

Stephen Wadsworth

## The Best of the Wunderkinder

**L**ots of young instrumental virtuosos play with more than mere technical brilliance. A good number of them are uncommonly musical and master the finer points of some forbidding pieces with that amazing, unwitting insight that is the divine right of the *Wunderkind*. Then there are a few young players whose art—for they are artists—goes beyond unwitting insight. These few make us forget about everything except the music, which they hear for us in new ways.

Deutsche Grammophon showcases five young virtuosos, all of them under 25, in recent releases (each \$10.98). The youngest, German violinist **Anne-Sophie Mutter**, comes flying into our lives on Herbert von Karajan's coattails. Her record of the Beethoven concerto (2531250\*) is marred only by the staid, doggedly *senza rubato* tempi of her mentor, whose Berlin Philharmonic otherwise gives her exemplary support. Mutter opens surely, with a precise, tight vibrato, perfect tuning, and curvaceous phrase-making. She's straightforward, bright, *up*, and the rather tortuous Kreisler cadenzas are dispatched with élan to spare.

The same qualities distinguish her traversal of two Mozart concertos, also with Karajan (2531049\*). On Karajan's new disc of Beethoven's triple concerto (2531262\*), Mutter is joined by pianist Mark Zeltser and cellist Yo-Yo Ma. With Ma she duets hotly while the Berlin Philharmonic follows like a crowd oohing and ahing at two graceful gymnasts.

Yugoslav pianist **Ivo Pogorelich** won fame by *not* winning the 1980 Chopin Competition in Warsaw. His playing was too visionary—and his leather-pants-and-string-tie appearance too anarchic for the judges. The audiences loved Pogorelich, and so did pianist Martha

\*cassette available

Argerich, who quit the jury in highest dudgeon, proclaiming him a genius. Interestingly, DG has just released performances by both Pogorelich and Argerich of the Chopin B-flat minor sonata (Pogorelich, 2531346\*; Argerich, 2531289\*). While his reading of Chopin's accents is more accurate than hers, and his articulation cleaner, her touch is more varied, her dynamic range greater, her reading more faithful to Chopin (she takes the important repeats, which he does not). Here and elsewhere on his debut disc, Pogorelich invents his own dynamics and goes—often *sans* pedal—

disturbing to me. He plays the Bruch G-minor concerto less well on the reverse side but is given strong, propulsive support in both concertos by Claudio Abbado and the Chicago Symphony. Mintz's record of short pieces by Fritz Kreisler (2531305\*) is appealing, but he is "doing" Kreisler—fruity vibrato and all—and the concerto record is a better meter of his *own* eminence.

I suspect that Polish pianist **Krystian Zimerman** is also great. His playing of Brahms's first two sonatas (early, eclectic, and hyperactive), from bracingly percussive *fortes* to cushioned *piano* attacks, is inexhaustible and stunning (2531252). His urgent, forward-leaning march through Chopin's F-minor piano concerto is tense, searching, never indulgent—the articulation crystalline, the line grand (2531126\*). This record makes me irrational, which is why I daren't say outright that Zimerman is great. Maybe it's only a personal response. In any case, this is also one of conductor Carlo Maria Giulini's best recorded efforts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

On his latest record (2531330\*) Zimerman introduces us to his friend **Kaja Danczowska**, an unusual violinist with unfalteringly pure tone, light but firm. They play the Franck sonata together with infinite tenderness and musicality. They also offer some attractive pieces by their compatriot Karol Szymanowski, including the Scriabinesque *Mythes*. Danczowska's playing of a song from Szymanowski's opera *King Roger* goes way beyond unwitting insight.

