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Earl Wild
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VOLUME 3

Giovanni Doria Miglietta piano
Frank Churchill 1901-1942/
Earl Wild 1915-2010
Reminiscences of Snow White 8'13
1  “Whistle While You Work”
   “I’m Wishing”
   “One Song”
   “Heigh-Ho”
   “Someday My Prince Will Come”

George Gershwin 1898-1937/Wild
Fantasy on Porgy and Bess 29'21
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   Summertime
   Oh, I can’t sit down
   My man’s gone now
   I got plenty o’ nuttin
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   It ain’t necessarily so
   Duet - I love you porgy/Bess you
   is my woman
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EARL WILD AND POPULAR MUSIC
On a number of occasions Earl Wild has been compared to Franz Liszt, and in 1986 (the centennial of Liszt’s death) Hungary awarded him a Liszt Medal. They both dazzled their audiences with outstanding skills. They both were virtuoso performers of other composers’ music as well as composers themselves of technically challenging piano pieces. Alongside their transcendent musicianship they shared a flair for showmanship too. Liszt’s charisma and theatricality are well known (he used to open concerts by throwing his white gloves to the adoring audience). Earl Wild, from 1955 to 1957, was a regular guest in the Caesar’s Hour TV comedy show hosted by comedian/musician Sid Caesar, to which Mr. Wild contributed musical skits akin to those of the Grand Maestro of musical comedy, Victor Borge. In general, Mr. Wild was always committed to bringing concert music to the wider audience, being in constant touch with the popular side of the music world - think of the third movement of his Piano Sonata (2000) subtitled “à la Ricky Martin”. In 1942 Mr. Wild premiered Ferde Grofé full-orchestra version of Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue on NBC Radio under Arturo Toscanini – up to that point the piece was considered more suitable to jazz clubs than to symphony halls – and he also recorded it with the Boston Pops Orchestra, an ensemble whose mission is precisely that of bridging the classic and the popular repertoire and with which Mr. Wild appeared numerous times. Being in touch with the popular repertoire is another element that links him to Liszt. Amongst the vast body of work by the Austro-Hungarian pianist-composer...
are the so-called “Paraphrases”, “Fantaisies”, “Reminiscences” and transcriptions of popular music (for example, Tarantelle di bravura d’après la tarantelle de La muette de Portici, Paraphrase de concert sur Rigoletto, Reminiscences de La Scala...). These are virtuoso piano arrangements of popular materials, a large part of which came from opera, the most popular outlet for orchestral composers in the 19th century. The American Liszt of the 20th century, Mr. Wild similarly paid homage to popular music in his body of piano transcriptions.

After presenting the arrangements of Gershwin’s songs (Seven Virtuoso Etudes) in the first album of Wild’s complete transcriptions, in this third instalment Giovanni Doria Miglietta applies his own virtuoso technique to other staples of Wild’s exploration of American popular music. If opera and operetta used to be the popular forms of orchestral music in the 19th century, their 20th century heirs have been American musical and film music, represented in this album respectively by the Gershwin opera Porgie and Bess and the film score to Disney’s Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

Lisztian in scope – and in the use of ‘Reminiscences’ in its title – Reminiscences of Snow White (1995) is based on Frank Churchill’s music for Walt Disney’s 1937 animated film Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Glistening high-note scales open the piece, taking the listener into fairy-tale territories, with fragments of the principal themes scattered across the musical texture, most notably “Whistle while You Work.” “I’m Wishing,” which in the film is sung by Snow White at a wishing well during a respite from her chores, is rendered with a dreamy soft touch (in the middle cadenza Doria Miglietta, instead of the low C in the score, uses a low E to create a less stable harmony, as does Wild in his recording). The demureness of “I’m Wishing” is then contrasted with the assertiveness of “One Song,” the Prince’s love pledge. Then, a spirited fugato treatment wittingly presents the dwarfs’ “Heigh-Ho” work song. A bridge elaborates on the “One Song” melody, followed by a restrained and longing presentation of “Some Day My Prince Will Come,” Snow White’s love song. This builds up to a more passionate refrain, intertwined with “One Song” to mark the long-awaited reunion of the two lovers. The happy ending is consolidated with a sparkling rendition of “Whistle while You Work” and the reprise of the glistening “fairy-tale” runs that opened the piece.

