



ORION WEISS, PIANO

1-8	J. S. BACH	
	French Overture for keyboard in B Minor BWV 831	28:34
	1. Overture	07:40
	2. Courante	02:03
	3. Gavotte I & II	03:41
	4. Passepied I & II	02:48
	5. Sarabande	04:08
	6. Bourrée I & II	02:26
	7. Gigue	02:50
	8. Echo	02:57
9	SCRIABIN	
	Piano Sonata No. 5 in F-Sharp Major Op. 53	12:43
10	MOZART	
	Variations on "Salve tu, Domine" by Paisiello K.398/416e	07:11
11-12	CARTER	
	Piano Sonata	25:47
	1. Maestoso	11:08
	2. Andante	14:39



ORION

NOTES BY MICHAEL FREMER

Conventional wisdom suggests that classical music is either nearing extinction, particularly in the United States, or at best, struggling for survival and relevance in the 21st century. There are signs: when you attend most live concerts (particularly in the United States) the audience demographic trends towards old, older and elderly. Orchestras struggle financially. Some well-regarded ensembles have disappeared. Few orchestras or soloists today, even among the top echelon, have recording contracts with record labels.

Yet bubbling just below this seemingly bleak surface is a vibrant, healthy classical music scene—one that has adapted to changing times with vigor, determination and high-tech ingenuity. The older demographic is hardly a cause for great concern. Like the taste for sophisticated food and drink, an appreciation for classical music often seems to be a later-in-life acquisition. It's not surprising then, that the "baby boom" generation has helped propel concert hall and festival attendance to what many see as an all-time high. And of course, at most concerts are pockets of intensely enthusiastic youngsters. In case you've missed the news stories, overseas, particularly in China, classical music is wildly popular among the very young, with violin virtuosos receiving adulation usually reserved for rock stars.

The great orchestras soldier on and if the major labels are too busy mass marketing pop stars to bother with serious music, smaller, independent labels, such as the one that's released this recording, have picked up the slack.

Today's technology also makes it relatively easy for orchestras to self-record, produce and distribute their music, either on CD or via MP3 Internet download, thus producing a much needed link with audiences outside their geographical region. And in the future, high resolution downloads will include the sonic luster lost in the compression processes of today. Online sales of classical music recordings, purchased either directly from orchestra websites or Apple's iTunes, are healthy, as is listenership among the many internet and satellite radio classical music stations.

The greatest cause for optimism about the future of this music, though, has to be the proliferation of new, young, talented and exciting artists such as Gustavo Dudamel, the 27 year old Venezuelan conducting dynamo who is drawing well-deserved comparisons to the young Leonard Bernstein when he burst upon the scene, and of course the gifted 26 year old American pianist Orion Weiss who makes his recording debut on this superbly recorded album.

Look around you in the audience at an Orion Weiss concert. The older audience loves him. But notice too how many young people come to hear him play. It may be his repertoire, carefully and excitingly chosen, and it may be the way he plays this music. How many young people can resist Orion's presentation of the orgasmic end of Scriabin's fifth sonata?

The multi-award winning Mr. Weiss (Google him for the long award list please!), toured with Munich's Orchester der Klangverwaltung in 2007, and performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the New York Philharmonic, and the Minnesota, Baltimore, San Francisco, and New World Symphony Orchestras. In 2005 he toured Israel with the Israeli Symphony Orchestra conducted by Itzhak Perlman. During the 2007–2008 season, Mr. Weiss is scheduled to perform concertos with the Cleveland, Philadelphia and Chicago Symphony Orchestras as well as with the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

The Lyndhurst, Ohio native made his Cleveland Orchestra debut back in 1999 performing Liszt's Piano Concerto #1. A month later, with less than 24 hours' notice, he filled in for André Watts in a performance of Shostakovich's Piano Concerto #2 with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, returning later that year for a performance of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto #1. In 2004, Mr. Weiss graduated from Julliard, where he studied with Emanuel Ax.

This wonderfully varied recital, recorded in Zipper Hall at Colburn School in Los Angeles, showcases both Mr. Weiss's impeccable technique and his considerable interpretive skills.

Performing Bach's *French Overture* with the requisite precision and clarity of line, Weiss wrests from the mathematical counterpoint ephemeral moments of elegance and great beauty. Scriabin's fiery fifth sonata showcases Mr. Weiss's dynamism and delicacy as well as his ability to produce a breathtakingly broad range of warm, mid-keyboard colors contained within this impressionistic piece that ends as furiously (and explosively) as it begins.

Switching to Mozart's *Paisiello Variations*, Weiss elicits a warmer, softer, authentically Mozartian, playful Spring-like tone, while demonstrating his right hand's extraordinary dexterity and precision on the upper reaches of the keyboard.

The recital concludes with Elliott Carter's piano sonata (in two movements) a modern but accessible work that couldn't be more different from, but no less enticing than, the Mozart. Who better than a confident youngster, brimming with talent and youthful vigor, to tackle this brooding, sharp-edged composition that aptly expresses the tribulations and uncertainties of today's hectic existence?

