

Also coming next spring, Soundstreams is celebrating **Steve Reich**'s 80th birthday with a concert featuring three of his seminal works. *Clapping Music*, *Tehillim* and the iconic *Music for 18 Musicians* will be performed at Massey Hall on April 14, 2016. There is a new recording of *Music for 18 Musicians* featuring New York's **Ensemble Signal** under the direction of **Brad Lubman (Harmonia Mundi 907608)** and if you are not familiar with this classic minimalist work for four pianos, three marimbas, two xylophones, vibraphone, two clarinets, violin, cello and four voices, I would recommend this recording. As Steve Reich himself says, "Signal has made an extraordinary recording of *Music for 18 Musicians*. Fast moving, spot on and emotionally charged." With top rank Toronto musicians engaged for the Massey Hall performance I am sure we can expect nothing less from Soundstreams.



Speaking of iconic works of contemporary music, the **London Philharmonic Orchestra** has just released **Des Canyons Aux Étoiles** by **Olivier Messiaen** under the direction of **Christoph Eschenbach (LPO – 0083)**. At 100 minutes in length, *From the Canyons to the Stars* (1971-74) draws extensively on Messiaen's signature birdsong transcriptions for much of its musical material. As always it is also a paean

to the glory of God, this time in the context of the natural beauty of Bryce Canyon National Park in Utah, which Messiaen visited in 1972 in conjunction with this commission from an American philanthropist. The full forces of the modern symphony orchestra are supplemented with four soloists: Tzimon Barto (piano), John Ryan (horn), Andrew Barclay (xyloimba) and Erika Öhman (glockenspiel), all of whom rise to the occasion. Highly recommended.

Canada's triple threat **Triple Forte** – Jasper Wood, violin; Yegor Dyachov, cello; David Jalbert, piano – have a new recording of **Dvořák Piano Trios (ATMA ACD2 2691)** and as one would expect it is a treasure. Founded in 2003 this trio comprises three top soloists who work together as a finely oiled machine. Their debut disc in 2012 of music by Ravel, Shostakovich and Ives showed them



to be at home in 20th-century idioms. This proves no less true of the preceding century with these captivating performances of two of the pinnacles of Romantic chamber repertoire, the *Trio in F Minor, Op. 65* and the "Dumky" *Trio in E Minor, Op. 90*, Dvořák's third and fourth ventures into this genre. Although the opus numbers suggest a larger gap, the two works were written within a span of seven years, in 1883 and 1890. The first is set in the usual four-movement form, opening with a majestic and expansive *Allegro ma non troppo* replete with melodies reminiscent of Schumann and Mendelssohn. The "Dumky," dating from the height of the composer's Slavic period, is a set of six contrasting movements all based on the Ukrainian Dumka folk-song form. In both works the strength (i.e. forte) of each of the players is allowed to shine while goading the others on to new heights in performances that exemplify the group's name.



Berlin Sonatas (Passacaille 1006 passacaille.be) features 18th-century works by Abel, J.C.F. and C.P.E. Bach, Benda, Kirnberger and Graun performed by **Elinor Frey** on five-string cello and **Lorenzo Ghielmi** on a Silbermann fortepiano (known at the time as a "Cembalo con il forte e piano" due to its ability to produce sounds both loudly and softly, unlike the harpsichord with its limited

dynamic range). Frey provides an extended essay to explain why she feels a five-string cello is appropriate, and likely originally intended, for this repertoire. She makes a strong case for the instrument, not only in her writing but more particularly in her performance, especially in two violin solo works by Benda, here heard one octave below

their intended pitch. One intriguing aspect of the keyboard used here is a "stop" heard in the final movement of Carl Friedrich Abel's *Sonata in G Major* which makes it sound like a hackbrett (hammered dulcimer). I had understood that the prepared piano had been invented by American Henry Cowell in the early 20th century and further developed by John Cage in the 40s, but it seems that piano-maker Gottfried Silbermann (1783-1853) beat them to the punch a century earlier. He developed a technique for replicating the sound on his keyboard instruments with a device he called the *pantaleone* in honour of the hackbrett virtuoso Pantaleone Hebenstreit.

Catching up

The first of the discs overlooked at the time of their release that I want to bring to your attention is a 2014 realization of **The Rite of Spring** in a surprising orchestration for piano, string bass and drum kit by the jazz combo **The Bad Plus (Sony Masterworks**



88843 02405 2), primarily known for their avant-garde approach to jazz, tinged with hints of rock and pop. I was particularly impressed with their convincing recreation of Stravinsky's score using only the minimal tools of their trio. Comprised of Ethan Iverson (piano), Reid Anderson (bass and electronics, mostly involving treatments and layerings of the piano part in the introductory section of the piece) and David King (drums), the group developed this project during a year-long residency at Duke University in 2010-2011. The result has to be heard to be believed. With the exception of the addition of a brief and unnecessary percussive coda following Stravinsky's final chord, the trio stays true to the original score and gives a remarkable performance using only limited resources. Highly recommended!



Streamlined **Stravinsky** is also a feature of a disc by the **Zodiac Trio (Blue Griffin BGR257 bluegriffin.com)** although in this instance the reduction is the work of the composer himself. *L'Histoire du Soldat* was originally written as a theatrical piece for three speakers – soldier, devil and narrator – dancer and seven instruments based on a Russian folk tale.

The sponsor of the piece, Werner Reinhart, was an excellent amateur clarinetist and the year after its 1918 theatrical debut in Lausanne Stravinsky made a suite of five movements for clarinet, violin and piano. Stripped to the bare bones, this already skeletal work – said to be a reflection of the depleted supply of musicians as a result of the Great War – is still very effective, as Zodiac's dedicated performance proves.

The group – Kliment Krylovsky (clarinet), Vanessa Mollard (violin) and Riko Higuma (piano) – was formed at the Manhattan School of Music in 2006 and its goal is "to etch this instrumentation into the ranks of chamber music's dominant combinations." To this end they commission works and tour extensively. Their 2010 debut recording featured original works but this latest draws on existing repertoire. The Stravinsky *Suite* notwithstanding it is **Bartók's Contrasts**, written for Benny Goodman and Joseph Szigeti, which is generally considered to have launched this genre. Zodiac gives *Contrasts* an exuberant and idiomatic performance, confirming its place at the head of the table. The disc also includes the world premiere recording of the somewhat anachronistic *A Smiling Suite* by French composer Nicolas **Bacri**, and a moving (and haunting) early work by Shostakovich protégé Galina **Ustvol'skaya**.

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