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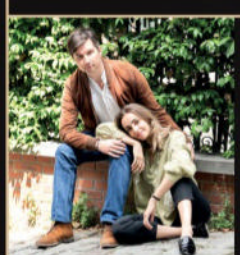

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GRAMOPHONE
SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Avery

'Sweetgrass'
Can't Be[a]. Decolonization[a]. Gratitude. Mebêngôkre. Ohònte Wenserá:kon (Sweetgrass). Onenh'sa (Spirit)[a]. Tripartita. We Enter Together
Wilhelmina Smith *vc* with [a]**Dawn Avery** *voice*
Azica (AZICA71377 • 53')

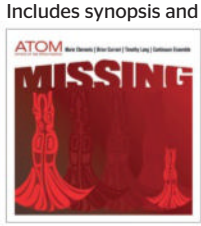
A player as lithe as cellist Wilhelmina Smith could wring lyricism from the mere act of tuning her instrument, and thus the largely unremarkable works on 'Sweetgrass', Smith's collaboration with composer Dawn Avery, emerge as a pleasurable listen. Avery, who also sings on several of the tracks, cites classical and sacred world music alongside her own Mohawk and other Native and Indigenous cultures in these compositions. This is sincere, coherent writing that flatters the instrument, yet to what end; the results are often mellifluous and monotonous in equal measure.

Many of these pieces, orientated around similar deployments of resonance and open strings, coast on account of the quality of Smith and Avery's performances. Avery's singing brings a notable facet to certain tracks that would otherwise have been forgettable, such as *Can't Be* – in which the cellist is preoccupied with a five-beat rhythm that is based on the phrase 'can't be a good girl' – on which Avery joins to soulfully sing a Mohawk prayer. *Mebêngôkre* features the album's principal intrigue towards its end, where voice and cello trill slowly together for a strangely piercing effect. *We Enter Together*, the ballade-like opening duo between Smith and her own pre-recorded pizzicato ostinato (which accompanies Avery's own voice on the last track, *Onenh'sa*), is nothing to write home about musically either, yet succeeds on account of Smith's gossamer playing.

All of these tracks, particularly the serene two-tracked *Tripartita*, are fundamentally palatable, yet none of them resides in the memory for long, and the missteps are all the more disappointing as a consequence. *Decolonization*, which quotes Indigenous, blues and other Western music as an inquisition into 'American' identity, strolls through Cringe Valley with a *sul ponticello*-fied *Star-Spangled Banner* quotation, where the flailing country's anthem is rendered with maximum distortion – what the booklet notes describe as a nod to Jimi Hendrix but which, absent that context, is simply cheesy. The titular track *Ohònte Wenserá:kon (Sweetgrass)* is a tedious exploration of harmonics, while *Gratitude*, for Smith and her pre-recorded self once again, is a close cousin of elevator music. This is a safe album of expressive performances that is likely to be of general appeal, but, perhaps needless to say, safety and general appeal need not go hand in hand. **Jennifer Gersten**

Current

Missing
Cait Wood *sop* ..... Ava
Melody Courage *sop* ..... Native Girl
Andrea Ludwig *mez* ..... Jess
Marion Newman *mez* ..... Dr Wilson
Michelle Lafferty *mez* ..... Native Mother
Asitha Tennekoon *ten* ..... Devon
Evan Korbut *bar* ..... Angus
ATOM (Artists of The Opera Missing); Continuum Ensemble / Timothy Long
Bright Shiny Things (BTSCO221 • 79')
Includes synopsis and libretto

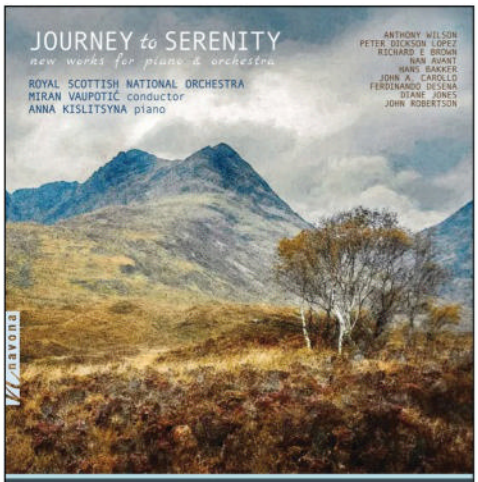


Few operas arrive with such a fierce sense of purpose. In its mission statement, the opera *Missing* was 'created to confront Canada's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Woman and Girls'. Obviously, it's out to reach beyond the usual venues such as City Opera of Vancouver, where it was premiered in 2017. 'This is not an Indigenous issue; it's a human issue', states librettist Marie Clements, who is of Métis/Dene heritage. Yes indeed. *Missing* is strongly anchored in well-drawn characters – in an entrancing and highly accomplished piece with a distinctive atmosphere resonating from an ancient, mystical world view. Unseen elements assume a natural place in this post-minimalist, post-tonal instrumental ecosystem.

The central plot has an Indigenous modern woman named Ava who has grown up alienated from her cultural heritage but has intense periods of self-discovery as another Indigenous woman, the spirit of one who is among the missing, appears in Ava's mirror images. 'You could be me if I was you' is the spirit's circular message. The Clements libretto raises any number of questions as disappearances are investigated. What constitutes tribal loyalty in the 21st century? Are the missing women to be partly blamed for being in harm's way, in evenings of partying and hitchhiking? (The conclusion: consequences are a matter of chance, not choice.) More deeply, the opera explores loss felt among the living – and among the non-living who are unacknowledged by the temporal world. The highly singable Gitxsan language plays a key part in Ava's discovery of identity: she seems to remember it from long ago.

Composer Brian Current tells the story with seven singers in 16 scenes (plus instrumental prelude and epilogue), with each dramatic incident having its own precisely fashioned ostinato, often in conjunction with nervous rhythms, all dramatically apt and engagingly propulsive. Sequential development of various motifs goes from predictable tonal scales to atonal ones that take the opera into unknown regions. Vocal lines are well attuned to the words, and are limited in their range so that intelligibility is never in question. Sparkly percussion enhances the presence of everyday magic. Skilfully wrought collage effects are everywhere. Massed voices effectively come out of the blue, sometimes as a Greek chorus that sings 'missing and murdered' at key moments. Most arresting is a dramatisation of Ava's abduction nightmare consisting only of a vocal line and relentless percussion.

The opera seems to arrive fully realised on this recording, which is produced much



JOURNEY TO SERENITY

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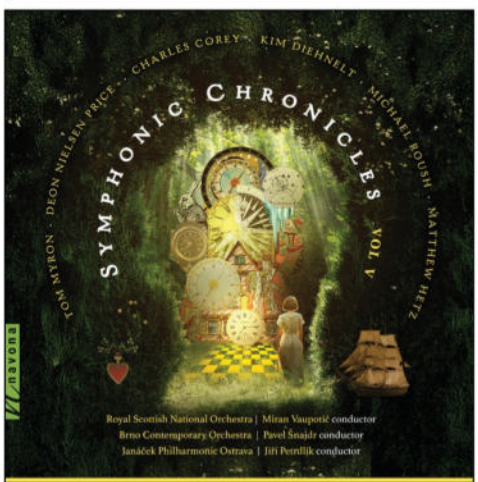

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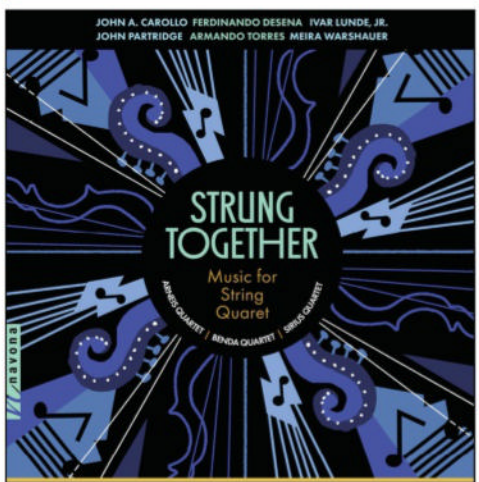

STRUNG TOGETHER

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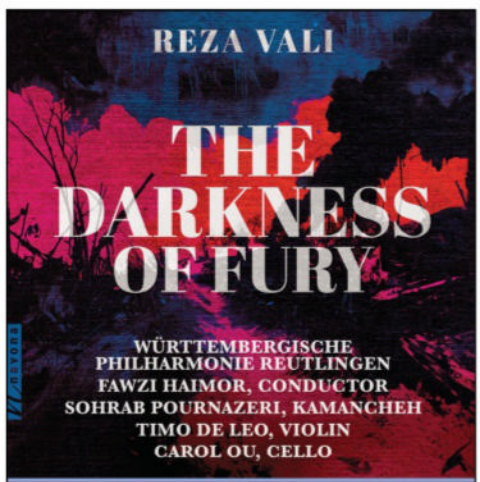

THE DARKNESS OF FURY

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The duo Mystery Sonata – violinist Zachary Carrettin and pianist Mina Gajić – present a series of haunting soundscapes created by contemporary Icelandic composers

like a radio play, including spatial effects that make the opera feel like a complete world unto itself. The consistently excellent cast – headed by Cait Wood as Ava, Melody Courage as the Native Girl and Michelle Lafferty as the Native Mother – benefits from close microphone placement and unforced singing that creates helpful intimacy with the listener. Indigenous-orientated works by Ana Sokolović and Ian Cusson recently premiered by the Montreal Symphony (on the same concert with Mahler's also-cross-cultural *Das Lied von der Erde*) may be more imposing. But *Missing* is better scaled and presented for effective broad-based communication.

David Patrick Stearns

Ruehr

'Songs for Stephen'

Five Men[a]. Lied[a]. Lullabies & Spring Songs[b]. Travel Songs[a]. Wonderful Bears[a]

Stephen Salters *bar*

[a]**Donald Berman,** [b]**David Zobel** *pf*

Avie (AV2672 • 59' • T/t)

Recorded [b]1999

Boston-resident Elena Ruehr is probably most familiar internationally for her string quartets and Avie's recordings of them (Nos 1-8, 5/18, 7/22; Nos 9-11 will appear later this year). In the US she is also known for her five operas, only one of which – the one-act chamber opera *Toussaint Before the Spirits* (2003) – has been recorded commercially; none has been staged in the UK. (What about it, ENO? They would fit neatly into your American-facing productions of recent years.) *Toussaint* was composed especially for baritone Stephen Salters, the central performer in this captivating album of songs, all composed specifically for him, as were the Second Quartet, *Song of the Silkie*, and a pair of cantatas. Salters has been Ruehr's vocal muse for nearly 30 years, since he asked her for a cycle for a debut recital and sent her a sample tape of Schubert songs. Her enthusiasm was instant: 'This was the singer I had always wanted to write for!' Ruehr's understanding of what Salters's voice is capable of is matched only by his sympathy and comprehension of her musical expressivity.

The songs here, composed between 1998 and 2021, are eloquent testimony to the depth of the connection between them and its deepening over decades. That first cycle, *Lullabies & Spring Songs* (1998), is a tour de force for voice and accompanist (here the excellent David Zobel), touching on a variety of styles of manners in its seven songs (sample just 'Autumn Thought' or the nightmarish 'Sandman' to hear what I mean). All the works that ensued follow suit to lesser or greater degrees, such as Salters's hummed intro to *Five Men* (2010), or the jazzy fourth number, 'Carver's Song', the shared dismay at Covid confinement with which *Travel Songs* (2021) is shot through, or the sheer euphoria in 'Wonderful Bears'. Donald Berman is the impeccable accompanist in the 21st-century songs, serving equally Salters's voice and Ruehr's inspiration. Avie's sound is fine, although I would have preferred a touch more depth. Oh, and there are tunes: did I mention that?

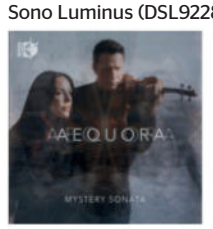
Guy Rickards

'Aequora'

Bjarnason First Escape **Pálsson** Notre Dame **Sigfúsdóttir** Aequora. Re/fractions **Thorvaldsdottir** Reminiscence

Mystery Sonata (Zachary Carrettin *vn* Mina Gajić *pf*)

Sono Luminus (DSL92282 • 42')



The cover of this latest album by violinist Zachary Carrettin and pianist Mina Gajić includes a misty photo of the married couple, who run the Boulder Bach Festival

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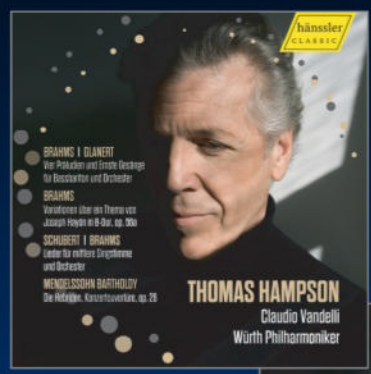

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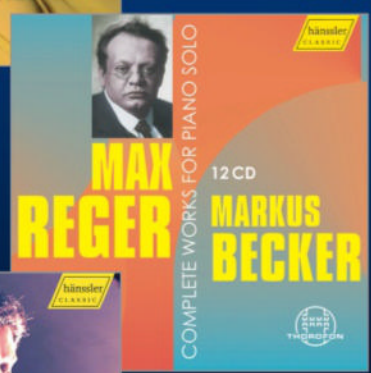

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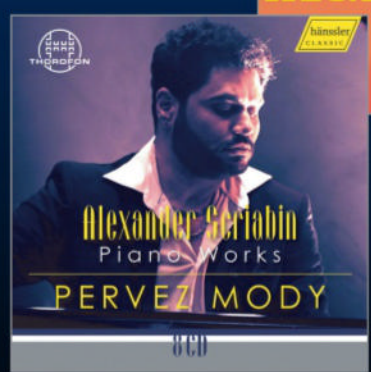

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in Colorado, and only three words: Aequora, which turns out to be one of the works they perform here, and Mystery Sonata, not a reference to the Biber violin sonatas but the name of these adventurous musicians' ensemble when they undertake artistic journeys beyond the mainstream of classical repertoire. On this occasion, the itinerary comprises pieces by four contemporary Icelandic composers who have created a series of haunting soundscapes.

María Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir originally wrote *Aequora* for grand piano and electronics but added violin after meeting Carrettin and Gajić. The work's title is Latin for a calm sea, and the music achieves such an ambience through muted electronics beneath subtle violin and piano details. Moving between stillness and urgency, the piece is a study in nuanced contrasts shaded by delicate strokes inside the piano and hushed violin flourishes.

In the two-part *Notre Dame*, Páll Ragnar Pálsson explores the interplay of unisons and a panoply of glistening sonorities and gestures that surround them. The title celebrates the Parisian cathedral that caught fire in 2019 as the composer was writing the piece; his response is reflected in the ethereal nature of the material and relationships between violin and piano. Also in two connected parts is Sigfúsdóttir's *Re/fractions*, which blends whispered passages with proud statements in a spectrum of hues and affecting images.

Carrettin and Gajić work seamlessly as a team, and they bring expressive acuity and technical prowess to the disc's two solo pieces. Daníel Bjarnason's *First Escape* depicts entrapment in a box and the need to break free in the violin's wild flights, lonely sighs and other-worldly harmonics. In Anna Thorvaldsdottir's *Reminiscence*, the piano's extended techniques evoke dreamy vistas and ominous rumblings, mostly through soft, controlled textures.

The scope of the sophistication Carrettin and Gajić apply to all of this fare can be summed up in the title of a previous Sono Luminus release on which they play Schubert sonatinas on historical instruments: Boundless.

Donald Rosenberg

Lyra Baroque Orchestra

Our monthly guide to North American ensembles

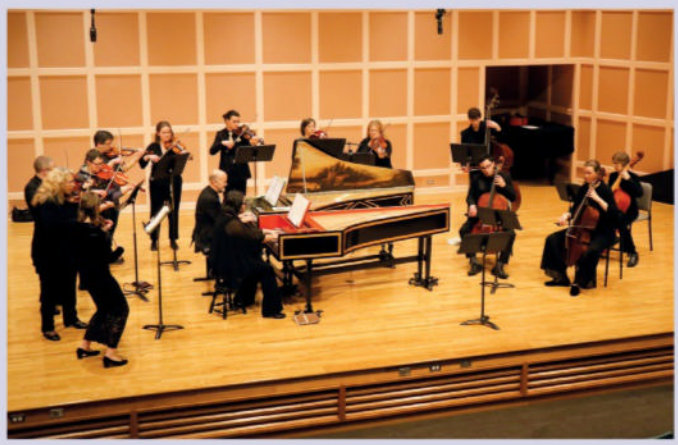
Founded 1985
Home Sundin Music Hall, St Paul, Minnesota, and Mount Olive Lutheran Church, Rochester, Minnesota

HIP was starting to get hip when the Lyra Baroque Orchestra was launched in 1985. Historically informed performance was inspiring a lot more curiosity, and the ensembles being founded around North America were usually the result of their cities having a few enthusiastic evangelists for playing pre-1750 music much as it sounded at the time of its first performances.

In the southern Minnesota city of Rochester – home to the world-famous Mayo Clinic – that enthusiast was Randy Bourne, a harpsichordist and host on the local classical music radio station. He enlisted a group of musicians to perform for a station event and they soon became the Lyra Concert, a group that performed at venues in Rochester and 80 miles north in St Paul – and has been doing so ever since, changing its name to the Lyra Baroque Orchestra in 2003.

By that time, the early music enthusiasm baton had been handed off to Dutch harpsichordist Jacques Ogg, who recently concluded his 25-year tenure as Lyra's artistic director (a post he shared with violinist David Douglass from 2000 to 2004). The ebullient Ogg moved off into 'emeritus' status with a June concert programme that featured some of his favourite collaborators joining him for music of Telemann, JS Bach, Jean-Marie Leclair and Luigi Boccherini.

Ogg's tenure was marked by increasing international renown for the orchestra, the quality of its playing enhanced greatly by the company it kept. He commuted four to seven times a year from his Netherlands home near Maastricht to St Paul, often inviting along such outstanding early music artists as flautist Wilbert Hazelzet, violinist Marc Destrubé and cellist Jaap ter Linden. Among the highlights of Ogg's tenure were two tours of Spain in the early 2000s, one of them landing the group at the medieval monastery that was once home to composer Antonio Soler. There, they recorded five of Soler's *Villancicos*.



By 2011 Lyra Baroque had its own home venue in downtown St Paul, the Baroque Room, an intimate upstairs space in the Lowertown neighbourhood that it uses for rehearsals, recording, chamber music concerts, recitals and masterclasses with prominent soloists. It's also been among the venues for the Twin Cities Early Music Festival, a gathering of the area's many purveyors of old-school styles that Lyra helped launch in 2014. And baroque lovers were kept engaged during the pandemic's lockdown days by the recitals Lyra presented via Zoom.

But the core of the group's concerts continue to be found at St Paul's Sundin Music Hall and Rochester's Mount Olive Lutheran Church, where the orchestra has gained a reputation for precision, energy, expressiveness and introducing audiences to seldom-heard works. Ogg's talent for musical archaeology became evident through such efforts as reconstructing a Boccherini opera and leading its first performances in centuries.

After Ogg announced his retirement, four finalists from four countries vied to become his successor, each invited to curate and lead a programme over the course of the 2024-25 season. It was an impressive group, but the decision was made to hire Croatian violinist Bojan Čičić, the current leader of the Academy of Ancient Music in Oxford, UK. His first season at the helm begins in November.

Rob Hubbard

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A LETTER FROM *Chicago*

Howard Reich reports on arrivals and departures at the city's orchestras, plus a daring new opera

What happens when bold new conductors take charge of top-notch ensembles? In the case of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Grant Park Orchestra, the shift in tone and style becomes unmistakably clear.

Klaus Mäkelä doesn't assume the CSO's music directorship until 2027 but his early work with the orchestra has proved quite promising. In May he closed out a brief spring residency as Music Director Designate with two landmark works: Dvořák's Symphony No 7 in D minor and Brahms's Piano Concerto No 2 in B flat major, featuring outgoing Artist-in-Residence Daniil Trifonov as soloist.

If we have come to expect ultra-refined, profoundly poetic readings from 84-year-old former CSO Music Director Riccardo Muti (now Music Director Emeritus for Life), 29-year-old Mäkelä has struck a crisp contrast via the youthful ardour, dramatic urgency and keen sensitivity of his interpretations. Mäkelä offered a red-blooded Dvořák Seventh of ferocious conviction and emotional intensity. In the Brahms Concerto, pianist Trifonov hardly could have asked for a more empathic podium collaborator, Mäkelä bringing heroic scale to orchestral passages while reflecting the subtlest nuances in Trifonov's pianism.

> Daniil Trifonov hardly could have asked for a more empathic podium collaborator than Klaus Mäkelä

The change from past to present was still more vivid in June, when Giancarlo Guerrero led his first week of concerts with the Grant Park Orchestra as its Artistic Director and Principal Conductor, at the Frank Gehry-designed band shell in Millennium Park. Unlike predecessor Carlos Kalmar, Guerrero kept his onstage commentary to a pithy minimum, a welcome improvement over Kalmar's loquacious attempts at stand-up comedy. Better still, Guerrero commanded attention in both populist and standard repertoire. The conductor brought forth soaring lines and irrepressible rhythmic dynamism in the Latin American music of Clarice Assad and Arturo Márquez, and welcome light to Mahler's Symphony No 1 (in part by including the infrequently performed 'Blumine' movement). This was music-making designed to keep focus on the score, not the conductor, auguring well for the future of the city's beloved outdoor music festival.

Chicago Opera Theater made music history in June presenting the world premiere of *She Who Dared*, billed as the first professionally staged opera penned by two Black women: composer Jasmine Arielle Barnes and librettist Deborah DEEP Mouton. The two-act drama takes on the story of Black women who refused to sit at the back of the bus before Rosa Parks famously did so in 1955. Commissioned by American Lyric Theater, *She Who Dared* elegantly intertwines jazz, gospel and classical musical idioms, its vocal ensemble writing emerging as its greatest virtue. But the libretto for a tedious first act offered more concept than drama, the opera's narrative taking flight too late.

Canadian-born pianist Tony Siqi Yun, winner of the 2019 First China International Music Competition, attracted a large turnout for his much-anticipated Ravinia Festival debut in June. His recital brought forth the music beneath the pyrotechnics of Liszt's transcription of Isolde's Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde* and offered considerable dramatic sweep in a rarity, Busoni's Berceuse, the seventh of his *Elegies*. Though Yun leaned too heavily on the sustaining pedal in Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata and took a breakneck tempo he could not manage in its final pages, he was more at home in Schumann's *Études symphoniques* in C sharp minor – its turbulent romanticism ideally suited his hyper-emotional sensibility.

But in Chicago these days, there's as much drama happening offstage as on. Chicago music lovers breathed a sigh of relief to learn that CSO principal trumpet Esteban Batallán has decided to return to the orchestra for the 2025-26 season, following a season's leave of absence in which he held the same chair in the Philadelphia Orchestra. 'Despite some situations that might have happened in the last few seasons at the CSO,' he cryptically told the *Chicago Tribune*, 'I couldn't go against my whole life's desire: being the principal trumpet of the CSO.'

Alas, principal flute Stefán Ragnar Höskuldsson is taking a one-year leave in the 2025-26 season to hold the same chair in the Berlin Philharmonic. Höskuldsson has been the soul of the CSO's wind section since 2016, and a permanent departure would be a blow to the orchestra.

That wasn't the only mixed news from the CSO. On the plus side, the orchestra has signed Donald Palumbo – previously the esteemed chorusmaster of the Metropolitan Opera – to a three-year contract leading the Chicago Symphony Chorus (he started in July).

But MusicNOW, the CSO's indispensable new-music series, will be on 'pause' due to economic reasons during the 2025-26 season, leading many to fear it may be gone for good. That would be a significant loss to the city's lively contemporary music scene.

Developments are brighter up at the Ravinia Festival, the CSO's summer home in the northern suburb of Highland Park, where work has begun on a multi-year, $75 million campus renovation that will yield a new stage and acoustic shell in the main pavilion and various improvements at the festival's other auditoriums. As always in musical Chicago, change remains the only constant.

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Classical music's place on a world stage

Artists and orchestras are often talked about as being among the most inspiring representatives of a country, or city, carrying a place and people's name to far-off corners of the world. This was caught wonderfully wittily by the Estonian ambassador to the UK when launching the 90th birthday celebrations of Arvo Pärt last month. 'Does anyone know who I am?' he asked the gathered guests. 'No? Does anyone know who Arvo Pärt is? And that is why it's Arvo Pärt who is the real ambassador for Estonia.' As his country's President says in our My Music interview this month, wherever you go, there are people who know of Arvo Pärt, and a desire to discover the roots behind his intensely personal and spiritual music will undoubtedly lead many to learn more about his country, its culture and its history. Indeed, it's even led some to visit the country itself.

This is not about nationalism, quite the opposite (and I'm sure most composers would abhor such an idea) – nothing truly transcends borders as well as music does, and composers and their works can indeed be that voice that steps across divisions, forging friendships among international artists and audiences alike. It's about understanding. Visiting Ainola, Sibelius's home nestling in the Finnish forests beyond Helsinki, felt like a formative part of understanding this composer's music; closer to home I'd say the same of Elgar, and looking across the landscape from his beloved Malvern Hills.

The Estonian President also makes another interesting point, that simply by bringing the significance of his position to bear by attending

concerts, he can open doors for classical music, and encourage more people to listen to it. In an era in which classical music might not have the prominence in wider society, let alone in education, that every reader of *Gramophone* believes it should have, it's a reminder of the important role that politicians, indeed all public figures, who love our art form can and must play in championing classical music. We're of course fortunate in the UK to also have a head of state in HM King Charles who genuinely loves classical music: where he leads, may others follow. There's too much at stake not to.

Many recent issues of *Gramophone* seem to record the passing of a pivotal figure. In interviews, I find the name of Sir Roger Norrington cited by other musicians more than many, often as shorthand for an approach or style – that perhaps oversimplifies the impact of this pioneering figure, but what it does show is just how much he shook things up and made people think, and that's an extraordinary contribution to place alongside a catalogue rich in important recordings.

And then, just as we went to press, we learnt of the death of another pioneering figure whose commitment and energy helped shape our musical environment – Amelia Freedman, founder and guiding spirit of the Nash Ensemble. Devoted champions of contemporary music, since its debut six decade ago the group has premiered more than 330 works by 225 composers, while also setting such works in the context of wonderfully performed music spanning centuries. We will pay tribute next month.

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

Andrew Achenbach • Tim Ashley • Richard Bratby • Stephen Cera • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • John Fallas • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Marina Frolova-Walker • Charlotte Gardner • Jennifer Gersten • Rob Hubbard • Lindsay Kemp • Aleksander Laskowski • Richard Lawrence • Geraint Lewis • Andrew Mellor • Jeremy Nicholas • Peter Quantrill • Mark Pullinger • Howard Reich • Guy Rickards • Donald Rosenberg • Patrick Rucker • Edward Seckerson • Mark Seow • Nigel Simeone • Pwyll ap Siôn • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • Richard Whitehouse • Flora Willson • William Yeoman

'Every year is a big year for Arvo Pärt,' says **ANDREW MELLOR**, who writes this month's cover story, 'but the composer's 90th birthday presents an opportunity to ask what he means to Estonia as well as to the world – in addition to looking at what we might have missed from his varied output.'

'Thomas Dunford and Lea Desandre are a class double act,' writes **MARK SEOW**, who interviews this pair of inspiring musicians this issue. 'Their passion for music of the English Renaissance and early Baroque perfectly lends itself to a repertoire that was designed to stir the passions of its listeners.'

'Writing a *Gramophone* Collection on Debussy's *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* finally allowed me to immerse myself in a work I've always loved,' writes **TIM ASHLEY**. 'It's been an extraordinary journey through its beauties and ambiguities that has only increased my affection for this remarkable score.'

COVER PHOTOGRAPHS: KAUPO KIKKAS/PARLOPHONE RECORDS LTD/BENJAMIN EALOVEGA

***Gramophone*, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.**

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Reviews

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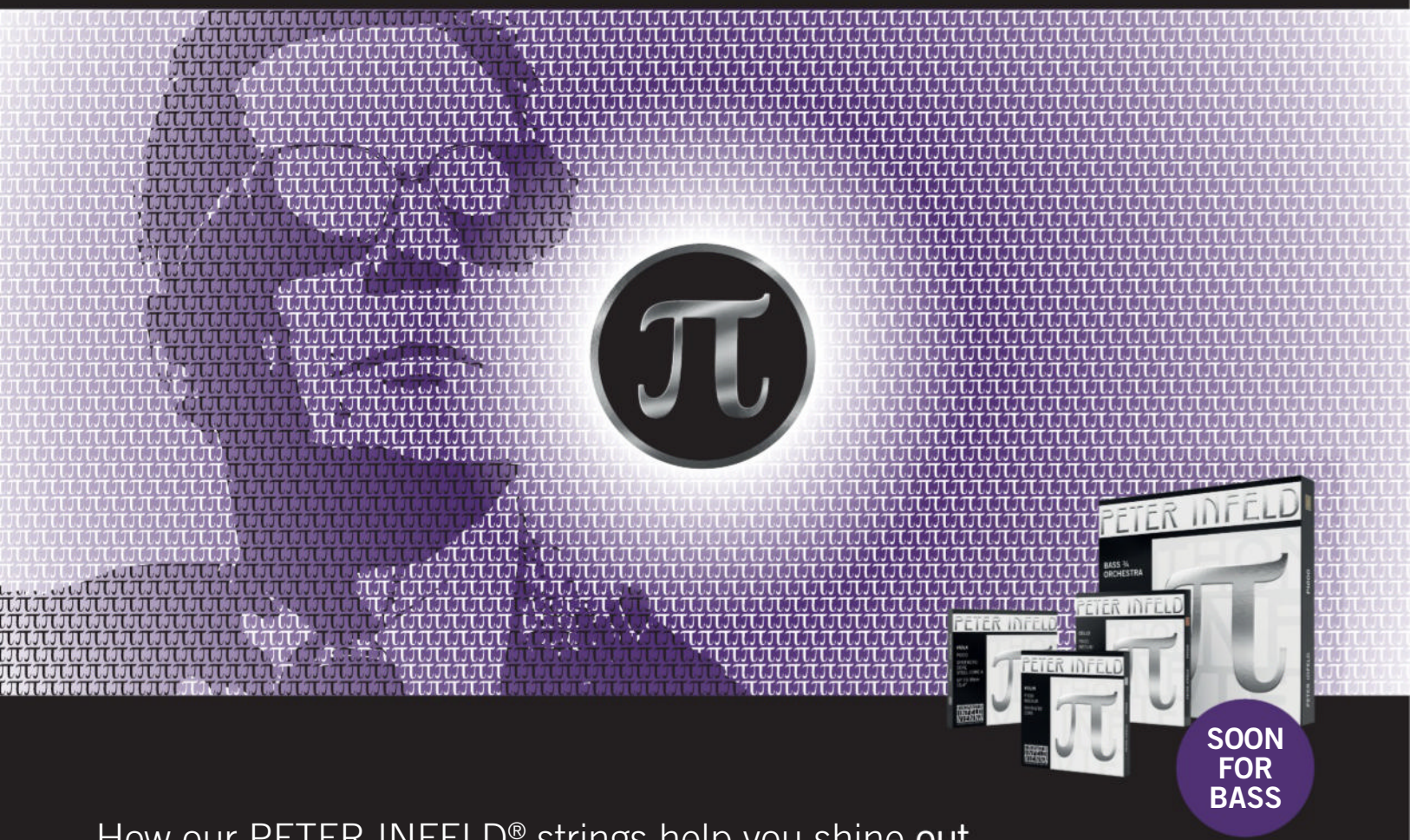

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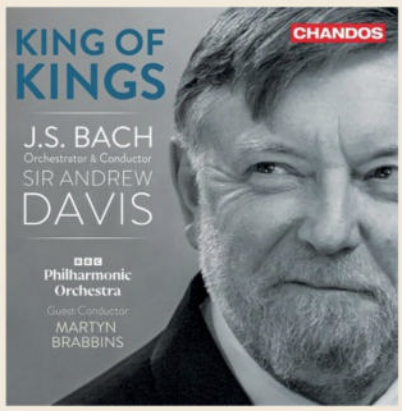
GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews

RECORDING OF THE MONTH



JS BACH
'King of Kings' – Orchestral Transcriptions by Andrew Davis
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins, Andrew Davis
Chandos
▶ **JEREMY DIBBLE'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 36**

On this splendid tribute to Sir Andrew Davis, his Bach transcriptions – initially by him and then completed by Martyn Brabbins – are beautifully realised by the BBC Philharmonic.

BACEWICZ
'Orchestral Works, Vol 2'
Peter Donohoe *pf*
BBC Symphony Orchestra / Sakari Oramo
Chandos
Sakari Oramo, who spoke of his commitment to Bacewicz in last month's issue, matches words with performance with this excellent showcase of her music.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 38

ORTIZ Yanga, etc
Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra / Gustavo Dudamel
Platoon
New works by Gabriela Ortiz – another interviewee last issue – including a cello concerto and a major choral/orchestral piece, receive powerful advocacy.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 42.

