as supple as it once was, he projects the roles of Hunding and Hagen with absolute conviction. Die Walküre gets a boost above the competition with the forceful Siegmund of John Keyes and Nadine Secunde's exquisite Sieglinde. The veteran Wagnerian, Graham Clark, presents an outstanding Mime to dominate the first act of Siegfried. Encountering the title character for the third opera invites speculation that Audi is making a subtle statement about the inadvisability of incestuous reproduction. Heinz Kruse as the 'fearless youth' is middle-aged, short, squat and often awkward in movement. Yet he is an intelligent and durable singer who can make one overlook the fact that he is craning his neck to respond to the towering Brünnhilde of Jeannine Altmeyer. The preservation of Altmeyer's interpretation of the wayward Valkyrie is another good reason to acquire these sets. It is implied that the Gibichung brother and sister, Gunther and Gutrune are physically intimate but the digression does not inhibit the singing of Wolfgang Schöne and Eva-Marie Bundschuh.

These productions were restaged by the Netherlands Opera in 2005 and it would be interesting to discover what changed. Audi converted Wotan's spear into a projectile of totemic proportions. It wallows through the air like a slow motion cruise missile and its eventual destruction by Siegfried is a visual misfire. In their big number, the Valkyries display penguin tendencies because they are fitted with wing-shaped shields on both arms. Other Audi touches are more compelling. In the prologue to Götterdämmerung, the Norns are passing a non-existent rope. This achieves a more mystical effect for less risk (mind you, Gustav Mahler did exactly the same thing at the Vienna Court Opera a century ago).

Sound quality in 2.0 stereo and 5.1 surround is superb. Opus Arte again require one more DVD per opera than any other label. This allows for some useful extra features including a decent documentary on the production.

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Books

Shostakovich Symphonies and Concertos: An Owner's Manual

David Hurwitz

Amadeus Press Trade Paperback 219 pp

★★★★☆ \$\$\$

For his sixth title in the *Unlocking the Masters* series from Amadeus Press, David Hurwitz has given us a very useful accessory for the Shostakovich centennial. The author is a musician, commentator and founding editor of *Classictoday.com*. As in previous volumes in the series, Hurwitz provides chapter-length descriptions of the respective scores for the fifteen symphonies and six concertos. Examination of the works is not presented as musical analysis as such. By means of awareness of form and astute observations, the book is a valuable aid to musical appreciation. It is framed by a thoughtful introduction and incisive conclusion, avoiding the raging topic of the composer's resistance and/or collaboration with the Soviet regime. Hurwitz con-



centrates on the music and its colossal emotional impact, which dwarfs a lot of the purported Shostakovich scholarship of recent decades. The book includes a CD of Symphony No 5 from the BIS catalogue in a worthy performance with the Stockholm Philharmonic conducted by Yuri Ahronovitch. A chronology of works and a summary of individual movement forms are included as appendices along with a select bibliography. This is a well considered and well written reference work that no Shostakovich collector should be without.

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Philadelphia Maestros:

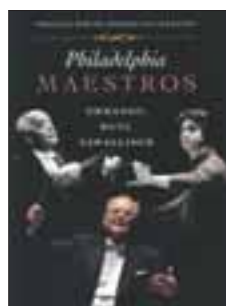
Ormandy, Muti, Sawallisch

Phyllis White Rodriguez-Peralta

Temple University Press 172 pp

★★★★☆ \$\$\$

Ardent fans of the fabulous Philadelphians will welcome this handsome but slim volume which offers a pleasant afternoon's diversion. Mrs White Rodriguez-Peralta is a distinguished academic (Spanish and



Portuguese studies) and long term supporter of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Her book informally profiles three music directors (after Stokowski and up to Eschenbach) in a hagiographical sequence, which can be broadly interpreted as: Good, Better and Best over the period 1936-2003. The forty-four years of Eugene Ormandy are covered in less than one page per year. The author is respectful towards Ormandy but regrettably repeats the old shibboleth, "The Philadelphia Sound? The Philadelphia Sound is me." As Ormandy explained to the CBC's Robert Chesterman in 1971, what he actually said to a journalist was, "There is no such thing as the Philadelphia Sound, the sound is the sound of the conductor." Ormandy always claimed to be a good musician rather than a great conductor and his dedication to Philadelphia has few equals in the history of musical performance. Sadly, the splendid recorded legacy of the orchestra under Ormandy is given scant and even slighting attention in the book. Muti (12 years) and Sawallisch (10 years) receive more equitable treatment. They presided over a period when the orchestra's recording activities dwindled to token levels, and the results never seemed to last in the catalogue. The era of Ormandy-propelled over-work in the studio must be recalled nostalgically by veteran players.

