A Northern Hemisphere Musical Emprise: an Omnibus of Reviews and Interviews

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By

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A Portfolio of Critical Reviews

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ABSTRACT

This portfolio is divided into four sections:

1. *Introductory Essay*

This essay is an examination of reviewers' critical function and responsibility not only to the readers, but also to the artist, and the art form they are writing about. It is a personal account of the processes I adhered to in writing the interviews and reviews that follow, but from the perspective of an outsider.

2. *Interviews with Critics and Artists*

This section contains interviews with three critics currently writing reviews for Canadian newspapers, concerning their approaches to reviewing, particularly the difference in their approach to reviewing live concerts and studio recordings. In addition, to provide context for the reviewing process, there are interviews with two Canadian pianists regarding their opinions toward performing live and recording in a studio.

3. *Concert Reviews*

This section comprises original concert reviews, written during my two years in the Northern Hemisphere.

4. *CD Reviews*

This section comprises original CD reviews, written during my two years in the Northern Hemisphere.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A project such as this is never a solo effort. The writing itself may be the result of hours spent toiling alone in front of a computer, but it is the external love, support, and encouragement that helps one arrive at this point. I have received this in abundance from...

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PART ONE :: Introductory Essay

How to help when a member of your family admits to wanting to be a music critic – a twelve-step programme to recovery and acceptance.

It is every parent's nightmare. Your progeny comes home from school having had "Career Day," to announce that she is going to be a music critic. This is generally followed by hours of pleading, crying, angered accusations, and suggestions that the armed forces may not be so bad after all. But to no avail. She has made up her mind.

The following is a very simple account of what may have drawn your offspring to this 'profession,' how you can help and support her, and how to successfully disguise yourself at public concerts so that no one knows you are related to the critic!

Step One :: Help her admit to being irresistibly possessed by music.

The first and undeniably hardest and longest step is to accept the fact that listening to music and then writing a critical review has become the central craving of life for your loved one. This can be identified in a number of ways, but perhaps the most damning evidence will come from attending a concert with your 'critic-wannabe.'

Once the lights have dimmed, and the gradual hush from the audience has taken effect, watch for a pencil or similar marking implement to appear in her hand. This method of annotating the programme with criticisms of the performance is particularly popular with newspaper critics. They have a stressful existence, as most

have to write a review of the performance directly after the event, so as to make the column for the following day. The only exceptions are critics for nationwide newspapers, who generally have a day more than the local critics due to an earlier publishing deadline.

Of course, writing during a performance can be incredibly distracting for those seated near the critic. This is one of the first situations when special precautions need to be taken so that you are not assumed to be 'with' the distractor. I would suggest making annoyed 'tsk-ing' noises, and demonstrably shifting your body away from her. The only other method, albeit a slightly more risky one, is to ask in a loud whisper what she is doing. You would be surprised how often this method is employed. It generally results in questions such as, for which publication she writes, or if she would like a layperson's opinion.

The most curious thing about critics who write during performances is that despite suffering ignominy to preserve their thoughts about the performance indelibly on the programme, very few will ever look at these notes again. So why do they do it? It is generally done so as to alleviate the pressure of forgetting something noteworthy that has occurred during the concert. There is only one surefire way to really do this, however, and that involves the highly illegal practice of secreting a Sony Recording Walkman™ in one's handbag, or coat pocket, and taping the whole event. However, if caught the ramifications are severe – public censure, suspension from all subsequent concerts, and being fired from one's job.

So, the notetaking behaviour is what to expect from a critic during the concert. Afterwards you should expect to be quizzed on what you thought. If gullible enough to offer an opinion, be prepared to be shot down. Your 'critic-wannabe' will

have done her homework meticulously – studying the scores prior to attending the concert; reading through the programme notes with a fine-tooth comb; listening to recordings of the works on the programme; and possibly even interviewing the performer/s. There is a certain fervour and fanaticism involved in preparing to write a review of a concert. For the fledgling critic, there is no chance to fall back on previous concert experiences or prior knowledge of the performers and the works to be performed. Thus, adequate preparation simply must be adhered to (such as the other types outlined above).

So far, we have only dealt with a concert-going critic. There is, unfortunately, another type – the record critic. This somewhat antiquated title (is there any vinyl available anymore?) may be assigned to anyone who is prepared to lock herself in a room, turn down the phone, don a pair of headphones, and listen to her heart's content. (Your critic-in-training probably leads a double life, as most music critics are wont to do. She probably does the concert circuit as well as this 'record reviewing.')

The first sign of record-listening-deviancy (RLD) is normally displayed in a social situation. Your future critic will hover at the stereo system, moving the attenuator up infinitesimally, until conversation of any description becomes impossible. She will be taking copious notes on a napkin, using the search button indiscriminately, and generally ensuring that all guests leave with splitting headaches. RLD is incurable. However, there are two measures that can be taken to make it less obvious to those outside the family.

First of all, a subscription to a journal that deals specifically with record reviews is essential. There is a plethora of such publications, for example,

'Gramophone,' 'American Record Guide,' 'Soundscapes,' 'Fanfare,' to name but a few. These magazines contain prime examples of how record reviews should be written. Most record critics have enormous CD collections, so that comparative reviews of new and old recordings can be done. This is an expensive venture; thus, joining a record club may be a help to the burgeoning Visa bill.

The second measure is the purchasing of a set of headphones. This has a dual effect. Firstly, it enables your RLD to listen very closely to the recording being reviewed, even to the extent of being able to identify poor edit points, squeaky chairs, and heavy breathing. Secondly, it achieves peace and quiet for the others in the house.

If the relative-in-question displays any of the above characteristics, you can be certain that she is well on the way to becoming a professional music critic. There are only eleven more steps for you to encounter before you can accept this radical choice of profession. Don't be discouraged.

Step Two :: Reassure her that somewhere, an Editor greater than herself will re-work her obsessional reviews.

Most newspapers and magazines have the distinction of expecting all their employees to write to a particular style. This is called the 'house style,' and it makes newspapers and magazines the homogeneous documents that readers come to rely upon. Consider the average Saturday paper reader – lolling in bed in pyjamas, drinking coffee, with cornflakes and croissant on a tray. There is no more blissful way to start the weekend than with a paper overflowing with the minutiae of the previous week in one's hand. It is in this hotbed of articles about current affairs, world events,

itineraries for sojourns to India, and the relative merits of Pamela Anderson-Lee's breast implants that the critic's review must be placed. It is normally situated in the generically titled 'Arts' section.

Very little space is allotted for reviews. In fact, usually only a slim column. (Nowadays it is more likely that one will see a profile of a performer or a thinkpiece on a major musical happening than a review of a concert.) Anyway, this is where the guiding hand of the Editor comes into play. The Editor is a powerful influence, whose wisdom and knowledge of the requirements of the paper reign supreme. In the early days of your critic's appointment at a newspaper, the Editor will always be lurking in the shadows to ensure that your critic does not write astray. There will be more divulged about the role of the Editor throughout this twelve-step programme. Needless to say, the Editor is a force to be reckoned with.

Step Three :: Support her in her writing of the best reviews possible about the joys and temptations of music for the well-being of the public and the Editor.

Assuming that your little darling is now installed as a professional critic at a major North American newspaper (situations vary from continent to continent), she will be writing about music ad nauseam. Half-written reviews, balls of screwed-up paper, and laptop computers will be strewn around the house. Part of the process will necessarily be self-doubt – for example, have concert preparation procedures been followed? Is the opinion being expressed clearly? Have the performers been accorded all the rights and privileges they deserve? There will also be hours and hours spent anguishing over the choice of just one little word – for example, is 'awful' too harsh?

Your role in this process is to encourage and listen. For one who is as passionate about music criticism as your critic, perfecting written expression is essential and must be achieved for optimum results. She will see her job as one of subjective judge, and educator-of-the-public. She will believe that the average reader knows very little about music, and will attempt to bring a musical event to life for this reader through the unlikely means of words. (Be warned never to toss in the axiom that writing about music is like dancing about architecture. This will result in an endless philosophical debate, which no one can ever hope to win conclusively.)

Step Four :: Encourage her to expose all of her biases/prejudices so that every reader can also join in the purging process of personal honesty.

This may make or break the success of a critic. No one likes a critic who has obvious blindspots but can't admit them – for example, hatred of music that sounds like fingernails being scraped down a blackboard; aversion to warbling sopranos; concerts that run late; sitting in a chair with an air-conditioning vent above; disdain for the clarinet. Believe it or not, most readers are intelligent enough to realise such flaws of character, and appreciate being forewarned of these biases. A successful way to deal with this is to admit openly at the front of a review what one's prejudices are. As a relative of the critic, it is your responsibility to cajole her into being open about these pleasures and displeasures. It can improve the review immeasurably, as it will not only save your critic from failure, but also give the readers an opportunity to express their own likes and dislikes about music. This is a situation when it can truly be said that honesty is the best policy.

Step Five :: Help her admit to the Editor and to the general readership the exact nature of the performance's wrongs in order to continue the cathartic critical process.

There is nothing worse than settling into an armchair with your newspaper or record review magazine of choice only to find that the review is just a report of an event and contains no actual appraisal of the performance or composition. Readers expect subjective opinion, tempered with real musical knowledge. If they wanted a dispassionate report, a news event would suffice.

A review of a concert or recording is supposed to provoke a response, be it vehemently for or against the opinion expressed. A direct criticism of the concert is what is called for. The Editor is there to ensure something of newsworthy value has been written. In fact, as far as the Editor is concerned, the more controversial the review is, the more readers it will attract. This particular approach, however, has lost some steam with the sharp increase in defamation suits. Be assured that generally the legal department of the newspaper or magazine will peruse any potentially litigable reviews.

Step Six :: Prepare her to have the Editor remove all of her infelicities of expression, including circumlocution, solecisms, and all specialist musical jargon.

This is the fine-tuning, so to speak, of all the nuances and gradations of musical assessment. During the creative process of opinion balancing, there are many occasions, due to the constraints of time and concentration power, a seasoned critic will write something unworthy of her intelligence. She may even slide into the interglossia of Derrida, Foucault, or Barthes, let alone grammatical abnormalities and

expressional blunder up with which no one should ever be expected to put. This is when the Editor Strikes Back.

No language can ever be allowed to make the average reader feel intellectually jejune (i.e. like an idiot). Therefore, going into detail about the harmonic structure, tonal centres, and the like, should be avoided as argotic obfuscation. Also remember that no one likes foreign words, periphrasis, or sesquipedalianism. Even the well-read Editor will just enjoy marking her clever writing well red!

Step Seven :: Advise her to humbly ask the Editor to continue monitoring her progress by dispatching her on even more musical performance assessments.

Simply stated, the critic should seek to attend as many musical events as possible and write about them all, even if all her reviews are not published. Here, once again, a tried and true saying sums it all up – practice makes perfect. There will be times when the thought of attending the third concert of the week gives your critic a severe case of agoraphobia. You will need great patience and perseverance to help her through this stage. You may also need to assist her with 'Time Management Skills.'

Step Eight :: Encourage her to make a confessional list of all performers she has harshly criticised, and be willing to leave past reviewing debacles in the past and not bring them up again and again in subsequent reviews.

Great performers have off-nights. This does not mean that their career should end, it just means they had an off-night. It can be very hard if the critic is hearing the performer-under-scrutiny for the first time on such a night, because she is apt to think that the performer is perhaps not so great after all. Any subsequent

reviews of performers who were not at their peak the last time they were heard, must not contain allusions to the previous debacles. This severely undermines the credibility of the critic, as the reader will then see that the critic has trouble attending a concert or listening to a recording with fresh ears.

The judgement of a performance or recording must be approached with a fresh set of ears each and every time. Your role is to be there to erase previous unkind reviews from your critic's ears. (There are many ways to do this, but putting on a piece of banal music prior to her impending listening escapade will doubtless clean out the ears. The theme from 'Love Story' is a particularly good aural enema.)

Step Nine :: Help her make direct amends to such performers in the form of an open admission of previous excesses, wherever possible.

This is a further expression of Step Eight. There will be some occasions when the legal department goes to sleep and an unkind or perhaps even unjust review goes to print. It is important for the publication to be seen to be responsible. This may mean your critic re-thinking, or even re-writing the review of a performer whose performance was completely and unnecessarily torn apart. If she seems to be baulking at this recantation, the silent treatment for a week following the incident will normally ensure an amended comment, or re-written review. Your critic will then need considerable bolstering to prevent further damage to her psyche.

Step Ten :: Counsel her to continue to expose her own biases/prejudices and, when tempted to be temperamental, or just plain scarifying, confess and seek forgiveness.

It is so easy to revert to old biases, as well as the threat that new biases will emerge. Continue to keep your critic on the straight and narrow by prodding her to admit that the thought of another performance of Sibelius 2 will send her into a catatonic state. The omnipresent Editor will catch any prejudicial lapses you might overlook in her writing.

Step Eleven :: Help her seek through writing and re-writing to come to terms with her passions and obsessions and expressive skills as a music critic.

This is an ongoing quest for a music critic. She must never settle back on her laurels and become a smug musical vigilante. She must continue to find new ways to approach music reviewing and not write the same review umpteen different ways, even if it is her sixth piano recital in ten days. If you feel she is becoming stale and jaded by the whole profession, encourage her to move out and let a fresh set of ears take her place.

Step Twelve :: Help her realise that having had a spiritual awakening about the importance of the job of a music critic as a result of these steps, she must carry this message of purity and self-worth to other music critics and all readers about musical performances.

This is an opportunity for franchising. Get your critic to go on the record, figuratively speaking, about writing music reviews. Get family members to go on 'Oprah' to discuss the trauma of living with a self-confessed music critic. Get a book deal better than O.J. Simpson's. But most important of all, is to make sure she continues to write music reviews, no matter how hard it may seem. It is a profession

frowned upon by so many musicians and audience members alike, but where would we be without a music critic to tell us what was wrong or right?

Step Thirteen :: Further reading (a special bonus in this programme)

Barzun, Jacques. *On Writing, Editing and Publishing.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Chatelin, Ray. "Marketing the Classics in the 1990's," *Classical Music Magazine*, 14, no. 5 (1991), 16-19.

Crory, Neil. "For and Against the Record," *Opera Canada*, 31, no. 4 (1990), 14-16.

Gould, William. "Music's New Market," *Musical Opinion*, 115 (October, 1992), 398.

Nowinski, Joseph, and Baker, Stuart. *The Twelve-Step Facilitation Handbook.* New York: Lexington Books, 1992.

Rivers, William L. *Writing Opinion: Reviews.* Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988.

Titchener, Campbell B. *Reviewing the Arts.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1988.

Wolseley, Roland E. *Critical Writing for the Journalist.* Philadelphia: Chilton, 1959.

PART TWO :: Interviews with five Canadian critics and artists

The following section comprises interviews with three music critics and two concert pianists. The critics write for the three major newspapers in the Toronto/Hamilton area – 'Globe and Mail,' 'Toronto Star,' and 'Hamilton Spectator.' Both pianists perform regularly throughout North America and Europe, and have made numerous recordings.

Each interview is presented in a slightly different style to reflect the personality of the interviewee, and the information garnered. Where the interviews are presented in question and answer format, this is a direct transcription from the tape recording of the interview. The only editorial invasion has been to correct some grammatical quirks. In the other interviews, any quotations included are also direct transcriptions from the tape. The linking paragraphs in these interviews are interpretations of what was said in a more circuitous way by the interviewee.

Robert Everett-Green

Senior Features Writer, *Globe and Mail*

Interviewed at the 'Globe and Mail' Building, November, 1994.

Looming large in the heart of an industrial wasteland in metropolitan Toronto sits the 'Globe and Mail' building. Home of Canada's National Newspaper. In this citadel, Robert Everett-Green has been composing, amongst other things, upwards of one hundred concert reviews per year since 1987. Everett-Green began his musical training as an oboist, studying at the University of Toronto. A brief foray into orchestral playing followed, but he could not envisage playing in an orchestra for the rest of his life.

Writing has always been of particular interest to Everett-Green. "I wrote a number of pieces for the Globe, not all of them artistic, and certainly not all about music." After writing on diverse subjects such as architecture, art, and design, he wrote a music review. Once his musical credentials were exposed, the editor asked if he would consider writing some concert reviews.

When his predecessor retired in April, 1987, after working for the paper for some thirty years, Everett-Green was appointed chief music critic. "There was nothing pre-meditated about this. I didn't actually set out to be a music critic. It just happened. As a critic I found that I was much more widely engaged with the art of music than I generally was as a performer."

Music critics have often been taken to task for their knowledge, or lack thereof, of the repertoire they review. Many will openly admit to not having broad knowledge of all styles and periods, but they counter these deficiencies with research

prior to attending concerts. "I think research is important. Typically I would try to get hold of the scores, and look through them before the concert."