GINASTERA
Three String Quartets
Kiera Duffy *sop*
Miró Quartet
Pentatone
'The most technically polished accounts yet of these extraordinary works' is Andrew Farach-Colton's spot-on response to this superb set of Ginastera's string quartets.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 53

JS BACH
Six English Suites
Alexandra Papastefanou *pf*
First Hand
These stylish and exploratory performances of Bach's *English Suites* from pianist Alexandra Papastefanou feel natural and convincing and reveal her deep connection to this music's spirit.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 62

FROBERGER 'Suites for Harpsichord, Vol 4'
Gilbert Rowland *hpd*
Athene
Gilbert Rowland draws his six-year, four-volume (eight-disc) survey of the almost 50 suites by 17th-century harpsichord master Froberger to a triumphant and elegant close.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 63

SCHUBERT. BEETHOVEN
'Schubert+'
Can Çakmur *pf*
BIS
The fifth volume of Can Çakmur's enterprising and expertly performed Schubert series pairs two of the composer's sonatas, D664 and D958, with Beethoven's C minor Variations.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 68

JS BACH 'Bach's Horns'
Solomon's Knot
Prospero
Three works tied together thematically with great spirit by the excellent baroque and early music collective Solomon's Knot: an ingenious idea, wonderfully executed and strongly recommended by David Vickers.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 75

'ALMA'
'Ibero-American Songs'
Julieth Lozano Rolong *sop* **João Araújo** *pf*
Somm
Audience Prize winner at the 2023 Cardiff Singer of the World competition, Julieth Lozano Rolong is a compellingly characterful soprano – and this issue's One to Watch – see page 9.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 78

'MUSIK DER HANSESTÄDTE, VOL 3'
European Hanseatic Ensemble / Manfred Cordes
CPO
Music from 16th- and 17th-century Magdeburg, full of discoveries, brought vividly to life by Cordes and his ensemble of young artists. ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 80

VIDEO

WAGNER Der Ring des Nibelungen
Sols; Philharmonia Zürich / Gianandrea Noseda
Accentus
A production of 'radical simplicity', writes David Patrick Stearns of this new *Ring* on video, conductor Gianandrea Noseda leading the musical forces at Zurich Opera.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 86

REISSUE/ARCHIVE

BEETHOVEN 'The Lost Tapes'
Sviatoslav Richter *pf*
DG
Discover Richter's Beethoven afresh, thanks to these five lost performances from 1965; these DG-issued live accounts are a valuable addition to our understanding of one of greatest of all 20th-century pianists.
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 62

FOR THE RECORD

Remembering conductor Sir Roger Norrington

Peter Quantrill pays tribute to a pioneering musician always happy to set a cat among the pigeons

Conducting Mahler's Ninth at the BBC Proms in 2011, Sir Roger Norrington spun around on his seat at the end of the *Ländler* and put his hands in the air to the audience: that's all, folks. Cue nervous titters. The gesture was pure theatre, and Norrington to a T.

The conductor had become celebrated – notorious in some quarters – for puncturing balloons in the symphonic canon for the previous 20 years. In fact Norrington, who died in July at the age of 91, arrived at this repertoire relatively late in life. He said he was 50 before he conducted a Beethoven symphony. Yet, in reviewing the album of Nos 2 and 8 which launched Norrington's first, mould-breaking cycle on EMI (3/87), Richard Osborne made a perceptive comparison with the work of Toscanini and Erich Kleiber: as knowingly provocative as Norrington himself, perhaps.

Sir Roger Norrington: a true teller of the stories that lie within music

Norrington's own career path was far from conventional; and yet, like those distinguished predecessors, he had learnt his craft in the theatre. The idea of music without words as 'abstract' – and therefore somehow nobler, elevated from vulgar or everyday concerns – was anathema to him, and to his musicianship. All his performances told stories, and his life's work was to discover the plot of those stories as their creators conceived them, and then tell them anew.

Born in Oxford in 1934, he completed his National Service in the RAF before reading English at Cambridge. He had sung and played the violin since childhood, and began conducting singers towards the end of his degree. At a summer music camp, in a student choir led by Colin Davis, he encountered the music of Heinrich Schütz. Only in 1962, however, did he resolve to leave his editor's job at Oxford University Press and dedicate himself to music. He formed the Schütz Choir of London, in the same spirit of discovery which would lead John Eliot Gardiner to form the Monteverdi Choir in Cambridge, two years later.

Norrington then studied conducting with Adrian Boult at the Royal College of Music, but he made his first appearance in the pages of *Gramophone* as a tenor on a Pye album of Monteverdi (9/67). Recording soon became as central to Norrington's career as it did to the progress of the wider early-music movement. For the Argo label, between 1968 and 1975, he conducted the Schütz Choir in albums of not only their namesake but also Mendelssohn, Bruckner and Richard Strauss.

Meanwhile, in 1969, his theatrical gifts had been spotted by the founder-director of Kent Opera, Norman Platt. 'The brightest thing we ever did was to choose Norrington [as Music Director] before anyone else had noticed or recognised his potential as an opera conductor.' Over the next 15 years, he would spend several months a year with the company, leading productions of not just Handel and Telemann but Tchaikovsky and Tippett: the film of *King Priam*, last seen on Arthaus, is a precious and all-too-rare example of their work together. Meanwhile Norrington also conducted *La traviata* at ENO, and *Ariodante* at the Edinburgh Festival, with the company of the Piccola Scala from Milan.

In 1989, he told Alan Blyth that 'I prefer to let things happen, often dictated by what people ask me to do.' Perhaps so, but during the course of the 1980s he divorced and remarried, left Kent Opera and founded the Early Opera Project (with his second wife, the choreographer Kay Lawrence) and, in 1978, created the London Classical Players. Having crossed another rubicon with an iconoclastic Wagner album in 1995, he moved on once again, and began to bring 'period' principles to symphony orchestras.

Norrington's tenacious commitment to pure tone, on both historical and aesthetic grounds, continues to ruffle feathers once applied to the music of Mahler, Elgar and beyond; but it is thanks to him, as much as anyone else, that listeners now hear and orchestras play the Classical and Romantic repertoire with at least the ambition to realise the scores in a way that their composers would have recognised.

Norrington was always happy to set a cat among the pigeons, in words as well as music. His legacy, however, resides not only in his many recordings but in the work of many younger musicians whom he coached and who treasured his lightly worn scholarship and authority. Having worked as an assistant to both Claudio Abbado and Norrington, Lena-Lisa Wüstendorfer told me that 'something common to both of them is that they were always curious. They were always challenging the score and challenging themselves.'

Norrington's very last recordings were made for Chandos with the violinist Francesca Dego. 'It was a life-changing experience,' she later remarked to me, of their time together, studying and playing and recording the Mozart concertos (10/21, 10/22). 'With him, you want to listen and absorb as much as possible. He would always say exactly what he thinks, but our relationship was absolutely not intimidating. He's just wonderful.'

Sir Roger Norrington: born March 16, 1934; died July 18, 2025

PHOTOGRAPHY: TREVOR LEIGHTON/WARNER

Pavarotti at 90

Decca Classics will begin a year-long celebration commemorating what would have been the 90th birthday of Luciano Pavarotti on October 12 with the release in November of *The Lost Concert: Live from Llangollen* (1995) – an unreleased recording of the tenor's return to the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod, four decades after winning there as a young choirboy with Corale Rossini. To mark the anniversary a giant chalk mural of Pavarotti was created on the fields above this year's Eisteddfod site.

A giant chalk mural marks Pavarotti's anniversary

BBC Singers news

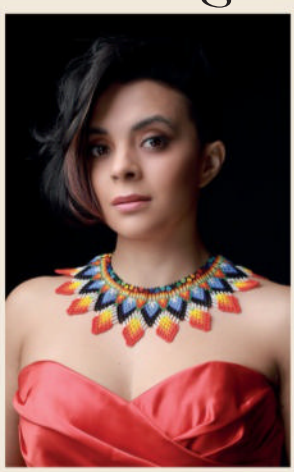
Owain Park has been appointed Chief Conductor of the BBC Singers, beginning in autumn 2026. Park has regularly featured in *Gramophone* as composer and founder of vocal ensemble The Gesualdo Six. He succeeds Sofi Jeannin, who has led the group since 2018. 'It's both a dream and an honour,' said Park. 'With their rich history and spirit of innovation, the Singers represent so much of what excites me about music-making.'

New Higgins role

Gavin Higgins has been named the inaugural Associate Composer of the Three Choirs Festival. His first commission will be a setting of the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis for the 2026 Festival in Gloucester, the city of his birth, which will be broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. The three-year residency is part of a major new composer development programme, deepening the historic festival's ties with modern music ahead of its 300th edition in 2028.

ONE TO WATCH

Julieth Lozano Rolong Soprano



Julieth Lozano Rolong is swiftly establishing herself as an exciting new voice in classical music. Winner of the Dame Kiri Te Kanawa Audience Prize at the 2023 Cardiff Singer of the World competition and recipient of the Royal College of Music's President's Award, this Colombian soprano has just released her debut album, 'Alma' (Somm – see our review on page 78), featuring a varied programme of Ibero-American songs recorded with pianist João Araújo. Spanning seven countries, the recording includes lullabies, folk settings and popular classics such as María Grever's 'Alma mía' and Waldemar Henrique's 'Uirapuru'.

Gramophone's Andrew Farach-Colton praises Rolong's 'warm tone, velvety legato and ability to characterise a song vividly and with imagination,' highlighting her touching interpretations of Grever's 'Te quiero dijiste' and Henrique's vivid storytelling in 'Uirapuru'.

Born in Bogotá, Columbia, she began her studies in industrial engineering before pursuing formal training in opera. Her musical identity blends the rhythmic vibrancy of Latin America with Western classical traditions, drawing on both her heritage and international training at the Royal College of Music and the National Opera Studio. She has since performed Vixen in *The Cunning Little Vixen* at Longborough Festival Opera, Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* at Bogotá's Teatro Mayor, and Aksinia in *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* at Grand Théâtre de Genève.

Julieth Lozano Rolong offers a fresh point of view on both established classical repertoire as well as exposing Latin music to a new audience, all of which very much makes her 'one to watch'!

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit **gramophone.co.uk** for ...

Podcasts

This month we mark a significant milestone for the *Gramophone* Podcast – our 500th episode! In a special celebratory edition, James Jolly, Martin Cullingford, Tim Parry and Hattie Butterworth each choose a standout episode from the archive: Julian Bream on a life in music; William Christie on Mondonville; Richard Wigmore on the enduring brilliance of Schubert and Fatma Said on collaboration.

Guy Johnston joins the Gramophone Podcast

And to celebrate further, we republished one of those classic episodes as Martin Cullingford went to visit the great guitarist Julian Bream at his home. Also on the Podcast this month, the *Gramophone* team pick their favourite concerts from this year's BBC Proms, and Guy Johnston joins Hattie Butterworth to discuss his recording of Arthur Bliss's Cello Concerto with Andrew Manze and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Don't miss Andrew Mellor's conversation with Andrew Manze on page 30.

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GUIDE TO RECORD LABELS

LAWO Classics

In our latest guide to a classical record label, **Tim Parry** delves into the delights of a Norwegian label that punches well above its weight

LAWO Classics was founded in 2008 by Vegard Landaas, a prominent Norwegian saxophonist, and Thomas Wolden, an experienced sound engineer – the label's name is a conflation of the opening letters of each their surnames. LAWO has grown into a powerful advocate for classical performers and composers across Norway and beyond. Combining the complementary strengths of Landaas, with his roots in performance and understanding of musicians' needs, and Wolden, with his technical studio expertise, the label set out to provide a high-quality recording and distribution platform for Norwegian classical music and musicians, many of whom had limited international exposure.

From its earliest releases LAWO has explored a rich mix of repertoire – early music to contemporary premieres, solo recitals to large-scale orchestral works. In terms of both music and artists, LAWO has always been rooted in its national identity. Although this Norwegian focus remains, the label's reputation now reaches far beyond national borders, with international recognition across Europe and North America.

Among the many relationships with artists and ensembles that LAWO has cultivated are long-term collaborations with the Oslo Philharmonic and their former Chief Conductor Vasily Petrenko. Together they have recorded the symphonies of Scriabin, No 2 being coupled with the Piano Concerto played by Kirill Gerstein (Jed Distler concluded that 'the concerto is memorable, the symphony is indispensable', 12/17), as well as works by Richard Strauss, and Prokofiev symphonies paired with examples by Myaskovsky ('what better coupling for Prokofiev's familiar Fifth Symphony than the 21st by his closest friend?' asked David Gutman, 1/21).

LAWO has also worked with Norway's other leading orchestra, the Bergen Philharmonic. Perhaps the finest example of this collaboration is their recording of Delius's *A Mass of Life* with Sir Mark Elder (1/24), which was shortlisted for a *Gramophone* Award (Andrew Achenbach, choosing it as his Critics' Choice in 12/24, described it as 'meticulously prepared and thrillingly committed'). The same orchestra's recording of Arne Nordheim's Suite from his ballet *The Tempest* was an Editor's Choice in 5/23.

As one might expect, LAWO's closest collaborations have been with Norwegian artists. The Engegård Quartet have made a strong impression in Mozart, with David Threasher lauding their 'charismatic music-making' (A/21). The organists Kåre Nordstoga and Anders Eidsten Dahl have recorded extensively, the former surveying the organ works of JS Bach and also accompanying his younger compatriot Tine Thing Helseth on an evergreen programme of works for trumpet and organ, 'Magical Memories' (an Editor's Choice in 8/21). Albums by the mezzo-soprano Marianne Beate Kielland and pianist Nils Anders Mortensen range from Second Viennese School rarities (6/13) and accomplished Grieg (A/14; Andrew Mellor referenced their 'pristine and musically moving account' of the song cycle *Haugtussa* in his *Gramophone* Collection – 2/21), to the more familiar pastures of Mozart (4/17). Among many living Norwegian composers LAWO has championed is Ketil Hvoslef (born 1939), including an extensive survey of his chamber music ('a sit-and-and-listen treat' was *Gramophone*'s verdict on Vol 6, 11/19).

IN THE NEW EDITION OF OPERA NOW

Editor **Hattie Butterworth** introduces the Summer issue of Gramophone's sister title

The Autumn issue of *Opera Now* has an American focus, beginning with our cover star, the Finnish-American tenor Miles Mykkanen. He speaks to us about his Metropolitan Opera debut in Mason Bates's premiere *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. Mykkanen shares his journey to singing on the world stage, setting up his music festival and living closely to his beliefs and identity.

Conductor Daniela Candillari speaks to the Editor about her career in new opera, early influences in her native Serbia and Slovenia, debuting in the UK and leading the Opera Theater of Saint Louis.

Gerald Finley speaks about playing the ruthless and manipulative Scarpia in the Royal Opera's new production of *Tosca*. Holly Baker meets Francesca Zambello, Artistic Director of the Kennedy Center. Our Young Artist Programme focus looks at the Berlin Staatsoper's International Opera Studio, while our small company focus is the London-based Gothic Opera, whose production of *De Vampyr* last autumn was widely praised. Finally, as opera houses release future plans, we give our top picks of the 2025/26 season.

For details of how to subscribe, visit **magsubscriptions.com/music**

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...*

Sir András Schiff

The pianist reflects on winning this year's Praemium Imperiale Award

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOANNA BERGIN

Congratulations on winning the Japan Art Association's annual prize for music. In your acceptance video, you spoke eloquently about music needing to emerge from silence and return to silence, despite our living in a noisy world. Can you elaborate on this?
We live in a very noisy world. It amazes me how insensitive most people are to noise – traffic, construction, lawnmowers, etc. And wherever you go – airports, shops, restaurants, hotels, elevators, even toilets – you are bombarded by music, whether you want it or not. In many modern concert halls the air conditioning system is so loud that it completely destroys the overtones of the music. Are most people afraid of silence? Does it make them feel uncomfortable?

Do you think people – perhaps especially young people – need to learn how to listen?
Yes, absolutely. It comes with education and experience. Not by birth.

The Praemium Imperiale celebrates excellence in several artistic disciplines – including sculpture, painting, theatre/film and architecture, as well as music. To what extend do other art forms inform your life as a musician?
To me the other arts are just as important, and I would of course add literature. We all learn from each other.

Having made many recordings over a long career, what role has recording played in your musical life?
An important one but not as important as live concerts. My 'philosophy' is that a recording represents your view of a piece of music on a given day. The next day is already different. So recordings are valuable documents but they are not made for eternity. Really, we are not all that important. The composers and the works – they are important.

Can you share anything about your future plans, whether performing or recording, or details of repertoire you are keen to learn or return to?
I am deliberately reducing my repertoire to its essentials. Not increasing it. However, I would love to do much Debussy and record the Chopin Mazurkas on old Pleyel instruments.

EXPLORATIONS

PAUL HINDEMITH (1895-1963)

Ludus tonalis

Jed Distler introduces a 20th-century cyclic celebration of pianistic polyphony

Hindemith's Ludus tonalis (1942) has attracted loyal but hardly widespread advocacy

Two years after becoming Professor of Composition at Yale University in 1940, Paul Hindemith began writing a series of what he referred to as 'Little Three-Part Fugues for Piano', initially intending to arrange them in the chromatic sequence of their keys. However, while working further on the fugues, Hindemith decided to expand them into an extensive cycle of piano pieces, where the sequence of keys corresponds not to major and minor modes but to the composer's own overtone-based hierarchy of tones, intervals and chords, as outlined in his book *The Craft of Musical Composition*. The result was *Ludus tonalis*, a title that loosely translates as 'The Play of Tones' or 'The Game of Tones'.

Hindemith aptly subtitled the work 'Studies in Counterpoint, Tonal Organisation and Piano Playing'. One might consider *Ludus tonalis* a 20th-century response to Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* or *The Art of Fugue*. It encompasses 12 three-voice fugues separated by 11 'Interludiums' that function as modulatory transitions from one fugue to the next. The piece commences with a 'Praeludium' that evokes the free-flowing style of Bach's keyboard Toccatas, and concludes with a 'Postludium' that is an exact retrograde inversion of the 'Praeludium'.

Completed in a six-week burst of creativity in September and October 1942, *Ludus tonalis* turned out to be Hindemith's final work for solo piano – certainly his longest and arguably his most underrated. Although didactic precepts govern the work's overall structure, there's more stylistic and expressive variety beneath the surface rigour than meets the eye and ear. Take the jaunty first Interludium and the inventive dancing Fugue in 5/8 time that immediately follows, in contrast to the elegant and witty gavotte characterising the third Interludium. The sixth Interludium – a joyous march laced with allusions to other movements – stands at the work's centre. And the bracing gigue representing the fifth Fugue is far removed from the nimbly ornamented sixth Fugue. Perhaps Interludium No 9 represents the work's emotional core. Annotator RJ Stove astutely linked this part to Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* Symphony: 'If the funereal right-hand tune and the pulsating accompanimental chords were transcribed for solo oboe and muted strings respectively, they would fit into *Mathis*'s central movement without the slightest stylistic clash.'

Although it remains on the repertoire's fringes, *Ludus tonalis* has not lacked ardent champions since Willard MacGregor gave the 1943 world premiere and Bruce Simonds made the first recording (Concert Hall). Longtime Juilliard professor Jane Carlson (1918-98) earned Hindemith's esteem for her countless performances, and her 1965 Dutch studio recording (EMI) deserves to be revived. Unfortunately, Nella Maissa's remarkable interpretation (Strauss Portugalsom) is undermined by each movement being announced on a 1958 broadcast. Among Russian pianists, Anatoly Vedernikov's technically impressive though musically dry 1961 Melodiya recording is available via download and streaming services, while Svetlana Navasardyan's fine 1980 traversal (also Melodiya) is less well known. Sviatoslav Richter's live 1985 Grange de Meslay performance (Pyramid/Priory, 1/91) takes a while to find its focus after a stiff start, while the piano's tuning begins to slip midway. Among the digital era's studio versions, the sobriety and integrity typifying John McCabe (Hyperion, 5/96), Martin Perry (Bridge, 8/17[US]) and Bernard Roberts (Nimbus, 11/96) contrast with the more vivacious versions from Olli Mustonen (Decca, 5/96), Ivo Janssen (Globe, 3/92) and Boris Berezovsky (Warner Classics, A/06). The late Edward Aldwell's cultivated pianism and polyphonic astuteness is matched by excellent recorded sound on a 1995 release (Pro-Piano) that stood as a reference during its brief catalogue life. Also from 1995, Hüseyin Sermet's Naïve recording matches Aldwell for mindful musicianship, yet with more personal poetry and fire in the belly.

While coaching the Estonian/Swedish pianist Käbi Laretei (1922-2014) for concert performances, Hindemith emphasised the lyrical character of specific movements and rhythmic punctuation. Hindemith also addressed a tempo error in Interludium No 7. The printed metronome mark indicates crotchet=54, yet Hindemith actually wanted it to be quaver=54, twice as slow, which logically corresponds to his 'very broad' tempo indication. In her 1965 Philips recording, Laretei here brings out the music's stark and brooding character, just as Berezovsky does at an even slower tempo. More importantly, however, Laretei channels her considerable virtuosity towards expressive ends, enlivening Hindemith's keyboard writing with vitality, meaning and genuine love. The sonics are a tad boxy and drab, yet we owe Australian Eloquence gratitude for reissuing Käbi Laretei's unsurpassed, top-choice interpretation. G

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Käbi Laretei *pf*

Decca Eloquence ELQ484 0142 (1/20)

Having worked closely with Hindemith, Käbi Laretei's fresh and imaginative interpretation thoroughly dispels any notion of *Ludus tonalis* as a dry and didactic tome, rather than as an undervalued 20th-century masterpiece.

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

CARTE BLANCHE

This month **James Jolly** meets the head of one of the most-admired artist management agencies specialising in singers, MWA Management, **Maria Mot**

Shaping singers' careers with passion

What – apart from being wonderful singers – do Louise Alder, Lise Davidsen, Freddie De Tommaso, Gerald Finley, Christopher Maltman and Huw Montague Rendall have in common? They (and many others) are all represented by Maria Mot, whose artist management company, MWA Management, has a roster of some of the most exciting vocalists performing today. Mot's reputation in the business makes her someone to be reckoned with.

Based in London, her life started in Romania where her father was a bass at the Romanian National Opera in Iaşi. 'To this day,' she recalls, 'I don't think I've ever heard a more beautiful bass voice. He had an extraordinary range of repertoire – he sang the Inquisitor in *Don Carlo*, he sang Basilio, he sang the four villains in *Hofmann* (which are very high), he even sang Dulcamara. And there was so much beauty to the voice. But because of the Iron Curtain, there were extraordinary talents that no one would ever hear about because there were no recordings. There is no legacy. There were no recordings of my father – I have some really bad DVDs but they don't do justice to his voice. For me it's always been the driving force to make sure that I bring the artist every possibility. I open all the doors and I enhance the career at its absolute maximum … because my father never had that chance.'

Maria Mot is delightful company: passionate, hugely knowledgeable about opera and the voice, creative, very open and obviously deeply caring about her artists (particularly if they have children and need to find a good work-life balance). In short, one of the music business's really Good People. I ask her about a singer whose recorded debut on Erato made quite a splash, and whose Pelléas I went over to Paris to hear earlier this year, the hugely impressive baritone Huw Montague Rendall (this summer singing the Count in *Le nozze di Figaro* at Glyndebourne). She laughs: 'I signed him when he was 20. He's still, to this day, the youngest artist I have ever signed.' At the time Mot was working for Intermusica where one of her artists was

Maria Mot, of MWA Management, a home for singers

the mezzo Diana Montague, Huw's mother (his father was the recently deceased tenor, David Rendall – quite a pedigree!). 'Diana kept telling me how her son was very talented. Of course, they all say that! And I remember meeting Huw for the first time

> 'Huw Montague Rendall is the youngest artist I've ever signed. He was 20!'
>
> *Maria Mot*

when Diana was doing Martha in *Faust* at Covent Garden and I said "So how old are you? And what voice are you?" And he said, "I'm 19 and I'm a baritone." And I sort of tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Why don't you look me up in ten years' time?" Not, I hope, patronisingly, but simply because baritones tend to blossom in their thirties. But Diana kept insisting and she made me promise that I'd come to his end-of-year lunchtime recital at the Royal College. I remember being late, and had to wait, so was listening from outside the hall. He was singing the *Figaro* Count and I was completely mesmerised by the artistry and the quality of the voice – it was all there, everything was there. It was extraordinary. And then I came in and I sat through the remainder of the recital. At one point he sang some Duparc songs, and I burst into tears because it was so extraordinary. The artistry was completely overwhelming – the emotion he conveyed.'

Another singer Mot signed early – long before she won the Operalia competition in 2015 – was the soprano Lise Davidsen, now in huge demand at the world's great opera houses. With an artist of colossal talent and potential, does Mot plot a career path right at the start? 'Yes, I'm always a planner, a forward thinker. So I never start with tomorrow. I never start with the immediate future. I always start with "Where do we want to get?" And then I start building backwards. In many cases, the career path is quite obvious in terms of repertoire. But, of course, as you start building the career, there is always going to be a curveball thrown, and then you have to decide whether it's worth the risk or not, because it's not really part of that plan you've initially made. It's maybe too dramatic or it's maybe not what people would expect. I said that to Lise Davidsen, who's also been with me since she was 28, I said that to Huw, and I said that to Freddie, and I've said to all the artists that I've taken on sort of as my children. "The really great careers are not made on what you accept. They're made on what you turn down" – because what you decide *not* to do will really determine the longevity of your career, and its impact.'

For Davidsen, Mot says, there was a very strict plan because right at the start people were coming and suggesting roles that would come – naturally – later rather than sooner. 'Right from the beginning of her career it was only German repertoire that was offered. I turned down everything that had to do with Isolde, because I knew that once you open that door, you can't shut it again. So, basically, for most of Lise's early career I was just saying no, and then convincing people to think outside the box and, persuading people to consider her for Jenůfa and Elisabetta in *Don Carlo*, and all of these things that no one actually really wanted to consider because they all thought Isolde, Elisabeth [*Tannhäuser*] and


With Lise Davidsen at the 2018 Gramophone Awards when the soprano was named Young Artist of the Year, and (right) with Freddie De Tommaso, as Don José in Carmen (Wiener Staatsoper), and Christopher Maltman

Sieglinde. So I was very, very strict with that. And speaking of building the German repertoire, it was one after another – so it was Salome and then Senta – trying to put her foot into Senta before she takes on Isolde [which she sings in January next year in Barcelona followed by The Met in March]. We made a very interesting, quite strict, plan, in which we said she will not sing Isolde for maybe ten years – so when she's in her late thirties – and then after that she will approach Brünnhilde. It was all about developing the repertoire, keeping the flexibility of the voice, and so on. And yes, I did get a lot of inspiration in her case by roles that Birgit Nilsson sang, but also letting her get an understanding of her own voice, her personality on stage, and building it up on that. But you have to keep a dose of flexibility because every artist evolves. And also sometimes, it's not just me and the artists. There are incredible ideas that the casting directors have. And maybe sometimes you accept something in three or four years and so you start adding things to help the artist get to that point.'

The one quality that crops up time and again when talking to a manager about their artist is trust – and it operates on so many levels. The manager must trust their own instincts and experience; they must trust the artist to put in the work and 'play the game' (one can think of quite a few careers that flatlined because the artist became complacent, didn't put in the hours of rehearsal or even show up for rehearsal), but – and perhaps more critical – the manager needs to earn the trust of the decision makers in the major houses.

'Yes it's about creating a relationship of trust with the casting directors and with the industry in general. It is about having no fear in saying no. It's quite interesting when people talk about singers, it's always about the voice, but actually the personality is incredibly important. People don't often talk about it. Of course there are roles that the artist *can* sing, but they are just not that person, that character. And there are roles that suit a particular personality. I always thought that Lise would do Elisabetta in *Don Carlo* extraordinarily well – a woman who tries to keep everything inside, a wealth of emotions internalised. Then you have artists who have a certain melancholy in their voice, others who have virility, other who have morbidity. I don't think an artist will do 100 roles and all those 100 roles will be perfect. But if you make history with five roles, then your job is done in a way. My mother had a great phrase: "Only mediocrity can be without fault".'

A perfect example of Maria Mot's inspiring trust came with the baritone Christopher Maltman's move towards Wagner, something she takes no credit for, pointing out it was Sir Antonio Pappano and the Royal Opera's Peter Katona who suggested it. But Mot built on it: 'When Chris came to me and we started working together, the Wotan at Covent Garden was already in the schedule. But I did look at the diary and said to myself I think we need to have a very good trajectory. Chris's way with the German language is extraordinary – you don't need surtitles when he sings! – and then there's the size of the voice and also the authority and the personality. So I just made it a personal goal to make sure that he gets to sing the large German dramatic baritone characters that he can. His Hans Sachs in Berlin was simply extraordinary. It was a role of a lifetime. He had two-minute standing ovations every night. And that was one of those moments when I'd called the casting director in Berlin, and I said, "Look, having heard Chris's extraordinary Wotan in *Rheingold*, I know it will be his first and I know it's in Berlin, but I really think he will be an extraordinary Hans Sachs".' And she had earned the trust for a suggestion to become reality.

Being a *Gramophone* interview, I couldn't let Maria Mot go without talking about recording. 'I'm glad you bring this up,' she says. 'I have three artists signed to labels: Huw, Freddie and Lise. I have always been extremely involved in everything from repertoire decisions to marketing. I've always been very hands on, but I've also found ways to create recordings for artists, like finding sponsorship or finding orchestras. When I took on those singers I remember thinking – particularly with Lise – "You are going to make history, this voice is going to make history". So my job, my *only* job, is to make sure that she writes the best page of history possible. Recordings are your legacy, and creating an artist's legacy has to be a sort of a *sine qua non* of your job as a manager. And it was the same when I signed one of my all-time favourite artists, Gerald Finley.'

Finley and Davidsen came together on a Decca recording project – which was *Gramophone*'s Recording of the Month in May – Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*. 'This whole *Dutchman* recording was a project I had in mind for about ten years. It was supposed to be with a different orchestra and a different conductor, but that fell apart about three years ago. The only thing I knew is that I wanted Lise to record Senta. The only thing I said to her was "You should never sing it on stage, but it should be part of your legacy, and there should be a record of you doing it. So let's do it once, live." No soprano really likes singing it, it's horrid to sing night after night. I've never met a soprano who told me she loves singing Senta! Anyway, it all fell apart. The sponsorship we had for it, everything, fell apart. So I then had to go and speak to Norwegian National Opera, speak to Ed Gardner, and I found private sponsorship. To record a full opera nowadays is simply impossible – so many elements have to come together. It was so much work, but it was worth every ounce of effort.' Certainly, I feel sure this will be a strong contender for many people's opera recording of the year. G

PHOTOGRAPHY: GRD

NOTES & LETTERS

Write to us at St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or gramophone@markallengroup.com; email is preferable

Wand's pursuit of perfection

I was thrilled to see Christian Hoskins single out one of Günter Wand's recordings as his preferred choice for Bruckner's Symphony No 6 (July, page 108). When he revisited this piece in 1995, Günter had finally resolved a nagging concern about it. Compared to some of its siblings, this symphony is relatively uncontroversial in terms of editions: Robert Haas stripped away any bogus accretions and the Nowak edition is, to all intents and purposes, identical to his. There was a single note, however, that troubled Günter Wand, in bars 112/113 of the first movement, where he was convinced a notation of an accidental sharp came a note early. He studied the autograph score in detail and found what he was looking for: a parallel phrase in the flutes later in the movement (bars 296/297) clearly confirmed the tiny slip. I remember him describing, over a convivial post-concert dinner, how he heard the sound of a young man cry out in triumph at that moment, breaking the silence of the study room. It was his own voice (aged 82). The subsequent re-recording of the symphony with the NDR Symphony (and also Christian Hoskins's Collection choice with the DSO) include the correction. Had Günter remained active for one more year, he would have added this piece to his remarkable survey of Bruckner's later symphonies with the Berliner Phiharmoniker. I wonder, might this be a unique instance of a work being re-recorded for the sake of a single note?

Michael McManus, via email

Disturbing the peace

I echo Andrew Moth's comments about omnipresent standing ovations (Letters, July, page 16), together with US football stadium whoops and wolf whistles (especially present at any stage musical top note or key modulation!) and the idiot 'Bravo' screamed before the last note has finished sounding that ruins many concerts, especially when broadcast (and such a contrast to the seemingly endless silence at the end of the Mahler 3 that was Abbado's last Proms appearance).

I do, though, have to contradict his Amsterdam admonishment! I attended Esa-Pekka Salonen's first appearances in Amsterdam and Vienna as Chief Conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra with Mahler's Ninth. At the Concertgebouw, he received a standing ovation – an indication of a great success with his Mahler in a hall so famed for its Mahler history. I mentioned this to my (Dutch) companion. 'Oh yes, it was pretty good … but we always stand up here – it's our custom!'

Nicholas Goldwyn, via email

Letter of the Month

Don't forget the acoustic era

Rob Cowan's timely article (August, page 20) makes clear that the introduction of the microphone was the most important development in the history of recording, but he rightly reminds us of some of the great 'acoustic' artists from the past. Of course, *Gramophone* itself began in the acoustic era when obtaining a recording of a complete work was a rarity, and as he launched *Gramophone* in 1923, Sir Compton Mackenzie published a little book, *Gramophone Nights* in which he and his fellow author, Archibald Marshall offered advice to would-be listeners. Mackenzie then owned 1500 discs and the equivalent of the highest hi-fi of the time, the cost of which would have been beyond the reach of many record buyers.

August cover: Electrical recording at 100

However, the limitations imposed on listeners of the time are clear from the book, and Mackenzie and Marshall divide it into sections such as Bach and Handel, Pastoral, Bohemian, Chamber, French and more. Few complete symphonies are recommended, Sir Henry Wood's cut *Eroica* being an exception. A list of 'warnings' is also provided including: 'Do not let people smoke when they are playing your gramophone, and do not smoke yourself'. A different age but, as with all developing technologies, this was 'the cutting edge' of the time, in more ways than one!

Over the years the acoustic recording engineers developed their technique so that as their profession came to an end, they could record over 50 players in, for example, Elgar's E flat symphony in sessions in 1924 and 1925. How good it would have been to discuss with these forgotten men how they managed a challenging new technology and the freedoms and challenges offered by the microphone.

Despite the limited dynamic range and surface noise of an acoustic record, that we can hear so many great musicians from a time long past is part of the legacy of an industry which has continued to develop in ways unimaginable in 1925.

Andrew Neill, London

More on novels about music

I'm grateful to *Gramophone* for having published 'Novels About Music' – I've made a list of the featured books and will absolutely check some of them out.

One that you omitted was the final book of Pulitzer-Prize-winning author John Hersey, *Antonietta*, published in 1991.

It takes the form of what Wikipedia calls 'a novel of circulation', in which the protagonist is not a human being but a physical object. This was apparently a popular literary genre in the 18th century. The title character in *Antonietta* is a violin constructed by Antonio Stradivari in 1699. He names it after his late, much-beloved second wife. The action hops centuries, and we read about Antonietta in the company of Mozart, Berlioz, Stravinsky and a crass 20th-century plutocrat, who purchases the violin and keeps it in a display case, purely as an investment. Finally, in the last paragraph, John Hersey himself rescues the instrument from this unmusical fate, buying it with the money he had received as an advance for writing *Antonietta*.

Several years after the book came out, a French film titled *The Red Violin*, directed by François Girard, appeared. It too features a violin as protagonist, and the plot takes the instrument from its birthplace in Cremona to Vienna, Oxford, Shanghai and Montreal. The film's producers said they were aware of Hersey's book, and had cautioned the screenwriters not to read it, and that the plot similarities were purely coincidental.