Fantasy on Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess is the album’s piece de resistance not only in terms of length but also of technical challenges, grandeur, and inventiveness. The Fantasy is not so much a transcription – along the lines of Percy Grainger’s 1951 Fantasy for Two Pianos – but a veritable Lisztian treatment that combines, reprises, intertwines, and revisits the central songs and recurring motifs of the opera. Wild manages to perfectly balance his own piano personality with a treatment that is respectful and faithful to Gershwin’s opera, as Doria Miglietta manages to deliver a perfect balance of technical excellence and sensitive interpretation of the music’s soul. Porgy and Bess was composed in 1935 and successfully combined the African-American idioms with the European operatic heritage represented, for example, by the extensive use of the leitmotiv
tonk pianist who is providing musical entertainment in the room where the tenement’s lodgers are playing an animated game of craps. In the meantime, Clara is singing a sweet lullaby to her daughter, “Summertime”, one of the most successful songs from this opera, itself recurring four times; the melody is played in the middle register, with dreamy scales and arpeggios embellishing the upper range. The next entry, “Oh, I Can’t Sit Down”, describes the Catfish Row people joyously heading towards a picnic. Porgy cannot join the merry party because, with his injured leg, he is unable to sit down, but he nevertheless encourages Bess not to miss the pleasant diversion. The excited semi-quavers passage from the opera introduction appears here in the Fantasy, alongside a reprise of the “Jasbo Brown Blues” opening, prolonging the festive atmosphere of the picnic music. The musical flow slows down, and a more sullen mood emerges as “My Man’s Gone Now” is introduced. This is a funeral song, sung by the widowed Serena at the wake of her husband, killed in a brawl by Crown. Yet, Wild emphasises the drama more than the quiet weeping, and the music soars passionately with tragic accents. A bridge leads to another favourite from this opera, “I Got Plenty o’ Nuttin.” Porgy, now sharing his place with Bess, expresses his happiness, based on being able to be contented with what one has – “I got plenty o’ nuttin’, and nuttin’s plenty fo’ me.” He has his singing voice and now he has Bess too; he couldn’t ask for more. The buoyant melody is passed around in all the registers, and then forearm clusters mark Porgy’s simple but full-of-life celebration. A reprise of “Summertime” seems to cast a shadow over Porgy’s happiness, but the main melody is energetically restated, as to dispel the threat. Yet, technique. Gershwin called his a ‘folk opera’ for its use of the forms of folk songs – such as spirituals, blues, work songs, street cries – alongside the arias and recitatives from the opera tradition. Set amongst the African-American community living in Catfish Row, a fictional impoverished slum of Charlotte, South Carolina, it tells the story of Porgy, a disabled beggar, and his attempt to save Bess from her possessive and violent man, Crown. The triggering action is Crown killing a man during a brawl, an incident that forces him to flee and hide from the police. Nobody is willing to house Crown’s woman, Bess, in the meantime, and the only one that eventually offers some shelter is Porgy. From this temporary accommodation, love blossoms between the two. Yet, Crown returns to forcibly take his woman back, but eventually, in a confrontation with Porgy, he gets killed. With Porgy arrested and brought to jail, Bess has nobody left in town and resigns to accept the proposal of Sportin’ Life – the local drug dealer of whom Bess is a former customer – to go to New York with her. But Porgy is not convicted and is released soon. The opera closes with him leaving to the Big City determined to find his Bess. Interestingly, Wild published his homage in 1975, one year before the Houston Opera House 1976 revival that triggered a widespread re-evaluation of Porgy and Bess. The first section in Wild’s Fantasy is an “Introduction” that, surprisingly, does not start with the famous rush of strings and xylophone semiquavers that opens the opera and most other arrangements and transcriptions; it starts with a jazzy cell – identifiable as Porgy’s leitmotif for its limping movements – that recurs throughout the opera and, more notably, closes it. To follow, we have “Jasbo Brown Blues”, named after the honky-tonk pianist who is providing musical entertainment in the room where the tenement’s lodgers are playing an animated game of craps. In the meantime, Clara is singing a sweet lullaby to her daughter, “Summertime”, one of the most successful songs from this opera, itself recurring four times; the melody is played in the middle register, with dreamy scales and arpeggios embellishing the upper range. The next entry, “Oh, I Can’t Sit Down”, describes the Catfish Row people joyously heading towards a picnic. Porgy cannot join the merry party because, with his injured leg, he is unable to sit down, but he nevertheless encourages Bess not to miss the pleasant diversion. The excited semi-quavers passage from the opera introduction appears here in the Fantasy, alongside a reprise of the “Jasbo Brown Blues” opening, prolonging the festive atmosphere of the picnic music. 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“My Man’s Gone Now” resurfaces, casting more gloomy overtones. The music seems to come to a halt in an ecstatic cadenza: “Summertime” is intertwined with “My Man’s Gone Now” and “I Got Plenty o’ Nuttin” closes it in a morose minor-mode rendition. Rarefied chords create tension as the “Buzzard Song” starts. The scene depicted is that of a buzzard, a bird of bad omen, suddenly appearing and flying over Porgy’s house, to materialise the threat to Porgy’s happiness that was foreshadowed in the previous musical passage. The piece has advanced harmony and almost non-tonal writing, with fast runs evoking the circling flights of the bird. A dramatic bridge leads to the comic centrepiece of the opera, the song “It Ain’t Necessarily So,” in which the drug dealer Sportin’ Life offers his alternative (and almost blasphemous) view of the Scriptures to a scandalised audience of pious women gathered in prayer – scholars have identified here influences from the Jewish liturgical music. A bridge based on the opening of the “Jasbo Brown Blues” leads to the “Duet”, combining “Bess, You Is My Woman” and “I Loves You, Porgy,” the mutual declaration of love between the two. But the duet – and the couple – is broken as Porgy, in self-defence, kills Crown and is arrested. An aggressive bridge based on the opening of “It Ain’t Necessarily So” communicates the arrival of Sportin’ Life to lure Bess, who has just lost Porgy too, to come with him to New York – “There’s a Boat dat’s Leavin’ soon for New York.” The music’s sly moves depict Sportin’ Life’s successful seduction. The music deflates and Wild inserts a quotation of the famous Tristan chord from Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde: as the romance between those Wagnerian lovers was tragically doomed, so is the one between Porgy and Bess, seemingly… But Porgy is released from jail and resolves to move to New York himself to look for his Bess. With this ironic Wagner quotation Wild seems to suggest that if the lovers of the nineteenth-century European opera, Tristan and Isolde, passively succumbed to the adverse Fate, the ones of the twentieth-century American opera face the problem and reacts – as per the American Pragmatism. The optimistic and determined “Oh, Lawd, I’m on My Way,” closes he opera, and the Fantasy, on a positive note of hope. (Doria Miglietta, in this recording, presents an ending that is a combination of the two alternative endings provided in Wild’s score.)

