

CLASSICAL ★ CDs

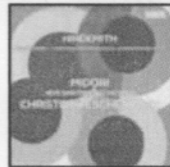
VIOLIN & ORCHESTRA

Hindemith - Violinkonzert /
Symphonic Metamorphosis /
Konzertmusik Op. 50

The robust themes of composer Paul Hindemith typified the denouement of 19th century German romanticism and the first stirrings of the modern neoclassical era. This recent release from Ondine does an excellent job of demonstrating the unique qualities of Hindemith's music in light of its historical context, thanks to the virtuoso performance of violinist Midori, the superlative playing of her accompanists in the NDR Symphony Orchestra, and the direction of conductor Christoph Eschenbach. The CD opens with the lush and lovely Symphonic Metamorphosis (1943), among Hindemith's best-known works, and one that he wrote based on piano pieces by Carl Maria von Weber. Weber - one of the first significant composers of German romanticism - is an ironic yet appropriate inspiration. Even though the expansive sound of Symphonic Metamorphosis is huge, there is no musical 'fat' here; perhaps a conceit from Hindemith, acknowledging the leaner arrangements of modern orchestral music. Later, nimble phrasing and energetic expression throughout 1939's violin concerto offers aural delight in a composition that demonstrates Hindemith's intimate understanding of live performance as well as his mastery of contrapuntal dynamics. Most impressive.

- Chris Morgan

> NDR Sinfonieorchester, Midori (violin), Christoph Eschenbach (conductor)



MEMOIR/POETRY

★ BOOKS

Juanita Wildrose: My True Life

"Oh, tall Papa, here I am, your trouble-girl, Juanita Wildrose, me, seeing you come home weary for dinner," writes London poet Susan Downe in her new book about her mother, Juanita Emack Thompson. The sentence signals a pivotal moment, a reckoning at the end of a childhood spent on a farm in the Midwestern United States, an upbringing that cultivated an unflappable determination in an imaginative child who was spirited away from her hometown as she made the transition from girl to woman. Downe takes on the voice of her mother through engaging, affectionate prose and poetic passages between Juanita's life and that of Juanita's mother Mollie - and all of the sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, parents, grandparents, and kind friends along the way - resulting in a candid, heartfelt and oft-intense adventure that will almost assuredly coax tears from readers. There is a lot of authentic historical information here, particularly about the Civil War and race relations in the mid-1800s in America, yet the story retains a clear, easy cadence that renders it impossible to put down. The memoir also contains actual writings from Juanita herself, a resourceful and gifted individual born in Wichita who, despite what was expected of women born in the early 20th century, studied chemistry, questioned religion, admired the works of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, and went on to receive a university scholarship. Downe will launch her book at Landon Library on October 23 at 7:30pm. Books will be available for purchase from Oxford Book Shop. Recommended.

-Amie Ronald-Morgan

> Susan Downe

> Pedlar Press, 2013 • 153 pages



CLASSICAL GUITAR

Contemporary Italian
Guitar Music

The prosaic title of this recording belies the genius of the music presented here. Like some finely-tuned machine synchronized to the actions of its member parts, the players in the Guitalian Quartet operate of one accord. Single descending phrases, repeated, such as the one at the four-and-a-half minute mark of Absinthium - the opening track on the ensemble's sophomore release - is just one demonstration of Guido Fichtner, Claudio Marcotulli, Maurizio Norrito and Stefano Palamidessi's collaborative chemistry on classical guitar. Others include Mauro Schiavone's minimalist masterpiece Quatteto no. 5, a visionary approach to consolidating the sound of four, six-stringed instruments in a piece that attempts to conjure a 24-string guitar; Giovanni Sollima's Leonardo Bestiary, which blends various compositional styles, including classical, minimalism, rock and new age; and Serenata per un satellite by Bruno Madera, an avant-garde composition intended to inspire the creative meanderings of the musicians who perform the piece. Crisp production values and impeccable engineering technique add clarity and focus to an already well-defined body of work, while the sweetness and purity of the guitar itself is a balm; a summer breeze off the Mediterranean that mingles easily with memory and desire.

