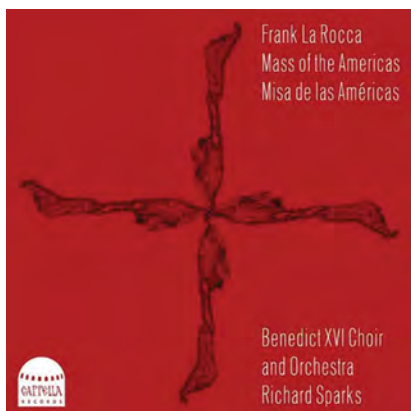




MUSIC ●●●●● SONICS ●●●●●

La Rocca: *Mass of the Americas*. Benedict XVI Choir and Orchestra, Richard Sparks, conductor. Cappella.

The *Mass of the Americas* was commissioned in 2018 to mark the joint occurrence that year of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8) and the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which commemorates a series of apparitions of the Virgin Mary to a peasant named Juan Diego near Mexico City in 1531. Frank La Rocca's beautiful and consoling setting takes as its jumping off point traditional Gregorian chant and two Hispanic folk melodies (*El Cantico del Alba* and *La Guadalupeana*), and includes offertory and communion pieces, an "Aue Maria" in Nahuatl (the language of the apparitions), and four gorgeous Marian antiphons belonging to different seasons that can be used in conjunction with the mass. The complexity of thought underlying the outward simplicity of the settings speaks of rooted Catholic spirituality rather than a floating New Age sentiment, and marks La Rocca as a liturgical composer of the first rank. Fine performances, in good sound, though with some hard reflections off the walls. (Disclosure: I have known La Rocca since we were classmates in college; additionally, I studied with Bill Mahrt, author of the insightful notes that accompany this recording.) **TL**

Further Listening: La Rocca: *In This Place* (AVE/Enharmonic); Lauridsen: *O Magnum Mysterium* (Hänssler)



MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●●

Shostakovich & Schubert: Cello Sonatas. Daniel Shafran, Lydia Pecherskaya. Analogue Productions (LP).

The Leningrad-born Shafran (1923–1997) was a talented, strict perfectionist who rarely performed outside the USSR. His shimmering vibrato and tonal control set him apart from most other cellists and "(made) him the envy of many violinists," as David Oistrakh put it. He shines in this album recorded for RCA while on tour in America; the original release has been a very expensive collector's favorite and an entry on our Super LP List for years. The engineering is warm and close-up, and it certainly favors the cello. Sony Japan released this on a perfectly respectable CD, but I can't help but notice more atmosphere around the instruments on this LP. The piano definitely fares better, and the cello is richer in the mid-range and sounds noticeably more natural. The Shostakovich is one of his most enjoyable pieces, neither turning too tragic nor blaring artificial triumph. Shafran doesn't dawdle in Schubert's famous *Arpeggione Sonata*, to put it mildly, but I enjoy the vivacity he brings to a composer I often find repetitive and soporific. It's nice to have an affordable copy of this LP at last, and I hope the SACD that Analogue Productions has on pre-order makes it to market, too. **Stephen Estep**

Further Listening: Shostakovich: Cello Concerto No. 1



MUSIC ●●●●● SONICS ●●●●●

Mozart: Piano Sonatas, Volumes 1–3. Orli Shaham, piano. Canary Classics.

There have been several recent recordings of the piano music of Mozart that seek to portray the 18th-century composer as a proto-Romantic. This new project covering the complete piano sonatas is not among them. Orli Shaham plays the music in the tradition of the Mozart revivalists of the 20th century, including Schnabel, Badura-Skoda, Brendel, and Uchida, which is to say, with firm rhythms, bold dynamics, and an ear for the innately theatrical nature of the music. If anything, Shaham takes the approach of her venerable predecessors up a notch in intensity, finding a giddy, youthful joy in the fast music of the earlier sonatas, elegant repose in the slower music, and deepening stylistic complexity in the mature works. It is well accepted that Mozart himself often improvised in the repeated passages, and most modern pianists do so as well. Shaham is especially tasteful in her use of improvised embellishments, always enhancing the spirit of the music but never altering it. The recorded sound of her Hamburg Steinway Model D is glistening and richly toned. This new set of the Mozart piano sonatas (there will be six volumes in all) goes straight to the top of my list of preferred recordings.

Peter Burwasser

Further Listening: Mozart Piano Concertos No. 17 & No. 24 (Shaham, piano; Robertson, cond; St. Louis SO/Canary Classics)