In the next entries, Mr. Wild applies his inventiveness to the classical canon. Le Rouet d’Omphale (Omphale’s spinning wheel), penned in 1995, translates for the keyboard the lively storytelling of the 1871 symphonic poem by Camille Saint-Saëns, adorned with Wild’s trademark virtuoso writing. Based on a Greek myth, it tells the story of the comically humiliating punishments of the semi-god Hercules, in need of atonement for having inadvertently killed a man. The punishment consists of serving as the slave of Omphales, queen of Lydia, for one year in which the virile almighty hero is required to attend to feminine houseworks, sometimes also forced to do so in drag. Saint-Saëns’ symphonic poem concentrates on one of such unheroic chores: operating a spinning wheel. A recurring circular movement in the musical texture depicts the rotation of the wheel, and graceful feminine touches by the flutes and violins sound as if they were making fun of Hercules’ situation. A minor-mode theme in the middle-low register appears in the central section, as if to communicate Hercules’ masculine embarrassment.
The “Harmonious Blacksmith” Air and variations (1994) is an elaboration of the final movement of Haendel’s Suite No. 5 in E major (HWV 430), one of the eight harpsichord suites published in 1720. Soon detached from the other movements and played as a stand-alone piece, this became known as “The Harmonious Blacksmith” in the nineteenth century, for obscure reasons – some suggest that it mimics the hammering on an anvil, some that it was inspired by the whistling of a blacksmith on the job, some that it was named after a blacksmith from Bath, England, who later became a musician. The piece was rather popular in the American piano repertoire of the twentieth century, often played by Sergei Rachmaninov, for example. Wild’s take on it is quite faithful to the piece’s original structure, with interventions aimed at heightening the virtuoso quality, especially in the second refrain of each variation: while the first exposition is kept closer to the original, the second is given the full Wild treatment.

Dance of the Four Swans, from 1975, is based on Piotr Tchaikovsky’s “Dance of the Little Swans” from Act 2 of his 1876 ballet The Swan Lake. The short piece accompanies the dance of four baby swans – it is a “pas de quatre” (for four dancers), which explains Wild’s alternate title – and mimics the somewhat awkward and unconfident moves of the young creatures, its tone being in-between graceful and comic. The duration of the original piece and the piano transcription is virtually identical. Wild’s intervention is mainly in harmonic terms, inserting twentieth-century dissonances to make the sound more piquant – see for example in the second exposition of the main theme – and adding embellishing runs, scales, and arpeggios, most notably in the piece’s closing section.

