

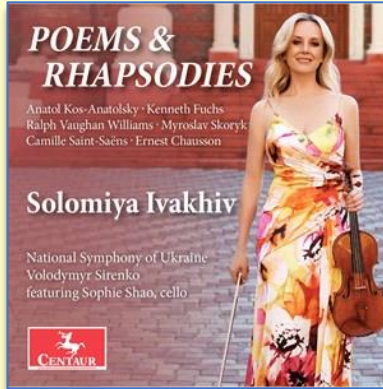
“When There Are No Words,”
Revolutionary Works for Oboe & Piano
Alex Klein, oboe; Phillip Bush, piano
(Cedille)

Alex Klein, principal oboe emeritus of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, joins forces with pianist Philip Bush to put across some intriguing, and on occasion rapturous, music for oboe and piano by 20th century composers. The title of the album “When There Are No Words,” reinforced by the visual image on the booklet cover of the ruins of Coventry Cathedral which was bombed by the Luftwaffe in 1940, would seem to indicate a political message in these works by composers threatened by totalitarian oppression.

In fact, some of them *did* have to move elsewhere to avoid oppressive forces in their native lands. However, the primary impression I get from the music found here is that of a spirit of adventure, ever experimenting with ways to make music for these instruments boldly expressive, vivid, and exciting. My pet name for this album is, in fact, “Six Composers in Search of an Oboe.”

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) found it necessary to move from his native Germany to Switzerland in 1938 for the sake of his half-Jewish wife. His Sonata for Oboe & Piano is in two movements: I. *Munter* (“awake” or “joyful”) and II. *Sehr Langsam* (very slow). We seem to detect a nostalgia for happier days in this charming little work with just a touch of “:swing.”

Czech native Pavel Haas (1899-1944), was a victim of the ultimate oppression, perishing at Auschwitz at the height of his prowess as composer. In three movements, *Furioso*, *Con fuoco*, and

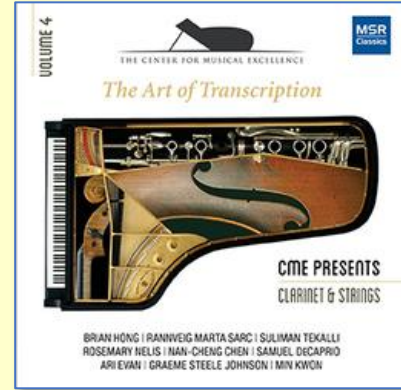


“Poems & Rhapsodies” – Solomiya Ivakhiv, violin; Sophie Shao, cello
National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, Volodymyr Sirenko, conductor
(Centaur)

What a refreshing new offering this is, coming as it does just after some of the darkest days of the year! Violinist Solomiya Ivakhiv, native of Ukraine, has helped light up the musical culture, as soloist and teacher, in two countries. That includes the United States, where she is currently Assistant Professor of Violin and Viola and Head of Strings at the University of Connecticut and Professor of Violin at the Longy School of Music of Bard College.

“Poem” and “rhapsody” are essentially the same name for a type of composition relatively free of formal constraints and characterized by sweeping melodies and brilliant passagework. Finely considered intuition takes the place of classical form in determining whether or not the end result is satisfying. On this program, Solomiya, with the assistance of the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine under Volodymyr Sirenko, presents well-known examples of the genre by famous composers, plus three others that, with any luck, you are going to hear more of in the future.

The three standards lead off with Camille Saint-Saëns’ *La Muse et le poète* (The Muse and the Poet) which the composer, vacationing at Luxor in Egypt, was moved to write upon learning the sad news of the death of a lady of his acquaintance with whom he had been close friends for some years. A beautiful, dignified work, it is largely conversational in tone due to the added presence of a cello (played here by Sophie Shao) and the telling entrance of



CME Presents Clarinet & Strings:
The Art of Transcription
Graeme Steele Johnson. Clarinet,
other artists on strings and piano
(MSR Classics)

Min Kwon, pianist and founder / director of the non-profit Center for Musical Excellence (CME) has gathered seven like-minded colleagues together for an intriguing program. It is dedicated to the principle that a work of true musical art can be re-arranged and re-scored in the interest of bringing out further riches of beauty and artistic insight. In this program Min does just that, together with her talented CME collaborators: Graeme Steele Johnson, clarinet; Brian Hong, Ranneveig Marta Sarc and Suliman Tekalli, violins; Rosemary Nelis, viola; and Nan-Cheng Chen, Samuel Decaprio, and Ari Evan, cellos.

