

are presented with a very detailed *précis* of this imaginary opus and its premiere which coincided with the strikingly similar events that took place in Waco, Texas in 1993. As always, Powers' blending of fact and fiction keeps us on the edge of our seats. *Orfeo* the novel, and by extension its complex musical worlds – real and imagined – provided one of the most satisfying literary adventures I've had in a long time. I highly recommend it.

Another book

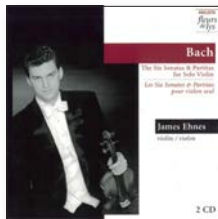
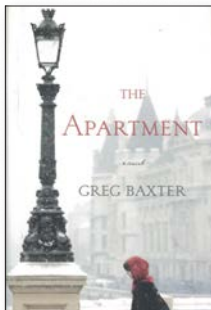
I enjoyed over the recent holidays also led me to my music library.

The Apartment (Twelve ISBN978-1-4555-7478-0)

by the American author **Greg Baxter** who now makes his home in Germany,

takes place over the period of one day in an unnamed European city. It is a book in which nothing of note happens except in the form of memories of the time the narrator spent in Iraq and of the life he abandoned in the United States. Nevertheless it is a compelling read. The musical interest here is a recital by Japanese violin students where the featured work is the *Ciaccona* (Chaconne) from Bach's *Partita for Violin No.2*. After the recital the narrator strikes up a conversation with Schmetterling, the German violin teacher, who launches into a lecture about how the *Ciaccona* encompasses "a profundity and intensity heretofore unknown in music. [...and which] resulted in the ascension of the violin as the most venerated of all Western instruments." There are five or six pages devoted to Schmetterling's appreciation of the work and his claim that "On one stave, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings." However, he goes on to say "a spiritual sympathy with the piece ... [is] ... virtually non-existent in violinists under the age of thirty... perhaps forty." As taken as I was by the elegance and emotion of his speech, this last sounded like a challenge and off I headed to my CD shelves. What I came back with was a favourite of mine, a 2CD set of the **Bach Sonatas and Partitas** which **James Ehnes** recorded in 1999 at the tender age of 23 (**Analekta FL 2 3147-8**). I am quite prepared to accept that his understanding and depth of knowledge of the *Ciaccona*, and the repertoire in general for that matter, will only increase with time, but I must say that if this early testament is any indication, we can all look forward to a truly awe-inspiring interpretation from Ehnes in the years to come.

Music: Books aside, sometimes it's enough just to focus on the music...



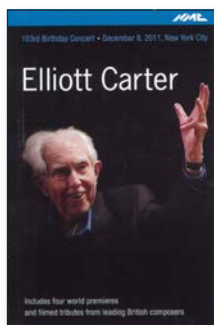
On the eve of **Elliott Carter's** 102nd birthday back in December 2010 Toronto's New Music Concerts presented an evening of his recent works under the banner "Elliott Carter at 102." Were it not for last minute health and weather complications it would have been Mr. Carter's seventh visit to Toronto at the invitation of New Music Concerts. As it was, the concert went on as planned – including the world premiere of the *Concertino* for bass clarinet and chamber orchestra and the Canadian premiere of the *Flute Concerto* – and the audience was treated to a taped telephone message from the iconic composer expressing his delight. Carter recovered his health and went on to compose most of a dozen more works in the following year and a half before the final illness that led to his death just a month before his 104th birthday. New Music Concerts continued its practice of celebrating the long and creative life of this gentle man with Toronto premieres of *Trije glasbeniki* in 2011 and the *Double Trio* in 2012.

The New York premieres of these two works took place at the 92nd Street Y on December 8, 2011 as part of **Elliott Carter's 103rd Birthday Concert**.

That festive occasion included world premieres of four new works ranging from *Mnemosyne* for solo violin (Rolf Schulte) to *A Sunbeam's Architecture*, a cycle of six songs on texts by E.E. Cummings for tenor (Nicholas Phan) and large chamber ensemble. The concert, organized by and under the artistic direction of cellist and long-time Carter associate **Fred Sherry**, has now been released on the British NMC label (**NMC DVD193**). Other than the solo harp piece *Bariolage* from 1992, the 12 works featured all date from Carter's 11th decade. What a treat it is to see Carter fêted in such a creative way and to see the composer's pleasure in the performances. Still uncompromising in its rhythmic and harmonic complexity, the music is perhaps a bit more approachable than earlier works because of its vigour and gestural exuberance – an amazing testament to Carter's longevity and *joie de vivre*.

The concert concludes with a seemingly spontaneous performance of *Happy Birthday* and bows from the beaming centenarian. The film continues with moving tributes from leading British composers George Benjamin, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Alexander Goehr, Oliver Knussen and Colin Matthews. The booklet contains an extensive biography and program notes. This is a wonderful celebration of the artist as an old man for those familiar with the work of Elliott Carter. It would serve as a wonderful point of entry to those who are not.

As someone who has spent much of my



adult life (folk) singing and accompanying myself on the guitar it strikes me as a bit strange that such a thing is quite rare in the world of Art Song. Of course not many lieder singers accompany themselves on the piano either and I am willing to accept that in the world of classical music it is a life's work to master even one medium. So it was with pleasure that I received a new disc from Renaissance man **Doug MacNaughton** on which he accompanies his own distinctive baritone voice with panache on a beautiful-sounding classical guitar constructed by Edward Klein. **Guitarias (DougMacNaughton.com)** features original works written for MacNaughton by Canadian composers John Beckwith, Leslie Uyeda and William Beauvais (who it seems has also served as guitar teacher and mentor to the singer).



The most immediately appealing work on the album, *Shadows*, is a collection of songs by British composer John Rutter, best known for his lush choral settings. The appeal however turns out to be from familiarity; his settings of 16th-century poetry sound charmingly anachronistic in their mimicking of lute songs of that era. That being said they are lovely and provide a contrast to the more contemporary sounds of the preceding tracks. Which is not to imply that the other works are not lyrical. Beckwith's settings of Samuel Beckett's poetic texts are surprising to this auditor who is more familiar with the bleak prose writings of the Nobel laureate whose motto might well have been the final sentences from *The Unnamable*: "I can't go on. I'll go on." Uyeda's *Flower Arranger* is a gently angular setting of a poignant poem from Joy Kogawa's collection *A Garden of Anchors*. The most idiomatic writing for the guitar, not surprisingly, comes from Beauvais in his cycle of songs on texts by Native American poet Linda Hogan. There are occasional extended techniques involved in the guitar writing which MacNaughton handles with apparent ease and without becoming distracted from his lyrical delivery of the vocal lines. I bet he could even walk and chew gum at the same time! My only quibble is the amount of reverb on the recording which seems a bit excessive. All in all though, an impressive solo release from a multi-talented artist. We welcome your feedback and invite submissions. CDs and comments should be sent to: *The WholeNote*, Centre for Social Innovation, 503 – 720 Bathurst St. Toronto ON M5S 2R4. We also encourage you to visit our website thewholenote.com where you can find added features including direct links to performers, composers and record labels, and additional, expanded and archival reviews.

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