

I N T E R N A T I O N A L
RECORD REVIEW

FOR THE SERIOUS CLASSICAL COLLECTOR

January 2011 £4.00

**Simone
Dinnerstein**

Romantic Bach

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as Simon Boccanegra**

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Bezuidenhout's
Mozart**

Murray Perahia's Brahms



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Comparisons:

Keyboard Concertos Nos. 1 and 5:

Schiff, ECO/Malcolm (Denon) C37-7236 (1979)

Keyboard Concerto No. 1:

Hewitt, Australian CO/Tognetti (Hyperion) CDA67307 (2005, rev. July/Aug 2005)

Keyboard Concerto No. 5:

Hewitt, Australian CO/Tognetti (Hyperion) CDA67308 (2005, rev. July/Aug 2005)

English Suite No. 3:

Pogorelich (DG) 445 573-2 (1985)



Simone Dinnerstein

Lisa Marie Mazzucco

Simone Dinnerstein's latest release – 'Bach: A Strange Beauty', alluding to Francis Bacon's remark 'There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion' – presents a rather curious selection of Bach keyboard works, with the Third *English Suite* for solo keyboard and two of the concertos. Alternating between these are some of the richest of Bach transcriptions from the first half of the last century, by Busoni, Hess and Kempff. The variety takes some getting used to – I'm not entirely convinced that it works – but it's hard to fault the playing. The transcriptions are played with the fullest of tone and colour, and Kempff's fleet-fingered arrangement of *Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein* is bathed in pedal, creating a wonderful halo of sound.

Dinnerstein's approach to the rest of the programme reflects this same love of pianistic sonorities, with clarity of articulation without entirely shying away from the sustaining pedal and preferring a legato approach, playing to the bed of the note, where many others tend to be more spikey and over-articulated, in the style of Glenn Gould or Ivo Pogorelich. The latter's coupling of the Second and Third *English Suites* remains one of the most thought-provoking of Bach keyboard discs, with electrifying technical control, rhythmic tautness and inexorable drive in the outer movements, especially the final 'Gigue'

movements. Dinnerstein's approach is in real contrast and there is nothing exaggerated or self-seeking about her technical display. Where she excels is in the slow movements, and in that of the Third *English Suite* she indulges in some fabulous ornamentation and embellishment, romanticizing it in many ways in terms of rubato and interpretative freedom, and anticipating the rhapsodic approach of C. P. E. Bach. The slow movements of the concertos fare similarly in their improvisatory nature and there is a real sense that the trills are not pre-prepared but continued for just as long as the musical flow will allow. For some it will be too much, but the involvement and emotional commitment is total.

In the outer movements of the concertos, she eschews the zest and sheer *élan* of the likes of Angela Hewitt or Andrés Schiff, the latter heard to best effect in his first recording of these works, with the English Chamber Orchestra under George Malcolm. Both these artists are Bach interpreters of the modern age, with lightness of touch and a sparkling brilliance which Dinnerstein does not seek to emulate. They are also rather better supported than Dinnerstein, and the Kammerorchester

Staatskapelle Berlin is a little bass-heavy and slightly sluggish at times.

Dinnerstein's is a fascinating and soulful approach of which I hope to hear more, especially in the transcriptions to which her romantic temperament and depth of sonorities are ideally suited.

The recording quality is ideal. Most of the programme notes consist (along with reproductions of several of her father's paintings) of an artist interview. This reveals much about the freedom of her approach and her conflict with the excessively rhythmic attitude of so many modern Bach exponents, and those who see 'only the formal composition and the symbolism but miss what makes it mysterious and expressive, what makes it beautiful'. *Nicholas Sawley*

Symphonic Poems

Bainton *Paracelsus*, Op. 8. *Pompilia*, Op. 11. *Prometheus*, Op. 19. **Boughton** *A Summer Night*, Op. 5. *Troilus and Cressida* (Thou and I), Op. 17. *Love and Spring*, Op. 23. **Royal Scottish National Orchestra/Martin Yates.**

Dutton Epoch CDLX7262 (medium price, 1 hour 17 minutes). Website www.duttonvocalion.co.uk. Producer Michael Ponder. Engineers Dexter Newman, Dillon Gallagher. Dates June 1st and 2nd, 2010.

Boldly going (as seems to be its remit) to regions of the British repertoire where no company has gone before, Dutton here presents us with the première recordings of six symphonic poems, three apiece by the close friends Rutland Boughton and Edgar Bainton, all clocking in around the 12-13-minute mark, all composed in the decade 1899-1909, and all but one unheard for over 100 years. (Indeed, for Boughton's *Troilus and Cressida*, composed in 1902, this is a world première performance.) Both composers had not long graduated from the Royal College of Music and both were furnished already with a confident and fluent handling of the orchestra. These are early, long-forgotten works – two of the Boughton scores, indeed, go completely unmentioned in Michael Hurd's authoritative study of the composer, *Rutland Boughton and the Glastonbury Festivals* (OUP; 1993). Taken together these six works are eloquent testimony to the attraction that the symphonic poem held for young British composers of that era, who must have felt, like Liszt and Strauss a generation or two before, that it represented the music of the future. Bax, Delius, Bantock and Holbrooke might be named as prominent contemporaries who were equally under its spell.

The three Boughton symphonic poems are presented in reverse chronological order, beginning with the latest and best, *Love and Spring* (1906). Bainton's three follow in opus-number order, which is not quite chronological, beginning with *Paracelsus* (1904) and ending with *Prometheus* (1909) – which is also the best of them – with the earliest, *Pompilia* (1903), between. When all six works are interleaved and played in order, which was how I listened to the disc first, one thing that emerges is that though Bainton's idiom was settled early, but steadily refined upon, it was Boughton whose actual language was rapidly developing over those few years. While *A Summer Night* (1899) is a pleasant but unremarkable essay in a derivative, generalized post-Wagnerian idiom, *Troilus and Cressida* (which Boughton later re-titled *Thou and I*, acknowledging its actual autobiographical inspiration) is already more distinctive in the probing chromaticism of its opening unison theme and the imperious vigour of its first *Allegro* subject. Tchaikovsky, as much as Liszt or Wagner, is a palpable influence here. With *Love and Spring*, Boughton has practically arrived at his mature style. The scoring is lighter, more iridescent, and the melodic language more forthrightly 'English'.

Boughton's symphonic poems paint landscapes, or evoke situations between two people. Bainton's three are all portraits, two (*Paracelsus* and *Pompilia*) after Robert Browning, the third (*Prometheus*) after Shelley. With Bainton, too, Tchaikovsky is an influence – especially in *Prometheus*, which has strong echoes of *Manfred* and *Francesca da Rimini*. The latter work is also evoked in *Pompilia*, inspired by Browning's *The Ring*