

mière rhapsodie: See SPOHR.

lo Sonata. Violin Sonata: See RAVEL.

te bergamasque: Clair de lune. Étude No. 11, "Pour les arpèges composés". Preludes, n B♯, "Danseuses de Delphes"; No. 4 in A, "Les Sons et les parfums tourmentent dans l'air"; No. 2: No. 7 in F♯, "La Terrasse des audiences du clair de lune." La plus que lente. e: See CHOPIN.

obin Hood • Lynn Thompson, cond; Timothy Oliver (*Robin Hood*); Frederick Reeder (*tingham*); Dominique McCormick (*Maid Marian*); Sandra Ross (*Allan-a-Dale*); James Tuck; Oliver Henderson (*Little John*); Ohio Light Opera Ch & O • ALBANY 712-13 (2 CD) Live: Ohio Light Opera Festival 2004

De Koven (1859–1920) was virtually an exact contemporary of Victor Herbert. Both composers wrote light operas (or operettas), though Herbert's demonstrate a originality and musical inspiration. That does not mean that De Koven's are not worthy, and Lynn Thompson and his Ohio Light Opera Company have performed a real making *Robin Hood* available in its first modern recording.

*Hood* was one of the earliest successful American light operas/musical comedies, open. De Koven wrote two serious operas: *Canterbury Pilgrims* for the Metropolitan in 1917 and *Winkle* for the Chicago Opera in 1920. Neither was a success, and he didn't live to see of the latter. But his operettas were more successful, and *Robin Hood* was considered its time.

g in *Robin Hood* is known to us all—even if we could not have identified its composer. "Oh Promise Me," sung at weddings ever since its introduction. It was not written for *Robin Hood* as a separate art song. However the mezzo singing the trouser role of Alan-a-dale solo number for the premiere, so De Koven inserted it early in the second act.

is the music like? Think Gilbert and Sullivan. The accompanying notes try to minimize of G & S on De Koven, but listening makes clear how much his style owes to the ses. There are a few songs that could be lifted directly from a Gilbert and Sullivan out modification, and others that would require only modest changes. Still, one could model, and there is no denying the attractiveness of much of the music. The traditional tale is transformed into an *opera buffa* story, and the whole thing is a delightful romp. Performance falls into that area that is difficult to review: Some of it is very good (Reeder's McCormick's Maid Marian are superb), and some of it is neither outstandingly bad nor good. Oliver, in the title role, has a lovely lyric tenor voice that he too often pushes into hardness; Mismas's Friar Tuck is unsteady in his first solo, a bit more solid as the performer. Ross sings quite beautifully in "Oh Promise Me." The fact that this is a live recording always work to its advantage, particularly in the dialogue. Some of what may have been in the theater with a visual element, and some distance between audience and stage, comes in and a bit heavy-handed on disc. The actual recording sound is more than adequate, may be distracted by stage movement and noises; for me it is not a problem.

one interested in the development of American musical theater as an art form, this is a trial. While it is not perhaps the recording of one's dreams, it is an adequate representation of success in that genre.

Writing the above, I learned of a prior CD on the AEI label, which combines a number of songs from *Robin Hood*, some of them truly historic (two with members of the original cast recorded in 1898 and 1906!). For those with a serious or scholarly interest in the history of musical theater, this is probably of interest. But the incredibly shrill recorded sound on this modern of the recordings makes it virtually unlistenable to most. Henry Fogel

s, the *Song of a Great City* (arr. Butths). *Eventyr* (arr. Dale). *Fantastic Dance* (arr. Dale). *March/April 2014*

In 2003, pianists Noriko Ogawa and Kathryn Stott produced a fascinating disc of piano duet transcriptions of orchestral music by Delius, a BIS release that was enthusiastically recommended by Adrian Corleonis in *Fanfare* 27:6. All the transcriptions on that disc were made by the composer's acolyte Philip Heseltine (who, under the name Peter Warlock, became a noted composer of English songs), but Delius also had other friends who transcribed his orchestral music. Among them were the pianist, composer, and prolific rearranger Percy Grainger, the German conductor Julius Butths, the duo-piano team of Ethel Bartlett and Rae Robinson, and the now-forgotten composer Benjamin Dale.