This poses very few problems when reviewing works that have been heard and performed many times before. But what about new compositions, newly commissioned works? "I am of two minds about that, because I think that it is quite important to give a first reaction to the work as it exists in its proper form, which is as a performance. A score is really a set of instructions for making a performance. So I think it is important to hear it as everyone else does, for the first time in the hall.

"On the other hand, there is something to be said for viewing the score ahead of time, because then you are protected against some terrible error in the performance. I was reviewing several new pieces a few years ago. After my review was published I was speaking with one of the composers, and he told me the conductor, who was normally excellent, had simply missed a tempo indication that occurred about a minute and a half before the piece ended. They played the entire last section twice as slow as it was meant to be. A very obvious error which of course I didn't pick up."

Another method sometimes employed by Everett-Green in preparation for a concert involves listening to recordings of the works he is to hear. One acknowledged problem with this is then having a very set idea as to how a piece should sound, thus making comparisons inevitable.

"I'm a bit wary of those sorts of comparisons because they imply a norm, and there is very little in the way of a norm in performance. There's the score, but in terms of performances, I don't really accept the idea of a definitive performance. And I

think it is quite sterile to go and listen to a performance and think, 'How is this deviating from what Karajan did?'"

However, it is often suggested that this is the comparison many concert-goers make when they attend live performances. They expect to hear in the concert hall what they have been listening to at home on their CD players, and are quite disappointed when perfection is not replicated.

Everett-Green disagrees with such a view about audiences. He believes that there is not one audience, but many. Within any of these audiences, he considers there will only be a few fanatics who have a definite idea about what should happen. For the most part, audiences are open to music and their acquaintance with it is not so specific.

His opinion about the number and variety of audiences sets up many challenges for him as a writer. "Well, the trick is to write to all those audiences, which is impossible to do with any real consistency." He acknowledges that there is a limit to the writing of reviews on esoteric music, taking into account the level of musical expertise of his readership. As the vast majority of the reading public does not have specialised knowledge, he avoids such critiques.

Everett-Green is not concerned when his reviews are edited, as he rarely has had to sustain changes to his copy. The queries he usually receives from his editor are indicative that he has strayed a little too far into specialised musical terminology.

In fact, Everett-Green has fielded more criticism from the public than his editor about his reviews. However, he has rarely received letters from the subjects he reviews. "I think few performers, or composers, or artists generally respond to criticisms because I think partly they fear that will get them into worse trouble with that critic,

which I think is unfortunate. My response to the few letters I have had from performers has been quite neutral."

He understands the agony some performers undergo when they receive a 'bad' review, but "...it is really just another opinion. And I don't presume to be making some great statement from on high about the absolute truth of this performance. I am trying to make an educated response to someone's efforts."

Everett-Green is pragmatic about the responses he gets. He often feels that it is his most controversial pieces that are ignored. "But this is another important aspect of newspaper writing. There is interpretation both ways. The critic is interpreting and then being interpreted."

The way a piece is interpreted can also lead to accusations of bias toward or against a particular artist. Everett-Green is careful to remove himself from situations where he thinks this may be a problem.

"Bias is a funny thing. It would be foolish to claim that one has some sort of objective standard, whatever that is. One always has a sort of honorable subjectivity. Objective is very difficult to define. What I work with is a self-analysed subjectivity – that you are aware of your own signposts, shall we say, where your co-ordinates are in the musical universe. You make you readers aware of that whether you know it or not, whether you want to or not. Because over time the preferences of the reviewer become quite clear to everyone."

People often speculate as to whether the exchange of money helps artists 'get good reviews.' The closest Everett-Green has been to this is being asked to write some advance publicity for an event – no money involved. "As Virgil Thomson once

said, 'Music critics do not as a rule accept graft, nor are they ever offered it on a scale which would make it remotely tempting.'"

One of the many luxuries of being an audience member and not a critic is being able to stop one's ears when a concert is dull or uninteresting. But for Everett-Green this cannot happen, as he has to pay special attention when something is not working. "It is not good enough to say, 'my attention wandered.' You have to give some explanation as to why the performance didn't work."

The fundamentals of writing the review have always been a matter of routine for Everett-Green. "I avoid going to lots of concerts. I review certainly no more than three or four per week." He takes some notes during the performance, "as surreptitiously as possible so as not to disturb." More often than not he never refers to these notes again.

As the 'Globe and Mail' has been unable for many years now to publish the review in the paper the following day, there is no pressure to dash up a piece the instant the concert concludes.

"My way of working is to go to the concert, listen to it carefully, make whatever notes I wish, leave the concert and not think about it again until the next morning. I think that there is some sort of subconscious activity going on, because sometimes I would leave a concert and not be quite sure what I really thought about it. By the next morning or noon, I did have a strong sense of what it was about, or what I felt. Sometimes it just takes a little time for the mind to sift the information."

Reviewing records involves a similar process. One thing he is careful to avoid in record reviews is writing in terms of whether the record is worth buying. He feels this type of judgmental writing should be left to record guides.

Everett-Green is no longer writing reviews of concerts. "I found it increasingly difficult to accept the particular division of criticism into the various subject areas, and it seemed to be quite arbitrary that I was covering just classical music."

He is now senior features writer for Arts+. Music will still be included in his portfolio, but he will be writing about the other arts as well – not dissimilar to how he began in journalism.

William Littler

Chief Music Critic, *Toronto Star*

Interviewed at the 'Toronto Star' Building, July, 1996

How did you begin as a music critic?

I started as a music student at university. It was simply that I got so angry with the reviews that were running in the student newspaper at the university I was attending, that I complained to the editor of the paper. He said, "OK, if you're so smart, here are a couple of tickets to the next symphony concert. Go and write us a review." I went, I wrote a review, and in my innocence I thought I could write my own headline for it. I chose what I thought was the appropriate headline for it, which was rather boring but apt nonetheless, "One Man's Opinion." After all, that is what a review is. To my surprise the review got printed and the headline stayed, and the editor said I was better, so appointed me as music critic. My plan was to become a musicologist, so essentially I thought I would wind up spending life teaching music history in some college somewhere.

During the course of writing those reviews for the student newspaper, to my surprise the people at the downtown newspaper were reading the reviews as well. I then got asked by them to back up their music critic on an occasional basis. While I was still in graduate school, the poor man died of a heart attack, and they asked me to become their music critic at the age of twenty-two. That was in Vancouver, at the 'Vancouver Sun' – the third-largest newspaper in the country. I was still impecunious, as most students are, and still desirous of attending concerts without having to pay, so I said OK. Life from then on took a different turn for me. I thought I was going to

be a full-time academic and a part-time reviewer. Instead I have become a full-time reviewer and a part-time academic. I still teach at the Royal Conservatory, and over the years I have taught courses at various universities. The criticism became the focus of the career instead of the musicology.

Do you teach courses in music criticism?

I have on occasion. I have taught for the McMaster programme, and I've taught dance criticism as well, since I also write about dance. At various places and various times I have taught criticism courses.

How do you feel music criticism has changed for you as a writer?

It is the conditions under which we operate that are changing. Newspapers are becoming smaller in size. They are attempting to save newsprint because of the enormous rise recently in newsprint costs, and they have also diversified in terms of the subjects they cover and their priorities. For example, when I started writing music criticism for the 'Toronto Star,' this is now three decades ago, popular music received relatively little attention in our pages, and it tended to be at the back. Classical music, so-called, tended to be at the front and given much more space. That situation has now reversed itself in most newspapers, including my own. So not only has the space per piece diminished, but the position within in the paper of classical music coverage has declined.

Do you think that is due to changing public attitude?

That's the argument of the newspapers, that in fact society is changing, and its priorities are changing. I'm not sure they're wrong. Last year when I was in Japan, I was talking to people about the wonderful public they have for classical music, and I was being told by concert promoters that the current generation is fine, but the next generation may not be so interested. After World War II, there was a rejection of traditional Japanese culture, because Japan had lost the war. An embrace of European art music followed. The current generation no longer has that war guilt feeling, and the future generations will have even less of it. They see that younger people want to go to concerts, rock concerts, art exhibitions, shows, and so on. They are more eclectic in their tastes, and they don't have the same loyalties as their parents to going to the symphony concert on a regular basis.

I think the same is true, broadly speaking, for North American society as well – we are also more eclectic in our tastes. Opera is much more popular now than it was three decades ago, as are ballet and dance. Theatre is doing well too. The other art forms are encroaching upon the priority that classical music once had. I think it's a combination of factors that have produced a situation in which we really do have to fight for the attention which is given to classical music now.

Has the advance in technology as far as recordings are concerned affected the expectation of the audience and perhaps even the reviewer?

Technical levels are certainly much higher in recordings, and they certainly are in the concert hall, and on the operatic stage as well. We don't necessarily have interpretation at greater depth, but we generally have a higher technical polish to performances. I think recordings have led people to expect a great deal. Similarly,

television and film have led people to expect a greater degree of realism on the operatic stage, that perhaps they were not demanding thirty years ago. That's been a part of it too. The quality of home equipment has improved so much, and the cost hasn't risen dramatically, so people can have a comfortable experience of music and the other arts in their homes without bothering to go out. Now to me, and most other people I think, there is still an element of the live experience that makes it qualitatively different. I think people still enjoy the social aspect of music-making in the public concert hall. But there's no question we're in the era of the couch potato, and people are cocooning more.

Is the preparation different for reviewing a live concert versus a studio recording?

It certainly is different. There's a difference in terms of time. In terms of the compact disc, you have comparative versions that you can listen to at home at your leisure. I think especially as there is much more of a consumer service aspect to record reviews than there is to concert reviews. Many concerts are not repeated, and in any event, they are not repeated the same way because the performer is going to be different the second night. Whereas the record is going to be the same the next night, and thereafter into eternity. You really have to give people an idea what's out there, and if this recording is worth examining relative to another recording of the same piece. It's a different kind of reviewing, much more comparison is involved.

Is there a particular space devoted to record reviews? How does this compare to the space given to concert reviews?

We don't have that much space for record reviews in daily newspapers really. Most newspapers have record reviews one day a week, whereas they have concert reviews through the week. So the live music actually gets more attention proportionate to reader interest, I believe, than recorded music. I'm just as happy to keep it that way, because I happen to prefer live music. But it's not fair in a sense to the record industry, because more people derive their listening from recorded material than they do from live material. We just don't reflect that.

When you're listening to a CD for review, do you listen to it repeatedly to elicit whether it will be worth this kind of attention for the potential consumer?

One has the possibility of doing that. In practice I don't, simply because of shortage of time. I may compare it to other recordings, but I have a fairly good memory of recordings I have heard previously. Since the reviews are generally very brief anyway – they're not like 'Gramophone' magazine where you say "in bar three hundred and twelve this happened" – so that kind of cursory attention is usually all we are able to offer. Besides which, as I say, that's one day a week and there are other days in which we have to do other things.

How do the recordings of pieces you are familiar with impinge upon your opinion of these same pieces performed live?

I don't like the idea of using one artist as a club to beat another artist over the head. But we don't have blank memories. We do have memories of what we have heard in the past and they do, naturally, affect our judgement. In fact, it's one of the things we can offer as a service to our readers, that we have a greater listening

experience than most of them, and can therefore recall performances in the past that might be interesting to talk about in terms of the present performance we're reviewing. But I don't think that many of us go to a performance of the Mississauga Symphony Orchestra and criticise it for the fact that it doesn't sound like the Berlin Philharmonic. That's not realistic. There are critics who do tend to bring their recorded memories in as a yardstick to judge a live concert, but I think it's an unrealistic yardstick to use.

When you attend these concerts, are you aware ahead of time just how much space you have for your review?

What usually happens is, I usually have to write my reviews on the same evening as the event, and the deadline is about 11.45pm. As soon as I come into my office, I phone my night editor and ask how much space I have, and then I will write to that space. It can happen that at the last moment someone important will die, or an ad has to be moved on the page, and I will find out that something is missing from the review because he's had to change it. But by and large I write to space, and I think most of us do that. Now that we are using word-processors, computers, one can very quickly get a sense of how long the review is that one's writing, so that one can quite accurately write to the given space, Even the editor is not completely precise in terms of what he is able to do with that, it may be that he has to drop a sentence, or something like that, but it's a much closer approximation than before. Before we came to write on computers and were using typewriters, I would usually write to an approximately standard length and just leave it to the gods as to whether it would get in or not.

What about new music? When you review a concert in which there is a premiere of a new piece, or perhaps a piece you are not familiar with, would you request a score prior to the performance, or ask to attend a rehearsal?

I've had standard requests in to local concert-giving organisations when they do premieres to try and get the score to me advance. Quite often they don't, as there isn't a second score to be had. Everybody's rushing at the last minute to get it done and there aren't extra copies. Sometimes there are, in which case I get one, and I do like to have it to look at. Depending on how complex the music is, sometimes one can get an idea of it, and sometimes only a very approximate idea of the shape of it, depending on the techniques utilised. It's a little difficult sometimes to get a sense of what it is, but it's always a help if I can get access to a score. In practice it isn't nearly as possible as it is in theory.

In terms of rehearsals, I prefer not to go to rehearsals in advance of the concert. I don't want to start judging the piece before it's properly prepared. One can get a mistaken impression of what's happening. As the 'New York Times" drama critic once said, "I don't want to see the artists' problems. I want to see the artists' solutions." I think the piece has a better chance to be heard when they've put in all their preparation. Sometimes I have gone to rehearsals of pieces beforehand, but I haven't always found that it worked all that well to the piece's advantage. You're very conscious of what's going wrong and not so conscious of what's going right. The final performance is the one. Now, with access to the score, that's a different matter. There you can see what they're trying to do conceptually, but when they're actually doing it, as opposed to during a rehearsal, I think you're in a better position to judge when you

are at the performance having had time to study the score. Besides, as you well know, there are some pieces that don't come together very well until the last moment, especially in the case of new music.

If you attend a concert given by an established artist, and it is not up to par, would you give a severe review, or would you point out that such bad playing was anomalous for this artist?

That's the classic problem with Yehudi Menuhin. He's a great artist who often plays badly. Of course now he's at an advanced age, so one doesn't expect the freshness of youth. But he's had problems throughout his career that way. I think it's fair to point out when he's playing badly, but it's proper at the same to point out that this is a great artist performing badly and to recall this in context. This performance isn't the totality of the man and his career.

I suppose the other side of that is the performer who isn't well-known who performs badly. Would you write a severely critical piece, risking perhaps the annihilation of the performer's confidence, or would you simply forfeit the review?

I have left some performances at the end and not written a review, since I felt there was nothing useful that could be accomplished by it – the artist was not prepared, or of a professional standard. But that doesn't happen very often. We review very selectively what's going on, and that level of artist doesn't usually get a critic in the hall anymore, as there is so much going on of a high level. I think there's no point in going out and just attacking somebody who is obviously not ready for the concert stage, or who has put in an appalling performance. If a major artist puts in an

appalling performance, that's a different matter. We have to be there because the artist is important, and if it's an appalling performance, that's news.

So you are able to select the concerts you review?

Yes, I select the concerts I go to personally. But there are obvious responsibilities that one has to bear in mind. For example, there might be a young composer premiering a piece the same night the Canadian Opera Company is opening its season. There's no one else to review, so I would have to go to the Canadian Opera Company because of the weight of importance of that in the musical community and in the newspaper's sense of what is most important. The young composer would probably be ignored, even though from a purely selfish point of view, I'd much rather go to hear the young composer, because it would be something I hadn't heard before and am curious about. Chances are the opera, on the other hand, I've heard before.

Do you believe that there is some essential training one should have to become a music critic?

It's very difficult to define the appropriate training for music critics, since the outstanding ones have had such varied backgrounds. I mean, when you bear in mind Ernest Newman, who was probably the leading music critic for a couple of generations and who wrote that standard four-volume biography of Wagner, was entirely self-taught. Neville Cardus, his somewhat younger colleague on 'The Guardian,' had the grand sum of six months singing lessons as the totality of his formal musical training. To say that these men were not learned would be to insult them. They acquired their knowledge by themselves – the autodidactic tradition.

That's a tradition that's very characteristic of English music criticism until fairly recently. And still now, many of the English critics went to Oxford or Cambridge, but they took general degrees and acquired their musical education on the side, as it were. The North American tradition is becoming more of a professional tradition. The German-language tradition has always been a musicological tradition primarily. People have taken degrees, quite often doctorates, before going into music journalism in Germany.