I didn't see *The Red Violin* and cannot comment on its merits, but *Antonietta* is delightful.

David English, Acton, MA, USA

OBITUARIES

DAVID RENDALL

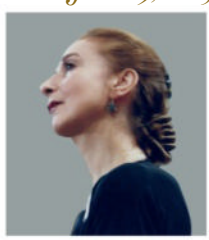
Tenor
Born October 11, 1948
Died July 21, 2025

David Rendall's studies at London's Royal Academy of Music and the Salzburg Mozarteum prepared him perfectly for an international career appearing on the world's greatest opera stages, from Covent Garden to The Met, La Scala, Deutsche Oper Berlin and Glyndebourne. His flexible, sweet tenor voice, characterised by a fast vibrato, was an instrument of considerable power that took him from Mozart to Verdi (he sang both Otello and Radamès) and Wagner (Lohengrin).

Among his notable recordings were Leicester in Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda* alongside Dames Janet Baker and Rosalind Plowright with English National Opera forces and Sir Charles Mackerras (3/89); Puccini's *La Rondine* with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Plácido Domingo under Lorin Maazel (Sony Classical, 10/85); Mozart's Requiem conducted by Daniel Barenboim (EMI, 9/85); and Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with the LSO and Sir Colin Davis (LSO Live, 10/06). Rendall's first appearance in *Gramophone* (May 1978) was as Ferrando in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (Erato), Stanley Sadie warmly welcoming 'a fresh, lyrical tenor also capable of producing hints of passion.' David Rendall was married to the mezzo Diana Montague and their son is the baritone Huw Montague Rendall.

NELLY AKOPIAN-TAMARINA

Pianist
Born January 5, 1941
Died June 19, 2025



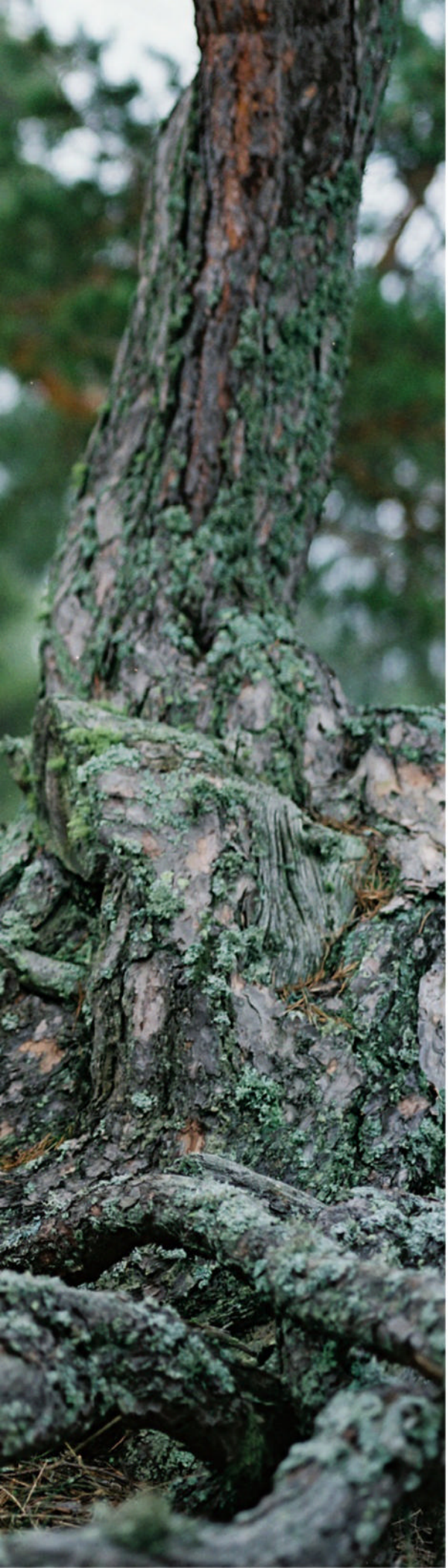
The Russian pianist Nelly Akopian-Tamarina, one of the last students of Alexander Goldenweiser and a pupil of Dmitry Bashkirov at the Moscow Conservatoire, has died at the age of 84. She proudly represented a long tradition of Russian Romanticism. In 1963 she won the Gold Medal at the Zwickau Schumann International Competition and in 1974 was awarded the coveted Robert Schumann Prize. Her early recordings for Melodiya – Schumann's Piano Concerto (1966) and Chopin's Preludes (1970) – were never reissued on CD and are collectors' items.

Akopian-Tamarina was banned from performing in the Soviet Union, because her sister had married a Jew, and she turned to painting. She was eventually allowed to leave the country and settled in the United Kingdom, where she taught at both the Royal Academy and Royal College of Music. She returned to Russia to perform in 2002 and later gave annual concerts at London's Wigmore Hall in 2008-2010, selections from which ended up on a album called 'Slavonic Reflections' (Pentatone, 1/21 – where David Fanning found a 'unique brand of quiet rapture'). She also recorded a Brahms album for Pentatone (1/18).

PHOTOGRAPHY: JULIA WESELY / GUY GRAVETT, GLYNDEBOURNE PRODUCTIONS LTD

Spiritual *roots*

As Arvo Pärt enters his tenth decade, **Andrew Mellor** examines how the worlds of contemporary music, recording, performance practice and geopolitics continue to respond to this most pivotal of figures



PHOTOGRAPHY: BIRGIT PÕVE

Even after the 40-minute drive west from Tallinn, the Arvo Pärt Centre takes some getting to. Vehicles must be abandond in a car park hemmed in by trees. From there, visitors walk the remaining 250 metres through a dense pine forest before the structure gradually reveals itself: an indecipherable building whose zinc roof is supported by a multitude of arboreal columns placed at rhythmic intervals. There is no main entrance or exit; the centre appears not to begin or end. It just *is* – strikingly separate from what surrounds it, yet somehow absolutely rooted.

Whether they realise it or not, visitors who make that final walk through the woods are being prepared, in body and mind, for Pärt's whole aesthetic. As the composer marks his 90th birthday on September 11, we can recognise that aesthetic as one of the most resonant and wide-reaching in all contemporary art. People who claim no interest in notated music cleave nonetheless to the still, spiritual sounds made by the Estonian composer, as his compatriots do to the music of their most famous son. 'He is the one Estonian who is recognised the world over,' says Toomas Hendrik Ilves – the country's president from 2006 to 2016 – when I finally catch him on the phone. 'Contemporary classical music has a far broader audience than it would have reached without him.'

Every year is a big year for Pärt. Plenty of polls rate him either the most performed composer alive, or a close second to John Williams. Unsurprisingly, 2025 is proving even bigger. 'We noticed things gearing up almost two years ago,' says Maarja Tyler, a researcher at the Arvo Pärt Centre. There will be at least 48 Pärt-themed concerts in Australia alone, and plenty more in the Philippines, Korea, China and Japan, with a notable surge in the composer's heartlands of Europe and America, she tells me. 'There is a worldwide Arvo Pärt cult,' jokes the Finnish conductor Eva Ollikainen, fresh from recording the composer's four symphonies with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. 'People just really want to hear this music.'

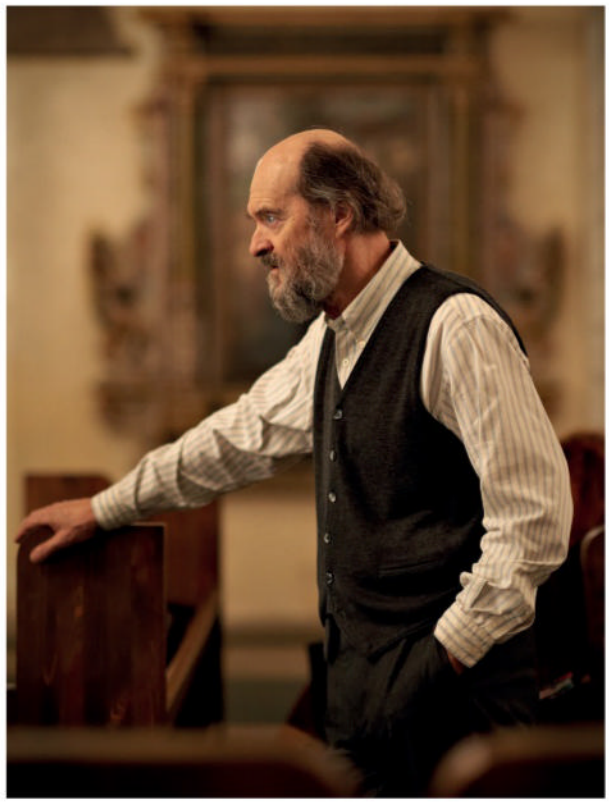
'Contemporary music has a far broader audience than it would have reached without him' – *Toomas Ilves, former Estonian president*

That all began in 1984, with the release of ECM's album 'Tabula rasa' – still just about as striking an introduction to what we think of as the 'Pärt sound' as it's possible to hear. What we consider Pärt staples – *Fratres*, *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* and *Tabula rasa* – sound with as much freshness now as they must have four decades ago when many heard them for the first time on that album, testament to a singular style that has been flatteringly imitated but never superseded, despite all the waters that have flowed under the minimalist bridge. The works remain cast-iron endorsements of Pärt's belief in the fertility of the triad and in the beauteous potential of a considerately placed note.

The release of 'Tabula rasa' also initiated what arguably remains the most influential composer–label partnership of all time, that between Pärt and Manfred Eicher's ECM (whose New Series imprint was launched with the album – a 'clean slate' indeed). Many Estonian and German new-music aficionados already knew about Pärt in 1984, but the rest of the world didn't. 'It was deeply embarrassing for the Soviet authorities,' says Ilves of the success of the album. 'Here was someone they had treated so badly being exalted in the West and considered a great composer.' But for decades, Pärt had been 'giving the Soviet regime the finger' – to borrow a phrase from Ollikainen.

BAD BOY OF THE SOVIET UNION: PRE-TINTINNABULI PÄRT

Ollikainen's recording of the symphonies provides a timely reminder that the 'tintinnabuli' style with which we now associate Pärt – in its most basic form, a combination of two lines, one melodic and formed of ascending or descending modal lines, the other triadic – grew from something very different. The first two symphonies are radically experimental works, the polyphonic games of the First (1963) graduating into total serialism in the Second (1966) – a dodecaphonic score strewn with clusters, sound masses and a final-movement collage that quotes Tchaikovsky's *Children's Album*. Change is signalled in Symphony No 3 (1971), which tentatively feels its way towards the tintinnabuli style and in whose bones the outline of ancient music might be felt. Thirty-six years would pass between that work's first performance in 1972 and the composition of Pärt's Fourth Symphony – to date, the only one that embraces the style for which he is famous.



Beauty, simplicity and tenderness have mattered to Pärt since the 1960s

As well as recording them for Chandos, Ollikainen and her Iceland SO presented all four symphonies in a single concert in Reykjavik. 'The only reason they're not performed is because the materials are poor – the scores are full of mistakes,' she says. Otherwise, she attests, they work well together despite their contrasting content, not least as Pärt's protests against Soviet authoritarianism in the Second are echoed in the Fourth's prescient critique of Vladimir Putin. The Estonian conductor Tõnu Kaljuste also performed all the symphonies in one concert back in 2015 with the NFM Wrocław Philharmonic at the Baltic Sea Festival, Stockholm. 'You can make all four sound like one symphony – one symphony telling the story of a generation,' he tells me on a call from Tallinn, remembering the event and the 2018 ECM release it produced. In the audience was Gennady Rozhdestvensky. 'He told me, "You must always play these four symphonies together – separately they are half a picture," and I thanked God that I had been right,' remembers Kaljuste.

'He was realising that contemporary music, as well as the world, was full of unnecessary noise' – *Paavo Järvi*

Familiarity with Pärt's earlier works is essential to understanding the composer in full, believes Estonian conductor Paavo Järvi – one of Pärt's most tireless advocates, to whose father, Neeme, so many works have been dedicated (including Symphony No 3) and whose recordings of Pärt's first three symphonies were re-released by Erato last year. 'In order to understand where Arvo Pärt comes from, you need to understand that he was the avant-garde bad boy of the Soviet Union,' says Järvi. 'He called his first orchestral piece *Nekrolog* [1960], and his roots were in 20th-century rebellion in the Soviet context.'

Context is all-important. When the Tchaikovsky quote arrives at the end of Symphony No 2 after a surge of dissonance, the meaning is clear: beauty, simplicity and tenderness matter. 'The message, surely, is that after all this brutality, humanity will win,' says Ollikainen. 'In Estonia in 1966, that was a super-powerful statement.' In retrospect, we can easily sense where Pärt was heading. 'He was realising that contemporary music, as well as the world, was full of unnecessary noise,' says Järvi.

Järvi's latest recording of Pärt's music contains the work in which those sentiments came to a head. With his Estonian Festival Orchestra, the Estonian National Male Choir, Ellerhein Girls' Choir and pianist Kalle Randalu, Järvi has recorded the 1968 *Credo* – a work that spelt the end of Pärt's time in Estonia and for that of the entire Järvi family (temporarily, as it turned out, in both cases). When Neeme Järvi conducted the premiere in November 1968 at the Estonia Concert Hall in Tallinn, a reprise was immediately demanded. The score was promptly banned and Järvi senior placed on a blacklist. The Järvis eventually defected to America, and the Pärts to Germany via Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev's emigration programme for Soviet Jews (the composer's wife, Nora, is Jewish).

Credo slams into reverse the culminating musical device of Pärt's Symphony No 2 while employing the fashionable 'collage' form propagated by Soviet composers including Schnittke. A pianist plays the opening to Bach's Prelude in C from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* before a choir aggressively interrupts with dodecaphony and atonality. 'It is a musical metaphor for what was going on in the Soviet Union at the time,' says Järvi. 'You have two worlds juxtaposed: that of real values and beauty, and the fake, brutal world in which he lived and in which we are basically still living.' Pärt was sensing that his own musical truth lay in the triadic scale and a distilled form of beauty whose natural state of repose was silence. But the bravery of his outburst in *Credo* is not to be underestimated. 'I think it was his form of protest at a time when people were scared to voice their opinions,' says Järvi. 'This was the Soviet Union of the 1960s, so no joke – one wrong word, and you were sent to Siberia.'

THE PÄRT AESTHETIC IN PHYSICAL FORM

The Arvo Pärt Centre neighbours the home the composer shares with Nora in Laulasmaa, on a peninsula protruding into the Baltic Sea on Estonia's northern coast (Laulasmaa literally means 'the land that sings'). It incorporates a museum, archive, research facility, concert hall, cafe and chapel and exists as much to welcome curious and interested minds as to assist with the dissemination and understanding of Pärt's work. 'It embodies the essence of [Estonian] culture in immediate and visceral

ways – the forest, the sea, the stillness,' says Anna Gustafson, one of the centre's artistic advisors.

It is also an unlikely triumph of vicarious architectural messaging, in which the deep spirituality of Pärt's post-1976 music somehow finds physical form; a space that doesn't just exude spiritual reflection but surreptitiously lubricates it. However useful Pärt's earlier music might be in clarifying his creative and life journey, it's the aerated purity of his later works that changed the landscape of contemporary music and brought it a new audience. It is this sound to which Steve Reich referred when in an interview he described Pärt as being 'completely out of step with the zeitgeist and yet … His music fulfils a deep human need.'

In the years straddling the turn of the century, Pärt still had his detractors. 'Nobody from the Boulez crowd took him seriously,' says Järvi. 'These people, let's call them Darmstadt leftovers, saw any music with a mystic or spiritual side as intellectually invalid – some kind of easy way out. The bottom line is that Pärt's music is still played and is played more than any of those people put together.' Is that due to a changing of the guard or a general shift in attitude? 'The Darmstadt leftovers had control of the modern music world until very recently. Gods only rule for a while.' Järvi points to evolved attitudes towards Sibelius and Rachmaninov in continental Europe. 'Things change. Ultimately the truth comes out and stays.'

Pärt's international popularity is one thing, his domestic significance quite another. It is almost impossible to imagine Estonia without the composer – not just the country's music scene, but its understanding of itself, its collective tracing of that disorientating journey out of the frying pan of Soviet rule into the fire of free-market capitalism, a process tragically buffeted by the sinking of the MS *Estonia* in 1994, which so nearly stopped the nation in its tracks. After becoming Europe's most nifty digital hotspot – 'a place where digital is native', to use a favourite phrase of former president Ilves – Estonia now finds itself once again under threat from its colossal eastern neighbour.

Echoing Sibelius's Finland of a century earlier, Estonia deals with Russia's overbearing presence by continuing to invest in the arts, knowing that independence depends on identity. Tallinn will soon have a new opera house and national museum. It was Ilves, as president, who convinced Arvo and Nora Pärt that the facility in Laulasmaa should be more than a modest

PHOTOGRAPHY: KAUPO KIKKAS / PACO ULMAN / ROLAND HALBE

Arvo Pärt Centre: everything about it reflects the essence of both Pärt and his country

wooden structure storing the composer's archive. 'I got to know Krzysztof Penderecki,' Ilves explains, 'who had this big centre [in Lusławice, Poland]. I said to Arvo, "We've got to go big. You are too important a figure in the world of music to open a little hut to house your scores. You have to have a centre that is commensurate with your place in the music world." A couple of us, Tõnu Kaljuste and I, started pushing for it.'

Ilves knows the value of such projects. Since the centre opened in 2018, the Estonian government has used it as a space for entertaining foreign dignitaries (in the week I spoke to Tyler, it was the prime minister of Vietnam). 'Music', says Ilves, 'is something we gather around as a symbol of our nation.' That may go back many decades, to the establishment of the Song Festival in 1869 and the pan-Baltic Singing Revolution of 1987-91, but the 'Pärt effect' has added an international dimension. 'People would hear Pärt and then ask where Estonia is,' says Ilves. 'We are a country of 1.3 million people. Not much was known about us back in the 1980s.'

Nor has Järvi let this opportunity go to waste. When he lobbied government to fund his 'start-up' Estonian Festival Orchestra in 2011, he described the country's classical music tradition, with Pärt at its head, as 'our Nokia', referring to the tech giant that put Finland on the map before being swallowed up by Microsoft. 'The difference', Järvi argued, 'is that nobody can buy Arvo Pärt.'

It's easy to hear Estonia's growing pains in Pärt's music; the sense that the one thing the nation could compute less easily than Soviet occupation was the rampant capitalism that came afterwards, for all the essential prosperity it brought. 'There are composers who maybe feel more Estonian to the listener because they use folk elements,' says Tyler, 'but there is a deeper level of Estonianness in Arvo Pärt: I think it is this need to express yourself precisely, so that when you say something, it has to mean something – the words you use are important.'

ADVOCATING PÄRT: PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

Part of what we think of as the 'Pärt sound' is tied up in the particular sonic mysticism of ECM's producers and the performance practice of those ensembles who have disseminated the music most. Leading the pack there are the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (EPCC) and its partner the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra. Both were founded by Kaljuste, who turned to Pärt following years conducting the very physical music of Tormis, who had taught Pärt. 'I needed another side to my music making, and I found Pärt,' says Kaljuste, who believes the composer's mature style is founded on 'simplicity, depth, a connection to the past, an openness to surprise, and – of course – algebra'.

The conductor refuses to draw a parallel between the very pure sound of his EPCC and the equivalent quality in Pärt's music. 'We change our colours according to the music we sing,' he insists. But he acknowledges that preparing a new Pärt work with the composer in the room can be 'two-way traffic'; that ideas developed there sometimes manifest themselves as markings in the published score. As for the composer's development, Kaljuste points to the tendency to view text as form. 'He finds different ideas in different texts. By the time he was writing *Adam's Lament* [for choir and string orchestra; 2009, rev 2010], he just sat down and wrote music according to the words; he didn't use the algebra of the tintinnabuli system any more – although, of course, it's probably in there somewhere.'

Not many composers get to witness a serious development in the performance practice of their own works – one sufficient enough to prompt re-recordings

For his 2011 ECM account of *Adam's Lament*, Kaljuste reached for the more grainy, Slavic sound of the Latvian Radio Choir, but his most recent recording of Pärt's music has taken him into still more varied sound worlds. In August last year, the EPCC joined the baroque instruments of Concerto Copenhagen for a recording of Pärt's *Festina lente* (1986, rev 1990), *Berliner Messe* (string orchestra version, 1991, rev 2002), *Silouan's Song* (for string orchestra, 1991), *Trisagion* (1992, rev 1994) and *Stabat mater* (version for choir and orchestra, 2008) (Berlin Classics, 8/25). The result is startlingly different from the well-established sound of the EPCC with the Tallinn CO.

Kaljuste, a solemn Estonian, springs to life when talk turns to this project. 'I had not recorded the *Stabat mater* before and there are elements like the energetic ritornellos and dialogues that are naturally suited to baroque instruments,' he says. He cites Pärt's 1985 *Te Deum*, which he reorchestrated for his 1993 recording with the EPCC and the Tallinn CO, reducing many of the *tutti* string passages down to solo string groups 'to make it breathe a bit more'. Baroque instruments, however, allow something more: 'You can draw the polyphonic lines a lot better – as in *Festina lente*, which is similar to *Cantus* [*in Memory of Benjamin Britten*] in that there is thematic material running at different speeds creating the polyphony.' His interpretation of *Festina lente* is four minutes slower than others on record but somehow far more animated. 'You open a magical world with a piece like this, if you use baroque instruments,' says Kaljuste, who has further plans to record Pärt with the EPCC and Concerto Copenhagen.

Not many composers get to witness a serious development in the performance practice of their own works – one sufficient enough to prompt re-recordings. Such is the scope of Pärt's vision, and such is the malleability of his music, which in turn speaks to its greatness. Tyler tells me of the Arvo Pärt Centre's artist residency programme which ensures that composers of other voices, disciplines and nationalities

ECM's Manfred Eicher and Pärt (right) have enjoyed a recording partnership since the early 1980s

Today's troubled world is crying out for the peace and spirituality of Pärt and his music

PHOTOGRAPHY: KAUPO KIKKAS

can absorb Pärt's influence, and he theirs. 'The idea of being a meeting point is very important to us,' she says.

Tyler tells me of the visitors of the last few days – in addition to the Vietnamese prime minister – and leafs through their comments in the visitors' book as we talk on a video call. There was a couple from America, for whom the centre was their sole excuse to make a first visit to Europe, and an old man born in 1935 – the same year as Pärt – who had travelled especially from Australia. They come here, Tyler says, in search of 'closeness' to Pärt; and there is every chance they'll get it, encountering the man himself as they make their way to the building through the woods where he takes daily walks.

Tyler and her staff have a privileged position, surveying the demographic diversity of Pärt's most ardent devotees from their little oasis in the woods. 'The more humanity moves towards machines, wars and aggression, the more people need the kind of music that Arvo writes,' she says. 'There is a very big connection there. We don't need to provide any proof; we can just see it.' G

Paavo Järvi's recording of Pärt's Credo and other works on Alpha Classics is due for release on September; Eva Ollikainen's recording of Pärt's Symphonies Nos 1-4 on Chandos will be released in April 2026

Songs of PASSION

Mezzo-soprano Lea Desandre and lutenist Thomas Dunford's new album of Dowland and Purcell with the Jupiter ensemble is very much a 'family' affair, as they tell **Mark Seow**

'When I started playing the lute aged nine, I was obsessed with Dowland. I listened to Paul O'Dette's lute recordings over and over and tried to play Dowland like him. I had a poster of Paul O'Dette in my room; he was my hero.'

Even over Zoom from the back of a taxi, Thomas Dunford is effusive about his love for the lute. He never once says 'Paul' or 'O'Dette' – it's always 'Paul O'Dette' in full, in tones that gleam with reverence as if he were saying 'Zeus' or 'Apollo'. We're to discuss his latest album 'Songs of Passion', a double-disc set dedicated to Dowland and Purcell, created with the equally in-demand mezzo-soprano Lea Desandre, who will be joining us down the line shortly. So it is a good moment to lean into his childhood and those years uniquely doused in the spirit of the early music movement.

'I would bring my big book of Dowland everywhere when I was following my parents on tour. It was my bible.' Dunford is the son of two viola da gamba players, Jonathan Dunford and Sylvia Abramowicz, who met in Basel while studying with Jordi Savall at the Schola Cantorum and who performed together as the duo À Deux Violes Esgales (named after the title of Sainte-Colombe's manuscript set of *Concerts*). 'So, of course, the first album I released had to be of Dowland. While other people had rock stars, I had Paul O'Dette and Dowland.'

'With Dowland and Purcell, there's no artifice. The emotions are deep, it's in your face, it's raw' – Thomas Dunford

There are plenty of other composers for lute, so I wondered what it was about this musician and possible spy of the English Renaissance that resonated with him. 'You're a teenager and you have all these problems. And then you have this guy who says, "Flow, my tears, fall from your springs! Exiled for ever, let me mourn; Where night's black bird her sad infamy sings, There let me live forlorn."' Dunford locks eyes with me on-screen as he recites the text of the start of Dowland's most famous song without hesitation, and then skips to the last quatrain when he senses he has made his point. 'You really feel like he's a friend, that he's suffering too. Somehow it feels almost like he's a part of me. When I play Dowland's music on the lute, I really know the guy, and I really love the guy.'

In 2012, Dunford recorded his debut solo album, for which he was joined by the soprano Ruby Hughes, tenors Reinoud Van Mechelen and Paul Agnew and bass Alain Buet. There you'll find as much of a homage to O'Dette as you can imagine, with lute solos interspersed among the 'Songs or Ayres' sung in various permutations – a flexible performance practice of the time as described on the original title page of Dowland's first book of 1597. On paper, Dunford's latest offering with Desandre and his instrumental ensemble Jupiter looks not dissimilar; certainly, there's plenty of overlap in the choice of works. *Sorrow, stay*; *Come again, sweet love doth now invite*; *Now, o now, I needs must part*; and *Can she excuse my wrongs?* all reappear, as well as some of the movements from Dowland's *Lachrimae* collection. But the sound worlds of the albums, as well as what they represent for Dunford, are poles apart.

'I was very young,' confesses Dunford when recalling his debut. 'I didn't control as much as I do now. I would just record and let the album come out. Aline Blondiau, the sound engineer, did all the work. But with this album, we put our hands into everything: the musical direction, the libretto, the editing with Daniel Alay, the mixing with Olivier Rosset. We went through every take. We also did a long tour beforehand with many, many dates so that we could get into the spirit of the music. We even had a hand in the album cover with the photographer – we've been trying to make it really personal. I always put my soul into things, but here it feels like I've put my soul everywhere. *We've* really put our soul into it.'

Dunford confusingly uses the plural 'we' but the singular 'soul'. It's a slip that is delightfully non-performative. We're used to seeing Dunford and Desandre joined at the hip such as on the cover of 'Idylle' (their album which knits together French love songs from three centuries), but here their coupling isn't posed for the camera or a theatrical tableau for the stage, instead manifesting itself at the granular level of grammar. 'She's my muse, she's the voice that I dream of. I'm the harmonic side, and together we're a team.'

When Desandre finally arrives, it's fascinating to see how she dances throughout the conversation – figuratively, that is, though she was already training as a dancer when she joined the children's choir of the Paris Opera aged 12. She moves from listening intently to Dunford's descriptions, to steering the conversation into exuberant chatter as well as meditative stillness. It's not difficult to see why she has been picked for such varied operatic roles, ranging from Mozart's Cherubino with Raphaël Pichon in Salzburg to the fiendishly

PHOTOGRAPHY: PARLOPHONE RECORDS LTD

Togetherness: Desandre and Dunford are joined by Jupiter on the new album – forming a dream team capable of plumbing the depths of emotion in Dowland and Purcell

challenging title-role of Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Médée* last year at the Palais Garnier. That production was conducted by William Christie, a mentor to Desandre since she joined his elite Le Jardin des Voix in 2015.

While she is at home on the operatic stage, Desandre adores the intimacy of singing with just the lute. 'Thomas is very inspiring. He is always connected to the music, he really wants to be at the service of the music. It's never about himself or his ego – it's about the music. I also admire his improvisation skills. He has such a mastery of this art. It inspires us to let go, to stop thinking and just be in the moment with him.'

Their portrait of Jupiter as a family who eat, swim and make music together is joyous. Even in their downtime, the ensemble members seek out shaded corners to compose in collaboration – something that tends to occur in pauses on long lavender-scented walks during which they in any case sing (presumably in four-part harmony). Dunford describes Doug Balliett, who plays the baroque bass on the album, as being 'like a brother' to him; and similarly, gambist Myriam Rignol as 'like a sister' – he's known her since they were 14. 'It really is a family album,' he concludes. Violinists Louise Ayrton and Ruiqi Ren, who work in sublime telepathy on the album, are more recent yet deeply enmeshed additions to this musical family.

'When it's the lute alone, of course, it's poetry and all that, but I like shaping the music with friends' – *Thomas Dunford*

I'm lucky to get hold of an early preview of 'Songs of Passion', and even on this unmastered version, various arrangements testify to that feeling of togetherness. Especially when compared with the versions from 13 years ago, we can hear in Dunford a musician who is much more interested in collective invention and spontaneous surrender. Dowland's *The Frog Galliard*, for example, which admittedly was already a stunning lute solo, is now transformed into a self-assured collaboration. Dunford describes it: 'I start with an "A" section on just the lute. And then we get to Dowland's genius where he doubles with the strings. He was just such a natural musician and does what, say, Jacob Collier would do now, or what Bach did. He simply thinks, "How can the lute sound even better?" Well, it sounds even better with viols doubling the line where they can phrase at the same time. When it's the lute alone, of course, it's poetry and all that, but I like shaping the music with friends.' Dunford's ornamental tracery that comes in and out of being the melody is a wonder to behold. It breathes along that delicate line of support and soloistic shine.

But Dowland is only one half of the story. 'Songs of Passion' is a double album that Dunford very much conceived in the vein of two 'best of' collections. For the Dowland side, he merely had to dip and pick – 'in my mind, I have the entire Dowland catalogue'; whereas for the Purcell side, they decided

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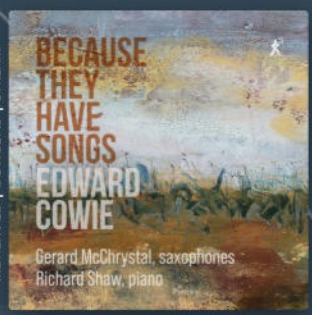

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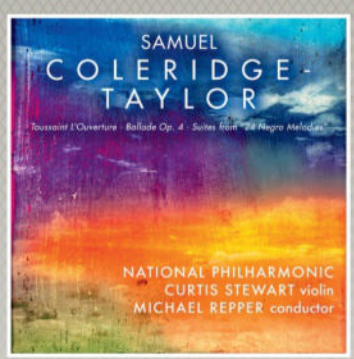

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to present *The Fairy Queen* and *Dido and Aeneas* in the form of 'mini-operas'. He describes the ease and speed of putting together the programme, and how, somewhat unusually, the order of the pieces hasn't changed since the concerts. 'I wanted to create a kind of Shakespearean programme. With Dowland and Purcell, there's no artifice. It's not like French music with its ornaments and all that. The emotions are deep, it's in your face, it's raw.'

'From a technical point of view, it's the same for me,' explains Desandre when asked to compare what it's like to perform the two English composers. 'Whether it's Bellini, Schubert or Purcell, I try to sing with the same technique.' The bigger challenge for Desandre is that English is not her mother tongue (of which she usefully has two: French and Italian). She tells me how a lot of coaching helped to shake off the influence of 'American English' from her childhood, and how that process revealed subtleties of meaning. From a creative point of view, however, getting to grips with Purcell was fairly straightforward for Desandre, as his music and texts are 'much more dramatic; the story is clearer'; but Dowland was challenging, as he is 'much more poetic and metaphorical'.

I think of Dowland's 'night's black bird', which was conjured earlier in our conversation, and then the 'blackbird singing in the dead of night' – words by Paul McCartney, set to a musical accompaniment inspired by the Bourrée from Bach's Lute Suite in E minor, BWV996. Last year, Dunford released his own cover of *Blackbird* on 'The Other Side' – an EP that embraces the singer-songwriting side of the lutenist, which I expect we will see much more of in the future (conducting, he tells me, is also on the cards). Dunford seems to relish joining up these threads separated by centuries, reminding us that Dowland, like McCartney and himself, was just a 'guy' who strummed on an instrument.

'Have you seen *Tous les matins du monde*?' Dunford excitedly asks me, referring to the 1991 film about Marin Marais and Sainte-Colombe. 'For me, Dowland is like Sainte-Colombe. He's the introvert, who doesn't really care about what you should or should not do. Purcell is a little more diplomatic and knows how to work with the world. They're both geniuses in their own right, but there's something a little eccentric about Dowland. Dowland will go to the deepest harmonies of hell.'

The way that Dunford describes communing with these historical composers in such terms of pally familiarity might be down to recent company. He has just finished assisting Sir John Eliot Gardiner and the newly established Constellation Choir and Orchestra on a tour of Bach cantatas. This included a concert in Leipzig's Thomaskirche where the 18th-century cantor's skeleton is ostensibly buried. 'We're performing his music three hundred years later, but it's just a time difference. It's the same music played in the same place. Somehow, Bach was doing his music through a different situation.' Seemingly talking of the pantheon of composers, of which Bach is up there with Dowland (and not the other way around), Dunford assures me that 'their spirits still shine on'.

Desandre, on the other hand, seems more to channel personal experience. At the time of recording Purcell's 'O let me weep' (from *The Fairy Queen*), she found herself unexpectedly tapping into what I assume to be recent events, as its text intensely resonated with her. 'After recording for a few days with lots of people, we were now in a very intimate group,' she recalls with a tender slowness. 'It was the end of the day. We had a kind of religious moment. When recording, you normally have to be very careful and keep control of everything; but after recording the piece a few times, for one take I opened something in myself. I let go of emotions inside me, and I started to cry; we decided to keep most of that take. I remember opening my eyes, in a way to say sorry to my colleagues for becoming overwhelmed, but we were all looking at each other, connected together in emotion. It was a very special and magical moment. You don't have many like that in recording.'