Several of these artists are also credited with the engaging arrangements we hear on this album, all based on the idea that anything that has been originally scored can be re-arranged to bring out fascinating musical ideas that were inherent in it all along, just waiting for someone to deck them out in a fresh coat of paint and a new point of view. For instance, the way Robert Aldridge’s re-scored accompaniment to *Erlikönig* (The Elf-King) relieves the burden on an over-worked piano by augmenting it with strings, at the same time underscoring the dark element of supernatural menace in Schubert’s song. Likewise, Johnson’s arrangement for clarinet and strings of the Theme and Variations from Mozart’s Sonata in A Major, K331, brings out the gracious *opera buffa* element inherent in Mozart’s music.

And so it goes, all the way through a very rich and richly rewarding program

<p><i>Moderato</i>, his Suite for Oboe & Piano starts off poignantly but with a love of spirit and variety as a balance. The middle movement is insouciant, but with undertones of irony and sadness, and the finale is poignant and heartbreaking, though a bright oboe melody finally offers consolation.</p>	<p>a harp at about 9:35. Saint- Saëns was, by instinct and training, one of history's most assured composers in terms of tone color and expression, traits that serve him well here in a work that comes across as a conversation between individuals, and not a contest between virtuosos.</p>	<p>that includes the likes of Enrique Granados' <i>La maja y el ruiseñor</i> (The Maiden and the Nightingale), in which the addition of an eerie violin to the piano accompaniment casts an aura of moonlit mystery in Suliman Tekalli's arrangement, while his animated setting of <i>El pelele</i> (The Straw Puppet) captures the traditional plight of a rejected suitor: namely, to be tossed in effigy in a blanket!</p>
<p>Aubade, by American composer William Bolcom (b.1938) is subtitled "for the Continuation of Life" and features sad yet hopeful music. The oboe melody has a wide range of expression, and is balanced by spare but quite effective commentary from the piano.</p>	<p>Ernest Chausson's <i>Poème</i> is both rhapsodic and moody. It begins slowly and mysteriously and ends tranquilly, with double-stop passages and a full range of rising and falling tensions in between. It is Chausson's best and also best-known major work, and Ivakhiv gives it all the all the attention it deserves.</p>	<p>Another evocation of Spain by French composer Maurice Ravel, <i>Pavane pour une Infante Defunte</i> (Pavane for a Dead Princess) and Camille Saint-Saëns' <i>Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix</i> from Samson et Delilah, both benefit from the gracious sound of Rosemary Nelis' viola. And an adaptation for two cellos of the Prelude to Dmitri Shostakovich's 5 Pieces for Two Volins and Piano brings out an unexpected depth of warm feeling that we do not ordinarily associate with this composer.</p>
<p>Temporal Variations by Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) is in no fewer than nine movements. We might consider it a Carnival: for modern times. The oboe theme is astringent, with piano that is at first halting, then strident in character. Next, we Are given an Oration, bright and with staccato piano in support; a jaunty March, and Exercises, featuring a staccato oboe and lively, insistent support from the piano. The oddly titled Communion, which the dictionary defines as "action threatening divine vengeance," is querulous, probing, and painfully bright. Chorale is appropriately slow and solemn, with a piercing tone. Waltz is slow and hesitant, with the oboe impervious to the piano's urgings for more liveliness. Polka is satirical, with hee-haws in the oboe, and Resolution is ironically an unanswered question. This is Britten at his most piquant and aggravating.