So it varies a lot, and you have to judge it case by case in terms of the individual. One can be as general as saying that one should be musically literate, one should be able to write, and one should have powers of perception and judgement. When you go beyond that, it's very difficult to be very precise. The writing style tends necessarily to adapt to the particular publication for which one is writing. It's not that every magazine or newspaper has a "house style," but they do have a general style. For example, newspaper paragraphs tend to be very short, because newspaper type is small and the newspaper column is narrow. So if it's a very long paragraph, it is just aesthetically difficult for the reader to deal with. Short paragraphs are better. Now many of those short paragraphs properly belong in one long paragraph, if one is thinking of traditional English style. But newspaper layout and convention determine that you adopt a different style. It's partly a question of the nature of the publication, as well as one's own inclinations as a writer.

Is there a specific policy on specialist language?

The amount of jargon, as they call it, one can use once again depends on the publication. It always puzzles me that we're always admonished to minimise

jargon talk about music, but sports writers are able to use terms like hat-trick – I haven't the foggiest notion what it means – and expect their readers to know it. It's difficult and we're talking in any case about one language, music, in terms of another, words. So we can't possibly represent music accurately. We really can only testify to our witnessing of music, and that we can express in words. So it's an interesting challenge to come to terms with this.

Do you think the space allotted music criticism in North American newspapers is shrinking?

Its prominence is shrinking. I don't think its validity is any the less. I think the nature of the activity of the musical journalist, broadly speaking, has changed. I think we have to do far more polemical and proselytising work in order to argue the value of music in society. I think many of the critics spend a good deal of their time now writing features and articles that draw attention to what's going on musically, and are spending less time writing actual formal reviews. Some newspapers barely run reviews anymore. They argue that the concert is over, so that's it. They'll run a review of an opera, play or a film because they run for several performances. But a concert that isn't going to be repeated, many newspapers feel is of secondary importance, so the critic is encouraged to spend his time elsewhere. That means writing a feature piece, an interpretative piece, subjects that draw people into the musical world, and are legitimate means of making people aware that music is a subject that is interesting. The job is still there in many publications, but the nature of the work has changed. It's a pity, because I've always thought of reviewing as the core activity of a music critic.

Hugh Fraser

Chief Music Critic, *Hamilton Spectator*

Interviewed at the 'Hamilton Spectator' Building, July, 1996

For Hugh Fraser, the smoke stacks of Hamilton are decidedly removed from his exciting start in journalism at 'The Guardian' newspaper on London's Fleet Street. Fraser landed in Hamilton thirty years ago after deciding that riding to work on a moped from Epping Forest was not his ideal mode of transportation for life. "I mean there was no money in journalism in London, and it was awfully expensive to live there, which it still is. I wanted a family as well."

He began his musical training in the UK, first at the Dartington Hall School of Music, and then at the prestigious Guildhall School of Music. It was Guildhall's proximity to Fleet Street that led to his first job in journalism.

"Whenever the protein levels got really bad, there were two things we could do. We all knew people who were working in 'My Fair Lady,' at Drury Lane, so we could get work there playing in the orchestra. Or we could work at various things at the newspapers, freelance jobs and such. I went to 'The Guardian.' It was sort of a natural fit – music and Fleet Street being so close together. I was an editorial assistant to start with, running around with messages, doing copying. It was an apprenticeship second to none."

The worldwide reputation of 'The Guardian' helped Fraser enormously on arrival in Canada. He began his North American journalistic foray in the proof room at the 'Hamilton Spectator' so he could "learn the language, which was very different from England." He remained there for quite some time, absorbing as much about his new

cultural surroundings as possible. Fraser also took a keen interest in the shift from lead to photo printing in 1965.

"It was a whole revolution, absolutely fascinating. But after such a big change and the increase in costs that came with it, the newspaper tried to get rid of as many of us as they could. They looked through my CV, noticed my music background, and asked me to do music reviewing instead. I said yes – an answer for which I think my mother has never forgiven me. She's a singer, and she thinks it's just about the most appalling thing I could've done."

Music reviewing accounts for half of his professional life at the 'Spectator.' And even though Fraser's musical interests have ebbed somewhat over the years, he has always maintained a firm commitment to covering local events first, no matter what the standard.

"I have always been determined to cover the community. When I first started they [the paper] went to Toronto a lot more, covering the Toronto Symphony, and the like. The Toronto Symphony actually had a season in Hamilton at that time. When I started, the Hamilton Philharmonic was a community orchestra. The first bassoonist was actually a tenor saxophone player who harvested vegetables up in Milgrove.

"But there's been a tremendous evolution in Hamilton, including the professional Philharmonic, and Opera Hamilton. We've had a wonderful flowering of excellent stuff here. But I still always wanted to cover the community orchestras, the duet club scholarships, because there I met all of those people, like Martin Beaver, who went on to become really quite something. And I enjoyed that. I enjoy the community music-making at all levels."

The freedom he has to cover smaller musical events is a perk of Fraser's job in Hamilton, but it is something he would never have been able to do had he remained in London, or moved to one of the other musical Meccas. In such places, the larger professional spectacles prevent writing about amateur music performances in major newspapers.

Despite his gratitude for such an influential, accessible role in the community, it is not without its drawbacks. "You see, the film critic can say what he likes about Robert Redford in 'Out of Africa,' and it's pretty safe to say Robert Redford will never read the 'Hamilton Spectator.' I write about people I will meet in the IGA the next day. You're a part of the community, you're available. You get the whole gamut of emotions from the people you review."

Understandably, Fraser adapts his critical style to suit the particular event he is covering. As he covers concerts from the truly amateur to the consummate professional, there is a lot of discretion in the words he chooses. Fraser believes that it is difficult to convey the reality of a musical event through language, which is after all "an imperfect science."

On occasion he has been reprimanded for seemingly favouring the amateur music-makers over the professionals. In the era of Boris Brott, Fraser would often receive irate calls from Brott castigating him for giving Symphony Hamilton a rave review, whilst being less than enthusiastic about the Hamilton Philharmonic. His answer was always the same.

"When you're writing about the HPO and Symphony Hamilton, you're talking about two very different things, and you have to write differently. There's very little way around this. When you write about young musicians, now I'm talking about

the Hamilton Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, your role is to encourage, not to blight. You can so easily blight young people. But it's hard enough for them to get up and do something. To encourage and to say what's good is usually my thing, and then to get around to what was not so good. It's a fine balance."

Fraser's fervent support of live music is matched by his equally fervent indifference to recorded music. This is no more apparent than in his avoidance of reviewing recordings. "It's the difference between going to Mars yourself, and sending a probe. What's more exciting? Sitting at home watching the pictures the probe sends back on TV, or actually being there? I would say most people want to be there themselves.

"I have no patience for CD perfection. I don't really value it. There was a programme in the UK called 'Desert Island Discs.' What they would do is ask some famous person which twelve records they would take with them if they were stranded on a desert island. Well, Sir Malcolm Sergeant was one I particularly remember. He said, 'I don't want the records. Give me the scores.' He had a point. Recordings always stay the same. They never get better, but are more likely to deteriorate over time.

"However, there are some pieces of music I have to hear at least once a week, and that I can only do with recordings. But otherwise, no. For me, the human to human communication makes live music what I live for."

The audience in Hamilton for classical music has altered dramatically in the past twenty years. When Fraser began writing his reviews, he was very aware that the majority of the population would rather be at a football game than a symphony concert.

"I remember going to 'Adieu Robert Schumann' by Murray Schafer and the Hamilton Place audience booing because it was modern. And then hearing last season, to contrast it as well as I can, Schafer's 'Cortège' with Daniel Lipton conducting and just huge applause at the finish. I think there has been a quantum shift in the sophistication of the audience in Hamilton. It's changed quite a bit for the better. There's been a kind of education, which I hope I've helped in. Audiences no longer mind being excited and challenged."

There have been occasional glitches in his reviewing experience though. "One horrible experience was when this soprano came to the Philharmonic. Gorgeous looking, tall willowy blonde. But she was an atrocious singer. I had never liked her voice, so I wrote a pretty terrible review. Well, I was in bed after writing the review, and I decided to come back into work, get the review back and soften it a bit. Same sentiment, but different words to make it more palatable. Next day, I came in, took the paper, and the editor had put a story underneath my review about how this was this soprano's first concert after five year's lay-off recovering from the death of her nineteen-year-old daughter. My review made me look like butcher Fraser after that. It was awful."

Boris Nelson, the music critic for the 'Toledo Blade,' was one of Fraser's early mentors. He attended a symposium chaired by Nelson. "[Nelson] said as you get older, you get more severe as a critic, and you tell yourself that's because you've found exactly the right tempi for this movement and that movement, etc. He said it's actually rubbish. What it is, is that you've found out over the years that the only time you receive total contempt is when you give a kind review to a bad performance. One should avoid contempt like that."

He astutely dodges any contempt by preparing meticulously for concerts he is to review. If a new piece is to be performed, he will not only ask to see a score in advance, but will also sit in on rehearsals to familiarise himself with the piece. Fraser believes this can only enhance his final review, rather than prejudice him against a piece by hearing it in its rough stages.

Despite his optimistic outlook on the music in Hamilton and the increasing audience for classical music, he is not so optimistic about his role.

"Music criticism is shrinking rapidly. Partly because the newspaper doesn't want this 'it's over and we're just telling our readers they missed it,' sort of reporting. Partly because whereas the music community is getting more sophisticated, more attuned, and in some ways bigger, there's a tremendous philistinism elsewhere about the arts."

Valerie Tryon

Pianist

Interviewed at Valerie Tryon's home, July, 1996

Valerie Tryon exudes elegance and finesse. Not only on the stage, where her pianistic ability has enthralled audiences in both Canada and abroad, but in real life as well. This British-born pianist did not burst onto the stage, rather she has quietly established herself as one of Canada's finest pianists. Somewhere in between the chores of everyday life such as cleaning the pool, doing the shopping and mowing the lawn, Tryon squeezes in four hours at the piano each day. She has won many awards during her career, including the Liszt Medal of Honour, and the Harriet Cohen Award. I was fortunate enough to catch up with this incredibly busy pianist to ask her about her life and career in Britain and Canada.

Has there been a person in your musical life who has influenced your development more than anyone else?

My teacher in France, Jacques Février influenced me a lot. I had already gotten everything, more or less, under my belt by then, as I was twenty-one when I went to him. So all the teachers before him had been terrific. But he was the one who somehow really inspired me. When I went to him with a piece, sometimes I was lukewarm about it. But as soon he taught me, I began to feel that the piece was fantastic. He was a really marvellous teacher.

Of course, my continual teacher was my mother. She was there always in the background. Right up until she died, she would listen to everything I wanted her

to hear. It was an enormous help to me. She would put her finger on something wrong, and I would think, 'Of course! Why didn't I think of that.'

Were you encouraged to enter competitions as a means of starting your career?

No, not really. I did one competition, though – the Liszt Competition in 1956 in Hungary. I didn't really want to go in for a competition so far away, especially a country where I didn't know any of the language. It was a bit frightening, as I was only about twenty-one. I took the train right across Europe to get there. It was quite an undertaking, but it was wonderful. It was also interesting from the point of view of the playing. There were all of these wonderful pianists, sixty altogether. The competition was great.

When I got there I was tired, because I hadn't had any sleep for about two nights. I went to the hotel and the first thing I did was get into bed. I had to play at four o'clock in the afternoon after getting there at about one. Almost the moment I fell on the pillow, I was asleep, but I was woken up by a knocking at the door. I tottered to the door and there was the receptionist. She said she was terribly sorry but she had given me the wrong room. So I had to get everything out of that room to move into another. I slept until it was time to go. Then I went on and played – I just walked straight on the platform. It was probably the best performance I gave anywhere. I don't know why. Maybe I should always get up after a heavy sleep and play straight away. I got a special prize, which was very nice.

You haven't lived in Canada all of your life. In fact your career was already well underway in the UK when you came to Canada. What prompted this move?

I came over with my former husband, Alan Walker. He got the job at McMaster, and I had the choice, either go with him or stay at home in England. I wanted to stay in England desperately, I loved it there and I was very happy. It was a very, very difficult decision for him too, because he knew I didn't want to leave, and he knew all the sacrifices I had to make. It was terrible for both of us. Now I think I'm glad, because I like Canada and I've made lots of lovely friends here. My sister's here now with her children.

The first five years here were very difficult. I already had engagements in England, so I had to commute. This was a constant stress. Each time I went back to England I'd see my family and all my friends and not want to leave. But I'd fly back to Canada and I'd be glad to come back to Alan, but not to Canada. At that time Hamilton was not wonderful. It has improved enormously since then, which was 1971. It really was like living in the "back of beyond" after living in London.

Did you begin teaching at McMaster soon after settling in Hamilton?

No, no. I didn't start teaching until sometime around the end of the seventies, I think. I began to teach part-time at Mac during the eighties. Then I was appointed as Artist-in-Residence about eight years ago. The only other teaching I had done prior to that was at a posh girls' school in Dulwich in the UK. I was about eighteen at the time.

Did it take a long time for you to establish your concert career in Canada?

Oh yes. It happened very slowly. It's always the same. The ball starts rolling and gradually you accumulate more speed. That's exactly how it happened in Britain as well.

How do you determine which engagements to accept and which to turn down?

If the phone rings, I say yes. Very few times have I said no. My single dates seem to come from outer space. I don't know how they find me, but they do. You can't plan it, that's the only trouble. You might get two or three dates within two weeks, or you might get nothing for a whole month. I would love it to be spaced out perfectly.

Even with repertory you don't always have choice. With concertos, I have always been asked for a certain concerto. Never have they said to me, 'Which one would you like to play?' Recitals I can generally choose. I send maybe two or three choices to the organisation from which they can pick which one they want.

One of the things that there seems to be little consensus about is whether performers read the reviews written about them. Do you read the reviews written about your playing?

Oh yes. I always read the reviews. The first review that was the most important one for me was written by Martin Cooper in the 'Daily Telegraph.' It was my first Wigmore Hall recital, a sort of debut. They call [Wigmore Hall] "Heartbreak House," for all the people who are trying to start out. I played there when I was about nineteen. Mum and Dad bought me this very expensive Chanel dress, which made a noise every time I moved. Anyway, I was extremely nervous. Martin Cooper wrote a wonderful review, except for the last sentence, which completely destroyed me. He said something to the effect that, 'the interpretative meaning of the pieces was missing.' So

everything he put before that was ruined by that comment. My father was so annoyed that he cancelled his subscription to the 'Telegraph.'

Martin Cooper's daughter rang me and asked me for lessons years later, which was rather a conquest. She's a concert pianist now. She was just getting into her late teens when she came to me for lessons. I must say it didn't upset me terribly. I didn't tell her about her father's review of my recital, though.

All the reviews from the provincial places I played in England were, generally speaking, excellent. I couldn't possibly fault them. However, the ones that really matter are in London. They're the ones you really want. I never met any of the critics, but I knew they were very distinguished musicians and writers.

I haven't had a lot of reviews in Canada outside of Hamilton. Whenever I've been out of town, they seem to miss me. Of course all of Hugh Fraser's are wonderful. He's a very generous critic. I did have one from John Kraglund when I first came to Toronto. That was a terrible one, I think. I never saw it because everyone tried to keep it from me. I didn't find out until years later that he'd even written the review. I still don't know what he said.

Do you take into consideration suggestions that are made in reviews about how your performance may have been improved?

If it is someone whose opinion I respect, I would certainly take note of it. It is often very difficult for artists to depersonalise themselves, though. They forget that the critic is looking at you not as a person, but as a conveyor of music. They are listening to the music. They write down their opinion of how you play. I have managed to detach myself from taking things personally. I concentrate more on the

music. For me music is something you express, and you want to play as beautifully as you possibly can. Whether I'm playing to that tree in the garden or to you, it makes no difference. It's the music.

Do you get nervous performing live?

Oh yes. The nerves have been there for me since I was little. When I was young the actual playing didn't bother me. What bothered me was whether I came on at the right place, whether I bowed correctly, whether I'd fall over the wires. That's what I was worried about. Now I'm the other way. I'm much more concerned about the playing. I don't care about the appearances. It would be rather a nice diversion if I fell over something. They might say 'She had an off night because she fell.'

Does this mean you prefer working in the studio to performing live?

Yes.

But how does the lack of nerves in the recording situation affect your playing?

It's better. The pressure of performing is not good for me. People say that my playing on the stage is very exciting. And for them maybe it is, but for me it's awful. I never feel pressure doing a recording. With recordings I am as relaxed as I am now.

A lot has been said about the preparation required for recording sessions as opposed to live performances. Do you find there is a difference in your preparation?

