

Quantum of Solace

and a unit of verve

When Marc Forster was approached to direct 'Quantum of Solace,' the unusual title was the least of his reservations. Daniel Craig managed to change his mind

BY RYAN GILBEY
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Marc Forster remembers his response when his agent told him he was in line to direct the 22nd James Bond film: "No, no, no, no, no." The 39-year-old, German-born filmmaker squeezes out an incredulous laugh. "I said, 'They've got the wrong director.'" You take the point. A long, hard stare at his resume — which ranges from the intensity of *Monster's Ball* to the winsome *Finding Neverland* and the smartypants comedy *Stranger Than Fiction* — reveals nothing to suggest an aptitude for mildly fogeyish, espionage-based escapism.

And yet here he is, 18 months later, discussing the 22nd James Bond film. Precisely how many razor-sharp bowler hats, switchblade shoes and genital thrashings was he threatened with before he signed on the dotted line? Actually, Forster experienced nothing more torturous than a charm offensive from Barbara Broccoli, one of the most tenacious producers ever to share a name with a vegetable.

"Even so, I kept thinking: What's the upside here?" he says, averting his eyes from the open laptop on the coffee table before him, which lends his features a faint, blue glow. A silent assistant with an air of Rosa Klebb about her taps at another keyboard on the other side of the room, making me wonder if she's feeding Forster his answers. "I'm at a point in my career where I can make the mid-budget movies I want to make. I have creative freedom, final cut, and now they're offering me a US\$200 million movie? If it's a failure, it could harm my career. And if it's a success, the only advantage is I can make more blockbusters. Do I really want that? I don't think so!" He scoffs at the idea. With his floodlight eyes and enormous hairless head, he momentarily resembles a surly baby.

The clincher for Forster was talking things over with Daniel Craig, the man who should be praised for bringing the first hint of nastiness to Bond, and blamed for causing an unhealthy upswing in the wearing of Speedos. "Daniel and I are very much in sync; he's a highly intelligent and sensitive actor. His achievement has been to humanize Bond, so that he could be one of us — not a hero, but an antihero with a dark side. Meeting him made me want to jump in, take the risk."

On the minus side, there was still the matter of the film's title — it didn't have one. "When I signed on, we had a release date but no script and no title," he says with a disbelieving laugh. During pre-production, Broccoli and her co-producer Michael G. Wilson summoned Forster to their office,

Above: Daniel Craig, left, and Olga Kurylenko are pictured in this publicity photo from a scene in the latest James Bond movie, *Quantum of Solace*. Craig plays a grim-faced 007 on the warpath in *Quantum of Solace*, the sequel to box office hit *Casino Royale*. PHOTOS: REUTERS

where a poster, emblazoned with the proposed title, was laid out for his inspection. It would be fair to say that his immediate reaction foreshadowed that of fans the world over, many of whom were left marveling that the accolade of Worst Ever Bond Title had been stolen at last from *Octopussy*, while at the same time wondering how on earth anyone was supposed to mime *Quantum of Solace* in a game of charades.

"That's the title?" he spluttered. "Well — what do you think?" asked Broccoli. "Er, I'm not sure," Forster replied.

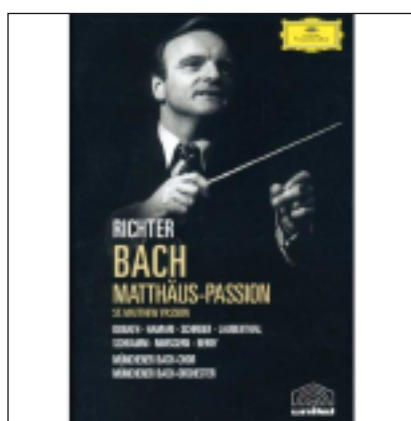
"Where is this going?" He says he grew accustomed to the title after a while. Now he even claims to love it. "At least it created discussion," he points out. Yes, but so did foot-and-mouth.

When we meet, Forster is still cutting the picture together, and is showing the strain of a punishing schedule which has left him with five weeks to complete editing compared to his usual 14. "It's the way Barbara and Michael work," he sighs. "I think it's to minimize studio interference. I can't think of any other reason to impose such a horrible deadline."

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[CLASSICAL DVD REVIEWS]



MATTHEUS-PASSION
Bach
Karl Richter
DGM 073 4149



MAYUKO KAMIO
In Recital
Tchaikovsky, Chausson, Stravinsky, Etc
Sony BMG 88697301002



SOL GABBETA
Shostakovich
Munich Philharmonic
Sony BMG 8869734612



NIKOLAI TOKAREV
French Album
Rameau, Debussy, Ravel, Franck
Sony BMG 8867341452

At last a DVD of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* to get excited about!

