

Phil's Classical Reviews

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“Gershwin Songbook,” song arrangements by Gershwin, Fagnoni - Enrico Fagnoni, piano (Piano Classics)

Enrico Fagnoni’s veneration for the music of George Gershwin goes back many years, to the time of his first visit to America as a boy. The young Italian piano student arrived, his head filled with the classics from Bach to Rachmaninoff, and ended up falling in love with the jazz and ragtime he heard in America. Now, after long-established careers in both jazz and classics, he returns to the scene of the crime to pay homage to George Gershwin, his predecessor as a master in both genres.

The subject is the Songbook that Gershwin put together at the urging of his publisher in the early Thirties. These were solo-piano arrangements of 18 of his own favorite songs. They were not just straightforward piano versions of his songs, but what were then known as “novelty” arrangements, intended to challenge the technique of good amateur pianists at a time when most middle-class American homes had an available piano in the parlor.

Fagnoni has taken things a step further by writing his own arrangements to the 18 Gershwin songs, further revealing their richness as source material. The



“The Sound of Black & White,” music of Khachaturian, Levant, Gershwin Raffi Besalyan, piano (Sono Luminus)

Raffi Besalyan conceives the present program as a dual tribute to both Aram Khachaturian, the great national figure from his native Republic of Armenia, and George Gershwin, the musical genius of his adopted home the United States, with Oscar Levant bridging the gap between the two towering figures.

Besalyan makes no secret of the reverence he feels for Gershwin and Khachaturian, as his steel-riveting performances plumb the depths of some of the richest harmonies and most pungent rhythms in all music. Khachaturian comes first, with the piquant Waltz from his Masquerade Suite. Then we have the intensely moving Adagio from the Spartacus ballet, eight and a half minutes of music that captures the tenderness of the love of the rebel Spartacus and the slave girl Phrygia, with a dark undertow foreboding their tragic ending.

Khachaturian’s seldom-heard Sonata is next in the program, and Besalyan does a great job acquainting us with the abundant riches and variety that are hinted-at in the titles of its three movements: I. Allegro giocoso, II. Andante con anima, rubato, III. Allegro mosso.



“Trios from the City of Big Shoulders” Music by Ernst Bacon, Leo Sowerby - The Lincoln Trio (Cedille Records)

The Lincoln Trio, consisting of violinist Desirée Ruhstrat, cellist David Cunliffe, and pianist Marta Aznavoorian, give their all, in performances of two great trios that are really in need of increased public exposure. Billed as “Trios from the City of Big Shoulders,” after a line from *Chicago*, Carl Sandburg’s famous encomium to the city he loved, these are works by two 20th century figures associated with it, Ernst Bacon (1898-1990) and Leo Sowerby (1895-1968).

Bacon was born and raised in Chicago, though he was associated with places on the west and east coasts as a composer, conductor, pianist, teacher, and a founder of the Carmel (CA) Bach Festival. Sowerby was actually a native of Grand Rapids, MI, but he was intimately associated with Chicago through his interests in both the classics and jazz (he was a frequent arranger and composer of music, including a Symphony for Jazz Orchestra, which he wrote for legendary bandleader Paul Whiteman). The Chicago connection was inevitable for Sowerby, who probably would have swum Lake Michigan to get there!

Gershwin song arrangements occur first in the program, followed by Fagnoni's own takes on them in the same sequence, so you can move back and forth between Gershwin and Fagnoni arrangements of any song by adding or subtracting 18 tracks. Songs include such Gershwin favorites as Fascinatin' Rhythm, Do, Do, Do (What You Done, Done, Done to Me), Strike Up the Band, My One and Only, Somebody Loves Me, Swanee, That Certain Feeling, Sweet and Low Down, Oh Lady Be Good, I Got Rhythm, The Man I Love, and more.

It's all-so fascinatin' to listen to the differences between Gershwin's and Fagnoni's arrangements of the same song. Fagnoni's trope on I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise is even more up-beat than Gershwin's own peppy arrangement, while in his arrangement of Liza (All the Clouds'll Roll Away) he gives Gershwin's heady, amorous optimism a nostalgic, wistful, mood.

