

# American Record Guide

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ensemble under the direction of Shahab Paranaj and dedicated to the performance and preservation of Iranian music.

*Songs of My Father* (2021) sets poems in English written by the composer's father, Sayid Danielpour, as love letters to his mother. They are affectionate, candid expressions of devotion and wonder. The settings are unhurried and gentle, with beautiful, sensitive accompaniments for viola and harp.

*Songs of Nature* (2021) is longer than the other two cycles combined, setting all of the Italian sonnets Vivaldi appended to the *4 Seasons* with cello and piano accompaniment. As with the other cycles, Danielpour writes with variety, lyricism, and sensitivity—I'm particularly taken with a tender intermezzo for cello and piano alone. Still, this cycle is over half an hour long and it can drag; as with the *4 Seasons* concertos, I wonder if the cycle would be best enjoyed as stand-alone works.

Ms Plitmann sings with beauty and sensitivity. Danielpour clearly knows how to show off her voice in his writing. He couldn't have asked for better performances. Texts and translations.

FARO

**DEBUSSY:** *Pour le Piano; Rameau Homage; Suite Bergamasque;*

**RAMEAU:** *Movements*

Alessandro Del Gobbo, p  
Da Vinci 905—59 minutes

Taking Debussy's Rameau Hommage as a point of departure, Alessandro Del Gobbo presents an album exploring the kinship between Claude Debussy and Jean-Philippe Rameau. This follows Del Gobbo's 2022 release, likewise a juxtaposition—between Francois Couperin and Maurice Ravel.

Sometimes Del Gobbo's interpretation of Debussy's *Pour le Piano* seems a bit rigid and direct, lacking the nuance and poetry that the music might suggest. The watercolor hazes of ephemeral chords sometimes forge too harsh an outline, losing its mysticism. But the more dexterous and rigorous moments make Del Gobbo's touch palpable and scintillating. The famed *je perle* pianistic technique shines through in each carefully shaped note. Gobbo layers textures, particularly in the *Suite Bergamasque*, where gestures now seem sculptural and

painterly, sweeping across canvases with saturation and vibrance.

Without fail, Del Gobbo's interpretations of Rameau's character pieces serve as high points of the recital. In addition to his career with the modern piano, Del Gobbo has studied harpsichord, and this venture seemingly fits the young Italian virtuoso. The fiendishly difficult ornaments of Rameau, which require lightning-fast trills and turns, have a delightful bite and precision with Del Gobbo's masterly technique. Detached articulations likewise carry a buoyant vitality, while tasteful inclusions of *notes inégales* and other performance practices demonstrate both knowledge and tact. Never sounding stiff or dutifully bound to imitate a harpsichord, Del Gobbo fully explores the sonic possibilities of the modern piano in this Baroque repertoire. Particularly with his performance of *Les Cyclopes* to close the program, Del Gobbo throws his hat into the ring next to other perceptive artists. One looks forward to hearing his coming projects, whether they might continue juxtaposing old and new, or move in a different direction.

FIGEL

**DELIUS:** *Violin Concerto;* see BRAUNSTEIN

**DELLAIRA:** *The Leopard*

Kim Josephson (Don Fabrizio), Robynne Redmon (Princess Stella), Minghao Liu (Tancredi Falconeri), Margarita Parsamyan (Concetta), Yaqi Yang (Angelica), Frank Ragsdale (Father Pirrone), Kevin Short (Cavaliere Chevalley), Thandolwethu Mamba (Don Calogero Sedara); Frost Opera/ Gerard Schwarz

Naxos 669052 [2CD] 121 minutes

*The Leopard* (Il Gattopardo) is the most famous 20th Century novel in Italian. Published very soon after the death of its author, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (1896-1957), it quickly became a best seller in many languages. A famously extravagant film was made of it, directed by Luchino Visconti and starring Burt Lancaster.

Nobody until now, it seems, has tried adapting the work for the stage, much less for the musical stage. Along comes Michael Dellaira (b. 1949). We reviewed 3 of his previous operas (2002, 2014, 2016).