No, not really. I try to make everything as clear as I can, wherever, whenever, whatever I play. There is not a lot of difference between the two. The only

thing I like more about recordings than concerts is that you get the chance to re-do things if it doesn't go right the first time. A lot of performers resort to intricate editing, such as re-doing a single bar, or even note. I don't like doing that. I think it's too fussy. You lose the spontaneity. I like to do the whole piece twice, maybe, and then parts of it. Usually the producer wants two takes so that bits can be spliced together. If there's one or two parts I haven't liked or they haven't liked, I'll do those bits again. If I'm satisfied, usually they're satisfied too. But they really have the last word.

I understand that you have recently begun recording for Naxos. What have you recorded for them, and how does this affect your other recording options?

I did two recordings for Naxos last July, which haven't come out yet, and I'm doing another in England this August. Last year I did some Liszt transcriptions, and this year I'm doing Liszt transcriptions again – this time of Schubert songs.

As far as affecting my career goes, I heard from a singer that other record companies are extremely against Naxos. Some will not even hire artists who record for Naxos. They're pretty steamed up that Naxos is selling so well. Naxos CDs are distributed very, very well all over the world, and they're really cheap. The performers are paid a flat fee with no royalties. Frankly, I don't care about the money for the recordings because I like to make them. A lot of people have to pay out of their own pocket to make recordings. At least in this case someone is actually paying me. So I think I am very lucky.

Have you found that since the technology for recording has improved immeasurably that audiences are becoming more inclined to expect the perfection they hear on their CDs in the concert hall?

I think so. What is unkind about the CD is that everyone has perfection in their minds all the time. Recordings are ideal performances. When you come to the live concert, the audience is disappointed because it's not the same as the CD. But the fact is, it's impossible to live up to those CDs. You can't possibly expect to play a whole performance of something without some blemishes. Part of the nervousness I feel with performing is that it won't be perfect. That's a pity, because you get to the state when you can't sit back and enjoy the music anymore.

Marc-André Hamelin

Pianist

Interviewed at a friend's home in Ancaster, March, 1996

Energy, interest, passion, reverie. All qualities that radiate from Canadian-born pianist Marc-André Hamelin both on the stage and off. A native Montrealer, now living in Philadelphia, Hamelin has been enjoying considerable success of late. This year, amongst numerous accolades for his recitals and recordings, he received the 'Juno' for classical music's best solo or chamber music album for his CD of Alkan's piano music.

Whilst Hamelin is pleased with this notoriety, including a couple of home pages on the World Wide Web, he has not wasted any time basking in this glory. He is a devoted musician and has spent a lot of time championing the music of lesser-known composers. This fascination for the uncelebrated began early in his career.

Who was your principal piano teacher, or the teacher who has influenced you the most?

The piano teacher who I think was the main influence, or the most beneficial influence for me was a man named Harvey Wedeen, at Temple University in Philadelphia, and I saw him from roughly 1980 to 1986. Even though much of what he imparted to me was absolutely essential and really provided a very solid foundation, the main thing on which I disagreed with him with was the repertoire. He was very narrow-minded as far as repertoire was concerned. He was one of those people who seemed to believe that if it's not played, there must be a reason for it.

You now perform a lot of more obscure repertoire. Are you afraid of being pigeonholed by this?

No. If I can achieve something in life and in my career, it would be to eradicate the dismissal of pieces that are not "mainstream." Of course that'll never happen, but I would like to pave the way towards a better understanding of some of these masterpieces that haven't been played. For some pieces the only reason they're not played is that they are too difficult technically. In many cases pianists may consider that the expenditure of time involved in preparing such pieces is too great and is not, shall we say, money efficient.

Do some of the technical problems you speak of spring from the fact that these composers and their pieces are unfamiliar to the performer?

There are more correlations between unknown repertoire and traditional repertoire than most people would seem to believe. Composers influence each other all the time. The amount of knowledge that one gains from working on traditional repertoire can certainly be used for unknown repertoire, even though one has to, in each case, penetrate the composer's thought as much as possible. That is mostly achieved, I think, through oneself trying to compose. That is very, very beneficial. I believe in that very strongly, because only then can you even begin to appreciate the process that goes on when a composer tries to put his intangible thoughts into a proportionate system, an almost scientifically devised system that is musical notation.

Hamelin has devoted a lot of his time to recording music. His discography reflects his varied taste in music, including works by Ives, Alkan, Sorabji, Godowsky,

Britten, Schoenberg, Bolcom, Wolpe, Maurice Wright, Liszt. The Penguin Guide awarded the prestigious rosette to his 'Live at the Wigmore Hall' CD. All of these recordings, despite the technical stamina required, sound effortless. One London critic remarked that he is "that rare kind of virtuoso for whom mounting, torrential challenges are so completely in hand that he can give his full attention to the music – lyrically, structurally, intellectually."

Are there differences in preparation for live performances and studio recordings?

I am often told that my live performances are more exciting than my studio recordings, piece for piece. I myself have trouble believing that simply because I approach them exactly the same way. I am not one of those musicians who approach the studio as a studio and live performance as a live performance. I really try to give the same emotional message. But I am told that it comes out differently. I have to accept that, but I have no idea why it does.

How long does it usually take to complete a recording?

The average recording that I do is done in three days, although I have been able to be more efficient. One of the latest that came out, the Alkan, was actually done in two days. Three were scheduled, but we found to our delight and surprise that everything was finished in two days. For a recording like that it's really quite exceptional. In any case, I will play until it is "at least perfect" if not "perfect perfect." That will sometimes mean hundreds of takes.

When you say 'hundreds of takes,' do you mean playing movements or pieces over and over again, or do you also mean one bar, one section, or maybe even one note? Does the editing extend to this sort of manipulation?

Oh yes. That is the only way to work. It is like that all the time. In the Scriabin recording which we did – it was four and half days and it is a two CD set – there were nine hundred or so takes overall. Some of them are maybe a second and some of them as much as a movement.

But how does that affect concentration, because in a live performance you are going from start to finish and can't go back to fix up a bungled bar.

You concentrate in a different way. Of course the producer is there to tie things together, and I couldn't do without a producer myself, because I have to have a second pair of eyes and ears which holds it all together. It is also ideal if you, as the performer, try to remember as much of the session as you can, what you have done, so you can shape it as much as possible. One thing that is very important is to remain consistent in tempo and emotion. It has happened that the tempos don't quite match – I can remember once in particular in the Wigmore Hall recording but I won't tell you which piece. I know, of course, you are going to say it is a live recording, but it consists of edits too. For those Wigmore Hall concerts there were re-takes in the empty Wigmore Hall. Those were done before the concerts and not after because of budgetary and scheduling reasons.

Is this common then, for 'live' recordings to be touched up after the event so as to be almost perfect?

Absolutely. None of the recordings that are 'live' are just straight from the performance. This is a secret about the Wigmore CD I don't tell people – it has three hundred and eighty-one edits. At the beginning I was mortified by this. It was a statistic that completely floored me. Until I was told that that was about average for a live recording. The 'Kissin at Carnegie Hall' CD has about seven or eight hundred edits, because they recorded his rehearsals, and spliced it all together. People today want perfection. The only live recordings issued today that are not edited are those from the past for which there is no extant material to splice in. Ninety-nine percent of the listening population has no clue that it is anything but a one-take live recording. But when you think about it for more than five seconds, how could they be from one take? Nobody plays perfectly.

Does the record company have control over whether or not edits need to be done, or is that your choice?

I think they pretty much dictate the recording to suit the budget allotted. I had much more favorable conditions for this Liszt recording, which is the second Wigmore Hall record, because the concert was on a Sunday afternoon and the re-takes were done at night. We had three and a half hours which we used to the fullest. It was one of the most exhausting things I have ever had to do, but I think the result is really going to pay off.

Do you have any notion as to how much of the actual concert recording remained on the CD that was released, and how much was from the rehearsals and re-takes?

It is extremely difficult to tell when live recordings have been edited. Even though it might be a studio take, they will add in some room noise from when the audience was there, because they have enough sample from a live recording. I really wouldn't know unless I did the take picking myself, which I don't do anymore. When I was recording for small labels early-on in my career, it was always done for me. Then for the three recordings that I made with 'Music and Arts,' [the Alkan Concerto, the Liszt studio album, and the cabaret album with his wife] I had the opportunity to pick the takes myself in every case. The cabaret of course was live, but we did some re-takes about a month later in the empty hall and it really melded perfectly. There are all kind of audio tricks that you can do. It keeps getting better too. The editing facilities now are unimaginably good.

Do you have a favourite place to record?

The producer from Hyperion does, actually. We recorded the Alkan and the Scriabin sonatas in East Finchley in the All Saints Church, which was ideal acoustically, except for the outside noises that became completely out of hand sometimes. I remember one early afternoon we tried to record the opening of the Scriabin ninth sonata, which is very quiet – it is probably the quietest music in the entire set – and that time we had to contend with people passing by and talking, because there's a path on the side of the church, children playing in the next yard, birds, passing cars, the wind in the trees and airplanes. We had to wait to record that sonata later in the night when it was not as noisy.

If you are in a long recording session, doing one or more pieces, does it sometimes happen that your playing changes from take to take, even piece to piece?

That's when a producer comes in handy. I have the impression of giving my all, one hundred percent, all of the time. I am never less than one hundred percent honest. But, because of some physical circumstances, or emotional circumstances, I don't know, my playing may be inconsistent.

Are you as nervous in the studio as you are on stage?

No, and that's the difference between live and studio. Sometimes I won't feel nervous when performing, though, but that's hard to tell. When I listen to a tape I can usually tell I was, as the tempi were substantially faster than I wanted. That's why you have a producer in a studio recording to really keep you on the straight and narrow, or to suggest that this or that didn't match. Occasionally in the studio I do takes which are good but do not match the other takes from the same piece. I try to keep track of this as much as possible, though. It's a very difficult job to remember tempos. I find it very helpful to keep a playback system right by me in the studio, so when I want to listen to something, which is fairly often, I don't always have to run to the control room. This way all I have to do is put the headphones on. It's very helpful.

How much of the repertory do you only do in the studio and not on stage?

I have recorded quite a number of things that I have never played, nor will ever play in public. But that doesn't matter to me, because I consider making recordings a kind of service. I bring out these unknown but worthy works. However,

there's only going to be time for so much, and I'd like to achieve as much as possible in the time available.

Do you prefer to do concerts or recordings?

I like both. But I have a feeling I can leave my mark most obviously by making recordings. I believe the audience for a recording is going to be far greater than for a recital or group of recitals. The recording has a greater impact. But, I couldn't live without giving concerts.

For Hamelin, it has been through his extraordinary recordings that the offers for recitals have flooded in. He performs regularly throughout North America and Europe, but laments the fact that he is still better known in Europe than in his home continent. This will hopefully be rectified with a series of three recitals at the Alice Tully Hall in New York City from April to June of this year. His journey to fame has never included a competition win, however, as this is a method of attaining prominence that is not particularly appealing for Hamelin.

You have said in an interview for 'Gramophone' that you don't particularly like the competition circuit. Why is that?

When you consider the history of competitions, say the Van Cliburn, it's hard to see why anyone in their right mind would enter it. The winners seem to be terribly disadvantaged. Their schedule is crammed with concerts, they get completely exhausted, and they get forgotten after two years. One hears so many stories. The Tchaikovsky competition is riddled with corruption, and so is the Leeds, and those are

two of the most well-known in the world. I am also too old for most of these competitions now.

How many recitals are you doing per year at the moment?

I would say it's between forty and fifty. The situation I would like to correct right now is that I am still relatively unknown in the States, because of management problems.

Does your hectic schedule impinge on your practice time?

Through a series of very fortunate circumstances, mostly due to uncommonly good early training, I have been able to cut my practice time considerably, to the point where I can do two or three hours a day and still be in fine shape. However, it should be stressed that practice time at the piano is not the only beneficial kind. Because one can certainly practice as efficiently, if not better, away from the piano. As a matter of fact, almost any musician will tell you, although they are too lazy to do it, that looking at a score away from the piano is the only situation in which all the details can reveal themselves. It's always very useful to do it. Artur Schnabel recommended copying music for half an hour every day to learn what you are missing. It's astonishing how this works.

This sounds like pedagogical advice. Do you teach as well?

No. I have no talent for it. Well, I have one student I see every three or four months. He is a recording engineer, so he has a busy schedule. I don't do masterclasses either. I don't really believe in them, because if you are to have a

relationship with a student in order to influence him in a significant way, it shouldn't last twenty minutes to half an hour.

What about conducting, then? Would you like to do that at some point?

Well, firstly, for me it is not an ego thing. Secondly, I am not that interested, and I don't think I have that sort of ability to communicate, or that type of magnetism. Third of all, one of my greatest pleasures in having a musical career is to be liked. Musicians do not like the conductors they play under. Orchestral musicians do not choose the conductor they play under, and that's too bad.

When you are engaged to do a recital, do you submit the repertoire to be performed?

Almost always. I try to take into consideration the fact that the audience might not be as educated in one place as in another, but that is balanced by the fact that I want to educate them as well. So sometimes I don't skimp on introducing repertoire they might not have heard before, but it's always a careful balance. I was just asked to submit a programme for the Queen Elizabeth Hall, and I thought it would be interesting to play the Charles Ives 'Concord Sonata.' I just feel instinctively that it would be good to play it there.

A number of your recital programmes contain works that are transcriptions. How do you find the reception of these works to be?

It depends. Some people who know both French and English would be prepared to read a novel in both languages, that is, the original and a translation. This is the same thing with an original piece of music and a transcription, is it not?

My feeling is that people who don't listen to both are denying themselves another experience. It helps one see the personality of the person doing the transcription as well. For example, Godowsky was never understood for having done the Chopin transcriptions. He was severely criticised for having dared to do that. This was because he was doing transcriptions of pieces already for the piano for the piano again. These works were revered. I think he did it absolutely brilliantly, though. I have no problem with that at all, because it adds to the literature in a very significant way. As far as the category of people who think that composers are gods, I'm sorry but composers were and are human beings, just like you and I. I consider transcribing a type of communication with the composer. It's a friendly thing. I've never considered it a desecration.

Do you read the reviews of your performances?

Yes. It's always good to keep track of these things, I think, because they can give you at least a shadow of an idea of what you've done. I think deep down you know what you've done, but there are times when you don't see the forest for the trees. There might be something you've missed which is stated quite clearly in the review. In that sense, they're useful. Of course it does depend on the reviewer.

There have been many new labels applied to you recently, such as 'gifted artist,' 'a cult figure,' 'a rare kind of virtuoso,' 'a major new figure in piano playing,' etc. Does this apply an inordinate amount of pressure on you when you perform?

No, it gives me confidence. It really does, because I didn't have that for so long. It gives me the feeling that I've arrived somewhere.

PART THREE :: Concert Reviews

During my two years in the Northern Hemisphere, I attended approximately eighty concerts. In the interests of space, I have included only ten of my reviews. Nine of them are from the period February-July, 1995, whilst the other dates from February, 1996. There was no particular selection criteria for the reviews included in this portfolio.

It was my intention that these reviews be written for a newspaper audience. In preparation for writing to such a style, I examined the music reviews published in the newspapers of Toronto and Hamilton, as well as the 'New York Times' and the 'New Yorker.'

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Roy Thomson Hall, Thursday 9 February, 1995, 8pm

Jukka-Pekka Saraste (conductor)

Christian Tetzlaff (violin)

Magnus Lindberg :: Corrente II

Beethoven :: Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61

Rachmaninoff :: Symphonic Dances, Op. 45

There is no doubt that since Jukka-Pekka Saraste took over the task as Music Director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra there has been a steep increase in the amount of Scandinavian music creeping into the programming, most notably by Jean Sibelius.

Thursday night was no exception, with the inclusion of Magnus Lindberg's 'Corrente II', written in 1991 in tandem with 'Corrente,' which used only sixteen players. In the program notes, Saraste provides a supportive, albeit perfunctory testimonial for Lindberg, remarking that he believes him to be the "most interesting Finnish composer after Jean Sibelius."

Conceived as a work for a standard orchestra, minus flutes, 'Corrente II' is a relentless saturation of sound for approximately twenty minutes. Whilst the orchestra played with a strong sense of urgency and commitment, one could not help wondering whether the lack of registral variation was entirely satisfying for the performers, or indeed, the audience. A slow and slightly quieter middle section was the only relief from this unyieldingly repetitive work.

A leap from the vapid to the sublime came with young German violinist Christian Tetzlaff's mesmerizing rendering of the Beethoven violin concerto. This was

the highlight of the evening. His luxurious sound was generously complemented by some of the finest string playing from the Toronto Symphony this season. Tetzlaff displayed his intimate understanding of Beethoven's challenging score with his chameleon-like ability to thrill and dazzle in the fast sections, and to charm and tug at the heartstrings in the more lyrical passages.

