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February 2007

## 2006's Best Classical Albums

By Andrew Quint

1. Golijov: *Ainadamar* (Upshaw/Spano). DG. (TAS 164)
2. Theater of Voices/Fretwork: *The Cries of London*. Harmonia Mundi. (TAS 164)
3. Berlioz: *Requiem* (Norrington). Hänssler.
4. Paganini/Spohr: *Violin Concertos* (Hahn). DG. (TAS 167)
5. Joel Fan: *World Keys*. Reference. (TAS 165)
6. Beethoven: *Symphony No. 9* (Vänskäl/Minnesota). BIS. (TAS 168)
7. Rorem: *Flute & Violin Concertos*. Naxos.
8. Brahms: *Piano Concerto No. 2* (Hamelin/Litton) Hyperion. (TAS 169)
9. Renaud and Gautier Capuçon: *Inventions*. Virgin. (TAS 169)
10. Greenberg: *Symphony No. 5*. Sony. (TAS 166)



WORLD KEYS.

Joel Fan, piano. J.

Tambllyn Henderson, Jr., producer;  
Keith O. Johnson, engineer. Reference  
Recordings 106.

At first glance, this CD's program seems impossibly eclectic: ten works by ten composers of ten different nationalities. The music ranges from straight-down-the-middle European repertoire (Schumann's Sonata No. 2, Prokofiev's Third Sonata, and the Liszt *Rigoletto* Paraphrase) to high-profile contemporary composers (Australian Peter Sculthorpe, American William Bolcolm, and

Latvian Peteris Vasks) to piano pieces from the Middle and Far East that will surely be unfamiliar to most. Joel Fan, a member of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, plays it all authoritatively with sensitivity to the unique flavor of each work. He leaves the listener hankering for more of everything.

It's those unfamiliar composers that make this recital especially intriguing. The musically xenophobic need not panic: These selections are "Western" in structure and use their ethno-specific material in a way that's fully integrated with the composer's style—as Bartók and Kodály did with Hungarian folk materials. A highlight is the Chinese composer Qigang Chen's *Instants d'un opéra de Pékin*. Chen was Olivier Messiaen's last student, and the older composer's influence is easily heard. But Chen also evokes the sounds of traditional Chinese instruments—the sheng, pipa, drums, and cymbals—as he imaginatively develops two pentatonic motives. Likewise, *La Nuit du Destin* by Syrian Dia Succari utilizes a rich neompressionist harmonic palette and seamlessly integrates sections of improvisation in the Persian style known as *taksim*, where the keyboard suggests the sound of the *ud* and *santour*. Shorter pieces by A. Adnan Saygun (Turkey) and Halim El-Dabh (Egypt) are also satisfying discoveries.

The piano sound is superb, very similar to that rendered by Keith Johnson 19 years ago on an early digital audiophile classic, *Nojima Plays Liszt*. There's excellent percussive attack without claustrophobia and a wonderful sense of the body of the instrument; the warm acoustic of the Bayside Performing Arts Center in San Mateo supports the natural resonance of Fan's Steinway. All of the pianist's carefully judged dynamic shadings get through. If it matters to anyone at this point, the disc is HDCCD encoded. **AQ**

Further Listening: *Nojima Plays Liszt*;  
*Kaleidoscope* (Marc-André Hamelin)