SO, how much ground would a groundhog hog?
MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER, February 5 2021

This is to let you know that we have revised our print schedule for the balance of 2020/2021, reducing this season from nine to eight editions by consolidating four remaining issues into three.

Revised Publication Schedule for the remaining season:
• March 19: Vol 26 No 6, covering mid March to early May
• May 7: Vol 26 No 7, covering early May to late June
• June 25: Volume 26 No 8, covering late June to early early September.

Volume 27 No 1 is currently scheduled for Friday September 10 2021.

Cutting our financial coat to fit our COVID cloth is high on our list of reasons. Also we are grappling with ever-changing restrictions on where and how quickly we can distribute the print magazine.

Equally, we recognize the financial and logistical strain our live music community is under, with ongoing uncertainty about committing to live and even live-streamed performances.

Many of the listings that do find their way to us are hatched and dispatched within a very compressed timeframe, and subject to modification or cancellation at very short notice. So while for 25 years a predictable monthly concert calendar has been the bedrock of what we do, it’s illusory to attempt it – for now.

In print, as this issue demonstrates, we're focussing on telling the stories of people and organizations within the musical communities we serve; and what they are facing.

Accordingly, we’re using the extra time afforded by extended print production cycles to build on our digital publishing – better suited to these times. We urge you to engage with our regular HalfTones e-letters; our weekly online listings updates; frequent blog posting; and all our social media: Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

AND - you can help by taking a three-issue subscription to the remainder of Vol 26, as explained in the order form below. Everyone wins; you assure yourself of your usual print copy – especially those of you who have benefitted from picking up The WholeNote free of charge for decades. You’ll take some financial pressure off us and off a music community not able – for now – to support us with paid advertising the way it has always, faithfully done.

We have a role to play in the months and years ahead. So thank you for considering this.

David Perlman, publisher@thewholenote.com

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WHOLENOTE MEDIA INC., CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION, 720 BATHURST ST., SUITE 503, TORONTO ON M5S 2R4 www.thewholenote.com
Spanish music is the focus of Tapeo, a new recording by cellist Cameron Crozman and pianist Philip Chiu.

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New! Weekly online updates 6pm every Tuesday for Friday posting

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Display Advertising, reservation deadline 6pm Tuesday March 2

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Publication Dates

Friday, March 12 (online)

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Volume 26 No 6

March 19 – May 7, 2021

Overall Credits

Ontario Arts Council
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A government agency of the Government of Ontario

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Groundhog Day, Again

How much ground would a groundhog hog
If a groundhog could hog ground?
Not nearly as much as the other hogs do.
Don’t just believe me. Look around.

Somewhere out there, in Hogtown,
there’s a developer shitting bricks.

Our lead story by Brian Chang about the Dominion Foundries at 153 Eastern Avenue goes into the details of the community response to our provincial government’s end run around the city’s usual planning procedures, so I won’t go into detail here. And I have no idea who the particular developer is who did this deal with the Ontario party in power. But I have a sneaking suspicion that by the time you read this, their names will be known and the aforementioned bricks will hit the fan.

Even if I did know, mind you, I probably wouldn’t say, because here at The WholeNote we are not well equipped for the fast-moving “big scoop” (hounds) business. As I mentioned, with my other hat on, on page 2, these days we can’t even keep up, in print anyway, with the dizzying pace at which our formerly reliable monthly concert calendar, the backbone of what we have always existed to do, goes out of date before we’ve even hit the street.

But for now let’s stick with the growing stink around the Dominion Foundries site.

The developers could turn out to be party-in-power cronies, about to benefit from a sleazy provincial end-run under cover of of COVID darkness.

Or at the other end of the spectrum they could be one of a rarer species: developers who understand that when they participate in building functional communities it costs more at first but makes what they build, in the longer term, a more valued place to be.

Or they could be somewhere in between – not particularly interested in the longer term because why should they care about the longer term when there’s always new ground to hog?

I’m no Wiarton Willie or Punxsutawney Phil when it comes to prognostications, but if I have to guess, I am leaning more towards crony than community builder. I’d love to be wrong.

Let’s just say, for sake of argument, that the community alliance (arts groups, existing residential associations and business districts, housing advocates) that has temporarily prevented demolition of the heritage structures on the site wins a much bigger victory, and manages to persuade, compel or publicly shame the province and whomever they’re in cahoots with here into some form of meaningful negotiations, however long it takes to get there.

That’s when things will get really interesting. Because one of the things that will immediately be put to the test will be the word community itself. And that will mean having to be specific about what “the community” does want, rather than just agree on what it doesn’t. At which point things either cohere into something splendidly more than the sum of its parts, or disintegrate into clusters of competing visions, with epithets like “elitist” starting to fly.

Let’s hope it’s the former, and we end up with something worth putting on the map.

So what’s with all these groundhogs?

In the 1993 film Groundhog Day a jaded Pittsburgh weatherman reluctantly makes his way into the western Pennsylvania hinterland for the station’s obligatory coverage of the annual Groundhog Day hoopla as Punxsutawney Phil, for the 135th consecutive time, is prodded out of hibernation into the early morning cold, and either sees his shadow or doesn’t. If he does – sorry folks, six more weeks of winter, as decreed by Phil or Willie or Sam, for Punxsutawney; or, due north, for Wiarton; or down east for Shubenacadie.

In the film, our human weather forecaster (also called Phil), finds himself trapped in time, waking to the same song on the radio, going through the same day over and over again each time with variations, but with each episode ending and restarting the same way – trapped in the same day, with the same song on the radio, without hope of redemption, until ...

So here’s the really terrifying thought du jour: what would happen if each time Willie or Sam or Phil heads out of hibernation they have forgotten the previous excursus, and thinks it’s still February 2? Does that mean we get six weeks piled on another six weeks, and another... Just think what that would be like.

At some point the whole Groundhog Day routine, designed as a fun and fine way of putting a small town on the map, would turn into a predictable moment of dread – a bit like the regular province-by-province COVID briefings, either announcing that because it’s gloomy out there things are about to get bright; or that, precisely because we have started behaving as though things are looking brighter, there’s now an even longer shadow of doubt as to when, or even whether, they will.

They will. And in the meanwhile, here are some stories to read.

publisher@thewholenote.com
TEST CASE

Dominion Foundries: Pushing Back Against Heritage Loss

BRIAN CHANG

A couple of blocks from the Distillery District in the downtown Toronto Port Lands, there is a series of buildings, over a hundred years old, that once made up the Dominion Wheel and Foundries, manufacturing railway equipment for Canadian National Rail. With the decline of rail transportation and manufacturing, the area had become derelict until revitalization that began with the adjacent Distillery District and continued through the Pan Am Games.

On January 18, 2021, with no notice or consultation, demolition crews erected fences and began preparations to dismantle these heritage buildings under the instruction of the Government of Ontario. Community members, neighbourhood associations and businesses in the area were aghast at seeing these iconic buildings suddenly being demolished without warning. Elected representatives in the area were also blindsided: without access to answers because the obscure use of a Ministerial Zoning Order (MZO) issued by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Steve Clark, allowed the demolition to bypass the City’s usual procedures.

According to City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam’s office, there was – and remains – no formal development application for this site. “The City has asked the province to produce or demonstrate provision for: Cultural Heritage, Archaeological Assessment, Heritage Impact, Strategic Conservation, and Environmental Site Assessment. None of this has been provided. In fact, the developer for the site has not been revealed by the provincial government.”

Councillor Wong-Tam continues: “One thing I know is that before the MZO was issued up to and including today [January 18, 2021], not one single person was consulted about the Province’s intentions for the site. In not doing so, the Province is willfully negligent in following its own heritage policies.”

Following well-established practices in both provincial and municipal law, heritage buildings are subject to extra scrutiny and preservation of the core elements of the building, in whatever project a developer has in mind. People have the right to participate in public meetings, while city staff and planners work to ensure the adequacy of planned services and utilities, as well as ensuring cohesion with the surrounding neighbourhoods. Developers must obtain feedback to ensure their projects mesh well with the existing community and do not become random, unwanted aberrations.

None of these processes were followed in the lead-up to this demolition, and the public has not been informed of what is contemplated for the soon-to-be vacant land.

The type of MZO issued by Minister Clark and Premier Ford, if left unchallenged, will allow developers to bypass any public and City input into what gets built on the land where the foundry buildings are located. The MZO also allows for destruction of the heritage properties on the site, which is normally not permitted. For a developer, being unshackled from the preservation of heritage elements of the foundry buildings means they can build faster and at a lower cost, ultimately increasing the profitability of the project.

IRCPA

One local stakeholder in the area is the International Resource Centre for the Performing Arts (IRCPA) which has long been championing an arts and culture hub in these buildings, something they call the “Foundry Project.” IRCPA executive director, Ann Summers Dossena, said about the unplanned demolition: “Losing the buildings is only half the story. The benefits of the Foundry Project with new and old buildings include a work and performance centre for musicians, a cultural centre, affordable housing for musicians, daycare and a community hub for the 25,000 people and businesses in historic Corktown. All this will be lost.”

For over a year now, the IRCPA and the Corktown Residents and Business Association have been working to bring their vision of an arts and culture hub to fruition in the area. So much of what makes the area attractive is the blend of the old and new. Aaron Binder, owner of local business Go Tours, told The Wholenote, “the balance between heritage and modern is a key element of our company’s tours – and the fabric of our business and residential communities. The Distillery District neighbourhood is our home and a shining example of how commercial and residential interests can meet at the intersection of preservation and profit.” It’s hard to imagine the Distillery...
planning procedures is being conducted. On January 22, 2021, the injunction was denied, leaving the province free to continue demolition until a hearing, scheduled for January 27, could be conducted before the courts.

Community members persisted, continuing to demand transparency and accountability; and demolition work was suspended “as a courtesy” by Minister Clark. On January 27, the Ontario Divisional Court held a provisional hearing on a motion to stop the demolition, with Justice David Corbett reserving his decision until Friday, January 29, at which point, in a clear, albeit temporary, victory for the community, Justice Corbett ruled that demolition should cease until a full hearing is held on February 26, 2021.

So the story continues, with the demolition of the foundry buildings just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the Ford government’s plans for the area. On the same day as bulldozers rolled onto the foundry site, the City was also notified that, only a few blocks away, the Province was beginning expropriation proceedings at 271 Front Street East and 25 Berkeley Street. Currently home to parking lots and a car dealership, this was the site of the first Parliament Buildings of Upper Canada, built in 1797, and has huge untapped archaeological history likely hiding underground.

The area as a whole was subject to a master plan that elected officials, city staff, neighbourhood and business associations, and community members have been working on for years, to be implemented over the next two decades. Now the Province is seeking to expropriate much of these lands, ostensibly through Metrolinx, which Premier Ford requires as part of his so-called-plan for the “Ontario Line.” As with the foundry site, the master plan and local planning process will not apply. This public transit project, too, was proposed without any public input and without any consideration from the Toronto Transit Commission or the City of Toronto.

Regarding the First Parliament site, Councillor Wong-Tam said: “Residents and community leaders have been engaged in the assembly of land and the design of the First Parliament Master Plan for years. In order to build complete communities, it is essential to work with impacted stakeholders, business owners, and residents, as it makes for a stronger neighbourhood master plan. This cannot be another provincial example of bulldozing local democracy and our neighbourhood master plans.”

Amidst the closure and loss of live music venues across Toronto, well documented in the pages of *The WholeNote*, the destruction of landmark heritage properties would represent both the loss of something that was, and a lost opportunity for what could be. It is unusual to find a set of unused government-owned buildings of sufficient size and scope in stable condition in the heart of a vibrant and growing community in downtown Toronto. This unique offering of empty, large industrial manufacturing buildings with historical significance could still be a beautiful economic and community hub with both housing and arts and music at its core. The opportunity will not easily be replicated.

“Nothing in our community asked for these buildings to be demolished,” continues MPP Morrison. “The community has been clear that it wants affordable housing, it wants an arts hub, it wants community space. Everything that Ford is doing here contradicts good planning, it makes for a stronger neighbourhood master plan. This cannot be another provincial example of bulldozing local democracy and our neighbourhood master plans.”

Brian Chang on Twitter

Brian Chang, local musician, resident, and former NDP candidate for Toronto Centre, writes Choral Scene for *The WholeNote*. Follow Brian on Twitter @bfchangto.
Frank Horvat’s Music for Self-Isolation Gets in Under the Wire at RTH

ANDREW TIMAR

One Sunday morning a few years ago, when the possibility of a multi-year pandemic seemed light years remote, I assisted in tidying up at a small event at a local community centre. Absentmindedly humming as I stacked chairs, I was unaware of my barely audible personal music-making.

Until a friend brought my attention to it asking, “What song is that?” “There’s always a song in my heart,” I blurted out enigmatically, but with a smile. Though an honest reply, it immediately felt glib. But it stuck with me, an off-the-cuff remark with implications which occasionally still bear reflection as we fast forward to the second calendar year of the current pandemic and once again try to take stock of how musicians and the venues they work in are coping with our shifting and often confusing regulatory environment.

While most Toronto music venues have been closed for “business as usual” since last March, many had also found ways to come back to at least a semblance of life with examples of innovative livestream concerts or video productions (as I have reported in several recent stories, notably “Exquisite Departures in Trying Times” in November and most recently “Modal Stories Are Alive and Well in the Labyrinth”).

Then on January 14, 2021 the Premier of Ontario announced the latest emergency stay-at-home order. At the stroke of 12 that day almost all the province’s struggling music venues were forced to close their doors again, even virtually. It prompted a new wave of concert cancellations and postponements, an echo of the cancellation tsunami that tore up the live events calendar during COVID-19’s first wave. It sent musicians who could work back home, isolated once again.

“We can’t film, record or livestream anything. Our theatres are closed,” said a dispirited-sounding Mervyn Mehta, the executive director of performing arts for the Royal Conservatory of Music. “We’re losing the ability to engage our audience and put some music in front of them, even on a screen.”

At least one small venue, however, has been able to pivot hard and fast. West-end downtown Toronto’s Array Studio, for example, has come up with a “contactless production strategy” for its in-studio recording projects. As of this writing, at any rate, it means that all technical setups can be done by the house technician in advance, including mic placement and lighting, with sessions conducted remotely from the studio booth using a talkback system to communicate, with a screen, allowing clients views from all the cameras in the space. But they are definitely the exception to the rule, at least in part because of the size of the venue. To come back to my first remark, right now, where venues are concerned, the larger the size of the heart, the less music there can be in it.

Music for Self-Isolation: Just one day before the January 14 provincial stay-at-home order came into force, Toronto composer and pianist Frank Horvat wrapped a three-day recording session of his Music for Self-Isolation at one of the city’s premier venues, Roy Thomson Hall. The timing couldn’t have been better for an extraordinary exercise that had caught my attention on a variety of levels, and that I had been following on my Facebook feed for days.

I called Horvat the day after the January 14 announcement about the nick-of-time RTH session to talk about the project’s genesis and trajectory. He explained that early in the COVID-19 global pandemic, he had felt deep empathy with musician friends as they coped with the uncertainty of cancelled concerts and the strain of isolation. Feeling isolated at home too, he began to think about composing a work each day, calling the multi-faceted project, Music for Self-Isolation.

“It dawned on me that I could at least provide musical friends with new compositions while they were in self-isolation,” he said. “So in the spring of 2020 I composed 31 new short pieces, each of music for an unaccompanied solo instrument or voice, or for a duo of musicians self-isolating together. With the cancellation of performances, COVID-19 has adversely impacted the world’s music community. This project is my attempt to raise the spirits of fellow musicians and the community at large as we continue to traverse through uncertain times. We might be self-isolating but we are never alone...we have music.”

Horvat composed his first piece in late March 2020, with a new one every weekday until the first days of May. “Each score is around two minutes, a miniature creative act I could complete in a day and share with musicians on social media right away. I also thought they would amount to a satisfying suite when performed together,” he added. His website hosts the sheet music for the 31 works, downloadable for free.

While Horvat freely admits he launched the Music for Self-Isolation project to keep himself busy, he was surprised at the positive reception that began to build among national and even international musicians. “The very first piece in the series, a flute solo, has resonated with the flute community, as have the cello and violin solos too. I feel very humbled by that.”

An indication of the work’s welcome reception is that some 150 publicly shared video performances of individual pieces have already been posted online to date, a growing number of which have been uploaded to Horvat’s website, frankhorvat.com.

“I’ve invited everyone to play them, not just professional musicians,” he clarifies. “It’s been particularly rewarding to privately hear from amateurs how proud they were of their performance, how it gave them a sense of purpose, of doing something relevant while in self-isolation.” One of the unexpected things has been seeing some
If music is an essential aspect of our humanness, responses to the pandemic like Horvath’s make it clear that musicians are essential workers.

musicians who play instrument A deciding to interpret piece B scored for another instrument. “I found that some of the compositions work quite well on several instruments. In fact the entire Music for Self-Isolation project has turned out to be very much community-minded and interactive.”

Sharing performances online prompted further conversations about the challenges musicians were facing during the pandemic. This inspired Horvat to start Phase 2 of Music for Self-Isolation – Pandemic Stories. He interviewed eight musicians who had posted videos and with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, produced audio documentary compositions, also accessible on his website. “I felt more of us needed to hear about their hopes, dreams and fears for themselves and the arts and culture sector in order to heal and move forward together.”

Then with the pandemic still raging and musicians still not being able to get back to work, Horvat decided last fall to produce an album of the compositions to capture this moment in history. From January 11 to 13, 2021, 25 musicians converged on Toronto’s iconic (and empty) Roy Thomson Hall, one at a time, to record all 31 solo and duo pieces. Horvat chose the hall for its pristine acoustics, he says, “while at the same time capturing the poignancy of musicians performing in a cavernous empty hall. In addition, we also individually recorded parts of a new large ensemble work, Together in Spirit. Although we couldn’t be together to record it, technology allows us to imagine the time when we will be able to return to playing together.”

With the support of the Toronto Arts Council and FACTOR, the album of these recordings is set to be released on the Centrediscs label in the spring of 2021, commemorating the first anniversary of the start of the pandemic lockdown in Canada. A documentary was also filmed capturing the recording process. Adding interviews chronicling the musicians’ stories of the pandemic, it will be screened later this year by Tiny Pictures.

Toronto clarinetist extraordinaire Peter Stoll, one of the musicians who participated in the recording, enthusiastically captured the spirit of the moment writing on his Facebook page: “Surprisingly warm and intimate-sounding acoustics for a single clarinet in that huge space! … So weird to be heading out of the house to play a gig for the first time in almost a year. Crazy, crazy times!”

Eager to spread the benefits of his Music for Self-Isolation project broader, Horvat states that he “is proud to support the efforts of the Unison Benevolent Fund (unisonfund.ca), a non-profit, registered charity that provides counselling and emergency relief services to the Canadian music community.”

If music is an essential aspect of our humanness, responses to the pandemic like Horvath’s make it clear that musicians are essential workers. They provide a valuable, though admittedly hard-to-define, essential quality to our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health, particularly during times of adversity.

Musicians who have performed physically distanced in parks, parking lots, on the streets, balconies, porches and patios during warmer weather have been met with impromptu crowds savouring every live sonic moment. Whatever the format, they have served to remind us that the living performance of music in its infinite forms, actively listened to, is among our species’ most mysterious and highest order skills. It cuts across all cultures and all social strata.

To those who have persevered through the numerous punishing challenges we’ve experienced over the pandemic year 2020: kudos. History tells us we will make it through 2021 too – with a song in our hearts.

Andrew Timar is a Toronto musician and music writer. He can be contacted at worldmusic@thewholenote.com.
On January 14, the Herculean efforts of The Royal Conservatory to save as much of their extensive 2020/21 concert season as possible suddenly turned Sisyphean when the Ontario government extended and tightened restrictions for everyone in the province. It was a cruel act of whiplash, after the RCM had managed to slow-walk a schedule that included four remarkable mid-December concerts (which I had the good fortune to attend virtually) celebrating Beethoven’s 250th birthday.

In a subsequent press release detailing the postponement and rescheduling of all concerts and livestreams until February 11, RCM added that because of the restrictions they were no longer able to have artists or production staff create livestreams. “This is a profoundly disappointing blow to all of us at The Royal Conservatory and to our artists who were so looking forward to performing.”

I contacted Mervon Mehta, RCM’s executive director, performing arts, to share his perspective with WholeNote readers. He confirmed that everything had changed since January 14. “We cancelled 18 days of concert livestreams, rehearsals and recordings from January 14 to February 11. Our entire 21C Festival has been postponed.” Is the RCM lobbying the government, I wanted to know. “Yes,” he said. “Us along with many others.”

Contextualizing the situation, he said that RCM is acutely aware of the crisis, not only as a venue that has lost its ability to present concerts but also as a school. “Obviously,” he said, “the safety of our students and audience is our highest priority. We have spent months pivoting, spent thousands on PPE and plexiglass shields, cancelling and/or postponing foreign artists and, since mid-October, presenting concerts of our own and hosting others – such as the TSO, Against the Grain’s Messiah/Complex, Opera Atelier’s fall opera and our own Beethoven Festival of eight full concerts.” Importantly, he points out, a huge amount of work was generated for exclusively Canadian artists.

When government regulations last October required that the RCM’s doors be closed to audiences, the Conservatory lobbied to allow rehearsals and livestreams and were granted that privilege. “We have had health inspections and musician union reps drop by,” Mehta said, “and all were very impressed with our protocols and preparedness. “Hundreds of artists and crew – not to mention students – have been in the building” he said, “and we have not had a single COVID case. In fact, concert halls across Ontario have not had a single case as far as I have heard. Why are we now singled out and had our only means of revenue taken away (from us, artists, crews etc)?”

He does not downplay the seriousness of COVID. “We all understand, and we want to do all we can to help Ontario get back to business. But where is the science that led to this recent decision?” In the meantime, the RCM is not just waiting to see what happens when the current restrictions run out; they are advocating and hoping for a reversal to the pre-January 14 regulations.

“It must be a world-class juggling act to keep up with the new protocol,” I said. “Yes, it is,” Mehta replied. “Now multiply that by ten to get artist schedules, Glenn Gould School schedules, quarantine rules etc all to align.”

The four December Beethoven concerts mentioned earlier illustrated all that was good about the RCM Koerner Hall experience in these restrictive times. Despite the lack of an audience, there was a feeling of intimacy and the frisson of live performance – I treated each of the concerts as a destination event, watching them being performed for the first time in three consecutive evenings (December 10 to 12) followed by a Sunday matinee (December 13). The changes in repertoire and performers due to travel restrictions ended up – fortunately – enhancing the experience. Violinist James Ehnes led a top-notch coterie of string players in a rare foray into Beethoven’s under-performed Quintet for strings, Op.29. With its breathtakingly beautiful opening notes, the second movement’s lovely, innocent, aspirational main tune and the jaunty lightness of the brief third movement, by the finale, you could feel the music – its intense building of thematic fragments – vaulting into a new century, even as it glanced back to the 18th.

Pianist Charles Richard-Hamelin joined Ehnes and the strings for the welcome opportunity to hear Chausson’s Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Quartet, which Ehnes called “a totally unique unicorn of a piece.” Richard-Hamelin carried off the demanding piano part with aplomb while Ehnes’ beautiful phrasing showcased the work’s melodic content.

The pandemic prevented Ehnes’ regular pianist, Andrew Armstrong, from participating in the three-day chronological traversal of Beethoven’s ten violin sonatas, setting up Stewart Goodyear as his stellar replacement. Goodyear had less than four weeks to prepare for works he had never played and four days of rehearsal with Ehnes, with whom he had played only once before. It reminded Mervon Mehta – who spoke briefly with Ehnes and Goodyear before each concert – of Goodyear’s time studying at the Curtis Institute when Leon Fleisher, his teacher, asked him to learn one of Beethoven’s 32 piano sonatas each week over 33 weeks – he was given two weeks for

Mervon Mehta
We all understand, and we want to do all we can to help Ontario get back to business. But where is the science that led to this recent decision?