This simply miked recording, using a pair of Neumann U-47s fitted with the original metal-clad VF14M vacuum tubes and recorded directly to two-track 172k/24 bit digital, eschews the usual audiophile insistence upon bathing the solo piano in hall reverberation in favor of a more direct balance that emphasizes the Steinway's and Mr. Weiss's awesome dynamic expressiveness and their almost unlimited range of tonal colors. The recording also captures a superior blend of transient keyboard attack and soundingboard sustain and decay.

In short, if your system can handle the piano's prodigious low frequency energy and intense dynamics, you will be presented with a realistic rendering of a piano in all of its sonic and physical glory, with sufficient reverberant energy to place it convincingly in concert hall surroundings. More importantly, the recording compellingly communicates every deft keyboard stroke of a young virtuoso making a memorable recorded debut.

— *Michael Fremer*
editor, www.musicangle.com
senior contributing editor, Stereophile

PRODUCER'S NOTES

Orion Weiss combines exacting perfectionism with genuine affability and Midwestern charm. Orion's combination of personality traits makes him a producer's dream. And these traits, plus his ability as a pianist, win him a great number of friends and admirers, onstage and off. Orion offers high voltage electricity as a performer, linked with intellectual and musical maturity as a poet at the keyboard. In his notes, Michael Fremer compares Orion to Gustavo Dudamel. Indeed we are especially fortunate; this appears to be the beginning of another musical golden era, in which young and extremely talented musicians enrich our enjoyment of the nuances in concert music by bringing fresh vitality to seasoned masterpieces and new compositions alike.

Orion arrived energized for our sessions in Los Angeles, despite his return some days earlier from an extended concert tour in China and Japan. Following our four days of sessions, Orion then spent tireless hours at home, on airplanes and between concerts working through our many takes of each movement to help us choose the most appropriate one. Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, many of these choices settled on tracks Orion performed live in our Yarlung Artists concert, such as Scriabin's sonata number 5. And something I took as an excellent omen for our recording and how our sessions would unfold, the Bach Overture, the

first track on our disc, is our first take, the first morning of our recording session. For more information about Orion, and to be aware of his upcoming concert schedule, please visit his website www.orionweiss.com

Many people have asked me to discuss audiophile recording, asking in person and in various audio forums, as if expecting me to guard or reveal special secret sauces, either in mastering or in recording techniques. The answers, in truth, are not complicated. As we hope to have achieved with Orion's recording, as with all the albums we release at Yarlung Records, the "secret elements" are not many and they are not secret, but they are each important.

First, most of the credit goes to Orion, the musician. Without his musical instincts and ability, none of the rest of what we do would matter. Second, we use the finest instrument we can find, and in this case we feel blessed with support from Steinway & Sons (New York) and David Ida at Fields Pianos in Los Angeles, who generously provided us with Concert & Artists piano 599 for this recording. Under the spell cast by Orion's fingers, this instrument provided the transparency, color variety, dynamics and exciting bass to which Michael Fremer refers in his generous comments.

Third, we put the musician and instrument in a concert hall with excellent natural acoustics. All the ambiance in these recordings comes from the concert hall itself—from the air in the hall, the wood on the walls, and so forth. We added nothing in mastering. We were fortunate to rent Zipper Hall at Colburn School in Los Angeles for this recording and for Orion's concert.

Fourth, we use the finest recording equipment we can find, and we use the least amount of equipment possible. Thanks to our friend and supporter Jon Fisher, Gearworks Pro Audio gave us the use of two matched Neumann U-47 microphones with their original vF14M tubes, which are metal-clad pentode tubes configured as triodes. These microphones may be the most famous microphones in the world, and Neumann made many of them, but it is a special privilege to use a pair with the original tubes in good condition. When recording only two tracks (necessary in some people's minds for truly audiophile sound) one must place musician and microphones precisely. In this case we spent seven hours setting the two microphones, making many adjustments, half-centimeter at a time, driving quickly back and forth to check these changes with Elliot Midwood at Acoustic Image in Studio City, until we felt the sound was "just right." We wanted to avoid making further adjustments in mastering. There are no adjustments to the EQ of this album. We made all "EQ adjustments" with microphone placement at the start. It is always our goal to record this way, and we succeeded similarly with David Fung's *Evening*

Conversations released in 2006, and *David Howard, Ryan MacEvoy McCullough in Concert, Joanne Pearce Martin: Barefoot, Dialoghi* and *Inner World: Music by David Lefkowitz*, among others to be released in 2008 as well.

For this recording we used short (five feet) stranded silver interconnects designed by Yarlung Records, customized vacuum tube microphone preamplifiers, no mixer, and recorded directly to two tracks sampled at 176,400 samples per second at 24 bit depth.

Fifth, we “stayed out of the way of the music” when Steve Hoffman, Kevin Gray and I mastered Orion’s recording. It is a privilege to work with Steve and Kevin, who share the view (and teach me so much about the mastering process as we work) that in audiophile recordings “less is more.” We hope this album lives up to this principle and delights your ears as a result.¹ Thank you Orion, for what you share with us in this recording.

