Scaling Olympus: Talking Beethoven's Violin Concerto and Other Matters with Manrico Padovani

BY JERRY DUBINS

I suspect that violinist Manrico Padovani is not all that familiar to *Fanfare*'s readers in the States, so I'm going to begin by asking him to introduce himself.

Tell us about your backgound, who you studied with, when and where your career took off, what venues you've played, and what recordings you've made, other than your new Beethoven album.

I grew up with my three sisters in a family of Italian origin in the Italian part of Switzerland.

My father was a hotel manager and my mother was a housewife who helped in the hotel in times of need, having also completed formal education in this direction.

I started playing the violin after watching a film about Paganini's life, which totally fascinated me. At the beginning, it was difficult because I was very active and animated as a child, and my father was convinced that classical music was only suitable for very calm people, and he was not very convinced of my passion. But seeing me so involved, he let me live my fantasy, convinced that I would calm down. Only after I won some prizes in national competitions, and after some very positive auditions with important musical personalities and also in front of the directors at the conservatories in Zurich and Milan, did he decide to support my talent and my choice to become a professional musician.

Among my teachers, I would like to mention Aida Stucki-Piraccini, a very important Swiss violinist and pupil of Carl Flesch, who also counted Anne-Sophie Mutter among her students. She was very precise, and wanted me to have an absolutely clear idea of every musical phrase I was playing. With her, I obtained my diploma as a soloist. Other teachers and mentors were Herman Krebbers, the great Dutch soloist in Amsterdam, the *virtuosissimo* Ruggiero Ricci (I earned several awards in his competition in Berlin), the aristocrat Franco Gulli (one of the first recordings I owned was of his wonderful world premiere recording of Paganini's Concerto No. 5), and the crazy Ivry Gitlis, who taught me that in music you cannot predict everything in advance, and that it depends on your mood on a given day how you will shape a musical phrase. Unlike Aida Stucki, Gitlis was much more connected to the very moment of performance.

I made my debut in the early 1990s with a recital at the Lucerne Festival in Switzerland, with a program that included music by Les Six (Honegger, Poulenc Milhaud, Tailleferre, Auric, and Durey) and was subsequently engaged by several important orchestras, initially in Switzerland and Germany, and then on several continents. During my international tours, I performed with important orchestras: the Russian Philharmonic Orchestra Moscow, the Academic State Capella Symphony Orchestra in St. Petersburg, the Philharmonics in Prague and Stuttgart the Orchestra della Svizzera

Italiana, the Güri Philharmonic in Seoul, and many others. And I played under the direction of conductors such as Rudolf Barshai, Marcello Viotti, Andrei Boreyko (who conducted the Berlin Philharmonic), and Peter Altrichter. Among the halls in which I played I would like to mention the Smetana Hall in Prague, Kölner Philharmonie in Cologne, the Ohji Hall in Tokyo, Phoenix Hall in Osaka, the Goldener Saal at the Musikverein in Vienna, the great hall of the Casino in Basel, the Alte Oper in Frankfurt, the Auditorium of the Louvre in Paris, and the National Theater in Bucharest.

In addition to my new "live" CD, dedicated to the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth, my previously published recordings include concertos by Brahms, Prokofiev (No. 1), an earlier Beethoven (in a studio in Moscow), Paganini (No. 1); a CD of concertos for two violins by Bach, Vivaldi, Schnittke, and Pärt; and another "live" CD of virtuoso pieces for violin and orchestra by Sarasate, Saint-Saëns, and Massenet. I've also recorded violin sonatas by Poulenc, Janáček, Debussy, and Honegger, and among contemporary composers works in collaboration with Thomas Fortmann, who wrote some of his compositions for me, as has the Swiss producer, flutist, and composer Christian Gilardi (for solo violin) and the Italian composer Stefano Mongiusti (for two violins). I'm also planning to release other CDs, including "live" recordings of concertos by Prokofiev, Spohr, and Paganini; a studio recording of Paganini's 24 Caprices with some of my own improvisations; and the great works for violin and piano by Franz Schubert (the *Grand Duo*, the *Rondo Brillant* in B Minor, and the Fantasy in C Major).

Something I read—I believe it was on your website—indicated that you were in possession of four go-to violins: a 1695 Johann Baptiste Rogerius, a 1722 Strad, a 1780 Joseph Gagliano, and an 1870 Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume. An amusing thought crossed my mind when I read that. Unless Padovani is Jeff Bezos-rich, I said to myself, these instruments must be on loan to him. Do you own any of these violins outright? Do you have a favorite among them? Do you feel there is a "best-fit" between their individual voices and responsiveness to your playing and the period and style of the music at hand? Which instrument, or instruments, are we hearing on your Beethoven recording?