'We were all connected in emotion – a very special, magical moment. You don't have many like that in recording' – *Lea Desandre*

We pause collectively in our respective places separated by screens, knowing full well how these moments are rare even in the most successful of musical careers. 'During that take, Lea was really acting – but like a great actress, you know, not pretending. She was actually really feeling what it is to lose someone, to know that you'll never see that person any more. We were all fully connected to her, in full service to that emotion.' G

'Songs of Passion' (Erato) is released on September 12

Joined at the hip: Desandre and Dunford have long enjoyed recording together

PHOTOGRAPHY: PARLOPHONE RECORDS LTD

Symphonic champion

Could a composer ask for a more sincere and committed advocate than conductor Andrew Manze? As he releases a new recording with his beloved RLPO, he chats with **Andrew Mellor** about his many and varied projects and plans

Know a Vaughan Williams sceptic? Send them Andrew Manze's way. If his personal enthusiasm can't convert them, his series of recordings with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra will – as they have this magazine's critics, who handed the last instalment a *Gramophone* Award in 2024. 'Twice in my life I've conducted Vaughan Williams's Fifth Symphony with an orchestra that has never played it before – one of them the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra,' Manze tells me. 'It was like watering a plant: there was this gradual opening up in the rehearsal, a sort of, "Wow, this is really something." It was incredibly moving to witness; good musicians meeting great music.'

When Manze introduced the NDR Radiophilharmonie in Hanover to Vaughan Williams's Sixth, the orchestra promptly offered him its chief conductorship, a post he held for nine years from 2014. 'Of course, it blew everyone away, because it's that sort of piece,' says Manze; 'and that's something about great music, that if you come to it without preconceptions, you are more open to its power.'

If British musicians and audiences can have preconceptions about the likes of Sir Edward Elgar and Vaughan Williams, their European counterparts tend to exist in blissful ignorance. The music of those composers can sound vitally different on the Continent, with an illuminating expressionism and lack of musical and cultural baggage. Manze's 2022 Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival performance of Elgar's Symphony No 1 with his NDR orchestra is on YouTube for anyone to see. The players react with visceral power to the symphony's final pages, flying in the face of the idea of Elgar as buttoned-up.

'I didn't really tell them what to do,' Manze says of the performance. 'I did share a couple of ideas with them – for example, everyone abroad has heard of the British stiff upper lip, but what they never think about is what the lower lip is doing. The upper lip can be stiff in Elgar, but the lower lip is wobbling away and there are tears in the eyes. I came rather late to Elgar because I was put off by the pomp. Then I realised it was the lower lip, not the upper lip, that really excites me about him.'

'Now I'm really excited about Bliss. There are some really fantastic pieces. I hope we can get him back onto the musical menu'

A few weeks after we talk on a video call – Manze at home in the Derbyshire Peak District – the conductor is off to Spain for another Vaughan Williams debut: the Fifth with the Gran Canaria Philharmonic Orchestra. 'They asked for it – amazingly!' he beams. I ask if he'd be so confident taking his latest musical discovery, Sir Arthur Bliss, into Europe. 'I'm doing it! Bliss's *Colour Symphony* with the Dresden Philharmonic in a few months. I suggested it, it fitted their season's theme and it's Bliss's anniversary year. They said yes.'

Manze's new-found enthusiasm for Bliss is the sweet fruit of a moment of adversity. Last year, he was due to perform Vaughan Williams's Piano Concerto with the RLPO and Mark Bebbington, until the pianist broke a finger two weeks before. As the concert was being supported by the Bliss Trust, cellist Guy Johnston suggested Manze replace the Vaughan Williams with Bliss's Cello Concerto, first performed in 1970 by its dedicatee, Mstislav Rostropovich. 'Even the cellists in the orchestra didn't know that Bliss had written a cello concerto,' says Manze, who had never conducted music by the composer before. The concerts proved interesting enough for recording plans to be hatched, with a date available two months later, in January this year.

'It's interesting, to note what happens to a piece of music when the players are not playing it,' says Manze, referring to the time that elapsed between the concert and the recording. 'The music is sort of sinking down, macerating.' By the end of the first recording session, in the morning, things were flying. Then came the afternoon takes. 'We did the last movement, which is the most difficult to get your head round and fiendishly tricky for Guy. We finished, I saw a look come into Guy's eye, and he asked if we could record the first movement again. We did it, of course, and what we recorded became the first movement you hear on the recording.'

The process turned Manze on to Bliss, a composer he had 'puzzled over' before. 'Now I'm really excited,' he says with his characteristic puppyish enthusiasm. 'I wouldn't say there are masterpieces all along the way, but there are some really fantastic pieces. I hope he is another composer we could get back on to the musical menu.'

That is not all. Manze and the label Onyx have been busy on Hope Street, also finding time to record music by Holst and Butterworth with the RLPO, including the latter's *A Shropshire Lad* and *The Banks of Green Willow* and the former's *A Fugal Concerto* and *St Paul's Suite*. Manze shoots down the term 'cowpat music', but I ask if the Butterworth idylls, in particular, need care in order not to sound cloyingly sentimental. 'I take your point. What appeals to me about the music is not the actual folk songs, but everything else – what's around the edges, the creativity with which he builds it in.'

Manze has found an ideal partner for this repertoire in the RLPO, an orchestra he apparently can hardly praise highly enough and frequently refers to in the same breath as the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. 'Liverpool and the Concertgebouw are rather similar,' he observes, 'because, of course, they are great orchestras with egos in them, but they are egos that are willing to meet and connect with the other egos. That, to me, is what makes a wonderful orchestra.'

The feeling is apparently mutual, and the RLPO appointed Manze Principal Guest Conductor in 2018 (he has held the same position at the Scottish Chamber Orchestra since 2024). Following a combined 17 years in two chief conductor roles – the first (coming before the NDR appointment) a transformative eight-season tenure at the Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra on the west coast of Sweden which ended in 2014 – Manze is enjoying life as a free agent. Two weeks before we talk, he jumped in at two days' notice to conduct the Danish National Symphony Orchestra in Copenhagen in a tricky programme opening with Anna Thorvaldsdóttir's *Catamorphosis* (2020) and continuing with Barber and Sibelius. In Gran Canaria, he pairs Vaughan Williams with Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 3 (soloist Nobuyuki Tsujii). It's all a far cry from the repertoire with which the average *Gramophone* reader would have associated the baroque violinist Manze two decades ago.

Last time the magazine sat down with him, in 2018, he expressed his disappointment with the early music scene: 'A gauntlet is thrown down – and it hasn't been picked up,' he told Richard Bratby *in situ* at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall. I push him to expand. 'It's maybe wrong of me to pontificate as I don't really follow much of what's going on these days,' he qualifies. There is a reason he stays away. 'Let me put it like this: I played with Richard Egarr for 25 years, and in the last concert we did, he was making sounds on the harpsichord

PHOTOGRAPHY: BENJAMIN EALOVEGA

Conducting the BBC SO in a concert of three Vaughan Williams symphonies (Nos 4, 5 and 6), BBC Proms 2012, before embarking on his recorded cycle with the RLPO in 2015

that I had never heard before – and this on an instrument that basically goes "twang". There are not many people who are creative in that way in the early music world.'

Towards the end of his involvement in the historically informed performance movement, says Manze, he was 'only hearing safety and not challenging music-making'. It was, he says, 'just rehashing old ground. There were many reasons I stopped, but one of them was that not enough musicians were getting to the nub of the question.' He is speaking without relish; rather, with a sort of pained honesty. 'I would hate to damn a whole area of music-making. There are still very skilful people in early music and I admire a lot of the thinking. I use it every day, in every piece I do: the same thought processes are relevant for music by Anna Thorvaldsdóttir or whoever it is. I bring the same questions, I just get very different answers.'

'Early music thought processes are relevant also for music by Anna Thorvaldsdóttir or whoever it is. I bring the same questions, I just get very different answers'

It is a striking reversal of the trend that originally saw historically informed musicians kicking against the ossified habits of symphony orchestras – the very institutions, says Manze, that are now most hungry for stylistic flexibility. 'I did Handel's *Water Music* with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, a normal symphony orchestra,' says Manze, 'and they were in heaven. They probably hadn't heard the music since they were children, it's easy to play, and they did such beautiful things with it. Go to a period-instrument orchestra with Handel's *Water Music* and the reaction will be, "Boring!"'

Would Manze take on another chief conductor role or is he glad to be rid of the responsibility? 'It's nice not to have the responsibility, but if the right orchestra came along and we clicked, then I would very happily do it,' he says. Watch this space, because orchestras do tend to fall for Manze – his talent, generosity, work ethic and human touch. More than once have I received a raving SMS from an artistic leader of a Nordic orchestra the week after he's worked with them. His own philosophy might explain why: 'The last thing you're thinking about as a chief conductor is what you want to do. You're thinking about your musicians, what's good for them, their musical life, because they are tied into this orchestra for 50 weeks a year. You're thinking about your audience, what's good for them, and radio orchestras, of course, have a separate agenda on top of that. You're thinking about the good of music in general: if you don't support the contemporary music of your own area, nobody else will. Your own preferences come last.'

Perhaps Manze is enjoying his freelancing because he's getting wise to some tricks. He has learnt not to accept work the week after certain conductors who will 'either have terrified the orchestra into paralysis or allowed them to play so sloppily

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS CHRISTODOULOU

Manze receiving the Gramophone Orchestral Award for one of his Vaughan Williams albums with the RLPO, October 2024

that you'll have a lot to do to get it back together again'. And orchestras where it's tough? 'I'm quite lucky, because I'm a polite Englishman who uses humour in rehearsal, so I can avoid prodding orchestras and they tend to realise that I'm not coming in thinking I'm God almighty, but just to help us all have a good time with the music.' For an experienced conductor, he is still making enough debuts to bring the odd wobble. 'You meet a brick wall. You think, "What have I done? They hate me and I haven't said a word!" It's a hard enough job when you work well together, but when 50 per cent of your energy is trying to stop people from hating you, that's not much fun. And some orchestras are just not that nice, even though they're very good, so I am not interested to revisit. I'm old enough now just to want to enjoy myself.'

On the subject of which, Manze has a burning desire: Bruckner. He describes the composer as his 'desert island dream', but is clearly also on a mission. 'Bruckner is ill-served, if I apply my early music thinking,' he says. 'I'm not saying Bruckner should sound like late Mozart – although he perhaps should sound more like late Schubert, given they had the same teacher – but you soon realise that the tradition around Bruckner has nothing to do with Bruckner's time; it is a post-First World War tradition combined with the National Socialist project to play him as a bombastic, monolithic monster. He is the total opposite of that.' Manze demonstrates, by singing, the misreading of the tempo marking *nicht schnell* at the start of the final movement of the Seventh Symphony. 'Everyone starts it like [he sings, swiftly, 'da, dumdeedumdee daaa dee de']. Lahav Shani is almost the only conductor I've heard get it right. If you open the score and do what Bruckner says, you are 99 per cent of the way there and the other 1 per cent is when Bruckner is not quite clear enough. Some horrible traditions have crept in that I think Bruckner would hate. This is something I feel quite strongly about.' Manze has covered all the symphonies with various orchestras, including enacting his experimental ideas with the NDR Radiophilharmonie, which didn't have a strong Bruckner tradition, in the Fifth and Sixth. He is itching to do more but, he says, 'Nobody thinks, "Ah, Manze, let's ask him to do Bruckner."'

Manze's return to English domicile status has given him an overview of the shifting sands of cultural life either side of the Channel. An obvious point of discussion is the institution that is the German broadcasting orchestra – the breed of ensemble that has kept Manze most busy recently. 'The [federal] head of German radio, in his retirement speech recently, told a room full of radio executives that he couldn't see any need to have orchestras any more,' says Manze. 'My ex-boss at NDR was appalled – not just at what was said, but that everyone apparently agreed with it. Of course, we can access concerts from across the world at the touch of a button, so who needs a local radio orchestra? But I actually think we do. The BBC Symphony Orchestra did a whole evening of John Cage. Could that have happened anywhere other than a radio orchestra? I don't believe so. They do things that are incredibly important and I will fight for them. But I can see the tide is turning.'

'The tradition around Bruckner has nothing to do with Bruckner's time'

In Britain, it's the bottom of the pyramid that concerns him most. 'I do worry about the future,' says Manze, citing the collapse of music education in England. He entered the profession via the music service in Bedford, where there were four youth orchestras, three symphony-sized. 'Now there is one very small undernourished string orchestra,' he says. 'We have lived through some golden years and in the next decades we are going to see a decline. I just hope we don't *hear* a decline.' If there's a slither of hope for Manze, it comes, unsurprisingly, from Liverpool – and the RLPO's In Harmony programme, which brings musical opportunities to deprived children in Everton and Anfield. It has delivered impressive results over 16 years. 'It's an absolute beacon,' says Manze, 'a perfect example of what should be going on everywhere.' He sounds almost as excited as he does about Vaughan Williams. G

The RLPO/Manze Holst–Butterworth album is due out September 26

PHOTOGRAPHY: COLIN MILLER

GRAMOPHONE
RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Jeremy Dibble is awed by a collection of Bach organ works, transcribed by Sir Andrew Davis and recorded with the BBC Philharmonic, a project majestically completed by Martyn Brabbins

JS Bach

'King of Kings'
Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, BWV542[a]. Herzlich tut mich verlangen, BWV727[a]. Heut' triumphieret Gottes Sohn, BWV630[a]. In dulci jubilo, BWV608[a]. Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier, BWV731[b]. O Mensch, bewein' dein' Sünde gross, BWV622[a]. Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor, BWV582[b]. Prelude and Fugue in E flat, 'St Anne', BWV552[b]. Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV565[a]. Trio super Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend', BWV655[b]. Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, BWV645[a] (all orch A Davis)
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / [a]Martyn Brabbins, [b]Andrew Davis
Chandos (CHAN20400 ◖◖ • 68')

'It gives a glimpse into the soul of Davis, who believed Bach's music was capable of expressing everything from pathos to humour'

Over the past hundred years a catalogue of Bach orchestral transcriptions has established itself in the repertoire by figures such as Elgar, Schoenberg, Respighi, Ormandy, Henry Wood, Frederick Stock, Toscanini, Horenstein, Gui, Melichar, Sargent, Barbirolli, Damrosch, Klemperer, Webern, Stravinsky and, perhaps most prolific of them all, Stokowski (and we should not forget Hamilton Harty's special affinity for Handel, which Davis appears to have shared in his 'new concert version' of *Messiah* in Toronto – 1/17). Andrew Davis's impressive list of transcriptions provides a welcome, colourful and, at times, unconventional addition to this repertoire. Davis and Stokowski shared two fundamental career aspects: both served their apprenticeships in the organ loft (Stokowski as an RCM student in London, Davis principally at King's College, Cambridge), and, later, both enjoyed distinguished careers as orchestral conductors with many of the world's most accomplished orchestras, with which, through practical immersion and exhaustive observation and knowledge of the orchestra's immense potential for colour and polyphony, they honed their art (and love) of orchestration.


Davis creates orchestral chemistry that has a timeless power

Davis's propensity for Bach transcriptions seems to have been triggered by the desire to provide a prelude to performances of Bach's Cantata No 82, *Ich habe genug*, given by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra between 2002 and 2004, though, bar this transcription, the rest were made in 2023 and 2024 in preparation for a recording with Chandos and the BBC Philharmonic. Unfortunately, with Davis's death on April 20, 2024, only *Liebster Jesu*, BWV731, and the Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor, BWV582, had been recorded, so the task of completing the album was taken up by Martyn Brabbins.

The 11 transcriptions on this recording no doubt reflect Davis's particular favourites within the Bach organ repertoire, but they also probably intimate works that he himself thought convincingly transcribable for the broad palette of the modern orchestra. Some, of course, invite comparison with other transcriptions: of the larger canvases one thinks of Stokowski's, Wood's and Melichar's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV565, Schoenberg's and Stock's Prelude and Fugue in E flat, BWV552, and Respighi's Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor, BWV582; and of the chorale preludes, Gui's *O Mensch bewein* and Stokowski's *Wachet auf*. The sound of Davis's conceptions is always fresh and clear, often garnished with the glinting edges of glockenspiel and celesta, the colourful hues of marimba, vibraphone, xylophone or piano, tints of pizzicato and harp harmonics, the more thrilling

Stunning execution from the BBC Philharmonic brings Andrew Davis's multicoloured orchestrations to life, conducted both by Davis himself and by Martyn Brabbins

PHOTOGRAPHY: DARIO ACOSTA / BBC PHILHARMONIC

extremities of the woodwind such as the contrabassoon, bass clarinet and contrabass clarinet, and the climactic effects of the heavy brass. Larger works such as the Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, BWV542, the Toccata and Fugue and the Passacaglia and Fugue embody something of the old 19th-century concept of 'cumulative registration' (cultivated by organists such as SS Wesley, Stainer and Best), where – especially in the fugues – the sense of increasing volume ran parallel to the growing intensity of the contrapuntal structure; nevertheless, the experience of hearing familiar notes in a new context is always compelling and entertaining. Yet, while the sound of the full orchestra is always exhilarating, it is Davis's moments of legerdemain that are most engaging. The gentle *Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier*, BWV731, is pure chamber music, the melancholy flugelhorn solo (replete with tasteful vibrato) of *Herzlich tut mich verlangen*, BWV727, deeply affecting, the gossamer textures of *Herr Jesu Christ, dich zu uns wend'* and *In dulci jubilo* (the version from the *Orglebüchlein*) enchanting, and the 'inversion' of *Wachet auf* with its unexpected core woodwind sonorities and string chorale melody diverting.

This is a wonderfully uplifting recording in which Bach's organ masterpieces come to life through the vigour and élan of the orchestra; in fact the very relationship between the composer's late Baroque world and the quintessentially Romantic one of the large orchestra creates a chemistry that has a timeless power. It also gives a glimpse into the soul and character of Davis himself, who clearly believed that Bach's music was capable of expressing everything from pathos to humour. The fine, forward sound from the Chandos engineers also brings a lucidity and precision to the range of Davis's multicoloured orchestrations, especially those subtle nuances of the hushed vibraphone, the staccato piano or the profundity of a contrabassoon passage. At times, even, one feels an affinity with the luminosity and panache of Grainger's orchestrations and arrangements, borne out by eccentric markings for the players such as 'proud' or 'voluptuous'. Yet the recording also picks up those instincts of Davis the organist for organ timbres which, through the agency of the woodwind and brass, he was able to reimagine through the orchestra's limitless prism. If you love your Bach and your romantic orchestra, this album, stunningly executed by the BBC PO under Brabbins's sure hand, will always be a captivating encounter. Ⓖ

KEY TO SYMBOLS

②	Compact disc (number of discs)	Ⓗ	Historic
SACD	SACD (Super Audio CD)	**T**	Text(s) included
DVD	DVD Video	**t**	translation(s) included
Blu-ray	Blu-ray	**s**	subtitles included
Dolby Atmos	Dolby Atmos	**nla**	no longer available
LP	LP	**aas**	all available separately
Download/ streaming only	Download/ streaming only	**oas**	only available separately
Ⓡ	Reissue		

Editor's Choice
Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral

Marina Frolova-Walker hears John Storgårds's latest Shostakovich: *'The BBC Philharmonic come across very well indeed: it is a feast for both the ears and the mind'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 44

William Yeoman enjoys Raphaël Feuillâtre's 'Spanish Serenades': *'Rodrigo's Concierto de Aranjuez achieves a compelling synthesis of soloistic authority and ensemble sensitivity'* ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 48

Bacewicz

'Orchestral Works, Vol 2'
Piano Concerto[a]. Symphony No 2. Concerto for Large Symphony Orchestra
[a]**Peter Donohoe** *pf*
BBC Symphony Orchestra / Sakari Oramo
Chandos (CHSA5345 • 64')

Sakari Oramo confirmed his sympathy for the music of Grażyna Bacewicz with recordings of the Third and Fourth Symphonies (12/23), and this follow-up volume does not disappoint.

Certainly, the Second Symphony (1951) exudes a variety of incident out of all proportion to its length. This is as true of its first movement's pivoting between equivocation and resolve as in the eloquence of a *Lento* with Bacewicz's scoring at its most resourceful, a Scherzo whose poetic asides never offset its vivacity, then a finale whose concision (as with Roussel's Fourth Symphony, which may well be the model) is demonstrably to the benefit of the work as a whole.

Again, in the Piano Concerto, Bacewicz is conscious of the implications of socialist realism while steering clear decisively of its values; this latter work finding the neoclassicism of her early maturity at its most combative. Peter Donohoe relishes the tensile interplay of an initial *Allegro* evoking Bartók and finds real plangency in the *Andante* with its variations on a folk song. Closer to Szymanowski, the final *Allegro* is driven home with all the requisite panache.

The Concerto for Orchestra (1962) indicates where Bacewicz was heading stylistically. If the opening *Allegro* still follows an orthodox evolution, that of the *Largo* is as much timbral and textural as motivic – its colouristic aspect reflecting this composer's fascination with Xenakis. The ensuing *Vivo* anticipates Lutosławski's formal concepts from later that decade, while the finale makes a virtue of any seeming discontinuity as it heads to a defiantly conclusive close.

Those who have the CPO and Ondine recordings can rest content, but for anyone wondering why Bacewicz is now considered among the more notable composers of her era this Chandos release, replete with its provocative notes from Katarzyna Naliwajek, is the preferred option.

Richard Whitehouse

Symphony No 2 – selected comparison:
WDR SO, Borowicz *CPO CPO555 660-2*
Piano Concerto – selected comparison:
Jablonski, Finnish RSO, Collon *Ondine ODE1427-2 (7/23)*
Concerto for Orchestra – selected comparison:
WDR SO, Borowicz *CPO CPO555 661-2*

JS Bach

'Complicité'
JS Bach Keyboard Concerto in E, BWV1053. Cantata No 161 – Der Leib war in der Erden (arr Dinnerstein/Baroklyn)[a]. Cantata No 170, Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust[b]. Herr Gott, nun schleuss den Himmel auf, BWV617 (arr Dinnerstein/Baroklyn) **JS Bach/Lasser** In the Air
[a]**Jennifer Johnson Cano** *mez* [ab]**Peggy Pearson** *ob d'amore* **Baroklyn / Simone Dinnerstein** *pf*
Supertrain (STR075 • 58')

Simone Dinnerstein has titled this album 'Complicité' to reflect the qualities of playfulness, togetherness and openness proposed by theatre guru Jacques Lecoq, and it has to be said that they do seem present in these performances. Baroklyn is a 12-piece string orchestra she founded to work with on particular projects; they have been performing a Philip Glass programme recently, but here they spend a pleasant hour gently experimenting with and rethinking a neatly chosen sequence of compositions by Bach.

Opening with an earnest arrangement of a chorale prelude from the *Orgelbüchlein* in which strings play the chorale tune while the piano supplies the running-quaver decorations, they quickly move on to the E major Keyboard Concerto, undoubtedly the piece on this album in which those *complicité* values are at their most effective. Dinnerstein tugs the pulse riskily in her first solo, but thereafter the performance is essentially a 'straight' one that happens to be full of life, engagement and detail. The slow movement is beautifully done, the piano line in the central section being set out in exquisite legato over a string accompaniment lightly dabbed out in rapt attention.

The final chorus from Cantata No 161 is heard in a wistful arrangement in which parts come and go in free-and-easy fashion, creating a dreamlike and spontaneous atmosphere, as if individual players were falling silent to listen to their comrades. Cantata No 170 follows, but here the broad lilt and meltingly autumnal oboe d'amore-led sound world that makes the opening aria one of Bach's most gorgeous is missing, the oboe being too far back in the mix and the piano continuo (composed with added harmonic quirks by Philip Lasser) over-cooked and intrusive. The second movement by contrast is one of Bach's weirdest, as snaking lines and unsettled harmonies grope their way through a bleak depiction of the wayward soul. The piano's replacement of the organ obbligato here adds a new and appropriately disorientating pointillism. The last aria strides out nicely, original thought showing in the way the first A section goes from *mf* to *p*, and the repeat from *pp* to *f*. If again, however, the piano tends to delight us more than it needs to in this cantata, the singing of Jennifer Johnson Cano – clear, rich, generously lyrical in arias and lucidly dramatic in recitatives – ought to be welcome in anyone's performance. It's a shame there is no text or translation, though.

As an encore, Lasser's version of the *Air on a G string*-plus-piano is sweet and, yes, faintly cheesy. It is hard sometimes when listening to this album's textures to avoid thinking of Loussier or Legrand (though there is no hint of jazz), but ultimately it is the mutualism and love for the music of this enterprise that shines through. **Lindsay Kemp**

For their second volume of orchestral works by Grażyna Bacewicz, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Sakari Oramo are joined by Peter Donohoe in the Piano Concerto

PHOTOGRAPHY: BRIAN PIDGEON

Brahms

Symphonies – No 3 in F, Op 90[a]; No 4 in E minor, Op 98[b]

Hamburg State Philharmonic Orchestra / Kent Nagano

BIS (BIS2374 SACD • 81')

Recorded live at the Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg, [b]January 2019, [a]April 2023

The booklet annotator makes a virtue of 'Brahms without bombast', which is true of these performances, so far as it goes. More to the point is a broad basic pulse admitting a good deal of fluctuation, especially when passions are stirred in the outer panels of each symphony. Nobility is a keynote of Kent Nagano's expressive direction, as it was for Christoph Eschenbach in his underrated Houston cycle (Virgin, now Warner). Where the older set sometimes betrayed its origins in a certain heavy-set brilliance (take the finale of the Fourth), these new performances more resemble the Brahms set down in Munich by Mariss Jansons (BR Klassik), organically moulded but rising on occasion to fiery heights of passion.

Take the interplay of motifs to open the Fourth: leaning into the down-beat, with upper strings not so concerned with 'the tune' to ignore their off-beat dialogue with winds, or the luminous tracery of violas and cellos beneath them. It takes musicians who know each other, and in a relationship of trust with their conductor, to play Brahms this way. They play as the Hamburg State Philharmonic when let out of the pit at the Staatsoper, where Nagano has been their GMD since 2015. Not that there is anything 'operatic' about these performances – perish the thought – but they resemble less the impetuous temperament of Schumann, elegised by his friend in the first movement of the Third, than they do the kind of 'period' Wagner sound and melos that Nagano has been developing in Dresden with Concerto Köln.

We are told these are live recordings, and one believes it, from the inclusion of passing infelicities such as the poor tuning of the G sharp/A flat not-quite-octaves in the coda of the Third's *Andante* (7'49"ff). The cycle deserves completion, all the same, especially on the strength of the Fourth. **Peter Quantrill**

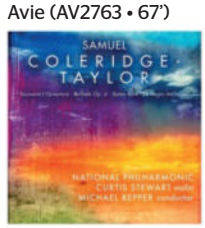
Coleridge-Taylor

Ballade in D minor, Op 4[a]. 24 Negro Melodies, Op 59 – The angels changed my name (arr Stewart)[a]; Deep river (arr Stewart/Berry)[a]; They will not lend me a child (arr Stewart/Roitstein)[a]; Suite (orch Coleridge-Taylor). Toussaint L'Ouverture

[a]**Curtis Stewart** *vn*

National Philharmonic / Michael Repper

Avie (AV2763 • 67')



Three cheers for this most enjoyable collection of premiere recordings marking the 150th birthday of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912). Proceedings are launched with the swashbuckling portrait-in-sound from 1901 of the Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint L'Ouverture (*c*1743-1803), instigator of a remarkable slave uprising that ultimately led to the establishment of that Caribbean

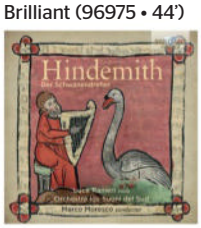
nation's independence in 1804. Solidly constructed, ably scored and always displaying a heart-warming lyrical gift, this 17-minute tone poem in all but name represents a notable addition to the Coleridge-Taylor discography and fully merits the spruce and infectiously committed advocacy it receives here from the Maryland-based National Philharmonic at Strathmore under Michael Repper.

It's followed by the 1895 *Ballade* in D minor for violin and orchestra, a sweetly innocuous essay which, clocking in at around 13 minutes, just about manages not to outstay its welcome. Curtis Stewart is the stylish soloist both here and in his own rewarding and highly imaginative treatments from 2022 of three selections ('Deep river', 'They will not lend me a child' and 'The angels changed my name') from Coleridge-Taylor's 1905 anthology entitled *24 Negro Melodies*. As for the five numbers from the same set that make up the appealing orchestral suite (never performed in the composer's lifetime and rescued from the British Library archives), the first ('I'm troubled in mind') will already be familiar to enthusiasts from its employment in the impressive and often haunting *Symphonic Variations on an African Air* (also composed during 1905). Elsewhere, the fourth movement sees the reappearance of 'They will not lend me a child', while other standouts include the vivacious central scherzo ('Ringendjé: Song of Conquest') and perky *Alla marcia* finale based on a West African tune ('Oloba').

Avie's helpful presentation contains a stimulating essay by Lionel Harrison as well as a download link to performing materials. Boasting eminently truthful sound, this enterprising release is certainly worth seeking out. **Andrew Achenbach**

Hindemith

Der Schwanendreher[a]. Fünf Stücke, Op 44 No 4
[a]**Luca Ranieri** *va* **Orchestra Ico Suoni del Sud / Marco Moresco**
Brilliant (96975 • 44')



Hindemith subtitled *Der Schwanendreher* a 'Concerto after Old Folk Songs for viola and small orchestra', and Luca Ranieri emphasises the songful character of the solo part on his new recording for Brilliant Classics. Note, for instance, the sweetness with which he sings the lilting theme at the heart of the slow movement. I was particularly touched by his deeply expressive use of portamento at the tune's return near the movement's end (start at 7'30").

Ranieri – a veteran of the orchestra at Milan's La Scala and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, among others – is alive to the score's rusticity, too. He imbues the earthy music of the finale with bold gestures and rhythmic brio, and if his tone isn't quite as refined as Lawrence Power's, that's not necessarily a bad thing in this context. I just wish Ranieri had the kind of adroit orchestral support Power receives from the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under David Atherton, as well as Hyperion's first-class engineering. The Foggia-based Orchestra Ico Suoni del Sud play reasonably well for Marco Moresco – the grinning confidentiality they bring to the Fugato section of the slow movement is a delight – but ensemble could be tauter and balances treated with greater care.

Power's Hyperion recording generously offers two of Hindemith's other major concerted works for viola, while this newcomer gives us only a set of five brief pieces for string orchestra. Moresco seems intent on making these slight miniatures (intended for student orchestras) into something far grander and the result is tiresomely heavy-handed. Turn to Terje Tønnesen and the crackerjack Camerata Nordica if you're keen to hear a more persuasive account. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Der Schwanendreher – selected comparison:
Power, BBC Scottish SO, Atherton
Hyperion CDA67774 (3/11)
Fünf Stücke – selected comparison:
Camerata Nordica, Tønnesen *BIS BIS2126 (12/14)*

Kendall

Even sweetness can scratch the throat[a]. shouting forever into the receiver[b]. Tuxedo – Diving Bell 2[c]; Crown[d]; Sun King[d]; Hot Summer No Water[e]. when flesh is pressed against the dark[f]. Where is the chariot of fire?[g]
[d]**Jonathan Morton** *vn* [e]**Louise McMonagle** *vc* [c]**Anne Denholm-Blair** *hp* [b]**Ensemble Modern / Vimbayi Kaziboni;** [f]**loadbang;** [g]**Hallé Orchestra / Jonathan Bloxham;** [a]**Wavefield Ensemble**
NMC (NMCD285 • 63')
[b]Recorded live at Donauhallen, Donaueschingen, October 16, 2022

This first CD release devoted to the music of Hannah Kendall interleaves four works for instrumental ensembles with three solo pieces (for harp, violin and cello respectively). Although each piece was recorded at a different time and place and by different performers, and although each ensemble piece has a different line-up, there are significant continuities – most immediately audible, the fact that players in each of the ensemble pieces double on harmonicas, and that the sound of music boxes also threads through the album (they appear in two of the solo works as well as all four ensemble pieces). Prophetic texts from the Bible, spoken through walkie-talkies, are another recurring feature.

Three of the ensemble pieces are concerned directly with what Kendall refers to as 'the Plantation Machine', a feedback loop of material conditions, their underpinning ideas and their concrete manifestations in sound – shouts and cries, the audible traces of repression and forced labour but also of resistance and hope, echoing down the centuries from the heyday of the transatlantic slave trade to police brutality in our own time.

Both the ensemble works and the solo pieces return frequently to the same ideas, images and sounds in an attempt simultaneously to represent this pervasive reality and to find ways to 'disrupt and thwart' its machinic repetitions and their human consequences. Water is present as both the stuff of life and the medium of transmission for global trade, including that in human bodies. The sweetness of sugar conceals the violence of its conditions of production and the addictive economy of its circulation. On the sonic level, walkie-talkies evoke the police state but also the possibility of communication with other spaces, while the harmonicas that feature so heavily collapse different time layers into a seemingly unescapable present while also representing breathing as that which the body is beyond mere flesh.

Similarly complex webs of meaning arise from the use of objects associated with Afro hair to transform the sound of iconically 'Western' instruments in the solo pieces for harp and violin; Kendall sees the juxtaposition as creating 'creolised sites of connectivity, [which] symbolically recreate the syncretic situation of the plantations'.

Some of these same pieces can also be found in video recordings on YouTube, and seeing them helps to clarify and make vivid the doubling of instruments and other sound sources by the same performer(s), such a key aspect of the music both sonically and symbolically. But it's valuable, too, to have several related works brought together on a single album, with Kendall's intelligent notes helping the listener to appreciate the complex, dense but never less than compelling imbrication of idea and sound in this important body of work. **John Fallas**

Rumon Gamba conducts the Oulu Sinfonia in 'Pictures from Finland', a selection of lighter works by Sibelius and his contemporaries – see review on page 48

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDREAS NILSSON

Lim

The Compass[a]. Mary/Transcendence after Trauma[b]. A Sutured World[c]
[a]**Carin Levine** *fl* [a]**William Barton** *didgeridoo*
[c]**Nicolas Altstaedt** *vc* **Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / [c]Edward Gardner, [b]Franck Ollu, [a]Christoph Poppen**
BR Klassik (900647 • 69')
Recorded live at the Herkulessaal der Residenz, Munich, [a]January 12, 2007; [b]May 12, 2023; [c]October 25, 2024

An arresting ear for orchestral sonorities marks out all three pieces by the Australian composer Liza Lim on this collection of performances from Munich's long-established new-music series, musica viva. Each work has a rich origin story, drawing in the inquisitive listener with multiple layers of context: the solo cello as a healer in *A Sutured World* (2024), for example, responding to qualities which Lim perceived in Nicolas Altstaedt's playing; fragments and wounds that can be repaired to make something new and beautiful from the cracks and scars.