“The Hammerklavier.” Minutes before, Goodyear told Mehta that he considers Beethoven to be his spiritual soul brother. Ehnes and Goodyear did not disappoint. They were totally engaged in the music and its variety of tone and dynamics. It was a musical conversation in a historical context, covering Beethoven’s early and middle periods stopping at the precipice of the late period. Musical confluence and conflict were enthusiastically conveyed. Much of their playing felt authoritative, from the optimistic gentility of No.6 to the forcefulness of No.7, the exuberance of No.8 to the sublime “Kreutzer” No.9 and the sunny intimacy of No.10.

Listening to them in such a concentrated way felt almost like being in the hall – a high point of my 2020 concertgoing, shattered a few weeks later by the new protocol of January 14.

RCM has produced a playlist freely available on Spotify called “In the Flow at Home” a wide-ranging selection from artists originally scheduled to appear in the RCM 2020/2021 season. Included are pianists Vikingur Ólafsson, Seong-Jin Cho, Stewart Goodyear, Joey Alexander, Nicholas Angelich and Marc-André Hamelin; violinists James Ehnes and Angèle Dubeau; and the Gryphon Trio. For further information please see rcmusic.com/concerts.
Toronto Symphony Orchestra
Other local presenters are maintaining their footprints on our collective calendar. The Toronto Symphony Orchestra (tso.ca) has two on-demand concerts available in the coming weeks, both recorded before the recent tightening of regulations.

The first of the concerts already “in the can” – available February 12 to March 4 and featuring 17 members of the TSO – is anchored by Beethoven’s Septet Op.20, one of his most popular works. Scored for a wholly original combination of instruments – violin, viola, cello, double bass, clarinet, horn and bassoon – Beethoven had high hopes of creating a template for a new chamber music form, but the piece was so well-liked that other composers were too intimidated by its success to compete. Beethoven’s Septet is truly one of a kind.

The program also includes the only completed movement from Schubert’s String Trio in B-flat Major D471 and Emilie LeBel’s woodwind quintet, Haareis auf Morschem Holz (hair ice on rotten wood), arranged à la Ludwig van B. for septet.

Concertmaster Jonathan Crow is both soloist and leader in Vivaldi’s The Four Seasons in a concert available March 12 to April 11. Crow will also lead the TSO in two contemporary works – “Coqueteos” from Gabriela Lena Frank’s melodic Legendas: An Andean Walkabout and Sri Lanka-born Canadian composer and lyrical master Dinuk Wijeratne’s poetic, JUNO Award-winning “A letter from the After-life” from Two Pop Songs on Antique Poems.

So far so good, but speaking before a January 22 Jonathan Crow livestream concert/webinar for more than a thousand TSO supporters and subscribers, TSO CEO Matthew Loden said that the latest regulations, if left unchanged, will significantly impact on what else they have been planning.

Music Toronto
Music Toronto’s free, online, virtual concert series – featuring several artists who were scheduled to appear in their now-canceled 2020/21 season – continues February 18 at 7:30 (available until 6pm, February 20) with the St. Lawrence String Quartet performing Beethoven string quartets: Op.18, No.4 and Op.74 “Harp.” Recorded on January 12, 2021 for the Noe Valley Ministry concert series in California, this concert was adapted by the SLSQ for Music Toronto. On March 16 at 7:30 – one show only – pianist Vadym Kholodenko has prepared a treat for Music Toronto’s audience. The winner of the 2013 Cliburn Competition’s program (recorded in January 2020 for Jaques Samuel Pianos London) includes Schubert’s Sonata In A Major, Op.120 D664, Kaija Saariaho’s Ballade, a selection of preludes by Scriabin and Rachmaninoff’s Piano Sonata No.2.

Wrapping up the series on April 15 at 7:30 (available until 6pm April 17), the Castalian String Quartet has prepared Haydn’s Quartet in C, Op.76 “Emperor” and Brahms’ Quartet in A Minor, Op.51 No.2 for Music Toronto. Founded in 2011 and based in London, UK the Castalian was a finalist in the 2016 Banff Competition won by the Rolston String Quartet. Two years later, they were named the winner of the first Merito String Quartet Award/Valentin Erben Prize which includes €20,000 for professional development, along with a further €25,000 towards sound recordings and a commission.

The award came as a complete surprise to the quartet since there was no application process or competition for it; instead, a secret jury assembled a shortlist of five quartets which were then observed in at least two concerts during the course of a year, always without the musicians’ knowledge. Award co-founder Erben, well-known as the founding cellist of the eminent Alban Berg Quartet, observed: “The human warmth and aura radiated by these four young people played a key role [in winning the Prize]. They are never just putting on a show – the music is always close to their heart. You can feel their intense passion for playing in a quartet.”

Kindred Spirits Orchestra
Finally, COVID-19 regulatory whiplash permitting, on February 27 at 8pm, the Kindred Spirits Orchestra (ksorchestra.ca), under the direction of Kristian Alexander, is planning to present two pillars of Russian modernism: Shostakovich’s Cello Concerto No.1, which Alexander describes as “a perfect virtuosic balance of romantic passion, tradition and form,” with versatile cellist Amahil Arulanandam, best-known for the duo VC2, making his KSO debut, and Scriabin’s Symphony No.2, “a lush and brooding work” according to Alexander.

Subject to regulatory issues resolving themselves, the concert will be livestreamed from the SMSV Cultural Centre in Markham and will include an on-stage discussion with Arulanandam and KSO associate conductor, Michael Berec. }

Paul Ennis is the managing editor of The WholeNote.
Singing the Way to Freedom

JACK BUELL

In May 2019 The WholeNote had a call from Lauris DaCosta, on behalf of The Hymn to Freedom Project, asking if we’d give permission for our Feb 2013 cover, featuring Jackie Richardson and Joe Sealy, to appear in a music video project featuring Oscar Peterson’s Hymn to Freedom. (That particular WholeNote cover was for a story by Ori Dagan called Africville Revisited). We were delighted to be asked, and sent the cover along.

DaCosta explained that for many years in the United States, Lift Every Voice and Sing has been the American “Black national anthem.” But Black history is Canadian history too, and she believed we should have a Canadian anthem for that, because getting people to sing together is a very good way of getting people to engage with that history. Her idea was that Peterson’s Hymn to Freedom could be that anthem. With pianist Oliver Jones, who was a good friend of Peterson’s, and with Oscar’s wife Kelly Peterson, the plan was born. A stirring new choral arrangement was done by Corey Butler, musical director of Toronto Mass Choir, and it premiered in Waterloo in March 2019.

Fast-forward to January 2021, we were excited to learn that the video project was completed and available for sharing. Along with the anthem, the video The Many Roads to Freedom features an extraordinary range of images – historical through contemporary – offering “glimpses of the integral, extensive influence and part that Black Canadians have played in the building of our country, Canada.”

Music Monday is The Coalition for Music Education in Canada’s coast-to-coast annual event that advocates for the importance of quality music education for all students. Thousands of students, educators and music makers celebrate the appointed day and time by singing collectively an original song by a Canadian artist. For 2020 Peterson’s Hymn to Freedom was, coincidentally, chosen to be the song that would be sung. It was a new bilingual translation by Hariette Hamilton, and was recorded at the National Arts Centre featuring several choirs, a youth jazz trio and Robi Botos, piano, Jim Doxas, drums, and Dave Young, bass, who mentored the youth trio. Their video recording was shared to help people all across the country prepare for the day. While a new song is usually chosen each year, this year Peterson’s anthem has been chosen again, because of the difficulty of learning a new song in a school year that has been as disrupted as this one has been so far.

Music Monday 2021 is Monday May 3! Join the nationwide celebration by planning and registering your own Music Monday event! You can enjoy the video, and access recordings and sheet music, teachers’ resources, and materials for parents and children to use at home, all available at coalitioncanada.ca/musicmonday/en.
The Lively Art of Stocking the Stream

JENNIFER PARR

How does a theatre company stay connected to its audience when no one is allowed to be in the theatre to rehearse or perform, or to take part with the audience? As we have seen, the answer is usually to go online with shows that are live, pre-filmed, or a combination of the two, with the exact recipe varying from company to company and project to project. Nearly a year after the first lockdown began last March, the experiments in creating streaming content continue with a number of exciting new multi-part initiatives from three of our major companies debuting in early 2021.

National Ballet of Canada

Dance fans who have been missing the National Ballet of Canada’s patented rich mix of full-length story ballets and mixed programs of shorter works that allow the company to experiment with cutting-edge choreography will be happy to tune in to the new Spotlight series on the company’s website. Short films of ballet excerpts have been curated by artistic director Karen Kain to showcase the full range of ballet performed by the company’s talented dancers and the wide variety of choreographers who have contributed to the repertoire. Each film debuts on a set date and remains available for 30 days for viewing online, at no cost, although donations are welcomed.

The series begins with Modern Masterpieces, a showcase of three exciting short works from the recent repertoire of leading contemporary choreographers Alexei Ratmansky, Jiří Kylián and Wayne McGregor, introduced by Kain. Immediately following is Power and Passion, which, in contrast, puts a spotlight on three full-length story ballets: John Cranko’s gloriously romantic Onegin, Christopher Wheeldon’s brilliant adaptation of Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale, and John Neumeier’s non-linear version of Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina. February 7 will see the digital debut of a full recent ballet: Robert Binet’s The Dreamers Ever Leave You, inspired by the works of Group of Seven painter Lawren Harris. Dreamers was scheduled to be performed at Toronto’s Harbourfront Centre this past fall before the pandemic made that impossible. Further films will follow every few weeks highlighting the works of choreographers John Neumeier and George Balanchine, Marius Petipa’s classic The Sleeping Beauty, and a program of new works by Jera Wolfe, Alysa Pires, and Kevin Ormsby commissioned specifically for this project. For more information please visit national.ballet.ca.

While the ballet excerpts look wonderful on film there is no additional context supplied within the films themselves other than a short introduction to the series at the beginning of the first episode. And while there is detailed written information on the website about each ballet and choreographer, as an audience member I miss a more direct connection with what I am viewing. I hope that as the series continues the company will consider connecting more directly with audiences, certainly in the added web-based elements, and perhaps even within new filmed episodes as they are created.

Toronto Musical Stage Company

Toronto’s Musical Stage Company, well-known for its excellent productions of socially relevant musicals, and incubation of new works, is already well on the path of experimenting with creating new ways to connect more directly with its audiences online: sharing with the public the masterclass talks from its Noteworthy composer/librettist program; and offering many different watch party options for its Uncovered concert this past fall.

This month, a new program is making its debut: The Musical Theatre Passport, responding to this desire for audience interconnectedness, while feeding our hunger for travel and new musical productions. Three unique virtual theatre outings are offered: to Vancouver, London (England) and New York, each including a curated pre-show chat with a member of the musical’s creative team and facilitated post-show discussion and analysis with Musical Stage’s artistic and managing director, Mitchell Marcus. The shows are an exciting mix, as well.
Right now in the pandemic, I think people would like to be uplifted, but they don’t want just fun and games. - Richard Ouzounian

I feel a song coming on!
Establishing this type of connection between audience and a show’s creative team and company is also my favourite part of the Stratford Festival’s online programming so far. From early last summer, Stratford has been giving us free livestreamed watch parties geared to their filmed Shakespeare productions on YouTube. The parties include new introductory pre-show (and sometimes also post-show) conversations among directors and cast members talking about the play, the approach and the rehearsal process – spontaneous interactions often including in-jokes and never-before-shared stories.

As the popularity of these Stratford watch parties has grown, so too has the desire of the watch party attendees to have the Festival do the same thing with their musical productions. Unfortunately this hasn’t been possible, as filming most musicals (other than, say, Gilbert and Sullivan productions) is prohibitively expensive because of the rights involved. Understandable, yes, but on the other hand, fully 60% of the people who go to Stratford in normal times every season go for the musicals!

Knowing this, Richard Ouzounian, former Stratford associate director, longtime theatre critic and broadcaster, approached Stratford’s artistic director Antoni Cimolino and executive director Anita Gaffney with an idea – to create a new musical series inspired by the cabaret scene he remembered from New York in the 1970s and 80s. “In those days,” he says, “you could go to a tiny club and see a
star perform onstage with nothing more than a microphone; all they would do is stand and sing and talk to you, but they would captivate the audience.”

The series he proposed to Cimolino and Gaffney took this idea further. As he said to me, “Right now in the pandemic, I think people would like to be uplifted, but they don’t want just fun and games. I have also often felt privileged in that I know a lot of the Stratford Company personally, and a lot of people out there don’t. They know what they see onstage, but in some cases it is drastically different.” This led him to the idea of letting each performer “speak for themselves.” Once a list of performers was decided on, Ouzounian contacted each of them with the invitation to take part saying, “I want you to think of a story about your life right now that you want to tell us, and I want you to pick five songs that will help to tell that story. In between the songs you’ll talk to us, sharing thoughts and bits and pieces of biography that illuminate things, telling the story you want to share.”

“Nobody said no,” he says, “but a lot of people were scared. In fact, Robert Markus, in his episode, says, ‘I was terrified when they asked me to do this, because, you know, we’re not used to speaking for ourselves as actors, we’re encouraged to take other people’s words and read them.’” Someone else asked if “everything was on the table” and they were told “yes” and that they would not be censored.

The only guidance given by Ouzounian in choosing songs was to say that “if there was a song that connected with their Stratford experience, to please use it, and that I would like the final number to have some sense of uplift or hope – Everybody does something different.”

One of the hardest things, other than rehearsing and designing the show on Zoom, was getting the rights to use the songs, which took months. In some cases, rights could not be acquired and then the team of Ouzounian and music director Franklin Brasz would step in and help to choose alternate songs. The process has been intense, from the individual crafting of each episode, to Zoom rehearsals, to the filming with full production values (and under rigorous COVID protocols) in the Festival Theatre – the only fully staged performances of the 2020 season, though without any audience other than the production team watching.

So intense was the process that, while Ouzounian focused on the songs, he brought in another expert – veteran musical theatre and cabaret performer, Thom Allison – to work with the performers on fine tuning what they would say in between the songs.

Having had the chance to pre-watch the first episode, Marcus Nance’s Preacher’s Son, which will debut on January 28, I have to say that the teamwork is impeccable. This first episode lives up beautifully to the series title, Up Close and Musical, alternating between stunning performances of the songs (with wonderful audio quality, rich lighting design and beautiful clothes) and the relaxed personal storytelling by a casually dressed Nance directly to the camera, not from the stage, but from a seat in the house. The tantalizing, mostly black and white, trailer for the series gives only a hint of the power of what these personal cabarets have achieved; a wonderful up close and personal introduction to some of Stratford’s – and Canada’s – top musical theatre talents: established Stratford stars Cynthia Dale, Dan Chameroy, Chilina Kennedy, Alexis Gordon, and Marcus Nance; more recent stars Vanessa Sears and Robert Markus; and newer members of the company Kimberley-Ann Truong who won over audiences for her comedic performances in The Rocky Horror Show and The Music Man, and Robert Ball, who would have made his Festival debut in the 2020 season.

Up Close and Musical will be available on Stratford’s streaming service STRATFEST@HOME, with new episodes premiering every two weeks. Happily, each episode will also be part of the free weekly watch parties on Stratford’s YouTube channel starting on January 28. For more information please visit stratfordfestival.ca.

Jennifer Parr is a Toronto-based director, dramaturge, fight director, and acting coach, brought up from a young age on a rich mix of musicals, Shakespeare and new Canadian plays.
The Rocking Horse Winner
And Other Tales

DAVID JAEGER

Of late, the topic of mentoring has been on my mind. Your Dictionary defines a mentor as “someone who guides another to greater success,” but one of my favourite quotes on this topic comes from flutist and composer, Robert Aitken: “You can only teach a person two things: how to listen, and how to teach themselves.” Particularly in this latter sense, I have experienced the joys and benefits of being mentored at various points of my life, as well as opportunities to “pay forward” what I have learned.

Particularly memorable, in the former category were my high school band teacher, my graduate school advisor, my trainer as a new recruit at CBC Radio in 1973, and Glenn Gould, whom I worked with often in the ensuing years.

Then, as my professional career developed, one detail of my personal history seems to have forecast how my own involvement in the role of mentor would evolve. In 1969, while still a university student, I had the good fortune to be named as a Fellow by what was then the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation (now The Institute for Citizens & Scholars). The panel of examiners for the Foundation was charged with the task of finding scholars entering graduate schools, whom they felt possessed the potential to become outstanding future teachers. I suppose, in retrospect, those perceptive examiners were on to something, although teaching “on the job” has always come naturally for me rather than as a formal profession.

It was during my 40 years as a music producer for CBC, that, with the passage of time, I began to find myself in the role of mentor rather than mentee. There were innumerable opportunities to share my knowledge, skills and experience with colleagues, especially those in the early stages of their own careers, as I had been when I arrived. I found myself delighting in introducing eager young colleagues to programming concepts and methods, and in enabling them to make productive and prudent choices. One of my broadcasting protégés, Stephanie Conn, describes the process as “being given the feeling that we were legitimate producers-in-training and part of the music community, and thus being enabled to grow into just that.”

One of the things I learned early on was that the process of broadcast content production is inherently teamwork, so the key to success is putting the best teams together. The ability of teams to focus effectively on the project’s agreed standards largely determines success in making meaningful content. This seems like common sense, but in reality, actually finding gifted team players and motivating them to join in the effort to make exceptional outcomes, is no small task. Among others, I think of someone like a young recording engineer named Dennis Patterson who was one of the people I had the chance to bring into my production teams, beginning in the mid-1990s. Patterson has worked steadily at his craft, and several of the recordings he engineered have won a variety of prestigious awards, including several JUNOs.

Fast forward, then, to 2020, when the plans of every single performing arts organization were brutally rendered void and radical adjustments to plans and well-established ways of thinking have become necessary just to survive. In this context the hierarchical relationship between mentor and mentee goes out of the window; mentorship becomes a team sport, with the ball being passed around as the situation demands.

I was given the exhilarating opportunity to work in one such team, when Michael Hidetoshi Mori, artistic director of Toronto’s Tapestry Opera (no stranger to mentoring himself) approached me to...
participate in one such radical readjustment to a well-set plan. Mori had already put a team in place for the remount of their successful production of the chamber opera, Rocking Horse Winner. Based on a story by D. H. Lawrence, libretto by Anna Chatterton with music by Gareth Williams, the opera was originally produced for the stage by Tapestry in May 2016. It had won five Dora Mavor Moore Awards and looked like an ideal remount candidate. Cast, chorus and instrumentalists had been booked for the spring and summer to rehearse and stage a fresh updated version of this proven work.

With rigid pandemic restrictions suddenly introduced last March, Mori faced the prospect of cancelling the entire production. As he describes it: “A combination of valuing the work of artists and making every dollar count are key to Tapestry’s ethos. Like everyone, we had to make some hard decisions. Our first step was to ask artists if they were okay with us honouring the full amount of their contracts, but being open to new ways of spending it.”

With that buy-in achieved, they began with a workshop of the piece, focusing on how online collaboration could happen. Music director Kamna Gupta prepared video and audio conducting tracks. Stéphane Mayer created piano tracks on Tapestry’s Bösendorfer Imperial Grand and, later on, a coaching track for difficult passages that included cues like breathing – something that would normally be followed in person. Mori, as director, was able to go into much greater detail than usual with table work, the time spent with actors focusing solely on character development and plot arc. And they collaborated with their orchestra to record tracks to Gupta’s conducting video.

At this point, as Mori says, the project took a decisive turn. “In doing all of this and stretching our creativity for collaboration, we discovered that deep and musical rehearsals were happening, giving us the confidence to say that we could record an audio album, and that layering as part of the recording process would afford us some creative possibilities in storytelling.”

Like everyone, we had to make some hard decisions. Our first step was to ask artists if they were okay with us honouring the full amount of their contracts, but being open to new ways of spending it.

As a result, in May 2020, Dennis Patterson and I were asked to work with Tapestry to produce a commercial recording of the opera at Tapestry’s Ernest Balmer Studio in Toronto’s Distillery District. We met via Zoom with Mori’s team and determined that we would be able to build the recording from the ground up, multi-tracking four performers at a time over a two-week period, following COVID safety protocols. Each layer of the recording would be complete and edited in time for the next layer, starting with the instruments and ending with the cast principals. In addition to Gupta’s video conducting tracks, live conducting was added when needed, in order to provide ongoing interpretive feedback. Gupta, who was in New York City, was channelled in live to the sessions via Source Connect Now software. Patterson took care at every stage of the recording to create a “real
life” monitor mix for the performers, enabling them to deliver a true, believable performance, rather than a simple execution of the notes.

We were, in effect, reimagining the opera in a purely sonic world, learning from each other as we went. Post-production editing, mixing and effects took another month, but finally, by early fall, we had our performance.

Tapestry Opera’s recording of Rocking Horse Winner was released in time for its premiere network broadcast, December 26, 2020 on CBC Music’s Saturday Afternoon at the Opera, and is now available to the public on bandcamp at tapestryopera.bandcamp.com/releases.

“We needed to be brave and find solutions that would keep us working, learning how to succeed amid restrictions, Mori says. “The silver lining is that this worthy production would have seen a couple thousand audience members live, but its broadcast reached over 300,000 across Canada and the world!”

Quite a different mentoring challenge came my way when a student of mine, Ruby Turok-Squire, who sings with the English vocal octet, Aeterna Voices, based in Leamington Spa in the English Midlands, got in touch. I had composed a setting of the famous W. B. Yeats poem, He Wishes for The Cloths of Heaven, for the group early in 2020; she now wanted to let me know the group had decided to make their debut recording, to be titled The Cloths of Heaven, and to ask if I would guide the process from a distance.

Suddenly our conversations, previously largely centred on the topic of choral text-setting, shifted to recording techniques, microphone characteristics, and how to run a recording session. The recording was made last summer at the spectacular Gothic church, All Saints, in Leamington Spa, and will soon be released online.

My summer of 2020 was, in fact, filled with a seemingly endless series of projects, both large and small in scale, and covering a vast range of repertoire. All were by people pivoting to working in remote mode, most, if not all, performing their parts from home. All required coordination in innumerable different ways and for different reasons. All developed their own flow.

With the U.S.-Canada border closing, Canadian cellist Arlen Hlusko, a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, and a member of New York’s famed Bang on a Can All-Stars, returned to her home village of Lowville, Ontario. Hlusko’s creative solution to relative isolation was to act as a self mentor: producing and learning from regular webcasts of her own live solo cello performance.

I connected with her, impressed by her mastery of the cello, and offered to send her music. She hatched the idea of inviting composers from around the world to collaborate with her to create miniature compositions for solo cello, written for Instagram (hence the minute-or-less limit.) The 20 composers who responded came from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Kosovo and the United States; in each case, Hlusko and the composer corresponded, discovering common interests upon which the works were based. All of them had online premiers on Hlusko’s @celloarlen Instagram, as well as live performances on her webcasts in her regular Saturday afternoon series, Live from Lowville with Love. I ended up creating three miniature pieces, solo cello compositions based on works by Scottish poet, David Cameron, now based in Belfast, with whom I had collaborated in another project. An album release will follow.

Looking back at the overall legacy of the content I have been involved in producing, I find it immensely reassuring that those involved have by and large been populated with people with open minds, eager, as Robert Aitken described it, to continue to learn. That kind of reflexive mentoring has never been more important than now.

David Jaeger is a composer, producer and broadcaster based in Toronto.
As we continually lurch our way (back) towards some form of concert life in the midst of this seemingly neverending pandemic saga, how composers and musicians find solutions remains an ongoing story of adaptation, ingenuity and perseverance.

Take the 21C Music Festival for example, originally scheduled to happen from January 15 to 29. In my last column, written for the December-January issue, I spoke with composer Cecilia Livingstone about her Garden of Vanished Pleasures, slated to be programmed at the festival. As conditions grew more dire during December, with Toronto facing a lockdown, the festival was scaled down in response, with plans shifting to a series of livestream-only concerts in place of the previously planned livestream with a limited live audience. Then, on January 14, when a state of emergency was declared in Ontario, even livestream-only concerts from Koerner Hall were precluded – a blow for them and for other music organizations in the city planning to present their livestreamed events there as well.