This is a very funny question. If I were as rich as Jeff Bezos, I would have bought both the Paganini's "Cannon" and Stradivari's "Messiah" violins by now, or at least the entire city of Cremona! Actually, living together with my partner Natasha Korsakova (a great violinist in her own right), with whom I have made all the mentioned recordings of the pieces written for two violins and orchestra, we have several violins at home. The 1695 Rogerius is the violin used by the great Andrei Korsakov, her father, throughout his fabulous international career and his famous recordings on CD and for TV. The Strads made available to me are loans from foundations, such as the 1722 Strad, but also other violins made by Stradivari in 1711, 1715, and 1716. I am the owner of two J. B. Vuillaume violins (an 1842 copy of the Paganini "Cannon" and an 1870 precise copy of the Stradivari "Messiah"), and additionally of a 1780 Joseph Gagliano.

I actually prefer not to play on loaned violins, because you can't make any modifications without making a formal request. Moreover, there is always the fear that the owner might suddenly come to want the instrument back, as happened to cellist Natalia Gutman with the Stradivari cello she was playing. It gives you a feeling of uncertainty that really isn't very positive, either for the art or for your health. Personally, I decided to limit myself with the change of instruments, deciding to use mainly the two wonderful Vuillaumes in my possession, which are also the ones I play on the new Beethoven CD—the concerto and Romance No. 2 on the 1842 "del Gesù" Vuillaume, and the Sonata No.1 on the 1870 "Messiah" Vuillaume.

Let's get to the Beethoven, which, after all, is mostly what this interview is about. I note, once again on your website, that you've recorded concertos by Paganini, Brahms, and Prokofiev, not to mention a recording of works by your Swiss kinsman, Thomas Fortmann, which was reviewed in Fanfare *back in 2014. All of that seems at a rather far remove from the Beethoven Concerto. So, what brought you to Olympus?*

Actually, this is the second recording of the Beethoven Concerto I've made. The first one was a studio recording in Moscow with the Russian Philharmonic Orchestra. If we are talking about Olympus, then I already visited the mountain when I recorded the Brahms Concerto as my very first recording in St. Petersburg. And at least on one of the mountains slopes (reserved for great violin-

ists), we should also include Paganini's Concerto No. 1. So, it was not a new experience but a logical continuation of my development. I would also like to say that it is not possible to publish everything you do. In this perspective, I'm planning to publish some recordings from some live concerts, as I mentioned before, with works by Prokofiev, Spohr, Verdi (yes, the quartet!), and Paganini.

I played the Beethoven when I was a kid, especially the fast movements since I didn't have the patience and maturity to search for the profound *cantabile* required by the score, especially in the slow movement. A decisive push came from my teacher, Aida Stucki. Under her guidance, I learned respect for this score and she opened up new perspectives, inspiring me in a decisive way and making me fall madly in love with this concerto. On this Beethoven work, I also made my written dissertation of analysis concerning form, harmony, and its historical positioning, concluding the first part of my studies.

Not the dazzling virtuosic showpiece of the Paganini, or Brahms's impenetrable fortress against the New German School, Beethoven's Violin Concerto conceals its virtuosity in lyrical embroideries and masks its muscularity in moments of dream-like reverie that seem to arrest time itself. And yet, it's regarded in many, if not most, forums to be the violin concerto of violin concertos. Why do you suppose that is?

First of all, I think this general impression comes from the fact that, besides being the only violin concerto written by a genius like Beethoven which, like the Brahms Concerto, plays a decisive role in the repertoire of every violinist, it is also the first concerto in history that begins with what my teachers always called a great entry "cadenza"—very delicate and dangerous by the way. In this concerto, we have a great demonstration of Beethoven's great ability to amalgamate both the solo part and its interaction with the orchestra, which is often accompanied by the soloist and not vice versa. This makes it already a fantastic concerto.

But the real reason is found in the depth of its ethereal themes, such as in its second movement, which one never tires of listening to, and this catapults it to the Olympus of the most important vi-

olin concertos ever. At the same time, this concerto holds a special place in Beethoven's *oeuvre* precisely because of the serenity in his musical expression. If we look closely at his works of the middle period, we notice that these are often very controversial and full of episodes filled with temperament and tragedy.