*The Leopard* has had some previous partial tryouts, but now the University of

Miami's Frost School of Music has given it a full production. At the helm is the renowned conductor Gerard Schwarz (longtime music director of the Seattle Symphony). Some major operatic performers take leading roles here, with experienced young professionals and some Frost School students picking up the rest.

The result is engaging and approachable, except for the intense angularity of many of the vocal lines—do composers feel they have to write this way to be taken seriously? On the plus side, Dellaira seems to have avoided giving any role too extended a range: nearly all the singers seem to encompass both the highest and lowest notes comfortably.

The staged performances were hailed by the prolific critic and historian Paul Du Quenoy as easy to understand (he did not complain about the vocal lines) and a relief from the spate of operas about minorities, the agonies of the creative class, and other fashionable topics. *The Leopard* is one of the most accessible new operas I have encountered in recent years.

*The Leopard* tells the tale of an aristocrat in mid-19th Century Italy, Don Fabrizio Corbera, who is caught between the comforts of his life and family and the challenges posed by the Risorgimento, in the person of his own beloved nephew, Tancredi Falconeri. The libretto was crafted by the renowned playwright and libretto-translator JD McClatchy (1945-2018; he died just as the opera was completed). McClatchy used relatively straightforward language, peppered by occasional poeticisms unfortunately bordering on obscurity ("At last, beloved Sicily will throw off the Bourbon rule and resign its mystery"—resign?). The libretto is well structured. The main action takes place in 1860, near Palermo, when Garibaldi's small red-shirted army arrives to promote the unification of Italy—a process that of course will reduce greatly the power and influence of landed families such as the Corberas. These scenes are framed by a Prologue and Epilogue where women in the family, a half-century later, recall, sometimes bitterly, the events in the opera's main scenes. There are also occasional moments when a character (the town priest Pirrone, the nephew Tancredi) will "break the fourth wall"—as one says in the world of the theater—and offer comment on the events shown on stage. The isolated Concetta

repeatedly engages in self-revealing soliloquy.

The plot involves an operatic triangle: Don Fabrizio and his wife Stella, Princess of Salina, want their nephew Tancredi to marry their daughter Concetta, but the spirited youth is drawn to the beautiful Angelica, daughter of a self-made man and opportunist, Don Calogero Sedara, described in McClatchy's wonderfully detailed synopsis as "a self-made man and an opportunist". Father Pirrone tells us that he makes money partly by buying up land "in shady deals" and raising the price of grain at periods of famine. He "has a wife of great beauty whom no one has laid eyes on. And", McClatchy adds pointedly, "a daughter, Anglica, whom everyone has."

The opera includes many of the famous scenes in the book, such as when the priest (Father Pirrone) comes to talk to Don Fabrizio and finds him in his bath—and is flustered (and perhaps excited) to see him naked—or, toward the end of Act 2, a ball, at which Don Fabrizio—who, somewhat sympathetic to Tancredi's cause, has voted for Sicily to become part of Italy—watches as Tancredi and Angelica dance and remarks that young people in love are "blind to each other's faults, deaf to the warnings of fate, thinking their lives will be as smooth as the ballroom floor". The opera gives a certain emphasis to the role of Concetta, beloved by her parents but left, by Tancredi, to live her life alone, as shown in the epilogue when she slashes a portrait of her father (he is known as The Leopard, because that fearsome animal is on the family crest) with a knife and collapses weeping.

I had never encountered the music of Michael Dellaira before, but I found it generally effective at putting McClatchy's savvy, touching, generally plain-spoken text across. There are frequent brief allusions to musical styles associated with various aspects of late-19th Century Italian life: church hymns, ballroom waltzing, a string-instrument village band tuning up, a guitarist outside the window playing Edgardo's final aria from *Lucia di Lammermoor*. There are notable moments when, "over" orchestral music, characters do not sing but are merely seen doing such things as dressing, gathering, or (in the case of Tancredi and Angelica) chasing each other playfully and then kissing passionately, or making shady business deals (Don Calogero). Here the lis-

tener, unlike an operagoer in the theater, needs to follow the libretto's stage directions closely.

