
New on CD

The singing voice and the singing keyboard

by Kathy Wolfe

"Baroque Duet"

Kathleen Battle, soprano, Wynton Marsalis, trumpet
Sony Classical SK 46672, 1992, \$14.88

Beethoven, Sonatas Op. 10 & Op. 79

Melvyn Tan, fortepiano
EMI Classics CDC 7 54207 2, 1991, \$14.99

Schumann, Liederkreis Op. 24 & Kerner-Lieder Op.35

Olaf Bär, baritone, Geoffrey Parsons, piano
EMI Classics CDC 7 54027 2, 1991, \$14.99

Mozart, " 'Coronation' Mass in C" K. 317 & "Missa brevis in C ('Sparrow')" K. 220

Vienna Boys' Choir, Vienna Symphony
Philips 411 139-2, 1983, \$14.99

"We instrumentalists are always trying for the clarity the vocalists have. I just want to hear the way Kathleen Battle phrases, to learn how to play with that level of expression," says jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis in the PBS television documentary on the making of "Baroque Duet." Good idea, for Miss Battle is at her vocal and musical peak. The contrapuntal force of the Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti arias chosen has voice-led Mr. Marsalis and the Orchestra of St. Luke's, conducted by John Nelson, to one of the best sets of this repertoire available.

Collecting these pieces alone is a big help to students of vocal and instrumental music. The exquisite Scarlatti songs,

especially "Mio tesoro, per te moro" shed much light on the history of both bel canto singing and the trumpet. The singing and dialogue in the better-known selections such as Bach's "Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen" and Handel's "Let the Bright Seraphim" equal the best performances of the 1950s by Elisabeth Schwartzkopf.

PBS's video is worth watching in order to see Miss Battle's vocal technique, growing rounder every year; be sure to avoid the footage of the duo's "pop" side when they lapse into "be-bop" in rehearsal. PBS plans to air the 90-minute program again in August, and the video, "Baroque Duet," will be released by Sony both in videocassette and laserdisc in September. The segment on Mr. Marsalis and his New Orleans jazz family portrays this as musically equal to bel canto, which it is not. We hope now Mr. Marsalis will return to his earlier, classical repertoire.

'Singing' the fortepiano

Melvyn Tan's recent EMI release of four Beethoven sonatas on fortepiano (the term used nowadays to distinguish the instrument invented by Cristofori in the early 1700s, from the post-1840 modern grand) reveals an impressive mind. The only fault is in the liner notes, which tell nothing of him. He succeeds in not only playing the fortepiano, but in playing all of the counterpoint and different voices such that Beethoven's humor comes out. Even the most rapid passages have a delightful, singing phrasing, internal rubato, and voice differentiation.

Most fortepianists can't play the instrument. The results are either precious, as if on harpsichord, or banged out using



Soprano Kathleen Battle and trumpeter Wynton Marsalis in musical dialogue.

irrelevant modern pianoforte technique. Mr. Tan, however, has gotten the joy of the fortepiano into his blood. He delights in the very different fortepiano low and high registers, and its uncannily precise ability to shape a tone, because he has seen how Beethoven's concepts require these. The music, his technique, and the instrument's powers are highly integrated.

The three earlier sonatas of Op. 10 are played on a modern fortepiano replica. The fourth, Op. 79 in G, is a special treat, played on an antique 1815 Nannette Streicher from Beethoven's Vienna, whose richer tone is evident in comparison. The entire CD is far better miked than most other fortepiano efforts I have heard.

Singing Schumann

Olaf Bär, Germany's popular baritone, has a glorious voice, but a badly romanticized approach to Schumann's Liederkreis Op. 24 on his recent EMI CD. Pianist Geoffrey Parsons, often very good, here responds even more romantically and the result is sentimental schmaltz. This is a shame, as Op. 24, the first songs Schumann wrote in 1840, contains some of Schumann's finest responses to some of Heinrich Heine's most ironic poetry. In this CD, almost no irony is to be heard.

Schumann/Heine fans would do much better with baritone Thomas Allen's CD of Op. 24 and "Dichterliebe" with the very poetic Roger Vignoles at the keyboard, on Virgin Classics, VC 7 90787-2 (1989). Mr. Allen is the best Mozart baritone alive: Years of singing Mozart operas have taught him to let his voice do the composer's work and not gild the lily with overly pronounced theatrics. The result, with Vignoles's impressive support, is the long line missing from most recordings of the Heine cycles.

Mr. Bär does better in some of Schumann's less often recorded "Twelve Poems of Justus Kerner," Op. 35, some of the last songs Schumann wrote in that extraordinarily productive year, 1840. These are important songs which deserve more notice, and a number of recordings of them have just been released.

Children's voices

As a result of the Vienna Boys' Choir wonderful 1992 U.S. national tour, *EIR* acquired their European recording of Mozart's "Coronation Mass" K. 317 and "Sparrow Mass" K. 220 on Philips 411 139-2 (1983). The disc is only now being made available in the United States.

The earlier "Missa brevis" K. 220 (1777) is the better of the performances. Mozart clearly wrote it for boy trebles, in adherence to the famous, annoying demand by his employer, the pompous Archbishop Colloredo of Salzburg, that he "keep it short." While the tag "Sparrow Mass" is said to have been given after Mozart's death to a humorous violin figure, the Vienna and Salzburg boy singers have always been taught to "sing forward, like a bird." Such a brief and happy work is just the sort best sung by children, the elevation of whose

voices create such a joyful sense of freedom that even chained to the "letter" of the archbishop's law, Mozart was "free as a bird" to have the last laugh.

The "Coronation Mass" is not as good. Conductor Uwe Harrer rushes the counterpoint, so that little of it is heard. Moreover, this mass is better sung by adults, even though it was written in Salzburg where only boy trebles were used. By 1779, Mozart was writing more complex ideas for which he had in mind the revolutionary use of adult women's voices, which he required in later Vienna works such as the "Great Mass" in C Minor and the "Requiem." Mozart broke the old rule forbidding women to sing in church, because children simply don't have the maturity to grasp certain extended musical ideas he was inventing.

Tantalizing sample: Bournonville in D.C.

by Nora Hamerman

The Royal Ballet of Denmark came to the Washington Opera House for a week of performances in June featuring works by the Danish-born, French-educated August Bournonville (1805-79), the greatest choreographer of the last century. He founded a school of ballet which has struggled to uphold classical esthetics in dance, against the juggernaut of what some call the "Anglo-Russian School" of flashy (not to mention fleshy) athleticism.

Our encounter with the U.S. tour of the Royal Ballet confirmed that Bournonville's heirs are valiantly maintaining the dialogue principle in their own, demanding artistic medium.

Ballet is the one art form which can claim to be both temporal (like music and poetry) and spatial (like sculpture and architecture). It suffers from some drawbacks in comparison to these other media. Its primary vehicle of expression is the human body; and unlike the voice, which is not only invisible, but is the very organ that renders us uniquely human through speech and song, the body is linked with the mechanics of living and, well, sex. So classical dancing has to fight to turn that into an irony, to prove that ideas which are immaterial are expressed through the very material body.

A second handicap is that ballet as we now know it matured in the 1830s—the era when the classic gave way to romanticism as the dominant esthetic. Of course there were still classical artists—like the composers Schumann and Brahms—throughout the 19th century, but an art form born in that era has less chance to define a truly noble standard for itself. For example, most of the music to which the great "classic" ballets are danced ranges from the tolerably light-