These musically resonant ideas become the catalyst for a four-movement concerto, gratifyingly full of incident and resistant to instant appraisal. Even on repeated listening – to which Altstaedt's centred tone and sensitive phrasing issues a persuasive invitation in this premiere performance – climaxes and resolutions can remain tantalisingly out of reach. One of them arrives as a serene melodic cantilena (track 2, 9'00") at the end of the 'Chrysalis' second movement; another as a carillon of bells (5'40") to cap the more violent third, prompting first another high-lying soliloquy from the cello, then (to open the finale) a contrasting attempt to make peace through the innocent and playful vitality of children's games, in a rough version of 'Simon Says'.

The rate of change in the other two works is marginally slower, the harmonic texture more open. For a profile in this magazine (A/21), Lim introduced *Mary/ Transcendence after Trauma* (2020-21) as music that learns from itself in the way the Virgin listened to the child in her womb. Whether or not you follow her lead, through further sections of the 20-minute score relating to Sappho and to Fatimah, daughter of the prophet Muhammad, you may enjoy (as I did) the sense of complex life taking shape from embryonic gestures.

Finally, *The Compass* (2006) makes the most explicit appeal to Lim's adopted heritage. The didgeridoo part struggles to assert itself against the turbulent full-orchestral texture, more so than the soloist's initial vocal call to attention or the paired flute solo, but that may partly be the point in another piece which, like much of Lim's music, composes the search (often painful and frustrated) for a centre or a grounding point. Annotations for all three pieces are as detailed as the performances and Bavarian-standard recordings. Newcomers to Lim's music now have a clear point of entry. **Peter Quantrill**

Locatelli

Six Introduttioni teatrali, Op 4. Violin Concerto in A, DunL1.5
Europa Galante / Fabio Biondi *vn*
Naïve (V8210 ⏮ • 49')

Say the word 'Locatelli' to a baroque violinist and they might feel

a sudden pain in their back or left hand. The music of the Bergamo-born violinist-composer is fiendish. It's no surprise that it's much less performed than that of his Italian counterparts, and few have the mettle (and muscle) to commit it to disc. There's a scattering of fine recordings, and recent years have brought us various Locatelli concertos from Isabelle Faust and Il Giardino Armonico (Harmonia Mundi, 10/23), as well as Théotime Langlois de Swarte with Les Ombres (also HM, 3/22). Here Europa Galante bring us the first half of Locatelli's Op 4, which comprises six *Introduttioni teatrali* – works that were potentially conceived for the Amsterdam Municipal Theatre as preludes.

Fabio Biondi is an interesting soloist. He throws his bow against the string in the most fascinatingly unprecious way. Indeed, one of Biondi's strengths in live performance is that he doesn't seem to care all that much. Here the result is oftentimes clean, bright and robust, such as in the *Presto* of the Introduttione No 1 in D. Occasionally it teeters into slapdash, and it is this that is catching. The *tutti* playing from Europa Galante is somewhat ropy. Take the start of Introduttione No 5 in D. I'm pretty sure that the effect Locatelli was after was electricity rather than chaos. In the following movement, the *tutti* violin-playing is not blended, and the intonation in the opening movement of the Introduttione No 4 in G major is unconvincing (particularly sour at the 0'44" mark).

There is plenty of lovely music. The closing movement of the Introduttione No 2 in F, for instance, is charming. The playing from Europa Galante, however, falls between two stools and is neither delicate nor sumptuous enough. Again, we're treated to a lovely unfolding melody and tender harmonies in the *Andante* of the Introduttione No 3 in B flat, but it isn't until Biondi's cadenza in the final few seconds that it really catches my attention.

The album closes with Locatelli's Violin Concerto in A. The musicologist Fulvia Morabito suggests that it dates from Locatelli's years in Germany: in the spring of 1728, a musical competition was called by Queen Sophia Dorothea, mother of Frederick the Great, and standing opposite Locatelli in the ring was the violinist Johann Gottlieb Graun. The concerto certainly teems with competitive virtuosity fit for such an occasion, and Biondi does excellently, especially in the dramatic central *Largo* movement, to make it come alive.

Mark Seow

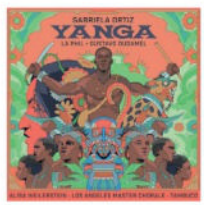
Ortiz

Dzonot[a]. Seis Piezas a Violeta[b]. Yanga[c]

[a]**Alisa Weilerstein** *vc* [b]**Joanne Pearce Martin** *pf* [c]**Los Angeles Master Chorale;** [c]**Tambuco Percussion Ensemble; Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra / Gustavo Dudamel**

Platoon (PLAT27432 • 67' • T)

Recorded live at Walt Disney Hall, Los Angeles, [b]November 1-3, 2023; [a]October 3-4, [c]November 10-12, 2024



Gustavo Dudamel's previous album of Gabriela Ortiz's music featured *Altar de cuerda*, a knockout of a concerto for Maria Dueñas (8/24). And now, barely a year later, he's back with *Dzonot*, an equally alluring concerto for Alisa Weilerstein. *Dzonot* is the Mayan word for cenotes, water-filled caves that are found on the Yucatán Peninsula. Having visited these cenotes, I can vouch for their mysterious atmosphere – the dark pools illuminated in fine shafts of sunlight that find their way through cracks and openings in the rock overhead.

Ortiz gives a painterly sense of these darkly luminous chambers in the concerto's first movement, 'Vertical Light', as Weilerstein swims through the waters in an other-worldly high register. This segues into a scherzo-like section, 'Eye of the Jaguar', where the cello appears to be on the hunt, albeit with feral elegance. In 'Jade', the exotically lyrical slow movement, the soloist's sonorities include drones that suggest something ancient, perhaps, while the finale refers to the Mayan legend of the Toh bird in music that flies, flutters and also struggles. Weilerstein and the Los Angelenos play *Dzonot* with such conviction and technical mastery that I did a double take when I read in the booklet that this recording is taken from the premiere performances.

Yanga was commissioned by Dudamel and the LA Phil, who asked for a choral/orchestral work to be programmed alongside Beethoven's Ninth. The title refers to the 16th-century African prince who was brought to Mexico as a slave, escaped and lived as a fugitive. With the help of other slaves whom he helped to escape, he organised raids on Spanish caravans, which gave him leverage to strike a deal with the crown that allowed him and his people to live freely. The text, by Santiago Martín Bermúdez, also includes chants of Congo origins, and Ortiz employs a quartet of percussionists playing a battery of African instruments that enslaved people brought with them to Latin America. It should come as no surprise that *Yanga* is a brilliantly colourful, rhythmically vital and ultimately uplifting cantata that Ortiz says 'speaks of the greatness of humanity when in search of equality'.

The *Seis Piezas a Violeta* were composed in 2002 for piano and strings; the version heard here was adapted for string orchestra at Dudamel's request. Although meant as a homage to the Chilean singer and folklorist Violet Parra, I hear Messiaen and Ligeti in its musical references rather than anything folkloric. More cerebral than its disc-mates, it's beautiful nonetheless – particularly the delicate fourth movement ('Song of the Little Angel') and the final 'Amen' with its lustrous cloud-like layers.

I, for one, am immensely grateful to Dudamel, the LA Phil and Platoon for their ongoing commitment to Ortiz's music. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Ptaszyńska

Concerto grosso[a]. Double Concerto[b]. Mancala[c]. La novella d'inverno[d]. SE-TA (Sequenza e Tarantella)[e]. Sogno d'Euridice[f]

[b]**Daniel Mieczkowski** *fl* [ac]**Roksana Kwaśnikowska-Stankiewicz,** [ac]**Wojciech Koprowski** *vn* [bf]**Zuzanna Elster,** [f]**Anastasia Razvalyaeva** *hp* [e]**Klaudiusz Baran,** [e]**Rafał Grząka** *accordion* [abd]**Chopin University Chamber Orchestra / Mariusz Smolij**

Naxos (8 579173 • 66')

In Poland Marta Ptaszyńska is held in high esteem. Born in Warsaw in 1943, she studied percussion and composition. She was mentored by Witold Lutosławski and also studied with Nadia Boulanger and Olivier Messiaen, which is clearly audible in her music. She divides her time between Poland and the US, where she has held various teaching positions. Her vast output includes such works as a concerto for marimba, *Sonnets to Orpheus* and the operas *Oscar from Alva*, *Mister Marimba*, *Magic Doremik* and *Chopin in Majorca*. You will find her works on such albums as 'Eastern Gems' (Centaur) and 'Hommage to Women Composers' (Navona), and on a number of Polish labels.

Clearly, for a major female composer she is under-represented on record, so this Naxos album is a welcome addition to Ptaszyńska's short discography. The music is presented in (mostly) chronological order, starting with *La novella d'inverno* ('The Winter's Tale') for orchestra from 1984, which takes

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its inspiration not from Shakespeare but from surrealist paintings by Max Ernst, Yves Tanguy and Giorgio de Chirico (uniting 'elements of the real world with the subconscious imagery found in the world of dreams', as the composer explains). Then comes *Concerto grosso* from 1996 for two violins and chamber orchestra, an evocation of the Baroque archetype, written for Yehudi Menuhin and dedicated to him on the occasion of his 80th birthday. *Mancala* for two violins from 1997 derives its title, as Ptaszyńska says, from 'a number game which was one of the favoured mathematical recreations of the Pharaohs in ancient Egypt'. The Double Concerto for flute, harp and orchestra from 2007-08 is in two movements, contrasting colours and rhythms, as titles of the movements suggest ('Jeu de couleurs' and 'Jeu du rythme'). *Sogno d'Euridice* for two harps from 2001 was composed for the fifth edition of the International Krzysztof Penderecki Competition of Contemporary Chamber Music. The final piece on the album is entitled *SE-TA (Sequenza e Tarantella)*. It was written in 2018 for two accordions and percussion. Here you will find a later version from 2023 for two accordions, percussion and string orchestra.

All the numerous soloists on this album do really well. The Chopin University Chamber Orchestra conducted by Mariusz Smolij plays Ptaszyńska's music with vigour and dedication. Complete with Richard Whitehouse's informative booklet notes, this album is a good introduction to Marta Ptaszyńska's sonic worlds. If you would like to hear more, try *Magic Voyage*, her concerto for accordion and orchestra, with Klaudiusz Baran and the Chopin University Chamber Orchestra conducted by Michał Klauza, released on the Chopin University's own label in 2022.

Aleksander Laskowski

Reger

Romantic Suite, Op 125. Four Symphonic Poems after Arnold Böcklin, Op 128

Gävle Symphony Orchestra / Jaime Martín

Ondine (ODE1462-2 • 67')

Lovers of Vaughan Williams and Delius are unlikely to resist the first of Reger's affectingly pictorial *Four Symphonic Poems after Arnold Böcklin*, 'The Hermit Fiddler', where after a hymnlike opening the hermit violinist wafts in on a wave of serene feeling, a magical moment virtually unmatched by any other music from that period (May-July 1913). Prior to hearing Jaime Martín and the Gävle Symphony Orchestra, my go-to recording of the piece featured the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under Gerd Albrecht (1988), the violinist – a fabulous, sweet-voiced player alas uncredited on the DG reissue – possibly Hans Maile. Martin's soloist, Åsa Wirdefeldt – who ideally needs to function in the manner that Vaughan Williams's ascending lark does, meaning a first among equals – isn't quite so eloquent but plays well nonetheless. The big advantage with this Ondine album is the outstandingly dynamic sound (2019), the best possible calling card for the label's production values, and for recording producer Ingo Petry and recording engineers Marion Schwebel and Jens Braun.

Try the great swell of tone from 3'20" in 'The Fiddler' or the immediacy of the second movement, 'In the Play of the Waves', a sort of *valse macabre* (as is the central Scherzo of the *Romantic Suite*). The second movement of the Böcklin work is an evocation of *The Isle of the Dead*, more austere than Rachmaninov's longer, more flowing tone poem (which predated Reger's by some four or five years). Reger's movement is more eruptive in tone, a nine-and-a-half-minute drama that lets in some light only near the end. The work closes with a rowdy 'Bacchanal', another showcase for the Ondine recording team, and a performance that could hardly be bettered. The *Romantic Suite*'s first movement sets the scene like a passionate nocturne, a mood that returns for the marginally more expansive *Molto sostenuto* finale, the closing pages of which resemble a voluminous hymn to the sun.

A wonderful album, then. Now, could we have the Reger Ballet Suite and the Serenade Op 95 from the same forces so that we can permanently put the 'Reger-as-boring-contrapuntalist' rumour to rest?

Rob Cowan

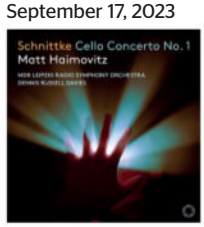
Schnittke

Cello Concerto No 1

Matt Haimovitz *vc* **MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra / Dennis Russell Davies**

Pentatone (PTC5187 342 • 52')

Recorded live at the Gewandhaus, Leipzig, September 17, 2023



The background to Schnittke's First Cello Concerto (1986), of how the composer suffered a stroke early in its genesis and wrote the finale as a 'return to life' on awaking from a coma, is now relatively well known. Yet it can never have been so graphically portrayed as by Matt Haimovitz, at one in his approach with Dennis Russell Davies and Leipzig Radio Symphony.

Earnestness of intent is evident from the start – the opening movement playing for almost 20 minutes, its alternation between stark monologue and seismic confrontation viscerally drawn. Impressively sustained as this is, its rhetorical overkill arguably overloads the formal structure while pre-empting expressively what follows. Thus, the *Largo* exudes a dirge-like sombreness which is leavened by barely a hint of pathos, leaving the scherzo-like *Allegro* with insufficient space to bring meaningful contrast before the onset of the closing *Largo*. This finale emerges from the depths towards an apotheosis that is nothing if not cathartic in import; whether such fervency has been achieved through the work's intrinsic content is, however, another matter.

Haimovitz is as dedicated an advocate as the music demands and those who had attended his performance were unlikely left unmoved. Yet returning to the recording by dedicatee Natalia Gutman is to be reminded that such emotional impact can be abetted by a corresponding formal cohesion, as is also true of the defter if no less perceptive account by Eckart Runge – tellingly coupled with the Cello Concerto by Nikolai Kapustin. Spaciously recorded with an unsparing immediacy, Haimovitz's is a reading that needs to be heard but not necessarily lived with.

Richard Whitehouse

Selected comparisons:

Gutman, LPO, Masur
Warner Classics 9029 63160-1 (8/92)

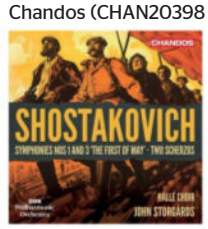
Runge, Berlin RSO, Strobel *Capriccio C5362*

Shostakovich

Symphonies – No 1 in F minor, Op 10; No 3 in E flat, 'The First of May', Op 20[a]. Scherzos – in F sharp minor, Op 1; in E flat, Op 7

[a]Hallé Choir; BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / John Storgårds

Chandos (CHAN20398 • 75' • T/t)



John Storgårds's exploration of Shostakovich with the BBC Philharmonic began with the late symphonies, laden with pain and gloom. On this album the musicians start at the beginning, with Shostakovich's Op 1 Scherzo, composed when he was only just into his teens. From his late teens is another Scherzo, Op 7, and then we enter his early maturity, with the First and Third Symphonies. Storgårds

Matt Haimovitz proves a dedicated advocate for Schnittke's First Cello Concerto with the MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra under Dennis Russell Davies

interprets the early works with future developments in mind, highlighting the precocious anticipations of his later music.

The Op 1 Scherzo is a charming, fairy-tale-like piece, a mixture of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov showing that Shostakovich absorbed the Russian tradition first. Storgårds ensures that listeners can detect the young composer's fascination with orchestral colour. The Op 7 Scherzo sets these interests aside in favour of early modernism, with the clear influence of Debussy and Prokofiev. The impudent middle section (with its wayward piano scales) and the irreverent coda both hint at the ironic manner that became Shostakovich's trademark.

The First Symphony is a well-known marvel of precocity but Storgårds's interpretation is unusual, although in keeping with his approach on this abum: instead of youthful energy, we have here a deeply felt premonition of things to come. The tempos in the first movement are moderated, the march-like theme deliberately pulled back (1'44"). The music eventually heats up, but listeners attached to the spontaneous and cloudless fun of established interpretations will not find it here. The usual wildness of the Scherzo second movement is also tempered a little, and the Trio section is given a tilt towards the lyrical and mysterious (0'59"), softening the usually grating bare fifths. The Trio's very straightforward tune certainly sounds more intense on its coda (3'46"), but it is held back from the barbaric quality it is often given. Nocturnal anxieties descend in the slow movement, from the haunting oboe and cello solos through to the portentous fanfares later. The questioning interruptions to the finale's whirlwind motion seem, in Storgårds, like a continuation of the previous movement's business. The disruptive passages take on a Wagnerian portentousness, and the movement struggles its way towards catharsis. I rather suspect that Storgårds mistakes Shostakovich's theatrical gestures here for the real thing, but even so, he delivers his interpretation with such conviction that I was prepared to travel along with him.

Shostakovich's Third Symphony usually comes last in popularity polls, an ugly duckling that begins with modernist experimentation, then switches to brash Soviet festivities around the First of May (designed as a Revolutionary replacement for Easter). While the piece is undoubtedly puzzling, there is still much to admire: we see, for example, how Shostakovich is learning to structure and pace himself over much longer stretches of symphonic time. Storgårds invites us to immerse ourselves in the experience and makes every note sound significant, as if the symphony skirts the great expanses we find in the Fourth Symphony (and in most of its successors). After the marches, polkas and orations that disturb this primordial void, the Hallé Choir give us a rousing simulation of early Soviet proletarian zeal.

The BBC Philharmonic come across very well indeed, although there are a few moments when the ensemble frays a little during tempo changes. The musicians deliver their expressive solos and duets with obvious relish, and they achieve great power in the climactic *tuttis*. The Chandos engineering brings them close to us but also draws the best out of the alluring spatial effects that abound in Shostakovich's scores. It is a feast for both the ears and the mind. **Marina Frolova-Walker**

PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFF RIANNE YOUNG

Erkki-Sven Tüür revisits the symphony's Classical archetype from a distinctly contemporary perspective his Tenth, 'Æris', composed in 2021

Telemann

Six Ouvertures à 4 ou 6, TWV55

L'Orfeo Baroque Orchestra / Carin van Heerden

CPO (CPO555 519-2 • 81')

Telemann's Suites (or Ouvertures) are often recorded in piecemeal fashion but the six offered on this generous programme were published as a set in 1736. By his standards, they are compact as regards form, scale and instrumentation, doubtless with accessibility in mind; and ever the pragmatist, he provides the odd-numbered ones with two optional horn parts. (The others are given to oboes or sometimes recorders doubling the top string parts and bassoon doubling the bass.) Past the more substantial opening movements there is the usual array of usually short (or very short) dance pieces, with an eye to variety across the set: few genres get more than one outing and there are character pieces with titles such as 'The Runners' or 'The Brawlers'.

The musical stakes are raised in the last two suites. The fifth has more prominent parts taken by the double reeds, to excellent effect; their gamey timbres are a delight. Another highlight, the opening movement of the sixth suite, has the grandeur and formal balance of the genre at its most poised. Whether any of this set will convert those inclined to dismiss Telemann I'm not sure, but his decision to commit these to print bespeaks a confidence borne out by repeated listening. L'Orfeo Barockorchester and their director, oboist/recorder player Carin van Heerden, have an impressive track record as interpreters of Telemann. They respond to the countless little touches by which Telemann gives performers something rewarding to tackle; and when he's at his best (which, here, is usually), so are they.

Fabrice Fitch

Tüür

'Aeris'

De profundis. Phantasma.

Symphony No 10, 'Æris'[a]

[a]German Hornsound; Estonian National Symphony Orchestra / Olari Elts

ECM New Series (487 6994 • 61')

Erkki-Sven Tüür (*b*1959) might be thought of among the more unlikely of symphonists but so, back in the day, was the late Per Nørgård, and while the Estonian composer's symphonies may prove less durable, their earnestness of conception and motivating ambition can hardly be denied.

Its title evoking imagery of breathing and thus creation, the Tenth Symphony (2021) unfolds as four continuous movements between them revisiting this genre's Classical archetype from a vantage distinctly of the present. The first of these draws from its salient ideas a cumulative development, out of which the horn quartet emerges as aspiring protagonist; a process whose inevitable falling short of its goal is offset with the simmering rhetoric of a 'slow movement', then by the impulsiveness of a 'scherzo' propelling the music to a point at which formal and expressive integration could be envisaged. The 'finale' attempts as much through its hymnic build-up towards an apotheosis

PHOTOGRAPHY: TEET RAIK; ECM RECORDS

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that seems the more believable in its ultimate understatement.

The works on either side anticipate the symphony in several ways. In the case of *Phantasma* (2018), various totemic gestures are gradually elaborated and intensified (evidently against a backdrop of Beethoven's *Coriolan* overture) prior to a febrile culmination that is cut short in the face of enveloping blankness. Conversely, *De profundis* (2013) expounds its defining themes at strategic junctures – as if embodying the individual, collective then universal that increasingly narrow before finally overcoming any divide between aspiration and attainment that is crucial to the Western tradition within which Tüür himself now consciously operates.

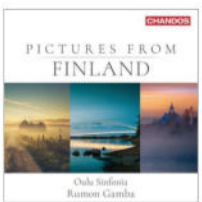
The Estonian National Symphony cannot be faulted under Olari Elts and German Hornsound are resplendent in *Æris*, which it would be instructive to hear within the context of Schumann's *Konzertstück*. Repetition, however, may not sustain the favourability of this initial encounter. **Richard Whitehouse**

'Pictures from Finland'

Kajanus Adagietto. Finnish Rhapsody No 2 in F, Op 8 **Madetoja** Marian murhe (Stabat mater), Op 27 No 2[a]. Suite pastorale, Op 34 **Palmgren** Aus Finnland, Op 24 **Raitio** Idylli. Scherzo 'Felis domestica' **Sibelius** Scene with Cranes, Op 44 No 2

[a]Madetoja Music High School's Girls' Choir; [a]Soma Ensemble; Oulu Sinfonia / Rumon Gamba

Chandos (CHAN20401 • 63' • T/t)



I suppose it is inevitable that an album entitled 'Pictures from Finland' – the title of Selim Palmgren's attractive opening suite – would include some Sibelius. So it is with this latest Chandos release of works mostly from the early 20th century, though in featuring *Scene with Cranes* the focus is on a piece not as well known now as it was, say, 30 years ago. (The Presto Classical database lists just four rival versions.) A mini tone poem formed from two numbers of the incidental music for *Kuolema*, also the source of the ubiquitous *Valse triste*, *Scene with Cranes* is a much subtler and more nuanced composition than its famous stablemate and is given a performance here of controlled refinement.

That Palmgren suite (1904), *Kuvia Suomesta* in Finnish, is a model of superior light-orchestral music, superbly scored, especially its third movement, 'Dance of the Falling Leaves'. It is a wholly more substantial affair than Leevi Madetoja's *Suite pastorale* (a 1933 arrangement of a 1916 piano set) which follows it, seeming just a bit trivial by comparison. Not so *Marian murhe*, a lovely reworking of the *Stabat mater* in Finnish for female voices and strings. Two other composers are represented by two works, Robert Kajanus – better known as a conductor and Sibelius's early champion – and Väinö Raitio. Kajanus's robust second *Finnish Rhapsody* was composed in 1886, before Sibelius burst on the scene with *Kullervo* and *En saga*, thereby reflecting the prevailing dominance in Nordic music at the time of Grieg and Svendsen. There could be little greater contrast than with his *Adagietto* for strings of 1913, a gentle hymnlike work.

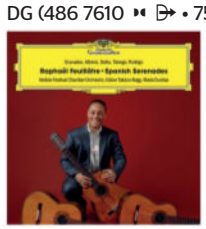
Gentleness is the prevailing quality of Raitio's *Idyll*, an inspiration that would not be out of place in a collection of Delius or Vaughan Williams. Raitio's whimsical side appears in the delightful Scherzo *Felis domestica* (1935) but listeners expecting the compositional virtuosity of, say, *Moonlight on Jupiter* will be disappointed. I would be keen to hear the Oulu Sinfonia, first-rate advocates for all this not-as-familiar-as-it-should-be repertoire, and Gamba tackle that fine work, but in the meantime this entertaining and untroubling programme will serve very nicely. **Guy Rickards**

'Spanish Serenades'

Albéniz Suite española, Op 47 – No 1, Granada (transcr Tárrega); No 5, Asturias. Capricho catalán, Op 165 No 5. Torre Bermeja, Op 92 No 12 **Granados** Danzas españolas – No 5, Andaluza[a]; No 10, Melancólica (transcr Llobet). Escenas romanticas – No 6, Epílogo **Llobet** Catalan Folk Songs – No 5, El testament d'Amelia; No 6, Cançó del lladre; No 8, El noi de la mare ; No 11, Lo fill del rei **Rodrigo** Concierto de Aranjuez[b] **Tárrega** Capricho arabe. Preludes – No 1 in D minor; No 6 in B minor; No 10 in D, 'Inedito'; No 15 in E; No 18 in D; No 34 in D minor, 'Endecha'; No 35 in D minor, 'Oremus'. Preludio in E. Recuerdos de la Alhambra

Raphaël Feuillâtre *gtr* **[a]María Dueñas** *vn* **[b]Verbier Festival Orchestra / Gábor Takács-Nagy**

DG (486 7610 • 75')



Performed on original 19th-century guitars, Raphaël Feuillâtre's impressive new recording yet again demonstrates an extraordinary ear for the more subtle colouristic aspects of the classical guitar that fully justifies the decision to leave his Greg Smallman for the most part in its case.

His inventive transcriptions of largely piano repertoire, much of which will be familiar to classical guitar aficionados, out Feuillâtre as a true (re)composer-performer in the romantic tradition, his understanding of idiomatic translation approaching the alchemical. For example, his arrangement of Albéniz's 'Asturias' transforms pianistic virtuosity into something uniquely guitaristic, while his collaboration with violinist María Dueñas on Granados's 'Andaluza' creates a dynamic dialogue between equals evoking more than the sum of the parts.

The centrepiece – Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* with the excellent Verbier Festival Orchestra under Gábor Takács-Nagy – achieves a compelling synthesis of soloistic authority and ensemble sensitivity. Feuillâtre is entering a very crowded field here, to be sure, but he does so by instinctively occupying the middle ground between interpretative extremes: more structurally aware than Paco de Lucía's flamenco-inflected 1991 recording (Philips), yet warmer than Narciso Yepes's many accounts, which consistently prioritise architectural clarity over emotional revelation. Indeed, Feuillâtre and Takács-Nagy eschew romanticism for something more penetrating: a reading that honours the work's neoclassical architecture while allowing its emotional undercurrents to surface organically.

But perhaps even more compelling are intimate pieces such as Tárrega's flowing *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* and the sequence of his miniature preludes, where Feuillâtre's touch reveals the composer's gift for emotional distillation. 'These guitars are extremely intimate, very delicate, very fragile, and full of colours', he observes, and his performance embodies precisely this delicate responsiveness. **William Yeoman**

'Sommernachtskonzert'

'Schönbrunn 2025'

JS Bach Orchestral Suite No 3 in D, BWV1068 – Air **Berlioz** La damnation de Faust – Hungarian March **Bizet** L'arlésienne: Suite No 2 – Farandole. Carmen – Entr'acte, Act 3; La fleur que tu m'avais jetée[a] **Dvořák** Slavonic Dance in C, Op 46 No 1 **Grieg** Peer Gynt – Morning **Kálmán** Gräfin Maritza – Wenn es Abend wird ... Grüss mir die süssen, die reizenden Frauen im schönen Wien[a]

Tugan Sokhiev makes his debut at the Vienna Philharmonic's Summer Night Concert, communicating his love of the repertoire to the players, who respond in kind

Lehár Giuditta – Freunde, das Leben ist lebenswert[a] **Mascagni** Cavalleria rusticana – Intermezzo **Nicolai** Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor – Overture **Offenbach** Die Rheinnixen – Komm zu uns und sing und tanze[b] **Puccini** Turandot – Nessun dorma[c] **Saint-Saëns** Samson et Dalila – Danse bacchanale **J Strauss II** Wiener Blut, Op 354 **Tchaikovsky** The Nutcracker – Waltz of the Flowers

[ac]**Piotr Beczała** *ten* [bc]**Vienna Boys' Choir; Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Tugan Sokhiev**

Sony Classical (19802 93540-2 • 19802 94075-9 DVD • 19802 94076-9 Blu-ray • 81')

Recorded live in the grounds of Schloss Schönbrunn, Vienna, June 13, 2025

This year's Summer Night Concert by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra at the Schönbrunn Palace took place as Austria was in mourning following the murder three days earlier of 11 of its citizens in Graz. The concert, conducted by Tugan Sokhiev, opened on a subdued note with the Air from Bach's Suite No 3 in D, strings divided, the famous tune borne aloft by the players. Following a period of reflection, the Vienna Boys' Choir, looking spruce in their naval outfits, sang the Elves' Chorus from Offenbach's *The Rhine Nixies*, the melody later transformed into the Barcarolle from *The Tales of Hoffmann*.

It was the choir's first appearance at this annual concert that also marked the debut of conductor Sokhiev and the Polish tenor Piotr Beczała. At 58, he might be deemed to be getting on a bit to sing Don José's 'La fleur que tu m'avais jetée' (Gedda was 34 when he sang the role on the Beecham recording for HMV in 1960), although it turned out to be perfect casting for this al fresco event in the pleasure park at the heart of the old Austrian Empire. After singing his heart out to his Carmen, he obliged the crowd with the obligatory 'Nessun dorma', and later sang two arias from the Silver Age of operetta, from Kálmán's *Gräfin Maritza* and Lehár's *Giuditta*, for more than their worth.

The VPO were on cracking form for maestro Sokhiev. No head-in-the-score page-turner he. He knows the repertoire and communicates his love of the music to his players, who respond in kind. A New Year's Day concert surely beckons for him. It was reassuring to hear the joyful Overture to *The Merry Wives of Windsor* executed with such élan, likewise the revels from the Bacchanale from *Samson and Delilah* delivered with such panache – the screen all aglow in red, puce and orange, flames leaping from jardinières. In contrast, the Entr'acte from Act 3 of *Carmen* is the epitome of cool, the flautist filmed through a water fountain, the music perfuming the air like the scent from the myriad plants in the formal gardens. Best of all is Sokhiev's Hungarian March from Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*, the military precision of the brass introduction fading into the dancing top line, piccolo and flutes answering with a smile.

This concert unfolds in the heat of the afternoon sun, the lights coming on as dusk falls, the palace in the foreground, the triumphal arch of the Gloriette in the distance and, further still, the lights of Vienna twinkling on the horizon. Drone shots sweep over the audience in their thousands, casually and formally attired, and the lingering image of couples dancing the night away to Johann Strauss II's *Vienna Blood* leaves the viewer, for the time being, in a more congenial spot.

Adrian Edwards

Bach's The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1

Mahan Esfahani joins Richard Bratby to home in on dilemmas surrounding the sources for this pivotal work

Esfahani leaves no stone unturned in his search for the best source from which to perform

On a grey morning in Prague, I meet Iranian-American harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani to talk about Book 1 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. The marble-topped tables of the Hotel Paris feel closer to the world of Mahler or Suk than that of Bach, but Esfahani is the kind of artist who brings his own energy with him, and this morning he's ready to talk Johann Sebastian. He orders a herbal tea (he was entertaining friends last night, and his voice is feeling the strain), pulls out a heavily marked score and powers up his laptop.

Of course he does. The first question when discussing scores with Esfahani is, 'Which score?' The answer, typically, is, 'That depends. Which piece, which page – no, which bar are you interested in?' With a work like the '48', he never relies on any one source. Instead, he ranges through critical editions, original manuscripts and the work's entire publication and performance history to conceive an interpretation that feels emotionally and intellectually true. Then, of course, he plays the socks off it.

So anyway, I'm sitting there with a Wiener Melange and a virginal Bärenreiter Urtext; and he's darting between screen and page, pointing to annotations and pencil marks, and busily pulling up facsimile scores and appendices. He's downloaded what looks like an original manuscript, and points to a curious series of decorative doodles – playful spirals of the pen – at the top of the dedication page. 'The first thing to talk about is temperament,' he explains.

'It's the "well-tempered clavier". It's not the "equal-tempered clavier". So you have to find a temperament that works for all of the keys. Bradley Lehman' – he means the contemporary American harpsichordist and Bach scholar – 'claims that he has determined, according to his reading of those patterns on the title page, the definitive temperament. Now, the truth is that it's actually a pretty good temperament. It does work well, and I suspect that the motivation of a lot of scholars who attacked it was anger that they hadn't discovered it first! Lehman claims that it was Bach's own temperament, which is nonsense: I'm sure Bach used many temperaments. But it is pretty good.

'But anyway … what to tell you about my relationship to the notation? Well, firstly, I did *not* record the Tovey edition.' That's Sir Donald Francis Tovey: yes, *that* Tovey, the early 20th-century master of accessible musical analysis. Esfahani is a professed fan. 'But Tovey is a template for me because he talks openly about the options and the other sources, and gives the player the power to make certain decisions. Apart from Tovey himself, and Hans Bischoff in the 19th century, the only other Bach editor who does this is Ferruccio Busoni. I won't speak against contemporary editions, but what I will say is that this approach is different from editions that dictate an Urtext to the exclusion of every other reading. So, for example, we have the 1722 autograph of Book 1 right here.' He points to the manuscript on the screen. 'It's in Bach's hand. And here,' – a click of the mouse – 'this is a copy that was made in the 1750s, after Bach's death. Wilhelm Friedemann Bach made corrections in it. Now, look what we have here – three quavers, a quaver, two semiquavers, two quavers.' We've left the title page of the copy and are looking at the opening subject of the first Fugue, in C. 'Now, let's go back to 1722 and what do we see? Demisemiquavers.' So WF Bach amended the semiquavers? 'You tell me!' Another click of the mouse. 'Let's go to Johann Christoph Altnickol, who in the 1740s copied it under Bach's supervision. He became Bach's son-in-law, and he was basically a very good son-in-law – he did what Bach told him to do. So let's see what he has.' Demisemiquavers again. 'I mean, Altnickol is copying in the 1740s. So this is about almost a generation later, but under Bach's supervision.' But haven't we just seen the 1722 manuscript in Bach's own writing? Isn't that definitive? 'You're assuming that Bach always played it the same way throughout his life.