Both takes, of course, are valid. The beauty of Gershwin's songs is their simplicity. You can do a lot in arranging a simple song in the way of flattening or inflating a blue note, picking up the rhythm or broadening it, pushing ahead to a climax or delaying it, making a simple key change, and so much more, as long as the original song is simple enough to lend itself to the treatment. And these changes, as Fagnoni shows us, can have a profound effect on your original material.

Listening to the inspired arrangements by both Gershwin and Fagnoni makes me wish that this sort of exercise were part of the basic training of all young composers. It would make them realize the importance of a good tune to start with. As a reviewer, I have the experience all-too often of coming to the end of a new work by one of our contemporaries without being able to recall a single theme or melody. (It's as if the composer would be considered a spotted dog if he were to dare include something as outré as a catchy tune in his music to make it memorable!) Gershwin knew better. So does Fagnoni.

Concerning the last, how can music be lively (allegro) and sad (mosso) at the same time? (Maybe it comes easier if you're an Armenian.) It is followed by the incredibly tender Lullaby from the ballet Gayane, in a fine piano setting by Oscar Levant.

And speaking of Levant, whose career as a serious composer has long been overshadowed by his fame as an acerbic personality in MGM musicals, he finally gets a hearing on his own in Besalyan's intelligent account of his finely wrought Piano Sonata. Its three movements, marked I. Con ritmo II. Andantino poco mosso, and III. Allegro deciso, come across, respectively, as rhythmic, a little sad, and decisive, just like the man said. One is intrigued to want to hear more music by this enigmatic, neglected figure.

On to Gershwin, next, beginning with Besalyan's performances of four delicious Virtuoso Etudes from the set of seven arranged from Gershwin songs by master pianist Earl Wild: Somebody Loves Me, Fascinatin' Rhythm, Embraceable You, and The Man I Love. Wild himself couldn't have given more infectious and compelling accounts of these old favorites.

The high point of the Gershwin part of the program are the 3 Preludes, fast, rhythmic and decisive as the markings for 1 and 3 tell us, and flavored with a delicious amount of rubato in 3. Besalyan's accounts show why these Preludes have been so enormously popular with pianists over the years. He continues his inspired work with a performance of the original piano version of Rhapsody in Blue.

Gershwin, as we know, was not trained in the art of orchestration at the time of the work's 1924 premiere by Paul Whiteman's concert band, and so the work of arranging it for orchestra was entrusted to Ferde Grofé, with results that ensured its great success. A funny thing, but, as Besalyan's account of the piano version shows us, clear hints as to what was needed in the way of orchestration were already present.

The two trios are as diverse as the composers who wrote them. Bacon's Trio No. 2 for Violin, Cello, and Piano, up first in the program, is a marvel of variety, breadth, and expression, in many ways more like an orchestral than a chamber work. This immediately engaging Trio begins, unusually, with a slow movement marked Lento, which diverges at the end to a second part "In Deliberate March Time." The actual second movement is described as "in an easy walk." Rambling dotted rhythms in the piano lead the way into an intricate dialog between violin and cello involving arpeggiated multiple stops and delicate pizzicati. Here, as in the following movement "Gravely expressive," we are aware of the vocal quality in Bacon's music, reflecting his belief that, in the words of his widow Ellen Bacon, "all music, whether vocal or instrumental, should retain an essential connection with humanity – not only with the human voice in its rich scope of expressive-ness, but also with the body and its movements of waking, running, waltzing, romping, and so forth."

The third movement, marked *Gravely expressive*, is one example of what Ellen Bacon meant, its remarkable nocturnal beauty enhanced by the cello gently singing against expressive harmonies in the piano. The fourth, marked *Allegro*, has all the excitement of a toe-tapping hoe-down, with jazzy syncopations tossed blithely among the three instruments. The fifth, *Comodo*, deftly sets flowing melodies in the piano against a spirited accompaniment in the strings. The final movement, *Vivace ma non presto*, comes across as a folksong ("Green Mountain") in a syncopated, spirited discourse between the violin and the cello.