A major concern was the rather obvious intonation mishaps from the woodwind and brass sections, which is, unfortunately, not an entirely uncommon occurrence. The only other area of puzzlement was the timpani-accompanied cadenza. It was impossible to discern whether the timpanist could hear the soloist, or vice-versa, such was the lack of ensemble.

Rachmaninoff's 'Symphonic Dances,' composed in the twilight of his career, are an interesting mix of the composer at his resolute best and syrupy worst. The rather forboding opening was well executed with some fine directing from the podium. There were occasions when the woodwind failed to respond to Saraste's clear and precise beat, but by and large, the success of the performance was a testament to Saraste's firm metronomic abilities as a conductor.

The unanimity of sound from the strings in the middle dance, a waltz, was irresistibly seductive. There was some scintillating excitement delivered by the percussion section as well, leading to an altogether satisfying end to an extremely diverse concert.

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

Royal Festival Hall, Sunday 19 February, 1995, 7.30pm

Christoph von Dohnányi (conductor)

Brahms :: Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

Brahms :: Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73

Christoph von Dohnányi became Principal Guest Conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra at the start of the 1994/95 season. Part of the excitement in attending this concert came from the expectation of what influence such a prodigious conductor as Dohnányi might be exerting on an already world-renowned orchestra such as the Philharmonia. Unfortunately, on Sunday evening there was no magical fusion, no meeting of majesties.

It is hard to believe that when Brahms composed his fourth and last symphony, it met with much uncertainty and ambivalence. Brahms himself called it "a few Entr'actes...which together form what is called a symphony." It was not long, however, before it was received in an altogether different light, as a work of immense power, passion, and heartfelt emotion.

The Philharmonia failed to transmit any such grandeur or fervour in their performance. Instead of producing a first movement with lilting lyricism and impassioned surges, it was taken at a dirge-like tempo with none of the expressive mannerisms that usually move the audience to spine-tingling, edge-of-the-chair emotions.

With the initial disappointment out of the way, it was all downhill from there. The second movement was temporally unsure, and the woodwind section was in desperate need of retuning. Perhaps the only glimmer of hope came with an enthralling interpretation of the third movement, complete with exciting dynamic contrasts.

Dohnányi's style of conducting was clear and authoritative, but he seemed unable to elicit anything approaching animation or commitment from any section of the orchestra. In spite of this shortfall, there was some fine playing from the horns in the slow movement.

Opportunities for redemption in the performance of the second symphony came and went unfulfilled, which left severe doubts as to the wisdom in the programming. To perform two Brahms symphonies in just one concert takes an enormous amount of energy from both performers and audience alike. In this case, it appeared to be beyond the capabilities of the orchestra.

The second symphony is perhaps the most substantial of the four symphonies, and is one of the most familiar to audiences. The ritualistic way in which it was approached by the Philharmonia was startling. One could not fault the technical assuredness, nor the accuracy of pitch. But these 'qualities' aside, there was an eerie feeling that the orchestra was entirely composed of automatons going through the motions with mechanical efficiency. It was completely soul-free.

It is not often that there is room for criticism of an orchestra of the calibre of the Philharmonia. On this occasion there is nothing more to say than it was an immense disappointment.

ALBAN BERG QUARTET

Queen Elizabeth Hall, Wednesday 22 February, 1995, 7.45pm

Günter Pichler (violin)

Gerhard Schulz (violin)

Thomas Kakuska (viola)

Valentin Erben (cello)

Haydn :: String Quartet in G major, Op. 76 No. 1

Schoenberg :: String Trio, Op. 45

Beethoven :: String Quartet in B flat major, Op. 130, with Große Fuge, Op. 133

If one could measure a quartet's talent and ability by the audience turnout for performances, then the Alban Berg Quartet has certainly made it big time! Playing to a packed house on Wednesday night, the ABQ, as they are entitled on their CDs of late, delivered the kind of polished performance for which they are renowned.

A conservatively constructed programme, with the two crowd pleasers at the start and finish, and the obligatory twentieth century piece just before interval, worked surprisingly in favour of the Schoenberg. Such was the response to Schoenberg's Trio, it seemed for a brief moment that an encore would be played. Almost...

Schoenberg's Trio Op. 45 is one of his most difficult works for players and listeners alike. It is comprised of a strange montage of sounds, including rapidly bowed string harmonics, sudden dynamic changes, unusual bowing techniques. All of this along with some very dense contrapuntal writing, and one has rather a challenge for the novice listener. Even for the more experienced.

First violinist Günter Pinchler stepped aside in favour of Gerhard Schulz for this captivating performance. He and his colleagues conveyed to the audience their conviction for and understanding of this work. Their intonation was impeccable, as was their attention to the many melodic intricacies of the piece, which often make it more difficult to comprehend.

The Haydn quartet Op. 76, No. 1 provided a sanguine start to the evening, with Günter Pinchler seemingly unable to contain his enjoyment of this piece. His

occasional leaps from his chair brought many chuckles from the audience. In fact, at the conclusion of the quartet, prior to any applause there was a burst of laughter. A perfect reflection of the character of this quartet. Once again the ensemble was beyond reproach, with some superb cello playing from Valentin Erben in the second movement.

Certainly the centrepiece of the evening's concert was the Beethoven Quartet Op. 130 with the originally intended final movement, the Große Fugue Op. 133. At the first performance of this quartet in 1826, there was considerable debate surrounding this enormous last-movement fugue, which was replaced with a shorter and more lighthearted finale. Only recently has it become common practice for string quartets to perform this quartet with Op. 133.

The grating harmonies and the overwhelming feeling of entropy in the Große Fuge are quite shocking on first hearing this movement. The first five movements are aurally standard fare compared to Op. 133. The ABQ displayed suitable verve for the second movement. However, their particularly robust interpretation of the fifth-movement Cavatina left some serious reservations. If any vindication was needed, this was achieved with an engrossing rendering of the Große Fuge. Although there were some incredibly rough and even scratchy sounds, this seemed entirely appropriate for the character of the movement.

A final point for comment is the particularly snazzy programme for this concert. Instead of the normal regurgitation of the composer's life followed by the detailed note on the actual work to be performed, this programme had the composer's life broken down into catchy sections – Major influences; Main/secondary sources of income; Family/personal circumstances; Most popular works; Other works worth a

listen; Recognition during lifetime. There was also a rather sensual cover, featuring a beautifully sculpted male torso caressing a violin. Full marks to the QEH!

THE ROYAL OPERA

Royal Opera House, Friday 24 February, 1995, 6.30pm

Andrew Davis (conductor)

David Edwards (revival director)

Soloists :: Anna Tomowa-Sintow, Ann Murray, Barbara Bonney, Kurt Moll, Alan Opie, Jennifer Rhys-Davies, Paul Crook, Leah-Marian Jones, Bonaventura Bottone

Strauss :: Der Rosenkavalier

Anna Tomowa-Sintow offered a delightfully fresh and evocative performance in 'Der Rosenkavalier' last night at Covent Garden. Having taken over the role of the Marschallin from Felicity Lott, Tomowa-Sintow opted for a heroine whose youthful bloom is no more, and whose mood is one of doleful resignation.

This is Tomowa-Sintow's first performance in this role for the Royal Opera, although it is a role she has performed many times before in Salzburg under Herbert von Karajan, including a recording for Deutsche Grammophon (see review p. 102).

In Act I, Tomowa-Sintow's Marschallin appeared less rejuvenated by her teenage lover than exhausted by his youthful verve and passion. She played the part as if she were biding her time for the act's closing reflection on her youth, her impending old age and the implacable passing of the hours, and indeed love. Tomowa-Sintow gripped the audience with a Marschallin wallowing in her own chagrin, and not caring too much about the events surrounding her. She hauntingly cast the mood for the relinquishing of Octavian to his new love, Sophie, in the last act. In fact

it was this final encounter with him in Act III that was a masterpiece of heartrending simplicity. As the Marschallin prepared to leave Octavian with his new love, she stood, back to the audience, with her hand outstretched for Octavian to kiss for the last time. It was a moment that could have broken the hardest of hearts.

Kurt Moll was a very refined Ochs, displaying none of the usual coarseness lavished on this oafish part. He left that to his motley servants. His bass was rather weak in the upper range, but his lower register remained gloriously rich. Ann Murray's Octavian was delightfully exuberant, albeit rather femininely coquettish. Another reservation was an overactive vibrato in the first act, which led to some wavering intonation. Her acting skills, however, are worthy of particular mention. The subterfuge when she dresses as a young maid and inadvertently wins the affection of Ochs was the epitome of slapstick humour. One could not help but feel his/her awkwardness at being female. Quite an extraordinary feat!

Barbara Bonney as Sophie was the perfect wife-to-be, with plenty of allure to appreciate. Her finest singing was delivered in the memorable 'Presentation of the Rose' scene, at the beginning of Act II. She showed no signs of discomfort or insecurity in an incredibly high register. In fact Bonney seemed more comfortable in this range than anywhere else This scene was also enhanced by some beautiful sets, everything overwhelmingly white and virginal: a perfect backdrop for the first meeting of the young couple-to-be.

The all too familiar tenor solo in Act I, performed on this occasion by Neil Griffiths, was the only disappointment of the evening. Whilst he maintained an extremely noble demeanour, his voice sounded strained, with the intonation faltering from time to time.

Andrew Davis retained a firm grip on the orchestra and coaxed some very lyrical and mellow playing. His sensitive attention to the imaginative details in the orchestral score were realised with finesse. It is this sort of playing that is only possible when the conductor keeps a balance between the orchestra and vocalists, as well as listening to the text.

As for visual impact, this production was conservatively luxurious. The opening boudoir scene was the picture of classical Viennese opulence – large four-poster bed, plush velvet curtains, mirrored wall. The pristine whiteness of Sophie's house has already been mentioned, which leaves just the private room in the house of assignation. This was suitably tasteless, with plenty of curtained off areas where the pantomime of mistaken identities could be carried out.

Overall this was a production with many merits, not least of which was the obvious enjoyment of all the performers in the execution of their roles.

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Roy Thomson Hall, Friday 3 March, 1995, 8pm
Michael Stern (conductor)
Yo-Yo Ma (cello)
John Estacio :: Saudades
Mendelssohn :: Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 56
Dvorák :: Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104

Amidst inopportune coughing from a packed Roy Thomson Hall on Friday night emerged a cello sound from heaven. American Michael Stern's prosaic

conducting was not enough to deter Yo-Yo Ma from an expressive and imaginative performance of what is regarded as the "lollipop" concerto of cello repertoire.

Dvorák's Cello Concerto in B minor delivers the full gamut of cello technique, which is perhaps why it is so popular amongst audiences. The pyrotechnics of Ma's playing had the audience completely entranced. The passages of virtuosic playing were clear, precise and thrilling to observe. It was such a pity that the orchestra could not match this display.

Whereas Ma's sound in the quiet, expressive sections was sweet, resonant and full of passion, the horn solo in the opening orchestral tutti of the first movement, normally a highlight, reflected no such depth of expression, sounding dull and two-dimensional. Stern's conducting did not help the floundering orchestra. There were several occasions when Ma seemed uncomfortable with the tempo, but Stern seemed completely oblivious.

These difficulties aside, Ma looked ensconced in the music, and the response he elicited from the audience at the conclusion of the performance is a testament to his abundant musicality and fine showmanship. As an encore Ma played the Sarabande from Bach's Sixth Cello Suite. This was, without a doubt, the highlight of the evening. His phrasings, articulation, and intonation were beyond reproach. It was spine-tingling playing.

There were some nice moments in the realisation of Mendelssohn's "Scottish" Symphony. It is not a programmatic work, but rather a reflection of atmosphere. The slow introduction, led by some mellifluous viola sounds, set the ominous mood of the symphony very well. However, there were some tempo insecurities, with Michael Stern unable to successfully communicate his intentions.

Stern seemed to allow the woodwind section to dictate the tempo for much of the first movement. The "storm" section in this movement, a Mendelssohn cliché, was executed with suitable verve, and perhaps the highlight of the entire symphony. Some of the nicest orchestral playing came from the strings, the first violins showing the way with a moving rendering of the lyrical melodies of the third movement. It may have been coincidence, but given the amount of coughing from the audience, the orchestra's performance was largely phlegmatic.

John Estacio's piece, 'Saudades,' composed for the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, was an innocuous work, adopting a traditional framework of starting softly, building to a climax, then dying away to nothing.

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Roy Thomson Hall, Saturday 25 March, 1995, 8pm
Stanislaw Skrowaczewski (conductor)
Joaquin Valdepeñas (clarinet)
Panufnik :: Nocturne
Mozart :: Clarinet Concerto in A major, K. 622
Brahms :: Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73

Brahms declared of the Second Symphony that he had "never written anything so sad, and the score must come out in mourning." Stanislaw Skrowaczewski took him at his word, although he ensured the black cladding was not too heavy.

The fine details of articulation in the opening movement created a sense of colour that was most definitely cinerous. The horns and woodwind breathed into this

light chill air, the horns especially, presented a tone that was abundant in warmth, passion and sparkle. Skrowaczewski managed to entreat a wonderful blend of the gentle and robust from the orchestra in this opening movement. The TSO has not sounded so fine this season. The third movement was particularly beguiling, with some splendid clarinet playing from Joaquin Valdepeñas, the soloist earlier in the programme. The finale was a paragon of balance and rhythmic precision.

Joaquin Valdepeñas would be the consummate salesman. He knows how to charm, coax and wheedle so as to make one completely unaware that one is being outrageously swindled. His physical personality is so entrancing – swaying, leaping, smiling, laughing. This is an unfortunate technique for Valdepeñas to use. Many performers do engage in such antics, but they have underlying musicality as well. With Valdepeñas, if one doesn't look, just listens, all that remains is rather dull and pedestrian playing. Having said that, there is nothing pedestrian about his technique, which is faultless. Nevertheless, it is intuitive musicality that matters when performing such a wonderful piece as this Mozart concerto.

The Panufnik was a suitably light and fluffy musical bauble with which to start the concert. The percussion displayed some very fine playing in the opening moments. The strings were in excellent form, producing a uniform sound of avuncular generosity.

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Roy Thomson Hall, Thursday 30 March, 1995, 8pm

Jukka-Pekka Saraste (conductor)

Mitsuko Uchida (piano)

Debussy :: Printemps

Beethoven :: Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat major, Op. 19

Schumann :: Symphony No. 1 in B flat major, Op. 38, *Spring*

"And the Spring comes slowly up this way," or so Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote. He could very well have been referring to the Toronto Symphony Orchestra's 'Expression of Spring' concert last night. They got off to a less than vernal start, with a distinctly winter hue in their performance of Debussy's 'Printemps'.

This work is remarkably dense. Perhaps the orchestration, which was not done by Debussy but by Henri-Paul Busser, is to blame. Whatever the reason, Jukka-Pekka Saraste was unable to divert this potential impermeability. The opening melody in the flute and piano was delicate enough, but rather than coaxing the strings and woodwinds out of this ethereal melody, Saraste encouraged a dauntless entry, which sounded more like a blunder than an intention.

Subtlety of tone colour, and range in dynamics were absent in this performance. However, the attention to rhythmic detail and intonation was fastidious, giving the performance an absolutist quality. Saraste would have been wiser to sacrifice some of the precise playing for some warmth to thaw the winter freeze.

On the other hand, Mitsuko Uchida seemed eager to usher in the Spring with a radiant smile as she took the stage for Beethoven's second piano concerto. Ms Uchida is renowned for her performances of classical repertoire, particularly Mozart. Her recording of the complete Mozart piano concertos with Jeffrey Tate and the English Chamber Orchestra brought her worldwide acclaim and numerous awards.

A note from Jukka-Pekka Saraste in the programme explained the inclusion of this Beethoven concerto in the performance, as it has no explicit claim to spring – "Ludwig van Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto is the least masculine of the five he wrote, in part because of the key..." One couldn't help wondering whether he was actually suggesting Spring to be a feminine season.

Uchida performed the Beethoven as if it were Mozart. Whilst the second concerto does indeed pre-date the first and owes a lot to the many models of this genre left by Mozart, Uchida could have added a little more weight and substance to distinguish her interpretation from the many pianists who also favour such a Mozartian touch. This minor criticism aside, she is an eminently sensitive player, and her performance imparted the first true sparkle of the evening.

The orchestra managed to shake off some of the sluggish humour left by the Debussy, to deliver a crisp, light accompaniment. They had no trouble feeding off the wonderfully joyful playing by Uchida. The first movement was all daintiness, with dashes of frivolity for good measure. My only concern was Uchida's handling of the cadenza which was a little bereft of dynamic contrast.