So now what? Another event planned for 21C I had been curious about was a concert titled FLIPBOOK: Music and Images, featuring the Glenn Gould School New Music Ensemble, which is now a free online concert scheduled for February 18. Curious to know how the plan for the event has had to change, I spoke with the ensemble’s conductor, composer Brian Current, and discovered a whole other layer of postponements and reinventions.

“It’s become an experiment in how music can be made during these strange times,” Current told me. “Now, all the players will record their parts from home and a production team will compile everything together in advance for the online event. It will become an entire concert with everyone playing in advance from home.”

This type of concert has sprung up everywhere in the Zoom world, and true to form, what the audience will see is everyone in their little boxes on their computer screens. Current spoke of the kind of perseverance required on the part of the players to make this happen, with some performers so committed to being in the city to further their studies at the Glenn Gould School that they self-isolated for two weeks earlier on in the fall. “This is what it takes to be a musician during this COVID era,” Current remarked.

Fortunately, the chosen repertoire for the concert, mostly for large ensemble, makes it ideal for this type of event. Three of the four pieces on the program have electronic components that even in a normal concert situation would already have required the conductor listening to a click track as they conducted the ensemble. Now, the players will also perform listening to the click track at home as they make a recording of their individual parts. As Current said, “It’s a lot easier to be together as a pulse rather than a string orchestra that has to sing together, which is also wonderful, but much harder to do from home.”

Also, as the title of the concert suggests, most of the pieces on the program have a visual element, a flipbook being a small book with printed images that give the illusion of motion when the pages are flipped through rapidly. It will be up to the videographer Taylor Long to decide on what the audience will see visually when all the recordings are compiled and mixed. It may mean that at times the moving images will be in one of the small boxes, so Current recommends using the biggest screen you have with the best audio speakers or headphones possible. Other members of the technical crew include Pouya Hamidi (audio production) and Adam Scime (media director).

The large-ensemble pieces on the program include Nicole Lizée’s 2017 work, 8-Bit Urbex, for 15 players, soundtrack and film. Originally commissioned by the Australian Art Orchestra, this work includes drum kits, electric guitars, turntables, jazz-based instrumentation, and even the sounds of trumpets being submerged into water. Everything is synchronized with images of urban environments that appeared in video games from the 1980s and 90s.

It’s a lot easier to be together as a pulse rather than a string orchestra that has to sing together, which is also wonderful, but much harder to do from home.
A plus of the pandemic

Another advantage, if one can call it that, of this new performing adventure, is the possibility of experiencing concerts from different locations. An early February example: INNERchamber has been organizing concert events for a local Stratford audience for the past 11 years, with two musicians at the helm: artistic director Andrew Chung, violin, and Ben Bolt-Martin, cello. Their concerts bring together performers from a myriad of musical traditions, including song, poetry performance, and improvisation. Each event has its own unique character, with a narrative thread weaving all the elements together. Usually, audience members can take in a meal and wine before the concert begins, which creates a lively community atmosphere.

French/Argentine composer Martin Matalon’s *Las siete vidas de un gato* (A Cat’s Seven Lives) is scored for the 1929 silent film *Un Chien Andalou* by Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel and artist Salvador Dalí, with electronics and acoustic instruments matching the surrealist images. Fortunately, because performers had already spent time rehearsing the piece together during the fall, Current says they’re now ready to perform their individual parts from home. Without that rehearsal time, he says, doing it solely from home recordings would not be possible.

The large-ensemble pieces are rounded out by French composer Pierre Jodlowski’s *Respire*, a work created in collaboration with a dance company filming a series of images of the body. In the first half, the music is paired with images of breathing body torsos; in the second half these change to moving bodies whose trance-like gestures were inspired by watching people dancing in a club.

The fourth work on the program arose from the fact that each year the GGS New Music Ensemble has a different makeup of instrumentalists. This year, three oboe players joined the group, so Current made the decision, with support from the Royal Conservatory, to commission a work for three oboes and viola from Montrealer Corie Rose Soumah, who is currently pursuing her doctorate at Columbia University. Her piece, *Chrysanthèmes asséchés s’abreuvent d’air et d’ennuis nocturnes*, captures her experience living in New York during the early days of the pandemic and is evocative, as its title suggests, of the still-life genre; it was the everyday objects she encountered during the endless repetitive days of lockdown that comforted her. The plan is to perform this work again in a future which includes live concerts.

As Current commented, this concert is a glimpse into what it feels like to be alive during this time and place in history, with concert life mirroring a world where people are already in their little digital boxes. Fortunately, the technology available to reassemble everything together makes these types of experiences possible.
Jazz Notes

New Year
Same Old

STEVE WALLACE

Many would agree that 2020 was the worst we’ve ever been through and we were all anxious to see the end of “The Year of Living Covidously.” So good riddance, 2020, and don’t let the door hit your ass on the way out. But of course the root of all our problems and suffering – the pandemic – hasn’t gone anywhere and simply flipping over to January of a new year on the calendar hasn’t solved it, any more than anything else we’ve tried. And Lord knows we’ve tried lots, at least most of us. Masking up, staying at home, social distancing, keeping our bubbles small, working from home (that’s if you still have a job), forgetting what eating in a restaurant or hearing live music feel like. Stores and schools closed, then open, then sort of half-open, then not. And still the numbers go up as we chase this invisible enemy, to the point where The Myth of Sisyphus no longer seems a metaphor but something we’re living on a daily basis. Keep pushing that boulder.

None of this is to say that we should join the ranks of the anti-mask loonies or herd-immunity-at-any-cost-COVID-deniers, not at all. We have only to look south of the border to see how well that hasn’t worked, as Samuel Goldwyn might have put it. Clearly we must stay the course with these mitigation measures because they’re the best tools we have and, just as clearly, we would be even worse off without abiding them in the last year. It’s just that after nine months and counting of cave-dwelling isolation… well, it’s getting harder.

To quote one of Mose Allison’s more sardonic later songs – “I am not discouraged. I am not down-hearted. I am not disillusioned… But I’m gettin’ there… yeah, I’m gettin’ there.”

And You Thought Jazz was Confusing

As someone who has spent an awful lot of time over the past 30 years being out of the house maintaining an insanely gruelling work regimen – full-time days at a law library, a busy playing schedule, with writing and teaching thrown in more recently – I haven’t found this much staying at home all that hard. I suspect I speak for many when I say that what I have found hard is the disorienting brain-fog which has resulted from so many months of anxious uncertainty about how we’re supposed to find a way out of this mess and how long that will take. Part of it has to do with the nature of the virus itself and how it behaves, which is proving elusive even to epidemiologists.

I believe in following the science and am inclined to cut our leaders, both political and medical, some slack because none of this came with a road map, but often a lack of consistent messaging and

A warm and lively INNERchamber event, pre-pandemic

The concert planned for February 7, titled Lost and Found, features the music of Pamela Jane Gerrand, singer and narrator, (pamelajane-errand.com), based on her own poetry as well as the poetry of Rumi. It will also include a performance of Toru Takemitsu’s Toward the Sea, originally commissioned in 1981 by Greenpeace for the Save the Whales campaign. Gerard Yun, shakuhachi, Daniel Ramjattan, guitar, and percussionist Graham Hargrove, will join Chung, Bolt-Martin and Gerrand.

In conversation with me, Gerrand described the concert as “an ode to this time of year that seems endless. It’s a time when we go within to find inspiration, strength and resilience.” The various pieces on the program have been chosen to help us “find solace and the experience of being found” (something I’m sure many of us can relate to right now). “We’ve lost our access points in this time of sequestering,” Gerrand says.

Gerrand’s journey as a performing artist began in theatre, gradually shifting over to songwriting when she began creating works to express the universal experience of being human – “the beauty and the pain, the connection and brokenness… At this time, we’re all suffering from the disease of disconnection, and the warmth that comes when we sing from the heart is where we can make the ineffable known. We can blast away the illusion of separation and come into the field of love.”

She remains hopeful and determined. “During this time of forced separation, people are learning how to go within,” she said, “and connect to their emotions and vulnerabilities; and, in that process, many are finding the gift of their own creativity.”

At the time I spoke with Gerrand, towards the end of January, the plan was for the concert to be livestreamed, from Revival House in Stratford, INNERchamber’s usual restaurant partner, with each of the players sufficiently distanced from each other and with the livestream captured by eight cameras. Since then the concert, like its title, has been “lost and found.” Given that the only places performers can currently perform from are TV or recording studios, it will be streamed instead from Canterbury Music Company studios in Toronto, but with Stratford-based audiences able to pick up concert day take-out meals from Revival House as usual, and tune in from there the way I was planning to tune in from here.

Wendalyn Bartley is a Toronto-based composer and electro-vocal sound artist. sounddreaming@gmail.com.
transparency from them have made things worse. Sometimes it seems like they’re making it up as they go along. Then there’s the mounting socio-economic and psychological fallout from all of this, hence the Twilight Zone fog we’re stumbling around in, as if somebody opened up a great big can of WEIRD. The horrific and (almost) shocking events of January 6 only served to ratchet up the insanity of everything a few notches. A couple of days later while swimming upstream in this mucky soup, I began laughing out loud while drooling slightly as a strange thought hit me: compared to all of this, jazz seems normal, a veritable oasis of reason, order and sanity. How often do you hear that?

Throughout its history, except for a couple of decades in and around the 30s through the 40s when it was popular music, jazz has suffered from a reputation of being confusing, flighty, inaccessible, too complex and abstract to be really enjoyable. Its practitioners were seen as low-life bohemians, drunks and drug addicts who wore strange clothes and affected insider hipster dialogue. Like weirdsville – dig, baby. And all this was before jazz discovered atonality. Like the coronavirus itself, jazz cannot be seen or touched. Really it can only be heard and felt, but at least it won’t make you sick or kill you – at least not most of the time. But it’s only taken life during a little old pandemic to make jazz seem solid, almost intelligible.

For example, a couple of days ago I was practising the bass – for what, I couldn’t tell you – when I began playing a blues in F. And sure enough, just like always, the structure was 12 bars long.

debut. And it knocked me out just as much as always – the darting velocity and swing of it, Young’s swooping two-chorus masterpiece solo as brilliant and daringly inventive as ever. Ineffable, yet carved in stone.

Then over to Kind of Blue, and sure enough, Jimmy Cobb’s cosmic ride-cymbal splash just ahead of Miles Davis’ solo entry on “So What” – still for me the most magic moment of many on that magical record – was still there in all its glory. It’s not that I expected these and other gleaming gems to have changed – after all, once music is recorded, it’s fixed in place forever and I know that. But these days, you find yourself wondering.

Jazz is neither weird nor confusing. Like everything else, it only seems so if you don’t understand it, or at least try. But life with COVID is decidedly weird and confusing. The only saving grace is that like wars, pandemics eventually end, whereas jazz is forever. Thank goodness.

Sound the Knell Again
As I mentioned in a previous column, 2020 was a horrible year for jazz musicians dying and unfortunately this parade has continued through early January. New York pianist Frank Kimbrough died of a sudden heart attack on December 31 at the age of 64. A very creative improviser/composer and a revered teacher, Kimbrough was known for his long association with the Maria Schneider Orchestra, for founding the Herbie Nichols Project with bassist Ben Allison, a longtime collaborator, and for being a charter member of the Jazz Composers’ Collective. His last recording was the ambitious 6-CD 2018 release, Monk’s Dreams: The Complete Compositions of Thelonious Sphere Monk, with multi-reedman Scott Robinson, bassist Rufus Reid and drummer Billy Drummond. Kimbrough died far too young and his death will leave a big hole.

Composer/arranger Sammy Nestico, best-known for his prolific writing for Count Basie, died on January 17 at 96. At least he made it to a ripe old age and if I had a dollar for every time I played one of his
Stitt and Gene Ammons before settling in New York for a long career. He met the Adderley brothers while serving in the army and played in their first mid-50s quintet. He led a trio for many years, releasing a string of fine records. His playing was a unique blend of earthy blues and bebop wed with elegance and a gentle touch. He was also prized as an incisive, swinging accompanist for singers and in small groups such as the Johnny Griffin “Lockjaw” Davis Quintet, and with Dizzy Gillespie. He was a regular at Toronto clubs such as the Café des Copains and the Montreal Bistro. I feel his death personally as I had the pleasure of first playing with Junior for two weeks in 1979 at Bourbon Street in a trio backing singer Helen Humes. I was pretty young and green at the time but Junior made the gig easy and fun with his energetic, straight-ahead style and we remained friends ever after. Above all, he was a wonderful person – soulful, warm, cheerful and friendly with a smile that lit up the room. He’ll be greatly missed.

Soul
As an antidote to the generally gloomy tone of this article – sorry – I highly recommend watching the 2020 Disney/Pixar animated film, Soul. It captivated me immediately and lifted my spirits throughout with its imaginative originality, humour and wit. Right off the bat it had me laughing as I saw the usual Disney castle image off in the distance, but “When You Wish Upon A Star” was played in a satirical, messy brass style that sounded just like a bad high-school band and I realized this was not going to be the usual glossy or sugary Disney fare. Although an animated film, it’s really intended for adults, though kids would certainly enjoy it. The story concerns Joe Gardner, a talented and dedicated jazz pianist who has never quite made it, and who finds himself teaching middle school music. Just as, against his better judgment, he accepts a full-time position, he catches a big break when an ex-student drummer arranges for him to audition with a top-flight alto saxophone star. Joe plays out of his skin and lands the gig which opens that night, only to fall down an open manhole cover on the way home, plummeting to his apparent death. And that’s all in the first 20 minutes. I don’t want to play spoiler any further, but suffice it to say that the rest of the story is a thoughtfully and complex rollercoaster ride worth seeing more than once. Although not entirely about jazz, the jazz content is rich and believable on various levels and doesn’t have any of the stumbles that many movies purporting to be about jazz often suffer from. All of the key elements – the story, the music (jazz and otherwise), the voice-over acting (Jamie Foxx and Tina Fey are the principals) and above all the animation – are above the usual Disney fare. Although there are indications of the usual glossy or sugary Disney fare, the animation is a visually stunning movie with the power to do something rare these days – to truly delight us and make us forget, at least for a couple of hours, the awful mess we’re in. I’ll take it.

Toronto bassist Steve Wallace writes a blog called “Steve Wallace Jazz, baseball, life and other ephemera” which can be accessed at wallacebass.com. Aside from the topics mentioned, he sometimes writes about movies and food.

Assessment as a Two-Way Street
Music School Auditions under Lockdown

At the beginning of January, I received a call from a friend of mine – a drummer – who was in the process of applying to the Master of Music program in jazz at the University of Toronto. Had he been applying last year, he might have asked me to play with him for his live audition. This year – in the midst of January’s stringent lockdown protocols – he asked me to play on his audition video. This prompted a simple question: what does auditioning for a music program in the physically distanced winter of 2021 entail?

Many WholeNote readers – whether you’re a professional musician, community orchestra member, chorister, or the best damn Betty Rizzo that ever graced the stage of an Elgin County high school – will have some experience with the audition process, in a general sense. For what this usually looks like in an academic context – and how things are different this year – here is some background, drawn from my own experiences as a university music student, as well as two years spent as the admissions and student services manager at the RCM’s Glenn Gould School, from 2015 to 2017.

Postsecondary music program auditions are generally relatively simple affairs: applicants come to a room at an appointed time, play selections from a repertoire list assembled by the school, have a brief interview with the audition panel, and leave. The composition of the audition panel is, typically, dependent on the instrument group auditioning, and usually involves both faculty representatives (e.g. piano faculty for piano auditions) and representatives from academic leadership (e.g. a program head). The panel takes notes, discusses the auditions, and makes recommendations to an admissions committee, which then embarks on a lengthy administrative process that addresses itself to merit-based financial aid, program number targets, teacher requests, offers of acceptance and waitlist, and other decisions.

As important administratively as auditions are to schools, assessment, however, goes both ways. Visiting a school for a live audition gives prospective students the opportunity to collect a great deal of information. This involves everything from their experience with the audition panel, the state of the facilities available, location of the school in relation to the larger community, and interactions with current students, uniquely capable of providing auditionees with frank, honest feedback about student life.

Usually, the vast majority of schools allow participants outside of a certain geographical range to submit audition videos in lieu of coming to the school for a live audition, and it is normal for schools to ask for pre-screening videos when students are submitting their applications. But it is a widely accepted norm that students will make the trek to come to a school in person. This norm is not without its issues: as in much of music education, there is an underlying assumption

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The last thing [schools wanted] was for a student to feel as though their whole future rests on their internet connection.

that prospective students are able to spend significant money simply to be considered for further training. Nevertheless, for students invited to audition, choosing to send a video rather than come to an audition in person is rare; in a typical audition period at the GGS, we would receive four to five videos in a pool of over 200 auditionees.

This year, however, everything has changed.

For Canadian postsecondary music programs in major cities, the beginning of the fall 2020 semester involved unprecedented uncertainty, as well as entirely new ways of working (this has been true for students, faculty members and administrative staff alike). The shifting lockdown requirements – so different between various regions – meant that some programs were more optimistic than others about the potential to have live auditions. Come winter, though, it became clear that the vast majority of major schools – including UBC, U of T, the GGS and McGill – would be conducting auditions via video recording. So I spoke to Whitney Mather, the current admissions and student services manager at the GGS, about this year’s unique admissions cycle, and about the ways in which the school has taken steps to make the application process meaningful to students.

The primary consideration, Mather said, is to ensure that students didn’t feel penalized by their circumstances. At the GGS, as at other programs, students will submit pre-recorded videos. There was, she told me, some consideration given to the idea that students would audition via Zoom. This idea, however, was quickly dismissed; the last thing that the school wanted, Mather said, was for a student “to feel as though their whole future rests on their internet connection.”

Another concern: access to an accompanist. No one, Mather said, will require an accompanist, out of respect for both safety and equity. Students will, however, not have the same opportunity to visit music buildings this year as they have in the past, but steps have been taken in music programs to build some kind of personal interaction into the application process. At the GGS, as at U of T and McGill, students will have an interview with a faculty member; this personal contact, Mather told me, is part of a concerted effort to help students avoid the feeling that they’re “sending off these materials into the void,” and that they “don’t have a chance to advocate for themselves in

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QUIET PLEASE!
RECORDING IN PROGRESS

Whitney Mather
the way that an interview gives you a chance to do.”

From the perspective of applicants, this year’s process has been both positive and negative. I spoke to a number of auditionees, for both jazz and classical programs (all of whom asked for anonymity, which I am honouring; the audition process is stressful enough). Of the comments I received, two constants emerged. The first, a positive: that videos gave applicants a break from the duress of the live audition process. It is tremendously difficult to be present and lose yourself in the moment when you’re so thoroughly aware that you are being assigned an objective value; recording at home, for one’s mirror and cat, removes this stress. The second, a negative: that the hardware and software involved can be frustrating to learn, and that one piece of gear – e.g. a USB microphone – can require unexpected technical expertise.

There is also, on the part of school staff who are not always familiar with recording technology, an insistence on certain requirements that don’t always make sense. On the UBC School of Music website, for example, there is a note that videos should be “preferably recorded by a professional technician,” and also a note that “each recorded selection must not be edited or manipulated in any way.” This requirement, however, misunderstands the language of recording: video and audio are not recorded on the same devices (video uses cameras, audio uses microphones/audio interfaces/computers). Even on a smartphone, these are discrete processes; the two files are simply put together automatically by the device’s software. To assemble multiple video and audio files, to add titles and simple fades between selections; all of this, in the language of audio engineering and videography, is editing, but does not, of course, constitute the kind of recording “fraud” that this rule is in place to pre-empt.

For students making a good-faith attempt to present themselves honestly and accurately, many of whom may be using recording and video editing software for the first time, making sense of these rules represents yet another step in an already-taxing admissions season.

Ultimately, as Mather told me, there is an underlying attitude in postsecondary music programs that “everyone is in this moment together. Things may not work perfectly, and – even more than in other years – there’s a lot of flexibility and patience.” Though this year’s admissions cycle is fundamentally different from those that came before it, one hopes that these lessons – of the importance of flexibility, and patience, and of kindness – will continue to inform the way that music programs operate in the physically proximate future.

Colin Story is a jazz guitarist, writer and teacher based in Toronto. He can be reached at www.colinstory.com, on Instagram and on Twitter.
It was the start of a lifelong Navy association, going on active service after high school; as he wryly described it in the April 2014 interview article, “learning some new instruments – radio and radar.” When WWII ended he completed his undergraduate degree at U of T where he played in the Varsity Band, the Conservatory Concert Band and the U of T Symphony. One memorable university summer, he recalled in that interview, he played trombone six nights a week in a dance band at the popular Erie Beach Pavilion – six days a week, from nine until midnight. And then Sundays they’d go to Detroit and hear all the touring big bands – Ellington, Kenton, Burnett, Herman, Dorsey.

Jack MacQuarrie returned to sea during the Korean War as a Navy Lieutenant Commander and diving officer, laying aside music during those seven years, but never since. With music fueling his lungs, mind and spirit, he returned to university, acquired an MBA and then did four years of graduate studies in engineering – investigating human performance in hostile (underwater) environments. He received a Massey Fellowship under Robertson Davies. He worked for some time at marketing in the airborne electronics business. He was a past president of the Skywide Amateur Radio Club, was the first instructor for the Hart House Underwater Club and to the last remained active in the Naval Club of Toronto. In January 2013 MacQuarrie was awarded the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for contributions to Canada.

In one episode he wrote about in The WholeNote, in 2014, he and Joan Andrews enrolled as volunteers in research on brain function and aging, comparing musicians with non-musicians, at the Baycrest Centre. It was one memorable story among hundreds over the years as he regaled readers with great anecdotes and dreadful puns – above all else spreading the word about all the people he was in touch with who were keeping community band music making alive. Readers so inclined can find his most recent column on our website and then scroll back in time, column after column, as I’ve been doing this last while.

Curious as to what might have changed or not over the course of this pandemic year, I went to look at the February 2020 column (wondering for a moment if just reprinting it would serve here to give readers a taste of the man). It didn’t disappoint: from Groundhog Day to the Newmarket Citizens Band’s bright idea of building their Christmas party around an open rehearsal: “How often do tuba players chat with clarinet players, after all?”, and from Henry “Dr. Hank” Meredith’s collection of 300 bugles, to Jack’s latest musings (something he was passionate about) on what bands should and shouldn’t take into consideration when selecting repertoire.

There’s one more snippet from that column that is a fitting place to end this – an exchange with a reader: “He [the reader, Bernie Lynch] recounted a bit about his personal band involvement, from Orono around 1946, to Weston in 1950, and Chinguacousy in 2012. ‘Never a very good performer but always a good participant,’ is how he describes himself. [Well] we need more good participants. Let us hear from more of you out in the community music world!”

A fitting place to end except for one thing. Jack always tried to throw in something at the end – a quip, a “daffy definition,” a pun – that would get a smile.

So here’s mine: the part of his February 2020 column that he got the biggest charge out of researching and writing, was of all things, a piece of music called “The Impeachment Polka”. Jack would have liked that.

David Perlman, with files from MJ Buell

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David Perlman, with files from MJ Buell
These listings are, for reasons we are all aware of, a work in progress as we explore how best to present to our readers the new ways our music community is discovering and inventing to reach their audiences, at a time where the old constants of fixed dates, times and places to gather and meet no longer apply in the same way.

Our tried and true monthly listings cycle is also of far less value at a time when projects come together much more quickly or can be postponed, cancelled or forced by external circumstances to re-invent themselves in the blink of an eye.

So it is important to note that in addition to these periodic print listings we are now offering regular weekly listings updates online every Friday (see the ad at the foot of page 31). We encourage both readers and presenters of musical events to make use of these. Deadlines for submissions to the weekly updates are listed at the bottom of this page.

We continue to look forward to your input as we move forward on reinventing our listings wheel!

Please address all suggestions, concerns and queries to the attention of our listings editor, John Sharpe at listings@thewholenote.com.

HOW TO LIST:

1. Use the convenient online form at thewholenote.com/applylistings
2. Email listings to listings@thewholenote.com.

Please note, we do not take listings over the phone.

