

BBC



CENSORED STRAUSS

The composers banned in wartime Britain

AND DID THOSE FEET...

The ever-changing history of Parry's *Jerusalem*

music

The world's best-selling classical music magazine



BICENTENARY SPECIAL

CÉSAR FRANCK

Why it's time to recognise
the brilliant Belgian's
melodic genius

Thomas Adès

The British composer
on breaking the rules

Herbert Howells

How his Requiem
foretold deep tragedy

Mary Bevan

On the music that
shaped her life

PLUS

The extraordinary life of
Hélène de Montgeroult

A celebration of The Ivors
Composer Awards

The old-fashioned charms
of Reinhold Glière

and much more...

100 reviews by the
world's finest critics

Recordings & books – see p76

Vivaldi

Juditha triumphans

Silvia Frigato, Francesca Lombardi Mazzulli (soprano), Luciana Mancini, Elena Biscuola, Marta Fumagalli (mezzo-soprano); Coro Accademia dello Spirito Santo; Ensemble Lorenzo Da Ponte/Roberto Zarpellon
Fra Bernardo FB2242327
119:10 mins (2 discs)



The Latin-text oratorio *Juditha triumphans*, whose story is related in the Apocrypha, is Vivaldi's only surviving work of its type. He wrote it in 1716 for the musically gifted women of the Ospedale della Pietà, the Venetian Orphanage with which he was associated almost throughout his working life.

Librettist Giacomo Casseti described his work as a 'sacred military oratorio performed in times of war...', the war being that which Venice had entered against the Ottoman Empire, and to which reference is made in the text. *Juditha triumphans* is not an oratorio of the older type favoured by Carissimi and others; there is, for example no narrator, bringing the piece, in this respect at least, closer to opera. Instead, the drama unfolds by means of recitative and aria, interspersed with five short choruses.

The musical riches of this work, which survives in Vivaldi's autograph, are enormous and Roberto Zarpellon reveals its inherent dramatic force with vigour and insight to its myriad subtle inflections. Few composers have matched Vivaldi's kaleidoscopic instrumentation which features recorders, oboes, soprano chalumeaux, mandolin, theorboes, viola d'amore, a consort of viols, clarinets (though trumpets are preferred here), obbligato organ, harpsichord, strings and continuo.

The cast of vocal soloists, five in all, is a mainly strong one, though Elena Biscuola's Holofernes is undercharacterised. Luciana Mancini's Judith is splendid, and her aria 'Veni, veni, me sequere fida', perhaps the most memorable music in the oratorio, is sensitively sung. Here, Vivaldi colours the textural image of a turtle-dove with a chalumeau, a veritable masterpiece.

A stimulating release, but only the original Latin text is provided in the booklet. *Nicholas Anderson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

The Blue Hour

Song Cycle by Rachel Grimes, Angélica Negrón, Shara Nova, Caroline Shaw and Sarah Kirkland Snider

Shara Nova (vocals); A Far Cry
Nonesuch 75597907995 68:10 mins



Two recent all-female collaborations have turned blue: in the UK, Laura Bowler's

The Blue Woman – an unsettling exploration of the shattering impact of sexual violence – just premiered at the Royal Opera House, while in the US a quintet of composers present *The Blue Hour*, a song cycle based on Carolyn Forché's poem of the same name. The latter is a more subtle reflection of dehumanisation, examined through alphabetically arranged phrases woven into 40 movements, each created by individual composers – Rachel Grimes, Sarah Kirkland Snider, Angélica Negrón, Shara Nova and Caroline Shaw. The narrative arc is difficult to follow without the text (not provided in the booklet note), except where Forché mentions 'fragments from the second *Brandenburg*', which are helpfully invoked by the ever-iconoclastic Caroline Shaw in 'Firmament'. Here, as elsewhere, the vocal line is recited rather than sung ('firmament, fissure, flare stars').

Other composers, such as Snider in 'He told her how', switch between recitation and singing; the transition is not always smooth. The soloist is composer Shara Nova, whose own 'Ghost swift' recruits the voices of some of the other composers and collaborating ensemble A Far Cry for an eerie chorus ('hayloft ... hawfrost'), developed further in Shaw's concluding '3rd Refrain'.