Contrasting with the balletic moves and humorous tone of the previous piece, At the Ball, published in 1994, is a transcription of Tchaikovsky’s song “Amidst the Din of the Ball” from his 1878 Opus 38, and brings us into more sombre territories. With lyrics by Aleksei Tolstoy, the piece, infused with the composer’s typical Slavic melancholia, describes an encounter at a noisy dance gathering. The poem, narrated in the first person, presents us an overwhelmed and disheartened attendee – “dismayed by the madding crowd” – who suddenly notices a similarly pensive human being, and from that encounter the narrator finds solace – “my heart is filled by your sad yet musical laughter” – and perhaps even love – “I don’t know if this means that I love you, but it seems to be that I’m in love!” As in the case of his transcriptions of Rachmaninov’s songs (available in Volume 2 of this collection), Wild here highlights the lyrical bitter-sweet nature of the encounter, embedding it in dynamic passages that render the swirls of the dance and the mundane atmosphere of the ball room. It is a serendipitous encounter between two kindred spirits that do not seem to belong to the world around them. Both the song and Wild’s transcription end on a piano minor chord, as to signify that the encounter’s solace might be only temporary, the existential sorrow bound to remain unresolved.

Back to popular music, the album is brought to an end by Wild’s tip of the hat to the influential culture of America’s neighbour, Mexico – in the wake
of Aaron Copland’s famous homages El Salón México (1936) and Billy the Kid (1938). In Jarabe Tapatio (1995) Wild offers an exuberant transcription of Mexico’s traditional “Hat Dance”, a piece typically played by a Mariachi band (guitars, violins, and trumpets) and depicting a man’s eventually successful courtship of a woman. Wild’s incisive writing emphasises the dance moves of the original, his staccato notation mimicking the plucking of the guitars, which in the middle section are joined by more romantic atmospheres and mellow phrasing reminiscent of sentimental violins, followed by the third section in which energetic repeated notes mimics the blasts of the trumpets. It is a humorous piece that demonstrates that entertaining popular music is not incompatible with the highest level of musicianship, a notion that had always been central in Mr. Wild’s entire career. There could be no better piece to bring the curtain down on this three-album exploration of Earl Wild’s piano music.

Dr. Emilio Audissino is a film scholar and film musicologist based at the University of Southampton, UK, author of “John Williams’s Film Music: ‘Jaws,’ ‘Star Wars,’ ‘Raiders of the Lost Ark,’ and the Return of the Classical Hollywood Music Style” (2014), the first academic monograph on the composer.

Giovanni Doria Miglietta was born in Imperia and started learning the piano under his father’s guidance. He completed his studies under Lidia Baldecchi Arcuri at the Conservatory of Genoa. In 2005 he earned a Master’s Degree at the Academy of Music of Pinerolo under Laura Richaud. Along with the same teacher, he earned the 2nd Level Academic Diploma at the Conservatory of Turin with highest distinction (cum laude and special mention).
He studied with pianists of the stature of Carlo Balzaretti and Arnulf Von Armin, and attended masterclasses with pianists like Alexander Lonquich, Philippe Entremont and Jean Bernard Pommier, who selected him to perform Saint-Saëns’ Piano Concert No.2 with the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra. Since 2008 he studied at the Academy of Pinerolo, where he met pianist Enrico Pace.

He is laureate of many international piano competitions: “Rovere D’Oro” in San Bartolomeo al Mare, Cidim Nuove Carriere (Palermo), Premio Nazionale delle Arti (Torino), Ibiza Piano Competition (Spain), The Muse International Piano Competition (Greece), Jean Françaix Piano Competition (France), Southern Highland Piano Competition (Australia).


He performed as a solo with the “Milano Classica” orchestra, the Philharmonic Orchestra of Turin, European Youth Chamber Orchestra, Canberra Symphony Orchestra, Donetsk Philharmonic Orchestra.

His interest for contemporary music often led him to perform pieces written by composers of the new generation, as Marco Reghezza, Carlo Balzaretti, Francesco Antonioni, Lamberto Curtoni, Azio Corghi, Giancarlo Facchinetti.

He recorded the complete works of Earl Wild for the label “Piano Classics”.

He is now teaching piano at the International Academy of Music of Pinerolo.

To my teacher Laura Richaud, director of the Pinerolo Academy, who has always believed in me

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