Leo Sowerby's 1953 Trio for Violin, Violoncello and Pianoforte, unlike the Bacon, is not billed here as a world premiere recording, although I have not been able to locate any other current listing in Arkivmusic.com. Its neglect is even more puzzling than that of the Bacon trio as it comes across here as a

	<p>What do you do for an encore after Rhapsody in Blue? Besalyan selects Khachaturian's Sabre Dance from Gayane, coming though with such a smashing performance, you wonder if the poor piano had to be sent out for repairs?</p>	<p>relentless major work of musical art in two slow, quiet (though not necessarily serene) movements followed by a stunning "Take-no-prisoners" finale.</p> <p>It is all pure music with no extramusical associations. The marking "slow and solemn" alerts us to expect the first</p> <p><i>Continued Below</i></p>
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movement to be serious business, and we are not disappointed. A pianissimo repeating pattern doubled in octaves in the lowest register of the piano is followed later by the muted violin addressing a pseudo-fugal subject in the way of a wandering melody that is reinforced by the muted cello. All this establishes a pattern of close interaction between instruments that is the hallmark of this work. The slow movement, "Quiet and Serene," features intertwined melodies in double stops in the violin and piano, both muted, and an expansive melody in bell-like open chords in the piano.

The finale is entitled "Fast, with broad sweep," and Sowerby really means what he says. Now we discover what the whole work has been building up to, as perpetual motion rhythms in the piano inaugurate the final section in which violin and cello are both enlisted in a march, increasing in dramatic intensity as the music hurtles towards a stunning conclusion. I note from their website that the Lincoln Trio have twice been nominated for Grammy Awards, but have evidently never been a winner. That may change this year, if we may judge from their compelling performances of two neglected works that truly belong in the standard repertoire for chamber music.

The Voyager String Quartet consists of Nico Christians and Maria Krebs, violins; Andreas Höricht, viola; and Klaus Kämper, cello. Founded as recently as 2014, they are not comprised of fresh conservatory graduates. Indeed, all the members have had distinguished careers in other famous quartets and European-class orchestras prior to their formation. I mention this because they possess just the right combination of independent-minded musicianship and orchestral discipline to put across as ambitious a project as they assay in *Boten der Liebe*, which may be translated "Messages of Love."



"Boten der Liebe," love-messages by Wagner and Mahler transcribed Voyager String Quartet (Solo Musica)

A glance at the program reveals music by Richard Wagner and Gustav Mahler, two composers whose careers were certainly not associated with chamber music. Why are they the objects of attention here? My guess is that the string quartet medium, being essentially "pure" music can provide an ideal means for revealing the essential structure of music conceived in more overtly dramatic forms such as opera, lieder, and symphony. In the process, we may discover things about the form and meaning of the original music that we hadn't surmised before.

might imagine with Wagner and Mahler, real-life lovers of actual women who lived in a period when open love declarations and revelations of affairs might carry a penalty (which is not unknown in what we fondly imagine as the more enlightened world in which we live today, where scandal has been institutionalized in the media).

As Sigmund Freud observed, none of us is more emotionally vulnerable than when we are in love. Hence the need, in art as in actual life, for *Boten der Liebe*, missives that carry the spiritual message for us as a psychogram in captivating tones.

First, the *Liebested* (Love-Death) from *Tristan und Isolde* which utilizes that incredible "Tristan-Chord" (F, B, D#, G#) that has intrigued scholars and crawled around inside listeners' dreams ever since he wrote it. Rising and falling like a sigh, it has a reputation for evoking emotions of the most ambivalent and conflicting nature, often in the same person who hears it.

In the present recomposition it is followed by the five Wesendonck Lieder, poems addressed to Wagner by his lover, Mathilda Wesendonck. Wagner reaches a climax of emotion in *Schmerzen* (Sorrows), the next-to-last of the lieder, followed by *Träume* (Dreams), subtitled "Study for *Tristan und Isolde*," thus clearly revealing its relationship to the forthcoming opera.

