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Tuesday 26 January 2021

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- **Prom 52:** Intelligent, vivid & satisfying account of Bizet's *Carmen* from Rihab Chaied, Evan LeRoy Johnson & Anja Bihlmaier at Glyndebourne's visit to the BBC Proms
- **Prom 50:** Two rarities and a classic from Jakub Hruša and Czech Philharmonic
- **Prom 49:** A consummate & deeply felt account of Suk's masterful *Asrael Symphony* crowns the Czech Philharmonic's first appearance at the 2024 BBC Proms
- **Prom 40:** Transcending limitations, Bach's *St John Passion* from Masaaki Suzuki & Bach Collegium Japan
- **Prom 37:** intense contrasts thundering cannonades to personal intimacy, Antonio Pappano conducts Britten's *War Requiem*



- **More Buffy the Vampire Slayer than German Romanticism:** Gothic Opera's *Der Vampyr* at the Grimeborn Festival
- **Vivacity, humour & pathos:** Opera Holland Park & Charles Court Opera in Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Yeomen of the Guard*

Record reviews

- **Far from special interest:** discs of brass band music by Arthur Bliss and Malcolm Arnold, two brilliant and highly satisfying portraits
- **Responses to Thomas Hardy:** composer Arthur Keegan's complex web of music new and old, atmospherically performed by Lotte Betts-Dean, James Girling & Ligeti Quartet
- **Substantial and satisfying listening:** Stuart Hancock's score for the new film, Kensuke's Kingdom
- **White-hot dramatic impetus: a new recording of Meyerbeer:** *Le prophète* on LSO Live might use a traditional version but captures the work's essential drama
- **Songs from two golden ages:** Nicholas Mulroy, Elizabeth Kenny & Toby Carr in a recital of effortless beauty with song from 17th century England & 20th century Latin America
- **More than entertainment:** Oliver Webber and the Monteverdi String Band's *The Madrigal Reimagined*

Top four posts this month

Prom 37: intense contrasts thundering cannonades to personal intimacy, Antonio

K: Brazilian conductor Simone Menezes and her new ensemble in Borodin, Debussy, Copland, Villa-Lobos and Lacaze

Labels: [cd review](#)



Accents - Borodin, Debussy, Copland, Villa-Lobos, Lacaze; Ensemble K, Simone Menezes; Aparté, Reviewed by Robert Hugill on 25 January 2021 Star rating: 4.0 (★★★★)

A new chamber ensemble brings a fresh approach and a seductive sound to music from Caucasus, Paris, Pennsylvania, Brazil and indigenous Australia

I have been in contact with the Brazilian conductor Simone Menezes several times over the last few years, usually in connection with the music of Villa Lobos, including reviving his film score *A Floresta do Amazonas* in a project at the *Philharmonie de Paris* (10 April 2021) alongside photographs by Sebastiao Salgado.

In 2020, Menezes founded Ensemble K, a flexible ensemble specialising in the larger chamber repertoire of the 20th century. On this new disc from Aparté, *Accents*, Simone Menezes conducts Ensemble K in Copland's *Appalachian*

Spring, and Sophie Lacaze's *Histoire sans paroles*, alongside chamber arrangements of Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances*, Debussy's *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune*, and Villa-Lobos' *Choros No. 5*. The ensemble fields 12 players - string quartet, double bass, single woodwind, french horn, piano, and accordion.

K is a multi-cultural ensemble, and proud of it, and this disc explores something of that multiculturalism by taking a group of works which have particular local influences. As Simone Menezes explains in her booklet note, 'Everybody knows that in order to play Mahler it is very important to know the Viennese waltz tradition but, on the other hand, how much do we know about the street choros when performing the works of Villa-Lobos, or the influence that cinema and folk music had on Copland? These pieces are also performed in Europe with a particular accent, without their performers necessarily being aware of those influences.'

So with have Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances* which were written after an ethnographic study of the region of the Cuman people (situated north of the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea), Copland's evocation of rural Pennsylvania with its landscape, folklore and prayers, a work which is deceptively sophisticated and creates the right atmosphere despite using the 'wrong' folk tune (Copland used the Shaker hymn, *Simple Gifts*, not realising there were no Shakers in Pennsylvania), Villa-Lobos' remarkable melding of Brazilian forms and classical tradition, and French composer Sophie Lacaze taking inspiration from the indigenous Australian peoples.

Does any of this matter? There are other issues in play here, for a start with the Borodin, Debussy and Villa-Lobos we are dealing with imaginative orchestral reductions. I have to say first up that I loved these performances, the orchestral reductions bring a lovely clarity to the music. We get finely detailed performances from the individual musicians, a sense of impulse and character in the music.