- Chris Morgan

> Guitalian Quartet

> Bridge Records, 2013



ESSAYS

Beautifully Unique Sparkleponies

Beautifully Unique Sparkleponies, written by musician, gamer, radio host and National Football League punter Chris Kluwe, incorporates both conventional and amusingly off-beat ideas in a collection of essays, letters, fiction, poetry and rants. The subtitle - "On Myths, Morons, Free Speech, Football, and Assorted Absurdities" - hints at the many subjects covered in the book, but human rights, politics, and sports are topics that take center stage. With words both grim and humorous, the book aims to reinforce the author's view that "our differences don't divide us but instead highlight our wondrous diversity". Even if a reader disagrees with some of his beliefs, Kluwe's skilled writing, irreverent asides, and an obvious affection for the vernacular make the entire collection endearing and enjoyable. The book is well thought-out and includes a number of letters, blog posts and pieces written for other publications over the last few years. Kluwe became known in recently for defending same-sex marriage across a number of forums and publicly denouncing several high-profile NFL players as 'douchebags' for holding up negotiations during the 2011 lockout. The book's title comes from the public consumption version of his profanity-filled letter responding to a Maryland delegate's request that an NFL team stop a player from advocating certain opinions. Beautifully Unique Sparkleponies also includes an index of themes, subjects, and pejoratives, should a reader wish to find every occurrence of the word 'douchebags'.

- Adam Shirley

> Chris Kluwe

> Little, Brown and Company, 2013 • 262 Pages



VIOLIN & PIANO

John McDonald - Airy

Composer and pianist John McDonald's latest release lives up to its name, since the pieces are rejuvenating, insubstantial and ethereal. 'Airy' is also the name of the final and most recently written piece on the recording, an exceptional exposition that navigates successfully between a delicate pizzicato passage and an upbeat lyrical refrain. Dedicated to the violinist Joanna Kurkovic - with whom McDonald performed the entirety of this recording - Airy is both the thesis statement and summation of the works compiled here. Composed over a period of 23 years, the merits of McDonald's creative output lie largely in his ability to compose capably within various musical traditions using the fulsome application of his own artistic sensibility. The result is an undeniably contemporary approach to violin and piano music that doesn't rely on recognizable rhythms and phrasing; an approach that pursues an ephemeral muse into the unknown jurisdictions of the human heart. Haunted and elevated, lost and found again, McDonald's severe yet sparsely beautiful soundscape is a place of exotic sonic artifacts and heady conceptualization. Must be something in the air.

- Chris Morgan

> Joanna Kurkovic (violin), John McDonald (piano)

> Bridge Records, 2013



POETRY

Unknown Actor

Jason Christie explores the poetics of famous writers in his latest collection of poetry. Just as a sommelier might describe their favourite wines, the intellectual tone of Unknown Actor will thrill some and leave others anxious and empty. Each poem is a perfectly constructed veneer, the momentary charm of a New York Street facade on the studio lot. Christie is an expert of form, but the cleverness of the writing gets in the way of its own voice. Several poems are on the cusp of the delicate, the earnest, but are interrupted by dazzling language play; all clever, no risk: "...words are failing us right now/diagrams that beasts sleeping outside, breasts/never interact with the system, we signal/quick fingers, sign bridges over rivers, copy/brades overt ridges, sighed hands copy/recedes into a brutally hot afternoon." This is reader as voyeur: poet-child raised in front of television; poet-adolescent mentored by English teacher; poet-adult writing for this new generation. All knowledge is literally at their fingertips, on smartphone search engines. As Christie writes, "Search results/Words, letters, scribbles, sighs..." A scholar will love the navigation of style and form, the absurd combinations of content, from Shakespeare to Sister Act 2 - but will the bookworm, that burrowing reader who searches for truth?

- Amy Andersen

> Jason Christie

> Insomniac Press, 2013 • 122 pages