Deadlines

1. Weekly online updates: submission deadline is 6pm Tuesday of the week prior to the event in question, for Friday posting.
2. Print: approximately fifteen days before publication.

Our next print issue covers the period March 19 to May 5 2021, and the submission deadline is 6pm Monday March 1.
Events by Date

PLEASE NOTE: All times are Eastern Time unless otherwise noted. Listings are based on information sent to WholeNote in advance by event presenters. Due to current restrictions, some events may be restructured, cancelled or postponed. Please visit presenters’ websites or contact them directly for updates.

Our next print issue will include events between March 19 and May 7, with a submission deadline of March 1. Events during that time period submitted after that deadline will be added online, and will also be included in our REGULAR FRIDAY ONLINE UPDATE of events for each coming week.

● ONGOING!! Jan 17 4:00: Travel by Sound. Freeman Brothers. Original music by Carson & Curtis Freeman, and songs from Mar- cus Miller, David Sanborn, Bela Fleck and the Recktones. Carson Freeman, sax; Curtis Freeman, bass; Stefan Carriman, keyboards; Alek Sekulovski, drums & percussion. Call 416-799-0737 or visit VictoriaYehliu.live.com. $40 per single concert or $100 for Full Ser- ies Pass (6 concerts). Virtually from Midtown Station. Series runs until Feb 21. Unlimited replays until Mar 21. ONLINE


● Feb 03 8:00: The Music Gallery. Turnandbenatoule. Amahli Arulannadam, cello; Yang Chen, percussion; Sara Constant, flute; Emilie Fortin, trumpet. Visit turnandbenatoule.com. Also Feb 4. ONLINE

● Feb 05 7:00: VOICEBOX. Opera in Concert. The Voice / La voix. Text by Jean Cocteau. Music by François Poulenç. Double bill of Jean Cocteau’s one-act play The Voice and Franc- ois Poulenç’s opera La voix humaine. Chilina Kennedy, actor (Elle); Mariam Khalil, soprano (Elle); Narmina Afandiyeva, piano; Guillerme Silva-Marin, stage director. Visit operaconcen- t.com. Available Feb 5-19, 2021. ONLINE


● Feb 10 4:00: Jay Gordon Wright. You Are a Star: Original songs written & performed by Jay Gordon Wright. Jay Gordon Wright, piano, guitar, drums, violin. Call 647-343-5965. Free. ONLINE

● Feb 14 7:00: Mississauga Arts Coun- cil. Hazel - A Celebration: 100 Years in 100 Minutes. A celebration to honour for- mer Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion. Septet in E-flat Op.20; Schubert: String Trio in E-flat D747; Emilie LeBel: Haareus auf morschem Holz (Hair Ice on Rotten Wood). Visit TSO.ca/ondemand or call 416-598-3575. Available until Mar 4. ONLINE

● Feb 16 7:30: Royal Conservatory of Music. Livestream Concerts: Rebands Family Fellow- ship Concert Series. Call 416-408-0208 or visit rcmusic.com/performance. Free. ONLINE


● Feb 16 1:00: John DeCani. Recorded music from St. Lawrence Quartet. Visit sinfoniatoronto.com. $15. LIVESTREAM ONLINE


● Feb 18 8:00: Tafelmusik Baroque Orches- tra. Seicento. Cazzati: Capriccio sopra sette note; Kapsperger: Sinfonias & Canario; Fal- conieri: Canon detta l'infante archibazzarz, Passacalle & Giosaona; Marini: Capriccio, Passacala & Sonata sopra la Monica; Gab- rieli: Sonata a violoncello solo; and other works. Elisa Citterio, director & curator. Visit info@tafelmusik.org or call 1-833-864-8337. ONLINE

● Feb 19 7:00: Music Gallery. Turnandbenatoule. Amahli Arulannadam, cello; Yang Chen, percussion; Sara Constant, flute; Emilie Fortin, trumpet. Visit turnandbenatoule.com. Also Feb 4. ONLINE

● Feb 21 8:00: Royal Conservatory of Music. Sunday Interlude Series David Louis, harp- sichord. Call 416-408-0208 or visit rcmusic.com/performance. Free. ONLINE


● Feb 26 8:00: Royal Conservatory of Music. RCO Concerts Series: Johannes Debus conducts the Royal Conservatory Orchestra. Brahms: Violin Concerto in D Op.77; Haydn: Symphony No.98 in G Hob.I:98; Bartók: The Miraculous Mandarin Op.19a BB82 Sz.73a (suite from pantomime). Koerner Hall, TELUS Centre, 273 Bloor St. W. Call 416-408-0208 or visit rcmusic.com/performance. $25-$60. TO BE CONFIRMED

● Feb 27 7:00: Kindred Spirits Orches- tra. Dark and Light. Shostakovich: Cello Concerto No.1; Scriabin: Symphony No. 2. Amahli Arulannadam, cello; Kristian Alexan- der, conductor. Call 905-604-8339 or visit KSOrchestra.ca. $15 per link. Includes dis- cussion with Amahli Arulannadam and KSO Associate Conductor Michael Berec. ONLINE

● Feb 27 8:00: Tapestry Opera. Our Song D’Hver: Mireille Asselin, soprano. Visit l2zma.net/live/kys2d/cx49f/kyho0j. Free. ONLINE

● Mar 05 8:00: Royal Conservatory of Music. Music Mix Series: Skratch Bastid and DJ Qbert. Call 416-408-0208 or visit rcmusic.com/performance. ONLINE

● Mar 07 3:00: Trio Arkel. La Bonne Chan- son. Beethoven: String Trio in G; Shostakov- itch: String Quartet No.1; Vaughan Williams: On Wenlock Edge; Fauré: La Bonne Chan- son. Marie Bérard, violin; Winona, Zeleka, cello; Russell Braun; baritone; Carolyn Muyle; piano; Rémi Pelletier; viola. Email admin@trioarkel.com for information. ONLINE


● Mar 13 7:00: Rezonance Baroque Ensem- ble. Musique de Chambre. Chamber music by François Couperin and others. Rezan Onen- Lapointe, baroque violin; David Podgorski, harpsichord. Visit rezonancefrench.event- brite.com or call 647-779-5696. $10. ONLINE

Events by Date


- Feb 07 1:30: Stéphane Potvin. Renaissance Songs and Dances Workshop. Stéphane Potvin, conductor and presenter. Visit tempotoronto.net or call 416-537-6811. ONLINE

- Arts@Home. A vibrant hub connecting Torontonians to arts and culture. Designed to strengthen personal and societal resilience through the arts. Visit artsathome.ca to learn more about this exciting collaborative initiative. ONLINE

- Esprit Orchestra. Soundbites: Zosha di Castri - Serifiniana. This performance was recorded by Esprit Orchestra in Koerner Hall on May 25, 2014. Conducted by Alex Pauk, and featuring Claudia Shaer on amplified violin, and Sanya Eng on amplified harp. Visit espiritorchestra.com. ONLINE

- Kevin Barrett. Live from Lockdown. Kevin Barrett does a live-streamed set of solo guitar tunes, coming directly from lockdown in his studio in Kensington Market, Toronto. Tune in to Kevin’s Facebook page on Friday at facebook.com/kevin.barrett165470. ONLINE

- Recollectiv: A unique musical online meeting group made up of people affected by memory challenges caused by illness (such as dementia) or brain injury (stroke, PTSD, etc.) and their care partners. Members of all ages also form part of the band, providing a positive intergenerational experience for all. Participation is free with pre-registration.

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In the two months since the last issue so much, and yet so little, has happened that it’s hard to know where to begin. One true highlight was spending a week savoring Welsh writer and musicologist Paul Griffiths’ latest novel Mr. Beethoven. I received an inscribed copy of the small press UK edition sent just before Christmas by the author, but I’ll wait to write about that, and the music it led me to, until later this year when the book is released in North America.

I suppose the best place to start is with old friends. During my tenure as host and producer of Transfigured Night (1984-1991) at CKLN-FM, I became interested in the field of electronic music, to the extent of becoming a founding member of the Canadian Electroacoustic Community (CEC). On a trip to Montreal in 1986, for a conference that led to the establishment of that national organization, I met and became friends with a number of movers and shakers in that rarified field, including Jean-François Denis, who went on to found the internationally renowned empreintes DIGITALEs (electrocd.com). At time of writing, the Montreal-based label has 171 releases featuring the most distinguished practitioners of electroacoustics, acousmatiques and musique concrète from around the world. While at CKLN, I commissioned radiophonic works from a dozen composers, one of the most successful of which was Figures de la nuit/Faces of the Night by Francis Dhomont. Since the late 1940s working with magnetic wire recorders in Paris – one of the first exponents of what Pierre Henry would later call musique concrète – Dhomont has been a pioneer of electroacoustic composition, and has worked exclusively in fixed media (i.e. magnetic tape and its digital progeny) since the 1970s. From 1978 until 2004, Dhomont split his time between France and Quebec, where he taught for 16 years at the Université de Montréal. I am pleased to see, as witnessed by the recent CD Images nomades (IMED 20167), that at the age of 94 Dhomont is still active in his studio in Avignon, France. This release includes three recent works – a particular favourite is Perpetuum mobile (Pluies fantômes) – plus a cycle of 15 shorter tributes to friends and colleagues such as composers Bernard Parmegiani and Jony Harrison he calls Ami-versaires – composed between 2002 and 2020. This and the dozen or so discs of Dhomont’s music available from empreintes DIGITALEs confirm him not only as a pioneer in the field, but also as a master of his craft.

A new ATMA release – Krzysztof Penderecki featuring Quatuor Molinari (ACD2 2736 atmaclassique.com/en) – also feels like an old friend. Although I did meet Penderecki on several occasions, I did not have the opportunity to get to know him. But I have met founding violinist Olga Ranzenhofer and through her the quartet’s namesake, the late painter Guido Molinari, both of whom I would consider friends. This latest disc in the Molinari’s extensive catalogue includes Penderecki’s two early avant-garde string quartets from 1960 and 1968 with their graphic scores and extended techniques, and the much later, more conservative String Quartet No.3 “Leaves from an Unwritten Diary” from 2008, a kind of autobiographical reminiscence replete with references to earlier works. Being familiar with these from a number of recordings, particularly those of Kitchener-Waterloo’s Penderecki String Quartet, of more interest to me are the in-between works included here, that give a kind of context to the transition from angry young man of the 60s to the successful gentleman of his later years. They include the brief movement for string quartet, The Broken Thought (1988), the String Trio (1990) and a Quartet for Clarinet and String Trio (1993). The trio opens aggressively but gradually subsides into variations on Penderecki’s signature descending-note motif. The clarinet piece begins gently, and even in its more strident moments is playful and melodic. Clarinetist André Moisan proves to be the perfect foil for the members of the Molinari, whose playing, as always, is exemplary in its expressivity. A fitting tribute to Penderecki, who died in late March, 2020 after a long illness (not related to the coronavirus). He was 86.

My first exposure to Penderecki’s clarinet quartet was on a Sony recording from the 1993 Penderecki Gala celebrating the composer’s 60th birthday. That performance featured, among others, the exceptional American violinist Kim Kashkashian, who is a key player on one of two recent ECM releases that I’ve spent a lot of time with over the past two months (ecmrecords.com/shop).

Kashkashian is joined by eight other A-list musicians, who mostly share her Armenian heritage, on Con Anima (ECM New Series 2687), devoted to the chamber music of Tigran Mansurian, an Armenian composer born in 1939. Again the highlights include a String Trio and a clarinet quartet, Agnus Dei. The clarinet is accompanied by violin, cello and piano in this instance and this is the only work on which Kashkashian does not appear. The earliest piece on the disc is String Quartet No.3, dating from 1993, which Kashkashian performs with violinists Movses Pogossian, Varty Manouelian and cellist Michael Kaufman. Two recent works from 2015 and 2016 are duos: Die Tänzerin where Kashkashian is joined by Manouelian and Sonata da Chiesa with pianist Tatevik Makatsian. Mansurian’s music is characterized by restrained pointillism, subtle rhythms and delicate impressionistic beauty. Most of his works begin and end quietly, as in the opening Agnus Dei, dedicated to the memory of violinist Oleg Kagan, which sets the tone for the entire disc. Contrary to expectation, the title work Con anima (in a spirited manner), is no exception. Completed in 2007, this string sextet, which adds former TSO principal violin Teng Li and cellist Karen Ouzounian to the string players noted above, is a gosh on Shostakovich’s String Quartet No.15 in which the viola dominates. That role is given here to first violin Kashkashian, whose gorgeous dark tone leads the others on a transformative journey. A brilliant, subdued and contemplative disc, perfect for our troubled times.

The other ECM release, Lost Prayers (ECM New Series 2666), features chamber works by Estonian composer Erkki-Sven Tüür. I had the pleasure of meeting Tüür several times, when he was in Toronto for the Border Crossings Festival in 1990, and again in 2010 when he was featured on a Soundstreams concert. This disc is book-ended by two piano trios effectively performed by Harry Traksman (violin), Leho Karin (cello) and Marrit Geritz-Traksman (piano) which are the earliest and latest works presented. The dramatic Fata Morgana (2002) is a quasi moto perpetuo whereas Lichtturrye (2017) is relatively introspective. Although rollicking string ostinati echoes of the former work emerge from time to time, the latter begins and ends with a sense of calm. The same can be said of Synergie (2011) featuring violinist Florian Donderer and cellist Tanja Tetzlaff. Written the following year, String...
Quartet No.2 “Lost Prayers,” performed here by the Signum Quartet, is atypical of Tüür’s output, at least thematically. His focus is more often identified by “rational-systematic designations” as in his series of Architectonics pieces (the fourth of which was commissioned by Toronto’s Sound Pressure and premiered here in 1990). In the quartet, Tüür says, “I tried to imagine a cloud of cries for help – from believers, non-believers, people of different traditions, of different periods of history. Are these cries lost? The music is dealing with the energetic field of the accumulation of these spontaneous outcries.” Fitting music for these distressing times, hauntingly performed. With ECM founder Manfred Eichmann’s characteristic concern for pristine sound, the disc was recorded in Bremen’s acoustically responsive Sendesaal, a venue that gained international attention in audiophile circles in 1973 when ECM released Keith Jarrett’s Solo Concerts: Bremen/Lausanne.

Very different from the quiet and meditative offerings from ECM is a new release from the Centre International Albert Roussel in Ravello, France. Olivier Greif – A Tale of the World (CC 002 ciar@free.fr) is a 48 minute piano quintet performed by Quintette Syntonia. It is a truly remarkable work integrating texts in Sanskrit, Elizabethan and modern English, Italian, French and German, meant to be spoken, sung and chanted by the musicians, all while playing their instruments with virtuosity. Greif (1950 -2000) began his studies at the Paris Conservatoire and continued them at the Juilliard School in New York. His first creative period (in the sense of Western art music) lasted from 1961 through 1981 when he became a disciple of the Indian spiritual master Sri Chinmoy. During the next decade, the bulk of his creativity went to composing devotional songs on Chinmoyo’s texts and writing small piano pieces dedicated to friends. In 1991 he returned to “classical” composition and in 1994 was commissioned to write this remarkable quintet by a festival in Kuhmo, Finland. Originally scheduled for premiere that year, the first performance was postponed for health reasons and A Tale of the World was not heard until 1996 when performed by Jean-François Heisser and the Sibillus Quartet. The Syntonia Quintet was founded in 1999 and had the opportunity to work briefly with Greif before his death the following year. The meeting had a profound effect on the young musicians who were then studying at the Paris Conservatoire. They have gone on to become champions of contemporary music and have recorded a number of Greif’s works, including String Quartet No.2 with voice “On Three Sonnets by Shakespeare” and the Ulysses Quartet which they premiered. In 2020, after years of preparation, they felt ready to record A Tale of the World, with its “wall of sound” textures sometimes reminiscent of the Ramayana Monkey Chant from Bali juxtaposed with moments of extreme delicacy and beauty; they realized this goal in late February just before COVID-19 overtook the world. A stunning achievement.

Sono Luminus has just completed its project with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra under Daniel Bjarnason. Volume Three: Occurrence (sonoluminus.com) includes Bjarnason’s own Violin Concerto, the atmospheric Lendh by young Canadian expatriate Veronique Vaka and works by Haikur Tomasson, Pállur Jónsdóttir and Magnús Blöndal Johannsson. Bjarnason’s concerto opens eerily with the soloist whistling high-pitched tones accompanied by sparse pizzicato notes before the violin melody begins in earnest. Later in the piece the quiet whistling returns, effectively trading off of “whistle tones” produced with harmonics high up the neck of the solo instrument. The effective cadenza was composed by the soloist Pekka Kuisisto. Vaka’s body of work “intends to create a poetic context between what she sees, hears and feels in the unspoiled nature” and this is obvious from the dramatic opening low chords of double basses and percussion in Lendh, reminiscent of calving icebergs. After its premiere during the Dark Music Days festival in January 2019, it went on to receive nominations for Composition of the Year in the Icelandic Music Awards and the Nordic Council Music Prize. Whistle tones, mentioned above, are more often created on the flute than on string instruments, and we hear these and other extended flute techniques, along with an insect-like electronic soundtrack, interacting with the orchestra in Jónsdóttir’s Flutter with soloist Mario Caroli. The disc ends with its most traditional piece, the breathtakingly beautiful Adagio for strings, celesta and percussion by Jóhannsson, a work that marked his return to composition in 1980 after a troubled decade following the death of his wife. Its quiet grandeur evokes in me visions of a still Arctic landscape during an endless night, and brings this orchestral tribute to the music of Iceland to a fitting close.

London-native Anna Clyne (b.1980) has impeccable credentials. She has served as composer-in-residence for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, L’Orchestre national d’Île-de-France and Berkeley Symphony. She is currently the Scottish Chamber Orchestra’s Associate Composer and a mentor composer for Orchestra of St Luke’s DeGaetano Composer Institute. 2020 saw the release of a portrait disc Mythologies (Avie AV1434 avierecords.com), featuring five works performed live by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the direction of four distinguished conductors including Marin Alsop and Andrew Litton. It opens with bombastic drama in the form of Masquerade, commissioned by BBC Radio 3 to open the Last Night of the Proms in 2013, and continues in much the same vein with This Midnight Hour. The centrepiece is an intriguing violin concerto titled The Seemstress. Unusual for Clyne, the work is based on a 12-note row, but more interesting is the whispered, almost inaudible recitation of William Butler Yeats’ stanza. A Coat, late in the work. ("I made my song a coat/ Covered with embroideries/Out of old mythologies...") Jennifer Koh is in stellar form as soloist, with Irene Buckley the speaker. The last two works return to the bombast of the opening with the stormy Night Ferry and the unrelenting <rewind>. All in all, an exhilarating introduction to a composer I look forward to hearing more from soon. ❇️

We invite submissions. CDs, DVDs and comments should be sent to: DISCoveries, WholeNote Media Inc., The Centre for Social Innovation, 503 – 720 Bathurst St. Toronto ON M5S 2R4

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Krzysztof Penderecki String Quatuets Molinari Quartet

This album presents Penderecki’s major chamber music works, including three string quartets, a clarinet quartet, a string trio, and some short pieces for strings.
In 2017, cellist Matt Haimovitz was working on the Poulenc Sonate with a student when he tripped and fell, breaking his 1710 Venetian Matteo Goffriller cello – his “friend” – and breaking the neck clean off the body. Following 15 months of painstaking repair, MON AMI, Mon amour is the first CD on which Haimovitz and his cello are reunited, accompanied by Mari Kodama in a recital of French music (PENTATONE Oxingale PTC 5186 816 naxosdirect.com/search/ptc5186816).

That same Poulenc Sonate opens a disc which includes the Debussy Sonata, Faure’s Papillon and Apres un rêve, Milhaud’s Élégie and Nadia Boulanger’s Trois pièces. Completing the program are Haimovitz’s own arrangements of Ravel’s Kaddish and the Deux pieces pour violon et piano by Nadia’s younger sister Lili Boulanger, the latter work featuring terrific agility and technique in the highest register by Haimovitz.

Recorded in June 2019 with “no worry of social distancing and masks,” an outstanding CD is complemented by Haimovitz’s excellent booklet notes, written in Montreal in June 2020 after four months of quarantine and highlighting the stifling restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Ginastera – Bernstein – Moussa violinist and OSM concertmaster Andrew Wan presents three major works with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal under Kent Nagano (Analekta AN 28920 analeka.com/en).

Alberto Ginastera’s Violin Concerto Op.30 from 1963 makes for an interesting opening to the CD. Ostensibly in three movements, it consists of 11 short sections. An opening Cadenza is followed by six extremely brief Studies and a Coda, an Adagio for 22 Soloists acting as a second movement before a Scherzo pianissimo and a Perpetuum mobile provide a two-part third. The soundscape is very much mid-20th century, reminiscent of Berg at times and with more than a hint of the Barber concerto in the Perpetuum mobile.

Bernstein’s Serenade for Solo Violin, Strings, Harp and Percussion (after Plato’s Symposium), from 1954, is an attractive five-part work described by the composer as a series of related statements in praise of love, inspired by his reading of the Plato work.

Samy Moussa was born in Montreal in 1984. His Violin Concerto “Adrano,” written in 2019 on an OSM commission, was inspired by a visit to Mount Etna. Adrano being an ancient fire god said to have lived beneath the volcano. It’s a very effective and accessible work of four relatively brief sections.

Wan is a terrific player, handling the varying stylistic and technical challenges with impressive ease on a fascinating CD.

The English violinist Charlie Siem is in great form on Between the clouds, ably supported by his regular recital partner Itamar Golan in a recital of light but never insubstantial pieces (Signum Classics SIGCD652 naxosdirect.com/search/sigcd652).

Siem has just the right blend of virtuosity, style and taste to show these charming works at their best, playing with effortless ease throughout a delightful disc. There are three pieces by Wieniawski – Légende Op.17, Polonaise No.1 Op.4 and Polonaise Brillante No.2 Op.21 – and five by Kreisler: Tambourin chinois Op.3; Recitatif et Scherzo-Caprice Op.6 and Three Alt-Wiener Tanzwerzen – Schön Rosmarin, Liebesfreud and Liebesleid. Edgar’s Chanson de Matin and Chanson de nuit, Saraste’s Introduction et Tarantelle, Paganini’s Cantabile, Godowsky’s Alt Wien (in the Helenfetz arrangement) and the Chaconne attributed to Vitali fill out a dazzling program that ends with Siem’s own arrangement of Britten’s gentle The Sally Gardens.

Siem draws a rich, warm tone from his 1735 Guarneri del Gesú “D’Egville” violin on an absolute gem of a CD.

Lucy Russell, the leader of the Fitzwilliam String Quartet, is the violinist on Beethoven Violin Sonatas, accompanied on forte-piano by Sezi Seskir in performances of the Sonatas No.4 in A Minor Op.23, No.5 in F Major Op.24 “Spring” and No.6 in A Major Op.30/1 (Acis APL29582 acisproductions.com).

Despite the CD’s title these works were originally designated (as were similar compositions at the time) as being for keyboard with accompanying violin, and the excellent balance here never lets the violin dominate.

Both players are equally at home on modern or period instruments, which seems to add an extra dimension to the playing in the period set-up here: the fortepiano is a Thomas and Barbara Wolf copy of a Johann Schanz instrument; the violin a Ferdinando Gagliano from the late 1700s with an open gut D string in addition to the A and E, and a John Dodd bow.

The performances are absolutely top-drawer, simply bursting with life and with excellent ensemble work, great dynamics and virtuosity galore.

Violinist Jennifer Koh completes her outstanding solo series Bach & Beyond with Part 3 Bach – Harbison – Berio, a 2CD set priced as a single disc and featuring Bach’s Sonatas No.2 in A Minor BWV1003 and No.3 in C Major BWV1005, Luciano Berio’s Sequenza VIII for solo violin from 1976 and John Harbison’s For Violin Alone, written for Koh in 1999 (Cedille Records CDR 90000199 cedillerecords.org).