Until just a few years ago, I always thought of the piece as a pioneering work, that nothing like it had been heard before in the violin concertos of Mozart or Haydn, and that it was something entirely new and original that sprang from the mind of possibly the greatest musical innovator in history. And then, suddenly, without warning, my lifelong belief was shattered in 2008, when Rachel Barton Pine came out with her recording of the Beethoven Concerto paired with a violin concerto by Franz Clement. Clement, of course, was the violinist who premiered Beethoven's concerto in 1806. But Clement had composed his own concerto a year earlier, in 1805, and there can be no doubt that Beethoven knew it because he conducted Clement in it at a concert on April 7, 1805, that featured the first public performance of Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony. I wouldn't want to suggest that Clement's concerto plumbs the emotional depths or ascends to the spiritual heights of the Beethoven, but the "concept" of the Clement—its Romantic style, breadth of expression, use of the orchestra, and its manner of integrating the solo violin part into the orchestral fabric—was not lost on Beethoven. So, much as I resisted having to admit it, Beethoven may have done it better, but this was one time he didn't do it first. What aspects of Beethoven's concerto do you find unique to the way the violin is written for and the way its part is woven into the orchestra?

It must be remembered that this concerto was not only premiered by Clement, but was also commissioned by him from Beethoven, who initially dedicated the concerto to Clement. Beethoven, however, delayed delivery of the score, not allowing Clement to prepare adequately. Probably for this reason, and especially to show what he was capable of if he'd had the time to prepare, Clement decided to play one of his own compositions for solo violin between the first and second movements of the concerto (as anecdote has it, on one string while holding his fiddle upside down) that had nothing to do with Beethoven's composition. Put out by Clement's reputed vaudeville act, and prickly as ever, Beethoven later withdrew the dedication to Clement and rededicated the concerto to one of his childhood friends, Stephan von Breuning.

In addition to being a very skilled violinist, Clement was also a fantastic pianist. Projecting myself into the situation, I can imagine that Beethoven adapted his own writing to the technical abilities of Clement, which Beethoven had ample evidence of in Clement's Concerto No. 1. Clement, among other things, loved to play in the upper regions of the violin, and Beethoven took notice of this, which is evident in the very first bars of the soloist's entrance. It's one of the most feared entrances in the entire violin concerto repertoire, as the violin, unaccompanied, must play ascending and descending scales in broken octaves that cover a range of three and a half octaves. This beginning, besides being an absolute novelty, is particularly delicate and difficult, posing the risk of faulty intonation and failure from the very start.

Anyway, researching and listening to Clement's Violin Concerto No. 1 (he composed six violin concertos altogether), I sincerely think that his influence in the Viennese musical world between 1805 and 1820 was quite important, since we can recognize some influences, not only in Beethoven, but also in some compositions for violin written by Schubert (I'm thinking of the Rondo for Violin and Orchestra in A Major and the three sonatinas).

In any case, the Beethoven Concerto, in addition to the novelty of the violin's entrance and the length of the orchestral introduction, creates a very extended dialogue between soloist and orchestra, as he had already given us in his First and Third Piano Concertos, and especially in the contemporary Piano Concerto No. 4. Never before had such interaction between a soloist and orchestra been heard in a violin concerto. After all, if someone thinks that Beethoven may have been inspired by Clement's concerto, which was led by Beethoven, as we know, at the same concert in which the "Eroica" Symphony was premiered, one could argue that the inspiration went both ways, for Clement surely was familiar Beethoven's compositional approach in his piano concertos and perhaps also in his sonatas for violin and piano, of which nine out of 10 had already been composed by that time.

The aspects that strike me most in this concerto are certainly, as already mentioned, the dialogue

between soloist and orchestra, especially in the orchestral restatement of the main theme in minor, where the violin accompanies the whole discourse in triplets in a wonderful passage. Or the many long trills that create a carpet for the woodwinds, first on the main theme and then on the four-note rhythmic figure repeated at the end of the exposition and at the end of the reprise by the woodwinds. In addition, the idea of the timpani strokes at the beginning of the concerto is absolutely unique. And in spite of the timpani strokes, which could be misunderstood as an element towards a development of martial character, the whole movement is pervaded by an intimate and deep serenity and sweetness, based on an expressive accounting. Beethoven, the genius of violent, lacerating, and surprising central parts, in the Violin Concerto prefers an ethereal *cantabile* in G Minor that has a flavor of the eternal. A celestial calm that we also find in the wonderful *Larghetto*. Still, in the first movement, I would also like to mention the small chromatic cadence of eight bars played by the soloist in triplets and in *pianissimo*, which in the span of one bar grows suddenly to lead to the reprise of the movement in *fortissimo* by the orchestra. This is an incredible and absolutely breathtaking moment. Unique also is the use of the bassoon, which has an important solo contribution to make in all three movements.