</p>	<p>Ralph Vaughn Williams' The Lark Ascending is one of those works of music that listeners fall in love with at first hearing, and the feeling does not diminish after years of exposure. Its textures range from rich to progressively airy and translucent as the music describes the rising flight of a skylark in ever higher and widening circles until it ends in pure sunlight and silence. Ivakhiv and Sirenko capture the enchantment of its silver chain of sound that must occur with the semblance of utter spontaneity.</p>	<p>Re-arrangements of choice favorites by George Gershwin and Leonard Bernstein strike real bull's-eyes here, beginning with a poignant arrangement by Michele Magnani of the Blues interlude from An American in Paris, in which Gershwin's Yank is hit by a bluesy attack of homesickness. Graeme Steele Johnson's moody arrangement of Gershwin's song "The Man I Love" is followed by a trio of choice Kwon and Tekalli arrangements from Bernstein's West Side Story, including "Tonight," "Somewhere," and "I Feel Pretty," with "I want to be in America" thrown in as a rousing kicker. I was really impressed with the arrangement of "I Feel Pretty," a song I'd previously regarded as mundane but which gets a real pick-up here when the repetition of the verse emphasizes the waltz character in the accompaniment.</p>
<p>Three Etudes for Oboe with Piano Accompaniment is the work of Brazilian composer José Siqueira (1907-1985). The first, <i>Calmo</i>, starts off living up to its billing, as a calm melody with disquieting accompaniment. Then the music becomes lively and animated, then languid, and finally spirited. The second Etude, <i>Allegro scherzoso</i>, reveals Brazilian folk influences, and the concluding <i>Allegro</i> starts off slowly and nostalgically, gradually becoming animated.</p>	<p>It says a lot for the trio of works by more recent composers, one an American and the other two Ivakhiv's fellow countrymen from Ukraine, that the appeal of this program for the listener does not falter for even a moment. Anatol Kos-Anatolsky (1909-1983) is represented by Poem for Violin & Orchestra, characterized by a vibrant, stirring opening with discords, florid writing for the violin, and brass that rises up sensationally at about 3:00. A lovely poetic middle section creates a fine moment for Ivakhiv before the music plunges into a rousing finale.</p>	<p>So it goes. I haven't even mentioned the other program items. They include: Maud Powell's nostalgic arrangement of Antonin Dvořák's "Songs My Mother Taught Me," pungent arrangements of two Latin American faves, Carlos Gardel's <i>Por una cabeza</i> and Astor Piazzolla's "Oblivion," "Waiting for Debby" by the multi- talented jazz pianist and composer Bill Evans, Charles Aznavour's "She," Theo Chandler's Undimmed by Tears: Variations on "America the Brautiful," and Paul</p>
<p>Concluding the program, is Suite for Oboe and Piano by the Czech composer Klement Slavický (1910-1999), consisting of the following three movements: 1) <i>Pastorale</i>, conjuring up a lazy</p>	<p>American Rhapsody by Kenneth Fuchs (b.1956) has a slow, sad, deeply atmospheric opening featuring a French horn solo and goes on to unveil a rich symphonic fabric in which the violin has plenty to say. The impression I got was of the panorama of a day in the life of an American city from dawn to dusk.</p>	
	<p>Finally, Carpathian Rhapsody by Myroslav Skoryk (1938-2020) has an out-of-doors grandeur that never fails,</p>	

summer afternoon, followed by 2) *Scherzo*, by turns: playful, frenetic and flighty, and then 3) *Triste* (sad), which opens with music appropriate to its title, moves to a more optimistic mood with an inner sense of joy, and then becomes urgent and striving, ending on a decidedly elegiac note.

plus a slow, passionate folk dance in the middle section and a rousing finish. The integration of solo violin and richly scored orchestration is nothing short of superb.

By the way, this is not the first time I've had the pleasure of reviewing Solomiya Ivakhiv's artistry. See my Classical Reviews for June, 2020.

McCartney's "Hey, Jude," the last-named in an inspired arrangement by Tekalli that does the virtually impossible in making an over-familiar hit song come up fresh as paint.