CD1 has the A-minor sonata and the Berio work, the latter a tribute to the Claude Monet’s painting of the same name, the world-premiere recording of the Harbison, a seven-movement dance suite that is closer in
spirit to the Bach partitas than the four-movement sonatas. Koh, as always, is faultless in her technique and sensitive and intelligent in her interpretations.

Based on her recital series of the same name, Koh’s three-volume Bach & Beyond set has brilliantly realized her desire to “strengthen the connection between our past and present worlds through a historical journey.” It’s an outstanding addition to the solo violin discography.

The two Bach works turn up again on 3 Violin Sonatas, a simply superb CD with classical guitarist Yuri Liberzon playing the Bach Unaccompanied Violin Sonatas in G Minor BWV1001, A Minor BWV1003 and C Major BWV1005 in transcriptions by Liberzon’s former teacher Manuel Barrueco (Laudable Records yuriguitar.com).

The transcriptions faithfully follow the Bach Gesellschaft Edition with very few additions or digressions; there’s the occasional filling-out of a chord or of an implied harmony, a pedal note allowed to sound through the bar or an octave change in the bass, but essentially the music runs as written, particularly in the fast linear movements.

In fact, at times it sounds even better than with violin. The multiple stops – particularly the triple and quadruple stops – present huge technical challenges for the violinist, especially when the melodic line runs through the middle, but on the guitar the issue presents less of a problem, the three Fuga movements in particular sounding smoother, cleaner and more clearly defined.

With beautifully clean playing, outstanding definition and line, a lovely variation of tonal colour and a perfect recorded sound, Liberzon gives a performance that fulfills all the technical and interpretative requirements that this challenging music demands. It’s an immensely satisfying musical experience on every level.

On Leo Brouwer – The Book of Imaginary Beings: The Music of Leo Brouwer for Two Guitars, the Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo of American guitarists Laura Oltman and Michael Newman celebrate not only their 40th anniversary season but also the world-premiere recording of Brouwer’s new guitar duet El Libro de los Seres Imaginarios, the centrepiece of a CD dedicated to his works for two guitars (Musicmasters Classics CD 1001 musicmastersclassics.com). Beattierianas consists of quite beautiful arrangements of The Fool on the Hill and She’s Leaving Home, credited to Lennon & McCartney but essentially two of Paul McCartney’s loveliest songs. Música Incidental Campesina from 1978 is a series of extremely short vignettes – about one minute each – inspired by Cuban folk music.

The four-movement title work from 2018 portrays figures from the book of the same name by the Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges. It is dedicated to the duo, who describe it as “an entirely Latin American creation, wildly intense and softly intimate.”

Superb playing, perfectly recorded, makes for a captivating, albeit at 28 minutes a disappointingly short, CD.

On Art of the Mandolin the brilliant Avi Avital presents original compositions for the instrument that span almost 300 years (Deutsche Grammophon 00289 483 8534 deutschegrammophon.com/en/catalogue). Vivaldi is represented by his Concerto in G Major for 2 Mandolins, Strings and Basso continuo, Avital being joined by Alon Sariel on second mandolin and the Venice Baroque Orchestra. Beethoven’s Adagio ma non troppo in E-flat Major WoO43/2 for Mandolin and Harpsichord or Harp features Anneleen Lenaerts on harp, with the other early work being Domenico Scarlatti’s Sonata In D Minor K89 for Mandolin and Basso continuo. In the latter work Avital is joined by several players who feature in the remaining contemporary works: Death is a Friend of Ours for Mandolin, Guitar, Harp, Theorbo and Harpsichord by David Bruce (b.1970), Sonata a tre for Mandolin, Guitar and Harpsichord by Paul Ben-Haim (1897–1984) and Carillon, Récitatif, Masque for Mandolin, Guitar and Harp by Hans Werner Henze (1926–2012). The terrific Prelude for Solo Mandolin by Giovanni Sollima (b.1962) with its southern Italian folk dance styles completes the disc.

Touch Harmonious (In a Circle Records ICRO18 incircle-records.com) is the second solo album from Brooklyn Rider and Silk Road Ensemble violinist Nicholas Cords, following his 2012 CD Recursions. Much of the work on the CD was done when the COVID-19 situation was developing, and the album’s title is taken from a 1740 Samuel Johnson epitaph for a musician that, says Cords, reminds us that music’s power to soothe and heal is essential.

Cords’ arrangement of the Prelude by viola da gamba virtuoso Carl Friedrich Abel opens the CD, with Bach’s Cello Suite No.1 in G Major BWV1007 and Handel’s Rinaldo aria Lascia ch’io panga in Toshio Hosokawa’s arrangement closing the recital. Inspired by Rostropovich’s Bach playing, Britten’s Cello Suite No.3 Op.87, in a transcription by Nobuko Imai, is at the heart of the CD, surrounded by Anna Clyne’s Rest These Hands and world-premiere recordings of two works written specifically for this album: Dana Lynn’s endlessly I would have walked, and Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky’s Short Epitaph.
based on the *La Folia* progression. Cords is in great form throughout this fascinating program, technically superb and with a clear, warm tone across the whole range of his instrument.

On *Babel*, the new CD from the Calidore String Quartet, the focus is the desire “to explore the innate human drive for communication” and also to explore what happens when music substitutes for language (*Sigurdur Sigurmundsson*, 2018). The result is a work that is highly profound and with a clear, warm tone across the whole range of his instrument.

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*Hyperion CDA68318*)

Hyperion CDA68318

Vocal

Machaut – The Lion of Nobility
Orlando Consort
Hyperion CDA68318

( hyperion-records.co.uk/dc.asp?dc = D_CDA68318 )

| Guillaume de Machaut’s status as the 14th century’s greatest composer is borne out by the respect in which he was held by his contemporary musicians as well as by the list of aristocratic patrons who supported him. One such patron, King John II of France, must surely have been the Lion of Nobility alluded to in the title of this CD; his capture at the battle of Poitiers in 1356 personified the massive English victory.

So it is that *En demantant et lamentant* comprises the longest track on this CD. (At a whisker under 18 minutes, it is an eternity by early music standards!) There are no choruses in this composition, as Machaut commences his powerful lament for King John’s fate. He sums up his own distress as he recounts his sad task, going on to describe the King’s bravery: “A lion of nobility in good times, leopard of ferocity in adversity…” Listen to the Orlando Consort as they unravel Machaut’s text, the countertenor part being sung by a disinterested Irene; and Bruno Taddia, in the lead role of Irene; and Bruno Taddia, in the lead role of Irene.

Of course, there are other compositions. *Dame, se nous m’estes lointaine* is a rarely, a monophonic composition, since Machaut is famous for his highly profound polyphonic pieces. Even stranger is his *Moul sui de bonne heure nee* – written from a woman’s perspective. And, yes, the lady is as passionate and romantic in her love for her lover as the male nobles are for their ladies.

Overall, however, Machaut’s tribute to King John dominates this CD. Much as Machaut dominated 14th-century music.

Michael Schwartz

*Vocal*
Vivaldi – Luce e Ombra
Myriam Leblanc; Ensemble Mirabilia
Analekta AN 2 9137
(analekta.com/en/albums)

Mirabilia have paired two apparently conflicting emotions. From the start Leblanc displays a real range of emotions. There is a jarring interpretation of Gelido in ogni vena reflecting the coldness identified in its title. This is supported by the ensemble’s flute, Baroque triple harp and cello. No one can be in doubt of the icy quality of Vivaldi’s score.

Exactly personifying Vivaldi’s contrasts is the chirpiness of Ercole Sul Termomonte. This draws on the flute-playing of Grégoire Jay, which in turn forms an excellent and equally challenging accompaniment to the soprano. The musicians have made a balanced selection from the Red Priest’s works. Arsilda, regina di Ponte continues the lively tones of light (rather than shade) around which this CD is formed. Again, the Baroque flute is prominent, but it should not disguise the intensity of the other parts.

This CD shows how deeply the musicians have looked into Vivaldi’s repertoire. The Ombra aspect of his work is prominent, but it should not disguise the intensity of the other parts.

This reviewer congratulates her on her first recording and wishes her many more.

Michael Schwartz

Solfeggio: Handel; Vivaldi; Vinci; Bach; Mozart
Hélène Brunet; L’Harmonie des saisons;
Eric Milnes
ATMA ACD2 2808 (atmaclassique.com/en)

Solfeggio is a well-balanced album, mixing rite-of-passage pieces such as Bach’s Schafe können sicher weiden and Mozart’s Alleluja with other Bach, Mozart and Vivaldi favourites. Brunet also offers two world-premiere recordings of arias by Leonardo Vinci, an Italian composer better known for his opera compositions.

Solfeggio opens with Handel’s dynamic aria Scoglio d’innomata fronte, which sets the tone for the rest of the album. Brunet’s impeccable technique is matched only by the beauty, warmth and fullness of her timbre in all of her vocal registers. Vivaldi’s Juditha triumphans is especially noteworthy, for the lone harpsichord accompaniment serves to highlight Brunet’s beautiful tone before she launches into a fully accompanied aria that requires great vocal gymnastics. The eponymous title, Mozart’s Solfeggio No.2, is an etude most likely written for Constanze Mozart in the early 1780s. The Solfeggio pieces (five in total) all require precise technique, which Brunet demonstrates in spades when she sings trills at very slow speed and sings the most lyrical of high notes.

Solfeggio should garner Brunet well-earned praise and a place of choice amongst other notable singers of the Baroque and Classical traditions.

Sophie Bisson

Lieder: Robert Schumann; Johannes Brahms
Elina Garanča; Malcolm Martineau
Deutsche Grammophon 4839210
(deutschegrammophon.com/en/catalogue)

The great Latvian mezzo-soprano, Elina Garanča, is already a legend in our time and for the last 20 years has conquered most opera repertoire, moving towards more and more complex dramatic roles. Her opera recordings are numerous and all have become runaway bestsellers.

This time however, she is turning towards the German lieder repertoire in contrast to opera. Here she can scale down her voice, become soft and intimate, where “three notes on the piano and an intricate melody can mean the world” (Garanča). For this purpose she teamed up with Scottish pianist Malcolm Martineau, himself a sensitive and brilliant accompanist ideal for the Romantic world of these songs. Composers chosen were Schumann and Brahms, whose careers intertwined in more ways than one (e.g. the love triangle of Robert and Clara Schumann with the young Brahms).

The opening selection is Schumann’s Frauenliebe und -leben, a series of eight songs chronicling, step by step, a woman falling in love with a man. Beginning with love at first sight (Seit ich ihn gesehen) and admiration of her lover (Er, der Herrlichste von allen) to renaming her girlish pleasures and finally total surrender (An meinem Herzen), engagement (Du Ring en meinem Finger), marriage and presumed consummation (emotionally each song is a world in itself and Garanča always finds the right expression and mood through her wonderful intonation, inflection and her perfect German diction. Similarly for the other 13 love songs, although “Brahms is more down to earth, earnest and...”

What we’re listening to this month: thewholenote.com/listening

FLIGHTS OF FANCY
Jan Järvlepp
Fusing European and American traditions, composer Jan Järvlepp’s FLIGHTS OF FANCY pairs the excitement of rock and jazz rhythms with classical music forms.

Nature
Fie Schouen
The compositions on this CD belong together since each work is inspired by nature or natural phenomena. Each track guides the eye upwards.

One Fine Morning
Denise Leslie
Romantic! Premiering Valentines’ Day is my video featuring Bob McAlpine on guitar performing Little River Band’s classic “Reminiscing” from ONE FINE MORNING! Enjoy: youtu.be/vTaDAJIR8SLU
sincere exploring different states of mind and his beloved nature e.g. Die Mainacht, O kühler Wald” (her words again). Garanca is most impressed by the beautiful harmonic writing that influences her interpretations. Very rewarding listening.  

Janos Gardonyi

Donizetti – L’Ange de Nisida
Soloists; Orchestra e Coro Donizetti Opera; Jean-Luc Tingaud
Dynamic 37848 (naxosdirect.com/search/8007144378486)

In Search of a “Lost” Opera is the title of musicologist Candida Mantica’s detailed account in the booklet describing how she solved “the jigsaw puzzle” of L’Ange de Nisida’s “dismembered” manuscript score and libretto. Commissioned by the Paris Théâtre de la Renaissance, Donizetti completed the opera in 1839. Its première was cancelled when the theatre went bankrupt, so the resourceful composer incorporated parts of the score into La Favorite for its December 1840 opening at the Paris Opéra. L’Ange de Nisida remained unheard until 2018 at a concert performance in London; this 2019 production at Bergamo’s Donizetti Opera Festival is its first-ever staged presentation.

Leone, a fugitive after fighting a duel in 15th-century Naples, flees to the island of Nisida, unaware that his beloved Sylvia, called "the angel of Nisida" for her kindness, is King Fernand’s captive mistress. Spoiler alert: no happy ending.

The unconventional, theatre-in-the-round production has the soloists in modern dress, Sylvia sometimes wearing angel wings, the stage illuminated with symbolic projections, strewn with lots of paper representing Mantica’s “jigsaw puzzle.”

Musically, this two-DVD set is enthralling, Donizetti’s endlessly melodious score thrillingly sung by soprano Lidia Fridman (Sylvia), tenor Konu Kim (Leone), baritone Florian Sempey (Fernand), bass-baritone Roberto Lorenzi (Gaspar, Fernand’s chamberlain) and bass Federico Benetti (the Monk who denounces Fernand’s illicit affair). Conductor Jean-Luc Tingaud generates real excitement from the chorus and orchestra, adding to the unique pleasure of witnessing the long-delayed, world-premiere staging of a very entertaining Donizetti opera.

Michael Schulman

Massenet – Don Quichotte
Gábor Bretz; David Stout; Anna Goryachova; Wiener Symphoniker; Daniel Cohen
C#major 754008 (naxosdirect.com/search/814337015404)

If Jules Massenet was discouraged by the scorn that fellow French composers and musicians poured upon his work, he showed no sign of it in lyrical new works infused with emotion. And while it is true that all of his compositions seemed to eschew the Wagnerian sense of drama, his work – especially later pieces such as Don Quichotte – could explore and evoke strong emotions.

It is somewhat curious that this late opera often hardly merits a mention in the scores of tomes dedicated to the dramatic art. Mariame Clément’s brilliant staging of it ought to alter this somewhat unfair historical narrative. This version of Don Quichotte, with Henri Cain’s libretto (after Jacques Le Lorrain’s Le chevalier de la longue figure) has been exquisitely recreated in this 2019 production and the Weiner Symphoniker directed by Daniel Cohen breathes new life into Massenet’s last opera.

After briefly referencing the original finale of drama, Clément reset the story in a meaningful contemporary manner. With stark yet innovative sets, dramatic lighting and of course, lyrical, beautifully paced and theatrical music, this melodious dramatic tragicomedy lives again. The masterstroke is the casting; delivered here with a dazzling performance by Anna Goryachova (Dulcinée). However, Gábor Bretz (Don Quichotte) and David Stout (Sancho) all but steal the show, especially in Écoute mon ami and in the glorious dénouement of Act V, L’Étoile! Dulcinée! Le temps d’amour a fui which makes for an evocatively tragic end.

Raul da Gama

André Messager – Fortunio
Cyrille Dubois; Anne-Catherine Gillet; Franck Legeur; Jean-Sebastien Bou; Philippe-Nicolas Martin; Choeur Les Eléments; Orchestre des Champs-Élysées; Louis Langrée
Naxos 2.110672 (naxosdirect.com/search/74731567256)

On June 5, 1907 André Messager, who had conducted the world première of Debussy’s Pelléas et Mélisande five years earlier, led the first performance of his own opérette Fortunio at the Paris Opéra Comique, with two leading members of the original Pelléas cast singing principal roles, and Debussy himself in the audience. Fortunio was a great success, remaining in the Opéra Comique’s repertoire until 1918, then inexplicably shelved until its 21st-century revival.

This 2019 Opéra Comique production delights both visually and musically. The attractive, fin-de-siècle sets and costumes are historically accurate, while Messager’s lovely, sentiment-laden score receives spirited performances from the excellent cast, led by the captivating lyric tenor Cyrille Dubois, wrenching emotions as Fortunio.

Jacqueline, the sex-deprived young wife of the much-older local notary André, begins an affair with Clavaroche, a lecherous army captain newly arrived in town. Another newcomer is Fortunio, a timid fellow from the sticks whose uncle brings him to his cousin Landry, one of André’s clerks, hoping Fortunio will accept a similar position. Reluctant at first, Fortunio agrees after glimpsing the beauteous Jacqueline. To allay her husband’s suspicions of her infidelity, Jacqueline enlists the smitten Fortunio to pose as an innocuous, lovelorn “decoy,” but she eventually succumbs to his heartfelt adoration, declaring her own true love for him.

How very French! Characteristically making light of adultery, with raunchy double entendres, erotic physical byplay, clandestine intrigues and endearing, charming music, Messager’s sugary confection Fortunio succeeds admirably in every way.

Michael Schulman

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Michael Schulman
Jaromír Weinberger – Frühlingsstürme
Soloists; Orchestra of the Komische Oper
Berlin; Jordan de Souza
Naxos 2.110677-78
(naxosdirect.com/search/2110677-78)

►When Frühlingsstürme opened in Berlin on January 20, 1933 it seemed to be another success for its celebrated composer, Jaromír Weinberger. But ten days later the Nazis took power, crushing the creative spirit of the Weimar Republic; Frühlingsstürme was shut down. This staging from January 2020 at the Komische Oper Berlin was the first since that precarious time. It too was shut down – by COVID-19. Fortunately, it was filmed. Frühlingsstürme is a dramatic spy story with a doomed love affair between a Russian widow and a Japanese general at its heart. The music is sophisticated and delightful. Gorgeous melodies draw on Weinberger’s Czech and Jewish heritage, and complex rhythms recall popular styles of the day like jazz, foxtrot and tango.

Barrie Kosky, the provocative Australian director who leads the Komische Oper, presents Weinberger’s operetta as an imaginative sequence of scenes taking place in and around an oversized, constantly transforming box. So an intimate duet like Traumversunken, liebestrunken can turn into a campy burlesque spectacle complete with a Busby Berkeley-style staircase and dancers wielding quivering ostrich feather fans. The cast is effective enough, with soprano Tansel Akzeybek’s well-placed tenor is lovely, though I can’t vouch for how successful each of these efforts has been, but I reckon it’s not an easy task, regardless of the instrument. (Even Robert Schumann, who wrote a piano accompaniment for all six Suites, had his arrangements rejected by his publisher.)

I can, however, vouch for the success of Bindman’s piano transcription, which is superb, embodying the true essence of the Suites, something she aspired to. As she states in her excellent liner notes, the “Suites didn’t need any improvement.”

Bindman maintains the majesty of Bach’s music, via both her transcription and her convincing command of the keyboard. Whether you’re a purist or a Bach devotee, this satisfying 2-CD set is worthy of a thoughtful listen.

Sharna Searle

Luigi Boccherini – Une nuit à Madrid
Les Ombres
Mirare MIR524 (mirare.fr)

►If Boccherini had never moved to Spain – ultimately regarding it as his native country – the world might have been denied much of his fine chamber music composed for the brother of King Charles III, the infante Don Luis. His move wasn’t entirely smooth – he referred to local musicians as “inveterate barbarians” – but the Spanish influence on his musical style was not an insignificant one, evident in such pieces as the renowned “Fandango” quintet, one of five quintets presented on this splendid Mirare recording performed by the Basel-trained ensemble, Les Ombres.

Of those featured here, three are for flute and strings – Nos.2, 4 and 5 from the set of six quintets Op.19. These are remarkable not only for their brevity (each comprises only two movements and is less than ten minutes in length) but for their diversity. The second

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has a dark and impassioned mood, while the fourth begins with a solemn adagio followed by a gentle minuet and the fifth is all roccoco grace.

Of greater scope is the four-movement Quintet G.448 in E Minor. Despite the inclusion of a guitar, there is no Spanish element to this music, but the instrumental blend is an appealing one and Les Ombres perform with a solid conviction, at all times maintaining a delicate balance among the instruments.

The highlight of the disc is surely the Quintet No. 4 G.448 known for its spirited Fandango finale. Performed with great panache – with the help of clacking castanets and Romaric Martin’s fine guitar playing – the movement is infused with Mediterranean exuberance – music that seems made for dancing!

Fine acoustics on this recording further enhance an exemplary performance throughout – bravo a todos!

Richard Haskell

André Grétry – L’Amant jaloux
Notturna; Christopher Palameta
ATMA ACD2 2797 (atmaclassique.com/en)

Among the most successful operatic composers in 18th-century France was Belgian-born André-Ernest Modeste Grétry (1741–1813). After studying in Rome, he arrived in France in 1767, and during the next 40 years, he enjoyed a career as a renowned composer and pedagogue.

Given the success of Grétry’s operas, and in keeping with the popular custom of the time, it was only natural that much of his dramatic music would eventually make its way from the opera house to both private salons and public gardens in the form of arrangements for small ensemble. It’s such an arrangement of music from his opera L’Amant jaloux (The Jealous Lover) that comprises the bulk of this fine ATMA recording featuring the six-member Montreal-based ensemble, Notturna, directed by oboist Christopher Palameta. The arranger is unknown, but it’s thought it may have been Grétry himself.

L’Amant jaloux was Grétry’s 23rd opera comique and met with resounding success when premiered in Versailles in 1778. While no doubt the score is unfamiliar to modern-day listeners, the music of this well-crafted arrangement is graceful and melodic while maintaining the spirit of the vocal originals. Throughout, Notturna delivers a polished performance with a fine balance among the instruments.

Following the suite is a quartet for oboe, violins and bass by François-André Phidilord and a brief ballet movement from Grétry’s 1783 opera La Caravane du Caire. Palameta’s sonorous and well-rounded tone further enhances this brief chamber-piece from 1755, while the closing ballet is a fine example of French courtly dance music before the fall of the Ancien Régime.

Kudos to Palameta and Notturna not only for some fine playing, but for helping bring to light some music that otherwise may have been overlooked.

Richard Haskell

Beethoven – Complete Sonatas for Piano & Violin on Historic Instruments
Jerilyn Jorgensen; Cullan Bryant
Abany Records TROY 1825-28 (albanyrecords.com)

Massachusetts, including an instrument built around 1805 by Casper Katholnig that had been part of the estate of the Esterházys in Eisenstadt and others by Joseph Brodmann, Johann Tröndlin and Ignaz Bösendorfer from Leipzig and Vienna. Jorgensen plays a violin built in 1797 by Andrea Carolus Leeb and employs a number of different historical bows. A great deal of care has been given to creating a specific sound world for the performance of each sonata and in all cases this produces an added element of a wide palette of aural colours that is missing from most modern instrument recordings of these brilliant works.

Unlike Beethoven’s string quartet output, which stretches across all the periods of his remarkable career, his ten sonatas for piano and violin were written in a shorter span of time – between 1797 and 1812. There are two sets of three sonatas each – Op.12 and Op.30 – and single sonatas Opp. 23, 24, 47 and 96. As the excellent liner notes to this CD collection point out, what make these sonatas so interesting is that they feature the two instruments that Beethoven played exceptionally well. He was an active violinist in his early life in Bonn and, of course, played piano throughout his life.

Each of these ten works is a strong, inventive, captivating piece that charts a growing independent compositional style, culminating with Op. 47 - the most famous sonata, dedicated to the French violinist and composer Rodolphe Kreutzer – and the powerful and unique Op.96 in G Major. Like the quartets, the early sonatas owe a great deal, formally and stylistically, to Mozart, Haydn and Antonio Salieri. As we move to the later works, Beethoven’s unique and original style – and all of those strong and contrasting voices that we appreciate so deeply – emerges.

The performances of Bryant and Jorgensen are of a uniformly high standard; risks are taken and, as mentioned above, the musical colours are vibrant. The early pianos also remind us of the percussive nature of the instrument and give a picture of what Beethoven was seeking with his articulation and dynamic markings. Many thanks to these two fine musicians for a thoughtful and musically satisfying recording.

Larry Beckwith

Beethoven 7; Leonore 3
Saito Kinen Orchestra; Seiji Ozawa

How wonderful that there is still a Seiji Ozawa! In celebration of the great conductor’s 85th birthday, here is a live recording of two favourites from the Beethoven shelf: the symphonic-sounding Ouverture to Leonore No.3, Op.72, and Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op.92.