Another reason to look at the libretto often: those incessant up-and-downs in the vocal lines sometimes make the words hard to grasp by ear. In the theater, one would probably be glancing often at the supertitles. If opera composers want the audience to watch the singers, they should try hard to make the words come across directly, as in a good Broadway show.

In general, the performances are vivid, creating distinctive characters. We hear some notable artists: Kim Josephson (who has sung major baritone roles at the Met) as Don Fabrizio; Robynne Redmon (likewise much heard at the Met) as Stella; the fine character tenor Frank Ragsdale as the family priest; a wonderful young lyric tenor named Minghao Liu as Tancredi (the man of the future who ends up becoming less idealistic over time); Margarita Parsamyan, an accomplished young mezzo, as Conchetta; and the bright and alert soprano Yaqi Yang as Tancredi's beloved but rather superficial Angelica.

The renowned bass-baritone Kevin Short lights up one scene as a delegate from the new government who offers Don Fabrizio a lifetime seat in the Senate as the spokesman for Sicily. Thandolwethu Mamba (a member of the Metropolitan Opera Chorus) projects well as the unscrupulous Calogero.

All strive valiantly, and often with success, to put McClatchy's savvy, occasionally too-clever text across while maintaining a steady core of tone. I hardly heard a single wobble or moment of barking!

I encourage anybody interested in the current state of opera to get to know *The Leopard*.

LOCKE

**DIETRICH:** *Symphony 2; Violin Concerto; Overture*

Klaidi Sahatci, v; Solistes Europeens Luxembourg/ Christoph Konig  
Naxos 574 507—83 minutes

Albert Dietrich (1829-1908) is best known as a contributor with Brahms and Schumann to the FAE Sonata. The works here continue the tradition of those two masters with some imagination but not quite their level of thematic invention. The Overture (1882) is

indifferent neo-Brahmsian boilerplate. Klaidi Sahatci does a capable job in the concerto, playing with a ripe tone, negotiating a difficult part with skill. The orchestra is no more than adequate. Their ensemble is so-so; tutti passages tend to sound soggy and bottom-heavy.

The symphony and concerto were recorded on CPO with a different filler (Mar/Apr 2009) by Alexander Rumpf and the Oldenburg Orchestra. Those performances had better playing, balances, and conducting, so the music made a far stronger impression. So unless the inclusion of a mediocre overture is critical, I'd recommend the older release.

O'CONNOR

**DISTLER:** *The Christmas Story*

Adam Riis, t; Concert Clemens/ Carsten Seyer-Hansen

OUR 6220684 [SACD] 40 minutes

Patterned after the choral writing of Heinrich Schutz, Hugo Distler's *Weihnachtsgeschichte* is a warm and loving account of the Christmas story told in the Gospel of Luke. As you'd expect in a work inspired by the Baroque Era, a solo tenor narrates the story with the choir (singing a cappella) contributing a dozen songs to flesh out its meaning. Several are variations on Michael Praetorius's 'Est ist ein Ros', one of our most beloved and beautiful Christmas melodies. (For the loveliest choral interlude in the piece, try 'Roslein, das ich meine' on track 4.)

The singing from this Danish chamber choir of 16 is exquisite, as is the solo tenor's sweet voice. It's all caught in handsome sound, and the booklet offers everything it should. In sum, an offering without blemish which, the faithful will tell you, is rather the point of the Christmas celebration in the first place.

GREENFIELD

**DORATI:** *Piano Concerto;*  
**SEIBER:** *The Invitation Suite;*  
*Renaissance Dance Suite*

Oliver Triendl, p; Staatskapelle Weimar/  
Domonkos Hééja

Hänssler 24035—66 minutes

Antal Dorati (1906-88) composed dozens of works in his youth and late middle age, abandoning composition in his 20s for a