In studying the score and observing violinists play the work in concert, one thing I've noted that strikes me as unusual about it is how much of the writing for the soloist "dwells on high," which is to say how much of the part is above the staff and fairly high on the violin's E-string. To no small degree, I think that is what imparts the feeling of dream-like reverie that seems to arrest time I mentioned earlier. There's that passage in the first movement shortly before the recapitulation, where the violin soars upwards over a gentle rocking accompaniment in the orchestra's strings, as if reaching out to touch eternity—one of those moments in Beethoven that has been described as "quiet ecstasy"—and then, of course, there's the entirety of the slow movement, music of such a rapt stillness there are no words to describe it. And yet, I've often wondered to myself if keeping the solo part relatively high throughout the concerto might have had something to do with the composer's early signs of his hearing loss, and if he wanted to make sure that solo violin would be audible above the orchestra. Do you have any theories on this? I ask because the high tessitura doesn't serve a virtuosic purpose, but it makes the part much more difficult than it sounds, especially in terms of intonation and maintaining sweetness of tone.

Indeed, the use of the violin's high register in this concerto is particularly turned toward the treble, though not exclusively so. The most significant moment of the second movement, namely the slow theme in G Major given to the violin in the middle of the movement, is in the low middle register, as is the main theme at the beginning of the third movement. And the coda of the first movement is also in the lower middle register.

I believe that Beethoven loved to utilize unusual registers, such as the high and upper high notes, in the same way that his formal innovations and his timbral effects were unusual for their time. Having excellent instrumentalists at his disposal, he loved to write in a difficult and virtuosic way. Think of the Triple Concerto, where he wrote for the very talented cellist Anton Craft one of the most difficult solo parts for cello of the whole repertoire, writing very often in the upper register of the instrument. This was made possible by the fact that the violinist Carl August Seidler was also an excellent virtuoso, for whom Beethoven also wrote in the high register. Or let's talk about the "Kreutzer" Sonata, where in the second variation of the slow (variations) movement, Beethoven reaches F^7 in the upper highest register of the violin. Examples of writing in the high register were already present in the fragment of a violin concerto in C Major, WoO 5, dating from 1790–92. So, I do not think that the use of a high register resulted from Beethoven's increasing deafness, but rather by his passion for extremes. And the combination of *cantabile* performed in that high register is a mark of that distinction.

Your performance of the concerto is a bit unusual in that you mix cadenzas, playing Leopold Auer's cadenza to the first movement (which Heifetz was partial to), but then playing the more familiar Kreisler cadenza in the finale. What was your thinking on that?

My initial idea was to play the cadenzas written by Beethoven in his piano version of this concerto, adapted for the violin, which I've played in other performances. Dedicated to the famous Italian pianist Muzio Clementi (note the interesting similarity between the violinist's last name and

the pianist's last name), the cadenza of the first movement in the violin version would require the participation of the drums, and preferably also the participation of a piano to bring back all the notes Beethoven wrote in his piano cadenza. In addition, there are in the third movement not one but two cadenzas. In this specific case, for the preparation of the live performance of this recording, as unfortunately happens almost always, there was only one rehearsal and a short stage rehearsal in the church before the performance. I preferred, therefore, because of the recording, to avoid any risk and to choose another solution.

In addition to the transcription for violin of the original piano cadenzas by Beethoven, there are countless cadenzas written by great violinists of the past, such as Kreisler (which cadenza is the most played), Joachim, Vieuxtemps, and many, many others. Personally, I was immediately fascinated by the cadenza of the first movement written by Leopold Auer, although I was not particularly convinced by his cadenza for the third movement. Living in a time where cultures often meet and mix themselves, finally I decided to play Auer's marvelous cadenza in the first movement, and to play what I consider the best cadenza for the third movement, which is the Kreisler, being sure that the audience will like the mix of these two brilliant cadenzas together. It worked!

You mentioned earlier a number of other recordings you've made of concertos by Brahms, Paganini, Prokofiev, Bach, Vivaldi, Schnittke, and Arvo Pärt. Also, you made a previous version of the Beethoven from Moscow; a collection of virtuoso pieces by Sarasate, Saint-Saëns, and Massenet; and a disc of violin sonatas by Poulenc, Janáček, Debussy, and Honegger. I found a couple of those recordings listed on Presto Classical's website and on Amazon, but most of the recordings you cited don't seem to show up on the usual mail order sites. If I, or any of our readers, were interested in finding these releases for sale, where would you direct us?

On my webpage manricopadovani.com, there is a store, and there is also the option to get a signed copy of one of the mentioned releases.

I note that some of your recordings are taken from "live," in-concert performances, while others are studio productions. Some listeners feel that the former have a certain sense of spontaneity and excitement to them that studio recordings don't quite capture. The tradeoff, of course, is that "live" recordings come with the risk of jitters before an audience and the potential for an out-of-tune or missed note here and there, unless the "live" recording can be edited and spliced together from the "takes" of two or three performances on subsequent nights. Do you have a preference for recording "live" or in the studio?