The other "message of love" is a recomposition for string quartet of finished and unfinished movements by Gustav Mahler. As Höricht explains it, he wove together pieces from the composer's fragmentary Piano Quartet, leading into the Adagietto from his Fifth Symphony and then to music of another unfinished work, his Tenth Symphony. The Adagietto, originally

Höricht, the violist of the Voyager Quartet, had done this sort of thing just this past year in not merely transcribing but “recomposing” Franz Schubert’s lieder cycle *Winterreise* (Winter Journeys) for the quartet medium, something which attracted much attention from the press when the recording was released by the Munich-based label Solo Musica. Actually, Schubert’s weary lovesick outcast in the song cycle has more in common than you

Both Wagner and Mahler realized its importance. As we know, the great love of Mahler’s life was his wife Alma, whereas Wagner never married, probably because he liked a variety of women too much. The Wagner “Quartet” we have in this program was assembled and re-composed by Andreas Höricht from two sources.

written as a wordless declaration of love to his estranged wife Alma and an appeal to return to him, is the high point of this recomposed and re-configured “quartet” as we can gather from the character of the music. Who could have resisted it?

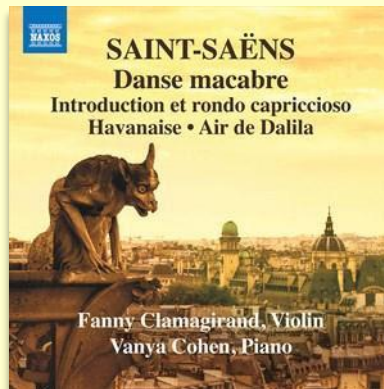
The essentially vocal quality of Mahler’s writing comes across very clearly in this performance by the Voyager Quartet. We might even use it as a key to understanding his late symphonies 6-9 which have never had the great popularity of Nos. 1-4, the so-called “Wunderhorn” Symphonies.



Canteloube: Songs of the Auvergne
Carolyn Sampson, soprano. Pascal Rophé directs the Tapiola Sinfonietta
(Bis Records)

Marie-Joseph Canteloube (1879-1957) is best known, in his day as in ours, for his collections of French folksongs from the district of the Auvergne, in which his family had deep roots. Arranged and gloriously orchestrated by the composer, these Songs of the Auvergne (*Chants d'Auvergne*) are his most important legacy to the world of music. And are they gorgeous! Like his close friend and mentor Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931), composer of Symphony on a French Mountain Air for piano and orchestra, he is famous for only one thing, but he made the most of it.

On the present disc, we have 25 songs, the pick of his five volumes of *Chants d'Auvergne*, culled by English soprano Carolyn Sampson and sung by her in



Saint-Saëns: Danse Macabre, Havanaise, Introduction & Rondo Capriccioso – Fanny Clamagirand, violin; Vanya Cohen, piano
(Naxos)

These works of Camille Saint-Saëns are particularly interesting because the composer took the art of arrangement to new heights in his belief that he should not content himself with simple transcriptions but to go beyond his models in the interest of exploring all possible modes of expression.

Fanny Clamagirand is an excellent artist to champion Saint-Saëns' duo arrangements of some of his most popular works in other genres. The French violinist, who has previously recorded the composer's three violin concertos and his two sonatas for violin and piano for Naxos, brings her very attractive tone, slender and lithe, to the present album. She is very capably assisted here by Vanya Cohen (a gal, not a guy, born in



Saint-Saëns: Symphonies No. 3, “Organ” and “Urbs Roma” Jean-Jacques Kantorow directs Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège; Thierry Escaich, organ (Bis Records)

Two symphonies by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921), one that still enjoys the greatest popularity to this day, the other almost unknown, comprise this recording by Jacques Kantorow and the Orchestre Philharmonique of Liège, Belgium. As we can gather from this pairing of early and mature works, there are a lot of compositional issues in the earlier symphony that would find fruitful solutions in the latter.

Otherwise, the two are about as different as we might expect from an earnest young man out to make an impression in the musical world and the same composer thirty years later. The earlier F-major Symphony was a unanimous winner of the first prize in a competition sponsored by

Canteloube's regional dialect. These songs speak of the natural beauty of the region, the pleasure of strolling through open meadows, and the feeling of loneliness and longing for love that one might experience as a solitary shepherd. *La pastoura als camps* (The Shepherdess in the Fields), *Obal din lou Limouzi* (Down in the Limousin), *La delai'ssádo* (The Deserted One), *Passo pel prat* (Go through the meadow), and the incomparable *Baïlèro*, a song in which time seems to become absolutely still, are all in this vein.