'Wanda Landowska's working theory was that Bach originally wrote it with two semiquavers. But she thought that led to voice-leading problems. I personally have not found those issues, but she felt that the demisemiquaver version was more graceful and that Bach probably said to

Altnickol, "Actually that sounds better. Just do that." And then Bach went back to his personal copy from 1722, and didn't make a clean copy, but – well, look what he does. Everywhere, he just scratches out the earlier version: you can tell because the ink is a little bit different.

'Times change, and I think Bach just thought, "Well, that's actually much more attractive." You have to remember that by the 1740s, when Altnickol was copying Bach's earlier music, CPE Bach had already published two sets of sonatas. Bach knew his sons' music, and he was learning from it. In Book 2 we have the famous F minor Prelude, with these *galant* gestures – a sort of falling sigh – and it's amazing to me how many Bach authors write that this is a sort of piss-take of his sons' music. Well, I don't see that. It seems to me that he liked their music.'

He pauses for a sip of tea. The brief was to talk about the first volume, and we've leapt straight into Book 2 without getting beyond the third page of Book 1 – no, without making it out of the first bar of the C major Fugue. Still, we've looked at two printed editions and three manuscript sources; we've talked about Lehman and Tovey and Landowska – and probably annoyed a few purists along the way, too. But that's Esfahani for you: two notes unlock limitless possibilities, and the simplest question starts a dialogue with the liveliest musical minds of the last three centuries. Esfahani, as ever, is impatient with anyone – even the most well-meaning of editors – who would limit his freedom to explore, to question and to say what he believes to be true, in music as in everyday

'People make all sorts of assumptions about your values as a person – and that's what scholars have done to Bach'

life. 'People make all sorts of assumptions about your values as a person – and that's what scholars have done to Bach,' he says. 'They have made wholly unsupported assumptions about his character.'

But still, when you were sitting there at your harpsichord with the red light on, presumably you had to decide? 'OK: I chose the later [demisemiquaver] version, because – as someone who writes, and someone who's done a bit of composition, and also as a Bruckner fan – I know that revisions tend to be better. I mean, God, you never want to hear Bruckner's Eighth Symphony in its original version! It sort of sucks. All the early versions of Bruckner are deadly boring!' Oh boy. I sense there's another herd of sacred cows lining up to be slaughtered, but the waiter is hovering, and time is nearly up. From now on, the recording will have to do the talking.

'I don't want to dwell on my process, or semaphore that this is very important music that I've really, really thought about. Why would I torture you with that? I wouldn't even torture myself with that! Saying that the recording is how I felt on the day doesn't mean that it didn't have decades of thought behind it. The "48" is probably the music I've spent the longest time with. I started playing it when I was about 10. I've been playing it for 30 years, and I've never figured out the answer to it.' But this is how you feel about it now? He smiles, then looks me in the eye. 'Let's put it this way – I would've felt equally discontented with every other version.' G

▶ Esfahani's The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1, will be reviewed next issue

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVE HINITT

Chamber

Jeremy Nicholas finds surpising delights in the music of John McCabe:
'As it proceeded I found its contrasting sections, sometimes mischievous and quirky, sometimes spooky, rather engaging' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 55

Adrian Edwards hears harpist Emmanuel Ceysson play Tournier:
'Beautifully recorded and beautifully performed, this is a very desirable recording'
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 57

Beethoven

Violin Sonatas Nos 6-8, Op 30
Francesca dePasquale *vn* **Peter Takács** *pf*
Leaf Music (LM303 • 69')

Francesca dePasquale and Peter Takács had me from the first bars of the A major Sonata, Op 30 No 1. Relaxed, lyrical and surprisingly confidential, their reading is like a gracious invitation. The ornamental filigree in the *Adagio molto espressivo* is rendered with suppleness and tender expression, while the theme-and-variations finale veers between exuberance and, in the minor variation (at 4'19"), determined studiousness. Keeping in mind that Beethoven composed this trio of sonatas around the same time as his anguished Heiligenstadt Testament, I found the interpretation especially poignant.

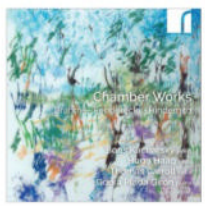
The C minor Sonata is, of course, a tougher and far more restless work. The way these players lengthen the long-held notes and rests heightens the sense of nervous anticipation in the opening *Allegro con brio*, although I do wish they'd observed the *piano* markings in the march-like second theme. But it's a thoughtful and compelling performance nonetheless, and I appreciate that dePasquale isn't afraid to rough up her tone in the crunching triple-stop chords. I also love how wonderfully weird she makes those birdlike calls at 4'25" in the *Adagio cantabile*.

The central *Tempo di minuetto* in the G major Sonata is taken at a leisurely pace but with delectably pointed rhythms that keep the phrasing buoyant. It's not unlike the opening movement of the A major Sonata in its soft-spoken intimacy. Yet given how magical dePasquale and Takács's quiet playing can be, I'm perplexed by how they overlook the quick-changing dynamic markings at the opening of the first movement. Christian Tetzlaff and Lars Vogt show how following the markings closely makes a dizzying ride even more thrillingly vertiginous (Ondine, 12/21). That said, dePasquale and Takács play the sonata's outer movements with verve and fizzy articulation. I certainly hope to hear more from this promising duo.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Brahms · Hindemith · Penderecki

Brahms Piano Quartet No 3 in C minor, Op 60[a]
Hindemith Viola Sonata in F, Op 11 No 4[b]
Penderecki Cadenza
[a]**Boris Kucharsky** *vn* [ab]**Hugo Haag** *va*
[a]**Thomas Carroll** *vc* [ab]**Gorka Plada Girón** *pf*
Resonus (RES10354 ⏮ • 59')



Brahms's Third Piano Quartet, the most personal of his three essays in this form, has been receiving a deal more attention than usual in the recording studios lately, this being the fifth recording I am aware of issued since May 2024, the third this year already. Pick of this recent bunch is undeniably the new DG recording, led by Krystian Zimerman – 'chamber music-making of the highest order' in Michelle Assay's judgement (5/25) – but there is much to admire in this new competitor, performed by three young alumni of the Yehudi Menuhin School, anchored by the distinguished cellist-conductor Thomas Carroll.

Brahms's quartet is the main focus of this curious, interesting and very well-recorded programme, juxtaposing his outpouring of feelings for Clara Schumann (and Robert's fate, too, I suspect, for all the supposed inspiration from Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*), with Hindemith's lyrical, variation-form First Viola Sonata (1919) and Penderecki's occasionally overwrought *Cadenza* (1984). Kucharsky, Haag, Carroll and Girón catch the expressive turbulence of Brahms's writing very finely; the Scherzo – originally intended as the finale in the 1855-56 original version before Brahms rewrote the piece almost two decades later – is full of passion, the *Andante* of romance. It is just that Zimerman, Nowak, Budnik and Okamoto score on points in terms of incisiveness, feeling and expressive ardour. That said, their coupling of Brahms's Second may appeal less to the inquisitive than the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective's of Héritte-Viardot's First.

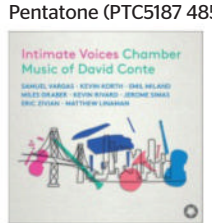
Much the same applies to Hindemith's sonata; Haag and Girón give a thoroughly poised, sweet-toned performance (especially in the opening *Fantasie*) and render both sets of variations that follow with aplomb. While Haag's sound is less raw than Kashkashian's, accompanied by Levin she delivers the more nuanced account; both are outshone by Tabea Zimmermann. Haag gets to the heart of Penderecki's *Cadenza* – often heard in Christiane Edinger's violin version prepared in 1987 – very well indeed, projecting its retrospective romanticism very convincingly.

Guy Rickards

Brahms – selected comparisons:
Zimerman, Nowak, Budnik, Okamoto DG 486 4650 (5/25)
Kaleidoscope Chbr Collective Chandos CHAN20329 (7/25)
Hindemith – selected comparisons:
Kashkashian, Levin ECM New Series 833 309-2 (11/88)
T Zimmermann, Hoppe Myrios MYR011 (5/14)

Conte

'Intimate Voices: Chamber Music'
Aria and Fugue[a]. Clarinet Sonata[b]. Elegy[c]. Horn Sonata[d]. Piano Trio No 2[e]
[b]**Jerome Simas** *cl* [d]**Kevin Rivard** *hn* [ce]**Samuel Vragas** *vn* [e]**Matthew Linaman,** [a]**Emil Miland** *vc* [a]**Miles Graber,** [cde]**Kevin Korth,** [b]**Eric Zivian** *pf*
Pentatone (PTC5187 485 • 72')



Of the many American composers who travelled across the Atlantic during the mid-20th century to study with Nadia Boulanger, David Conte (*b*1955) may not be as well known as high-profile names such as Aaron Copland, Elliott Carter,

Soprano Kiera Duffy joins the Miró Quartet for Ginastera, part of a complete survey of his string quartets, warmly expressive music delivered with technical polish and gusto

Roy Harris and Philip Glass. That said, Conte was one of the last in a long line to reap the benefits of Boulanger's strict and rigorous teaching methods, studying with the revered French teacher in the years prior to her death in 1979.

Judging from his musical style – with its emphasis on clear melodic shaping, purposeful thematic development and control, a rich and varied harmonic palette constructed around solid tonal foundations, consummate command of instrumental resources and inventive use of established formal archetypes (such as sonata form, fugue, scherzo and rondo) – one can easily imagine Conte being one of Boulanger's model students. Such elements appear throughout this recording of five chamber works – from Conte's purposeful use of contrasting first and second themes within the traditional sonata form design in the opening movements of the Horn Sonata and Piano Trio No 2 to the kind of textbook contrapuntal craftsmanship heard in the second part of his *Aria and Fugue*.

You cannot teach a bird to fly, however, and many of the most memorable moments on 'Intimate Voices' appear when Conte goes off-script and follows his creative intuition. In the *Elegy* for violin and piano, for example, Conte harnesses the single movement's episodic verse-refrain design to powerfully expressive ends, while the cello's poignant lyricism in the *Aria and Fugue* emerges fully formed out of a descending set of slow-moving chords heard in the piano.

Unlike the rather workmanlike Horn Sonata, the Clarinet Sonata is full of unexpected twists and turns that include a beautifully floating, Copland-esque ending to the first movement, while the 12-note melody in the chaconne-like third movement of the Piano Trio No 2 gives rise to a series of dramatic and powerful contrasts. Featuring impressive performances by seasoned Conte interpreters, cellist Emil Miland in the *Aria and Fugue* and clarinettist Jerome Simas in the sonata, 'Intimate Voices' complements an earlier album of the composer's chamber music (Albany, 2015), providing further evidence that Conte is the master of his own technique and craft.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Ginastera

String Quartets – No 1, Op 20; No 2, Op 26; No 3, Op 40[a]

[a]**Kiera Duffy** *sop* **Miró Quartet**

Pentatone (PTC5187 412 • 72')

Each of these three quartets comes from a distinct stylistic phase in Alberto Ginastera's output. The First (1948), from the end of the Argentine composer's self-described period of 'Objective Nationalism', abounds with rhythmic energy, swinging syncopations and blunt, folk-like melodies. Initially, I thought the Miró Quartet's tempo for the opening *Allegro violento ed agitato* a bit slow, but checking the score it seems they've hit the suggested metronome mark spot on. Not only that, but the scherzo-like *Vivacissimo* that follows has exactly the same marking (with more notes per beat, so it seems faster), linking the movements in an illuminating way.

The language of the Second Quartet (1958), from the period of 'Subjective Nationalism', is considerably more dissonant and its emotions far more febrile – listen, say, to the fever dream at 2'30" in the *Adagio angoscioso* – but this work often retains its predecessor's syncopated drive, too, as if Ginastera had taken many of the sounds and techniques developed by Schoenberg et al and made

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CATHEDRAL MUSIC TRUST

PHOTO © JAMIE GRAY

The Oliver Schnyder Trio bring an intensity to Shostakovich's Second Piano Trio that underlines the personal and cultural tragedies behind the music – see review overleaf

PHOTOGRAPHY: OLIVER SCHNYDER

them his own. And even in the modernist, or 'neo-expressionist', world of the Third (1973), the terrain of the Argentine pampas is still faintly recognisable. This final entry in the genre employs a soprano (modelled after Schoenberg's Second Quartet) who sings settings of poetry by Jiménez, Lorca and Alberti in four of the five movements.

Benita Valente sang the premiere of the Third with the Juilliard Quartet in 1974 but didn't record it until 2000 (Bridge) – again with the Juilliard – when her voice had lost some freshness. It's a terrific performance nonetheless, but this new one is even better. Kiera Duffy negotiates the *Drammatico* movement's high-wire vocal act with aplomb and is warmly expressive, even romantic, in the yearning *Amoroso* at the quartet's centre and in the other-worldly finale.

There have been satisfying recordings of the three Ginastera quartets by the Latinoamericano (Brilliant), Lyric (ASV, 10/96) and Ensō (Naxos) quartets, but the Miró give the most technically polished accounts yet of these extraordinary works, and the foursome's scrupulousness in no way inhibits the sheer gusto with which they dig into them. All in all, then, a stunning achievement – and gorgeously recorded, too. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Godfrey · Hodgson · McCabe · Walthew

Godfrey Piano Quintet, Op 16 **Hodgson** Piano Quintet **McCabe** Sam Variations **Walthew** 'Phantasy' Quintet

Peter Donohoe *pf* **I Musicanti / Leon Bosch**

Somm (SOMMCD0707 • 74')

From the ever-enterprising Somm label come four piano quintets (only two of which, however, are so titled) by four British composers, at least two of whom I guess few of us will have heard. Robert Matthew-Walker in his always amiable and informative booklet essay provides detailed background information on them and the works.

Let me say at the outset that the performances – bearing in mind I had no scores and had heard none of the pieces before – seem to be entirely worthy of the music, presenting all four works in the best possible light. The strings are forthright and closely integrated, with Peter Donohoe's piano very much in the midst of that tight ensemble (St George's Headstone, Harrow, London; recording engineer Adaq Khan). Everyone breathes together directed by former principal double bass of the ASMF, Leon Bosch.

As far as the music is concerned, there is little to frighten the horses and much to enjoy, beginning with the four-movement Piano Quintet by Derbyshire-born Percy Godfrey (1859-1945; no relation of Sir Dan). It was composed in 1900 and published the following year. Given its striking themes and obvious accomplishment, one might wonder why it has taken this long for it to receive a recording. If I said that Godfrey's Quintet sat happily somewhere between Dvořák and Elgar while not ignoring Brahms, it would offer a rough indication of what to expect. Is there another contemporary work of the genre by an English – all right, British – composer that equals it? It's a real gem.

In the same tonal and melodic idiom is the single-movement *Phantasy* Quintet by Richard Walthew (1872-1951) composed in 1912. The whole work takes its lead from the initial E minor theme and progresses not so much as a set of variations but 'continually find[s] varied answering statements and restatements from that theme … Walthew', RM-W avers, 'is recreating the spirit of the Elizabethan consort.'

Before that we have the more astringent harmonic language of Carlisle-born Ivor Hodgson (*b*1959). All four movements of his Piano Quintet are titled for and represent different inns in Derbyshire, a novel concept. I found 'The Quiet Woman' and the atmospheric 'Moonlight over Mount Famine' (the first and third movements) challenging, but immediately warmed to the witty, drunken strings of 'The Waltzing Weasel' and the exuberant finale 'The Oddfellow', both of them great fun.

Finally there is John McCabe's 1989 *Sam Variations*. Another single movement (14'03"), the work's origin is the theme music McCabe wrote for Granada TV's 1973 family saga *Sam* and was commissioned in 1989 by the Schubert Ensemble as a companion piece for Schubert's *Trout* using the same forces. At first I resisted its punchy dissonance but as it proceeded I found its constantly shifting metre and contrasting sections – sometimes mischievous and quirky, sometimes spooky, at others desolate – rather engaging.

Jeremy Nicholas

Hakim

Arabesque et Variations. Levantine Variations. Missa Cum jubilo. Montmartre. Prélude et Habanera

Gwendeline Lumaret *vc* **Naji Hakim** *pf*

Métier (MEX77130 • 59')

Known largely as an organist and composer for the organ, Beirut-born, French-trained (by Jean Langlais) Naji Hakim may not be a familiar name to readers who don't seek out these pages' organ reviews. Certainly new, I suspect, will be the name of the French cellist Gwendeline Lumaret, presenting the premiere recording of these five Hakim cello works, so know – courtesy of her biography, because she's equally a new name to me – that she is a pupil of Alain Meunier and Philippe Muller among others, that she plays with Coruscant Chamber Orchestra and that she has a special interest in world music.

Hakim is known for his synthesis of Western classical traditions and Middle Eastern influences, drawing on Gregorian chant, Levantine folk music and harmonic inversions of French modernism. That's very much what you hear with the album opener, *Arabesque et Variations* (four of them) for solo cello, based on the Egyptian song 'Ya Chadi el Alhhan' by Sayyed Darwish. Next comes the Gregorian chant-based *Missa Cum jubilo*, after which *Prélude et Habanera* is a homage to Bach and the Spanish colours of Ravel and Debussy – a Baroque toccata followed by a habanera. *Montmartre* reflects upon the history and spiritual resonance of the Parisian district where Hakim served as Sacré-Coeur organist. Hakim himself accompanies Lumaret at the piano for the concluding work: his *Levantine Variations* (five of them) on the popular song 'Bint El Shalabiya' with its folky modal and polytonal harmonies and asymmetrical rhythms.

Lumaret has a rich, attractive tone and solid technique. It's always tricky when assessing performances of brand-new music to work out how much is composer and how much performer, but after many listens I'm surprised not to be enjoying this as much as I'd hoped. There's no technical messiness to this cello-playing. It just sounds a bit academic. I'm reminded of the instrument's cumbersomeness. We're promised 'luminous tranquillity' for the *Missa Cum jubilo*'s *Agnus Dei*, for instance, but the prominent fingerboard sound effects work against this; as they do in *Montmartre*, which I'd be interested to hear interpreted with slightly less momentum and more reflection. The readings would often benefit from a wider-angle view of phrasing and architecture. Hakim himself injects some exciting rhythmic definition and taut, folky vim in his *Levantine Variations*' urgently pressing *Allegro energico* theme. In the ensuing *Moderato*, it's a shame his countermelody isn't a little higher up in the balance.

I don't wish to sound too negative. I've been very intrigued, and it's always good to have new chamber works cross one's radar. **Charlotte Gardner**

Shostakovich

'Complete String Quartets, Vol 2'

String Quartets – No 6 in G, Op 101; No 7 in F sharp minor, Op 108; No 8 in C minor, Op 110; No 9 in E flat, Op 117; No 10 in A flat, Op 118; No 11 in F minor, Op 122; No 12 in D flat, Op 133

Cuarteto Casals

Harmonia Mundi (HMM90 2733/4 ② • 153')

Anyone who enjoyed the first volume of the Cuarteto Casals' Shostakovich is unlikely to be disappointed by the second, which has just as much textural transparency, agility, sensitivity and drama.

These are back-handed compliments, however. My fuller reaction closely mirrors that of Marina Frolova-Walker to Quartets Nos 1-5 (1/25). While it is true, as she pointed out, that the Spaniards reveal new facets, there is less sense of psychological danger, of pushing to extremes, than in the finest recordings: from the Borodins (Decca) to the Danels (Accentus). If you value Shostakovich for moments of the bizarre, the macabre or existential threat, then you will have to turn to such classics.

The easily underestimated Sixth Quartet is light and cheerful, as the surface of the music dictates, with excellent interplay between the instruments. Darker undertones do register – as they are bound to in any performance that is faithful to the markings on the score – and there is a lot to be said for not making too much of a meal of them. On the downside, little or no sense of protest comes across, nor the fragility of the emotional foundations. The wonderful passacaglia third movement is touching, but not profoundly so.

Mutatis mutandis, much the same can be said of the succeeding quartets. I noted a commendable minimum of extraneous noise in faster movements, some nice withdrawn touches in slower ones, and a plenitude of sensitive detail throughout. At the same time, I found myself craving a wider dynamic range, more generous vibrato (not all the time, of course), and more sense of emotional pressure, of the musicians putting their whole selves on the line.

For further cases in point, the slow movement of No 10 – another of Shostakovich's emotion-processing passacaglias – is deeply felt, and the second movement is certainly exciting; but when Shostakovich wrote *furioso*, he surely had something more scathing in mind. No 11 is superbly sustained, with something of the bloody-minded quality I could have done with more of elsewhere; but when the last movement harks back to the corresponding point in No 6, there is more regret and wistfulness than the Casals find. Finally, while No 12 certainly has bite and passion in the fearsome three-in-one second movement, it never strikes terror into the heart, never suggesting how much superhuman effort Shostakovich's returns-to-life (as here and in No 9) cost him. The journey is simply too safe. **David Fanning**

Shostakovich

Piano Trios – No 1 in C minor, Op 8; No 2 in E minor, Op 67. Piano Quintet in G minor, Op 57[a]

[a]**Julia Fischer** *vn* [a]**Nils Mönkemeyer** *va*

Oliver Schnyder Trio

Prospero (PROSPO5425 • 76')

PHOTOGRAPHY: CREDIT INFORMATION TO BE ADVISED

Surprising these recordings have remained under wraps for five years; regrettably less so that Mikhail Shishkin's note should read as having emerged in the wake of the Soviet Union's demise, when Shostakovich's *Testimony* became the standard means of 'decoding' his music.

This latter point is made more ironic by so classically poised and objectified a Piano Quintet (1940). From a lucidly restrained Prelude and a Fugue that conveys its innate pathos warily, this moves via a playfully un-sardonic Scherzo to an Intermezzo whose eloquence yields confiding intimacy, thence a finale where intimations of unease are caught up in its limpid course. Julia Fischer and Nils Mönkemeyer are effortlessly absorbed into a reading intent on rendering the musical content from an audible remove: if not aloof, then pointedly detached.

Just three months earlier, the Oliver Schnyder Trio favoured an appreciably different stance on the piano trios. Admittedly the Second Trio (1944) was written against a background of personal and cultural tragedy, but even this might not account for its intensity of approach – whether in an opening *Moderato* whose eruptive later stages head straight into a scherzo of uninhibited verve, or a *Largo* whose methodical progress is countered with the fantasia-like unfolding of a finale unremittingly graphic in evoking the denigration of the human spirit.

If this implies a tale of two halves, it is not to decry what are always assured interpretations well worthy of repeated hearings; only that anyone wanting their Shostakovich consistently 'visceral' should choose the comparisons listed below. A bridge of sorts is provided by the First Trio heard in as perceptive a recording as this youthful piece has received, its disjunct themes melded into a finely proportioned and cumulatively sustained single span. With its numerous photos, several unfamiliar, the CD packaging is unusually classy for these times.

Richard Whitehouse

Piano Quintet, Piano Trio No 2 – selected comparisons:

Leonskaja, Borodin Qt *Warner Classics 2564 60813-2 (2/97)*

Uryash, St Petersburg Qt *Hyperion CDA67158 (11/04)*

Tournier

'Images – Hommage à Marcel Tournier'

Elle est venue, ella a souri[a]. Images – Suite No 1, Op 29; Suite No 2, Op 31; Suite No 3, Op 35; Suite No 4, Op 35. Insomnie[a]. La lettre du jardinier[a]. Rêverie de Bouddha[a]. Sonatine, Op 30

Emmanuel Ceysson *hp* with [a]**Véronique Gens** *sop*

Quatuor Voce

Alpha (ALPHA1133 • 66')

There can be few more alluring audio constellations than that of harp and strings, of which Debussy's *Danses sacrée et profane* must call for special mention. Now we have in this fine 'hommage' to Marcel Tournier, the harp professor at the Paris Conservatoire from 1912 to 1948 and a virtuoso in his own right, a handsome successor. Tournier composed nearly 100 pieces for solo harp in the most idiomatic and expressive manner that he subsequently returned to, adding string parts, some published, many left in manuscript. Of these the *Sonatine*, Op 30, is represented for the first time on disc. Tournier's adaptation works a treat,

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

FROM LATVIA WITH LOVE

Andrew Mellor greets a series of recordings issued by Skani, the Latvian Music Information Centre's label, celebrating its 10th anniversary

An album of music by Rihards Dubra includes his Petite symphonie, in which Ilze Reine and Aigars Reinis play the organ of Riga Cathedral, each also doubling percussion

The pulse quickens when new releases arrive from Skani. The imprint of the Latvian Music Information Centre is marking 10 years by accelerating releases without compromising quality. In the label's boutique-like physical distinctiveness, as well as its central mission, it's hard not to make comparison with Dacapo's vital ambassadorial work for Danish music.

I would recommend all five releases here while levying some reservations against the double disc of organ music by **Rihards Dubra**. Fans of the composer will not be disappointed and his block-like aesthetic suits the instrument (he holds a church position in Riga). Neo-Baroque preludes and fugues mingle with mystical works that employ the language familiar from Dubra's orchestral music, the scope of which I sometimes find limited and the means under-resourced. Despite some gauche gestures, there is an urge behind all the music here, with the highlight Dubra's *Petite symphonie* for two organists (each doubling percussion) at one instrument. This French-tinged piece ranges more widely and taps the splendour of the colossal Walcker organ in Riga Cathedral, under the hands and feet of Ilze Reine and Aigars Reinis.

Agris Engelmanis might well prove my musical discovery of the year – an eccentric lone wolf of an artist (there is a wonderful interview with him in the booklet, as well as one of his poems) who shunned Riga and cleaved instead to the city of Liepāja, whose impressive symphony orchestra and Great Amber Concert Hall are becoming closely associated with Skani. The trauma of Engelmanis's childhood clearly informs his *Diaphonies 1-3* – stripped back, three-movement suites for orchestra and solo piano, each tight as a nut, whose ferocious but latent power comes momentarily to head on pin-points, the orchestra appearing to shred itself into silence. *Musica Alba* is similarly sparse but a little less tense, while *Music for Symphony Orchestra* is more gregarious still and was played at the Great Amber's opening a decade ago (the live recording here). None of this music has been recorded elsewhere and some of it has never been played until now. It deserves to be heard.

Vilnis Šmīdbergs has been a central feature in Latvian music life, his 80th birthday being widely celebrated in 2024. His music won't waste your time, offering a new slant on Latvia's penchant for intense lamentation, sometimes concealing it with lightness. That much is apparent from the arcadian fantasy of the Trio Sonata for flute, violin and piano, an extraordinarily well-wrought piece. Šmīdbergs's tight *Piano Variations* goes to

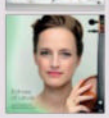
THE RECORDINGS

Dubra Music for Organ
Reinis, Reine
Skani ② LMIC168

Engelmanis Musica Alba
Liepāja SO / Lakstigala
Skani LMIC156

Šmīdbergs Chamber Music
Meija, Geka, Cālīte
Skani LMIC170

The White Birds
String Trio Baltia
Skani LMIC171



Echoes of Latvia
Zariņa, Egliņa
Skani LMIC169

more overtly dark places and becomes mightily heavy towards its end; it is impressively played by Iveta Cālīte but the recorded sound here needed more depth. The composer's Violin Sonata No 1, beautifully played by Magdalēna Geka (who also takes on the Viola Sonata) is compelling: its opening *Largo* obsessing over a circling motif that twists up; its third-movement *Andante* resembling a classic Baltic lament before a song of optimism rings out.

Loving performances of those works suggest Skani's chronicling of Latvian music is more than procedural. String Trio Baltia's album **The White Birds** only confirms the point. It takes its title from Gundega Šmite's four-movement survey of four Baltic bird types, a gently enchanting and gimmick-free piece. *Castillo Interior*, commissioned by Sol Gabetta on the theme of Teresa of Ávila, is classic Pēteris Vasks in its mining of light from darkness. We have heard from Gundaris Pone on Skani before (see *American Portraits* etc, 10/24) and this performance of his epic *Gran duo funebre* for viola and cello gets to the heart of a piece that doesn't mourn so much as ask the big questions (it was decorated with multiple state prizes). Closing the disc is Tālivaldis Ķeniņš's Trio, written in 1989 on his first return to Latvia for 40 years (after emigration to Canada), and which dredges up strong feelings paralleled in the performances.

Laura Zariņa has previously recorded Ķeniņš's impressive Violin Concerto for Skani. Her duo recital with pianist Agnese Egliņa, **Echoes of Latvia**, alternates violin-piano works by Lūcija Garūta (1902-77; don't miss Skani's album of her part-songs recorded by the Latvian Radio Choir – take Malcolm Riley's word for it if not mine, 11/23) around works for the same (or violin solo) scoring by current female composers. As an album, it is beautifully conceived, paced and played. But of course, it's also more than that: a reminder of Garūta's lyrical gift and the rightful placing of it as a precursor to the women who followed, who also need to be heard. Their voices differ even if many are lined with that distinctive Latvian mysticism that fuels such affecting music. I was drawn in particular to the first and last of them: Renāte Stivriņa's *Waves Come and Waves Go* and Selga Mence's *Between the Lake and the Sea*. G

PHOTOGRAPHY: JĀNIS PORIETIS

as a glance at the original demonstrates, the composer never over-egging the pudding. The main theme of the opening *Allègrement* is a beguiling tune, gently echoed throughout. The expressive slow movement takes us to a remote key, before a whirling dervish of a finale delivered with panache by harpist Emmanuel Ceysson and the Quatuor Voce. Their leader, Sarah Dayan, gives particular pleasure in the poised descent in the gentle winding-down of the first movement.

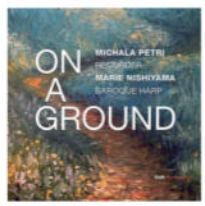
The four sets of *Images* reflect the pure blend of voices within, for example in the hushed sonorities of 'Clair de lune sur l'étang du parc', all beautifully captured in the warm acoustic of the Salle Colonne (Paris), a church conversion, so apt for this music. Most of the *Images* carry descriptive titles but in the third suite, the composer trades images for particular locations in Morocco and Tunisia that the booklet writer Carl Swanson describes as the composer's 'emotional response to the subject in hand', for as far as is known Tournier never travelled outside France. The players make light of the terpsichorean twists in a dance at a fete at Sedjenane, a paean to flamenco in 'Lolita la danseuse' and a Russian peasant dance, 'La danse de moujik'. Suite No 4 for solo harp carries the pictorial theme a step further with an impressionistic study of snow falling in a remote village ('Cloches sous la neige'), with Ceysson bringing to life the intricacies of the scoring in a magical performance. 'La volière magique', a picturesque study of children gazing in wonderment into an aviary, is likewise imbued by him and his players with the same delicacy and precision.

It was an inspired idea to cast Véronique Gens in the four songs, where she brings her operatic experience to a highly charged fleeting vision of the beloved in 'Elle est venue, elle a souri', a voluptuous tone to a study of insomnia ('Insomnie'), a seductive air to 'La lettre du jardinier', softly embodying the idea of 'fleurs flottantes' (soft-bodied wisteria) and heartbreak to 'Rêverie de Bouddha', where life it seems is nothing but a dream – perhaps the inspiration behind the striking cover image by Juliette Stive, after Dalì. Beautifully recorded and beautifully performed, this is a very desirable recording.

Adrian Edwards

'On a Ground'

Anonymous Greensleeves to a Ground. Tollet's Ground **JS Bach** Harpsichord Concerto in F minor, BWV1056 – Largo. Prelude in C major, BWV846 **JS Bach/Gounod** Ave Maria **Carr** An Italian Ground **Farinel** Faronells Ground (Folia) **Gluck** Dance of the Blessed Spirits and Melody **Hannibal** Dreams. Sunset Dance. Twilight on a Ground. Waves on a Ground **A Marcello** Oboe Concerto in D minor – Adagio **D Ortiz** Eight Recercadas **Satie** Trois Gymnopédies
Michala Petri *rec* **Marie Nishiyama** *hp*
OUR Recordings (8 226927 • 75')



There's something grounding about the ground bass. Its reassuring repetition can be meditative and mesmeric. It provides a solid footing for the most florid harmonic and melodic material, which one can read against its foundations, registering with renewed pleasure every variation. No wonder it's one of the oldest musical formulas in existence. Here, doyenne of the recorder Michala Petri and Japanese baroque harpist Marie Nishiyama present their own variation on the recorder-and-harp recital, with a century-spanning programme recorded just prior to Covid lockdown in the serenity of the Chichibu Muse Park, Tokyo.

Unlike, say, Stefan Temmingh and Margret Koell's edgier 'Sound Stories' (Accent), 'On a Ground' is predominantly given over to music, from the Renaissance to our own time, that is attractive, direct and, dare one say, eminently relaxing. The tensions are generated through contrast alone – in dynamics, tempo, pitch and register (Petri of course plays a range of recorders) and timbre – rather than stylistic extremes. The works by Carr, Farinel and Ortiz, grounded as they are in earlier styles, therefore sing in both sympathy and counterpoint with the Bach and Marcello arrangements as much as with Satie's three *Gymnopédies*.

Paradoxically, perhaps, it's in guitarist and lutenist Lars Hannibal's four contemporary works, originally written for guitar and recorder, where this combination of instruments and performers comes into its own. The instruments get equal billing, and as we move gently through the impressionistic *Dreams* and *Sunset Dance* and the more 'grounded' *Twilight on a Ground* and *Waves on a Ground*, we're able better to savour the evocative, delicately rendered individual colours with which Petri and Nishiyama fill their collective sound palette.

A gorgeous release, accessible to the neophyte yet with ample artistry and aesthetic sophistication to attract the aficionado.

William Yeoman

Edith Farnadi

Jeremy Nicholas champions an almost forgotten Hungarian pianist who not only worked as teaching assistant to Bartók but also played under some of the great European conductors

The Brazilian pianist Nelson Freire was a teenager when he was awarded a government scholarship to study in Vienna in 1959. Later, he recalled, 'In my early teens I was a fan of Edith Farnadi. I still am! Her records were issued in Brazil and I kept collecting them. In Vienna, I heard two recitals live. The first one was a chamber afternoon dedicated to Bartók in which she played the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion … among other pieces. The other was a solo recital in 1960 of Brahms, Kodály, Liszt and Bartók of course. I never forgot those performances. She was quite unique, with [a] certain gypsy quality in her playing that reminds me of Cziffra. Among my favourite recordings of her I should mention Bartok's Second Piano Concerto. It's musical and exciting, different of [*sic*] all other versions. Also Liszt's Second Concerto and First Ballade are astounding! She certainly deserves to be remembered.'