I definitely would prefer a live performance, but only if it worked as I was hoping for. Nowadays if there is a "live" recording of a performance with orchestra, usually there is also the recording of the dress rehearsal, to be sure that if something goes really wrong, there will be an opportunity to save the situation.

Finally, let me ask you this: the repertoire for violin and orchestra and for violin and piano is vast. If you could choose anything from that repertoire for your next recording, what would it be and why?

On my to do list are already the works by Schubert for violin and piano. I wish to do it because his music is divine. For violin and orchestra, maybe a recording of the four violin concertos by Saint-Saëns, which are really sparkling and fresh. Most listeners know only the No. 3. But there are so many dream pieces. To be honest, my real dream is to record a violin concerto written by me.

Olympus awaits.

⬇ BEETHOVEN Violin Concerto[1]. Romance No. 2 in F, op. 50[2]. **Violin Sonata No. 1 in F,** op. 12/1[3] • Manrico Padovani (vn); [3]Igor Longato (pn); [1,2]Boris Perrenoud, cond; [1]Prague PO; [2]Russian PO Moscow • ARS 38585 (75:17) Live: [1]St. Nicholas Church, Prague 10/2018; [3]Centro Culturale, Milan 9/2016. Reviewed from an MP3 download: 320 kbps

I previously encountered Swiss violinist Manrico Padovani on a Métier disc of music by Thomas Fortmann entitled *In Dust We Trust* (*Fanfare* 37:2), where Padovani was partnered by pianist Akemi Masko and, in the pieces for two violins, by Natasha Korsakova (the great-great-granddaughter of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov). Here we find Padovani in absolutely core repertoire, which provides a whole other set of challenges.

Giving the first movement plenty of space works wonders in the Beethoven Concerto (one need only think of the famously upholstered Perlman/Giulini recording). There is plenty of detail in Perrenoud's very finely conducted orchestral exposition, too. Padovani has a flawless technique. His sound is muscular (very possibly some might prefer powerful as a descriptor, but muscular seems to me the *mot juste*) in the lower register, tensile in the higher. He gives an intense, brilliant rendition of the Auer cadenza, but it is recorded very closely indeed. The re-entry of the orchestra, though, is well managed, with the bassoon solo making a huge emotional mark. Together, Padovani and Perrenoud take some real risks in the central movement, which is expansive and, from an orchestral standpoint, decidedly plush. But there is drama there, too, and once can certainly hear Padovani's playing in positively forensic detail (and the conductor's sharp intake of breath right at the end of the slow movement as well). Curiously, on headphones, the place of the solo violin in the sound picture has a tendency, as a general rule, to shift; one assumes this is a result of Padovani's own mobility in relation to the static microphone(s).

The cadenza in the finale is the more usual Kreisler. Apparently Padovani likes to play transcriptions of the cadenzas of the piano cadenzas Beethoven himself provided for the piano version of the Violin Concerto, but the rehearsal time for this performance was too limited, so we have the Auer in the first movement and the more usual Kreisler later.

Spotlighting in the recording does have its advantages. Hearing the bassoon in counterpoint with the solo violin in the finale is one, a moment early on not usually encountered so clearly in live performances. Padovani's strong G-string and his pure, somewhat steely upper register are both called on at speed in this finale. Those cadenzas in the finale offer a Paganini-like displays of extreme virtuosity, tremendously exciting and a real demonstration of the heights Padovani is capable of.

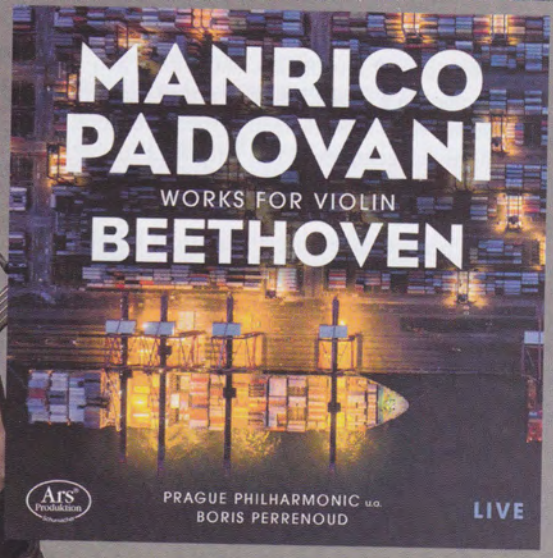
I notice that this is Padovani and Perrenoud's second recording of the Beethoven Concerto, the other being a studio recording with the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra coupled with both of the Beethoven Romances for Violin and Orchestra. Here, the Romance is given a clean account, but it feels a touch clinical from both soloist and orchestra, the latter veering towards the workaday that makes it really rather unsuccessful.