Enhancing the sensual appeal of the songs are Canteloube's wonderful orchestrations which seem to partake of the clear open air and blue distant vistas one might see in the region. Economically scored for best effect, they also frequently partake of the nature of fondly-remembered folk instruments such as the pastoral fiddle, hurdy-gurdy, and wooden flute, plus the characteristic footsteps of the folk dances. There are also songs with a manifest sense of humor, such as *Tè, l'co, tè!* (Run, dog, run!), *Malurous qu'o uno fenno* (Unfortunate he who has a wife), and *Hè! beyla-z-y dau fé!* (Hey! Give that donkey some hay!) We even have a parody of village gossips in such a song as *Lou diziou bé* (They said).

Carolyn Sampson renders all these Songs of the Auvergne with spirit, evident delight, and a feeling for the nuance of a song that is particularly welcome in the songs of love and loneliness and a very tender *Brezairola* (Lullaby). With the capable support of the Tapiola Sinfonietta under Pascal Rophé, this is music you will want to button-hole your friends and tell them about. It all makes for the most satisfying Songs of the Auvergne since I first heard the same on LP records by legendary soprano Netania Davrath some forty years ago in performances that are still to conjure with.

Monaco of Russian parents) who was her partner in the earlier duo sonata recordings).

When I said these were among the most popular of Saint-Saëns' works, I wasn't kidding. Included first is *Danse Macabre*, with which we have been familiar from the use of the symphonic version in an early animated cartoon depicting skeletons engaging in an eerie dance of death. Discords in the violin, heard over a sensational thumping bass accompaniment in the piano, make the desired effect.

It is followed, later on, by arrangements of three engaging pieces filled with Latin rhythms: a lively *Jota aragonesa* (using the same Spanish dance theme that Mikhail Glinka employed in his own version), then a glorious *Havanaise*, a dance of old Havana infused with the rhythm of the *habanera*, with a gracefully swelling melody in the central section and a dreamy fade-out at the end, and lastly the *Caprice andalous*. The latter lives up to its name, being very "capricious" in the early going before it settles down to more serious music-making along the lines of a theme and variations.

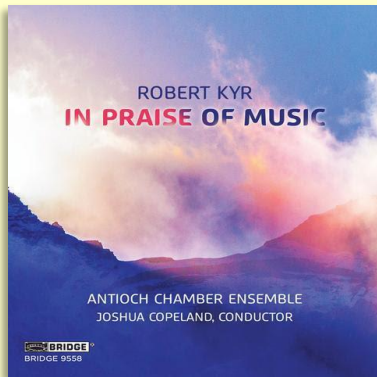
We are also given a fine account of the celebrated Introduction and Rondo *Capriccioso* for violin and orchestra, premiered in 1867 by Pablo de Sarasate and heard here in the duo arrangement by Georges Bizet. Also of interest is the setting, titled *Air de Dalila* of the aria "Printemps qui commence" from the opera *Samson and Dalila*, with the violin taking up the melody of the incredibly touching aria of the heroine when she realizes she is in love with the man she was sent to betray. Once again, Clamagirand's lithe tone fits in beautifully with the desired mood.

the Société Sainte Cécile. Despite its critical success, the composer showed little interest in this work in later life, to the extent of failing to include it in a catalog of his works.

Was it really *that* bad? Certainly not. Saint-Saëns was delighted to have the opportunity to compose a large-scale symphonic work that would give him public exposure and recognition, as well as the opportunity to work with rhythm, dynamics and thematic transformations as structural elements and mood-enhancers. We must remember that, at 21 years of age, he was really quite precocious. (As Hector Berlioz said of him in a famous *bon mot*, "He knows everything but lacks inexperience.")

In the last analysis, the symphony seems to start a great many hares but kills few of them, so it's hard to recall specific themes afterwards. There's a sense of mystery, even intrigue, in the slow movement, *Moderato, assai serioso*, but its exact nature is difficult to determine without a programme to use as a guide. Its nickname "Urbs Roma," provides scant information, as an awful lot of skulduggery has happened in Rome in its two-and-a-half millennia of existence for us to hazard a guess.