Last month I lamented the shortcomings of the King's College, Cambridge version, and in August praised Nikolaus Harnoncourt's marvelous rendering of the same composer's *St John Passion*. But a top-notch version on DVD in 2006, meaning that it employs modern instruments and larger forces than Bach would have known. But such distinctions hardly matter when the overall effect is as heartfelt and pervasive as this.

Karl Richter recorded it in 1971 but it was only released on DVD in 2006. Purists consider it a traditional (as opposed to an "authentic") reading, meaning that it employs modern instruments and larger forces than Bach would have known. But such distinctions hardly matter when the overall effect is as heartfelt and pervasive as this.

Particularly interesting is that its virtues are almost all the opposite of Harnoncourt's. The set is in a

featureless white space (Harnoncourt filmed his in an ornate rococo church). The work requires two choruses, and Richter opts for men, women and boys (Harnoncourt employed only men and boys). Richter's soloists stand in isolation on various levels, all painted white, while the orchestra, and often even the harpsichord, sounds sonorous in the extreme (Harnoncourt only used early 18th-century instruments, whether real ones or modern copies, and their softer sound was crucial to his reading).

The approach of the conductors themselves couldn't be more different either. Harnoncourt threw himself into the music, mouthing the words and seething with a passionate commitment. Richter is completely different. He spends some time conducting and some playing the harpsichord, but in neither role does he display a flicker of emotion.

The same, however, certainly can't be said of his singers. It's hard to know

where to start in distributing praise for these. When considering the soprano and contralto soloists, you have to remember that Bach gives the greater music to the contralto, so it's Julia Hamari who inevitably leaves the more lasting impression. But soprano Helen Donath is winningly fine as well wherever the music gives her the chance.

When it comes to the men, there's no problem in deciding precedence. Peter Schreier shines out — he's absolutely stupendous as the Evangelist, in other words the linkman throughout the entire three-and-a-quarter hours (broken into two halves in Bach's day by an hour-long sermon). Curiously he has identical virtues to Harnoncourt's Evangelist, Kurt Equiluz — a wonderfully high-pitched tenor voice, immense precision and a total lack of affectation. A powerful effect is achieved in both products by having the Evangelist filmed head-on and in close-up throughout.

But bass Ernst Gerold Schramm as Jesus proves at least Schreier's equal in his fewer moments in the spotlight — the dramatic problem is that, being seen as God, he can't display variety. But there isn't a weak link anywhere among the soloists, and with subtitles in English, French, Spanish and Chinese this pair of DVDs can be very highly recommended. It's currently being discounted by some Taipei retailers to around NT\$850.

If I still on balance prefer the *St John Passion*, at least as envisioned by Harnoncourt, it's partly because of a personal preference for the dramatic over the contemplative. Also striking is its insight, despite being shorter, into people and situations, most notably into the character of Pilate — intelligent, honest, but finally a pragmatist. Both works, of course, have their strengths, and the *St John* has nothing so plaintive yet simple as Peter's plea for forgiveness after

denying Jesus three times. Maybe Bach thought it had to be especially moving as clearly God himself was moved because he allowed him to go on, despite everything, and found the Christian church.

Sony BMG has recently released three CDs featuring young classical artists. All are former child prodigies. Argentine cellist Sol Gabetta, now 25, gave her first public recital at the age of 10, while Russian pianist Nikolai Tokarev, also 25, gave his, Mozart-like, at the age of 6.

The youngest of the three, the 22-year-old Japanese violinist Mayuko Kamio, performed in Taipei at age 19 with the Evergreen Symphony Orchestra in March 2005. Then she gave a loving rendition of Chausson's *Poeme* — the resulting DVD was reviewed in this column [Page 14, *Taipei Times*, May 7, 2008]. She repeats the same item on her new CD, only this time with piano-only

accompaniment. To it she adds items by Tchaikovsky, Szymanowski, Stravinsky and others.

For her part, Sol Gabetta offers a strenuous Shostakovich disc containing two works, his dolorous *Cello Concerto No. 2* and his *Cello Sonata*. The former, a live performance, is with the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, the latter with pianist Mihaela Ursuleasa. Both items have complex performance histories and a careful study of Shostakovich's political attitudes is advisable before attempting to listen to either.

Lastly, Nikolai Tokarev (who rather surprisingly for a Russian studied for two years in Manchester, England) gives a solo recital of French keyboard music stretching back 300 years. This CD is arguably the gem of the three — lyrical, humane, and accessible without detracting from the quality of the originals.

— BRADLEY WINTERTON