That freshness goes for the album as a whole. You won't want to miss this one!



"Inspiration populaire" Falla, Janáček, Schumann, Ginastera, Popper. Estelle Revaz, cello; Anaïs Crestin, piano (Solo Musica)

Cellist Estelle Revas (b. Switzerland, 1989) has been a member since 2015 of the Forum des 100, an organization dedicated to shaping the musical future of her country. She currently teaches cello and chamber music at the Kalaidos University of Music in Zurich while pursuing an international career. In 2012 she met Vandea, France native and pianist Anaïs Crestin, who is currently a resident of Argentina, where she is a professor at the UNA (University of Arts) and the Conservatory of the City of Buenos Aires. As a duo they have ever since explored the sort of ravishing music we hear on the present album.

The underlying concept of "Inspiration populaire" is an exploration of folk elements influencing what we now term "classical music." The classics didn't just come from nowhere, after all, and the popular influence provides one key to understanding the music of such disparate composers as Falla, Janáček, Schumann, Ginastera, and Popper that we hear on this rich musical program.

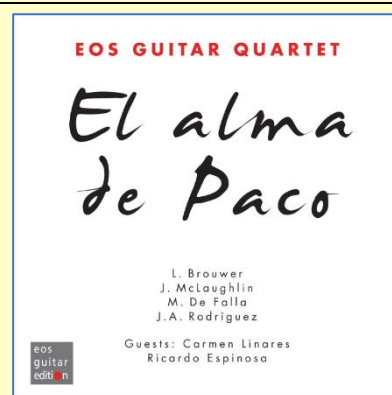
Manuel de Falla, up first, is represented by his *Siete Canciones populares Españolas* (Seven Popular Spanish



Bach: Partitas, BWV 825-830 Eleonor Bindman, pianist (Delos Productions)

Eleonor Bindman continues to impress with every new display of her keyboard artistry. The native of Riga, Latvia currently resides in new York City, where she is an active performer and teacher. I became aware of her prowess as pianist and arranger in her earlier recordings of Tchaikovsky's Seasons plus the Waltz and Polonaise from Eugene Onegin (MSR, 2005) and The Brandenburg Duets with fellow pianist Jenny Lin (Grand Piano, 2018). Now, her complete survey of the Bach Partitas, BWV 825-830, proves the clincher: this lady can do anything!

Don't be misled by the fact that Bach's six partitas were gathered together and published as a set in 1731 as the first part of his *Clavier Übung* (Keyboard Practice), which was in effect his "Opus 1." In Bach's day, you didn't assign an opus number to everything you wrote. "Opus" was a publisher's convention. And these were not Bach's earliest works. Far from it, they were his final statement as a composer for keyboard. Over time, they acquired a reputation in Germany as works that any aspiring keyboard artist who could interpret them



El Alma de Paco, Tribute to Paco de Lucía. Music of Brouwer, McLaughlin, Falla, Rodriguez, performed by Eos Guitar Quartet and guest artists (Solo Musica)

El Alma de Paco (The Soul of Paco) is a tribute to the Spanish virtuoso flamenco guitarist Francisco Gustavo Sánchez Gómez (1947-2014), popularly known as Paco de Lucía. From what I hear on this album from the Munich-based Solo Musica label (whose corporate motto is *Artist First*), he must have been one helluva guy!

Performances are by the Eos Guitar Quartet, currently consisting of Julio Azcano, Marcel Ege, David Sautter, and Michael Winkler. Founded in 1988 in Zurich and named after the Greek goddess of the dawn, they are dedicated to the pursuit of great guitar music, whether it be classical, jazz, rock, avant-garde, or flamenco. The last-named, of which we are treated to a real showcase on this album, is the most demanding because its audiences tend to be the most avid of aficionados. Consequently, the Eos Quartet are compelled to rise to the occasion. The result is music-making you won't easily forget.

They are joined in this endeavor by two guest artists: legendary flamenco singer Carmen Linares and percussionist