Wagner described this symphony as “the apotheosis of the dance.” (The question of what Wagner might have known about dance is for another time and place.) Having seen Ozawa rehearse the Vienna Philharmonic, I can think of no more fitting piece for a celebration of his own style of leading. He literally looked like he was dancing the cues, his entire body conducting. That was almost two decades past, but I hope this very senior, venerable citizen can still cut a rug.

This is a keepsake as much as a recording, certainly for thousands of Ozawa partisans. It was taken from a live performance, featuring the Saito Kinen Orchestra, a band who form once yearly in honour of their teacher Hideo Saito, co-founder of the Toho Gakuen School of Music. Naturally, then, one might not look so much for perfect ensemble unity, and more for enthusiasm and excellence on the particular level. While rhythmic and phrasing unity is certainly fine, and enthusiastic dynamics pervade, there’s a heavy feeling to the skipping rhythmic motif that should lift the first movement to terpsichorean apotheosis. I sense the age in the arms of this ageless master. A bit sad, but still a keeper. You can’t hear the marke funèbre second movement without thinking of inevitability. The tread slows slightly with each new iteration; is this mourning in advance? Not yet! The heaviness disperses in the second theme, the clouds part, the tread becomes a heartbeat.

Great playing throughout. Not such great recording values: live performance, whaddayagonnado?

Max Christie
Schubert: The Power of Fate
Mathieu Gaudet
Analekta AN 2 9183 (analekta.com/en)

What simple, unexpected gifts we receive from the hands of Mathieu Gaudet. In May of 2020, this writer reviewed Gaudet’s disc, Late Inspirations, the second installment in a broad Schubert project from Analekta. Then in June, Gaudet went back into the studio to record two sonatas by his indelible muse, his wonderful counsellor, Franz Schubert. Dubbed “a life-long vocation for Gaudet,” the music of Schubert yet radiates evergreen melody and benevolent light on this third record in the cycle. Themed The Power of Fate, Gaudet’s newest release features the little-known Sonata No.7 in E-flat Major, D568 and the seminal and nearly balladic Sonata No.25 in A Minor, D845.

Right from the first, open-hearted phrase of the E-flat Major, Gaudet warmly arrays us in a universe rich and rare. Herein, Schubertian laws of musical physics reign supreme and such unlikely sonatas as this are realized, beguilingly, with warty oddities explained and youthful charms celebrated. How marvelous that, even today, corners of the keyboard repertoire remain unfamiliar. Gratefully, Gaudet unearths gem upon gentle gem for our benefit.

The second work on the record opens a portal onto a shrouded musical garden, darkly glistening from a different sphere. The characterization of every last note is vividly, patiently considered by Gaudet as he soars yet loftier heights with the making of each new Schubert disc. I am reminded of Leon Fleisher – an important mentor of Gaudet’s – who once described this sonata’s second movement as “the fluttering of a songbird’s wings in flight.”

Adam Sherkin

Reincarnation – Schubert; Messiaen
Karin Kei Nagano
Analekta AN 2 8778 (analekta.com/en)

Musical programming can often be summarized as either contrasting or complementary, using the similarities and differences between two pieces to serve a specific purpose as outlined by the performer. Nagano’s Reincarnation attempts to do both simultaneously, drawing conceptual connections between Schubert’s Sonata in B-flat Major, D960 and Messiaen’s Première communion de la Vierge while clearly contrasting these disparate works from different times and places.

Schubert’s Sonata is a late masterwork, one of three large-scale sonatas written in the final year of his life. These sonatas were composed simultaneously, beginning with initial drafts in the spring of 1828 and concluding with final revisions in September, just two months before Schubert’s death; they share a number of musical similarities in both style and substance that continue to inspire and engage performers and listeners alike.

Nagano successfully captures the spirit of this work that, far from being a self-obsessed elegy dwelling on the composer’s imminent demise, is primarily a calm, graceful and optimistic survey of early Romantic pianistic skill.

Over a century after Schubert’s death, Olivier Messiaen was finding new ways of expressing his deep Catholic devotion through stylistic syntheses, using modes and rhythms that could be transposed, used in retrograde, and combined in a unique and immediately identifiable musical language. Written in 1944, Vingt regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus is one of Messiaen’s most intense and spiritual scores, expressing and conveying the various contemplations of the child Jesus in the crib from the Father, the Church and the Spirit, among others.

Première communion de la Vierge (The Virgin’s first communion) is, much like the Schubert Sonata, a calm reflection interspersed with moments of joy and exaltation, including an ecstatic middle section with pulsing rhythms and fleeting gestures.

Nagano’s Reincarnation is an exploration of deep profundity discerned in highly appealing, refined compositions. This is music with many layers, and the opportunity for listeners to continue to revisit and explore these works, drawing new discoveries and experiences each time, is one that should not be missed.

Matthew Whitfield

Bach at the Mendelssohns
Mika Putterman; Jory Vinikour
Analekta AN 2 9532 (analekta.com/en)

Historical flute specialist and music-history researcher Mika Putterman has investigated the musical life and culture of late-18th and early-to-mid-19th-century Berlin and the Mendelssohn family. Her research informs this recording, a re-creation so to speak of a musical soirée at the home of Sarah Levy, Felix Mendelssohn’s great-aunt.

According to the liner notes, “when 19th-century musicians performed Baroque music, they paid little attention to what performance practice norms of the Baroque period might have been and instead used the expressive devices of their day.” Her stated intention in this recording is to explore “new territory, envisioning how the Romantics would have played Bach.”

The result is a kind of hybrid interpretation of three of the flute sonatas traditionally attributed to J.S. Bach, combining much that sounds like contemporary historically informed Baroque interpretation with moments of Sturm und Drang and others of heart-on-sleeve Romanticism. With the very able collaboration of fortepianist Jory Vinikour, she has put together an altogether convincing performance.

The cornerstone of the whole production is Putterman’s transcription of Felix Mendelssohn’s Violin Sonata in F Minor, Op.4, in which the performance practices of the early 19th century make total sense. The extension of these practices into the flute sonatas, odd as it sounds on first listening, actually works! So, kudos to Putterman and Vinikour for opening at least my ears, and hopefully many others, to what might have been the sensibility of a long-lost time.

Allan Pulker

Romantic Fantasies
Aliya Turetayeva
KNS Classical KNS A/090 (aliyaturetayeva.com)

Schumann was the quintessential Romantic composer—a dreamer and idealist who particularly excelled at short forms such as art songs and piano pieces. Yet his symphonies and larger piano works attest to his proficiency with more extended compositions. This disc, with the young Kazakhstan-born pianist Aliya Turetayeva, portrays Schumann as both miniaturist and as a composer of large canvases, presenting two of the most renowned pieces of the Romantic period repertoire, the Sonata in G Minor Op.22 and Kreisleriana Op.16.

The piano sonata – his last contribution to the form – was composed between 1830 and 1838 and has long been known for its technical demands. From the outset, it’s clear that Turetayeva is in full command of this daunting repertoire, but in no way is this empty bravura. The first movement is marked So Rutsch w/e mögich (“as fast as possible”) while her tempo is brisk, it’s never frenetic, her phrasing carefully articulated. The second-movement Andantino is suitably lyrical and the fourth-movement Rondo: Presto demonstrates a bold confidence.

Schumann’s set Kreisleriana was written in 1838 but thoroughly revised a dozen years later. Inspired by E.T.A. Hoffmann, it comprises eight highly contrasting movements. Turetayeva approaches the score...
with the same thoughtful intelligence, convincingly addressing the various moods throughout, from the gentleness of the fourth movement (Sehr langsam) to the agitated energy of No.7 (Sehr rasch).

The gently rollicking finale, with its slight sense of the macabre, is never easy to bring off – but Tureyateva handles it adroitly, thus bringing the set, and the disc, to a most satisfying conclusion.

This young artist is on the brink of great success and here’s hoping we’ll hear more from her in the near future.

Richard Haskell

Brahms – The Last Piano Pieces, Opp. 117, 118, 119
Victor Rosenbaum
Bridge Records 9545 (bridgerecords.com)

As Rosenbaum writes in his self-brahms and illuminating liner notes, “he [Brahms] is drawing our attention not to speed but to vigor.” An excellent recording to start 2021!

Andrew Scott

Mariss Jansons – His Last Concert Live at Carnegie Hall
Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks
BR Klassik BRK900192
(naxosdirect.com/search/brk900192)

A great loss to the music world, one of the top conductors of our time, a great musical mind and a wonderful human being, Mariss Jansons passed away in December 2019. This concert was his last, November 8 of that year, a recording he regretfully will never hear.

Jansons, as a baby and being Jewish, was smuggled out of Latvia to the Soviet Union to escape the Nazis: he grew up studying under the legendary Mrvinsky in Leningrad and was discovered later by Karajan who invited him to Berlin.

I was lucky to have seen him conduct here in Toronto at Roy Thomson Hall. He did Mahler’s Second Symphony, commanding the vast forces of the TSO and the Mendelssohn Choir to a standing ovation.

In the last 16 years he was chief conductor of the Bavarian Radio Symphony which he honed to perfection, a world-class ensemble as witnessed by this recording.

Music of Richard Strauss, Four Interludes from the opera Intermezzo, pieces of extra-ordinary bravura, provide a rousing start and show off the virtuosity of the orchestra.

The music is full of spirit and beautifully melodic with a waltz sequence that rivals Der Rosenkavalier, but the harmonies and orchestration are far more adventurous.

What follows is a wonderful, idiomatic and personally reading of Brahms’ Fourth Symphony. I must admit I’ve never heard it played as beautifully, Carlos Kleiber notwithstanding. From the soft, undulating haupt-theme of the first movement through the second movement of pure beauty and the rambunctious, boisterous Scherzo (the first and only real scherzo Brahms ever wrote in a symphony) we arrive at the monumental, unorthodox Puccasquilia with 90 variations on an eight-note ground bass, and a standing ovation. Then the encore, Brahms’ Hungarian Dance No.5, the famous one, played with great gusto ends the concert. A recording to treasure.

Janos Gardonyi

Jeffrey Ryan – My Soul Upon My Lips
Various Artists
Redshift Records TK469
(redshiftrecords.org)

A labour of love by Canadian composer Jeffrey Ryan, My Soul Upon My Lips is a collection of music for solo woodwinds ten years in the making. Two larger works with piano bookend eight short solo pieces for a full complement of instruments from the woodwind family. Ryan captures the essence of each instrument with the use of a variety of 20th-century techniques to masterfully explore a range of colours and emotion. Aside from the use of the usual winds from an orchestra, Ryan also employs the tárogató and the alto saxophone, adding a unique timbre not often showcased in classical music, making this album’s repertoire approach uniquely his own.

In close collaboration with individual performers, each piece has been tailored to play to the strength of their instrument and highlight its spectrum of possibility – ingeniously invoking feelings from haunting to celestial and everything in between. My Soul Upon My Lips is an emotionally inspirational collection of character pieces that gives first place in title to no one instrument, uniting all in a stylish reformation of 20th century form in a 21st-century embodiment.

With a starry lineup of instruments and Ryan’s soaring imagination, these pieces are a welcome addition to any artist’s repertoire and would prove to be an engaging and exhilarating selection for a recital.

Melissa Scott

Jan Järvelepp – Concerto 2000 and other works
Pascale Margely; Janáček Philharmonic; Zagreb Festival; Moravian Philharmonic Navona Records nv6291 (navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6291)

Jan Järvelepp – Flights of Fancy: Chamber Works
Various Artists
Navona Records nv6323 (navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6323)

It is a pleasure to review two retrospective discs of music by Ottawa-based composer Jan Järvelepp (b.1953). Growing up, he played classical cello, popular music...
on several instruments and studied composition, then turned in a post-modern direction – incorporating influences from pop, jazz and Hispanic, Arab or Nordic folk styles. The disc Concerto 2000 includes orchestral music from the last 30 years while Flights of Fancy contains chamber music composed and recorded in the 1990s. Three orchestras, mostly Czech, were recorded for the former between 2017 and 2019. I am especially impressed by the title work, with outstanding flute soloist Pascale Margely. Each movement is characterized by a folk style: Caliente! with exciting flamenco rhythm, wood instruments and hand clapping is appealing; the atmospheric Nocturne, which evokes Arabic singing, is a deep, increasingly complex and tragic work. In Memoriam (2016) is a processional work for strings that I found solemn and dignified. Compositor's Music (1989) is a highly successful minimalist composition, with a pentatonic string ostinato soon doubled at the fifth by a flute. This is an example of the pervasive parallelism that is a fingerprint of Järvepp's music. Here it produces interesting harmonies and occasional clashes with increasingly divergent motifs and phrases above, as the ostinato breaks up. Other instruments are added and the work builds well. The other tracks are more pop-influenced, including the recent Brass Dance (2018) in which parallelism applies to diminished chords and train-horn sounds. But though they are entertaining, for me the pop elements sound familiar and somewhat tongue-in-cheek.

Flights of Fancy: Chamber Works is the other current release. It opens brilliantly with Pierrot Solaire (1994), an extended tour de force that is clearly pop in derivation, but with substantial smooth and contrasting interludes led by the violin. Later, there is cross-cutting between shorter music segments, and towards the end instruments become frenetic virtuosos. A three-movement Saxophone Quartet (1996) is played by the excellent ensemble, Saxart. The opening movement, Cadillacs, is a perpetual motion piece, blues-evoking and witty with virtuosic solo turns by each saxophone for contrast. Space does not allow for every work on this disc, but we must note that the versatile composer has played with and composed for many musicians in the Ottawa area, establishing lasting connections. He appears as electric guitarist on Tarantella (1996) and as cellist on Trio No.2 (1997). In the latter, flutist Margely and violinist Kevin James join with Järvepp in a piece whose opening movement achieves unique and beguiling combinations involving string harmonics. Another aspect of these chamber pieces is the composer’s adeptness with instrumentation for many different instruments, something that has facilitated his orchestral composing. In fact, though the chamber works are earlier than the orchestral ones, these two CD’s belong together – the working out of a long and productive compositional practice.

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Aperceptions
Taylor Brook Independent (taylorbrook.info)

The formidable Lysander Piano Trio celebrates its ten-year anniversary with an attractive new disc, featuring music that integrates with traditional soundscapes. The trio is fervently committed to new music and to the commissioning thereof: no less than six world-premiere recordings populate this disc.

Ne’er to shay away from muscular playing and athletic feats of prowess, the members of Lysander crack on through these works (generally having been constructed with their triply impressive strengths in mind). The composers represented here do seem to ensure a freshness of concept, sometimes sojourning in new directions. Thankfully, the result is a 21st-century deliverance of the genre from the shackles of a 19th-century canon.

The extra musical inspiration throughout the record is notable. Reinaldo Moya’s Ghostwritten Variations has been inspired by four novels that highlight composers as protagonists, namely those of Thomas Mann, David Mitchell, Richard Powers and Kim Stanley Robinson. Moya’s piece offers a reimagining of what music by these four might sound like – a compelling conceit. The Black Mirror by Jakub Cupiński turns to the visual arts for incentive, referencing a portable painting aid, curiously known as a “Claude glass.” And Sofia Bellmova’s brief, Titania and Her Suite, reaches our eyes by way of A Midsummer’s Night Dream.

Without doubt, a highlight of this release is Love Sweet by Jennifer Higdon, as sung by Sarah Shafer. The young soprano’s narrative abilities and refined vocal colour bring the new, five-song cycle to life.

Wang Lu – An Atlas of Time
Boston Modern Orchestra Project;
Momenta Quartet; Ryan Muncy; Daniel Lippel; Miranda Cuckson
New Focus Recordings FCR277 (newfocusrecordings.com/catalogue)

Chinese-American composer Wang Lu’s works excite like a case of sudden-onset fireworks display. Frenetic bombast prevails amid haunting breath-like interjections that induce enjoyable sonic nightmares of a welcome
kind. This whirlwind of activity is ever-present throughout the composer’s latest release titled An Atlas of Time – a disc with recent orchestral and chamber compositions.

The title track, performed by the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, is modernist excitement at its finest. Set in five character pieces, this is the gem of the disc and provides compelling landscapes and novel environments for the ear. Another exemplary selection of the release is the solo violin work Unbreathable Colours, performed by Miranda Cuckson. This piece is Wang’s artistic response to the unrelenting smog encountered on a recent visit to China – her native land. The hesitant, yet sharp, plucks and swells in this work truly provoke a suffocating listening experience – one that brilliantly paints a simultaneously eerie and beautiful musical haze.

Each piece on this release is an example of why Wang is one of the most original voices in contemporary classical composition, and each track unfolds with some of the most organic and strikingly enjoyable pacing in recent memory – I’ll be listening many more times!

Scott Lee – The Mangrove Tunnels
JACK Quartet; Steven Beck; Russell Lacy
Panoramic Recordings PAN20 (newfocusrecordings.com/catalogue)

I was lucky to receive this album during the latest COVID-19 lockdown, as it provided a welcome escape from my own four walls. This album is great storytelling, an audio film of tales of imaginative discoveries by the composer growing up wandering the swamps and bayous of Florida. Drawn from Lee’s memories of exploring the Weedon Island nature preserve as a youth, from one movement to the next I was captivated. From the opening track, Through the Mangrove Tunnels, we are transported to a small craft, peaking around corners through overgrown channels, encountering the unexpected. This album is an expertly played audio escape featuring pianist Steven Beck, drummer Russell Lacy and the JACK Quartet.

Part historical narrative, and part personal reflection, Lee manages to engage the listener with his blend of contemporary classical and extended jazz techniques, travelling seamlessly between tonalities and polyrhythmic styles without a single extraneous or gratuitous beat. Each track is expertly crafted to tell a tale of mystery: from shootouts, strange figures, ceremonial Native American gatherings, bootlegging, plane crashes and marvellous natural phenomena, the accompanying stories are fantastic sketches perfectly enhancing each gorgeous composition almost to the scale of Saint-Saëns’ Carnival of the Animals. The tracks Playthings of Desire and The Ballad of Willie Cole are both full compositions almost on their own, but presented here they remind us that although the album provides some entertaining and humorous listening, these are compositions of great depth. The final track, Floating Away, takes us home in a way that evokes the end of a long and mysterious voyage.

Be sure to get a hard copy or a download of the booklet if possible, and follow along with the stories, as this is an album that deserves to be experienced as we used to, when a composer shared a journey with us, and we stayed in one place to listen and receive it in full. Perfect lockdown listening.

Cheryl Ockrant

The Bells Bow Down – Chamber Music of Ilari Kaila
Adrienne Kim; Isabel Gleicher; Aizuri Quartet
Innova Recordings innova 036 (innova.mu)

This well-conceived and well-crafted recording is a magnificent presentation of works by Finnish-American contemporary classical and theatrical composer, Ilari Kaila. Produced by Kaila and Silas Brown, the album features his noted single-movement piano quartet, The Bells Bow Down (Kellojen kamarrus) in Memorium Hanna Sarvala, the five-movement Taonta and four other works. The interpreters of this challenging music are the internationally regarded, multiple award-winning Aizuri Quartet, which includes Ariana Kim and Miho Saegusa, violins; Ayane Koizasa, viola; and Karen Ouzzounian, cello. Also joining the stellar cast are the luminous pianist, Adrienne Kim; and flutist, Isabel Gleicher.

The title track is constructed out of non-corporeal gosamer light and sonorous strings, which wrap themselves lovingly around the heart of the listener. The grief, pain and loss contained in this work are palpable. Pianist Kim enters with elemental, percussive chords, bringing to mind tolling church bells, as she wends her way through the turgid waters of raw emotion. The majesty of this composition demands complete commitment, bravery and technical skill from all of the artists involved, which it receives in spades.

The nearly unbearable beauty of Hum and Drum’s Philip Glass-like repetitive themes easily floats the listener into a trance-like state and Wisteria seems to speak to loneliness and isolation, and perhaps the long winter of the Norse soul. Kaila’s Taonta is also a triumph for the pianist, and one cannot imagine a truer manifestation of the composer’s intent. A modern masterpiece.

Lesley Mitchell-Clarke

Tavener – No Longer Mourn for Me
Steven Isserlis; Philharmonia Orchestra; Omer Meir Wellber
Hyperion CDA68246 (hyperion-records.co.uk/find.asp?f=CDA68246)

Some albums follow a linear and straightforward path through their conception, recording and release, while others take many years of behind-the-scenes planning and work before finally reaching a listening audience. Tavener: No
longer mourn for me falls into this latter category, starting its gestation as cellist Steven Isserlis’ own passion project in 2013, thrown into disarray by Tavener’s death later that year and, after a long and labyrinthine journey, eventually unveiled seven years later, in October 2020.

As is the case with much of Tavener’s output, many of the works on this disc defy strict categorization, a reflection of the composer’s numerous and eclectic influences including the Orthodox Church, the Anglican Cathedral tradition, Catholicism, Islam, Tolstoy and Shakespeare. The two principal tracks, The death of Ivan Ilyich and Mahámátar, are fascinating and stunningly beautiful cross-cultural experiences: in Ivan Ilyich, Tolstoy’s text (sung in English by bass Matthew Rose) draws on Tavener’s influences to form a uniquely dramatic work resembling a one-act opera; Mahámátar features Sufi singer Abi Sampa, along with Isserlis and the Trinity Boys Choir, in a magnificent exploration of East-meets-West through Tavener’s eyes and ears.

The remaining works on No longer mourn for me are, although smaller in scale and performing forces, no less impressive, either from a compositional or interpretive perspective. Of particular interest are the two arrangements for eight-cello ensemble: Shakespeare’s Sonnet LXXI, No longer mourn for me; and the Preces and Responses, a sublime setting of the prayers traditionally sung at the Anglican service of Evensong, originally composed for choir.

John Tavener’s lengthy and highly regarded career resulted in an extraordinary range of material, as varied as the composer’s influences and inspirations. Although only a portion of his late works is represented on this disc, their depth and breadth serve both as an introduction for those previously unfamiliar with Tavener, as well as a point of exploration and discovery for those seeking to delve deeper into this great composer’s eclectic and evocative style.

Matthew Whitfield

Nature
Fie Schouten
SOL Classics SOL010
(fieschouten.nl/en/discografie/)

Fie Schouten makes the bass clarinet ring with a gorgeous sound. Nature is a collection of contemporary pieces that refer to our environment. They’re cleverly ordered, drawing attention first to the earth and sea, to the sky, and finally to the moon and stars.

Jonathan Harvey’s Cirrus Light is juxtaposed with Abîme des oiseaux, from Messiaen’s Quatuor pour la fin du temps. Harvey’s piece, which is played on soprano clarinet, was written in the final year of the composer’s life, and sounds almost like an homage to the Messiaen. Schouten elects to present the Messiaen on bass horn, bringing more Abyss and less Bird to the performance. This is not all a bad thing: at a perfect fourth below the original pitch, desolation is powerfully rendered by the lower voice. Some of the sustained crescendi are marred by unintended timbre alterations, and I think the bird calls are more brilliant on the soprano instrument. Although it’s a fine rendering, on balance, I prefer the original.

Of Ku, by Kaia Saariaho, is a duo for bass clarinet and cello that references the moon. It’s beautiful. George Aperghis’ Façade-Trio is also stunning. Written for two bass clarinet nets and percussion, it sounds like a dialogue of mad twins: two enraged geese, perhaps, arguing by the abyss. The extremely recent (August 2020) Mankind ReMix by Michael Finnissy is another solo bass clarinet piece, right in Schouten’s wheelhouse: singing tone and powerful expression.

Max Christie

Once/Memory/Night: Paul Celan Ensemble for These Times
E4TT (e4tt.org/discography.html)

Paul Celan was one of the 20th century’s most profound poets. To listen to this breathtaking recording of his poetry is to be drawn to its haunting beauty as if by gossamer strings. Elliptical, rhythmically spellbinding, each word obdurate and as inward as a geode, Celan’s poems embody a conviction that the truth of what has been broken and torn must be told with a jagged grace. And few – if any – recordings of his work tell their truth better than Once/Memory/Night. Paul Celan by Ensemble for These Times.