Her recordings reveal a pianist with an astonishing technique and a fearless, individual way with virtuoso repertoire

Today, though fondly remembered by pianophile collectors of a certain vintage, Farnadi is forgotten or, more probably, unknown to most music lovers. She was never a headliner in the same manner as her contemporaries Géza Anda, Georges Cziffra, Annie Fischer, Louis Kentner and Lívia Rév, to name but five of her compatriots. It is unclear why this should be, for her recordings, with exceptions, reveal a pianist with an astonishing technique and a fearless, individual way with virtuoso repertoire. Is it because there is no Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert or Schumann for solo piano in her discography? Chopin features prominently, but it is the music of Liszt and Bartók that dominates – and as she had been a pupil and was later a colleague of Bartók, her recordings of his music are especially valuable.

Farnadi was born on September 25, 1911 – not 1921, as many sources have it. (Had she been born at the later date, she would have been just two years old when she began studies in 1923 at the Budapest academy of music. Even for an astonishing child prodigy, that would be stretching things.) Born into a middle-class family, the daughter of an accountant father and piano teacher mother, the 10-year-old Farnadi enrolled at Budapest's Ernő Fodor School of Music, the largest private music school in Hungary, then moved to the academy, where her teacher was Arnold Székely, who had been taught by István Thomán, one of Liszt's favourite pupils. One of Farnadi's classmates, György Stern, later known as Sir Georg Solti, described her as 'an amazing child prodigy'. When Székely was incapacitated by pneumonia for six weeks, she had lessons with another teacher at the academy, 'Professor Bartók'.

During her time at the academy, Farnadi played all over Budapest. On one memorable occasion, for a concert in 1926, she and Annie Fischer played Beethoven's First Piano Concerto – Farnadi playing the first movement, Fisher playing the second and third. She made her first broadcast for Radio Budapest on March 26, 1926 (in a programme of Mendelssohn and Chopin). For one of the concerts in Budapest marking the centenary of the death of Beethoven, Farnadi was chosen to play the Fourth Piano Concerto under Ernő Unger.

Having left the academy – where she won the Liszt Prize – and with a concert and teaching career already established, she was asked by the legendary violinist Jenő Hubay to become the accompanist for his masterclasses. She also gave duo recitals with Polish violinist Bronisław Huberman. She became Bartók's assistant at the academy (he left in 1934) and was later appointed professor of piano (as he had been), resigning in 1943.

With the end of the Second World War, and Hungary becoming a Soviet satellite state, Farnadi thought it expedient to move to Vienna. Her first concert appearance on arrival there was on December 5, 1945, in

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1911 – *Born in Budapest, to piano-teacher mother*
Amid middle-class upbringing, begins piano lessons in 1915 with mother, Anna (née Breitner). 1921: enrols at Ernő Fodor Music School, Budapest, having played at school graduation events

•1923 – *Enters Budapest academy of music*
Studies piano there till 1929 with Arnold Székely (taught by a Liszt pupil) and for six weeks with Bartók. While there, awarded two Liszt Society scholarships, plays all over Budapest, is broadcast on radio for first time (1926), wins Liszt Prize (1928), receives academy's coveted Artist Diploma (1929)

•1932 – *Budapest academy employment begins*
Begins accompanying Jenő Hubay's masterclasses; continues working with his students after he dies (1937). Also 1932: Vienna debut: Schumann *Carnaval*. Becomes assistant to Bartók at academy (before 1934, when he leaves); later professor of piano, till 1943

•1945 – *Leaves Hungary for Vienna*
1946: makes first recording for Austrian Columbia label. 1948: marries Hungarian opera singer Pál Sugár and begins recording for Westminster label

•1963 – *Appointed at Graz academy of music*
During 1960s also returns to Hungary for guest performances. Teaches at Graz until death, December 14, 1973, of cancer. Ashes buried in Budapest

a programme of Bach, Bartók, Chopin, Debussy, Liszt and Rachmaninov. '[She] is the strongest pianistic figure since Austria has emerged again,' opined the Viennese newspaper *Weltpresse*. 'She transforms herself into a volcano at the piano'. The *Neues Österreich* reported, 'The artist's personality and temperament brought a storm of applause. As a Liszt virtuoso, the acclaimed artist stands at the undisputed height.'

In 1946 she made her first recordings (for Austrian Columbia), of pieces from her core repertoire. Two years later, she began the series of recordings for the Westminster label on which her posthumous reputation rests. Her discs of the complete Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsodies* made in 1953-54 elicited a great deal of excitement, with *Billboard* declaring it a set that 'must have a place in the library of all lovers of piano music. [Farnadi] is one of the greatest exponents of Liszt. She is fully conscious of the fire, brilliance and deeply emotional qualities of the music.'

It was in this repertoire that she excelled ('Liszt's *Spanish Rhapsody* could scarcely have been more exciting to watch had the composer himself played it,' trilled *The Times* after a 1949 visit to London). Others were less happy with her Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 2, her Bach and her Beethoven, the latter two thought by a Vienna critic as 'unsuitable composers' for her. From 1950 onwards she played with many of the leading European orchestras – such as the Berlin Philharmonic, the Concertgebouw Orchestra, the RPO and the Vienna Philharmonic – and conductors including Ernest Ansermet, Sir John Barbirolli, Karl Böhm, Sir Adrian Boult, Clemens Krauss, Josef Krips and Hermann Scherchen. What is mainly forgotten is her championship of contemporary music, introducing as she did works by Hartmann, Henze, von Einem and Liebermann.

In the final decade of her life, battling cancer, Farnadi divided her time between giving concerts and teaching on the staff of the academy in Graz. G

Thanks to Michael Waiblinger for biographical details

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING

'The Art of Edith Farnadi'
Edith Farnadi *pf* Gerhard Taschner *vn*
Philharmonic Promenade Orchestra / Sir Adrian Boult; Vienna State Opera Orchestra / Hermann Scherchen, Sir Adrian Boult
Scribendum (3/25)

This 21-CD set reissues Farnadi's Westminster recordings, with most of the discs devoted wholly or partly to her recordings of Liszt and Bartók. There are piano concertos by both, as well as by Tchaikovsky (Nos 1 and 2) and Rachmaninov (No 2). There's chamber music by Beethoven, Grieg, Dvořák and Schoeck; plus her benchmark disc of Strauss transcriptions by Godowsky, Schulhof and Dohnányi.

There are a few missing items (the early 78s – some Liszt and the Dvořák Op 81 Piano Quintet among them), but this is a most desirable box-set worthy of her name.

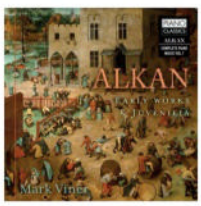
Instrumental

Pwyll ap Siôn hears Alexei Lubimov play music by Valentin Silvestrov:
'As Lubimov points out, sometimes a triad is all that's required to work a musical miracle'
▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 68

Richard Whitehouse on the piano sonatas of Hans Winterberg:
'Music of such immediacy and technical dexterity needs pianism to match, which it gets from Jonathan Powell' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 70

Alkan

'Complete Piano Music, Vol 7 – Early Works & Juvenilia'
Il était un p'tit homme, Op 3. Les omnibus, Op 2. Rondeau chromatique, Op 12. Rondo brillant, Op 4. Variations – on 'Ah! Segnata è la mia sorte' (Donizetti: Anna Bolena), Op 16 No 4; on a Neapolitan Barcarolle, Op 16 No 6; on a Theme by Steibelt, Op 1; on 'La tremenda ultice spada' (Bellini: I Capuleti e i Montecchi), Op 16 No 5; on 'L'elisir d'amore' (Donizetti)
Mark Viner *pf*
Piano Classics (PCL10298 • 72')



Pianophiles of a certain taste and vintage will recall (and may well still have) a Vanguard LP from 1964 entitled 'The Virtuoso Piano'. It had a selection of forgotten treasures by Herz, Hummel, Thalberg, Rubinstein, Paderewski and Godowsky. Mark Viner's latest volume in his Alkan odyssey put me in mind of that life-enhancing Earl Wild disc and the review it prompted from *The New York Times*: 'Mr Wild recreates … the image of the grand pianist who could lay down a thousand rippling, dashing notes simply by shaking them out of his sleeve.' For Wild read Viner – he is that good.

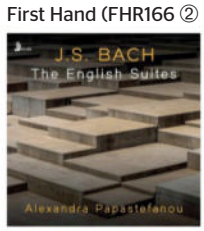
I know there are many people (colleagues on *Gramophone* included!) who cannot bear the kind of vapid, superficial music that dominates this volume of early works and juvenilia, some for whom the very mention of Alkan is anathema. True, there is very little great music in its 72 minutes' duration but, as Viner himself reminds us in his detailed and genial booklet, 'wisdom of experience and profundity are not attributes to be readily found in a 12-year-old boy and we are best off admiring these works for what they are rather than loathing them for what they are not'.

There are no fewer than four premiere recordings here. The first of these is the 'madcap' (Viner) *Les omnibus* variations, Op 2, from 1829, followed by *Il était un p'tit homme*, rondoletto Op 3, and *Rondo brillant*, Op 4, both of which seem to have been conceived as chamber works. Sadly, we shall never hear Alkan's Op 5, a rondo after 'Largo al factotum': no copy has ever surfaced. In the remaining works we see not only Alkan's rapid progress as a composer but also the seeds of what was to come – the eccentric gestures, the individual voice and, in all nine works, the colossal technical and musical demands.

There is no point any pianist troubling themselves with these scores unless they revel in the physical delight of what their 10 fingers (and two feet) can do. To be able to execute them on a modern grand instead of one of M Pape's light-action pianos is something else. Those familiar with Howard Shelley's resurrections of forgotten works in Hyperion's 'Romantic Piano Concerto' series and who thrill, like me, to his apparently nonchalant dispatch of iridescent showers of notes in the music of Herz, Pixis, Kalkbrenner and the like will, I think, get the same frisson from Viner in Alkan. In fact, with both pianists always gifted a beautifully voiced and recorded piano, one might well be mistaken for the other. I can offer no higher compliment to the younger man. Whatever your opinion on the merits of the music, this is a formidable display of bravura piano-playing.
Jeremy Nicholas

JS Bach

Six English Suites, BWV806-811
Alexandra Papastefanou *pf*
First Hand (FHR166 ② • 137')



Listeners familiar with Alexandra Papastefanou's Bach will not be surprised how she also makes the composer's *English Suites* feel right at home on the concert grand, while conveying astute stylistic awareness.

Her tonal resourcefulness and contrasts in articulation often evoke the small chamber aggregations that Bach employs in certain movements of his Passions and cantatas. A case in point is the pianist's curving right-hand melody in the A major Allemande, supported by her imaginatively varied arpeggiated left-hand chords, along with counterlines that suggest a cellist's bow in action. This applies as well to the G minor Allemande's ambidextrously conversing counterpoint. Papastefanou plays the A minor Prelude a shade faster than Murray Perahia (Sony, 4/99, 11/08), with unexpected bass-note accents that provide an extra kick and a tad more suppleness all around.

Certain precepts of harpsichord technique inform Papastefanou's Bach pianism, as revealed in the Courante movements' discreet agogic caesuras, or in the way the timbral contrasts between the first and second G minor Bourrées mirror a harpsichordist changing registrations. Yet had Bach known the capabilities of a modern piano, he would have appreciated the minute gradations in dynamics and canny timing of chords that Papastefanou brings to the F major Sarabande, or the impeccably balanced lines and galloping lilt of the F major and E minor Gigues. The pianist's intimately scaled introduction in the D minor Prelude gives little hint of the swaying vitality up ahead in the *Allegro*. Her captivating D minor Allemande features subtle interaction between hands, plus vocally orientated inflections that bypass the bar lines en route to pure music. Alexandra Papastefanou's Bach is utterly unpretentious in its naturalness, communicative warmth, cultivated energy and unselfregarding musicality. If you don't believe me, acquire this beautifully engineered release and hear for yourself. **Jed Distler**

Beethoven

'The Lost Tapes'
Piano Sonatas – No 18 in E flat, 'Hunt', Op 31 No 3[a]; No 27 in E minor, Op 90[a]; No 28 in A, Op 101[a]; No 31 in A flat, Op 110[b]
Sviatoslav Richter *pf*

Mark Viner's latest volume of Alkan's piano music, encompassing early works and juvenilia, is a formidable display of bravura piano-playing

DG (479 5554 • 486 7214 ② • 72')
Recorded live at the [a]Kunsthaus, Lucerne, September 2, 1965; [b]La Grange de Meslay, Tours, June 29, 1965

Anyone who doubts that Sviatoslav Richter was one of the most recorded musicians in history need only cast a cursory glance at Ates Tanin's discography. Its most recent iteration, dating from August 2006, is little short of breathtaking, both in the sheer quantity of recordings and the multiple recordings of individual works. And because Richter never warmed to what he considered the studio's sterility, the bulk of this vast legacy remarkably consists of live performance recordings. In fact, Richter left several recordings of each of the sonatas included here: 23 of Op 31 No 3, 12 of Op 90, 17 of Op 101 and 30 of Op 110. Yet the esteem in which Richter is held by pianists has only risen in the 28 years since his death in August 1997 at the age of 82. That is why these new recordings of performances from the 1960s at La Grange de Meslay near Tours and in Lucerne command attention.

The grand E flat major Sonata of the Op 31 set is stunning. The sunny opening *Allegro* unfolds with brilliant clarity that doesn't stint on drama. Richter's arsenal of touch is on display in the *Allegro vivace* Scherzo, the jaunty thematic material set off by the staccato energy of a virtuoso accompaniment. The sensual lyricism of the Minuet is completely disarming, its luxurious repose setting the stage for the finale, as breathless and exhilarating a tour de force as you're likely to encounter in any Beethoven performance.

Richter's gift for portraying the most vivid of contrasts is given full rein in the craggy ambivalence of the opening of Op 90, before all is ameliorated and reconciled in this most Schubertian of all Beethoven's sonata movements. Op 101, which Richter considered more difficult than all the subsequent sonatas, including the *Hammerklavier*, is noble in both concept and execution. The *Allegretto* stretches and arcs from nuance to nuance, its reverie abruptly halted by the bracing march. From there, regardless of one's familiarity with the piece, each new vista comes as a surprise, if not a revelation. Surely there are only a handful of interpretations so deeply felt and beautifully executed.

Arriving finally at Op 110, we enter the lofty climes of exquisite *cantabile* playing, mitigated by flights of fantasy. Then, I regret to say, the spell is broken by a Scherzo so flat-footed and rhythmically crude, so dynamically overblown that it risks sinking the entire sonata. Luckily the *Adagio*, with its *Arioso dolente* ushering in the fugues, is so completely arresting that equilibrium is regained and cohesion restored.

Overall, in the face of such imaginative music-making, one forgets the less than optimal sound of the instruments. It's wonderful to hear Richter again.

Patrick Rucker

Froberger

'Suites for Harpsichord, Vol 4'
Suites – in A minor, FbWV628*a*; in B flat, FbWV Anh02; in C minor, FbWV644; in D, FbWV611; in D minor, FbWV613; in D minor, FbWV639; in E minor, FbWV622; in E minor, 'Partita dolorosa', FbWV648; in F, FbWV621; in F, FbWV AnhIV/08; in G minor, FbWV614; in G minor, FbWV649
Gilbert Rowland *hpd*
Athene (ATH23215 ② • 129')

This is the fourth and final volume of a series devoted to Froberger's complete Suites, nearly 50 in total over eight CDs recorded over six years. They include the contents of the two autograph manuscripts dedicated to Froberger's patron, Emperor Ferdinand III, and those ascribed to the composer in other manuscripts (some famous and others less so). A few, finally, are attributed to the composer on various grounds. To judge by those included in this volume (including the one with which Gilbert Rowland rounds off the series, in whose opening I detect faint echoes of Byrd), these attributions are plausible at the very least and worth hearing in any case. Froberger is often referred to as a link between Frescobaldi's Italy and Bach, but it's perhaps in the Suites most of all that this historical perspective takes on palpable, audible form (the conclusion of the Gigue of the D minor Suite, FbWV639, being a case in point).

Rowland opts for continuity across the series, recording with the same harpsichord (a modern copy of a 1750 instrument) in the same venue and with the same engineer. In common with the previous volumes, Rowland begins the latest instalment with a Suite whose opening Allemande bears a programmatic or descriptive title; this one is the lament commemorating his being attacked and robbed while on his travels. One is thereby reminded of Froberger's endearing (and decidedly contemporary) willingness to let his biography intrude into his music. It's a thoughtful opening gambit on Rowland's part but even without it, Froberger extracts such variety from these dance forms that one can listen to each CD at one sitting without the ear being jaded in the slightest.

An entire, complex and sympathetic personality is on show, whose assimilation of different musical influences is constantly evident. Rowland is a fluent guide, discreet though not entirely self-effacing (I lost myself down a rabbit hole observing the desynchronisation of hands; the harpsichordist's bread-and-butter, perhaps, but in Rowland's hands a pleasure to listen to) and above all, as befits this music, elegant. (The meaning of Froberger's performance instruction, 'discretion', is not entirely clear but one feels that Rowland approaches its spirit.) Add to this a precise and atmospheric sound recording and you have a serious statement about a composer who deserves even wider recognition. After such a monument one really wishes for a postscript from Rowland, including some of the famous stand-alone character pieces (such as the laments on the death of Ferdinand III or the lutenist Blancrocher) that have been recorded before but on which Rowland's insights would be welcome indeed. **Fabrice Fitch**

Garūta · Mägi

'Baltic Tides'

Garūta Études for the Sostenuto Pedal. Legenda. Meditation. Four Preludes **Mägi** The Ancient Kannel. Junipers of Kassari. Ten Piano Pieces – Nos 1-4 & 6-8. Three Sea Tableaux

Eva Maria Doroszkowska *pf*

First Hand (FHR177 • 71')

This is a beautifully conceived and executed album, combining deeply felt, meticulously crafted and in some cases previously unrecorded music by the leading women of 20th-century Latvian and Estonian music, respectively Lūcija Garūta (1902-77) and Ester Mägi (1922-2021).

The two are not interspersed, but presented in that order. Garūta is building quite a presence on disc, to which pianist Eva Maria Doroszkowska's contribution here is significant. She opens with the first-ever recording of the composer's *Legenda*, a rhapsodic, lyrical work lined with that soulful melancholy which is so distinctively tinted when born of a Latvian musical mind. Each of the composer's four *Études for the Sostenuto Pedal* does something different but it's notable how No 2, 'Fairytale', starts out with sprinkled lightness before gaining potent weight; it is delectably paced by Doroszkowska. There is a similar majesty and solemnity to *Meditation*, which was later transcribed for organ. Scriabin lurks behind Garūta's Four Preludes. No 2 is a highly affecting piece; when Nos 3 and 4 were choreographed, the composer titled them 'Sorrowful Longing' and 'Turbulent Longing'. Enough said.

Mägi's music combines polyphony, impressionism and the raw material of Estonia's runic singing tradition (similar to Finland's). She was perhaps the more naturally pianistic composer of the two; there is more continuity and momentum here than in Garūta's piano works (which achieve something subtly different) and the certain feeling of a pianism filtered through late Brahms. *Three Sea Tableaux* is the album's standout multi-movement work, containing snapshots of the Baltic's infinite variety whose descriptive qualities are hypnotically evocative (the album cover speaks volumes). They were written in Laulasmaa, the woody peninsula that now houses the Arvo Pärt Centre, in whose concert hall this album was recorded.

There is an obsessive, minimalist tendency to Mägi's *Junipers of Kassari*, a pianistic portrait of the island off Estonia's west coast. We hear seven of the composer's 10 Piano Pieces, all first recordings – taut, attractive miniatures in which No 3, 'Trouble Song', seems to adumbrate the mystic spiritualism that would take root in later Estonian music. Doroszkowska ends with *The Ancient Kannel*, a tribute to folklorist Herbert Tampere in which the pianist's hands plunge us into the shamanistic world of Estonian folklore, where expressive elements mingle with thematic chants picked out in octaves. In summary, this is vital for our understanding of 20th-century Baltic music and just the sort of album I long for musicians to make. **Andrew Mellor**

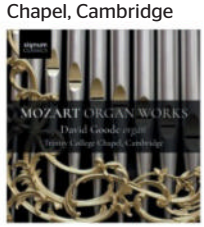
Mozart

Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darin, K620*b*. Adagio in C, K356. Fantasias – in F minor, K594; in F minor, K608. Fugues – in C, K394; in C minor, K426/546; in G minor, K401. Zwei kleine Fugen (Versetten), K154*a*. Eine kleine Gigue, K574. Londoner Skizzenbuch, K *Anh*109*b* – excs. Suite in C, K399 – Ouverture. Eine Walze in einer kleinen Orgel in F, K616

David Goode *org*

Signum (SIGCD899 • 74')

Played on the Metzler organ of Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge



'It is a kind of composition which I detest', wrote Mozart of the F minor Fantasia for mechanical clock, K594. 'If it were for a large instrument and the work would sound like an organ piece, then I might get some fun out of it. But, as it is, the works consist solely of little pipes, which sound too high-pitched and too childish for my taste.'

Yet the piece he eventually produced, the F minor Fantasia, K594, is nothing short of a miniature masterpiece in the churning harmonies of its framing *Adagio* and the frothing counterpoint of its central *Allegro*. It was followed by further works for the same clockwork organ: another F minor Fantasia (K608), which David Goode acknowledges as Mozart's greatest organ work, and the magical F major *Andante* (K616), which breathes the rarefied air of *The Magic Flute* and could be the product of no one other than Mozart.

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The use of a full-size organ rather than a squeaky automaton allows us to hear these works in their best light, stripped of their high-pitched and childish associations. The problem is, though, that beyond these pieces Mozart wrote nothing specifically for the organ as a solo instrument, despite his love of playing it. Goode thus fills out his programme with works associated with or appropriate to the instrument, and the result is not only a fine recital in its own right but also a conspectus of Mozart's developing approach to counterpoint. The 1782 Ouverture and Fugue (K399 and 394) show him trying on Baroque clothes following his encounter with the 'ancient' music of Bach and Handel, developing into the fully internalised and personal Fugue of K426 (1783) and those exquisite late mechanical organ pieces. But his polyphonic facility was evident much earlier: in the G minor Fugue of 1773 and even, fleetingly, in the little pieces from the *London Sketchbook* he wrote on the first grand tour at the ages of 8 and 9.

The ethereal, other-worldly glass harmonica piece K356 (1791, despite its early Köchel number) is also co-opted, as is the *Kleine Gigue*, K574 (1789 – usually played on the piano but composed for an organist), whose jagged edges are smoothed off a little in organ performance. Goode's performances are all one could wish for and his notes for each piece in the booklet are thorough and instructive, as is his explanation of the challenges of realising this music on a modern instrument. It's also worth mentioning that the most concise introduction to the organ works and their context is contained in *The Mozart Compendium* (Thames and Hudson: 1990) and was written by the novelist and former 'My Music' subject (7/08), Patrick Gale. **David Threasher**

Mozart

'Works for Solo Piano, Vol 2'

Adagio in B minor, K540. Piano Sonata No 11 in A, K331. Variations – on 'Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman', K265; on 'Unser dummer Pöbel meint', K455

Federico Colli *pf*

Chandos (CHAN20350 • 66')

The booklet annotations for this release feature a letter from Federico Colli to Mozart, where the pianist rambles on for many paragraphs atop his scholarly pedestal, as well as serving up reams of philosophical nonsense. All of this draws more attention to himself than to the music at hand. One largely can say the same for his interpretations.

Colli is a pianist who can execute anything his mind conceives, and can bring out any voice in any texture at any speed and at any dynamic level, while his portfolio of articulations bursts at the seams. His rule of thumb seems to be 'no two consecutive phrases can have the same colour'. And so far as ornaments go, the sky's the limit. However, Colli dips into his technical and imaginative wealth lavishly and garishly. In the case of Mozart's 'Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman' Variations, where the music's decorative surface essentially is the style, Colli arguably justifies his inventive embellishments on repeats, his reverse accents, his peek-a-boo *subito pianos* and his octave transpositions and contrived balances. The results may sound vulgar and obvious, yet they're admittedly fun to hear.

Comparably fustian jiggery-pokery, though, trivialises the B minor *Adagio*'s stark fragility and poignant harmonic tension. Vladimir Horowitz's late-period recording, for example, also abounds in colouristic allure, yet comes across like a mini-opera as opposed to Colli's slow-motion animated cartoon. The Variations on 'Unser dummer Pöbel meint' work best when Colli plays straight, yet irritate when the pianist throws in attention-getting agogic hiccups, superfluous breath marks and coy diminuendos.

The A major K331 Sonata's first-movement theme and variations is less about an unfolding narrative and unified tempo relationships than Colli's bottomless bag of tricks. He likewise spray-paints the Menuetto with expressive graffiti. Yet by substituting acciaccaturas for the commonly heard appoggiaturas, Colli sheds fresh and stimulating light on the *Rondo alla turca*'s main theme, abetted by a tempo that may be closer to an *allegro* than Mozart's indicated *allegretto* yet works on its own terms. In short, fascination and exasperation continue to be the name of Colli's Mozartian game on this superbly engineered release. **Jed Distler**

Poulenc

Improvisation, FP176. Two Improvisations – FP113; FP170. Ten Improvisations, FP63. Three Intermezzos. Mélancolie. Three Novelettes. Presto in B flat. Thème varié

Paul Berkowitz *pf*

Meridian (CDE84674 • 52')

The paradoxical combination of sweetness and acidity is almost always present in Poulenc's piano works. Representing a cross-section of compositions spanning the composer's creative life from 1927 through 1959, Paul Berkowitz's recital only intermittently addresses these characteristics.

The cutting edge and tart transparency associated with such Poulenc stylists as Gabriel Tacchino, Pascal Rogé and Éric Le Sage differs from Berkowitz's burnished warmth, which some listeners may find better suited to Brahms. Take the fourth of the *Ten Improvisations*, for example, where Berkowitz's sense of mass over line yields relatively heavy results, whereas Le Sage's considerably quicker, drier and brasher pianism represents a true *Presto con fuoco* (Sony, 12/15). Similarly, No 6 (*À toute vitesse*) is a genial amble here, lacking Le Sage's debonair briskness.

One also might want more bite to the C major Intermezzo's razor-sharp chords, while the B flat *Presto* sounds like a ponderous *adagietto* next to Vladimir Horowitz's delightful sprint. His conscientiously detailed, serious-minded way with Poulenc's wonderful *Thème varié* cannot compare with Tacchino's lighter textures and greater contrasts of mood between variations (Erato). However, the rounded richness of Berkowitz's sonority adds both breadth and depth to *Mélancolie*, in a performance that seems oddly yet aptly Schubertian. Indeed, an extensive series of Schubert releases from Meridian do far better justice to Berkowitz's pianistic proclivities and artistic temperament. **Jed Distler**

Satie

'Chapeau Satie'

Satie Trois Autres Mélodies[a] – No 1, Chanson; No 2, Les fleurs. La diva d l'empire[a]. Sept Gnossiennes. Trois Gymnopédies[b]. Je te veux[a]. Ludions – No 4, Air du poète[a]. Trois Mélodies (1886)[a]. Trois Mélodies (1916) – No 1, Le chapelier[a]. Petite ouverture à danser. Pièces froides – En y regardent à deux fois **H Werner** Mélancolie[a]

Xuefei Yang *gtr* with [a]**Héloïse Werner** *sop* [b]**Sharon Bezaly** *fl*

Platoon (PLAT26708 • 49')

Marking the centenary of the composer's death, Xuefei Yang here pays a singular, all-female homage to Erik Satie, that whimsical mystic, sonic minimalist and musical anti-hero of the belle époque.

Performing on a sonorous seven-string guitar by Amélie Bouvret, sometimes

Alexandra Papastefanou makes Bach's English Suites feel at home on the concert grand through her tonal resourcefulness and articulation contrasts – see review on page 62

double-tracked, Yang draws forth hues from Satie's elusive harmonies that the piano merely hints at. The *Gnossiennes* and *Gymnopédies*, long admired for their sepulchral grace, here gain new breath. Particularly striking is the interplay between Yang and Sharon Bezaly, whose flute pits a yearning sustain against the guitar's native evanescence.

Equally compelling are the songs, in which Héloïse Werner's soprano, crystalline and knowing, delivers the often absurdist texts with cabaret wit and classical elegance. The selections from *Trois Mélodies* (1886 and 1916), *Trois Autres Mélodies* (1906), *Ludions* and more form a narrative arc of longing, satire, erotic reverie and melancholic clarity. In many instances, Yang's transcriptions, always judicious, allow the voice to float over harp-like accompaniments that recall both troubadour song and French chanson.

Werner's own setting of Cécile Sauvage's *Mélancolie* – spectral, folkloric, yet fresh and contemporary – is a fitting coda, bridging the gap between Satie's dreamlike interiority and modernity and its discontents. Indeed, there is, throughout the programme, a sense of gentle reclamation: of Satie's irreverence, his inwardness, his timeless melancholy.

One occasionally misses the purity and simplicity of the more common arrangements for solo six-string guitar, such as those evocatively realised by Sébastien Llinares for Paraty. But be in no doubt: 'Chapeau Satie' is an intimate, intelligent and exquisitely realised virtual salon worthy of repeated visits.

William Yeoman

Satie

'Satie Discoveries'

Autour du 1er Nocturne. La belle excentrique – Cancan Grand-Mondain. Bourrée. Chanson barbare. Émergence du 4e Nocturne. Esquisses bitonales. Mélodie. Mélodie[a]. Menuet. Nocturne en filigrane. Parade – Prestidigitateur chinois[b]. Petite rêvasserie nocturne. Pousse de l'amour[a]. Reflexions nocturnes. Rêverie d'un plat. Soupirs fanés. Valse. Le vizir autrichien

Alexandre Tharaud *pf* with [a]**Nemanja Radulović** *vn* [b]**Gautier Capuçon** *pf*

Erato (2173 27842-4 • 30')

Virginia Woolf's comment about libraries being full of sunken treasures ripe for rediscovery could certainly be applied to the music of Erik Satie. With over 175 of the composer's sketchbooks kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and manuscripts and notebooks housed in Harvard University, no wonder Satie scholars have trawled through the archives in search of hidden treasures.

More recent deep digging by James Nye and Sato Matsui has yielded several newly discovered Satie works, as heard on this engaging recording of works for mainly solo piano. Lasting just over 30 minutes, the album contains 29 compositions, with several lasting less than a minute. Yet for all its brevity, 'Satie Discoveries' reveals Satie's chameleon-like creative personality, as heard on the opening three tracks.

The album bursts out of the musical blocks with a zany, quirky *Cancan Grand-Mondain*, followed by the dreamlike *Autour du 1er Nocturne*, which Nye pieced together from incomplete drafts of Satie's first Nocturne, composed in 1919. The composer's fondness for parody-like pastiche miniatures can be heard in the *Bourrée* and, later, a *Menuet*, both of which revel in a world of obsessively repeating patterns and clamped processes. No wonder Satie has often been hailed as a minimalist *avant la lettre*.

Nevertheless, there's nothing pared-down about the four short pieces comprising *Soupirs fanés* ('Faded Sighs'). In the second piece, 'Barbouillage', dissonant cluster chords and sudden silences give way to tender lyrical moments, while the third, 'Familial désespoir', contains echoes of Satie's famous *Vexations*. A similar sound world is contained in the *Esquisses bitonales* ('Bitonal Sketches').

Featuring well-measured and perfectly weighted interpretations throughout by pianist Alexandre Tharaud, alongside neat contributions from violinist Nemanja Radulović (in excerpts from Satie's operetta *Pousse l'amour*) and Gautier Capuçon in a well-paced performance of 'Prestidigitateur chinois' ('Chinese Conjuror') from the composer's well-known *Parade* in a piano four-hands version, 'Satie Discoveries' offers further evidence that there is still more to be rediscovered and appreciated in the music of this unique French figure who died 100 years ago. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Schubert · Beethoven

'Schubert+'

Beethoven Variations on an Original Theme in C minor, WoO80 **Schubert** Piano Sonatas – No 13 in A, D664; No 19 in C minor, D958

Can Çakmur *pf*

BIS (BIS2750 • 65')

Can Çakmur's 'Schubert+' series, begun in 2023 and combining works by Schubert with composers influencing or influenced by him, has now reached its fifth instalment. Here he presents the exquisite A major Sonata of 1819, while Beethoven's C minor Variations serve as a sort of overture to the first of the three crowning sonata masterpieces of Schubert's final year.

If the 32 C minor Variations are not Beethoven's most profound, they nevertheless effectively explore seemingly limitless instrumental textures. Çakmur seizes our interest from the outset and holds it fast through the early *leggiero* variations by a meticulous display of touch and articulation. By the fourth variation, a slightly sinister sense of anticipation emerges. This builds until the 12th variation, where the arrival in C major heralds a degree of relaxation without entirely relieving the underlying tension. But as the 16th variation achieves a calm that seems palpably near sunshine, the return of the minor key suddenly plunges us back into tense foreboding. From the 17th variation to the end is a sprint through kaleidoscopic colours and affects, concluding in triumphant defiance, tempered by two final chords of whispered retreat. This is a carefully conceived performance, brilliantly executed.

Schubert's 'little' A major Sonata is only small in comparison to the huge A major Sonata, D959. Here it is given a rhetorically apt, pristine performance of extraordinary beauty and nuance. In the context of this recording, however, its myriad interpretative felicities, including an *Andante* replete with touching lyricism and a carefree Rondo, are likely to be overshadowed by the late C minor Sonata.