This new disc from Simon Callaghan and Hiroaki Takenouchi is the second volume in a series covering all the extant Delius arrangements. (I have not heard the previous volume.) They date from an era when a piano or two-piano reduction was the only way to hear music that was rarely played in the concert hall. There are pluses and minuses in experiencing the music in this way. First among the pluses is a clarification of the composer's harmonic procedures in all their individuality and subtlety. (Corleonis quotes Heseltine's apt description of Delius's music as "a melody of chords".) As to the minuses, the result of robbing Delius's music of its orchestral color serves to reveal the banality of some of the thematic motifs and to underline its rambling formal structure. Both criticisms apply to Butths's arrangement of *Paris, the Song of a Great City*, an early work (composed in 1899) which relies heavily on orchestral textures to cloak a structure that is not so much episodic as kaleidoscopic. Dale's *Eventyr* (1917) fares better because the piece is more cohesive—though still rhapsodic—and, unlike Butths, Dale does not resort to tremolo, the dead giveaway of the piano transcription. (Incidentally, Dale wrote a magnificent Piano Sonata in his own right, which should be played far more often.) Grainger's arrangement of *Song of the High Hills* is also effective, due to his extraordinary ear for keyboard textures and his lack of restraint in approaching the task of transcription.

Callaghan and Takenouchi are sensitive to the music's ebb and flow, and occasionally compensate for a lack of orchestral color by varying a tempo or emphasizing a particular detail, such as the ringing bass notes in the final bell-like climax of *Paris*. The only overlap with Ogawa and Stott's disc is Heseltine's version of the short tone-picture *Summer Night on the River*. Here I found Callaghan and Takenouchi comparatively straightforward and even a little dull, although that may be due to the more atmospheric sound given to their predecessors. Callaghan and Takenouchi are at their most sensitive (and Grainger at his most imaginative) in the impressionistic closing pages of *Song of the High Hills*.

One criticism of this release pertains to the notes. While all the music is described as "arranged for two pianos," Heseltine's *Summer Night on the River* is clearly for piano duet—that is, four hands at one piano—and designated as such on the older BIS disc. In any case, annotator Martin Lee-Browne treats the program as though it was an orchestral collection. Why tell us about the "magical moment" when the choir enters in *Song of the High Hills* when all we hear are pianos?

Perhaps I am being unnecessarily pedantic. Overall, this enjoyable recital is well played, shining a light on the musical procedures of a distinctive and highly individual composer, but is not a genuine alternative to the various orchestral recordings available. Phillip Scott

**DELLAIRA *The Secret Agent*** • Sara Jobin, cond; Jodi Karem (*Lady Mabel*); Scott Bearden (*Adolf Verloc*); Nathan Resika (*First Secretary, The Singer, Constable*); Andrew Cummings (*The Ambassador*); Mark Zuckerman (*The Prime Minister*); Amy Burton (*Winnie Verloc*); Jonathan Blalock (*Stevie*); Matthew Garrett (*Ossipon*); Aaron Theno (*Michaelis*); Matt Boehler (*The Professor*); David Neal (*The Commissioner*); Jason Papowitz (*Chief Inspector Heat*); ens • ALBANY 1450/51 (2 CDs: 99:30 CD)

Michael Dellaira's 2011 opera *The Secret Agent*, based on Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel about an actual attempt to blow up the Royal Conservatory in Greenwich in 1894, is meant as an allegory for "our terror-haunted world." The plot centers around the double agent Adolf Verloc, working for the Germans but really in the employ of the British, who engineers the explosion with the help of the spy Ossipon and the strange, decadent Professor who walks around with a bomb in his pocket, a

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detonator in his hand, and a sneer on his face, contemptuous of all humanity. My lone argument against this plot as it exists in the libretto is that it is just a shade too convoluted and melodramatic in an almost cartoon-type way. It reminded me a bit too much of the wonderful silliness of Boris Badenov and Natasha Fatale or the old *Mad Magazine* *Spy* vs. *Spy* cartoons from the Cold War.