Padovani is joined by pianist Igor Longato for the Violin Sonata, op. 12/1, in an eminently musical account, full of life. Unfortunately, the recording of the piano is massively unsatisfactory, lacking in body, though musically it is all there. It is nice to hear the force of the effect of the return to the opening on the exposition repeat, and the two musicians clearly react well to one another in the many violin/piano exchanges. Most notable, perhaps, is the sheer expressivity of Padovani's stopping in this first movement. The second movement is a set of variations, and together both players navigate Beethoven's exploratory territory affectionately. Longato's evenness is admirable; from Padovani, I would welcome just a touch more sweetness up top. The finale is sprightly and lively, yet underpinned with Beethovenian fire.

The recording of the concerto is such that one can hear every extraneous rustle and page turn; it is certainly involving. There is no doubt that Padovani possesses a prodigious technique, and the performance of the Auer cadenza is unforgettable. Over the course of the performances, Padovani plays two different violins by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume: the concerto and the Romance on his Del Gesù-Vuillaume (a "Cannone" copy done 100 years later than the original, Paris, 1843) and for the sonata the Messiah Vuillaume from 1870. **Colin Clarke**

BEETHOVEN Violin Concerto[1]. Romance No. 2 in F, op. 50[2]. **Violin Sonata No. 1 in F,** op. 12/1[3] • Manrico Padovani (vn); [3]Igor Longato (pn); [1,2]Boris Perrenoud, cond; [1]Prague PO; [2]Russian PO Moscow • ARS 38585 (75:17) Live: [1]St. Nicholas Church, Prague 10/2018; [3]Centro Culturale, Milan 9/2016

Ars Produktion offers a trio of excellent Beethoven performances by the Swiss violinist Manrico Padovani. The centerpiece (and opening work) is the Beethoven Violin Concerto, recorded in performance at the St. Nicholas Church in Prague in October 2018. Padovani's collaborators are the Prague Philharmonic and conductor Boris Perrenoud. Tempos fall within the moderate range (24:38, 10:47, 10:02), providing the foundation for a performance that weds the admirable qualities of compelling momentum and sensitive flexibility of phrasing. Padovani's rendition is notable for its



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precision of articulation and pitch, and an infectious embrace of the beauty and vitality of Beethoven's score. There is a true sense of joy throughout the performance of this work, one of Beethoven's most radiantly lyrical creations. Padovani plays the Leopold Auer cadenza in the opening movement, and Fritz Kreisler's in the finale. Both are dispatched with the utmost technical panache and style. The Prague Philharmonic and Boris Perrenoud are sympathetic collaborators, very much in sync with Padovani and playing with a rich and attractive tone. The recording of this live performance suffers a bit from a lack of definition in the orchestral reproduction (the soloist, however, is closely miked), and a buzz in the right channel in louder passages. But the sound is still more than adequate to reflect the considerable qualities of this rendition. The recorded sound for the remaining two pieces is quite fine. Indeed in both, the lovely tonal qualities of Padovani's playing are heard to even better advantage than in the Beethoven Concerto. The performance of the Romance No. 2 in F Major, op. 50, recorded in the Moscow Radio Studio, is beautifully realized. Padovani's lyrical phrasing and angelic tone are beyond reproach. The Russian Philharmonic Orchestra Moscow, led by conductor Perrenoud, play with distinction as well. The recital concludes with an arresting performance of the Beethoven Violin Sonata, op. 12/1. Recorded in performance at Milan's Centro Culturale in September 2016, the sonata features Padovani alongside pianist Igor Longato. The opening *Allegro con brio*, taken at a spirited clip, is brimming with energy, while still relishing the moments of lyricism and introspection. The theme and variations second movement has a captivating sense of nobility and repose, with both artists playing with the utmost elegance. The brief rondo finale (*Allegro*) has an infectious playful quality, with the performers' delightful flexibility of phrasing once again enhancing the overall impact and pleasure. The booklet contains liner notes by Walter Labhart and Claus-Dieter Hanauer, as well as artist photos and bios. There's always room for recordings of Beethoven played with this level of technical accomplishment, spirit, and affection. Recommended. **Ken Meltzer**

