

# Animating the inanimate: Tedd Joselson comes out of retirement



Susan Lim and Tedd Joselson with the LSO

A long time ago – November 1986 – I attended a piano recital at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Not quite sure what to expect, I heard Mozart (K311) that was beautifully stylish, a dynamic Schubert ‘Wanderer’ Fantasy and an energy-drenched Prokofiev Sixth Sonata, plus a couple of Liszt pieces, one offering what was probably my first experience of the mysterious *Nuages gris*. The pianist was Tedd Joselson who then – as now – had a larger footprint on American soil than here in the UK; the recital was actually released on Olympia (OCD350). He has come out of retirement to make the present recording, such is his belief in this project.

Born of Belgian mother and American father, Joselson, after study at Juilliard, made his debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Ormandy. There is a story that, on auditioning Joselson, Ormandy gave him carte blanche as to repertoire. Joselson’s recording of Tchaikovsky First Concerto with Ormandy is currently part of a six-disc RCA set (*The Complete RCA Album Collection*);

he was offered a recording contract by that company while still a student. He has also made a noteworthy recording of the rarely-performed Barber Piano Concerto (LSO under Andrew Schenk). Meeting him at Abbey Road Studios on two occasions for his new disc (date of release tba) was a pleasure and a privilege. It was also fascinating, not least in the repertoire. Two stalwarts, the Grieg Concerto with the RPO and the Rachmaninov Second with the Philharmonia, are joined by a fascinating *Fantasy of Companionship*, a co-venture between pioneer surgeon and project creative director Dr Susan Lim, and composer Manu Martin, which seeks to explore the intersection between humans and machines: the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to produce intelligent machine companions for humans. The orchestra for the *Fantasy* was the LSO (all works were conducted by Arthur Fagen); the work is referred to as ‘Lim’s *Fantasy of Companionship*’. In November 2018, Lim commissioned composer Manu Martin

to write the *Fantasy* based on the story of companionship in the age of technology in *ALAN the musical*. Joselson describes this piece as ‘a truly magnificent addition to the realm of piano concerto repertoire’, praising the ‘glorious’ writing. Scored for orchestra with a prominent electric guitar (the session I attended was orchestra alone except for one short small vocal spot), solo voices and chorus, this is an impassioned, highly Romantic piece.

The *Fantasy of Companionship* is a fascinating premise, far more human at heart than it seems, for it speaks about the possibility of alleviating loneliness through the bioengineering of the inanimate. The music is eminently approachable – filmic at times – and composed with a confidence that brings the music of William Perry to mind. The dramatic opening, with shades of Rachmaninov, leads to a voyage of the utmost beauty, with Romantic cello solos, and a jazz/musicals element too. The orchestra is large – six horns, harp, celesta, six double-basses – and expertly marshalled by Fagen.

It was wonderful to hear the session for the Grieg Concerto also, this time with the RPO (luxury casting in David Pyatt for the horn solos). The two repertoire concertos had Adrian Peacock as producer, last encountered in this column producing a Hyperion choral disc and just as calm and professional in his directions here. Most impressive of all though was Joselson’s lyricism, his beautiful note placement and impeccably judged projection. Joselson is, surely, incapable of playing a single unmusical note; and there is no doubt that this disc will be one of a kind.