Whatever my reservations about the libretto, however, the music is absolutely fascinating, combining elegant old-style melodies with pungent modern ones in such a way that the ear is continually engaged in its progression. Moreover the singers, while not always possessing the greatest voices, are all first-rate vocal actors and—wonder of wonders!—all have clear diction! Hooray! An opera in English where you don't have to follow the libretto to understand what on earth they're singing!

Primarily it is baritone Cummings, as the Ambassador, whose voice is not of the best quality in the early going. Baritone Bearden as the double agent Verloc is just fine, as is soprano Karem as Lady Mabel, whose fancy soirees often host the German Ambassador (originator of this nefarious plot to blow up the Conservatory) as well as salon singers. In this story Verloc has a wife, Winnie, whose retarded younger brother Stevie lives with them, and it is he who is eventually blown up in the attack on the Conservatory. Amy Burton (Winnie) has a somewhat strained upper register but otherwise sings and phrases quite well, and tenor Blalock (Stevie) has a light, bright voice.

Generally speaking, the style of this opera is in the same mold as many such post-Copland works. Dellaira has found a way of emulating this style while still being able to invent new and different melodic lines. I was especially taken by his ingenuity in creating the proper *mood* for each scene while still spinning out an evolving musical structure; this is craftsmanship on a very high level, and much to be admired. The composer also moves easily from solo singing to polyphonic ensemble writing with remarkable ease, creating an interesting structure in which all the varied elements fit in with a feeling of inevitability. Equally fascinating is the way Dellaira is able to expand or contract the melodic line to fit in as many syllables as librettist J. D. McClatchy wrote into the sung text.

In the opening scene of act II, a baritone is singing Schubert's *Erlkönig* in Lady Mabel's drawing room. To be honest, the actual singer (Nathan Resika) isn't very good, but what was fascinating was how, several minutes later, Dellaira wove Schubert's song into his own music. But as the opera progressed, scene after scene, I sincerely lamented the lack of visuals. This really should have been a DVD and not a CD, as it's the kind of opera that you really want to see, not just hear, much like Copland's *The Tender Land* or Menotti's *The Consul*. I can very easily imagine that it is quite effective on the stage.

Special praise must also go to conductor Jobin and her *ad hoc* ensemble of 13 musicians. They played with consummate skill, expanding and contracting their sound almost at will as the dramatic situation demanded.

The slightly distant miking and recurring stage noises tell me that this recording emanates from a stage performance, yet there is no mention of date or venue anywhere in the CD booklet or jewel box insert. Even with the caveats noted above, this is an interesting work deserving of further performances. **Lynn René Bayley**

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Michael Dellaira's opera *The Secret Agent* is based on the 1907 Joseph Conrad novel of the same name, itself based on an actual historic event, the attempted bombing of the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, England, in 1894. The bombing, an act of anarchistic terrorism by one Martial Bourdin, did not succeed in causing any damage to the observatory, the official arbiter of the world's time, when Bourdin's explosives went off prematurely. Thus was Bourdin thwarted in his unique attempt to "kill time." The libretto of J. D. McClatchy follows Conrad's spy story fairly closely, but incorporates elements of both Conrad's original novel and a stage version that he subsequently made.

Since the plot of Conrad's story is either already well-known to the reader of this review, or easily ascertainable from the Wikipedia article on Conrad's book, I shall summarize it only briefly here. The secret agent is Adolf Verlac, a shifty sort who hides his spying activity behind the cover of a porn shop. He has been paid for some time by the German embassy to report on the activities of the various anarchist groups active in London, but is actually a double agent for the British government. The

German ambassador approaches Verlac to shake the complacent British out of their apathy by setting off a bomb in the observatory. Verlac meets with a motley group of conspirators that he's ingratiated himself to in order to spy on them. This meeting takes place in Verlac's home, also shared with his wife Winnie's mentally-challenged brother, Stevie. The latter becomes upset with the guests, and he is sent into the countryside to recuperate at the home of one of the conspirators.

