Canteloube’s every woman who walks by. The Rodrigo and vanishes, and I want to fall in love with (nearly) hopeless anything looks. The mental slush no matter what is falling apart, no matter how in the middle of spring, no matter the season, are two pieces that can put my soul smack dab until my speakers cry “Uncle”. There Aranjuez my room and blast Rodrigo’s bright, with some fast-moving clouds. I clean that first day in the year that IS spring: cool yet spring ritual has been to open the windows on For years (though I missed it this year), my ROTA:

**ROTA:** *Symphonies 1+2*
Philharmonic 900/ Marzio Conti
Chandos 10546—62 minutes

For years (though I missed it this year), my spring ritual has been to open the windows on that first day in the year that IS spring: cool yet bright, with some fast-moving clouds. I clean my room and blast Rodrigo’s *Concierto de Aranjuez* until my speakers cry “Uncle”. There are two pieces that can put my soul smack dab in the middle of spring, no matter the season, no matter what is falling apart, no matter how hopeless anything looks. The mental slush vanishes, and I want to fall in love with (nearly) every woman who walks by. The Rodrigo and Canteloube’s *Songs of the Auvergne* do this to me.

Well, now I’ve found a third piece, Nino Rota’s Symphony 1. And when it’s so tenderly and caringly played as it is here, I can’t help but melt. There is just enough drama to keep the music from being saccharine; and Rota, best known as a film-score composer, is a master of timing. The music is very tonal, warm, and bright; the only thing I wanted more of is rhythmic variety, though the hemiolas in III help. (Hemiolas are different ways of accenting the rhythm when the music is in a fast 3 or 6; think of the line “I like to be in America!” from West Side Story.) The playing gets a little rough in III, but it doesn’t harm the music at all.

Symphony 2 is titled *Anni di Pellegrinaggio—Tarantina*; the liner notes say this is “undoubtedly a reference to the new kind of life-style which he was beginning to enjoy, having just moved from the chaotic hustle of Rome to sunny Puglia”. Like Symphony 1, it was completed in the late 1930s, though not performed until 1975. II is a tarantella with a dramatic, lush slowdown about two-thirds of the way in that suddenly brought Star Wars to mind. Rota keeps you in suspense, making you wonder if he’ll bring the tarantella back at the very end; I won’t ruin the surprise. The opening of III, Andante con Moto, reminds me of I of Gorecki’s Symphony 3 with its dark, restless, contrapuntal lines in the lower reaches of the orchestra. The skies light up partway through, and the symphony ends with a lovely Allegro Vivace that has echoes of Dvorak’s Symphony 8.

I wouldn’t listen to the symphonies back to back; they’re too similar in mood for that, but each would make a worthwhile 30 minutes on its own. The orchestra plays very well, and the sound is just right. Mark Lehman spoke highly of the Norrköping Symphony’s recording with Ole Kristian Ruud (BIS 970, J/F 1999), noting its “fine performances, superb sonics, and interesting, informative documentation”. Notes in English, German, French, and Italian.

**RUDERS:** *Concerto in Pieces; Violin Concerto 1; Monodrama*
Erik Heide, v; Mathias Reumert, perc; Aarhus Symphony/ Thomas Sondergard
Dacapo 8226034—67 minutes

Poul Ruders (b. 1949) is best at full-scale orchestral works where he can play with a broader musical palette, even if what he plays with tends more toward the antics of post-modernism than the flourishes of neo-romanticism. I much prefer the latter instincts in him over the former. Here we have two examples of the latter and one example of the former; both underline the man’s strengths and his weaknesses (well, let’s say indulgences).

His brilliant *Concerto in Pieces* (1994-95) is subtitled “Purcell Variations for Orchestra” and came from a commission from the folks at the Last Night of the Proms for a sequel of sorts for Benjamin Britten’s *Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*. The composer still wonders why they chose him to do this. He selected a theme from Purcell that in no way resembles the themes Benjamin Britten played with—the Witches’ Chorus from Act II of Dido and Aeneas. It was a huge success, and you can hear why. Ruders is able to maintain an thematic air reminiscent of Britten while nonetheless exploring every aspect of an orchestra in his own unique way. This is done through tasteful insertions of percussive moments (chimes, celeste, etc.) and odd balancing strategies such as the use of medieval “hoquetting” where the notes of the main theme are bounced back and forth across the orchestra, from one instrument or set of instruments to another. A stunning achievement.