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Regrettably, the first thing one notices as this live recording of the Beethoven Violin Concerto opens is the tubby sound of the orchestra, which was recorded in the St. Nicholas Church in Prague in October 2018. Luckily, Manrico Padovani's violin is miked closely and one hears the overtones missing from the orchestra. Among Padovani's accomplishments is that he played the complete cycle of the 24 Caprices, op. 1, of Paganini in concert. He was the first Swiss violinist, they say, to accomplish that daunting task. I'd rather hear him play Beethoven. He plays intensely and with what sounds like utter confidence and with a wide dynamic range. He can hold a trill at a breathtaking whisper or vigorously attack relevant passages. Impressively, in the long first movement of the concerto, he and conductor Perrenoud provide variety without distortion the rhythmic flow of the music. Their *Larghetto* is taken slowly; the movement is a minute or so slower than the Szigeti I am used to. The richness of Padovani's tone, and the sprightliness of his phrasing, in the final rondo are impressive. The live audience is clearly pleased. The Romanze is recorded by a different orchestra in the Moscow Radio Studio. Here the sound of the orchestra is more clear and more forward. There is no sign of an audience. The sonata which concludes the disc was recorded in Milan in 2016. From its opening bars, it is played with particular vigor. Like many listeners with the taste for the historic, I am attached to the Szigeti concerto, and I'd also recommend the Suk disc with the concerto and both the romances. Padovani offers a distinctive, convincingly virtuosic alternative to those and to other favorite recordings. **Michael Ullman**

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In 1806, Ludwig van Beethoven was still working on his D-Major Violin Concerto the night before its premiere. The copies were a mess of corrections, some of which the violinist had to sight-read at the performance. It's no wonder that the public and other artists gave it a cool reception. Beethoven dedicated the piece to the soloist, Franz Clement, with a French pun typical of his sense of humor, "Concert par Clemenza pour Clement" (Concerto with clemency for Clement). The Violin Concerto remained in obscurity until 1844, 17 years after Beethoven's death, when Felix

Mendelssohn-Bartholdy revived it in London with the 12-year old Joseph Joachim as soloist. Only then did the work begin to elicit the serious praise and frequency of performance it deserves.

Swiss violinist Manrico Padovani has been described as a Violin Hero because of his good looks and strong playing. Born in 1973, in Zurich to a family of Italian origin, at age 12 he became interested in the violin after seeing a film about Niccolò Paganini. Not too long after that, he attended the Zurich Conservatory as its youngest student. In 1992 he received his soloist diploma and went on the Sweelinck Conservatory in Amsterdam. That same year he made his solo debut and he has been playing with famous conductors and major orchestras around the world ever since. The son of a composer and conductor, Boris Perrenoud has been performing since childhood. He studied at Vienna, Salzburg, and Tanglewood, where he worked with Leonard Bernstein. He is now a guest conductor for symphony orchestras on various continents.

Italian pianist Igor Longato who comes from a family of musicians, graduated *cum laude* from the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory in Milan. He, too, performs internationally in major concert halls.

Padovani, Longato, and Perrenoud face a world of competition greeting the birth of their Beethoven recording, but all artists have to dive into the world-wide pool to gain any kind of recognition. Artists with whom Padovani and Perrenoud have to compete in the Violin Concerto recording marketplace include Heifetz and Toscanini (1940), Oistrakh and Ehrling (1955), Stern and Bernstein (1959), Perlman and Barenboim (1992), Hahn and Zinman (1999), Bell and Norrington (2002), plus Tetzlaff and Zinman (2006), as well as Faust and Belohlávek (2007). I suggest enjoying the Heifetz, Oistrakh, and Stern recordings for the beauty of their mid-20th-century style. Even Perlman and Barenboim play in a more modern style today. Hahn, Bell, Tetzlaff, and Faust are the artists with whom Padovani competes most directly, and I do feel he can hold his place among them. Like Hahn, Padovani draws honeyed tones, clean articulation, and intense emotion from his instruments. He plays the Del Gesù Vuillaume and the Stradivarius Messiah Vuillaume with exquisite virtuosity. Bell's interpretation is quite distinctive, and he sometimes writes his own cadenzas. Tetzlaff is a fantastic technician, but Padovani's technique is also superb. The steady and even trills of the Swiss violinist range in mellifluous gradations from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, while his smooth playing is strong and masculine. Violinist Padovani, conductor Boris Perrenoud, and the Prague Philharmonic take the listener on a harmonic itinerary through Beethoven's many forms and reformations of melody without any of it ever getting bogged down or heavy. Faust's recording is the most recent and, although it sports a freshness not often found among recordings of Beethoven's music, both she and Padovani have similar 21st-century playing styles. I recommend keeping all of the above recordings in a personal library so as to provide variety within the Beethoven diet. Each of them is unadulterated ear-candy. The Romance in F Major is a lovely bit of fresh air in between two serious works. It cleanses the aural palate as it pleases the ear.