The explosion at the observatory takes place, but causes no damage, as the bomber stumbles and prematurely sets off the explosives. His badly mangled body is recovered by the police, who find Verloc's address sewn into the coat. The constables inform Verloc's family and friends (but not the conspirators, who all believe that Verloc himself was the man who had been blown to bits) that he will be arrested because of this evidence, but Verloc informs the officials that the German ambassador is behind it all. When the ambassador arrives, the police gently ask him to accompany them to Scotland Yard. In the meantime, Inspector Heat arrives at Verloc's home, and informs Winnie that he has found a label in the saboteur's coat that identifies it to her as Stevie's. Verloc himself arrives at that moment and, distraught, confesses that he was behind Stevie's bungled bombing. After Heat leaves, Winnie turns on her husband and inflicts a fatal stabbing wound upon him. Comrade Ossipon, one of Verloc's confederates infamous for preying upon vulnerable women, arrives and runs off with the funds that Verloc had withdrawn from his bank for Winnie, but is caught and carried away. Winnie is left at the end of the opera curled up in a corner, ruined and alone.

Michael Dellaira's setting of this story is appropriately conceived in a rather melodramatic way. There are few sections that could be considered arias (Winnie's lullaby to soothe Stevie is about as close as one gets). This is a dramatic story, though, and the declamation throughout is most appropriate to it. The composer confines his instrumental forces to a chamber ensemble, with what sound to be solo strings only in conjunction with selected winds and percussion. The sparse textures allow the words to be clearly projected throughout, which all of the singers do quite consistently. Stylistically, Dellaira continues the American operatic tradition of Douglas Moore, Jack Beeson, and Dominick Argento, albeit centered upon a slightly more astringent harmonic base than is typical in the music of those composers—but not a lot, a bit surprising in light of his studies with such avant-gardists as Milton Babbitt, Mario Davidovsky, and Franco Donatoni. Dellaira is clearly a master of setting texts to highlight and project the words so that they are understandable and dramatically effective. McClatchy aided in this by providing a libretto that was conducive to such setting, including sentences with good metrical flow (e.g., "They are determined to make a clean sweep of the whole social creation.") Librettist and composer have effectively collaborated to produce a work that is dramatically well-paced, and one that never flags in interest. Dellaira has incorporated a number of clever musical devices into the structure. One of my favorites was the scene in the parlor of socialite Lady Mabel, in which a singer is caught in the middle of a performance of Schubert's *Der Erlkönig*. Although only a few phrases of the song are heard intermittently, the composer extends the harmonies from this Lied throughout the scene, during which the main characters sing their non-Schubertian lines.

The Center for Contemporary Opera has assembled a good cast for this production. Every one of the singers brings good vocal declamation to the assigned role. A few of them are possessed of a slight metallic edge to their vocal production. Scott Bearden, who sings the title role, is one of them, but the effect is only evident when he sings at a *forte* level or above. But, lest I seem unduly negative, the opera succeeds on all levels, including the vocal ones.

Since this is a live performance (of the premiere), the listener will have to put up with a certain amount of stage noise, but it is rarely overtly distracting. The sound is well recorded, with good balance between soloists and ensemble, and the instrumentalists all play their parts accurately and musically, as far as I can judge without a score. This opera has had a number of performances by now in Europe, and I hope that we will hear it more in this country as well. Warmly recommended to enthusiasts of contemporary opera, and American music in general. **David DeBoor Canfield**

**DEVienne Oboe Sonatas**, op. 70/1; op. 71/1–3 • Burkhard Glaetzner (ob); Siegfried Pank (vc); Christine Schornsheim (fp) • BRILLIANT 94683 (64:31)