A few thoughts on the music selected for Orion’s debut album. This repertoire covers a wide emotional and chronological landscape, appropriate for a musician of Orion’s extraordinary gifts. J. S. Bach and Elliott Carter published their masterpieces 213 years apart, and the similarities and differences in the structure of these compositions fascinate us.

Carter’s piano sonata explores tension between the notes B and B-Flat and their respective tonalities. The first movement begins on B but ends on B-Flat, and throughout the movement Carter juxtaposes these pitches and alternates between the two. In his second movement, Carter explores a white-key tonality on B-Natural which he disturbs with haunting appearances of black notes including B-Flat, celebrating the dissonance and differences this tension suggests. By the end of the second movement, neither tonality dominates, and in the final minutes of the piece Carter merges these two tonalities toward one, magically dissonance-free.

¹ For those of you with extreme cases of what I fondly call “audiophilia nervosa.” This syndrome can develop after years of listening to great music through excellent audio equipment. (One can tell if one has this disease when one regularly compares the same recording through different interconnect cables or after swapping vacuum tubes in one’s amplifiers, for example, instead of comparing different musicians’ recordings of the same work. Many of us fall within this “diagnosis.”) I mention this because we recorded *Orion* and *Joanne Pearce Martin: Barefoot* with the same piano, same hall, and same equipment setup. Orion and Joanne, both virtuosic titans of the keyboard, sound very different in these recordings. Recording them as we did should enable you to enjoy them as distinct individuals with unique messages, colors and musical voices.

Scriabin's 5th Sonata, subtitled *The Poem of Ecstasy* and related to his larger symphonic work of that name, begins and ends on the same note. Scriabin creates a distinctive cyclical form for this composition, similar to what Carter creates in his piano sonata. These works share a circular shape, but the Scriabin ends in an ecstatic frenzy where the Carter leaves us peacefully: we feel release as time slows to a standstill.

Scriabin, Mozart and Carter each explore methods of circular construction, but do so differently. In Scriabin's 5th Sonata, the composer returns to and amplifies earlier material as he reaches a joyous, wild and suggestive climax upon its cyclical return; in the Carter Sonata, opening material reappears as an echo. Mozart's variations on "Salve tu Domine," a theme from Paisiello's opera *I filosofi immaginari*, share a roundness and return of earlier material and Mozart's coda revisits the theme's original texture.

We begin this album with J. S. Bach. Bach searched for perfection in all of his music: perfection reflecting the glory of God and creation, reflecting the golden ratios in nature, and revealing unity and completion. Bach's "French Overture" takes performer and audience on an epic and wide-ranging musical and emotional journey. And Bach manages to transport us these distances without ever moving far from his home key.

Of course, none of the music we chose for Orion's album creates a perfect circle, and neither should it: between the first note and the last lies a vast musical experience that affects us in irrevocable ways. Our journey from the beginning to the end may be linear as we listen to this recording. And when previous material returns it never merely repeats, but illuminates and unifies our understanding.

Creating this debut album for Orion Weiss was a joint effort, and we want to thank Steinway & Sons (New York) and especially David Ida of Fields Pianos in Los Angeles for making available c&a 599 for this recording and for our live concert. And to Yarlung Artists and the many Yarlung Artists donors who believe in Orion and enabled this album, I say a very personal thank you, especially to Ann & Jim Mulally, David & Margie Barry, David Bohnett Foundation, Jon Fisher of Gearworks Pro Audio, Kevin Gray, Annaliese Soros, Brenda Barnes, Los Angeles Philanthropic Committee for the Arts, Michael Fremer, Steve Hoffman, Music Sales Corporation, Abe and Lori Shefa, Mike Napoli, Barbara Bruser Clark, David Fung, Yarlung Records' music advisor Rina Dokshitsky, Anne Bleich, David & Romy Cohen, Jan Freibergs, Jerry Fecher, Karine Beesley, Lila Kommerstad, Linda Hodge, Michael Rosen, Ann & Les Noriel, James Egelhofer, and Rajeev Talwani. Thank you to all of you! Yarlung Artists is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. To support debut albums for musicians like Orion Weiss, please visit our website at

www.yarlungartists.org or write to Yarlung Artists by mail at 10920 Wilshire Boulevard 150-9162, Los Angeles, California 90024, USA

This album begins and ends on the same pitch. As we take this cyclical journey together, I hope it lifts your spirits as it does mine. It was a pleasure to make this recording for you. I hope you take this journey many times. Orion's artistry reveals more each time you hear him.

—Bob Attiyeh, producer

Graphic design: Erin Hauber
Photography by Leslie van Stelten

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A portrait of Orion Weiss, a young man with short brown hair, smiling and looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a dark jacket over a white t-shirt. The background is a blurred cityscape at dusk or dawn.

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|-------|----------|--|
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Recorded September 1-4, 2007 in Zipper Hall
at Colburn School, Los Angeles
Recording Engineer: Bob Attiyeh
Mastering Engineers: Steve Hoffman & Kevin Gray
Steinway Technicians: Fred Fehl & Daniel Ene
Monitoring Equipment: Elliot Midwood
Assistant Producer for High Resolution Downloads: Jacob Horowitz

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