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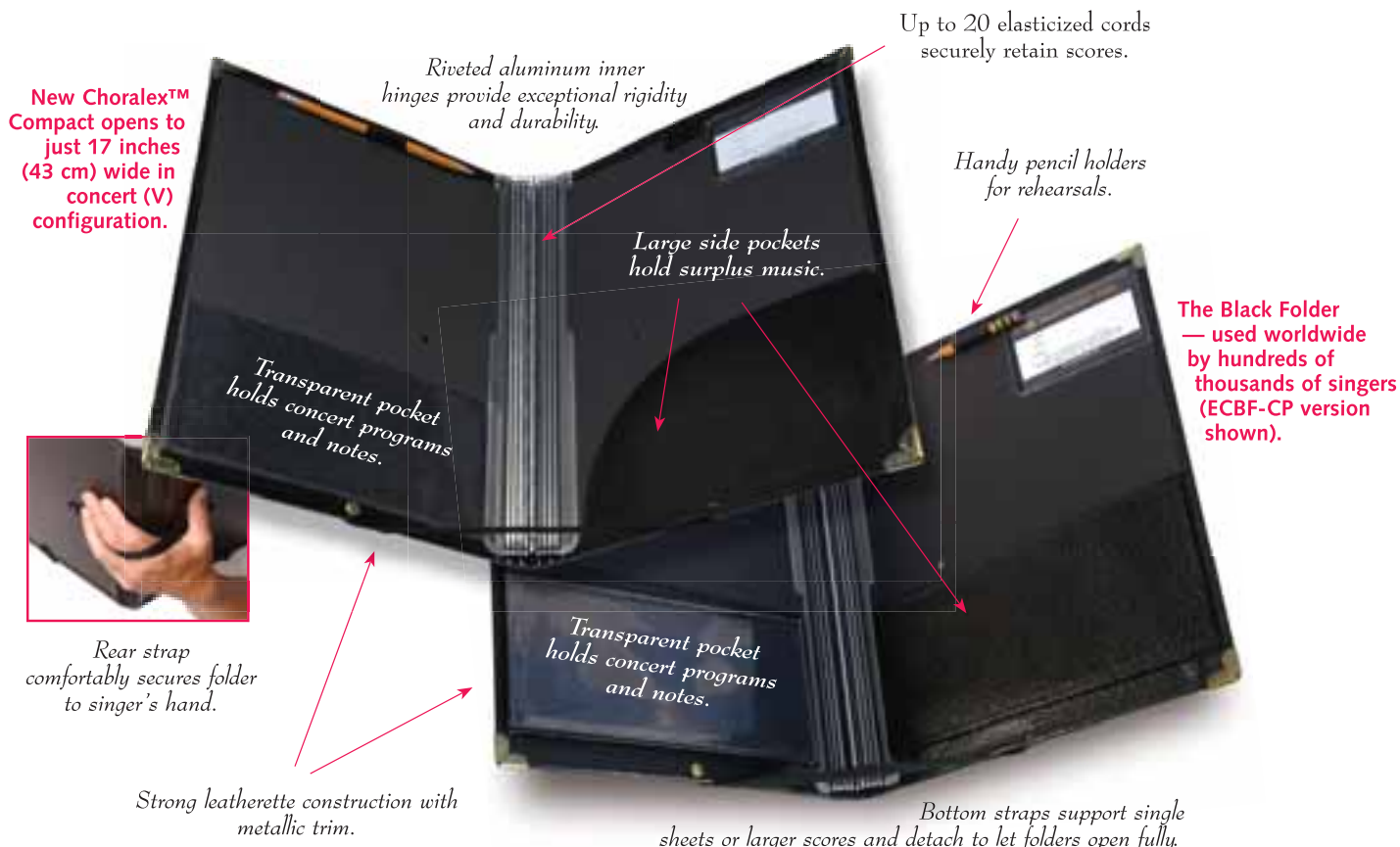
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