Symphony No. 3 in C Minor, the "Organ," is much more an unqualified success. The great textural variety in this work includes quiet moments, such as the soft plucking of cellos and basses in the *Poco Adagio*, followed by the stunning entrance of the organ on a sustained A-flat. This moment creates an indelible impression, as do the brass fanfares, the polyphonic writing, the pastoral interlude, and the blaze of glory in the grand finale, which lives up to its marking of "Maestoso" (Majestic). The organ is in the midst of it all, reminding us that Saint-Saëns was one of the great organists of his day. In this recording, Thierry Escaich, at the Great Organ of the Salle Philharmonique, Liège, re-creates the excitement and majesty of these great moments.

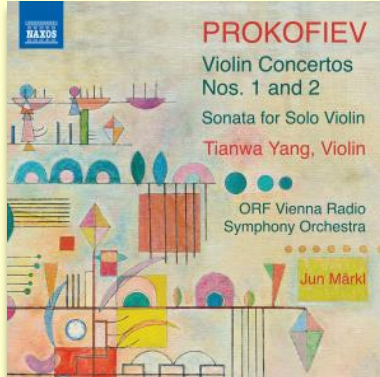


Robert Kyr: "In Praise of Music," performed by the Antioch Chamber Ensemble directed by Joshua Copeland (Bridge Records)

American composer Robert Kyr has taught composition and mentored students for some years at the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance and is director of the Oregon Bach Festival Composers Symposium, besides other activities. He stands out among many of his contemporaries in his concern for the human condition and man's search for freedom, beauty and transcendence. His professed goal of finding the means to lessen the strife in our world and increase occasions of peace, love, and forgiveness through music are indeed worthy, laudatory goals in a troubled world.

I have no problem with Kyr's goals as a sincere human being who wants to use music to better our lives in what Hamlet famously termed "this distracted globe" (a metaphor for the human mind). He is on the side of the angels, and I wish there were more like him. The only thing is, I just don't like his music, and I will try to explain why.

My basic issue with Robert Kyr is neither for his laudable intentions nor his choice of texts (Dies irae, Agnus Dei, A Prayer of St. Francis ("Create me as an instrument, a voice of your peace"), and the final text "Alleluia. Dona nobis pacem" (Grant us peace) from the Latin Mass. His own song texts, "In Praise of Music," "O Great Spirit," and "In the Name of Music," are pithy



Prokofiev: Violin Concertos 1 & 2, Sonata for Solo Violin – Tianwa Yang, violin; ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra cond. by Jun Märkl (Naxos)

This is the fourth time I've reviewed Chinese violinist Tianwa Yang on Naxos thus far, and I like this new all-Prokofiev album even better than her earlier recordings of Lalo/Manén, Sarasate, and Brahms. The two Prokofiev concertos seem to be just the sort of thing that really whets her appetite for a challenge, and with the assistance of conductor Jun Märkl and the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, she proves herself more than equal to it.

Beginning right off with Violin Concerto No. 1 in D Major, Op. 19, we are plunged into a brave new world of extreme contrasts and bold technical requirements. They include such striking innovations as sudden shifts from pizzicato to arco, long-limbed shapely melodies contrasted with dizzy scalar passages, and even some *sul ponticello* bowing below the bridge crossing of the instrument. For all that, Yang does not make the mistake of failing to characterize the melodies, which are as warm and welcome as they are frequently unexpected in a work that pushes the envelope in the direction of innovative effects. They must not be lost amid Prokofiev's sudden turns of phrase and changes in mood and texture, which includes the sudden pick-up in momentum between the Moderato and Allegro Moderato sections in the finale, that make this concerto what it is.



William Bland: Piano Sonatas 17 in A Minor & 18 in G Minor Kevin Gorman, piano (Bridge Records)

One of the things that struck me in this album which was my first acquaintance with American composer William Bland (b. West Virginia, 1947) was the fact that his name bears no relation to his music, which is anything *but* bland. On the contrary, most of what I hear sounds very purpose-driven and intense, the work of a man with a plan. Part of that plan stems from his disenchantment with the free atonality of the 1960's and 70's and his desire to reaffirm tonality itself in the light of the great achievements of the past. Some critics have found his melodies to be undistinguished, but that is hardly fair. Bland is simply more concerned with rich colors, thick, powerful Liszt-like chords, and bold harmonies. In particular, he seems interested in everything the piano can be made to sound and express, sometimes to the neglect of easily remembered melodies.

