

KORNGOLD: *Quartet 2*; see Collections
KRAGGERUD: *Topelius Variations*;
see BACH

KROUSE: *Armenian Requiem*
Shoushik Barsoumian, Garineh Avakian,
Yeghishe Manucharyan, Vladimir Chernov; Tzi-
atzan Children's Choir; Lark Master Singers;
UCLA Philharmonia/ Neal Stulberg
Naxos 559846 [2CD] 95 minutes

This is a stunning work. I don't know what I expected, but I did not expect to be "blown away" by the force of Krouse's music, which was written to commemorate the centennial of the atrocious Armenian Genocide. He takes a collection of poems, songs, chants, and liturgical texts and weaves them into a work of devastating power and imagination. In Vatsche Barsoumian's excellent notes, he tells us that Krouse structured the work after Britten's *War Requiem*, with its combination of the Latin Requiem Mass and poems by Wilfred Owen. "An issue that needed to be addressed early on in the compositional process was the general nature of Armenian musical expression, which is typically succinct and occupies minimal space," Barsoumian tells us. "The backbone of the *Armenian Requiem* is built on seven pillars, drawing from the traditional liturgical chants...Then, following the examples of Britten, this structure of seven is complemented with interludes built on texts by Armenian poets from the 10th Century through the 20th Century, culled and assembled to illustrate our collective responses to the Armenian Genocide."

The work begins with the baritone defiantly lamenting against a background of choral interjections that grow and grow until the chorus takes over completely, building a crushing sound wall of pain and outrage. The soloists join in voice by voice, commenting, comforting, fighting. The first interlude brings us a haunting lullaby that comforts and yet is shadowed by death—sung beautifully here by Garineh Avakian. Her voice is rich, steady, all-embracing. Things don't remain calm for long; the chorus re-enters with the powerful 'Creator of All Beings' text, their supplications made all the more effective by Krouse's melodic, yet clashing harmonies.

The second part brings us more of Yeghishe Manucharyan's colorful tenor, one capable of the difficult melismas and high tessitura Krouse composed (Manucharyan sang in the production of Rossini's *Armida* with Renee

Fleming at the Met nearly a decade ago—why hasn't he been asked back?). Soprano Shoushik Barsoumian has a shining soprano that she uses with great expression. Vladimir Chernov is well known from his Met days and all the Verdi recordings he made with James Levine. It's good to hear him again, the voice a bit darker than it used to be, the vibrato a little wider but expertly controlled. All four soloists do sterling work, listening and responding to each other. Krouse has given them music that allows them to do so.

The Lark Master Singers is superb, a large choir the blends well and fully participates in the drama. This is dramatic music too: a chorus that just sings the notes would be dead-on-arrival in this music. The Tziatzan Children's Choir is just as skilled, providing a lovely counterpoint to the adult forces. Barsoumian is the choral director for these forces and is an expert at drawing colors and emotions from his choral groups.

The UCLA Philharmonic Orchestra and the entire performance is led by Neal Stulberg in a work that still has me reeling after listening to it three times. I hope that other choral groups will take this up, but I suspect it's not a work that will be done often. I've already described the power and humanity of the music, but this is a fairly long work (95 minutes) and requires large forces: four excellent soloists, an organ, a Duduk, a string quartet, and two capable choruses. I don't think the language will be a problem. Choruses deal with German, French, Italian, and Latin; they can learn Armenian too. This work is definitely worth the effort.

The sound is excellent: full and spacious with great stereo definition. Texts and translations are available on the Naxos website: I downloaded them with no trouble (you will need them!)

Highly recommended to all choral buffs and people who need proof that there still are composers who can summon the heights and depths of humanity in their music.

REYNOLDS

KUHLAU: *Violin Sonata; 3 Brilliant Duos*
Duo Astrand
DaCapo 8.226083—79 minutes

This is volume 2 of Duo Astrand's recordings of the violin sonatas of Friedrich Kuhlau (1786-1832), who was one of Denmark's leading musicians of the late classical era. I reviewed Volume 1 (Jan/Feb 2015).