The Violin Concerto (1981) is almost...
unrecognizable as a work of this composer. It’s a solidly romantic (post-romantic?) work that harks back to bits of Vivaldi (his Four Seasons) with touches of Schubert. It’s a nearly perfect follow-up to the Concerto in Pieces; it almost seems like a coda to that piece. Both works seem gentle, playful, and yet both are invested with Ruders’s grasp of the way musical ideas can be molded by moving in and out of standard harmonic structures. Both should bring new fans to Ruders.

His Monodrama (1998) is subtitled “Drama Trilogy II for Percussion and Orchestra”. I’ve heard several pieces like this over the years, and they are pretty much the same. To quote the composer’s own words, this work is “pretty grim”. It is bleak, angry, and assertive. I’d add indulgent. It’s also quite long, at 30 minutes. There’s a lot of banging, crashing, and knocking around; and it uses up all of its creative mass.

Both works portray tormented struggles in temporary Scandinavian music.

Sinfonia Da Requiem; Violin Concerto I

In-Hye Kim, s; Cracow Radio Choir, Warsaw Radio Symphony/ Lukasz Borowicz; So-Ock Kim, v; Podlasie Orchestra/ Piotr Borkowski

Naxos 570599—62 minutes

Jeanjoon Ryu was born in Korea in 1970 and studied in Poland. His music reflects both his homeland and his teacher: his 2007 First Violin Concerto and 2008 Sinfonia da Requiem share the late-Mahlerian aesthetic updated by more jagged themes and chromatic harmonies evident in Penderecki’s more recent music, and the Sinfonia da Requiem draws its inspiration from the sacrifices of those who fought in the Korean War.

Both works portray tormented struggles in search of consolation. The somewhat more pensive concerto does so in a single 20-minute span, while the more intense and dramatic 42-minute Sinfonia is cast in four sections, each a setting (for soprano, chorus, and orchestra) of part of the standard Latin text of the requiem mass.

The Sinfonia da Requiem makes the stronger impression. It has appropriate grandeur and weight, with extended instrumental episodes (presumably the reason for the work’s title) offering effective contrast to the vocal sections, as in the dark, late-Busoni-like contrapuntal unwindings from 8:30 until 12:15 in the opening movement. But the real power—at times awe-inspiring—of this music is in the heartfelt vocal utterances. There’s no doubt that Ryu’s threnody for the victims of war has more than enough universality and tragic stature to achieve an honored place in this ancient genre that never, alas, seems much closer to becoming obsolete.

Both works are well played and vividly recorded. The Sinfonia in particular is rendered with terrifying power and urgency. Anyone even remotely drawn to large-scale late-romantic (or early modern) choral-and-orchestral music should hear this. It’s not the sort of thing that often appeals to a listener of my interests; nevertheless Ryu held me spellbound, at once aghast and uplifted. Dear Lord, save us from ourselves.

LEHMAN

SAARIAHO: Love from Afar

Daniel Belcher (Jaufré Rudel), Ekaterina Lekhina (Clemence), Marie-Ange Todorovitch (Pilgrim);

Berlin Radio Chorus, German Symphony, Berlin/Kent Nagano

Harmonia Mundi 801937 (2SACD) 2:01

Kaija Saariaho’s first opera, Love from Afar (L’Amour de Loin—2000), libretto by Amin Maalouf, recounts the story of 12th Century troubadour Jaufré Rudel, Prince of Blaye, and his search for the mythical Ideal Woman for whom he produces his songs. Convinced that she doesn’t exist, he is told by a newly arrived Pilgrim (a pants role, beautifully sung by Ms Todorovitch) that she indeed does, and her name is Clemence, Countess of Tripoli.

The work is in five acts, the last two without pause. The first three set up the growing obsession between the two lovers—a relationship nurtured only by speculation and rumor. The last two acts involve Jaufré’s journey to the East to find his beloved. He arrives in Tripoli desperately ill, finds Clemence, and dies in her arms. Distraught, she joins a convent, looks toward the sky, and prays to—God? Love? Jaufré? All of the above? Or none of the above?

Ms Saariaho has created a lush, erotic work that Debussy would have been proud of. Well orchestrated and sublimely molded, the piece is the most fully realized conception I have heard from this composer and makes me realize what all the fuss has been about. Much of its success is owing to the use of tonal resources that Ms Saariaho has carefully dissociated herself with through most of her career. Prolonged pedal points, quasi-modal vocal lines, and early music references all run contrary to the high modernist aesthetic embraced by Saariaho, Magnus Lindberg, and company when they sought to overthrow any conservative notions back when they were starting out revolutionizing Finnish music in the 70s and 80s. Although this score could hardly be called “conservative”, it seems as if the operatic genre has brought out Saariaho’s

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