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Die Winterreise (review)

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is intentionally genre-defying (Bang on a Can All Stars, "About," http://bangonacan.org/all_stars/about [accessed 18 November 2009]).

The first part of this film frames the musical landscape from which Bang on a Can emerged. The film almost exclusively focuses on New York City, with music of the various composers set against the backdrop of city scenes interspersed with interview footage. Interviews with Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and others who influenced Bang on a Can, as well as Bang on a Can musicians are included throughout. Reich and Glass discuss how their minimalist music was originally ostracized by the American academic establishment, which is in part why Bang on a Can musicians were originally attracted to their music. Founders Michael Gordon, David Lang and Julia Wolfe also discuss how the forming of their group was a means of bridging "uptown" music (associated with the "academy" and high art) and "downtown" music (associated with minimalism, inspired in part by popular music). The film eventually transitions to a focus on Bang on a Can itself, with members Gordon, Lang and Wolfe acknowledging the influence of Reich and Glass on their music, as well as Dutch composers Louis Andriessen and Martijn Padding.

Towards the end of the film, the focus goes back to Bang on a Can's arrangement

of Brian Eno's *Music for Airports*, where Eno openly appreciates the work Bang on a Can brought to his music. He believed that Bang on a Can brought emotion to the music that he originally did not put there.

The film follows a logical progression in presenting all the elements surrounding Bang on a Can's formation. The interviews with composers influential to Bang on a Can do well in explaining musical and cultural circumstances from which the group emerged. Additionally, the excerpts from each of these composers' works, set against the backdrop of New York City scenes, enhance these explanations both aurally and visually. As a result, viewers will emerge from this film better able to contextualize Bang on a Can's role within the current American musical landscape, as well as achieving a heightened awareness of some of the issues currently surrounding American music as a whole.

The program notes accompanying this DVD, in both English and French, do well to frame the context of both films, and also serve as a means of tying both together. It is useful to read these prior to viewing the films.

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Christa Ludwig, *Die Winterreise*. DVD. Produced and directed by Eugene Sánchez Lansch. [Halle, Germany]: Arthaus Musik, 2009. 102 147. \$24.99.

The performance of *Die Winterreise* preserved on this disc took place in Athens in 1994 and was specially prepared for television; it was not for the benefit of an immediate audience. The performers, renowned mezzo-soprano Christa Ludwig and accomplished pianist Charles Spencer (who is also professor of Lied Interpretation for singers and pianists at the Hochschule für Musik in Frankfurt), are of one mind—in perfect accord—as they bring forth Schubert's great song cycle to life. As a bonus, the disc contains the first part of a master class showing Ludwig publicly coaching three aspiring professional singers in matters of phrasing and interpretation. The second part of the class is on another disc,

"Christa Ludwig: Lieder Recital," which was not received for review here.

The liner notes that are included with this recording include a transcript (in English and French as well as the original German) of an interview with Ludwig conducted in December 2007 during which the singer discusses (1) approaching the performance of *Winterreise*, describing the issues of the "female perspective," transposition, and contemporary significance of the poems; and (2) her own musical background and pedagogical philosophy. This material yields insight into her conception of the cycle as the "journey of a soul" which, to her mind, renders moot the question of whether the cycle is more appropri-

ately performed by a man or a woman. This is despite the decidedly masculine perspective of several texts, e.g., “Das Mädchen sprach von Liebe, die Mutter gar von Eh” [“The girl spoke of love, her mother even of marriage”] of *Gute Nacht* or “Ich such’ im Schnee vergebens nach ihrer Tritte spur” [“I sought in vain for a trace of her footprint in the snow”] and “Wenn meine Schmerzen schweigen, wer sagt mir dann von ihr?” [“When my pain has abated, what shall remind me or her?”] of *Erstarrung*. Even bearing this in mind, Ludwig’s comments are well taken that the journey itself, which is depicted in Schubert’s *Winterreise*, is not specific to either sex. She suggests, rightly I think, that women “think differently about love [and] death . . . that women are more sensitive and have greater emotional depth than men” (p. 9). On the subject of transposition, Ludwig admits to freely transposing the songs in the cycle “so that they always lie within [her] natural range, where [she] can best express the meaning of the word.” She speaks, in the interview, of “[wanting] to make [the songs] as *simple* as possible, like a folksong you sing in a range that suits and your own timbre” (p. 10).

The second section of the interview, Ludwig’s comments on her pedagogy and her musical upbringing, is particularly meaningful when applied to the master class excerpt. She says, “my credo for teaching singing is a bit like a table resting on its legs: these are breath control and upper register—the two most important things—and after that you can start putting the other things on the table, the food and so on, but that is the basis” (p. 11). I watched

the disc in reverse order, in order to study Ludwig’s teaching, observe per pedagogical emphases and, only then, to listen to their application in her own performance. She coached Stella Gregorian (soprano), Markis Pelz (baritone), and Velerij Serkin (tenor). Her emphasis in each case was on the legato performance of the melodic line and the dramatic expression, whether musical or physical, that the situation requires. She counsels the singers, also, to strive for an even crescendo and to vary musical repetitions using either dynamics, articulation, or ornamentation. It nearly goes without saying, when considering an artist of Ludwig’s stature, that her dramatic and musical interpretation of Schubert’s music is first rate, her phrasing and expression is natural and expressive, and that, when (minimal) physical gestures are used, they are appropriate to the text or dramatic situation being expressed, e.g., flicking eyes and grasping hands in *Die Krähe*, open, imploring hands during *Einsamkeit*, or clenched fists in *Mut*.

I would recommend this disc for purchase by all music libraries; it is an exemplary performance of *Die Winterreise* in every musical respect, and an important one inasmuch as the cycle has been recorded by few women (Christine Schäfer, Mitsuko Shirai, and Lotte Lehmann are others), but is a mainstay of the baritone/tenor repertoire. This disc also affords the viewer a glimpse into the pedagogy of a great artist and can be enjoyed by all musicians, but especially by singers and teachers of singing.

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Scènes de Quatuor: Autour de La Grande Fugue de Beethoven (Strings Attached: Around Beethoven’s Great Fugue). DVD. Directed by Bruno Monsaingeon. Paris: Medici Arts, 2008. EDV 1333. \$24.99.

Since forming in 1989, the Berlin-based Artemis Quartet has earned an international reputation as one of the most exciting and intellectual young string quartets on the concert circuit today. French filmmaker Bruno Monsaingeon offers a brief glimpse into the working methods and musical acumen of this renowned quartet in his 2001 film *Strings Attached: Around Beethoven’s Great Fugue*, which profiles the quar-

ter and documents their preparations for an April 2001 Paris recital. Packaged with footage of the recital, this new DVD carefully depicts the challenges, risks, and rewards of chamber music and offers valuable insight into the complex nature of musical collaboration.

Interspersing the reflections of individual quartet members with excerpts from the ensemble’s Paris recital, the film’s