This recording features almost an hour of poetry echoing with heart-aching emotion delivered in a kind of near-spiritual quietude. A unique atmosphere is created by the disc’s opening track: Libby Larsen’s 4/12 A Piano Suite brought to eloquent life by pianist Xin Zhao. Then follows Die eichene Tür, the cycle of Celan poems set to music by David Garner. The Ensemble’s performance is both poised and haunting, and is raised to a rarefied realm by lustrous and soaring, songful recitatives executed by the inimitable Nanette McGuinness.

More of the transcendent beauty of Celan’s work unfolds in Jared Redmond’s Nachtlang before we are treated to the extraordinary recitation of another celebrated poet, Czeslaw Milosz’s A Song on the End of the World by Milosz’s son Anthony, followed by the disc’s denouement: a rapturous performance of Milosz’s poem which unfolds with poise and sensual fluidity from the lips of the magnificent McGuinness.

Raul da Gama

Albores
Dino Saluzzi
ECM New Series ECM 2638
(ecmrecords.com/shop)

► Albores – meaning “daybreak” – is Argentinian bandoneonist/composer Dino Saluzzi’s first solo album in decades. Born in 1935, Saluzzi is renowned for his performances with his family band and orchestra, other ensembles and orchestras, and work with many jazz musicians such as Charlie Haden and Gato Barbieri. Here Saluzzi plays nine of his compositions on solo bandoneon, an accordion-like instrument popular in Argentinian folk music and tangos. Even though Saluzzi uses tango references, he also develops other styles in this emotional, storytelling music chronicling his life and musical adventures.

The opening track, Adiós Maestro Kancheli, is a reflective, mournful musical tribute to his late friend Georgian composer Gia Kancheli, highlighted by a high-pitched melody against a lower chordal accompaniment, reminiscent of a two-person conversation. Superb controlled bellows during held notes and volume changes makes the slow sparse Ausencias equally moving.

Don Caye – Variaciones sobre obra de Cagietano Saluzzi pays homage to Saluzzi’s bandoneonist father, who taught him about music from a young age, in a more traditional joyful tango with steady rhythms, arpeggiated melodies and a short, slightly dissonate slower section. Según me cuenta la vida – Milongo briefly alludes to Piazzolla-flavoured tango nuevo yet Saluzzi’s shorter contrasting melodies, dissonances and repeated notes make this contemporary milonga more his own.

Throughout, Saluzzi performs on bandoneon with detailed personal musicality, conviction, dedication and thorough technical understanding. His compositional reflections awaken a lifetime of countless feelings from happiness to grief in his own personal sound.

Tiina Kiik
The Nimmons Tribute Volume One – To The Nth
Kevin Turcotte; Tara Davidson; Mike Murley; William Carn et al
Independent n/a (nimmonstribute.ca)

 Forgive the tired expression, but Phil Nimmons needs no introduction. As far as contributors to the Canadian music landscape go, it would be hard to find many as seismic as Nimmons. I am sadly too young to have appreciated him first hand, but his legacy at 97 is such that I can still get a sense of his transcendence both through his music and through his countless talented former students who constantly sing his praises. Case in point is this new tribute album that combines the best of both aforementioned worlds. Featuring an astonishing roster, spearheaded by Nimmons’ grandson and accomplished pianist Sean Nimmons, this album is a fitting tribute full of heart and brilliance.

Sean’s arranging and production are a highlight, as this record’s pristine sound allows for a modern, yet faithful, interpretation of his grandfather’s music. Another bright spot is the sample of Nimmons’ work selected for these recordings. Some of his finest compositions are featured spanning across multiple decades, which goes a long way to showcase the sheer scope of his prolific output. The Sean Nimmons–composed track Rista’s Vista is the one outlier here, and serves as the album’s centrepiece. Dedicated to his grandfather, it’s a love letter to a man who continues to inspire. To his grandfather, it’s a love letter to a man who continues to inspire.

Yoshi Maclear Wall

Very Well & Good
Richard Whiteman
Cornerstone Records CRST CD 153 (cornerstonerecordsinc.com)

Multi-instrumentalist Richard Whiteman is one of the most in-demand and respected jazz pianists and educators in Toronto. In 2004, he began studying the double bass and quickly became an adept and experienced performer on this instrument. In 2012 he formed his “bass” quartet featuring guitarist Reg Schwager, pianist Amanda Tosoff and drummer Morgan Childs – the group that forms the backbone for this new recording. The quartet is augmented on several tracks by Canadian tenor saxophonist Pat LaBarbera and Mike Murley. The set kicks off with the catchy Whiteman-penned title track, based on the chord progression of the standard, Fine and Dandy. The lyrical Not So Early pays tribute to the late jazz pianist Bill Evans, a musical reply of sorts to his famous composition, Very Early. This song features thoughtful and inventive solos from Whiteman, Tosoff and Schwager.

Pat and Mike pays tribute to LaBarbera and Murley, who both get a chance to ably stretch out in solos and trading on this minor blues. They are clearly enjoying playing with each other! Selohsaa is a change of pace, an even-eighth, 32-bar form that features a strong and personal statement from Schwager.

Tosoff deserves special mention for turning in one sparkling solo after another. Childs also stands out for his propulsive swing, musical sensitivity and crisp cymbal work. All told, one of the finest acoustic jazz recordings of the past year.

Barry Livingston

The Latest Tech
Dan Fortin
Elastic Recordings (danfortinthewebsite.com)

It seems to make sense that in the middle of a pandemic year, a solo upright bass album would be the perfect choice to record. Eliminating the band is a simple way to maintain physical distancing while exploring the many nuances of your instrument.

Dan Fortin has played with many groups and recorded multiple albums as sideman and leader and he currently teaches bass in the University of Toronto’s jazz program. The Latest Tech pares away the other traditional jazz instruments and we can listen to the full, fat sound of acoustic bass. On the title song, a series of repeated ostinato patterns cycle through different tonal centres and slight alterations of rhythmic emphasis create an intriguing journey. Beautiful Psychic Dream has a loping and sustained minor-sounding melodic line which seems to hang and shimmer as it moves onward. Mega Wish opens with a faster series of repeated melodic fragments which become more dispersed and exploratory before picking up speed and ending with a final repetition of the opening phrase.

Ted Parkinson

One Fine Morning
Denise Leslie
Independent (deniselesliesings.com)

With the release of her new recording, delightful contemporary jazz vocalist, Denise Leslie, has created a sump- tuous journey through some of the most potent and skillfully composed jazz/rock/pop hits of the 1970s. Leslie has also included two of her own well-crafted tunes in the collection. Her fine crew includes gifted producer/arranger/guitarist Bob McAlpine; first call jazz bassist/arranger Pat Collins; the iconic Paul DeLong on drums; the Lighthouse Horns (Simon Wallis on tenor sax; Chris
Howells and Bruce Cassidy on trumpet, Russ Little on trombone; Arturo Avalos on percussion; Don Baird on Hammond B3; and the Brass Transit Horns (Phil Poppa on tenor and baritone sax, Doug Gibson on trombone and Tony Carucci on trumpet).

Things kick off with a funky cool reimagining of the Badfinger hit, ‘Day After Day.’ Insistent, potent bass lines by Collins and thrilling drumming by DeLong are ensconced in a delicious vocal arrangement. Leslie is right in the pocket, bringing to mind (but not derivative of) another soulful gal, legendary British diva Cilla Black. Other highlights include Sting’s ‘Driven to Tears,’ presented here as a bluesy, moody lament that resonates easily with our contemporary chaos. Collins plumbs the lower depths here, while McAlpine lashes out with a spine-tingling guitar solo.

An absolute standout is Little River Band’s tender reverie, ‘Reminiscing,’ presented here with a stunning, succinct vocal arrangement; truly a compelling version of one of the loveliest contemporary pop ballads ever written. The tasty closer is a charming take on the Jimmy McHugh/Dorothy Fields’ standard ‘I’m in the Mood for Love,’ which cleverly seques into Eddie Jefferson and James Moody’s ‘Moody’s Mood.’

Lesley Mitchell-Clarke

Concert Note: The release of Denise Leslie’s video, featuring vocal/guitar version of Little River Band’s “Reminiscing,” is scheduled for Valentine’s Day, Sunday Feb 14th 2020 for viewing on all her social media platforms, and the Denise Leslie Jazz Band is featured the same day (7:30pm) along with 12 other Mississauga performers in a streamed video via Facebook Live and YouTube, celebrating the 100th birthday of legendary Mississauga mayor Hazel McCallion.

Today Will Be a Good Day

Red Hot Ramble

Hope springs eternal, musically and figuratively, right from the title of this disc. ‘Today Will Be a Good Day’ is what everyone needs, to be reminded of what the pandemic of 2020 took away not only from all of us, but from wonderful artists like these who create music with such vigorous positivity.

Red Hot Ramble may derive some of its spirit from the music of New Orleans, but the melodies and harmonies sing of stories that could be much more universal. Everything is brought to life magnificently in the vocals of the group’s frontwoman, Roberta Hunt. Her performance in the gloriously dark and sinister Marie Laveau, for instance, is just one example.

Alison Young also dazzles not only with her versatility on various saxophones, but in the visceral energy (‘Liquid Spirit’) and virtuosity (everywhere else) she displays on each variant. Jamie Stager’s mournful trombone grows its bittersweet way throughout; and Jack Zorawski’s bass and Glenn Anderson’s drumming create an appropriately immutable rhythmic power.

The roster of guest stars is a stellar one. Accordianist and organist Denis Keldie, clarinetist Jacob Gorzhaltsan, trumpeter Alexs Baro and guitarist Kevin Barrett are inspired choices. All told, each musician plays every heartfelt phrase as if his (and her) life depends upon it. This makes for music with unfettered emotional intensity, full of funked soul and joie de vivre. An album to die for.

Raula da Gama

Arcade

Griffith Hiltz Trio

G-B Records (gbrecords.ca)

Last week, a colleague who makes beats and electronic music sampled part of an ambient-sounding guitar piece I had shared online. During the COVID-19 pandemic I have been exploring home recording and this electronic reuse of my piece made me wonder what other sonic ideas I might probe. I am not the only musician currently investigating recording technology, nor am I alone in pondering electronic possibilities like beats and live-sound samples. A brilliantly original take on these electroacoustic explorations comes in the form of Arcade, the latest offering from the Griffith Hiltz Trio.

Concept albums with unifying themes can, at their worst, sound cheesy or forced. Arcade avoids this trap while tackling a very unique underlying theme: the video games and movies of the 1980s. This theme is realized with a plethora of synthesizers that blend immaculately with the acoustic instruments present, making this a departure stylistically from other Griffith Hiltz Trio releases and other jazz albums in general. Nathan Hiltz’s signature employment of Hammond organ pedals alongside his guitar playing may be the most unique aspect of the group, but that is to take nothing away from the saxophone work of Johnny Griffith and drumming of Neil MacIntosh. The album was recorded remotely by the group and their ample recording/production experience gives the 13 tracks unifying quirks that never sound gimmicky. This is no easy feat and commands a listen!

Sam Dickinson

Ars Transmutatoria Rouge

Michel Lambert

Jazz from Rant n’a (nette.ca/jazzfromrant/in-production-2)

I find that multidisciplinary free music is often one of the most unfairly dismissed genres in jazz. Works like Anthony Braxton’s operatic forays certainly come to mind. They are branded impene- trable in many circles and people don’t even bother to offer them anything resembling serious consideration. I attribute this reluctance to fear.

I’m going to be honest. This new Michel Lambert project is scary. It’s an amalgam of visual artworks (referred to as Lambert’s “visual scores”) and the band’s collective instinctual responses to them. The album is presented as an expedition of sorts, with both the band and listener travelling through 11 distinct audiovisual landscapes. Amazingly, it all works incredibly well. The improvisers not only know exactly how much space to leave for each other, but looking at the score, I was struck by how effectively the music evoked specific images on the score and vice versa with almost supernatural symbiosis.

As I listened, it became apparent that the glue holding the affair together was the expressive poetry of vocalist Jeanette Lambert. It felt like she articulated and/or punctuated my thoughts perfectly, serving as a tour guide. What is a Transmutatoria? Not sure, but taking the journey there has been a real pleasure.

Yoshi Maclear Wall

Tatouages miroir

Jean-Luc Guionnet et le GGRIL

Tour de Bras tdb90046cd (tourdebras.com)

French saxophonist, organist, composer and improviser Jean-Luc Guionnet has rare inventive powers. Among his activ- ities, two bands demonstrate his range: Hububb, a French quintet, looks like a conventional jazz group while impro- vising ethereal, symphony-length works of continuous sound through circular breathing on saxophones and bowing on cymbals and the strings of piano and guitar. The interna- tional trio Ames Room creates the most singularly intense, hard-bitten, minimalist

the whole note
expression ever developed by a stripped-down trio of saxophone, bass and drums. However, these recordings from Quebec performances show Guionnet’s inventiveness even without his saxophone.

_Tatouages miroir_ (“mirror tattoos”) is an orchestral composition realized by GGRIL (Grand groupe régional d’improvisation libérée), the highly exploratory improvising orchestra that has made Gaspé fertile soil for meaning-probing music. Here GGRIL is an 11-member ensemble of electric guitars and bass, strings, brass and reeds, stretching to include accordion and harp. Beginning with contrasting blasts of orchestral might and silence, the initial lead voice emerges unaccompanied, a tight metallic string sound – the harp – single notes plucked evenly with only microtonal shifts in pitch. In the background, a rich welling of winds plays a melodic pattern dominated by muted trumpet and baritone saxophone. Throughout there are contrasts between sound and silence, between small sounds magnified and rich ensembles moving from foreground to background, questioning their own status. It’s a rethink of what orchestras traditionally do, foregrounding random incidental percussion – footsteps, perhaps – while crying-baby-trumpet and multiphonic flute and saxophone elide into silence, creating unexpectedly rich drama. During its course, the work ranges across approaches and meanings, inviting a listener’s reflection on the work’s burrowing depths and strange sonic redistributions, a seeming interrogation of its own processes.

_Solo à la décolleté_ presents Guionnet as a church organist, though his performance is as remarkable as the L’Isle-Verte location: the Church of the Beheading of John the Baptist and its traditional Casavant organ, described as “in need of love.” The traditional church organ is a special site, as much monumental architecture and domicile as musical instrument, and Guionnet is here to probe it and the church’s iconic nooks and crannies in a performance that is as much meditation as query, including the incidental percussion of interaction with the instrument. Divided into four segments, the 70-minute work begins in near silence, a kind of breathing of the pipes with only the softest infrequent blips that lead to extended drones, shifting oscillations, overlays of tones and sharply contrasting keyboards laid over and through one another. It’s improvisation as meditation, music exploring notions of sound as symbolic site of symbolic conflict, source resolving and extending the voyage, with the kinks, fissures and vibrations of the particular instrument and church becoming key participants.

**Stuart Broomer**

_Scintillating Beauty_  
_Cat Toren’s Human Kind Panoramic Recordings PR 18_ (*newfocusrecordings.com*)

- Aiming to express her ideas of hope, Vancouverite-turned-Brooklynite pianist Cat Toren, also a practitioner of sound healing, has composed a four-track album that is both cadenced and curious by drawing on multiple musical strands.

On _Radiance in Veils_, for instance, she uses the modal outpourings of Xavier Del Castillo’s tenor saxophone, multiple-string chording from Yoshih Fruchter’s oud plus the textures of chimes, tuning forks, singing bowls, rattles and bells to outline spinning and soothing 1970s-style spiritual jazz. But on _Ignis Fatuus_ she creates a slow-burning swinger built on Jake Leckie’s walking bass line, with Del Castillo shouting in full bop-bluesy mode. In between, Toren varies the program from one signpost to the other. Added to each of the four tracks are cross pulses from drummer Matt Honor and her own playing which expresses stentorian notated music-style glissandis and snapping jazz vamps in equal measures.

Besides Del Castillo, whose intensity and variations move towards multiphonics and squeaking split tones, but never lose control, Fruchter’s string set is the secret weapon. Skillfully, he sometimes plucks and shapes his strings into patterns that could originate in the Maghreb, while on other tracks more closely aligned to a finger-snapping pulse, he replicates sympathetic rhythm guitar chording.

It’s unsure how COVID-19, which arrived after this CD was recorded, has affected Toren’s upbeat ideas. But she and her fellow humans certainly demonstrate resilience and adaptability in musical form on this disc.

**Ken Waxman**

_How to Turn the Moon_  
_Angelica Sanchez; Marilyn Crispell Pyroclastic Records PR 10_ (*angelicasanchez.com*)

- Currently residing in the Big Apple, famed composer, pianist and educator, Angelica Sanchez, has continuously left a resounding impression on the jazz community for the past 20 years with her unique sound. This latest release, from her and fellow pianist Marilyn Crispell, is a definite culmination of her innovative works that blur the lines between improvisation and composition. All tracks are penned either by Sanchez herself or along with Crispell and showcase both of their compositional talents superbly. It should be noted that what truly makes the auditory experience whole is the fact that each pianist is heard through separate channels, Sanchez through the left and Crispell in the right, allowing the listener to appreciate both melodies separately and together.

The record begins with a whirlwind track _Lobe of the Fly_, within which the image of the flying insect is called to mind with the tinkling, expeditious riffs that both musicians coalesce effortlessly from the keys. It’s interesting to hear how both random and uniform aspects of composition exist within each piece, the interplay between structure and free expression is fabulous. _Windfall Light_ is a piece which gives the listener a moment to appreciate just how in tune both pianists are with each other; it almost sounds at times as if one knows just what the other will play next. For those looking for a complete musical experience, this album would make a very worthy addition to your collection.

_Kati Killaspea_

_New Life_  
_Peter Leitch New Life Orchestra_  
_Jazz House 7006/7007_ (*peterleitch.com*)

- Montreal-born, eminent NYC jazz guitarist Peter Leitch wears several sizeable hats on his new recording: composer, arranger, conductor and co-producer. All compositions on this magnificent project (co-produced with Jed Levy) were written by Leitch, with the exception of Thelonious Monk’s _Round Midnight_. Rogers and Hart’s immortal balled of longing and loneliness _Spring is Here_ and _The Minister’s Son_ by Levy (an outstanding track, written in honour of Leitch’s dear friend, pianist and musical collaborator, the late John Hicks). In the framework of this arrangement, Hicks’ and Leitch’s unique, soulful, rhythmic style is palpable throughout, and the heady sax solo from Levy calls to mind the potency of a snifter of cognac!

Following a heroic victory over cancer, Leitch could no longer physically play guitar, so he chose to reinvent himself, and express his new musical vision through a mediumsized ensemble that would still have the flexibility to embrace free soloing by the gifted, NYC A-list members who define the sound. These include trumpeter Duane Eubanks, Bill Motley on trumpet/flugelhorn, Tim Harrison on flute, Steve Wilson and Dave Pietro on alto/soprano sax, Levy on tenor sax/flute/alto flute, Carl Maragh on baritone sax/bass clarinet, Matt Haviland on trombone, Max Seigel on bass trombone, Phil Robson on...
electric guitar, Chad Coe on acoustic guitar, Peter Zak on piano, Dennis James on arco bass, Yoshi Waki on bass and Joe Strasser in the drum chair (whose skill, dexterity and taste are the ultimate ingredient).

Leitch explains: “The title New Life refers not only to my personal odyssey, but also to the music itself – to the act of breathing ‘new life’ into the ‘raw materials’...” Every track on this 17-piece, two-disc recording is a pinnacle of jazz expression. A few of the many highlights include the opener, Mood for Max (for Dr. Maxim Krediet), a snappy, up-tempo, joyous arrangement featuring a fluid and thrilling trumpet solo from Mobley and equally fine alto and piano solos by Wilson and Zak; Portrait of Sylvia – a lovely tune for the ever-lovely Sylvia Levine Leitch – an exotic and ephemeral piece, featuring guitar work by Robson – and Fulton Street Suite, a masterpiece in three movements that paints an evocative, jazzy portrait of lower Manhattan, replete with all of its artsy, manic energy. Without question, this is one of the top jazz recordings of the past year.

Lesley Mitchell-Clarke

The Art of the Quartet
Benjamin Koppel; Kenny Werner; Scott Colley; Jack Dejohnette
Cowbell/Unit UTR 4958
(unitrecords.com/releases)

We’ve heard of the art of the duo and trio often enough, but perhaps not enough of the quartet. Certainly there has been very little musical exploration as significant as this, The Art of the Quartet, freewheeling explorations by the wizened majesty of drummer Jack DeJohnette and pianist Kenny Werner together with the derring-do of younger experimentalist, bassist Scott Colley, all of whom have been brought together at the behest of the superb Danish alto saxophonist Benjamin Koppel.

Koppel is possessed of an expressionistic wail and he uses it with tremendous effect throughout the repertoire of this album. His wild excursions flow like a river in flood and the yowling vibrato with which he often ends his phrases evokes restless northern spirits sweeping across space in powerful gusts of wind. Colley secures the roving melodies and thematic subtext of the improvisations. Mobius and Mucha is the most overt swinger with bugle-bright trumpet work cutting across sliding compositions from the other horns. Meanwhile, Sixth is a quasi-rondo that subverts its mellow form with colourful upward movements that encompass brass and reed call-and-response before textures meld into a stop-time climax.

Garchik draws on the skills of some of New York’s top younger talents like saxophonist Anna Webber and Kevin Sun and trumpeters Jonathan Finlayson and Adam O’Farrill. But with frequently displayed gorgeous harmonies, as highlighted on the concluding Clear Line, this is a suite of well-paced originals that stroll rather than gallop. This is also profound group music that makes its points through subtlety not showiness. (ahutchie.bandcamp.com)

Ken Waxman

Potion Shop
A. Hutchie
Cosmic Resonance Records CR-006
(ahutchie.bandcamp.com)

In another time and place A. Hutchie – short for Aaron Hutchinson – might easily have been a medieval apothecary, wandering the forests in search of herbs and roots with which to create all things magical. However, in today’s world, he has been incarnated as a peripatetic musician, author and creator of this suite of atmospheric music, appropriately titled Potion Shop.
This repertoire has been developed into an individualistic, difficult-to-classify personal genre. Here, as is customary for Hutchie, roots in, and branches from, jazz often surface, but there is so much else going on: Hutchie skillfully, imaginatively and (by and large) subtly mixes elements of electronic music, rock and contemporary composition together, all of which also nods to noise music, rap and hip-hop rhythms. Although most pieces develop from beguiling, elegant melodies, what makes them so special is Hutchie’s way with arresting textures and colours.

These sonic creations simulate mental pictures of mysterious narratives evoking the work of such chroniclers and visionaries as the painter Edward Hopper or film director David Lynch, yet they are always distinctively part of Hutchie’s own soundworld. Everything comes together to add a very special grace to this music. Yet, somehow, none of it would sound quite so special if not for the vocals added on top of everything else. In this regard Unconditional Love with Blankie, I Fell for the Moon with Sarah Good and Villain with Benita Whyte make for absolutely memorable listening.

Fermi’s Paradox
Carolyn Surrick; Ronn McFarlane
Sono Luminus DSL-92244
(sonoluminous.com/store/fermis-paradox)

> When the Beatles’ original bassist, Stu Sutcliffe, decided to leave the group in 1961 to attend the Hamburg College of Art, the band suddenly found themselves without a bassist. Guitarist and vocalist Paul McCartney stepped up, and in short order established himself as one of the most iconic and original bassists in the history of popular music. Necessity truly is the mother of invention!

I was reminded of this bit of history when listening to, and researching, the beautiful new recording, Fermi’s Paradox by Carolyn Surrick (viola da gamba) and Ronn McFarlane (lute). Gearing up for a scheduled 2020 performance tour the duo’s concertizing plans were furloughed as COVID cancellations came in fast and furious. Undeterred, Surrick and McFarlane continued to rehearse and embraced the process of playing their instruments for the sake of the music. Once again, necessity begets (re)invention.

