

ments, the way, they say, that Ravel transcribed his own piano works for orchestra and orchestral works for piano, let alone the works of many other composers. Thus, the album title, “Ravel Influences” (but for three marimbas?).

Well, Falla’s two dances from *La Vida Breve* work well here because the trio projects the melodies, countermelodies, and textures—even imitating castanets—with a rhythmic lilt. ‘Les Berceaux’ from Faure’s Opus 23, succeeds because the marimbas fit perfectly with this lullaby where sailors’ wives rock empty cradles as the vessels carrying their men face unknown risks over the horizon. The marimbas serve as soothing comfort to Kyrie Kristmanson, whose childlike voice would fit perfectly with the indigenous ones heard on an album of lullabies I own called “The World Sings Goodnight”, recorded in 33 different countries and cultures in their native tongues.

The work that should be ideally suited to SR9 is *Prisme* (2021) for prepared marimbas by Colombian Daniel Arango-Prada (b 1987) in its world premiere recording. It opens with perpetual swirls of patterns—not melodies or motifs but patterns that evolve into what sounds like dripping water and woodblocks played with woodpecker rhythms. After seven minutes I said, “Enough bonking!”

The rest are real flops. In the ‘Feria’ from Ravel’s *Rapsodie Espagnole* the marimbas are buried in the background to Shani Diluka’s piano. Bass notes are weak, the glissandos are next to inaudible, and the performance lacks drama. In *Gaspard de la Nuit* I sat counting 1-2-3-4 in both ‘Ondine’ and ‘Le Gibet’, and there’s nothing devilish about the dwarf, ‘Scarbo’—no “now you see me, now you don’t”. I expected Technicolor from the three marimbas, but the results here are one basic timbre from treble to bass.

The Scherzo from Rachmaninoff’s Cello Sonata, here with soloist Astrig Siranossian, is nicely paced, but her instrument is seriously mismatched here: in the first half, the cello’s low register is buried by the trio, and in the second half its treble range exists in a sound world apart from three marimbas. Is the problem the arrangement, the players, or the engineers?

One fault in several works is a bass rumble (it has to be from a bass marimba, if there is such a thing) that grows to distortion, like the sound from dude-mobiles when the rap is turned up to *fffff* and the rivets shake loose.

FRENCH

When There Are No Words

Bolcom, Britten, Haas, Hindemith, Siqueira, Slavicky—Alex Klein, ob; Phillip Bush, p
Cedille 208—76 minutes

World-renowned oboist Alex Klein maintains a busy schedule as Principal Oboe of the Calgary Philharmonic, Adjunct Professor of Oboe at DePaul University, a member of the Chicago Pro Musica Reed Trio, teacher and performer at the Aspen Music Festival, instructor at the New World Symphony in Miami, and recording artist, with over 25 releases as a soloist and chamber musician. Here he enlists University of South Carolina piano and chamber music professor Phillip Bush for a recital of six 20th Century works for oboe and piano, each written under political repression or the threat of war.

William Bolcom (b. 1938) wrote the shortest work, ‘Aubade—for the Continuation of Life’ (1980) after a conversation with oboist Heinz Holliger and conductor and pianist Dennis Russell Davies about a possible nuclear war between the West and the Soviet Union. Benjamin Britten (1913-76) offers the most enigmatic piece, *Temporal Variations* (1936), finished soon after he returned from Barcelona and just before the start of the Spanish Civil War. It is dedicated to poet, playwright, and fellow pacifist Montagu Slater (1902-56), who would later write the libretto to Britten’s landmark opera *Peter Grimes* (1945).

Czech composer Pavel Haas (1899-1944) completed his Suite for Oboe and Piano (1938) at the very beginning of the Nazi occupation of his homeland. It began as a collection of songs with pro-Czech and anti-Nazi sentiment; and to protect himself, Haas replaced the vocal part with the oboe. Despite his efforts to stay out of the spotlight, the Nazis deported him to the Terezin-Theresienstadt concentration camp and later to Auschwitz, where the vicious SS medical officer Josef Mengele murdered him in the gas chamber.

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) wrote his Oboe Sonata (1938) in Switzerland after the Nazi regime pushed him out of his teaching positions in response to his modernist style and the progressive populist themes in his opera *Mathis der Maler*.

