



**The Koan Project: Lana Cencic (vocals), Flip Philipp (vibraphone and arrangements) and artist Ty Waltinger in the background, performing at the Brahms Saal on March 9** Photo: Tobias Ratz

A Vienna Symphony chamber music novelty,  
The Koan Project is a work of 'art in progress'

## The Sound of Color

by Cynthia Peck

We don't usually expect the *avant garde* in the jewel-like Brahms-Saal of the Musikverein, that most perfect of all chamber music concert halls. It's a small treasure of a room; acoustically vibrant, it also radiates serenity and calm. The sound is due to some perfect combination of its width, length and height, and a wooden floor suspended like a drum over the space below. But its dignity stems from its beauty, its Greek Renaissance design, the greens and reds of the walls, and above all, the gold.

On Mar. 9, those colors came to life as if for the first time, during a treasure of a concert called "The Koan Project," part of the Vienna Symphony's chamber music series. Where one might expect a series of string quartets, the Koan Project served up live jazz and live painting. The jazz stage was all there: the vibraphone, the mikes, the sax stand. But here were also pots of paint and a 6½ by 3 meter canvas, a third of it covered in a crescent of gold, 24 carat leaf.

Conceived by the artist Ty Waltinger and composer Flip Philipp, principle percussionist of the Vienna Symphony, the ensemble's name derives from a term in Zen Buddhism.

"It describes a saying—often enigmatic or paradoxical—that leads one to contemplation," writes Philipp in the program notes. "Living and listening inwardly, completely free and spontaneous in the here and now — this is what the ensemble would like to present."

Despite this touch of the esoteric, the acoustic jazz was very straightforward, and very good. Singer and composer Lana Cencic, the epitome of charm, guided us through the ensemble and the pieces with ease, but her shimmering voice left us breathless.

As did a quintet of jazz musicians providing the inspiration for Waltinger and his creation, with Philipp on vibraphone, bass clarinet/saxes Fabian Rucker, Wolfgang Rainer on drums, and Robert Jukic on bass, plus a string quartet, with Nicolas Geremus, Gerald Wilfinger, Michael Buchmann, and Arne Kircher, all members of the Vienna Symphony.

The tone of the strings and the tablas laid a foundation for the shimmering tones of bells, the lingering resonance of the vibes. Sheets of color slowly acquired wisps of feathers and wind. The sax received swaths of ultramarine-

violet red, the deep purple blue that is the last color of the sky before the night falls. The higher strings the greens, true Victorian and viridian, the lower strings cobalt turquoise and true deep bordello red. The percussion vine black with lithopone, the voice, ivory. And, of course, the crystal tones of the vibes, the cadmium yellow hues. Engulfed in sensations, the visual merges into the heard.

It was all an exercise of art in progress: Improvisation as music and improvisation as painting. It is nearly voyeuristic to see a painting being born before your eyes. Waltinger uses very rare historical pigments, some more than a hundred years old. Just as an old rose has a fragrance that overwhelms, these old pigments are dazzling. We watched as tempo, rhythm and melody become color. Wait, stop, I wanted to say: it's perfect now! But just as the music does, the painting continues.

A look at Waltinger's website makes it clear that transience is a leitmotif: the "Cyclos Pigment Project" involved tossing pigment powder into the wind to spread on the sands of the Sahara, creating color paintings that slowly returned to nature (see the website below and the 2005 documentary film *Zeit. Spuren. Pigmente.*). Less fleeting is the debut album by Lana Cencic & Flip Philipp, *The Dust of a Week*, presented last August in Japan. Further Koan Project concerts are planned at Waltinger's atelier.

On the way out, we stopped to donate to "Contrast," an organization supporting early education for blind children. Sponsors could purchase one of one hundred "sound paintings" — 30cm by 30cm pieces of the Waltinger painting that had accompanied the concert's dress rehearsal — hung around the space.

In her final song, "Perpetual Blues," Lana had kissed away the blues — all of them: the light blues, the heavy blues, and the annoying, never-ending blues. "Now I feel bliss is real" and indeed I did too. Uplifted and light-hearted we left the hall, wishing to one and all golden dreams.

For further information on Ty Waltinger and Flip Philipp projects:  
[www.contrast.or.at](http://www.contrast.or.at)  
[www.pigmente.at](http://www.pigmente.at)  
[www.flip-philipp.at](http://www.flip-philipp.at)  
[www.myspace.com/lanaflip](http://www.myspace.com/lanaflip)

Sylvia Greenberg and husband David Aronson present a CD of songs by the musical legends who haunt their house

## Hausmusik 6., Theobaldgasse 7

by Stanley Hale

You could say that their house is haunted: For the musical spirits of Gustav Mahler, Giacomo Puccini, Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Bruno Walter all hover in the hallways of Theobaldgasse 7, in Vienna's 6th District, a lovely 1902 secessionist building off Gumpendorferstrasse. Just a short walk from the Vienna State Opera, it had been home both to the Korngold family and Bruno Walter as well as host to the most influential composers and performers of the time.

It was only after Sylvia Greenberg and David Aronson settled in, that they learned just what kind of role their address played in the musical history that continues to define this city.

"The place just felt right," Aronson said, "But we didn't know why until a neighbor told us that the Korngolds had lived there."

"It was so strong — we both felt it," Greenberg agreed, "And we wonder to this day if there aren't some kind of musical spirits here, that the building somehow remembers."

