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Magazine Issues	Conductors	Performers	Ensembles & Orchestras	Instrumentalists	Instruments
-----------------	------------	------------	------------------------	------------------	-------------

Singers	Voices	Vocal Roles	Advanced Audio	Reviewers	Labels
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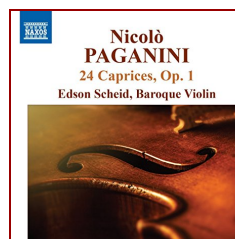
First	Prev	Issue 40:3 Jan/Feb 2017	Next	Last
First	Prev	Feature Articles	Next	Last
First	Prev	Dave Saemann	Next	Last
First	Prev	PAGANINI	Next	Last
First	Prev	NAXOS	Next	Last
First	Prev	Edson Scheid	Next	Last
First	Prev	violin	Next	Last

FEATURE REVIEW by Dave Saemann

PAGANINI Caprices for Unaccompanied Violin, op. 1 (complete) • Edson Scheid (vn) (period instrument) • NAXOS 9.70264 (80:02)

Around 1950, it was still a matter of controversy whether Nicolò Paganini's Violin Caprices should be played as solo works or with an added piano accompaniment. Happily, violinists lent their weight toward performing the caprices unaccompanied. Now we have a recording of the cycle on Baroque violin by Edson Scheid. Can you already hear the wails from some players of the modern violin that the period performance practice people are trying to steal one of the treasures of their repertoire? If this is what a historically informed performance of the caprices can sound like, we all must listen very carefully, violinists especially. The details of Edson Scheid's presentation are as follows: a 1739 Carlo Antonio Testore violin in its original configuration with gut strings and tuned lower than its modern counterpart, played with a Classical bow. Scheid's intonation and articulation are wonderful. He scrupulously observes Paganini's tempo markings, which some fiddlers play fast and loose with in the name of virtuosity. All this in an attempt to recreate the sound of Paganini's violin would be pointless if it were not for Scheid's wonderful sense of fantasy as a performer, offering something of the composer's divine madness. Though first published in 1820, the caprices were composed around 1805. Thus they are contemporaneous with Carl Maria von Weber's earliest successes, both composers offering a vision of the Romantic era to come. Far from being mere virtuoso stunts, Scheid's Caprices abound in the beauty and revolutionary spirit of these works, which Franz Liszt was so taken by.

I strongly urge you to see the YouTube videos of four of the caprices from a performance of the cycle Scheid gave at Paul Hall of the Julliard School. It is splendid to hear Scheid actually hit the notes, so that his CD is not the fantasy of a tape editor. The left hand pizzicatos in the final caprice are a thing of beauty both sonically and visually. Furthermore, you really can understand the way the details of Scheid's performance add up: how the absence of a chin rest alters the projection of Scheid's sound, and the way in which vibrato is applied only occasionally as a matter of expression. One way in which Scheid's performance is inauthentic is in his podium manner. He is quiet and unassuming on stage, far from the demonic Paganini of legend. Of course, on a CD you get the spirit of the



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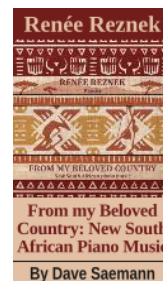
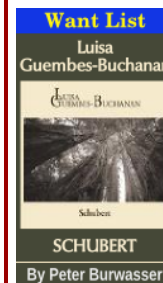
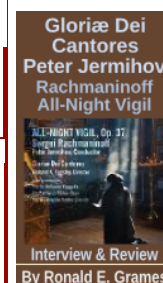
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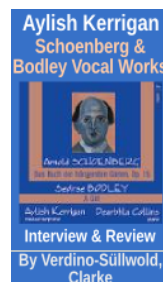
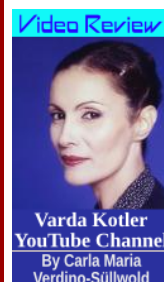
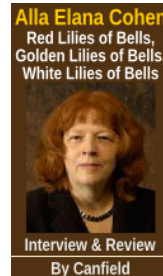
composer without any visual distractions. To truly appreciate Scheid's accomplishment, it is well to compare his cycle to the famous 1972 release by Itzhak Perlman. Perlman takes seven and a half minutes less time to perform the 24 Caprices than Scheid does, the former frequently speeding up passages that are far more expressive at Scheid's tempos. Perlman offers a kind of cookie-cutter virtuosity, very entertaining in its way but still somewhat unfulfilling. With Scheid, you recognize that Paganini also was a great composer for the guitar, an element completely absent from Perlman's rendition. Then there is the matter of Perlman's heavy, continuous vibrato, saturating the caprices in a thick, unvaried wash of sound, so different from the range of colors Scheid elicits.

Rather than a Perlman-type performance remaining the aspiration of violinists, Scheid's CD should give all violinists, including those on the modern instrument, much food for thought. Scheid also has performed the cycle on the modern violin; it would be interesting to know how much he adapted his performance practice on that instrument to the lessons learned from playing the Baroque violin. Given Roger Norrington's preaching about the color and expressiveness of pure tone on the modern instrument in music of Paganini's time, something very different from Perlman's style could evolve for the caprices on the modern violin. I find it interesting that the modern violin CD of the cycle I listen to most often, that of Ilya Kaler, times out to less than a minute's difference from Scheid's. Kaler's performances are much warmer and more terraced in their effects than Perlman's, although hearing Scheid's alongside them is a little like cleaning the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Did Michelangelo really want us to see, and Paganini really want us to hear, things this way? I come down strongly on Scheid's side. By the fourth time I sat through his CD, I found Paganini's music glowing from an inner strength I rarely have experienced. Excellent sound engineering, too. Highly recommended. **Dave Saemann**

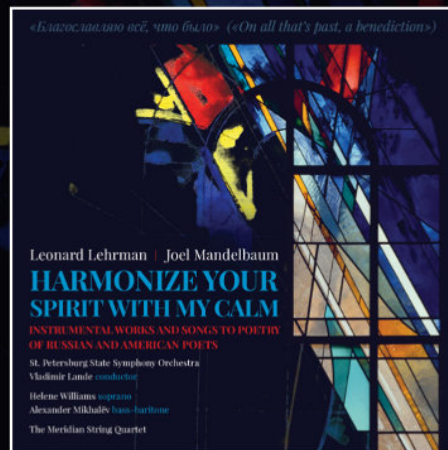
This article originally appeared in Issue 40:3 (Jan/Feb 2017) of *Fanfare Magazine*.

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		<i>Issue 40:3 Jan/Feb 2017</i>		
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		PAGANINI		
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A "fascinating and beautifully produced disc." Lehrman's songs are "imaginative, tender settings" ... "Impeccably and eloquently sung" in "a thought-provoking and powerful way." "The Russian soul bares itself." Mandelbaum's pieces are "dramatic" and "incredibly expressive." -Colin Clarke in this issue



Composers and longtime friends Leonard Lehrman and Joel Mandelbaum perform each other's compositions together with colleagues in the US and Russia, including 16 songs, 8 in English, 8 in Russian—a first for PARMA—and other works for orchestra, string quartet and piano.

Their wives Helene and Ellen participated in the album as performer and designer, and the entire album is dedicated to the memory of Leonard's mother, Emily R. Lehrman. The English title, drawn from one of the songs on the album, is representative of the two composers' relationship with each other. The Russian title, the first words sung on the album, represent their homage to the need for building on the past in order to create a viable future.

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