Jose Siqueira (1907-1985) grew up in rural northeastern Brazil as the son of a town bandmaster; and under the auspices of a left-leaning Brazilian government he enjoyed a fruitful career as a composer, conductor, and administrator, founding several orchestras. In 1964,

however, a right-wing military coup backed by the United States overthrew President Joao Goulart, turned back his socialist initiatives, and threatened the arts. By the time Siqueira finished his *Three Studies* (1969) for oboe and piano, he was already living in the Soviet Union; and the dedicatee, oboist Paolo Nardi, had left for Italy.

Czech composer Klement Slavicky (1910-99) founded his aesthetic on Moravian folk song, experimented with modernist elements, and declined to endorse or comment on any political rule. His refusal to join the Communist Party pushed him to the margins of Czech music; and he had to work harder than his peers to see his works performed. In November 1989, the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe enabled him to have his reputation restored and his oeuvre re-evaluated and appreciated in his home country. His *Suite* (1960) for oboe and piano seems to look past his personal hardship with cheerful and athletic writing that hints at peasant dances; yet the slow movement, titled 'Triste,' is full of sincere pathos, including stark and lonely declamations in the basement of the oboe.

As expected, the concert is fully professional. Klein offers a naturally clear tone in all registers and at all dynamics; and he performs each work with fluent fingers, nimble articulation, and warm and thoughtful phrasing. Meanwhile, Bush is fantastic at the keyboard, handling each score with superb touch, effortless technique, and acute sensitivity. In their hands, this modernist program is appealing and urgent, bringing each composer close to the listener and opening a line of sympathy between the qualms of the present and the difficulties of the past.

HANUDEL

Romance

Dranishnikova, Elgar, Schumann, Wallner
Gabriel Pidoux, ob; Jorge Gonzalez Buajasan, p
Alpha 789—50 minutes

French oboist Gabriel Pidoux and Cuban pianist Jorge Gonzalez Buajasan are part of the new young generation of classical musicians taking recital stages across Europe. In January 2021 they met in Paris to record an album of romantic music for oboe and piano. Listeners will know the Robert Schumann *Three Romances*; the Clara Schumann *Three Romances*, originally for violin; and the Elgar 'Salut d'Amour,' a miniature also originally for violin.

Less known is Leopold Wallner (1847-

1913), born in Kiev to an Austrian music publisher and a Polish mother. He studied briefly with Franz Liszt and studied at the Brussels Conservatory, yet as a composer he was mostly self-taught. The success of his compositions, including the *Three Pieces* here, earned him a teaching position at his alma mater.

Appearing too on the program is Russian composer Marina Dranishnikova (1929-94), whose father served as Music Director of the Mariinsky Theater in St Petersburg in the early years of the Stalin regime. Her *Poeme* (1953) is a dark modernist work with 19th Century roots.

The recital is thoroughly professional and artistically convincing. Pidoux boasts a sweet Gallic sound, heartfelt lyricism, excellent control in all registers, and a marvelous range of hues and volumes. Buajasan is also adept, delivering superb touch and technique in both flowing accompaniments and emphatic declamations. This is a fine addition to any music library.

HANUDEL

Nordic Journey 11

Nordic Romanticism; Modern Works; French Influence—James Hicks

ProOrgano 7297 [3CD] 234 minutes

I can't say enough about this wonderful series as the organs, music, playing, and recorded sound have all been superlative (M/A 2015; M/J 2015; M/J 2017; M/J 2018; J/A 2019; N/D 2019; S/O 2020; N/D 2020). Hicks plays with consummate musicianship, virtuosity, commitment, and musicality, all displaying an obvious love and understanding of this vibrant and incredibly rich culture of organ music, organ building, and organ playing.

The program is a unique collection of pieces from the 20th and 21st centuries, including 15 commissioned works, mostly first recordings. High points from Nordic Romanticism include pieces by John Granlund (1888-1962), Herman Akerberg (1875-1954), and Frithjof Spader (1896-1985); from the Modern Works pieces by Kjell Karlsen, Hildigunnur Runarsdottir, and Frederik Sixten; and from the French Influence pieces by Stig Holter, Santeri Siimes, Siguror Saevarsson, and Fredrik Sixten.

Hicks plays on another marvelous instrument, the 3-manual, 58-stop, 2007 Paschen Kiel organ in the Central Pori Church, Pori, Finland. It is a rich, powerful, and colorful instrument of distinct French personality, and

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