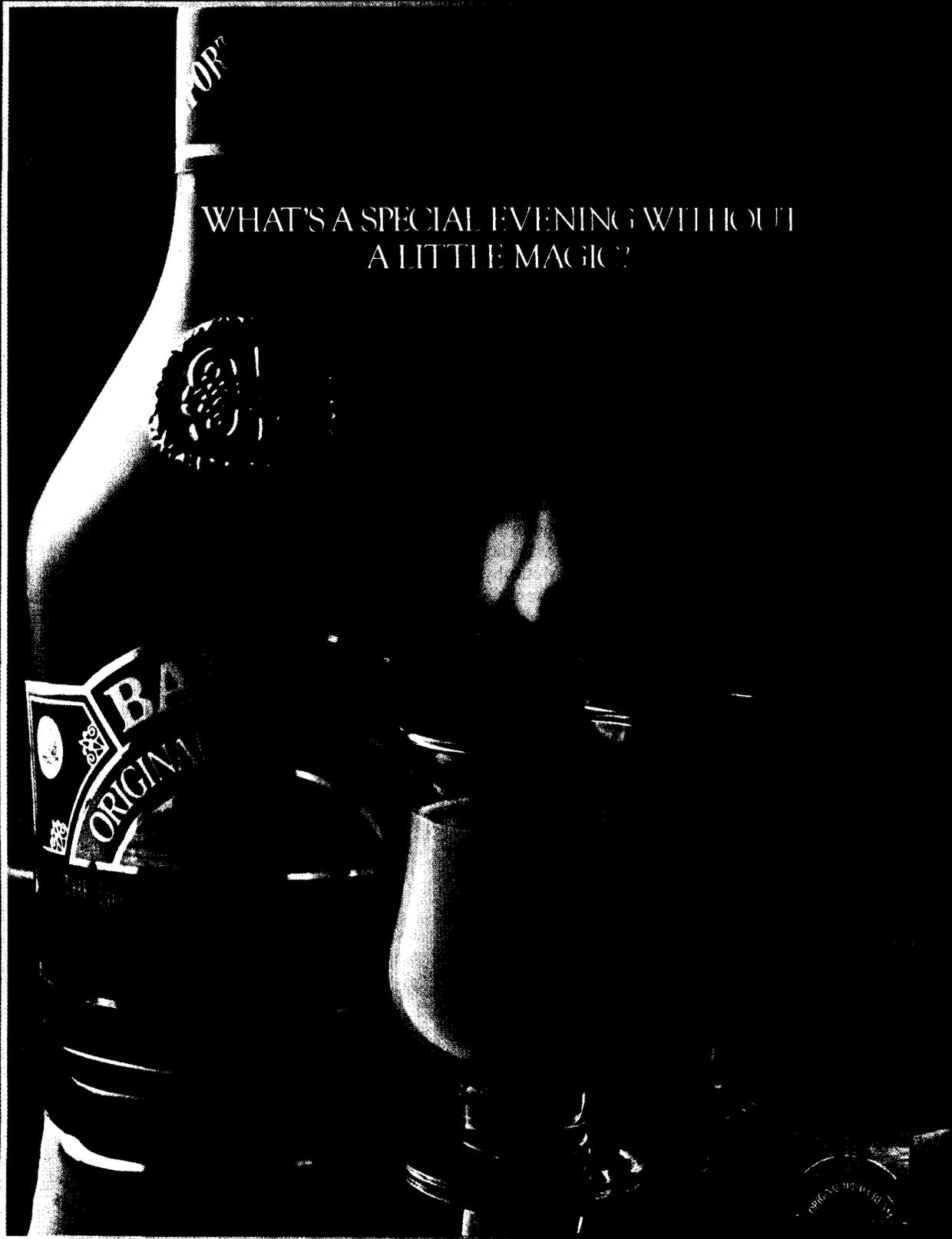
Mintz, Zimerman, and Danczowska are already major artists; Mutter is not far behind. Pogorelich is a pianistic whiz kid, but until he plays, say, Mozart or Beethoven, it will be hard to judge the depth of his *musical* gifts. ■



**These young virtuosos go beyond unwitting insight, hearing and interpreting the music for us in new ways.**

for big contrasts and dramatic action. Chopin comes across more the angry young man, less the ethereal poetaster. Pogorelich's arrogance is there in his playing, which has a spiky brilliance. He is a thrilling talent, but I'm not sure I'd trust him with Mozart.