Beethoven's Sonata for Violin and Piano No.1 in D Major has three movements: *Allegro con brio*, Tema con variazioni, and a final Rondo. As with the Beethoven Violin Concerto, there are myriad first-class recordings of the sonata by the world's great violinists. Padovani and Longato achieve a perfect balance of piano and violin. Padovani's articulation is dramatic, since he does not try to smooth out all the texture. In the light sections, where the piano and violin dialogue fluently, Padovani and Longato seem to breathe together and they play the rhythmic music with notable clarity. The Tema con variazioni demands heroic tones, and Padovani sends them out into the concert hall in waves. In the more rhythmic sections, both artists play with percussive sounds that make the listener want to dance. Longato's playing is usually robust and occasionally subtle. He buoys up the violin tone with a wide dynamic range wrapped in a colorful blanket of sound. The Padovani-Longato Rondo is light, playful, and tongue-in-cheek, with well thought out variations in tempo and a few truly beautiful ornaments. The sound on this Ars Produktion disc is pristine so that not only the violin, but also the orchestra and the piano, sound as if the listener was in a favorite concert hall. I will be listening to it again on my upcoming trip from Arizona to California, and I hope readers will enjoy it as much as I do. **Maria Nockin**

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These are performances of Beethoven music for violin and orchestra that are not especially exciting, but are instead thoughtful and vibrantly expressed. It is the kind of interpretation of standard repertoire that I find increasingly useful, as it focuses the listener's attention on the work at hand, rather than on the histrionics of a virtuoso performer. Boris Perrenoud and the Prague Philharmonic set the pace for the first movement of the Violin Concerto with an emphasis on the *ma non troppo* in Beethoven's modification to the *allegro* tempo. The excellent Italian violinist Manrico Padovani falls naturally and comfortably into this groove, while still maintaining a steady momentum. Padovani is especially fine in the *Larghetto*, holding forth with a glistening tone and wonderfully lyrical phrasing. The Rondo is robust and appropriately joyous. Not surprisingly, Perrenoud and Padovani present the youthful Romance with an easy gracefulness, as with the concerto, finding a lovely pace that never sags.

Beethoven's First Sonata for Violin and Piano sounds, at first, like an homage to Mozart, but as often happens in the early music of Beethoven, distinctive flashes of his personality burst out, often surprisingly, as in the theme and variations. Padovani, perhaps carried along by the bristling yet precise piano playing of Igor Longato, shows considerably more fire here than in his performances of the music for violin and orchestra. It is an exciting and insightful rendition, with all of the energy of a live performance fully on display. **Peter Burwasser**

"Only I Can Take Bruckner by the Ears!" An Interview with Bruckner Editor William Carragan

BY GAVIN DIXON

William Carragan is a familiar name to Bruckner enthusiasts. In 1987, he was asked by Leopold Nowak to prepare a publication of Bruckner's Second Symphony for the Collected Works Edition, which resulted in new editions of both the early and later versions of the work (1872 and 1877). Since then, he has produced many more scholarly editions of Bruckner's symphonies and is a distinguished authority on the composer's music. Carragan has pursued a diverse career: Outside of music, he was a professor of physics for 35 years at Hudson Valley Community College. And, alongside his Bruckner scholarship, his other main musical activity is playing the harpsichord. But for this interview, we focused squarely on Bruckner. Carragan has just published a book, *Anton Bruckner: Eleven Symphonies*, affectionately known in Bruckner circles as the Red Book. The book is a distillation of a lifetime's study of Bruckner's symphonies. It is subtitled "A Guide to the Versions" and is designed to clarify the thorny issue of Bruckner's revisions to his scores. The result is a reader-friendly volume, packed with informative musical examples, for which audio files are also provided, referenced though innovative QR codes in the text. I talked with Carragan via Skype in March 2021 to find out about the book and to hear more about Carragan's lifelong passion for Bruckner's music.

How did you first get involved in editing Bruckner scores?

It all started when I was a youngster and I started collecting LPs, maybe around 1951. My mother taught me a lot about symphonic literature. She was a composer and pianist, educated at a conservatory, but of course she knew nothing about Bruckner. But there was a family friend who was a conductor, Charles Adler. He was making recordings of Mahler and Bruckner in Vienna on his own label. My mother thought he was an odd character for doing that, but I didn't think so. I read Tovey's articles on both Bruckner and Mahler and was very impressed, and quickly began collecting records. So I've been interested in his music for a very long time. And I heard that the Ninth Symphony Finale was pretty well complete—that was just a remark, I didn't know if it was true or not—right up to the coda. I thought, "Well, anybody can write a Bruckner coda." Fast forward to 1979: A friend and I were asked to play at a meeting of what was then called the New York Mahlerites, now called the Gustav Mahler Society of New York. That was at the suggestion of the writer, critic, and all-