

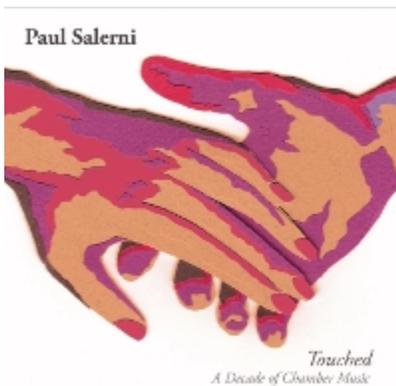
SALERNI: Touched - A Decade of Chamber Music



Written by [Henry Fogel](#)

Monday, 23 March 2015

SALERNI Turns 1 . Bad Pets 2 . The Animals Struck with the Plague 3 . Regimen Sanitatis Salernim 4 . Two Partita 5 . Generations 6 • 1,2,5 Robin Kani (fl); 1,2,5 Oren Fader (gtr); 1,3,4,5 Vega Qrt; 2 Jan Oplach (bbar); 3 Deborah Andrus (b cl); 4 Yunah Lee (s); 6 Leslie Johnson (s) • ALBANY 1537 (71:23 Text)



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What a pleasure it is to encounter a disk of chamber music, composed between 2002 and 2012, that is so filled with wit, melodic invention, genuine beauty, a high level of craftsmanship, and most of all genuine humanity. Salerni is quoted at the beginning of the accompanying booklet: “Music should make you want to dance, sing, cry, laugh. It should move you physically and emotionally. In the intimacy of chamber ensembles, I hoped to take advantage of the possibilities for music to touch and be touched.” Every piece on this disc is a testament to his success in those intentions. Much of the music composed in the past 20 or 30 years focuses on the angst of life in these tense and difficult times. Charm, wit, tenderness, and sheer exuberance are all qualities in short supply in much of today’s music. Not so with Salerni—these are the terms that define much of what he writes.

The second movement of *Turns* is a gorgeous arioso, a lovely lyrical interlude between two movements that are infused with dance rhythms. Salerni openly states his debt to Vivaldi in that slow movement, but while he may have borrowed, he has made the music his own. The humor of the cycle *Bad Pets* (three songs on texts about animals) is alternately subtle and overt, with the music completely integrated with the words, all of which are rendered with relish

by Jan Oplach. There is a bittersweet quality to *The Animals Struck with the Plague*, a quality explained by its place in the ballet *Fables* and clarified in Salerni's notes.

The highlight of the disc is *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni* (seven songs for a healthy diet from the *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni* of 1066). Salerni noticed the old book while living in Italy, noted that it contained his name in the title, and mentioned it to his wife, who gave it to him as a Christmas present. Salerni says he has always been fascinated by food and by the combination of food and music. The songs are titled "On pork," "On seasickness," "On the seasons of the year," "How to correct bad drinks," "The universal condiment," "On the washing of hands," and "On bread." These songs are gorgeously sung by Yunah Lee, and she and the Vega Quartet capture the spirit of the music perfectly. Salerni states that he set these poems with a nod to the style of Donizetti, whose music he had been studying at the time, but by no means are they second-rate Donizetti, or even imitative. The influence is there, but the melodic shape is Salerni's own. Salerni describes the cycle as "at times heartfelt, at times ironic, at times silly," and while I would agree, somehow it was the "heartfelt" that stayed longest with me.

In fact, all of this music clearly comes from the heart, not just the brain. The musical craft is there, to be sure. Salerni writes well for instruments and for combinations of instruments, and particularly well for voice. But overall, it is not the craft of composition that stays with the listener, but what I would call the art—the emotional and spiritual content of these genuinely lovely pieces. It is, as Salerni promised, music that sings and dances. Performances are all deeply felt and strong, and recorded sound is excellent. This disc is recommended with enthusiasm. Henry Fogel

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