Her second movement favoured a gently lilting tempo, perhaps a little faster than the intention of the composer. However, this is not an unusual choice, as the marking of adagio often encourages pianists to become overly self-indulgent, turning the movement into a marathon for the listener, and spoiling the architecture of the work as a whole. The finale was expeditious, with once again some copasetic dialogue between soloist and orchestra. A fine entrée to the Schumann.

According to musicological legend, Schumann sketched the entire first symphony in one day. This is not hard to imagine when one hears his fervent ode to

spring. It is a celebration of life and abundant growth, if a little trite in places. The heraldic trumpet opening, signifying the onset of spring, was delivered with adequate verve. But it was not until the entry of the strings that this performance really took shape.

The TSO is blessed with a cohesive string section. They have a fine reputation for playing that is both accurate and highly expressive. Their performance in the Schumann was no exception. Worthy of particular note are the violas, whose sonorous tone was the finest point in the first movement. They were, however, sadly but predictably let down by sloppy intonation in the woodwind. Poor intonation is the albatross of the woodwind section, which is a shame, as individually these are all outstanding players. Ensemble playing just seems to be a problem for them.

Not even the crystal clear sound from principal clarinettist Joaquin Valdapeñas could salvage the oxymoronically lugubrious scherzo. It does have the problematic feature of two trios, which makes the return of the scherzo rather tiresome when it appears for the third time, unless some attempt at variation is made. This was an unrealised possibility in this interpretation. Saraste favoured exact replicas each time the scherzo was heard.

However, spring returned with the opening violin flourish of the finale. This movement was dispatched with great excitement, with the horn and flute cadenza being a highlight. The audience was definitely imbued with a touch of spring.

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Tanglewood Shed, Friday 7 July, 1995, 8.30pm

Seiji Ozawa (conductor)

Kathleen Battle (soprano)

John Aler (tenor)

Boje Skovhus (baritone)

Tanglewood Festival Chorus

The Boys' Choir of Harlem

Wagner :: Overture and 'Bacchanale' from *Tannhäuser*

Granados :: Quejas, o la maja y el ruiseñor from *Goyescas*

Granados :: Elegia eterna for soprano and orchestra

Orff :: Carmina Burana

In a chic black dress, with a splash of shocking pink taffeta, Kathleen Battle proved that there is more to her than just good looks and a fiery temperament. Last night she dazzled the regaling crowd in the sold-out opening concert of the 1995 Tanglewood Festival in Lenox, Massachusetts.

Battle appears to be back in the spotlight after a hiatus from performing. This 'break' was due more to her highly publicised wrangles with various opera companies and orchestras around the world than anything else. Media scrutiny of her antics was intense, as was the criticism from fellow performers and fans alike.

All of that was forgotten as she glided on to the stage and cast her magic spell over the crowd by way of two introspective songs by Granados. The first, 'Quejas, o la maja y el ruiseñor' from the opera *Goyescas*, is better known as a solo piano piece dating from 1911. Battle's voice gently emerged from the wash of orchestral colour, eventually rising to the fore, ecstatically declaring, 'Your song is a hymn of love, oh, nightingale!'

She was not as successful in mirroring the evocative poetry of the 'Elegia eterna'. This is also a song about love, written in Granados' native tongue, Catalan.

Battle faltered on some of the higher notes, and consequently her voice became constricted and brittle.

Hedonistic, lascivious, exuberant, virile, seductive. All words that may certainly be applied to Carl Orff's setting of a collection of profane verse from mediæval Germany. This entertaining work was first performed in 1937, in a staged production at the Frankfurt Opera. Orff gained immediate fame, which changed the course of his compositional life, as the wealth and celebrity generated from Carmina Burana prompted him to destroy all his compositions prior to this one.

Unfortunately, Seiji Ozawa did not quite capture the swaggering spirit in his reading of Carmina Burana. The orchestra seemed unable to determine the tempos from his unclear direction. Ozawa's lack of command also led to many unusual choices in tempo. The opening, and perhaps best known movement, 'O Fortuna', was the slowest rendition I have ever heard. Had the orchestra been in tune, and the general ensemble a little tighter, it may have worked. But as it was, it sounded sluggish and impotent – not the requisite qualities for this work.

There was a conspicuous absence of any dynamic contrasts. This was particularly frustrating, as the piece thrives on ravishing fortes and tender pianos. Soloists were often completely swamped by the orchestra. Such a pity, because the soloists, in the moments when they could be heard, were outstanding. Tenor John Aler had the audience in hysterics with his graphic portrayal of a swan being roasted in 'Olim lacus colueram'. His voice was magnificent – secure and in his element in the brutally high tenor register.

However, in the 'Dulcissime' it was Kathleen Battle who provided the concert's most exquisite moment. No swooping to the highest note, and no overactive

vibrato. She transfigured sound into diamond-pure perfection. A moment of absolute stillness.

The evening began with an adequate performance of the Overture and Bacchanale from Wagner's 'Tannhäuser.' There was some instability in the brass' intonation for their opening chorale in the Overture. But they did relax into the music and delivered a richly satisfying sound. Ozawa steered the orchestra steadily through the meandering opening section, which led to an almost rousing finish. The Bacchanale was similarly tolerable, except that the Women of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus were barely audible and the words they sang unintelligible.

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Tanglewood Shed, Saturday July 8, 1995, 8.30pm
John Williams (conductor)
Cho-Liang Lin (violin)
Women of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus
William Schuman :: American Festival Overture
Mozart :: Violin Concerto No. 2 in D major, K. 211
Holst :: The Planets

John Williams, the doyen of post-1970 sci-fi film music, conducted a programme of suitably cinematic pieces last night at the Tanglewood Shed. Williams is known for his proclivity to conduct more 'mainstream' works, and last evening's programme was no exception. Two of the pieces on the programme – the Schuman and the Holst – were strongly reminiscent of some of Williams' better known film

scores. The result was the persistent expectation that either Darth Vader's asthmatic wheezing or ET's plea to return home would punctuate the music.

Schuman's 'American Festival Overture', written expressly for the Boston Symphony Orchestra during the halcyon Koussevitsky years, was the opening frippery. The piece was an instant success at its premiere in 1939, and equally acclaimed in subsequent performances. The reason for its popularity is not hard to understand when one hears the opening – all the thrill and cheer normally expected at American celebrations encapsulated in only a few bars of melody.

Williams managed to entreat a crowd-pleasing performance without any help from the celluloid heroes at his disposal. Instead, the orchestra came to his aid with some very earnest playing. The brass sounded like a section possessed with exactly the type of vigour needed for a successful performance. On the other hand, the strings were a little uncertain of their direction at times, leading to some shaky moments. Nonetheless, it was an entertaining performance.

The Mozart was the only piece on the programme that seemed safe from any cosmic allusions. Cho-Liang Lin was a robust soloist for the D major violin concerto, K.211. He adopted the classical practice of playing in the orchestral tuttis, which added an affable touch to the performance.

Lin's sound was forthright and his intonation secure. However, in the first and second movements he had a tendency to over-accentuate phrase-endings. This left one feeling rather cheated, as there was never any doubt as to what would happen next. This kind of predictability is often mistakenly applied to works by Mozart.

Technical flare and joviality dominated the finale. The principal theme was light and spirited, and reflected the overall mood of the movement. Such was the

contagion of Lin's delightful playing, the orchestra could not help but match his witty style. Elegant playing at its best.

The spectre of Darth Vader returned to haunt the second half of the programme, by way of Gustav Holst's suite, 'The Planets.' Contrary to the title, this suite is astrological rather than astrophysical, with Holst's notes for the first performance stating, "These pieces were suggested by the astrological significance of the planets...For instance, Jupiter brings jollity in the ordinary sense, and also the more ceremonial type of rejoicing associated with religious or national festivities. Saturn brings not only physical decay, but also a vision of fulfillment. Mercury is the symbol of mind."

For these words to prevail upon the music, Willams would have done well to consult his stars before embarking upon this performance. He would have been warned about the lack of anguish and melancholy that would dog Saturn's success; the creative intonation of the oboes that would eclipse Venus; the absence of effervescence that would turn Mercury into a fizzer; and the rather pedestrian end that would mar Neptune. His lucky planets would have been indicated as Jupiter, which was boisterous and brought favour to the horns and strings; Mars, which was replete with all the necessary evil spirit; and Uranus, which was suitably engaging. Thus Williams could have been forewarned. Maybe next time...

ANNE-SOPHIE MUTTER (violin) & LAMBERT ORKIS (piano)
George Weston Recital Hall, Tuesday 27 February, 1996, 8pm
Brahms :: Scherzo in C minor, Op. posth., *Sonatensatz*
Debussy :: Sonata in G minor
Mozart :: Sonata in E minor, K. 304

Bartók :: Sonata No. 2
Wieniawski :: Légende in G minor, Op. 17
Sarasate :: Zigeunerweisen, Op. 20

Anne-Sophie Mutter cuts a ravishing figure on the platform. Opulent off-the-shoulder, sleeveless gowns are her trademark. Such costumes have won her many fans (mostly male), but her talent does not end with the hem of these sartorial creations. Mutter's violinistic ability is as finely and elegantly constructed as the designer dresses she wears.

However, last night's recital was a design that seemed strangely passé. It was shaped to fit a very conservative audience that needed frills at the beginning and end to cover the real substance of the programme (the frills being the Brahms, Wieniawski and Sarasate, and the real substance, the Debussy, Mozart and Bartók). This was an unfortunate decision by Mutter, because she grossly underestimated the sophistication of Toronto audiences.

In spite of this, as far as musical frills are concerned, there is not much finer than the Brahms scherzo movement from the FAE Sonata, which was the exciting prelude to the evening. It is not musically substantive as a standalone work, but it was nonetheless performed uncompromisingly. The precision both rhythmically and dynamically was flawless.

Similarly, Debussy's violin sonata was an exemplar of technical proficiency at its highest level. It is just too bad that Mutter sheathed this piece in silk and not the coarser hessian, which was more the composer's intention. Mutter's penchant for perfection left the interpretation yearning for more pliance and spontaneity. In the first movement, the détaché needed to be more flexible; in the second movement, the

glissandos missed that raw, sensual feel. It was certainly stylish and elegant playing, but these characteristics were not suited to the underlying rawness of the work.

Such complaints are often attributed to the argument that Germans cannot play French music and vice-versa. That argument is entirely specious, because the real question is whether or not a performer can inhabit the very character of the piece of music he or she is performing. In the case of the Debussy, clearly Mutter could not.

Mozart's 'little' E minor sonata, K. 304 has only two movements, an Allegro followed by a Minuet. Given his compositional output, Mozart composed very few pieces in E minor. This quirk merely adds to the charm of the piece. It is relatively short, lasting only ten minutes – that is in most performances.

Mutter favoured tempos for both movements that were well under the norm. This worked very well for the minuet, but made the Allegro sound laboured. She also opted for a vibrato-less opening to the Allegro's simple theme. In fact there were many occasions in this movement when she eschewed vibrato. Had this been coupled with a slightly faster tempo, it may have yielded a more understandable interpretation. Rather, it sounded self-conscious and monotonous.

In the Bartók, Mutter became less stilted and precise, and embraced the music a little more. It was certainly the most substantial work in the programme, and was performed as though it had been lavished with preparation time. There was an overwhelming feeling of urgency that dogged the first movement. One couldn't help wondering whether this was intentional, or whether the memorisation was only just accomplished. In any event, it is a hard piece to perform effectively without the music, as there is so much interplay between piano and violin, in particular the rhythmic

intricacies. Nevertheless, Mutter and Orkis played this complex and edgy work with intelligence, imagination, and consummate skill.

The final two pieces on the programme, 'Légende' by Wieniawski, and 'Zigeunerweisen' by Sarasate were dispatched with the flare one would expect from such compositions. Both are showcases for technical prowess. Mutter proved that she has such prowess in abundance.

PART FOUR :: CD Reviews

The following nine CD reviews were written in the period January-July, 1996. All of these recordings are from my personal library. Five of those reviewed were arbitrarily selected. The other four have a direct connection to the concert reviews in the previous section – Mitsuko Uchida is reviewed on pages 67 and 87; the Alban Berg Quartet is reviewed on pages 59 and 92; Brahms' Fourth Symphony is reviewed on pages 66 and 95; Strauss' 'Der Rosenkavalier' is reviewed on pages 62 and 102.

As with the concert reviews, these were written with a newspaper audience in mind. In addition to analysing the CD reviews in North American newspapers, I studied the criticisms written for the British publication 'Gramophone,' which is dedicated to reviewing recorded music. It is a particular trait of 'Gramophone' to present comparative CD reviews. I experimented with this format in my reviews of Strauss' 'Metamorphosen,' Mozart's Piano Concertos Nos. 20 and 21, and Strauss' 'Der Rosenkavalier.'

J.S. BACH :: PARTITAS FOR VIOLIN SOLO

Viktoria Mullova

Philips 434 075-2 PH

It was during his period at the Court of Prince Leopold of Cöthen that Bach was able to concentrate on writing secular music. His six innovative works for solo violin date from this period (c.1720). These partitas could only have been written by someone with an intimate practical knowledge of the instrument.

Bach took advantage of the small fingerboard of the violin, which enables the player's left hand to execute a vast array of complex technical feats, It remains difficult, even in the hi-tech state of today's violinistic art, simply to produce the notes with accurate intonation and without making the three-and four-note chords sound laborious. But that is only the beginning. The player still has to comprehend the part-writing and to fully absorb and project the style and spirit of the immensely varied movements.

Mullova's recording of these three Partitas for Solo Violin comes as a breath of fresh air. Her playing is as close to technical perfection as makes no difference. Her leaner tone favours transparent textures, her dance movements are light on their feet (helped by her quickness in bowing through chords), and her nuancing of tone is full of subtlety and warm expression.

Mullova embellishes the score with consummate discretion. She adorns the sparse writing of the Sarabande of the B minor Partita delightfully but refrains from overloading the already ornate one in the D minor. Her performance of the D minor Chaconne is sublime, majestic in its realisation of the movement's architecture and expansiveness.

It is a violinstic bent to overwhelm these partitas with agogics, making them rhythmically more mundane than expressive. Mullova avoids this cliché, instead choosing to moderate the importance of particular notes with a judicious use of vibrato. Her gentle tweaks of the tempo in the rhythmically serpentine movements, such as the Allemanda of the D minor Partita, burst with originality.

Her articulation serves these partitas well – a perfect union with the lines being expressed. Despite the incredible difficulty of the many bow crossings and the speed and accuracy with which they must be executed, Mullova negotiates these registral divergences with secure aplomb (the Double from the B minor Partita is one particularly fine example).

There are only a few reservations in this recording. Repeats are regularly played with a more assertive, even predictable character; occasionally an inappropriately plangent tone emerges; there is a rather obvious change in acoustics for the Giga in the D minor Partita (some artificial reverberation added after the event perhaps?); finally, a rather abrupt end to the Double (Presto) in the B minor Partita (another engineering gaffe?).

These minor quibbles aside, one would do well to add this compelling disc to one's collection.

RICHARD STRAUSS :: METAMORPHOSEN

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Herbert von Karajan
Deutsche Grammophon 410 892-2 GH

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, André Previn
Philips 420 160-2 PH

"Never judge a book by its cover," or so the axiom goes. However, it doesn't necessarily hold fast for CD covers. Take for instance these two recordings, one under the masterly baton of Herbert von Karajan, the other by the reliable André Previn. Previn appears on the cover of the Vienna Philharmonic recording, baton and score in view – a picture perfect pose of the precise and learned academic. Karajan is nowhere to be seen on the cover of the Berlin Philharmonic recording, opting instead for a violin scroll masquerading as a comet flashing through the heavens – daring, exciting, unpredictable.

Metamorphosen, for twenty three solo strings, is an anguished elegy for a country ripped apart by war. Composed in the spring of 1945 for Paul Sacher and the Collegium Musicum Zürich, it reaffirms Strauss' compositional prowess even in his 81st year. It is a wonderful example of string writing, with exquisite intertwining counterpoint, continuous-variation technique applied to the themes and devastating contrasts of tone colour. Altogether an enthralling composition.

It seems a little trite to mention the Eroica quotation in the closing bars of the work so widely bandied about by performers and musicologists alike, but there is no denying that this does draw into focus the emotional intent of the composition. One wonders just how many other allusions and quotations exist that have not yet been discovered.

Previn's interpretation of this work is exact – neat, well-polished and an example of ensemble playing at its best. He adheres closely to all the markings in the score. The dynamic range is carefully monitored, with a strict gauge from pianissimo to fortissimo seemingly in place from the opening bars. There is also supreme attention

paid to the imitation amongst the parts, the bowings, attacks, and articulation well matched on every occasion. One would be hard pressed to find any fault with this performance. That is, if one enjoys performances of military precision, but very little else.

