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**CD Review by Colin Clarke**

**TABULA RASA** • Manrico Padovani, Natasha Korsakova (vn); Charles Olivieri-Munroe, cond; North Czech Philharmonia Teplice • ARS 38552 (66:49)

**BACH** Concerto for 2 Violins and Orchestra in d, BWV 1043. **PÄRT** *Tabula Rasa*. **VIVALDI** Concerto for 2 Violins in c, RV 522. **SCHNITTKE** Concerto grosso No. 3

It's nice to welcome Manrico Padovani back after his contribution to Metier's disc of music by Swiss-born composer Thomas Fortmann (*Fanfare* 37:2). While I was less than taken by his Beethoven Sonata, op. 12/1, on *Ars* (for sonic reasons, mainly), there are no such worries on this beautifully programmed, thought-provoking disc, recorded in Teplice's Dum Kultury in June 2016. The orchestra is the North Czech Philharmonic ("Nordböhmische" in German, "Severočeská," translates as "North Czech"). Nomenclature issues aside, it is a remarkably fine band caught here in fabulous sound. As in the Fortmann disc, Padovani is joined by violinist (and crime novelist) Natasha Korsakova. The disc focuses on juxtapositions of Baroque and contemporary double concertos for two violins. Korsakova takes *primo* in the Bach and Schnittke, Padovani in the Pärt and Vivaldi.

There is certainly a lovely cleanliness to the Teplice orchestra's opening ritornello of the Bach, mirrored in the execution of the soloists. There is energy aplenty from all parties here. The soloists are of absolutely equal excellence, balanced by the gloriously expressive lines of the central *Largo ma non tanto* (enlivened by some marvelously characterful articulation by Padovani and Korsakova). There is plenty of energy to the finale, too, a carefully judged mix of vim and grace.

The move to the opening gesture of Arvo Pärt's *Tabula rasa* is a stark one. Completed in 1977, this "double concerto" was dedicated to Tatyana Grindenko, Gidon Kremer, and Eri Klas (which gives Grindenko and Kremer's ECM recording a special significance, of course). The first movement, "Ludus" (Game) is in A Minor, a key area which links to both the Bach slow movement and to the Vivaldi. Padovani and Korsakova capture the flavor of Pärt's language perfectly; the approach to the final, heavy sonority of the first movement is well judged, the ghostly quiet of the finale (entitled "Silentium" and marked *Senza moto*) beautifully realized. Charles Olivieri-Munroe's command of the orchestra seems complete; there is nothing less than total concentration from the Czech players. This is a superb performance of held-breath intensity, heard in a recording of razor focus (listen to the descending double bass lines and you will see exactly what I mean).

The Vivaldi is an equally fine performance. By taking the

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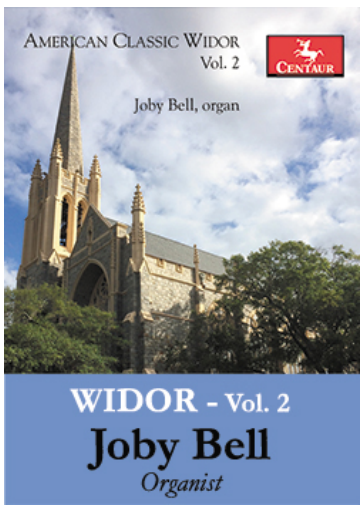
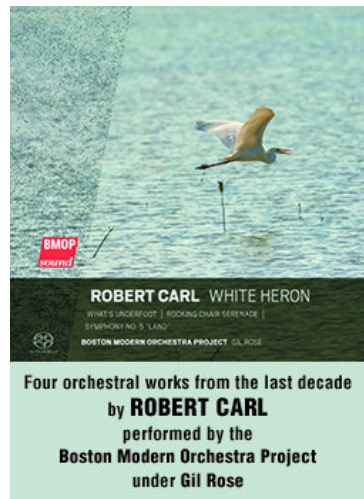
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opening *Allegro* at an ever so slightly held-back tempo, the music starts to dance, and one can appreciate Vivaldi's daring writing for the two soloists all the more. The more thinned down textures in particular impress, both in the first and then in that beautiful second movement, *Larghetto e spiritoso*. The way Padovani and Korsakova interact in the finale is miraculous, with Korsakova spinning a wondrous bed of sound for Padovani to soar over, while the orchestra grounds the experience. This is life-enhancing music-making of the first order,

There is no missing the Baroque references of the opening to the Schnittke Concerto grosso No. 3, which do indeed seem to hearken back to the Bach D-Minor. But then Schnittke characteristically "implodes" the music, a trajectory captured brilliantly by the Teplice orchestra and Olivieri-Munroe. There are parallels with the Pärt, too, with the descent into the depths from the double basses. This is a five-movement piece that includes use of the B-A-C-H motif; the central movement, the third movement *Pesante*, is modelled on the slow movement of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto with its tutti/solo exchanges, a brilliant exercise in remodeling. The Czech forces have the full measure of Schnittke's characteristic polystylism, as well as finding the emotional heart of this unforgettable movement; and how fine is Korsakova's playing in her highest register at the close of the fourth movement *Adagio*. Alternatives in the Schnittke center around Chailly and the Nemtanu sisters on Naïve (the latter another disc that juxtaposes Bach and Schnittke—see Scott Noriega's excellent review in *Fanfare* 38:5).

I have to assume the original running order of the disc was Vivaldi, Pärt, Bach, Schnittke, given that the booklet notes on *Tabula Rasa* say that the A-minor of the opening movement "picks up" on the Vivaldi and the D-Minor second movement "foreshadows" the key of the Bach; it is of course the other way around.

As a program this works beautifully, and Korsakova and Padovani make a fine duo; credit also is due to the Pardubice orchestra. A cherishable release. **Colin Clarke**

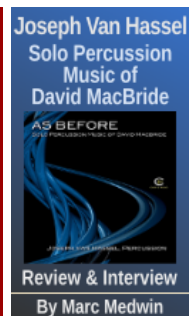
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