Certainly, there is a lovely sinuous quality to much of the melodic writing in the Borodin, and having the big tutti sections performed with great gusto by a small group of musicians gives the music a more folk-ish character than a lush version might not have. But overall, it is the vividness and sheer quality of the performance which counts. Debussy's prelude is similarly beautifully done, and whilst the reduction down to twelve instruments might imbue the music with greater clarity and a less nebulous quality, there is no doubt of the beauty of the performance. Benno Sachs' arrangement is imaginative, and whilst I can manage the piano, I was a bit uncertain about the moments when the accordion comes in.

With Copland's *Appalachian Spring* we reach music written for small ensemble. The work has a somewhat complex history, Copland wrote the ballet in 1944 for Martha Graham using an ensemble of 13 instruments (Copland uses double strings but this disc has only single strings), he then created a suite for orchestra based on the ballet, then orchestrated the complete ballet and finally did a version of the suite using the original orchestration. So there are in fact four different versions. Here we have the original.

Now, I have to admit that I often find the complete ballet outstays its welcome. There is something haunting and evocative about Copland's music but too often the performances lack impulse. Here, Menezes brings that quality into the mix without ever losing the music's sense of spaciousness and stasis. The clarity of the instrumental performance helps here, and the sense that this is a large-scale chamber work rather than an orchestra manque. Certainly, there is a different accent here, but it comes as much from bringing out the more European large-scale chamber music aspect of the piece.

Written in 1925 in Rio de Janeiro, Villa-Lobos' *Choros No. 5* was one of a sequence of 14 works called *Choros*, with instrumentation varying from solo guitar to orchestra. The Portuguese word *choro* means weeping or cry, but came to be the name for the music played by Brazilian street musicians using a mixture of European and African instruments. The composer is not emulating a par style here but creating a sort of pan-Brazilian synthesis of native folklore, both Indian and popular.





Pappano conducts
Britten's War Requiem at
the BBC Proms



Prom 23: riveting
symphonic theatre from
Benjamin Grosvenor,
Edward Gardner & London
Philharmonic Orchestra in
Busoni's Piano Concerto



Prom 40: Transcending
limitations, Bach's St John
Passion from Masaaki
Suzuki and Bach
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Prom 24: Vividness &
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The Fairy Queen with Les
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Káfig,

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I have to admit that the Villa-Lobos was a new piece to me, and the sound world here is thoroughly seductive with the combination of structure, freedom and haunting melodies so familiar from other Villa-Lobos work. Like the Borodin, the chamber performance only serves to bring out the folk character of much of the music, whilst Menezes and her musicians do not stint on drama or vibrant rhythms. Frankly, I wanted more of this, and do hope that the ensemble explores Villa-Lobos' copious output much further.

The final work on the disc is contemporary French but takes the indigenous Australian peoples as its inspiration. Written for piano trio, it is full of vividly imagined textures for this tricky combination and some fascinating and evocative writing. Definitely a work to explore.



Simone Menezes and Ensemble K recording session (Photo Marc Paton)

I enjoyed this disc immensely, Simone Menezes and the players of Ensemble K present their varied selection of music with a vividness and a sense of sheer engagement which makes the disc delightful listening. The ensemble brings a very distinctive quality to each of the pieces which, combined with fine musicianship, makes for a lovely disc. I look forward to seeing what they do next, and hope they might think about exploring some of Percy Grainger's large scale room music!

Alexander Porfiryevich Borodin (1833-1887), arr. Vincent Paulet - Polovtsian Dances (1869-1887) [12'37]

Claude Debussy (1862-1918), arr. Benno Sachs - Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune (1894) [9'53]

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) - Appalachian Spring (1944) [25'46]

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959), arr. Gustavo de Sà - Choros No. 5 (1925) [4'48]

Sophie Lacaze (born 1963) - Histoire sans paroles, trio for violin, cello and piano (2002) [8'53]

Ensemble K (Nicolas Dupont, Manon Galy - violin, Clément Holvoet - viola, Kacper Nowak - cello, Adrien Tyberghein - double-bass, Mara Dobresco - piano, Daniela Mars/Ludivine Moreau - flute, Anne-Marie Gay - oboe, Christian Laborie - clarinet, Jules Postel - bassoon, Gabriel Potier - french horn, Florian Delporte - accordion)

Simone Menezes (music director)

Recorded 6 to 9 July 2020 at the auditorium of the Conservatoire de Tourcoing

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Posted by Planet Hugill at [Tuesday, January 26, 2021](#)



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
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