The Berlin Philharmonic recording may be a little rough around some of the edges, but it is electrifying. The sense of emotional urgency, even desperation is gripping and involving. There is a life-and-death intensity to every climax, particularly the C major eruption just before the coda, which is delivered with thrilling effect. This makes the final turn to the minor just that much more poignant. Certainly there are some lax entries and moments when players are not quite together, but frankly, who cares or notices when the performance is this vivid. It is a superbly intense reading.

Previn enunciates the music's structure and provides an interesting account of the thematic relationships. But it is the savage strain and the grief too intense to be expressed in the Karajan recording that is so convincing and absorbing. One cannot help but be completely immersed in the unbearable tensions and resolutions provided by the Berlin Philharmonic.

From the recording viewpoint, the Vienna Philharmonic sound is slightly weak in the bass and the dynamic ceiling seems a little cautious. Still, the trueness to the string sound is unquestionable. Ditto for the Karajan recording, which is both naturally spacious and atmospheric.

VIVALDI :: GLORIA, RV 589; BEATUS, VIR RV 597
J.S. BACH :: MAGNIFICAT BWV 243; CANTATA 'ICH HABE GENUG' BWV 82
Schola Cantorum of Oxford, Jeremy Summerly (conductor)

Northern Chamber Orchestra, Nicholas Ward (conductor)
Naxos 8.550767 and Naxos 8.550763

Whilst Bach is generally regarded as one of the great protean composers of the Baroque, one does not ordinarily think of Vivaldi in such a way. His instrumental music, especially that stalwart of the chamber orchestra repertoire, 'The Four Seasons', keeps his name alive in subscription series around the world. The paucity of extant sacred vocal music by Vivaldi is unusual, since he spent much of his life in the service of the church.

The 'Gloria,' RV 589, is one of the first choral works Vivaldi composed, circa 1713, whilst 'Beatus Vir' comes from later in his life. The brief but informative anonymous sleeve notes accompanying the CD provide some interesting insights to these two works – "One of the most striking features of Vivaldi's style is his ability to fashion melodies out of even a cadential fragment and this facility is nowhere better illustrated than in the opening movement of the 'Gloria'"; "'Beatus Vir' is even more structurally cohesive than the 'Gloria'"; and "much of the interest that ['Beatus Vir'] holds for the listener relies on the use of double orchestra and choir..."

From the opening orchestral passage in the first movement of the 'Gloria,' it is clear that this performance is a conservative one. There are no surprises in tempo, dynamics, or phrasing. However, it is exactly this erring on the side of caution that recommends this CD – no extravagant interpretative decisions, hence no disasters to follow.

Not that the recording is mundane. There is a lovely marriage between choir and orchestra which provides a satisfying result. It is particularly apparent in

the second movement, 'Et in terra pax', where the orchestra supports the articulation, dynamics and pervasive melancholy delivered by the choir.

Similarly, 'Beatus Vir' is reliably performed. Although the singing is superior in this performance to that in the 'Gloria,' the orchestral playing declines somewhat, mostly from waning attention to dynamics and intonation. One of the problematic features of this work is the restatement of the 'Beatus Vir' movement between each of the other movements. This can be tedious for the listener, but Jeremy Summerly adeptly negotiates the choir around this with subtle dynamic changes, even excising its reiteration on two occasions.

Bach's 'Magnificat,' BWV 243, for five-part chorus and orchestra, is a resplendent work – an unabashed celebration of God. Not only is the vocal writing vivid and luscious, but the orchestration is also of grand proportions for the average church of the period – three trumpets, two flutes, two oboes and strings. 'Cantata 82,' 'Ich habe genug', was written in 1727 for the Feast of the Purification, and is renowned primarily for the sublime aria, 'Schlummert ein', performed on this occasion by Nicholas Gedge.

Opening the CD with the 'Magnificat' is shrewd marketing, as it is performed with such verve and conviction in this recording. One can even forgive the occasional lapses in orchestral ensemble for the delightful singing that ensues. The choir is taut and exultant throughout. Tenor Timothy Robinson and alto Caroline Trevor give a particularly haunting performance of the 'Et misericordia'.

An overwhelming wash of emotion heralds the start of 'Ich habe genug', the second work on this Bach disc. This is some of the finest orchestral playing on the CD. Unfortunately the soloist, Nicholas Gedge, does not quite match the orchestra's

evocative performance. Despite the strength of his voice and precise diction, Gedge's overactive vibrato weakens his dramatic impact. Because the first movement is long, it needs touches of variety to sustain interest for both the audience and the performers. The orchestra achieves this through the phrasing and dynamics, whereas Gedge simply flounders, unable to overcome the stasis of his vocal timbre.

These are the first Schola Cantorum of Oxford recordings I have encountered. The biographical information included in the sleeve notes cites a bevy of now famous musicians who were once associated with the ensemble – Emma Kirkby, Jane Glover, Andrew Parrott and Nicholas Cleobury, to name just a few. My only reservation, and a minor one at that, is the choice of the two soprano soloists on both discs – Anna Crookes, in particular, has a cloying voice.

The accompanying orchestra, the Northern Chamber Orchestra conducted by Nicholas Ward, provides a solid and dependable backing. However, they do have some difficulty with intonation and articulation, particularly in the strings. Nicholas Ward's direction is clear and exact, and the dynamic range he entreats, although a little conservative, never threatens the audibility of the soloists or choir. The oboe solo at the beginning of the sixth movement of the 'Gloria' is winsomely performed – an emotion perfectly suited to the melody.

There are indeed more daring recordings of all four marvellous works, but these Naxos CDs are by no means substandard. They fit quite nicely into the budget category, and are relaxed, refined and the perfect addition to a burgeoning CD collection.

MOZART :: PIANO CONCERTOS NO. 20 IN D MINOR, K. 466; NO. 21 IN C MAJOR, K. 467.

Daniel Barenboim (piano); English Chamber Orchestra, Daniel Barenboim (conductor).

EMI Classics 0 77776 78782 4.

Malcolm Bilson (fortepiano); The English Baroque Soloists, John Eliot Gardiner (conductor).

Archiv Produktion digital 419 609-2

Mitsuko Uchida (piano); English Chamber Orchestra, Jeffrey Tate (conductor).

Philips digital 438 207-9.

With more and more pianists today using authentic instruments in their recordings of Mozart piano concertos, one is often looked upon with disbelief if caught enjoying a performance on modern piano. It is true that the quantity and quality of so-called 'authentic' performances has improved immeasurably, but there is still a lot to be heard and lauded in the recordings of these magnificent concertos on a modern piano.

Daniel Barenboim's recording of K. 466 and 467 (both on modern piano), made for the HMV label in 1967, is an EMI Classics re-release. At the time this recording was made, Barenboim was riding the crest of international superstardom. Quotes used to market the original record include "Few records have been so eagerly awaited as this" and "No better performance or recording exists."

Even though the hype remains, Barenboim's rendition of these two well-known concertos is somewhat out of place in a climate of restrained and sometimes clinical interpretations. Perhaps then, this is what makes this recording such a refreshing relief. The opening tutti of K. 466, is full of vitality and character – fiery, volatile and slightly impetuous.

There is a firmness and clarity in his choice of tempo in the first movement, even though it is a little slow for my liking. Rather than the crisp orchestral sound we are accustomed to hearing in Mozart, Barenboim squeezes a gluey orchestral timbre, especially from the strings. My only reservation in the orchestral playing is the excessive and somewhat relentless vibrato from the woodwind section. Unfortunately this mars many of the more expressive orchestral passages.

The phrases are neatly articulated, with delightful curves and shapings. Appropriate easings of the dramatic tension are accommodated with sublime instinctiveness. His use of the pedal is subtle, never threatening the clarity of the melodic line, and actually contributes to the expansive tone he coaxes from the keyboard. Barenboim also flexes his technical muscle with some dashing virtuoso playing in the fast and furious finale of K. 466.

His performance of K. 467 is far less convincing, particularly his choice of tempos. For example, I feel that he is never quite comfortable with the extreme slowness of the second movement. It also becomes rather pedestrian, lacking the innate musicality which is normally so evident in his playing. His sometimes brittle and precious sound is not strong enough for the first and third movements. The dynamic range is also a little too narrow, leading to some tedious sections. The semiquaver passages in this concerto, which should dazzle, are also lacking in colour and brilliance. Having said this, the rapport between soloist and orchestra is still very much apparent, and Barenboim is complemented precisely and thoughtfully.

As far as the actual recording is concerned, there are a couple technical glitches which really should not occur at this level. Firstly, the piano stool is heard squeaking on several occasions, most of these squeaks unfortunately occurring during

the quieter moments. Secondly, there are some very poor edits, one in particular when Barenboim is dropped in after he has played the note, so the head of the note is actually missing. Whilst this would be inaudible on a regular home stereo system, it can most certainly be discerned with headphones.

I normally find the sound of a fortepiano ugly. It is generally weak, tinny, and displays no expressive qualities. It was with this in mind that I hesitantly began listening to the recording of these same concertos by Malcolm Bilson. My apprehension was totally unnecessary. The sound he achieved could, and did, rival that of the pianoforte – robust, sweet, clear, and convincing.

These concertos were recorded at St John's, Smith Square, London, in 1987. The premise behind the recordings, according to the liner notes, was to provide an alternative to the already numerous recordings on the pianoforte. Bilson's is a wonderfully large-scale interpretation of the two concertos. He captures the intimate, introspective, and foreboding character of K. 466 with ease, whilst K. 467 is abundant in high spirits, wit, and impish impulsiveness.

K. 466, which is a far more serious work than its successor, is performed with great intensity. There is an extraordinary breadth to the rhythmic conception. Bilson shapes the phrases in very long sections, perhaps more so than Barenboim. However, he is always careful to maintain the detail in the lines. This shows an awareness of the functional shape of the passages.

The orchestra, playing on period instruments, is full of vitality, with delightfully crisp playing. The orchestral writing is often richly contrapuntal in texture, and this sounds engaging on period instruments. Also, the care with which they copy the articulation of the piano is exemplary.

However, a problem that Bilson has been unable to resolve in this recording of K. 466 is balance. On many occasions the orchestra swamps the fortepiano sound. Better placement of the orchestra and soloist could have resolved this issue. But the acoustics of the hall may also not have helped.

Bilson gives a robust account of K. 467. His articulation is neat, and he captures the march-like pomposity of the first movement brilliantly. Its contrast in moods seem to be perfectly balanced. Even though this movement is enjoyable, it is the only one in both concertos where there is a lack of depth to the sound of the fortepiano. It seems to be placed too far back in the stereo field.

The second movement is not entirely convincing, with no real interest from either soloist or orchestra. The only redeeming feature is his choice of tempo, which has a nice lilting quality. The final movement is full of verve and excitement. There is some skimming over fast passages, and it is a little uneven rhythmically. Nonetheless, it is good, lighthearted playing.

There is only one minor technical problem on this recording. On several occasions there is a most curious, and incredibly loud knocking sound. It is possible that it is a foot tapping, but this really should have been eliminated in the final mix. It is quite distracting for the listener.

Whereas the playing of Barenboim and Bilson abounds in excitement and unpredictability, Uchida is the paragon of restraint, elegance and sophistication. She is already renowned for her sensitive interpretation of Mozart's piano sonatas. Uchida's recording of concertos K. 466 and 467 is part of a project in which she will perform and record all of Mozart's piano concertos with the English Chamber Orchestra, under the direction of Jeffrey Tate.

The liner notes indicate that the pairing of chronologically adjacent works was crucial to the recording process, thus revealing the profound differences of emotional content often found between works Mozart wrote almost simultaneously. If this was the object, unfortunately it is not obvious in Uchida's performance of these concertos. There is very little in style or character to distinguish her recording of K. 466 with K. 467.

The whole character of the opening movement of the D minor concerto should be expressed by the orchestra in the opening fifteen bars. In this case, the orchestra begins well, but there is no climax to the first, unexpected forte in bar sixteen. In fact it is Uchida who provides most of the dynamic contrasts, whilst the orchestra continues to lack any vigour or expression. There is also an irritating habit: when any orchestral instrument has an interesting line, it is dynamically enhanced by the engineer. This completely undermines the natural balance.

Uchida has indicated her preference for the piano to be a part of the texture in these concertos, not simply the solo instrument out in front of the orchestra. This actually suits her style of playing perfectly, which is quietly eloquent and almost self-effacing.

It is in Uchida's performance of K. 467 that she really shines. Her technique allows her plenty of scope to attend to the finer details of the phrasing and dynamics, and the orchestra supports her beautifully. The second movement is worthy of particular praise, where a perfect balance is struck between simplicity and an expressive urgency. There is also some very fine playing from the French horn. The last movement is certainly very fast, the fastest of all three performers. It is delivered with panache.

After hearing these pianists play with such flair and elegance, one would be forgiven for thinking that Mozart concertos are easy to perform. But of course they are not. This is part of the charm of these recordings. Despite the technical difficulty, each player manages to communicate a musical understanding of these concertos, and to project an idea of how they should be played.

That sort of musicianship is splendidly prominent in the performances on these discs. This comes from the fine orchestral playing integrated with the intuitive and expressive interpretations by the pianists.

These are three very fine performers, giving very fine performances. I would have no hesitation recommending all three of these recordings to those who like, and perhaps even more strongly to those who think they won't like, Mozart's piano concertos.

MOZART :: STRING QUARTETS NO. 20 IN D MAJOR, K. 499; NO. 21 IN D MAJOR, K. 575
Alban Berg Quartet
EMI Digital D154449

Mozart's string quartets are extremely difficult to perform. The writing is such that every note is audible, and any glitch, even the slightest, is patently obvious. This would explain the reluctance of many professional quartets to tackle Mozart, both on the stage and in the studio. Fortunately the Alban Berg Quartet (ABQ) is not so coy.

This CD contains two of Mozart's three D major string quartets, K. 499 and K. 575 (the other being K. 155). K. 499 was composed in 1786, widely touted as one of

Mozart's finest compositional years, with such works as 'The Marriage of Figaro,' the piano concerto in C major, K. 503, and Symphony No. 38, 'Prague' coming from this period.

K. 499's nickname is the "Hoffmeister," after Mozart's friend Franz Anton Hoffmeister, who published the quartet the year it was written. This quartet is considered an anomaly, as it was published separately and not as part of a set, which was by far the more common practice in the eighteenth century. Maynard Solomon, in his recent book 'Mozart,' calls it "one of Mozart's more uncompromising compositions."

It is perhaps not so much the Mozart that is "uncompromising" but rather the ABQ. Their supreme command of string quartet playing is no more finely articulated than in this recording. They play with a sumptuous tone and the greatest clarity and bloom. The attractive warmth they impart to the music is refreshing, and nicely removed from the oft-encouraged restrained approach.

For want of better cliché, the ABQ throws caution to the wind. We are duly rewarded with exciting and innovative playing. The opening of the first movement is highlighted by some outstanding playing from violist Thomas Kakuska. The viola's role in Mozart quartets, unfortunately much maligned, is often the pivotal part. Kakuska manages to be heard (a difficult feat for the viola), whilst never upsetting the internal balance of the music.

However, in this performance it is the development section of the first movement that stands out. In a quartet that is seemingly buoyant and lighthearted, this is a moment of doleful expression. Rather than rushing over it coolly, the ABQ allows more time for the relentless eighth notes, and gives them some weight and

hence anguish. Despite some occasional rough sounds, it is a thoroughly convincing performance.

A smallish flaw in an otherwise exceptional interpretation is the second movement. It is a minuet and trio, but one would think from the tempo and touch awarded it, that it is a dance in some rather heavy mud. There is no apparent explanation for this plod. Worse still, it seems to be cellist Valentin Erben's stodgy emphasis of the first beat of each bar that gives it this inescapable feeling of sluggishness.

The third movement is a return to the naturally expressive playing of the ABQ. They phrase this contemplative and quietly moody movement thoughtfully, affectionately. One qualm with this is the overblown surges that punctuate the smooth lines. They seem an unnecessary addition to the dynamics of the movement.

The allegro finale is spirited and cheery. It is a tour de force by first violinist Günter Pichler. His part is very exposed, often way above the tessitura of the other instruments, thus requiring secure intonation and dazzling finger-work. Pichler's technique makes it sound effortless.

K. 575, the second D major quartet on this CD, is the first of three Prussian quartets written in 1789 for the cello-playing King of Prussia. This accounts for the sometimes prominent cello writing, and also the technically straightforward part writing. There is an element of mystery surrounding this quartet, for even though Mozart wrote in his thematic catalogue that K. 575 was expressly written as a result of a commission received from King Wilhelm, there is no evidence to suggest that this commission was ever made.