I'd trust **Shlomo Mintz**, who comes to us from Russia via Israel, with anything. Here is a great romantic violinist whose recording of the Mendelssohn E-minor concerto (2531304\*) ranks with the best. His velvety tone, startlingly cello-like in the lower range, has an incandescence that is moving, and he makes such *music*. His power isn't necessarily physical: There is a tragic intensity in the Mendelssohn that is both new and



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# A Painter of Inanimate Souls

**G**iorgio Morandi began painting in 1910, at the age of 20. Almost immediately, he found one of his abiding images—a row of dishes and glassware standing on a narrow shelf. Until his death in 1964, nearly every one of his still lifes treated this subject. To point to a typical Morandi is easy—easier than in the case of any other major painter of our century, with the possible exception of Mondrian. An air of calm, relentless devotion pervades Morandi's art, and that air is just as intense in his landscapes as in his still lifes. In fact, the scale hardly seems to change when Morandi leaves his studio for the countryside around his native Bologna. His ranks of bottles and vases are monumental. And in the landscapes, the flow of hill meeting foliage against a sun-bleached sky is as delicate as the curve of a vase standing against a beige wall. Morandi's vision is "constructive"—in other words, unifying, given to the discovery of wholeness in the contemplation of diversity.

Now, James Demetron of the Des Moines Art Center has assembled the first major museum exhibition of Morandi's oeuvre to be held in America. After a stay at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the show will move on November 19 to the Guggenheim in New York, where it will be on view until January 17. On February 1 it will travel to Des Moines.

The earliest works in the show are from the period 1910-14, when Morandi was coming to terms with those modernist predecessors whose company he now keeps in the modernist pantheon. Cézanne was the most important, with his doggedly analytic eye. Morandi learned freedom from the rules of "correct" representation from him and from two

other Cézannians, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, who were still struggling in those days to win full independence for Cubism. Morandi flirted with Cubist devices, then quickly dropped them. Futurism, the Italian answer to Braque and Picasso, might have seduced him but didn't. Only in 1918 do we see Morandi gravitating toward an art movement, and he never really joins. The movement that attracted him was the school of *pittura metafisica*—Metaphysical painting—whose leaders were Giorgio de Chirico, that myth-maker whom the Surrealists later claimed for their own, and Carlo

years, he became a legendary figure—a saint of modernism—so well known in Europe that his name could be dropped in movies. About halfway through Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, the rudderless intellectual played by Marcello Mastroianni finds himself adrift at a posh cocktail party. An aimless chat leads him to remark on a still life hanging on a nearby wall. It's one of Giorgio Morandi's line-ups of crockery. With his patented look of rueful sophistication, Mastroianni turns to his conversational partner and says, "I always think they"—meaning each of Morandi's exquisitely rendered objects—"have souls. Don't you?"

The scene being Italy in 1957, the answer can only be "Yes, of course." Morandi was an old master by then, a cultural monument. No one at a Felliniesque cocktail party ever is in a position to deny that Morandi's bottles and vases, those heroically humble presences, have souls. And talk of the inner life of Morandi's subjects is just as mandatory on these shores as in Europe. This is in part because the touch of Morandi's brush is so quietly, distinctively his own. As he outlines form,

gives it volume, then indicates a slow spread of light across rounded surfaces, some of the artist's own humanity seems to be transferred to glass, china, and metal—all the more easily because we have already anthropomorphized the sort of objects Morandi paints. We say bottles have necks, even shoulders. Kettles are usually full-bellied. Further, all of Morandi's subjects stand before us, sometimes like soldiers in slightly un-military ranks, sometimes like a family in a portrait.

If tables have legs and chairs have arms, why shouldn't the objects Morandi



"Still Life" (1943): Morandi's subjects stand like soldiers or a family.

Carra, a refugee from Futurism.

Most innovative painters of our century balance their adventurousness with a need to belong. Hence all the art movements, the endless array of avant-garde splinter groups. Carrà and de Chirico did their best to wake this herd-instinct in Morandi, but their success was only temporary. By 1920, Morandi was ensconced alone in a small studio in provincial Bologna. He spent the next four decades working on refinements that were visible in his art before he made contact with the *pittura metafisica* group. Over the long haul of those many