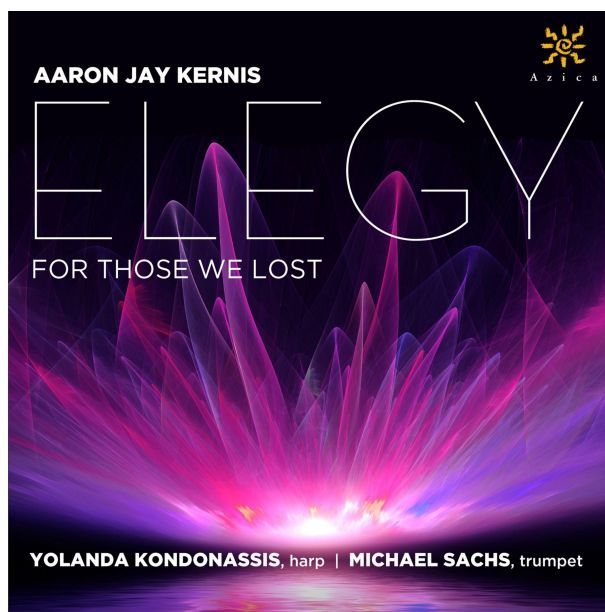


CD Single:
Sachs & Kondonassis in Kernis'
Elegy...for those we lost (Azica)

by Daniel Hathaway



When British musicians have needed a piece of memorial music, their choice since the turn of the 20th century has often been the “Nimrod” movement from Edward Elgar’s *Variations on an Original Theme*, or Henry Walford Davies’ *A Solemn Melody*.

Since 1935 when it was born as the second movement of his Op. 11 String Quartet, Americans have frequently turned to Samuel Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*, a piece the composer later textured with the words of the *Agnus Dei* and re-published for unaccompanied chorus.

A more recent and very personal entry into the category of musical laments is Aaron Jay Kernis’s *Elegy...for those we lost*, originally a piano piece composed after the composer had contracted and recovered from COVID-19. He has written, “I strived to create music to counterpoint the terrible pandemic and honor the dead — to try to give some measure of solace to families by sharing a personal expression of grief.”

Impressed by the emotional directness and honesty of the piece, harpist Yolanda Kondonassis easily persuaded Kernis to arrange the piece for harp and trumpet so she could perform and record it with her husband, Cleveland Orchestra principal trumpet Michael Sachs. The two musicians, who rarely perform together, recorded it on the Severance Hall stage earlier this year for The Cleveland Orchestra’s *In Focus* Episode 12, “Celestial Serenades,” where it can still be viewed on the [Adella](#) platform.

On September 17, Azica Records released a single of Kondonassis and Sachs performing the seven-minute piece in Sauder Concert Hall at Goshen College, superbly recorded and mastered last May by Alan Bise.



The *Elegy* is a moving testament to those who have not survived to hear it. In the shape of its melody and its spiritual content, the piece subconsciously bears a resemblance to Elgar's *Nimrod*, but if that's in fact intentional, it's only by way of tribute.

Moving from the meditative to the quasi-triumphant on a stream of conflicting emotions, the piece ends as quietly as it began. Although their instruments are radically different in character, the two musicians combine their individual sounds beautifully, Sachs achieving a lyrical blend of gold and silver hues and Kondonassis producing strong, weighted tones that stand up bravely to the trumpet.

Kondonassis noted in a Q&A that the work has a “wonderful architecture of emotional states. Aaron achieves that rare but perfect musical arc that takes the listener on a journey through the stages of grief — deep sadness, resignation, despair, and rage, ultimately leading towards hope, sublimation, resolve, acceptance, and finally peace. That's quite a feat in a seven-minute work, but Aaron manages it with seamless grace.”

That feat is reproduced just as seamlessly by Yolanda Kondonassis and Michael Sachs in their performance of the Kernis *Elegy* on this digital single.

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