That mystery aside, there is no doubt that it was written with a cellist in mind, as there are some uncharacteristic bursts to prominence in the cello part. Valentin Erben seems to relish this ostentation, and lavishes it with a rich and forthright sound – not so much as to overshadow the other players, however. The ABQ is always very careful to avoid such ensemble mishaps.

The ABQ displays good judgment in tempos, as three of the four movements in K. 575 are marked allegretto. One may be excused for thinking that this would make the quartet as a whole temporally dull. But this is where the genius of Mozart and the integrity of the ABQ unite to form an exquisite combination. The ABQ dons a subtle rhythmic fluidity upon the first movement, lightens the bow strokes for the minuet, and ensures the finale is suitably light-hearted. Sublime quartet playing such as this is rare, but so necessary.

This is a CD worthy of the highest praise.

BRAHMS :: SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN E MINOR, OP. 98
Vienna Philharmonic, Carlos Kleiber (conductor)
Deutsche Grammophon D103114

Any mention of conductor Carlos Kleiber usually results in hushed murmurings of awe. He has made a career out of elusiveness, both as a musician and as a personality. He conducts reluctantly, and has even said that he prefers working with a score alone to working with an orchestra. When he can be coaxed from his almost reclusive existence, he demands hours of rehearsal time – a demand that daunts many North American orchestras.

For most critics and fans, it is his fabled recording of Beethoven's Fifth and Seventh Symphonies that springs to mind as the benchmark of his musical success. But this splendid recording pales in comparison to his reading of Brahms' Fourth Symphony with the Vienna Philharmonic, originally released on the Polydor label in 1981.

Kleiber's Brahms is a compelling exemplar of what meticulous attention to detail, devotion to the score, and original musical insight can do for a recording. Indeed it is the musicality of Kleiber and his undeniable skill as a conductor, coupled with the marvellous Vienna Philharmonic, that propels this recording from above average to hallowed near-perfection.

From the opening of the first movement, it is apparent that Kleiber is content to let Brahms' score impart the romantic temper. There are far too many recordings circulating in which the rhythm is pulled and pushed, and the strings allowed to make some less than prudent slides. No such blemishes impinge on this thoughtful interpretation. Kleiber yields to patience rather than urgency. The strings are allowed to luxuriate in the melodies, but the woodwind and brass, impeccably woven into the overall texture, keep them from being overly indulgent.

Just one of the highlights of the first movement is the impressive range of dynamics Kleiber entreats from the orchestra. Stark contrasts are forsaken for more energetic swirls to climax, whilst the tempo is always kept carefully in check. In his score, Brahms adopted the strategy of registral shifts (in the violins particularly), for moments of heightened passion. It is in these moments that Kleiber's patience is rewarded, with no rush to spoil the effect. The result is quite simply ecstasy.

The first movement is fecund with the magnificent, homogenous sound of the Vienna Philharmonic string section. One hears complete agreement in bow strokes, shifting, and intonation.

Although the strings once again have the majority of pivotal moments in the second movement, the woodwind and brass are not to be relegated to the background. Their intonation and ensemble is beyond reproach, as phrases are tossed gracefully between players. Except for the fact that the timbre changes as the instruments do, one could be forgiven for thinking that just one person is doing all the playing.

Even with such marvellous playing as this, the first appearance of the second subject in the cellos prevails as the essence of the whole movement, perhaps even of the symphony. It is one of the finest examples of ensemble playing on record. Whereas most interpretations enjoy the cellos carrying the melody and the other strings simply providing peripheral noise, Kleiber ensures a complete string experience. The cello melody is inextricably interwoven with the texture, impossible to separate. It is worth buying the CD if just to experience this transfiguration.

The third movement is replete with the energy befitting an Allegro giocoso. Six minutes of respite from emotional intensity, this march-like movement is delivered with buoyancy and precision. Its emotional benignity heightens the impact of the surrounding movements effectively, and Kleiber acknowledges this with a fairly straightforward performance.

There is a return to sweeping passion and intensity for the finale. This ardent chaconne is difficult to grasp aurally, and is more easily understood with score

in hand. In this movement Brahms pays homage to Bach – the bass is a modified version of Bach's Cantata No. 150, 'Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich.'

Once again, Kleiber deliberately charts the rises to climax – this time with more hubris than angst, to distinguish it from the mood of the first movement. The same excellent playing from the Vienna Philharmonic is evident, although there is some wayward intonation in the French horns. Despite this, it is an envigorating interpretation.

Some may baulk at paying full-price for a CD that contains only thirty-nine and a half minutes of music. However, these are thirty-nine and a half minutes not to be missed, whatever the cost!

OFFENBACH :: SUITES FOR TWO CELLOS, OP. 54
Première Suite - Allegro ma non troppo; Adagio religioso; Rondo (Allegro).
Deuxième Suite - Allegro; Andante; Polonaise.
Etienne Peclard and Roland Pidoux (cellos)
Harmonia Mundi HMA 1901043

For those courageous enough to admit a weakness for the French-German composer Jacques Offenbach, this CD is a must. Replete with lilting melodies, and jolly, swaggering rhythms, it features very fine playing by the two French cellists Etienne Peclard and Roland Pidoux.

Offenbach, the oft maligned composer of comic opera, has been assigned the somewhat derogatory title as pre-cursor of Gilbert and Sullivan. This is a shame, because not all of his compositions are light operettas such as 'The Tales of Hoffmann.'

He wrote a number of marvellous works for cello duo, as he was himself a very accomplished cellist.

These two suites of Opus 54 date from Offenbach's own concert-giving years. The writing is arcane, given that he understood the technical demands of the instrument intimately. Both suites abound in double-stops, pianistic arpeggio figures, and an extremely fraught tessitura. Indeed, the sleeve notes by Ginette Keller that accompany the CD assert that the suites are "of a technical difficulty that the simplicity of the musical material hardly warrants."

The musical material may be simple, but it is presented in a manner that is both refreshing and entertaining for the listener. The first suite has three movements, each structurally conventional – sonata form, ternary form and rondo form respectively. The melodies are also very predictable and 'singable.' However, the suite is an exciting tour of the infinite capabilities of the cello to vary the expression of a melody. The second suite is fairly similar to the first, save for the haunting beauty of the second movement. It is an *aria da capo* of enchanting intimacy, built upon a gently rocking accompaniment reminiscent of a *barcarolle*.

As far as the playing is concerned, it is astonishing that these two cellists are not heard more often. In the First Suite, both cellists display the requisite technical assuredness of all the renowned cellists of today. In fact, the third movement of this suite is the only occasion in which there is some intonation insecurity, despite the incredible difficulty of the writing. This intonation mishap occurs when the first cellist, Etienne Peclard, reaches for the higher notes in the principal theme.

The second suite is played with sheer uninhibited enjoyment. It is vital playing, and both players have a convincing linear sense of what Offenbach was trying to communicate linearly through his jejune melodies.

This CD is definitely for the die-hard Offenbach fan, but it may also convince those of us who have been a little unkind to him to take a closer listen, and appreciate his music for what it is – a "bon-bon" worthy of the finest candy-maker.

STEVE REICH :: TEHILLIM
Steve Reich and Musicians, conducted by George Manahan
ECM New Series, 827 411-2

It is hard to imagine the liturgical context for Steve Reich's setting of the Hebrew psalms of praise. Contrary to most of Reich's earlier compositions, 'Tehillim' is not comprised of short repeating patterns, he states in his explanation of the work for the CD's sleeve notes. The indiscriminate listener may have difficulty hearing this music, however, as it is a melodically repetitive piece.

To avoid such confusion, before pressing start on the CD-player, one would do well to have some background information on the work's genesis. However, even after an explanation, some may still feel that this is music for those in a drug-induced stupor, or in some heavy meditative trance.

There is no doubt that it is hypnotic music, but it was not Reich's intent to lull the listener into a state of high suggestibility. He was attempting to break free from his strict minimalist penchant, and venture into music with greater rhythmic and melodic freedom. In 'Tehillim' Reich experiments with modulation, as well as giving the

vocal parts more independence and expressiveness. 'Tehillim' also has a much stronger feeling of tonality. Reich comments in the sleeve notes that the last movement "affirms the key of D major as the basic tonal centre of the work after considerable harmonic ambiguity earlier."

The texts are settings of the Psalms 19: 2-5, 34: 13-15, 18: 26-27, and finally 150: 4-6. All glorify God, peace, and love. The last text is a hymn of praise, advocating musical instruments to join in.

One of the outstanding features of this work is Reich's shunning of fixed meter, alluded to earlier in this review. The explanation for this is quite simply the words. Reich determined that the rhythm of the music should be derived from the rhythm of the Hebrew text, and is consequently more flexible than any of his previous compositions. The text was set with the meaning in mind. He even went so far as to inflect melodies to mirror the inflection of the words of the Psalms.

This recording presents the chamber version of the work, and is scored for high soprano, two lyric sopranos, alto, piccolo, flute, oboe, cor anglais, two clarinets, percussion (tuned tambourines, clapping, maracas, marimba, vibraphone, crotales), two electric organs, two violins, viola, cello and double bass. It was written on commission from the South German Radio, Stuttgart; the West German Radio, Cologne; and The Rothko Chapel, Houston. It was premiered in 1981 in Stuttgart, Germany.

The performance is vivid and interesting. The vocalists are excellent, with the high soprano Pamela Wood being particularly outstanding. Her vocal agility in reaching the high notes with no audible distress is truly stunning. The drummer and

clapper should also be congratulated for surviving the repetitive nature of their parts without falling prey to lack of concentration – so easy to do in continuo parts.

Overall this is a curious work. It is somewhat different from other Reich works, but not so much as to startle. Its most serious defect is that despite the exhaustive sleeve notes and other sources of explanation, the work still remains aurally elusive. This can result in extreme irritation and disillusion for a critical listener. But for the more relaxed listener, it will do nicely as background music to a mellow and lazy day at home.

RICHARD STRAUSS :: DER ROSENKAVALIER
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Herbert von Karajan (conductor)
Soloists: Anna Tomowa-Sintow, Agnes Baltsa, Janet Perry, Kurt Moll, Wilma Lipp, Helga Müller-Molinari, Vinson Cole, Victor von Halem, Gottfried Hornik, Heinz Zednik
Deutsche Grammophon 413 163-2 GH

Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus, Herbert von Karajan (conductor)
Soloists: Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Christa Ludwig, Teresa Stich-Randall, Otto Edelmann, Eberhard Wächter, Ljuba Welitsch, Paul Kuen, Kerstin Meyer, Nicolai Gedda
EMI Classics 7 49354 2

When the news broke that Herbert von Karajan was recording another version of Strauss' 'Der Rosenkavalier,' speculation as to his state of mind ran overtime in the media. Everyone wanted to know what Karajan was hoping to achieve by re-recording the opera, given that his own 1957 version with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf was considered as perfect as opera recordings could get. In his inimitable style, Karajan responded that he hadn't done all he could with the opera. Also, it was conveniently

timed to coincide with the new production for the Salzburg Festival, featuring the same cast as on this Deutsche Grammophon recording.

Considering that by 1984 Karajan had been familiar with 'Der Rosenkavalier' for close to sixty-five years, it was a startling admission that the master was still finding new things in the score. For an interview with 'Gramophone' magazine in September 1984, he said he found it ludicrous when young conductors claimed to know opera scores simply on the basis of having listened to them with a recording – "It takes years to learn these roles and to know them from the singer's point of view. Nowadays, I can tell you if a singer is comfortable in a role even if I can only see his back."

So how do these two recordings (separated by twenty-three years) compare? Certainly the newer one has some very fine points, but it presents no challenge to the supremacy of the 1957 recording. In fact, it seems almost unfair to make such a comparison, mostly because Karajan's earlier recording boasts a Marschallin who is probably the greatest female Strauss singer ever – Dame Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. With her mentor, confidante, and life-long partner Walter Legge at her side, Schwarzkopf engulfs the role in heartbreaking insight. Her interpretation has become the standard by which other performances of this role are measured.

The story of the opera, simplistically condensed, is that the Marschallin is faced with the imminent prospect that her young lover, Octavian, will leave her for a younger woman. Schwarzkopf beautifully captures the melancholy of the Marschallin, not only at losing Octavian, but also at her own impending old-age. Schwarzkopf played the role with a calm acceptance of the inevitable. This helps the plot immeasurably, as there are so many comical elements to be juxtaposed with this

sadness. The subtlety and detailed understanding of the role created by librettist Hoffmannsthal is conveyed sublimely by Schwarzkopf's flawless voice.

With Anna Tomowa-Sintow in the role, the Marschallin becomes much more a woman paralysed by her own fear of losing Octavian, rather than someone calmly resigned to the fact that her life is necessarily changing. Tomowa-Sintow is far more compelling on the stage than on record (see Royal Opera review p. 62). This is perhaps because the sumptuous images are not available when listening to the CD, and it is the powerful theatrical setting that carries her performance. She is not a bad singer. In fact, she acquits herself admirably, with a wonderfully focussed tone, and impeccable intonation. However, Tomowa-Sintow's faults lie with her misinterpretation of the role, and her lack of command of the language.

That is one of the anomalies of this recent recording. The three leading ladies are not native German speakers – Tomowa-Sintow is Bulgarian, Agnes Baltsa (Octavian) is Greek, and Janet Perry (Sophie) is American. Normally this would not matter, but this opera thrives on the subtle distinctions of class, as communicated through the dialects used by all the principal characters. The Marschallin and Octavian speak with an elegant and measured Viennese dialect, whilst the Baron's speech is littered with split infinitives and double negatives to point up his lack of breeding and education, leaving Sophie and her father, Faninal, whose rise from poverty to new-found wealth is betrayed in their every utterance. Fortunately Kurt Moll as the Baron, and Gottfried Hornik as Faninal, both Germans, have no problems in pronunciation.

What Tomowa-Sintow lacks in pronunciation and interpretative skills she makes up for in poise and elegance of tone. The same cannot be said of Janet Perry.

Her voice is powerful, some might even say penetrating. But when one is performing the exquisite duet with Octavian for the 'Presentation of the Rose,' at the start of Act II, something more is needed. Perry not only fails to find that elusive quality, but she also has some excruciating lapses in intonation. Whilst the range is extremely high, she never sounds comfortable at any point in this performance.

On the other hand, Teresa Stich-Randall, as Sophie in the 1957 version, sounds as if she were born to sing in the heavens. Her control of dynamics, pitch, vibrato and diction is mesmerising. All one has to do is listen in awe. She was lucky to have at her side the marvellous Christa Ludwig as Octavian. Although Ludwig's career was still in its early stages at the time of this recording, she went on to become one of the finest singers of her generation. As Octavian, she epitomises the joyous and impish qualities of his boyhood. Octavian is supposed to be in his late teens and on the brink of manhood – another juxtaposition with the Marschallin as she moves from the autumn to the winter of her life. Ludwig's finest moment on this recording is in the final trio of Act III, as he/she leaves the Marschallin for the last time. It is one of the highlights of this recording.

The Octavian of the latest recording is Agnes Baltsa. She is secure and engrossed in the part, but her weakness, like Tomowa-Sintow's, lies in diction. There are occasions when it is difficult to make out what she is saying. Her pitch is fairly accurate, apart from the 'Presentation of the Rose' scene, where I wondered whether she was simply having trouble keeping with the wayward Janet Perry.

As far as the male leads go, there are really only two to speak of – the Baron and Faninal. On both recordings, these parts are performed with requisite flair. Kurt Moll as the Baron in the newer version is delightfully churlish, whilst Otto Edelmann

in the same part but in the 1957 recording chooses a more arrogant and sleazy demeanour. The two Faninals are as adequate as can be for such a minor part.

The other supporting roles are well done, with the famous tenor aria being superbly performed by Nicolai Gedda in the 1957 version. Wilma Lipp as the mercenary Annina is a delightful addition to the cast for the recent recording. For those who remember her thrilling recorded account as the Queen of the Night, her voice is still as fine and dazzling.

But of course the real star of both recordings is Herbert von Karajan. His first recording abounds in joy and passion, and certainly reflects the wonders of love. He coaxes the finest singing and playing I have heard on record from the cast and orchestra in the 1957 recording. This rendition is both lyrical and expansive, without being sluggish. That is perhaps the greatest shortcoming of his last attempt at this magnificent opera. The tempos are in general much slower, sometimes lengthening numbers by as much as two minutes, or more. Rather than making the emotion more intense, this slowness makes it all sound hollow and dull. It is never more apparent than in the final trio of Act III. Although the voices and orchestra are more than competent, one could not tell from their delivery that this is the most heartbreaking and heartwarming scene of the opera. For that, one definitely needs the 1957 recording. It captures everything that is expressed by both words and music about love and life.