Indeed, Bland's major life work would appear to be a complete cycle of 24 piano sonatas, one in each major and minor key, that he hewed out between 1998 and 2014, a remarkable ambition that would recall the great achievement of J. S. Bach in such a work as the Well-Tempered Klavier. In the present album, consisting of Sonatas 17 in A Minor and 18 in G Minor, we are given a nice pair of contrasts. No. 17 is more intense and concentrated, punctuated by elements of jazz and blues that are so well integrated into

enough with meaning. I just don't like what he does with them in so many of his settings.

In *too* many of them he aims at an overall arching sonic structure that to me is similar (and about as pleasing) as the sound of a jet plane warming up prior to takeoff, which is a sound I consider responsible for so much of the unconscionable noise pollution in our world. I was born in 1943, just a few years before the first jet plane crashed through the sound barrier and the world was changed forever. (Oh, Chuck Yeager, you shouldn't a' done it!) Even today, I get nostalgic for the warm, humming sound of propellers cutting through the air in the older Hollywood movies.)

So, how does all that affect my appreciation of Robert Kyr's vocal music? It's simply that I like to be able to decipher the words of the texts and see how sound and sense reinforce each other. I'm OK as long as I have a booklet with texts to follow, but if I'm distracted even for a brief moment and lose my place it takes me some time and effort to find it once more, pinned against Kyr's sonic ceiling.

That doesn't apply to all the selections in the present program. "Ode to Music," set to the incredibly striking text of John Donne's Holy Sonnet XIV ("Batter my heart, three-person'd God") proves a happy exception to what I've just said. So does Kyr's "Freedom Song," a powerful gospel music-influenced song that focuses on the urgent need for freedom in the face of lingering social and racial injustice in our world. Kyr himself as percussionist, pounding on a frame drum of his design with sensational effect, underscores the message.

So, I ended up saying some nice things after all about Robert Kyr and his music! All I can say is, he's that kind of guy, and whether or not you're charmed by his musical settings, he's a man with a message you can't ignore.

In short, Yang's performance of the D Major Concerto is as accomplished as any I have heard. And she isn't exactly shabby in her account of Violin Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 63, where the competition, going back to the likes of Heifetz, Milstein, and Oistrakh, is rugged. A special feature of this work that Yang is quick to discover is its wonderful lyricism, which takes its place alongside other elements, extroverted, stirring, and grotesque. This is Sergei Prokofiev really hitting the full stride of his career following the great success of his ballet *Romeo and Juliet*. Its slow movement will recall, for careful listeners, the tenderness of the scene "Juliet the Young Girl." With the help of Märkl and the ORF, Yang makes the most of said tenderness that is a real hallmark of this concerto.

In the Sonata for Solo Violin, Yang is on her own in a fiendishly difficult work. It was originally commissioned by the Committee for Arts Affairs of the Soviet Union as an upbeat learning tool for multiple talented children playing together, and presumably sharing its technical challenges. In its form as a solo work, Yang takes it all in stride.

the classical mix that they do not jump out at the listener.

Sonata No. 18 is filled with more diverse elements, including a Chaconne that concludes with a variation marked *Glassine e feroce* (gauzy or transparent, and fierce) which lives up to its name and may scare the fool out of you if you're not prepared for it. At the end of the Intermezzo, we are charmed by Bland's imaginative use of the luminous *Tristes* apprêts, Pâles *Flambeaux* (sad preparations, pale torches) from Jean-Philippe Rameau's baroque opera *Castor et Pollux*, which Bland considers one of the most beautiful arias ever written.

This is the first appearance of pianist Kevin Gorman (b. Pennsylvania, 1992) as a champion of William Bland's piano sonatas, and hopefully it will not be the last. He plays these works, recorded in the acoustically excellent venue of the Troy, NY Savings Bank Music Hall with the presence and immediacy of a live recording, so much does he put himself into the effort. This is said to be his first commercial recording. May we hear much more of this artist in the future.

Postscript: You may be interested to know that the name "Bland" may have been derived from an Old English word meaning "storm" or "commotion." I can't say if William Bland's family name was so derived, but that would be a much more appropriate origin for it than the current use of the adjective meaning "characterless" or "uninteresting," words that certainly do not apply to the really compelling music I hear on this album.