This wonderful album is a success on multiple fronts. First and foremost, it offers a gorgeously recorded, sonically supreme capture of two (and sometimes three with Jackie Moran joining in on bodhrán) of the finest traditional instrumentalists playing an exhilaratingly rich and diverse repertoire that binds together traditional Irish, English and Swedish music with

Something in the Air
Uncommon trumpet groupings, unusual and unique textures

KEN WAXMAN

Although seemingly limited in expressive textures by the trumpet’s size and construction, composers and players have steadily expanded the brass instrument’s range and adaptability during the past half century. As more have investigated the possibilities in improvised and aleatoric music, the definition of brass tone has modified. Concurrently the makeup of an acceptable ensemble connected with trumpet tones has evolved as well and each of these out-of-the-ordinary outings demonstrates how musical definition can shift from session to session.

Longtime partners, Japanese trumpeter Natsuki Tamura and pianist Satoko Fujii have played in many configurations from duo to big band, but Mantle (Not Two MW 10003-2 nottwo.com) is unique in that they collaborate with Spanish drummer Ramon Lopez in a trio featuring the trumpeter in the role usually taken by a reed player. Throughout the nine tracks as well, it’s Tamura’s choked or splayed capillary discur- sions which are most aggressive, with the pianist and drummer equally complementary. Brassy flutter tonguing, open horn accelerations, half-valve effects, kazoo-like blats and inner body tube excavations are Tamura’s common strategies. Meanwhile, as on Metaphors, the pianist’s careful arpeggios and the drummer’s contrapuntal shuf- fles preserve linear output. An equal line of this triangular creation, Lopez often sets up narratives with pops, ruffs or clinging cymbal work. As for Fujii, as demonstrated on Straw Coat, she skillfully creates a gentle impressionistic exposition with soundboard echoes and then turns to broken-chord power to counter Tamura’s fregleks-like brassy interjection. Other times, as on Encounter, her dynamic vibrations give impetus to a narrative dominated by Lopez’s resounding rolls and fluid paraddles plus Tamura’s brassy screeches. Still it’s the penultimate Autumn Sky which puts the trio’s skills in boldest relief. Beginning in a balladic mode with metronomic keyboard patterns and a brass part that is muted and moderated it subsequently creates andante excitement via grainy distended brass work and kinetic piano crunches and clusters from Fujii.

Another variation on the theme of timbre reorientation is Zurich Concert (Intakt CD 357 intaktrec.ch), a live program where American trumpeter Jaimie Branch joins the trio of Swiss guitarist Dave Gisler for the first time. Her vigorous drive, propelled with a touch of greasy blues, easily latches onto the sensibility of the guitarist, bassist Raffaele Bossard and drummer Lionel Friedli, whose playing encompasses rock energy. The trumpeter’s foreground/background role is best illustrated on One Minute too Late. Picking up from the short, shaking and rattling track that precedes it, this tune evolves into a solid narrative of horizontal brass tones decorated with Gisler’s flanges and frails. When the guitar solo transforms into a gentling theme elaboration with both folk and jazz inflections, the timbal decorations are from Branch’s plunger tones. Meanwhile, movement is provided by a bowed bass line and cymbal crashes. Throughout the set, cadences are further informed by rock sensibility. If Gisler’s slashing frails and echoing string slides are often staccato and distorted, their origins are British hard rock atop jazz perceptions. When a groove is established coupling fretted string echoes, a double bass pulse and drum backbeats, low-pitched bass colouration joins the guitarist’s shrilled fingering and the trumpeter’s brass smears to confirm this is no pop-rock CD. This maxim is further demonstrated on the smerey, scatological Better Don’t Fuck with the Drunken Sailor. A blues, it combines Gisler’s upward string shakes and stutters that could come from Led Zeppelin with Branch’s plunger mute extension which dates to Duke Ellington’s Jungle Band. The group also detours into post-modernism on Cappuccino, where the vocalized title is repeated and distorted by looping electronics and the stop-time narrative enhanced with guitar flanges and trumpet plunger growls.

If loops are one way to imaginatively add originality to trumpet-oriented jazz, Canadian-in-Brooklyn Steph Richards has come up with an even more outlandish statement. The nine tracks on Supersense

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pieces by J.S. Bach, Duane Allman and the performers themselves. Secondly, the recording is a wonderful and inspirational testament to the importance of music.

While we increasingly read about a dependence on the creature comforts of food, alcohol and Netflix to stave off pandemic-induced existential dread, it is aspirational to read Surrick’s inspiring words: She, McFarlane and Moran make music not because there is a current audience or concert tour pending but “because we can. We make music because the world needs music, our hearts need music. This is what we do in the face of isolation and despair. We are not alone.”

Important words, I think, and a much-needed 2021 optimistic counterpoint to Milton Rabbitt’s oft-repeated line, “Who Cares if You Listen?” I’m sure Surrick, McFarlane, Moran and the Sono Luminus label will indeed find a caring and listening audience for Fermi’s Paradox.

Andrew Scott

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**Blues Bash!**
Duke Robillard & Friends
Stony Plain SPCD 1423

![Blues Bash!](image)

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Timelessness and veritas are the special building blocks of good art – especially the blues – because the blues is a form of music where the very nakedness of the soul is bared. It is also upon this foundation, somewhat contrarily, that a certain joyfulness is often achieved. The music of Duke Robillard has espoused these virtues for half a century and it continues to have these qualities in spades. It’s why when you’re invited to this Blues Bash with Robillard and friends, it’s an invitation you must not refuse, or else you’ll regret it.

This music is dappled everywhere with Robillard’s poetic mellow, luminous – and sometimes weeping – guitar lines swinging in tandem with a magnificently rehearsed band, complete with mellifluous piano, sanctified organ, howling saxophones and topped off with two rumbling basses and a drummer playing rippling percussive grooves. The blues would be nothing if not for vocals that are cried (not sung) and there is plenty of that to cheer about here.

Vocalists Chris Cote on *What Can I Do* and Michelle Willson on *You Played On My Piano* are absolutely superb and that is only a sample of the electric charge in this music. But even without the vocals, this music sings. In this regard, and apart from Robillard’s glorious guitar, it would be a travesty not to call attention (especially, though not exclusively) to Rich Latalie’s smouldering saxophone performance on *Just Chillin’*. 

Raul da Gama

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In the right hands and mouth, trumpet tones also ally or contrast with experimental vocals and electronics, as well as instrumental techniques. That’s what happens on *Don’t Worry Be Happy* (Intonation Tri 002 thierry-wazniak.wixsite.com) as veteran American trumpeter by fragrance artist Sean Kaspet. A scratch-and-sniff card is included in the package to see if the music reflects the smells and vice versa. Olfactory connections may be up to individual debate. More compelling is the dynamic expressed between Richards’ downplayed brass undulations, the resonating drums and strained water tones she projects with the sensitive accompaniment provided by Americans, pianist Jason Moran, bassist Stomu Takeishi and drummer Kenny Wollesen. Stroked internal strings and stopped keys from the piano, languid double bass strokes and drum-top buzzes remain atmospherically low key and purposeful, as mewing and trilling trumpet splutters create contrapuntal theme extrapolations. That makes tracks like *Canopy and Metal Mouth*, where Richards unexpectedly exhales strident bursts of staccato snarls, stand out. Her splayed textures, plunger asides and muted slurs are expressively bright or gritty as the situation demands. Overall, the trumpeter by fragrance artist Sean Kaspet.

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(Northern Spy NS 130 northernspyrecs.com) are each named for a specific scent created for the trumpeter by fragrance artist Sean Kaspet. A scratch-and-sniff card is included in the package to see if the music reflects the smells and vice versa. Olfactory connections may be up to individual debate. More compelling is the dynamic expressed between Richards’ downplayed brass undulations, the resonating drums and strained water tones she projects with the sensitive accompaniment provided by Americans, pianist Jason Moran, bassist Stomu Takeishi and drummer Kenny Wollesen. Stroked internal strings and stopped keys from the piano, languid double bass strokes and drum-top buzzes remain atmospherically low key and purposeful, as mewing and trilling trumpet splutters create contrapuntal theme extrapolations. That makes tracks like *Canopy and Metal Mouth*, where Richards unexpectedly exhales strident bursts of staccato snarls, stand out. Her splayed textures, plunger asides and muted slurs are expressively bright or gritty as the situation demands. Overall, the few instances of revelle-like bugling or lively brass buzzing are secondary to the comprehensive integration of brass, string and percussion timbres. Like quality perfume, *Supersense* makes its presence felt through subtlety and understatement.

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Old Wine, New Bottles
Fine Old Recordings Re-Released

BRUCE SURTEES

The new 11-CD set, Ivan Moravec Portrait (Supraphon 4290-2 naxosdirect.com/search: 09925429027) will introduce, or reintroduce, a Czech pianist who was one of the very finest artists of the last generation. For a good many of the decades of the end of the 20th century into the 21st, Moravec was a familiar name to music lovers around the world, particularly to those who celebrated their Czech heritage. Born in Prague on November 9, 1930 he was influenced by his father who was an amateur pianist and singer. He illustrated Ivan to opera and taught him to read the scores which together they read and sang through. In an interview at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, where he had been a professor for more than 30 years, we learn that “I basically studied with Irma Grunfeld, the niece of Alfred Grunfeld, a very famous Viennese pianist through the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries – some of his recordings have been preserved. [...] In addition I was somewhat influenced by Professor Kurtz who was also teaching in Prague. Kurtz was an absolutely first-rate teacher.” In a most interesting interview in PIANO News in April 2002, reprinted in the accompanying notes, An Enthusiasm for a Radiance of Tone Moravec speaks about the many people who influenced his playing, especially Michelangelu.

The works included in the new discs embrace solo and concerted works by Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms, Debussy, Franck, Ravel, Janáček, Martinů and Smetana. Of course, I did not commence listening with the first track of the first disc as some listeners might have done if faced with such a wide range of compositions from 11 composers. Instead, I went straight to works by which to evaluate the artist. I have a special affection for the four Ballades of Chopin but have not heard a recorded performance to better express what I thought, Chopin would have heard in his head. From Cortot, Rubinstein, Richter, et.al, none has come close. There is lots more inspired Chopin here: the complete 24 Preludes, Op.28, the four Scherzi, the Piano Sonata No.2 in B-flat Minor, Op.35, the 17 Mazurkas and many individual works. Moravec’s Chopin at last realizes all expectations. His playing is majestic and exultant and wholly satisfying; playing unequalled that I know of. Who would have thought?

Moravec, as may have been expected, is a master of Schumann. Equally authoritative performances of Schumann’s Kinderszenen and that wonderful little Arabeske in C Major, followed by Brahms: Capriccio in B Minor, the Rhapsody in G Minor and also Three Intermezzi Op.117 and the Intermezzo in A Major, Op.118/2. The Brahms Piano Concerto No.1 is preceded by the Schumann Piano Concerto in A Minor, both conducted by Eduardo Mata with the Dallas Symphony in 1993. There are many other performances: Beethoven and Mozart concertos; some exquisite Debussy: Images Books 1 and 2; Estampes; Children’s Corner; and, naturally, Clair de Lune; and Preludes. Also, interesting Ravel, Martinů, Smetana and Janáček.

In the box is a DVD that includes a most enjoyable and informative video biography of Moravec including musical reminiscences by conductors and fellow musicians. Also, complete performances of works by Beethoven, the Appassionata; Prokofiev, the First Piano Concerto (Anercl); Mozart Concerto No.25 (Vlach); and the Ravel G Major (Neumann). In Czech, with subtitles in many languages. A first-class package not to be overlooked.

Volume Two of Profil’s Emil Gilels Edition is a 15-CD selection of memorable recordings (weren’t they all!) derived from various sources (PH17066 naxosdirect.com/search: 881488170665). All the composers are Russian from Tchaikovsky forward. There are performances of solo works, duos, trios, chamber music and concerts; too many for individual comment. The first disc contains two performances of the Tchaikovsky First: the first entry is a monaural recording of 1951 from Moscow conducted by Konstantin Ivanov with the USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra, then one in stereo from October 10, 1955 with the Chicago Symphony and Fritz Reiner. Happily, the listener can listen to both versions and may have a preference for one or the other. Gilels is the same in both. Ivanov or Reiner? Mono vs. stereo? I enjoyed the weight and majesty of the Russians. Tchaikovsky’s Second also merits two versions, a Russian performance conducted by Kondrashin and a Hungarian conducted by András Kórodi. Rachmaninoff’s Third gets two outings with Kondrashin, from January and March 1949, but the Fourth gets only two movements, the second and third. There are concertos, chamber works, sonatas and duos, and arrangements by these familiar and unfamiliar composers: Prokofiev, Stravinsky, Aleksander Alyabiev, Milly Balakirev, Borodin, Cesar Cui, Scriabin, Medtner, Glazunov, Borodin, Alexander Siloti, Moisey Wainberg, Kabalevsky, Khachaturian, Arno Babajanian and finally, Andrey Babayev. Assisting artists are Elizaveta Gilels, Leonid Kogan, Mstislav Rostropovich, Yakov Zak, Yakov Flier, Dmitri Tisganov, Vasily Shirinsky, Vadim Borovksoy, Sergei Shirinsky. The conductors are Fritz Reiner, Kirill Kondrashin, Dmitry Kabalevsky, Konstantin Ivanov, Franco Caracciolo and Kórodi. Never a dull moment in this superbly recorded collection.

To celebrate their establishment 40 years ago in Munich, Orfeo has issued several attractive compilations, Legendary Conductors, 40 Ultimate Recordings and now the collection Orfeo 40th Anniversary Edition – Legendary Pianists (C200071 naxosdirect.com/search/orfeo-c200071). This edition should be quite intriguing to collectors who surely will find a set of names quite different from what they might have chosen. It does not claim to be definitive; a collection, not the collection. There are ten CDs in the box featuring nine artists recorded live or recorded for broadcast, giving a sense of hearing an actual performance that contributes a heightened sense of you-are-there. It took a day to audition the set, which turned out to be not at all tedious, as the repertoire is pleasing and pianists clearly dedicated. Here are the pianists: Géza Anda, Bruno Leonardo Gelber, Friedrich Gulda, Wilhelm Kempff, Oleg Maisenberg, Konstantin Lifschitz, Carl Seemann, Gerhard Oppitz and Rudolf Serkin. Repertoire consists of mainly concertos from Bach to Brahms, via Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann. Also, a handful of variations, etc. This is a most attractive collection of pure pleasure.
A Rhapsodie on the Debussy heart good to hear the extremely subtle proofs that he and I share the nails all of the demands of this difficult literature. It does my envious sound and easy brilliant technique. Always understated, he modestly equal Campbell’s.

we had few homegrown stars; they inspired a larger crowd of next-dous career in Canada and around the world. This was the era when the excellent pianist John York, mark the start of Campbell’s tremen-

20th century .

20th century .

Sonatina
good old Malcolm Arnold’s
Witold Lutoslawski’s dashing and elegant Five Dance Preludes
and
precise,
Première rhapsodie
and Gabrielle Pierné, and with one of the finest pieces in the clarinet composers who provided us with fluff, in the case of Paul Jeanjean Seven V ariations on a theme from Silvana, Op.33 (charlieparkermusic.com)
Craft Recordings CRO00010 (LP)/CRO2774 (CD)
Charlie Parker
The Savoy 10-inch LP Collection
Charlie Parker
Craft Recordings CR000010 (LP)/CR02774 (CD)
(charlieparkermusic.com)

Atelier George Lewis – Rainbow Family 1984
George Lewis; Joëlle Léandre; Derek Bailey; Steve Lacy
Carrier 051 (carrierrecords.com/album/rainbow-family)

While forward-looking musicians (Sun Ra, Bob James) began fusing improvisation and electronic elements in the 1950s and 60s, composer/theoretician/trombonist George Lewis was among the very first to extend improvisational methodologies to computer programming. Best known for the work Voyager (beginning in 1986), he had entered the field with The Kim and I, a duet for trombone and programmed Moog synthesizer in 1979.

Rainbow Family is a previously unreleased 1984 concert from IRCAM in Paris. It integrates human and programmed computer improvisation, the program generating both its own material and reacting to the work of live improvisers through three Apple computers controlling three DX-7 Yamaha synthesizers. The work includes segments with individual improvisers – bassist Joëlle Léandre, guitarist Derek Bailey, bass clarinetist/flutist Douglas Ewart and saxophonist Steve Lacy – then Ewart and Lacy combine with the machinery before all four engage simultaneously with the program.

What’s most fascinating is how the program can match individual musicians’ distinctive approaches, whether adapting to the fluidly expressive lines of Ewart, the playfully analytical approach of Lacy, or the comparatively abstract inventions of Léandre and Bailey. The synthesizers do what the improvisers do, balancing their own impulses with the sonic environment in which they find themselves. As one might expect, the later pieces with more musicians are significantly more complex and generally richer, a genuine meeting of human improvisation and human-constructed, programmed improvisation.

Rainbow Family has taken 36 years to appear, but it’s definitely worthy of contemporary attention.

Stuart Broomer

Charlie Parker was a singularly creative force in bebop, influencing jazz improvisation on a scale comparable only to Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis and John Coltrane. The alto saxophonist’s greatest studio work was done in the 1940s, recorded by small, devoted companies. This set of four 10-inch LPs (or single CD) commemorates not just Parker’s Savoy recordings but replicates the form of his canonization. Originally released as 78-rpm records, one track per side, Parker’s principal work for Savoy – 28 tracks of it – were reissued as New Sounds in Modern Music Volumes 1–4, on four 10-inch LPs between 1950 and 1952.

Tracks weren’t in scholarly chronological order: Volume 3 leaps from 1948 to 1944, covering the range of the recordings in reverse and putting a swing rhythm section including pianist Clyde Hart and guitarist Tiny Grimes after cool jazz progenitors Miles Davis and John Lewis on the set’s last session. Why revisit this order? It best captures Parker’s impact as bop spread its influence, the last time jazz genius compressed its full flight into three-minute units. Armstrong’s Hot Fives and Sevens, from two decades earlier, are the only comparables.

Listening to Parker in this form, you hear the moments of transformation, as he uncovered new dimensions of harmony and rhythm with unparalleled joy, in company whose talents (Bud Powell, Dizzy Gillespie) sometimes approached his own. Parker soared as few other musicians have and soared highest here on recordings like Ko-Ko, Parker’s Mood, Cheryl and Constellation.

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My daughter said something to me last week that has had me thinking. She said that there’s been one very positive aspect to this world of suspended animation in which we’ve been living for almost a year now. And that was, she thought, that the virus has forced introspection upon us, forced us to slow down and disrupt our patterns of living, to scrutinize them with more care. For her it’s meant a serious career change, a new place to live, and a quite different attitude towards things – all very positive from her point of view.

My feeling has been almost the opposite – that we are so desperate to keep afloat these days, financially, socially and physically, that we haven’t had a minute to contemplate what the pandemic means on a larger scale. And what if it doesn’t mean anything? Perhaps it’s just something that happened, with no deeper implications.

It’s interesting to note, however, that back in the Middle Ages, when a similar pandemic rolled Europe, its meaning, for many, was extremely clear. God was punishing mankind for its sinfulness, and the Black Death was the result. That interpretation, almost universally held at the time, gave rise to many changes in thinking and attitude in the decades and centuries that followed. Indeed, some historians draw a straight line from the bubonic plague to the Protestant Reformation of a couple of hundred years later.

We live in a more secular age today, of course, so I’m not sure the prevailing currency on the meaning of the COVID virus centres around divine displeasure (although I’m certain there are many who think exactly as they thought in the 1300s). But it interests me that I haven’t yet come across any 21st-century equivalent explanations.

God knows there are plenty of explanations clamouring for consideration. That a pandemic that knows no boundaries is punishing a world that knows nothing but boundaries – of geography, nationalism, race, class, income, information, you name it. Or that in
the battle between a borderless pandemic and a bordered world, the pandemic always wins. We could point out, if we wanted to, that our scientific rational world, the one that we love and trust so much, was destined to triumph in the development of vaccines that can save us, only to fail miserably in the more mundane activities of human distribution – of information, safety procedures, basic preparedness.

We could note that the response to the pandemic demonstrates, above all, our incapacity for planning and a deeply entrenched inability to deal with the exigencies of the world – a humbling revelation that is also deeply troubling. It’s as though we are living through the ramifications, dozens of centuries later, of the scattering of mankind that the story of Babel recounts.

The things I am noticing lately have more to do with the role of the arts in modern societies, and particularly the performing arts. On a purely practical level, I think it is just dawning on us that the performing arts may well be the hardest hit economic sector of any in society, of all of society when this is all said and done. Businesses are reopening in restricted ways – spottily, but deliberately. The airlines have been flying again; hotels are open. Even sports teams are resuming a form of activity. But the world of live performing arts is closed tight, without exception, and will remain that way at least until the fall of this year, maybe even longer. Even with the virtual events on offer, that’s a sector that essentially will have been completely shut down for more than 18 months, maybe closer to two years. Two years of virtually no activity whatsoever – a desert that is devastating on so many levels. And I have been wondering if, honestly, we care.

Well, they do in the Federal Republic of Germany, where pandemic aid to artists and arts organizations totals $5.4 billion so far! That’s not a misprint. We’re at maybe $500 million here in Canada, about one one-hundredth of that amount. What the German government has recognized is a truth valid everywhere in the world – that artists are notoriously precarious, vulnerable, living from gig to gig, lacking any security at all. They are among the most vulnerable workers in society, facing an industry that has been more devastated than any other – a blindly catastrophic situation.

Now you can argue that the comparison between us and Germany is unfair, because they have a larger population, a longer history with the arts, a more prominent place in social life for artistic experience. But actually, none of these is especially true – they’re just two and a half times larger than us at 83 million, actually younger than us as a country by four years, and not quite as advanced artistically as you might think. I remember vividly interviewing the fine Argentinian pianist Ingrid Fliter when she was here a few years ago about whether I might think. I remember vividly interviewing the fine Argentinian pianist Ingrid Fliter when she was here a few years ago about whether she preferred performing for North American or European audiences. North American, her immediate response. Why, I asked? Because, she said, they are more attentive. And more knowledgeable. More knowable! The idea of this vast mass of highly cultured Europeans lining up nightly for artistic events is something of a myth.

What the Germans do understand that we do not is that the point of artistic activity is to provide an imaginative framework for the creation of a nation, a people, a sensibility, a world. The arts are not just a form of high-class entertainment, a perk for the upper-middle classes, a social event to demonstrate status. They are one of the means by which a nation defines itself, so protecting them is a national priority. I mentioned the story of Babel earlier, because one of the things I’ve been doing during the pandemic is, for the first time ever, reading the Bible carefully. I’m not doing so out of any new-found religious epiphany, but just out of a basic curiosity to find out what’s actually in the book. And what’s in the book are series of stories, like that of Babel, that act just like works of art do – that provide imaginative frameworks that define and influence our fundamental attitudes about the world.

This is a view of the power of art with which we struggle mightily in North America, especially in serious music. We can often see its validity here in the visual arts, or in literature. But our reliance on European forms of music-making, still, centuries later, really hampers our ability to use serious music to express ourselves completely in this country. Interestingly, it has been in popular music where this culture-defining role of the arts has been more obvious. And in Indigenous artistic activity, in which the power of the imagination to render justice, provide solace, create a future, expose hurt, re-engage a community, is on full display.

And occasionally, in other artistic endeavours, as with the finest moments of the recent Against the Grain Messiah/Complex. Listening to and watching Indigenous artists sing the spiritual music of one tradition against the explosive northern reality of another, we got just an inkling of how music might help us to create a new Canadian-ness, a differently imagined identity for ourselves. It was just a hint, a shadow, a fleeting moment of revelation, but that’s how the arts work. That is what they’re for.

Do I expect that we will be filled with this spirit of openness once our pandemic trials and tragedies are over? I can’t say that I do, but if even a bit of that blessing of interruption that my daughter was talking about becomes part of our new reality when this is done, we will be better for it. We have an opportunity; we should take it.

Robert Harris is a writer and broadcaster on music in all its forms. He is the former classical music critic of The Globe and Mail and the author of the Stratford Lectures and Song of a Nation: The Untold Story of O Canada.
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