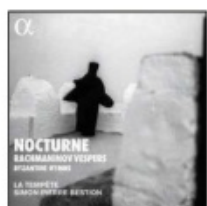
Boston-based A Far Cry – who commissioned the work – handles the ever-changing moods with poise, creating a sense of otherworldliness in movements like 'A memory', where distorted harmonies illuminate surrealist lyrics ('a cup of sleep'), and trepidation in 'Yet the women'. *Claire Jackson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Nocturne

Rachmaninov: All-Night Vigil; plus Byzantine Hymns

Adrian Sîrbu (Byzantine singer); La Tempête/Simon-Pierre Bestion
Alpha Classics ALPHA 897 76:39 mins



Simon-Pierre Bestion specialises in albums of cultural mash-ups – perhaps

most relevant to this one is his *Larmes de Résurrection*, with Lebanese singer Georges Abdallah, a specialist in Byzantine chant, as the Evangelist in 17th-century liturgical works by Schütz and Schein. Here we have Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil* prefaced and interleaved with ancient Orthodox Byzantine chants.

Romanian singer and Byzantine scholar Adrian Sîrbu sings the chants with a passion and microtonal inflection that convey a raw, living tradition. Unfortunately, the contrast between this and La Tempête's relatively disciplined performance style in the Rachmaninov is jarring. To a degree it's a matter of two different styles, but one can't help feeling that the problem is even more fundamental, given other, more emotionally empathetic performances of Rachmaninov's *Vigil* where the singers appear more engaged with the texts they are singing.

That's not to say that the Rachmaninov is presented entirely 'pure': besides segueing between the two musics, Bestion adds some theatrical touches: for some reason, Rachmaninov's opening 'Priidite, poklonimsia' (Come, let us worship) is rearranged for upper voices only, omitting the tenors and basses; less objectionable is the use of a semi-chorus for the livelier sections of 'Velichit dusha moyo Gospoda' (My Soul magnifies the Lord).

Generally, though, Bestion follows Rachmaninov's score to the letter, and occasionally the music catches fire: in 'Shestopsalmiye' (The Six Psalms), his following the score's accelerando results in a genuine moment of excitement. But for too long stretches, the *All-Night Vigil* appears here a denuded museum artefact, displayed alongside a distantly related musical tradition that's presented in a more vibrant and authentic style. *Daniel Jaffé*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Voyage

Jaëll: Lieder; Les Orientales – 'Rêverie'; Saint-Saëns: La Madonna col Bambino; Alla Riva del Tebro; Viardot-Garcia: 12 Poems by Pushkin, Fet and Turgenev – selection; Doppel-Liebe – L'innamorata; The Willow; Sérénade; plus songs by Chaminade, Duparc, Fauré, Gounod, Ravel and Widor

Marina Rebeka (soprano), Mathieu Pordoy (piano)

Prima Classic PRIMA014 71:33 mins



This debut song recording from operatic soprano Marina Rebeka, with up-and-coming vocal

coach and collaborative pianist Mathieu Pordoy, offers an original and appealing programme of mid-to late-19th-century French songs. There are real discoveries here, including a set of songs by the pioneering pianist-composer Marie Jaëll, alongside familiar figures like Widor, Gounod, Chaminade, Viardot, Saint-Saëns and Ravel.

Rebeka's discography is operacentred thus far, and with good reason. It's a superb voice, with a seamless, velvety legato and a brilliant, ringing colour across the entire range. She and Pordoy have a strong vision for the 'character' songs, such as Chaminade's 'Chanson slave' (Slavic Song), Saint-Saëns's 'Desir De l'Orient', Widor's 'Chanson Indienne' and Fauré's 'Les Roses d'Ispahan', all luxurious, sun-drenched products of French orientalism. The more introvert songs are less focused.

But the Jaëll songs are fascinating, although their expansive structures and searching texts sometimes demand more introspective colours. Rebeka sounds superbly healthy throughout, and Pordoy's restrained and elegant playing ensures she remains centre stage, though he could spar with this splendid voice more boldly. Still, there is much to enjoy; 'Der Sturm' is full of variety, and Rebeka's voice carries her effortlessly across fiendish vocal terrain. The closing Viardot set is a welcome addition to this wonderful composer's growing discography, 'The Willow' especially lovely. Rebeka revels in the Russian language and is supported by glowing recorded sound. *Natasha Loges*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★