



The singers are highly accomplished and impressive throughout. Markus Schäfer, in the title role, repeats his success as *Giob* and copes marvellously with the coloratura in his first aria, complete with a brief cadenza. Simone Kermes delivers her G minor *agitato* aria 'Cedi, o figlio' in Part 1 with panache and is quite brilliant in her coloratura comparison aria 'Colpo di vento' in Part 2, the piece that Kozeluch replaced in 1790 with an even more impressive recitative and aria ('Che veggo . . . / caro figlio'). As Faraone, the stock tyrant, Tom Sol is good in both his angry arias, their music noteworthy for the stabbing trumpets. His second aria is an *Allegro agitato* in C minor. Linda Perillo, the angel in *Giob*, is touching as Aaronne. The Rheinische Kantorei makes a splendid case for the chorus, while Hermann Max's period band is excellent throughout, as it was in *Giob*. Because CDs have mainly focused on Kozeluch's symphonies, concertos and chamber music, his vocal music comes as a welcome surprise. After hearing this oratorio one regrets the loss of Kozeluch's biblical operas about Deborah (1789) and Judith (1799). He would surely have provided some vigorous music for the murders of Sisera and Holofernes.

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MALCOLM BILSON (1935–)

KNOWING THE SCORE

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2005

DVD, 93 minutes

Malcolm Bilson is among the best-known modern performers who favour using early pianos. One would not, after experiencing this splendid DVD, wish to be more specific; he does not, for instance, suggest that you must not play older music on less old, or modern, instruments: 'I am becoming less of a purist', he says at one point, at least from the point of view of his own intensive preparation, for one can learn something by playing a piece on what, in the glare of historically informed scrutiny, might be 'wrong'. The DVD includes a ninety-minute lecture (conveniently divided into 'chapters'), with questions from an evidently professional audience (identified as piano teachers and musicologists). Bilson uses a modern Steinway and a replica Viennese piano of c1790. There are performances at Eszterháza of Haydn's witty Fantasia in C, on a replica Walter ('the Steinway of the 1790s'), and two of Schubert's *Moments musicaux* in the Brahmsaal of the Vienna Musikverein, using a Stein of c1830.

Performers and students, whatever instruments they prefer, should take note of what Bilson has to say. Indeed, this DVD should be compulsory viewing for teachers especially. I recommend those unfamiliar with early pianos (Bilson rejects the anachronistic 'fortepiano') to begin with the dialogue between Bilson and David Owen Norris, which takes place in Bilson's own house and has them moving around among four different types of early piano. Only occasionally does good repartee threaten to derail the conversation. While not eschewing shots from curious angles, the camera sometimes leaves faces and fingers to follow the discussion into the instruments' interiors. One might not want to hear the whole discussion often, but it has documentary value as well as being a good preparation for the main offering, the lecture. Both bear repetition (and the discussion should be repeated after the lecture, on which it also comments). The lecture itself, described in the blurb as 'provocative', could cause fluttering in the conservatoire dovecots, although it will no doubt be loftily ignored by the school of thought (it still exists) that holds that there is no value in returning to 'primitive' instruments and earlier performing styles. But to anyone with an open ear and mind, comparisons of the same passages on the Steinway and the early piano are persuasive, if only because players on these different instruments cannot really be trying to achieve



the same result. For some of the time we have music examples to follow, though they are occasionally blurred.

The central point of Bilson's argument is conveyed obliquely by his title, 'Knowing the score', expressed more fully as 'Do we really know how to read Urtext editions?' and 'How can this [proper reading of the editions] lead to expressive, even passionate performance?' Barely consulting his notes, he swings between specifics and general points, and between instruments – a passionate performance in itself. Here is a summary based on my notes (matter in quotes is thus an approximation):

Interpretation is the key. Music is like speech; what is apparently exactly notated need not be – *should* not be – exact in performance. Notes not marked staccato may nevertheless be short, particularly upbeats – example, the first note of Beethoven's Op. 2 No. 1 (I note incidentally that in the Henle edition, when the same idea is repeated in the left hand, the upbeat is marked staccato). We should use Urtext editions (preferably without much added fingering); at least they will not encourage the solecism of using two hands for the first two notes of Beethoven's Op. 111 ('it should be dangerous'). But we don't always know how to read even an Urtext. What is written means nothing without understanding the affect (Leopold Mozart); style education is neglected ('in conservatoires we're not encouraged to interpret, but to read the score and be careful'). Dotted rhythms may be in the proportion 2:1 or more usually be extended beyond the mathematical 3:1, nearly to the double dot; an exact 3:1 doesn't come naturally, and 'always sounds bad'. Shorter notes are lighter; 3/8 is lighter than 3/4, which is lighter than 3/2. Slurs (Leopold again) imply diminuendo; in the beautiful opening theme of (Wolfgang) Mozart's K332, in which 'not one measure resembles any other', the shortest note in bar 4 is the crotchet, although all the others are quavers. To a student who said 'my teacher would never allow that – I'll be thrown out of the competition', the response is a heartless 'Yup'.

But *can* one do Mozartian articulation on a modern piano? Or rather, on a replica Steinway? Because all modern pianos are replicas of an instrument unchanged in essence for well over a hundred years. The problem with playing Mozart on a Steinway is, because the sound fills out after the attack, the temptation is always to play legato, depriving the music of drama, of *soul* (even 'emasculating' it).

This is strong meat, and more follows. Bilson demonstrates – using a random selection of recordings – how untrue to the notation is most playing of Beethoven's Op. 26, first movement (this is further discussed with Norris). For one thing, 'You must never, ever, play evenly'. Playing evenly destroys caprice, character. An otherwise unarticulated note is not to be held for its full duration; silence between notes, at the ends of slurs, is of the essence in musical expression. Challenged to come and play an upbeat on the Steinway (lightly, so it sounds like an upbeat), the audience remained seated. Moving through Chopin's rubato and to remind us that music is a form of speech, we hear the two Elizabeths of song in Schubert's *Im Grünen*): Schumann with 'true rubato – she is never together with the pianist' – 'and she slides', and Schwarzkopf who stays with Edwin Fischer's meticulously regular quaver accompaniment, and does not slide. Bilson points out that even twentieth-century composers, whom we can hear playing their own music, do not replicate the text literally (there are pointed examples from Prokofiev and Bartók – 'hands not together'). But this does not make the text wrong. It is not (as claimed in a modern criticism that Bilson reads out) that fidelity to the notation has overcome spontaneity and imagination in modern performance; where musical notation is concerned, literalism is not fidelity.

To add to that seems superfluous. Highly recommended.

JULIAN RUSHTON