

and five songs by Charles Ives. It hasn't got quite the gloss and glow of Anne Sophie von Otter (DG), nor does her delivery achieve anything close to the tonal depth and ease of Brigitte Fassbaender (Harmonia Mundi), but it offers something closer to cabaret than either – a more inflected, theatrical take on Brecht's bitter text.

The Weill is the pick of the disc. Paus's *Hate Songs* – settings of deliciously acid Dorothy Parker texts dismantling every male stereotype in the book – is an elegantly orchestrated divertissement but little more. A nod to Bernstein's *I Hate Music!* at the start (its memorable opening octave leap self-consciously soured here) sets the tone for a work that's all aphorism and theatrical gesture, at its best in the satirical cadenzas rather than the sentimental leanings of the songs. Augestad dispatches it cleanly but it leaves little lasting impression, especially when sat alongside the Ives.

It's here that we really miss the scope of an operatic voice. Augestad's blanched, brittle instrument floats on the musical surface but never really dives in among John Adams's lavish orchestrations (a little distant in the mix here), and lacks the vibrato to sustain the long melodies.

Alexandra Coghlan

## 'Songplay'

**Bock** *She Loves Me* – Will he like me?

**Caccini** *Le nuove musiche* – Amarilli, mia bella

**Conti** *Doppo tante e tante pene* – Quella

fiamma **Ellington** (In My) Solitude **Giordani**

Caro mio ben **Paisiello** *La Molinara* – Nel cor

più non mi sento **Parisotti/Rosa** *Se tu m'ami/*

*Star vicino* **Rodgers** *Spring is Here* – With a

song in my heart **Scheer** *Lean Away* **Shearing**

*Lullaby of Birdland* **Torelli** *Tu lo sai* **Vivaldi**

*Arsilda* – Col piacer della mia fede. Il Giustino –

*Vedrò con mio diletto* **Wrubel** (I'm afraid) *The*

*masquerade is over*

**Joyce DiDonato** *mez* **Charlie Porter** *tpt*

**Lautaro Greco** *bandoneón* **Craig Terry** *plf/hpd*

**Chuck Israels** *db* **Jimmy Madison** *drums*

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(71' • DDD • T/t)



What we have here is the epitome of what we Brits call a 'Marmite' experience, with elements to love and/or loathe, whether or not you buy the concept in the first place. Joyce DiDonato's fans will, of course (and I am one), though as a muso and a journalist who straddles both the classical and popular genres I have to say

that even I was thrown by some of the curve balls.

DiDonato's penchant for the theatrical, the unexpected and even the slightly subversive is well known to us. 'Songplay' (as the title suggests) is no exception, embarking upon a capricious game of rediscovery and reinvention with a motley collection of songs (predominantly from the Italian songbook but that of her native America, too), each given a stylistic twist through the collective endeavours (and brilliance) of her jazz-centric collaborators: the poetic Craig Terry (piano), Charlie Porter (trumpet), Chuck Israels (bass) and Jimmy Madison (drums). So we might swing the Baroque, smooch or samba our way through the *da capos* or even lend the flavour of a tango through the evocative bandoneón of Lautaro Greco.

But the real twist here is that DiDonato retains the 'formality' of her operatic sound and delivery while attempting to apply a jazzier's instincts. So her singerly embellishments rub shoulders with jazz improv to achieve a deliberately provocative and (to my mind) unsettling dynamic. Some things work (the purer the treatment, the more poetic the outcome); others fail spectacularly.

It's interesting to me that the Italian numbers generally sound happier than the American ones. The operatic delivery (however scaled down) sits more comfortably with the Italian language than her slightly 'formal' enunciation and projection of the English. Even then there are exceptions: Gene Scheer's 'Lean Away' is possessed of a folksy simplicity and the overwhelming feeling is that less really is more with this album.

The best of it comes when voice and piano are in cool, quiet accord: Giordano's 'Caro mio ben' and Paisiello's 'Nel cor più non mi sento' sit very simply on pianist Craig Terry's exquisitely placed chords and harmonies; Caccini's 'Amarilli, mia bella' conveys a sultry desire; and Torelli's 'Tu lo sai' quietly inhabits the melancholy of the song, piano and trumpet at their most jazzily, smokily wistful.

It all starts to unravel for me when up-tempo jazz and opera collide. Ellington's '(In My) Solitude' and Wrubel/Magidson's '(I'm afraid) The masquerade is over' just sound uncomfortable and incongruous, as if (notwithstanding the 'bending' of notes and inherent portamento) the voice just doesn't belong in this context. I get that

that's the twist behind the album but in those moments I just want one or the other – jazz or opera – not both at the same time.

I wish that George Shearing's 'Lullaby of Birdland' had remained in the Baroque/Bachian mode of the opening – that is so cute. But the operatic quality of the voice alone makes the playfulness of the up-tempo section just sound, well, embarrassingly 'arch'. The same is also true, alas, of the two musical theatre songs included here. It's a genre I feel passionate about and protective towards, and again the phrasing and sound of DiDonato's rendition of 'Will he like me?' from Bock and Harnick's *She Loves Me* just feels wrong, and, by her standards, not particularly well sung either. Nor is Rodgers and Hart's 'With a song in my heart', one of my very favourite songs of all time and one in which the operatic complexion of her voice might well have worked in a different context. Rodgers did so hate people messing with his stuff and would undoubtedly have taken exception to the climax of the song never being delivered as he wrote it. First time around, the exciting 'money' note, E flat – the note on which the melody 'turns' into the climax – is dropped to a G and the return simply takes that G up an octave, so we still don't hear the note Rodgers actually wrote. Sounds minor, but you don't mess with a melody this good.

I have come to the conclusion that this whole project would have worked better with a few judicious exclusions and with just Craig Terry's searching hands at the keys of his piano. He really is a star. By the way, there's a little unannounced surprise following the last track – for those of you who get that far.

Edward Seckerson

## 'Voglio cantar'

**Cavalli** *Canzon a 3. Statura, principessa di*

*Persia* – Sinfonia; *Alba, ch'imperli i fiori...*

*Amor, che mascherasti; Cresce il foco,*

*avvampa il core; Vanne intrepido Cesti*

*Speranza ingannatrice* **Marini** *Affetti musicali,*

*Op 1* – Sinfonia grave 'La Zorzi'. *Sonata sopra*

*Fuggi dolente core, Op 22 No 21* **Merula** *Ballo*

*detto Eccardo, Op 12 No 19* **Strozzi** *Amante*

*loquace, Op 6 No 16. Arie a voce sola, Op 8 –*

*No 4, L'Astratto; No 6, Che si può fare. Diporti*

*di Euterpe, Op 7 – Lamento (Lagrimie mie);*

*Mi fa rider la Speranza. Il lamento (Sul Rodano*

*severo), Op 2 No 17*

**Emóke Baráth** *sop*

**Il Pomo d'Oro / Francesco Corti**

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