Theobaldgasse 7 was a locus of the last great creative era in Viennese music that began at the beginning of the twentieth century and continued until just before World War II.

In their very flat lived Bruno Walter, who, as a conductor, ranks similarly to Arturo Toscani and Leonard Bernstein, and the Korngold family lived immediately below. Julius Korngold (father of composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold) was the respected and feared chief music critic of the prestigious Neue Freie Presse. It was natural that these giants of the musical scene would attract visiting artists, the leading composers and performers of the time, who with the exception of Puccini, all lived in or near Vienna.

As Greenberg and Aronson learned more about the history of Theobaldgasse 7, they set out on an adventure of musical sleuthery of the musicians who had lived or frequented there. The product is a remarkable series of vocal renditions of the sounds of Jugendstil Vienna — a voyage into musical-Art Nouveau. Greenberg and Aronson chose 25 pieces composed by artists intimately associated with their home. The works were initially performed live for enthusiastic audiences in Vienna, New York, Ann Arbor and Los Angeles. It was these recitals that caught the attention of the producers for the Telos label who produced the present CD of masterworks that were probably composed within the walls of this fin de Siècle apartment or energetically discussed, analyzed, and performed there.

In addition to Korngold, there are six composers represented on the CD,

all friends or confidants of Bruno Walter and the Korngold family. Gustav Mahler chose Walter, for instance, to prepare the soloists — who rehearsed in the same room in which Greenberg and Aronson presented their CD — for the world premiere of Mahler's monumental 8th Symphony in Munich in 1910. Alexander Zemlinsky taught Erich Wolfgang composition, likely in the large music room at No.7, overlooking the street that has remained essentially unchanged for over a century.

Carl Goldmark too, was a close friend of Julius Korngold. Best known for the opera *Die Königin von Saba*, one of the most popular stage works of the time, and he was one of the experts to whom Dr. Korngold turned for advice in 1909 when he became aware of his son's astonishing talent. Another was Julius Bittner, a gifted composer who was a lawyer and judge by profession. His interests were he shared by Dr. Korngold, who had also been a lawyer before becoming a critic.

Bittner showed some of his own orchestral compositions to Gustav Mahler, who suggested he consult Bruno Walter, at Theobaldgasse 7, for advice. The collaboration produced among others the opera, *Die Rote Gred*, which Bruno Walter conducted in 1908. Bittner became one of Erich Korngold's closest friends and ultimately composed 14 operas, in all.

And the great Giacomo Puccini visited Theobaldgasse 7 at least three times in 1913, 1919, and 1921 at Julius Korngold's invitation.

The CD was presented to the public at a soirée in the very rooms that had engendered much of the music. Of those invited, few were treated to a live musical event in the truest sense of the Viennese Hausmusik tradition. Ms. Greenberg, with her impeccable vocal skills and radiant stage presence, and David Aronson displaying the musicianship gleaned from a lifetime of association with the greatest musicians of our times, was a fitting tribute to an earlier generation synonymous with the flowering of creativity when Vienna was in its perhaps fullest glory.



The CD Hausmusik will be available at major media outlets in Vienna starting mid April



Neil Ditt and Yvette Robinson in *I Do! I Do!*

Photo: Reinhard Reidinger

## Theater in Review

### I Do, I Do

In an era where half of all marriages end in divorce, few people give credence to the "happily ever after." Which can make it a risky choice to stage the 1960s musical *I Do, I Do* on a contemporary Vienna stage. And at the English Theater, no less.

("It's not really the 'niveau' of the plays they used to put on," a distinguished Austrian gentleman confided in the lobby, gesturing at the photos of Jeanne Moreau and Larry Hagman lining the walls.)

Perhaps not, but as a classic tale of scenes from a marriage, the fine performances of Neil Ditt as Michael and Yvette Robinson as Agnes were thor-

oughly engaging in the first preview performance, in spite of an occasional skewed wig or fumbled prop. Based on the stage classic *The Four Poster*, by Dutch playwright Jan de Hartog, which stole the heart of Broadway when it was first performed in English in the family-obsessed America of 1952, *I Do, I Do* — with music by Harvey Schmidt, and book and lyrics by Tom Jones — follows a couple through 65 years of marriage through romance and parenthood, disillusionment and mid-life crisis to the mellow understanding of later years.

In spite of a script riddled with tiresome stereotypes of the clueless man and the clothes-obsessed woman, the balance of understanding keeps shifting and the relationship feels real in this polished production directed by Julian Woolford. Most joyous, these two can really sing and really dance, with just enough of Fred and Ginger in this lively choreography by Steven Harris, to make you wish you could be up on stage with them. A satisfying change from *Reich und Schön!*

## Look Back in Anger

The current production at the International Theater couldn't be more different: John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* was considered "the most vivid British play of the decade" by the *New York Times* when it opened in New York in 1957.

Osborne was exploding with rage, in revolt against what he saw as the helpless incompetence of its leaders and the shriveled expectations it offered its youth. In a squalid attic somewhere in the Midlands, this is the story of three young people railing against the world.

Here, the disillusioned Jimmy Porter is played by the very able Ben Maddox, in a quartet with Rachel Carliss, Thomas Crawley and Linsey Thurgar. Directed by Jack Babb.

See Vienna Review Events p. 23 for details