I don't know of another performance of D958 that so successfully subordinates Schubert's occasionally awkward pianistic demands to the grand musical sweep of this monumental work. The mighty orchestral climes of the first movement make us regret that Schubert left us no minor-key symphonies after the *Unfinished*. The hushed sublimity of the *Adagio*'s opening is rendered even more vivid when contrasted with the menacing triplets of the movement's recurring nightmare. For all the Minuet's affective ambiguity, it maintains an inherent lightness and grace, providing an oasis in the sonata's overall scheme. Stormy skies return to threaten the supple concluding *Allegro*. Yet one never fears Çakmur will lose control of his steed, even as he constantly urges it forwards over the swells and dips of this varied terrain. He deftly delineates the magnificent architecture of this huge Rondo, sensitive to Schubert's surges and releases of energy, while highlighting myriad details without losing himself in them. Finally, one admires most Çakmur's inerrant kinaesthesia, vibrant, breathtaking, yet somehow always tempered by love for the beauty revealed in his art. Wholeheartedly recommended. **Patrick Rucker**

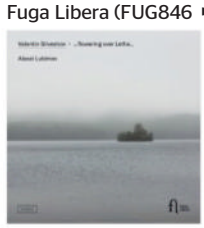
Silvestrov

'... flowering over Lethe ...'

3 February 1857 ... in memoriam Mikhail Glinka, Op 43. 19 November 1828 ... in memoriam Franz Schubert, Op 32. Birthday Dedications, Op 20. Two Dialogues with a Postscript. Hommage à Henry Purcell, Op 95. Moments of Memory I, Op 8. Nostalghia. Three Postludes, Op 64. Three Waltzes with a Postlude, Op 3

Alexei Lubimov *pf*

Fuga Libera (FUG846 • 78')



Postmodernists assert that – on a certain level at least – music is 'about' other music, whether intended by the composer or not. In Valentin Silvestrov's case, this sense of crafting music through the lens of others forms an important part of his creative practice, as heard in this collection of piano pieces by longtime interpreter Alexei Lubimov.

Eight short suites are presented in total, all written during the first decade of the 21st century, each one with a composer (or group of composers) in mind. Titles such as 'moments of memory', 'postludes', 'postscript', 'in memory of' and 'homage to …' offer helpful clues to Silvestrov's approach, where a fragment, trace or echo of an existing idea provides the spark for music that's rich in its connotations, connections and associations.

Interestingly, Silvestrov's approach generates a variety of musical memories. The pastiche-like set of three *Birthday Dedications* to Mozart, Schubert and Chopin wears its influences openly on its sleeve. At other times, however, such as in the *Three Postludes* to Arvo Pärt and *Hommage à Henry Purcell*, musical reference points remain buried underneath the surface, like fleeting sonic imprints whose audible trace evaporates into thin air.

Silvestrov has described his music as using a form of 'tonal atonality', where familiar objects are placed in unfamiliar surroundings. This is especially the case in *Two Dialogues with a Postscript*, where Wagner's presence results in a form of cognitive musical dissonance. The coordinates normally used to navigate through a tonal landscape have become scrambled, displaced and lost.

Crucially, what is gained from this process of partial memory retrieval is a reclamation of music's core elements: melody and harmony, solo and accompaniment, foreground and background. Lubimov's performance really comes into its own when viewed in this way, as heard in the opening piece, *Nostalghia*, written for Silvestrov's near-contemporary and fellow Ukrainian, composer Leonid Hrabovsky. The pianist's perfectly weighted separation between melody and harmony generates a floating quality that suffuses Silvestrov's music with a 'haunting serenity', to quote critic Allan Kozinn. As Lubimov once pointed out in relation to Silvestrov's music, sometimes a triad is all that's required to work a musical miracle. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Stockhausen

'Cosmic Clarinets'

Bassetsu[a]. Harmonien[b]. In Freundschaft[c]. Tierkreis[d]

PHOTOGRAPHY: CREDIT INFORMATION TO BE ADVISED

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Michele Marelli [cd]*cl*/[b]*bcl*/[e]*basset-hn*
[d]**Gianluca Cascioli** *pf*
Kairos (0022055KAI • 60')

Further expansion of the Stockhausen discography comes with this recital, Michele Marelli equally at home across three very distinct instruments in the executing of this singular vision.

There are few better ways into the composer's late music than *Harmonien* (2006), the Fifth Hour in Stockhausen's *Klang*, which envisaged 24 pieces representing each hour of the day. Given its position in the chronological scheme, this piece assumes the manner of an aubade that unfolds as elaborating variations on the melodic series heard at the outset, the timbre of bass clarinet intensively explored as its rhythmic profile becomes freer and more impulsive. Drawn from the fourth scene ('Michaelion') of his stage work *Mittwoch aus Licht*, *Bassetsu* (1997) affords pertinent contrast as it puts the basset-horn through an array of expressive guises in music that becomes more eventful and even characterful for its relative concision.

The other works reach back further into Stockhausen's output. Written for Suzanne Stephens, *In Freundschaft* (1977) typifies his 'formula' method of composing not least to the degree its formal complexity actively encourages freedom of expression and so results in music-theatre playful in its aural immediacy. Both this and *Tierkreis* (1975-81) have been often arranged for other instruments. The latter comprises 12 pieces, each centred on a sign of the zodiac and its parallel image whose musical representation is clarified when played on a melody instrument and piano – here the agile Gianluca Cascioli. Brevity and melodic poise might not always be associated with Stockhausen, yet they define his thinking as much as any vaunting ambition.

Harmonien comes on a diverse 2024 recital by Fie Schouten, the latter works by Volker Hemken and Steffan Schleiermacher as part of an absorbing 2007 collection for bass clarinet and/or piano. Well recorded with detailed notes, this new release fulfils its remit and is worth investigating.

Richard Whitehouse

Harmonien – comparative version:
Schouten *Attacca ATT2014140*
In Freundschaft, Tierkreis – selected comparison:
Hemken, Schleiermacher
Dabringhaus und Grimm MDG613 1451-2

Winterberg

Complete Piano Sonatas
Jonathan Powell *pf*
EDA (EDA54 • 80')

The exploration of composers silenced during the Third Reich continues apace, this release collating all five piano sonatas by Hans Winterberg (1901-91) – a Sudeten-Jew who, having survived the Theresienstadt ghetto, moved to Prague then Bavaria. Only in recent years has legal wrangling over his legacy been resolved to make works such as these sonatas easily available.

The First Sonata (1936) finds Winterberg mining an expressionist vein: witness the headlong impetus of an opening *Agitato* whose motivic tensility is accorded greater focus in its central *Adagio*, the final *Vivace* drawing on aspects of both as this heads towards a thunderous close. The Second Sonata (1941) clarifies the thematic element so its progress has greater emotional balance, not least in the central *Andante*, whose pathos feels no less tangible for its reticence.

The Third Sonata (1947) brings greater equivocation to its content so its progress seems less driven, an expressive poise coming to the fore in its *Adagio* with a sardonic, even parodistic tone underpinning its finale. The Fourth Sonata (1948) extends to four movements, with the first of them searching out an emotional fulfilment allayed by the relative pensiveness then recalcitrance of its successors; a tenuous conclusiveness then emerges from its impulsive finale. That this dies away makes a natural segue into the Fifth Sonata (1950) – its initial movement accumulating then subsiding in intensity, followed by the most unlikely 'song without words' then a scherzo whose capriciousness makes the solidity of its successor the more apposite in context. Several piano suites followed in its wake, but there were to be no further sonatas.

Music of such immediacy and technical dexterity needs pianism to match, which it gets from Jonathan Powell. Brigitte Helbig's accounts of the first two pieces are not outclassed but the vivid sound of this newcomer makes it the obvious recommendation for Winterberg's sonatas.

Richard Whitehouse

Comparative versions:
Sonata No 1 – comparative version:
Helbig *Toccata Classics TOCC0609*
Sonata No 2 – comparative version:
Helbig *Toccata Classics TOCC0531*

'Clara Schumann gewidmet'

Bargiel Drei Charakterstücke, Op 8 **Bernsdorf** Drei Intermezzi, Die Libellen, Op 10 **Brahms** Gavotte von CW Gluck **Dreyschock** Rhapsodie 'Zum Wintermärchen', Op 40 No 4 **JPE Hartmann** Fantasistykker, Op 54 **Heller** Zwei Tarantelles, Op 85 **E von Herzogenberg** Acht Klavierstücke – No 8, Allegro appassionato **Lachner** Zwei Klavierstücke, Op 52 **Mendelssohn** Lieder ohne Worte, Book 5, Op 62 **R Schumann** Geistervariationen, WoO24 **Smetana** Four Sketches, Op 4
Kathrin Schmidlin *pf*
Claves (50-3122/3 ② • 109')

Clara Wieck Schumann (1819-96) championed the piano works of her husband, Robert, and her close friend, Johannes Brahms, plus Bach, Beethoven and others. At the height of her fame her playing was hailed for its nobility and eloquence, her name invoked alongside those of Liszt and Thalberg. A greatly talented composer as well, she inspired about 30 fellow composers to dedicate works to her. Swiss pianist Kathrin Schmidlin offers a balanced conspectus of those compositions, featuring many partially forgotten and overlooked character pieces.

To be sure, they are of inconsistent quality. Schmidlin saves some of the best for last, notably Smetana's *Four Sketches*. I especially enjoyed 'Souvenir' and 'Persistent Endeavour' with their inventive counterpoint and distinctive voice. Another attractive morsel on the album is Brahms's charming Gavotte on a theme from Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*.

I wish that Schmidlin had replaced Robert Schumann's late *Ghost Variations* with his earlier and much finer *Impromptus on a Theme of Clara Wieck*, Op 5, also dedicated to Clara. (The theme was written by Clara when she was 14 years old.) This deeply poetic and wonderfully imaginative work is still rarely performed and recorded. All of Robert Schumann's greatest piano music was written before he was 30, but the *Ghost Variations* was the last piece he wrote for piano, years later, just before his admission to the asylum in Endenich. Schmidlin skilfully navigates its unwieldly textures, quirky rhythms and gnomic rhetoric but the spark of Robert Schumann's genius had nearly been extinguished.

Stephen Heller's *Tarantelles* (both marked *presto*) showcase some glittering keyboard-writing, and the second has a bracing Italianate flavour. Elsewhere, there

Alexandre Tharaud explores recently unearthed Satie works with guest artists including violinist Nemanja Radulović – see review on page 67

are longueurs in the Bargiel set (lasting over 17'00"), the Bernsdorf pieces (14'40"), and the Hartmann set (17'40"), though they may interest aficionados of little-known piano music of that era. The six Mendelssohn *Songs without Words* receive convincing and well-executed performances but do not displace rival versions by Perahia (Sony) or Barenboim (DG), whose vernal account of 'Spring Song' has the freshness of a first encounter. **Stephen Cera**

'Diabolico'

Castelnuovo-Tedesco Capriccio diabolico, Op 85*a* **D'Angelo** Due Canzoni lidie **Paganini** Grand Sonata in A, Op 39 **Rochberg** Caprice Variations (arr Fisk) **Rodrigo** Invocación y danza **Tartini** Violin Sonata in G minor, 'The Devil's Trill' – 1st movt (arr Zadra)

Laura Lootens *gtr*

Naïve (V8672 ▸▸ • 69')

The follow-up to 2022 Andrés Segovia Competition winner Laura Lootens's superb debut release featuring the music of Albéniz (AVI-Music), 'Diabolico' is less about fiendish virtuosity, more about 'a journey into a world of mystery and dark fascination'. Yet Lootens's exceptional command of her instrument – in this case, a 2023 Martínez & Lázaro guitar – is everywhere in evidence, even in the *Larghetto affettuoso* from Tartini's so-called *Devil's Trill* Sonata, the performance of which exhibits an oneiric transparency evoking Tartini's own frustrated dream-catching.

The album's most audacious undertaking is undoubtedly Eliot Fisk's transcription of Rochberg's *Caprice Variations*, originally for unaccompanied violin and itself a labyrinthine meditation on Paganini's 24th Caprice. Lootens's layered reading, by turns meditative and intense, points up the Lisztian tension between the facile and the profound.

Lootens's solo arrangement of Paganini's *Grand Sonata*, originally for violin and guitar, acknowledges that Paganini similarly understood the guitar as accompanist and protagonist; consequently, Lootens avails herself of the guitar's capacity for colouristic variations the better to delineate implied solo and *tutti* passages. D'Angelo's dreamlike *Due Canzoni lidie* and Rodrigo's *Invocación y danza* reveal Lootens's fine sensitivity to music that inhabits the nexus between the mystical and the mundane. And if her fluent navigation of different tunings and timbres in the D'Angelo conjure landscapes that exist more in memory than geography, her capacity for pure theatre, which honours the work's roots in Manuel de Falla's *El Amor brujo*, is very much on show in Rodrigo's supplicatory *Invocación* and terrifying *Danza*.

Lootens's expansive, mature take on Castelnuovo-Tedesco's Paganini homage, the multifaceted *Capriccio diabolico*, is not so much the programme's apotheosis as the casting of a musical eye back over the works that here precede it, rendering this compelling recital less a musical banquet than a last supper of delectable darkness. **William Yeoman**

PHOTOGRAPHY: RAPHAËL WERTHEIMER

Ian Venables

At 70, this British composer is at the peak of his powers, writes **Richard Whitehouse**

Venables has proved an innovative master of English song in a variety of forms

That certain composers are hailed as such from the outset while others only gradually come to prominence is an observation not relevant to the present alone. Yet the belated emergence of Ian Venables as a master of English song is of particular interest – whether in terms of his revivifying of a tradition that might have become moribund, or his drawing attention to authors whose poetry has been overlooked or, moreover, taken for granted as regards musical setting. The outcome is a corpus of songs and song-cycles that is second to none among those for whom the English language is a source of never-ending but often unexpected possibilities.

Although he studied the piano and the organ as part of his secondary education and had worked as a choirmaster when barely out of his teens, it wasn't until he was in his mid-twenties that Venables had composition lessons in earnest. Earliest pieces find him adept in instrumental media, notably the Op 1 Piano Sonata *In Memoriam DSCH* (1975, rev. 1980; hearing the UK premiere of Shostakovich's 15th Symphony in 1972 was a formative experience) with its powerfully inward finale. Piano collections include *The Stourhead Follies* (1985), which (with Op 1) has been recorded by Graham J Lloyd, while the *Three Pieces* for violin and piano (1986, recently recorded by Chu-Yu Yang and Eric McElroy on Somm, 6/25) have an expressive poise and rhythmic agility that has rightly ensured them a place among Venables's most often performed works.

'Remember This' may well be thought to be one of the finest vocal works to have emerged so far in the 21st century

Songs with piano accompaniment made a tentative (quantitively rather than qualitatively) early appearance in his output, with *Midnight Lamentation* (1974) reflecting the strophic design of Harold Monro's poem via a setting of cumulative intensity. *Pain* (1991) is a setting of Ivor Gurney's sonnet, investing its ominous observations on war with a wrenching anguish clinched, if not allayed, by the tonal starkness at its close (both recorded by Kevin McLean-Mair and Graham J Lloyd, Enigma, 4/00). (Gurney has since become a preoccupation, with Venables having rescued several of his major orchestral and instrumental works from oblivion.)

Several other stand-alone songs preceded *Venetian Songs* (1994-95), a cycle significant in that it marks Venables's first engagement with John Addington Symonds – 19th-century poet, literary critic and Renaissance scholar whose openness on sexual matters informs much of his creativity, as is affectingly conveyed in Venables's final song, 'Love's Voice'. This was followed by a setting of *At Malvern* (1998), where Venables vividly underscores Symonds's elision of serene evocation of landscape with canny take on Catullus's existential impulses (this and *Venetian Songs* have been recorded by Andrew Kennedy and Iain Burnside on Naxos). A very different perspective is that conjured up by the words of Rennie Parker in the song *Acton Burnell* (1997). Named after her poem inspired by the place where the first English parliament was held in the 13th century, the song renders its environs from an ethereal remove. It is also notable for placing muted viola alongside voice and piano, thereby making for an interplay whose finesse recalls Brahms's *Gestillte Sehnsucht*.

It was with *Invite, to Eternity* (1997) that Venables created his first undoubted masterpiece in the genre. Setting four poems by John Clare (pastoral meditations presciently informed by an industrial-era alienation), this song-cycle is for tenor and string quartet – a significant subgenre with indirect antecedents in Gurney and Vaughan Williams, but more so Schoeck and Van Dieren. Here the poem of that title becomes an equivocal intermezzo next to the insistent scherzo of 'Evening Bells', those two central songs framed by the fervent 'Born upon an Angel's Breast' and plangent 'I am' unerringly conveying Clare grasping onto his last vestige of self. This cycle's emotional trajectory may be compared to that of Vaughan Williams's *On Wenlock Edge*, but there is no transcendence or even resignation; rather, the music amplifies the poem's negatory essence in a symbiotic fusion (recorded by Andrew Kennedy and the Dante Quartet on Signum, 10/10). Vaughan Williams's early masterwork is more directly alluded to with the original version (for tenor and piano quintet) of *Songs of Eternity and Sorrow* (2003; recorded by Andrew Kennedy, the Dante Quartet and Simon Crawford-Phillips on Signum, 4/08), a cycle of four poems by AE Housman whose emotional emphasis falls on its opening setting of 'Easter Hymn'.

The half-hour 'cantata' *Remember This* (2008-11, for soprano, tenor and piano quintet), which sets a poem by Andrew Motion, is strikingly innovative as regards its overall conception. Its intricate yet unforced alternation between aria and recitative ensures the methodical accumulation of emotion towards the climactic final section, 'In the eyes of our minds', which brings to a close what may well be thought to be one of the finest vocal works to have emerged so far in the 21st century.

Songs might currently be predominant in Venables's output, but there is no lack of chamber works – among which, the Piano Quintet, Op 27 (1989-96), is the most substantial and certainly the best known. Its three movements are far from beholden to formal archetypes: witness the formal unpredictability of its first-movement *Allegro ma non troppo*,

VENABLES FACTS

Birth Liverpool, July 25, 1955
Studies Piano with Ronald Settle at Bluecoat Chambers, Liverpool (1971-73). BA (Hons) in Economics, Liverpool University (1974-77). Organ with Ian Tracey at Liverpool Cathedral (1972-77), then with Michael Fleming at Royal School of Church Music, Croydon (1979-81). Composition with Richard Arnell at Trinity College of Music, London (1980-83). Postgraduate composition at Birmingham Conservatoire with Andrew Downes, John Mayer and John Joubert (1987-91)
Appointments Organist and choirmaster at St Thomas's Church, Wavertree, Liverpool (1974-77). Schoolmaster (economics) at Sherborne School, Dorset (1983-86)
Earliest acknowledged works *Midnight Lamentation*, voice and piano (1974), premiere: Sherborne School, Dorset, June 1985. Piano Sonata, Op 1 (1975, rev. 1980), premiere: Patrick Hemmerle, Paris, April 2016
Notable premieres 'Love's Voice' (from *Venetian Songs*), Ian and Jennifer Partridge, Three Choirs Festival, Gloucester, August 1994. Piano Quintet, Op 27, Scott Mitchell and Duke Quartet, Malvern Festival, June 1996. String Quartet, Op 32, Duke Quartet, Droitwich Concert Club, March 1998. *Songs of Eternity and Sorrow*, Andrew Kennedy (tenor), Simon Lepper (piano) and Tippett Quartet, Weekend of English Song, Ludlow, June 2004. *Remember This*, Caroline MacPhie (soprano), Allan Clayton (tenor), Tom Poster (piano) and Elias Quartet, Cheltenham Festival, June 2011. *Through These Pale Cold Days* (song-cycle, 2016), Nick Pritchard (tenor), Louise Williams (viola) and Benjamin Frith (piano), Royal Grammar School, Worcester, June 2016. Requiem (orchestral version), Choir of Merton College, Oxford, Oxford Contemporary Sinfonia and Benjamin Nicholas (conductor), Merton College Chapel, Oxford, November 11, 2022. *Out of the Shadows* (orchestral version), Gareth Brynmor John (baritone), English SO and Kenneth Woods (conductor), Worcester Cathedral, May 2025

VENABLES ON RECORD

Mostly vocal works, plus an instrumental compilation

Elegy, Op 2. Piano Quintet, Op 27. Poem, Op 29. Soliloquy, Op 26. Three Pieces, Op 11
Mark Bebbington and Graham J Lloyd *pfs* Coull Quartet
Somm Céleste (5/11)
Chamber music features intermittently throughout Venables's career, and this collection centres on the Piano Quintet, which is becoming securely established in the repertoire.

'The Song of the Severn'
Roderick Williams *bar* Graham J Lloyd *pf* Carducci Quartet
Signum (A/15)
This vocal anthology includes two of Venables's most immediately appealing song-cycles – the title-track (2012-13) and *The Pine Boughs Past Music*, Op 39 (2009) – alongside a representative selection of individual songs accompanied either by piano or by string quartet.

'Love Lives beyond the Tomb: Songs and Song Cycles'
Mary Bevan *sop* Allan Clayton *ten* Graham J Lloyd *pf* Carducci Quartet
Signum (7/20)
The demands placed on the listener by both the song-cycles and the individual songs on this album are well rewarded by their depth of content (includes *Remember This*).

God be merciful, Op 51. Requiem, Op 48. Rhapsody, Op 25, 'In Memoriam Herbert Howells'
Choir of Merton College, Oxford; Oxford Contemporary Sinfonia / Benjamin Nicholas *org*
Delphian (2/23)
This album includes the orchestral version of Venables's Requiem, plus a piece for chorus (2020) and one for organ (1996, written in memory of Howells, whose music also features here).

preceded by an opening *Adagio espressivo* whose acute pathos informs the robust energy of what ensues, then the *Largo espressivo* that takes in a capricious scherzo-like central phase without at all undermining its soulful discourse. Nor is the finale's incisive animation resolved by its slow postlude, for all that a sense of this music having come affectingly full circle is undeniable. Less immediately approachable, though more subtle as to content, is the String Quartet, Op 32 (1997-98; recorded by the Dante Quartet). There are once again three movements, though here the opening *Allegro con energia* has an impetuousness maintained right through to its close, and the playful central *Allegretto scherzando* is a deft foil to the finale whose initial eloquence is purposefully alternated with more febrile material prior to an ending almost brutal in its decisiveness.

Choral music has enjoyed increasing prominence in the composer's catalogue. Earlier pieces such as the anthem for choir and organ *O sing aloud to God* (1993; recorded by Gloucester Cathedral Choir on Somm) – its text drawn from Psalms 77, 81 and 105 – evince a natural feeling for the medium, but there was little else before the Requiem (2018-19, for choir and organ; orchestrated 2020), which at 40 minutes is Venables's largest-scale work to date. Particularly in the version with orchestra, this can take its place within a lineage of essentially inward Requiems such as those by Fauré, Duruflé and Martin. Relatively modest in scale it might be, yet there is no lack of intensity in terms of its individual sections or its overall conception. The absence of the 'Dies irae' is more than compensated for by an unusually searching take on the *Offertorium*, followed by a relatively extended setting of the *Libera me* whose ambivalent emotion renders the 'Lux aeterna' more affirmative and thus more meaningful. There has been no lack of Requiem settings in recent decades, and that by Venables is surely among the most probing in terms of what this text might mean to us today.

This defining work in Venables's output has been followed by several short anthems and motets, along with two works – one of them *Hermes Trismegistus* (2021), a setting of Henry Longfellow pointedly designated a 'scena' – that again place the viola in the context of voice and piano. Two further song-cycles duly partner the voice with piano quintet and string quartet respectively. *Portraits of a Mind* (2022; recorded by Alessandro Fisher, William Vann and the Navarra Quartet on Albion, 8/23) opens with a setting of George Meredith's 'The Lark Ascending' which is very different from, though no less moving than, Vaughan Williams's fabled response, while *The Wreaths of Time* (2024) sets an anthology of American poets in what might be deemed an indication of the regard with which this composer is held on the other side of the Atlantic.

Venables was the featured composer at this year's Elgar Festival, which saw the premiere of the orchestral version of his song-cycle *Out of the Shadows* (2023), originally written for baritone and piano trio. It was given by the English SO with Kenneth Woods, whose 21st Century Symphony Project would surely be enhanced by Venables being commissioned to write for it a 'vocal symphony' that marries his innate feeling for song texts with the expansiveness of an orchestral setting. It would be a striking new departure for a composer who is now at the peak of his powers. G

PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL WHITEFOOT

Vocal

Edward Seckerson enjoys The Curious Case of Benjamin Button:
'No praise can be too high for the gifted ensemble giving their all on this exemplary cast album' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 76

Alexandra Coghlan hears Byrd and Muhly from New York Polyphony:
'The dancing, flexible freedom and interplay of voices is a reminder of the balance and clarity of these fine singers' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 81

Agricola

Missa In myne zyn. Missa Malheur me bat
Beauty Farm
Fra Bernardo (2468128 ② • 104')

Agricola's sacred music is less well represented in the discography than his secular works. It is very demanding vocally and his penchant for the unexpected poses a considerable interpretative challenge as well. Small wonder that recordings are like hen's teeth.

The four Masses based on named chansons were recorded more than 20 years ago by the Hungarian ANS Chorus and the *Missa In myne zyn* (possibly Agricola's last and most expansive) by Capilla Flamenca in 2010. Beauty Farm get in on the act with the first of two releases, which pairs the Masses on *In myne zyn* and *Malheur me bat* on two discs. ANS Chorus got through both on just one disc and sounded rushed in places, but Beauty Farm have the opposite problem. Take things too slowly and you struggle to generate the momentum and rhythmic drive that Agricola's music requires.

I've often singled out the tempo as one of the most essential decisions in this repertory, but here there are more fundamental issues at play. Some of the singers are mismatched technically and the ensemble sounds under-rehearsed and under-produced: there are missed or fluffed entries and misreadings, incorrect interpretation of mensuration signs (affecting notated changes of tempo), consistent failure to maintain pitch over a section, voices drop out, and so on. More than once, one of the tenors covers the top voice when it goes below (written) middle C: done unobtrusively, this can escape notice, but here it happens frequently, and with just one voice to a part one cannot ignore it. (Ironically, Agricola likes to split lines between singers seemingly arbitrarily, in the *Gloria* and the *Credo* of *In myne zyn*, for example, meaning that his intentional use of this trick is blunted.) Finally, the sound image is oddly unbalanced: in *In myne zyn* especially, the top line sounds as though it's coming from another room. It's just baffling. **Fabrice Fitch**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:
ANS Chorus, Bali *Hungaroton HCD32011*
Misse In myne zyn – selected comparison:
Capilla Flamenca, Snellings *Ricercar RIC306 (5/11)*

CPE Bach

St Matthew Passion, H782
Jörg Dürmüller *ten* Evangelist **Klaus Mertens** *bass* Christus **Deborah York, Orlanda Velez Isidro** *sop* **Franziska Gottwald** *contr* **René Steur** *bass*
Amsterdam Baroque Choir and Orchestra / Ton Koopman *org*
Fra Bernardo (FB2566624 ② • 102')
Recorded live at the Minoritenkirche, Vienna, August 29-30, 2002

The rediscovery and reassessment of the music of CPE Bach continues along its fitful way with this disinterment of one of his many Passions, composed annually for performance in Hamburg, where he succeeded his godfather Telemann as director of the city's music. This one, from 1769, has the status of a true rediscovery: like so many documents and artworks after the Second World War, the score of this *St Matthew Passion* was thought lost until it turned up in 1999 in Kyiv, as part of the music archive of the Berliner Singakademie. This presentation transmits a pair of concerts of the work, given in Vienna three years later, with nearly all the clarity and cleanliness of a studio production.

The work proceeds much like the more familiar Passions of Emanuel's father, with a succession of recitatives – recounting the story and the words of Jesus – linking reflective arias and familiar chorales for communal singing. The principal protagonists are all that might be expected from such a project: tireless tenor Jörg Dürmüller as the Evangelist, sonorous Klaus Mertens as Christ and Deborah York in a range of soprano roles, with the secondary singers never less than adequate. Ton Koopman's Amsterdam Baroque players and singers, too, are fervent in their advocacy.

As for the music, it is entirely representative of CPE Bach's position as a transitional figure in 18th-century music. Johann Sebastian's second composing son, he was born in 1714, the same year as Gluck and Jommelli, and died the year after Gluck. His music, then, leans to a certain extent on the passing Baroque age – appropriate for a devotional work such as this – while not immune to flashes of the innovations that would catch the ear of the likes of Haydn. In among severe fugal writing and busy *turba* choruses, aria styles often look forwards; there is a premonition of *Sturm und Drang* at the betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, while the arias towards the close of the first half or the long soprano duet in the second have audibly bade farewell to the Baroque, before you are suddenly yanked back in time in a passage that could almost be straight lift from the father's work – and indeed is just that in places such as the 'Lass ihn kreuzigen' sequence! (It appears that Emanuel didn't inherit Sebastian's fluency and facility, and accordingly co-opted and adapted the work of others in order to meet his deadlines.)

It is this transitional nature that provides much of the interest in the sacred music of CPE Bach. There is another *Matthäus-Passion* available from the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin and the Zelter Ensemble under Joshard Daus (Capriccio) but that is a different work, from 1785. There is no evidence of the audience on this recording, although there is occasionally some odd distortion on the pre-release digital files provided for review, which did not include an explanatory booklet or text. Nevertheless, this is a tempting addition to the erratically developing discography of this ever-fascinating composer.
David Threasher

Ton Koopman conducts Klaus Mertens and the Amsterdam Baroque Choir and Orchestra in the recenly rediscovered 1769 St Matthew Passion by CPE Bach

JS Bach

'Bach's Horns'
Brandenburg Concerto No 1 in F, BWV1046. Cantata No 208, Was mir behagt, ist nur die muntre Jagd. Mass in F, BWV233
Solomon's Knot
Prospero (PROSP30106 • 79' • T/t)
Recorded live at St Gumbertus Kirche, Ansbach, Germany, July 29 & 30, 2023

Recorded live in concerts during the Ansbach Bach Week, Solomon's Knot present music with horns devised for courtly entertainments in Weimar, Weissenfels and Cöthen, or for liturgical music-making in Leipzig's churches. Anneke Scott and Anna Drysdale's natural horns resound splendidly with visceral disruption, high-wire flamboyance or regal dignity (and sometimes all those elements at once). There is equivalent sophistication in spotlights for concertante strings and woodwinds, and the collective's eight singers switch adeptly between solos and choral interactions.

They begin with the short Mass in F major (Leipzig, late 1730s). The solemn *Kyrie* incorporates a Lutheran chorale but then 'Gloria in excelsis Deo' bursts in excitedly with whooping horns, bustling strings and chuckling oboes; the fulsome singers are unduly at the forefront to the detriment of their instrumental counterpart but 'Cum Sancto Spiritu' achieves better-balanced synergy. Jonathan Sells's articulate 'Domine Deus' segues without pause into Zoë Brookshaw and oboist Daniel Lanthier's serene dialogue in 'Qui tollis'. George Clifford's lithesome violin converses animatedly with James Hall ('Quoniam').

There is scholarly conjecture that an early short version of the first *Brandenburg Concerto* could have been a sinfonia for the hunt cantata *Was mir behagt, ist nur die muntre Jagd*, either at its first outing in 1713 for the birthday of Duke Christian of Saxe-Weissenfels or one of several revivals for Duke Ernst August in Weimar. This speculation is the catalyst for Solomon's Knot dispersing the entire concerto across the cantata. The first movement's prevalent horn fanfares and bustling energy set up Diana's proclamation that she loves nothing better than hunting (Brookshaw's mirthful 'Jagen ist die Lust der Götter') and her subsequent reassurance of the insecure Endymion that she still loves him too (his anxiety is expressed ardently by Thomas Herford). The concerto's lyrical oboe-led *Adagio* is inserted to evoke the descent of Pan – its woodwinds connect to the god's bucolic 'Ein Fürst ist seines Landes Pan!' (sung lustily by Alex Ashworth). Pales's charming pastoral 'Schafe können sicher weiden' blends Clare Lloyd-Griffiths's gentleness, undulating recorders and James Johnstone's sensitive use of the harpsichord's lute stop. The concerto's minuets, trios and polonaise function as a balletic divertissement prior to the panegyrical cantata's last stretch. An instrumental panoply and four characters dovetail elegantly in a final chorus that forges ahead into the concerto's urbane third movement. The fresh way that these three familiar works are strung together is ingenious and delightful.

David Vickers

Caldara

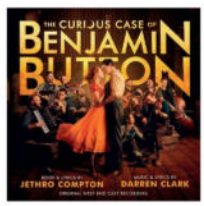
Gioseffo che interpreta i sogni
Eleonora Bellocci, Arianna Venditelli *sop*
Lorrie Garcia, Margherita Maria Sala *contr*
Mauro Borgioni *bar* **Luigi De Donato** *bass*
Consort Maghini / Alessandro De Marchi
Glossa (GCD923543 ② • 143' • T/t)
Recorded live at Tempio Valdese, Turin, November 29, 2024

Among Caldara's numerous works for the Habsburgs are over 20 oratorios for Lent and Holy Week. This complete recording of *Gioseffo che interpreta i sogni* (1726) was made at a concert celebrating the bicentenary of Turin's Egyptian Museum. The Sinfonia's contrapuntal subjects are delineated tautly by the band of strings and oboes. It is surprising that the continuo group lacks theorbo – high-profile lutenist Francesco Bartolomeo Conti was among Caldara's colleagues at the Vienna Hofkapelle. Mauro Borgioni makes hefty work of the narrator's contemplative arias that begin each half of the oratorio (Caldara notated the role for a tenor). Joseph's prophecies about the destinies of the fortunate cupbearer and doomed baker prompt emotive reactions from Eleonora Bellocci (virtuosic gleefulness) and Lorrie Garcia (an outburst raging at cruel fate). The liberated cupbearer has a buoyant duet with Pharoah that features trumpeter Gabriele Cassone's regal fluidity. The forgotten Joseph's imprisoned lament is sung poignantly by Margherita Maria Sala in partnership with Luca Lucchetta's lonely solo chalumeau, restrained continuo and interjections from chromatically falling strings ('E quando mai potrò cessar di piangere?').

Luigi De Donato enacts Pharaoh's unease at his mysterious dreams with dignified authority (there are some passing imperfections from the polyphonic strings). Arianna Venditelli's radiant stylishness is well suited to the soothsayer Zedekiah's cheerful inability to decipher Pharaoh's visions. Belocci dispatches the cupbearer's extrovert remembrance of Joseph's divine gift brilliantly. Joseph's paradoxical amazement and serenity upon his release from prison are characterised charmingly in the oratorio's longest aria, 'Libertà cara, e gradita'; Sala's vocal intimacy and Margit Übellacker's beguiling psaltery float over simple continuo support, assigned shrewdly by director Alessandro De Marchi to soft organ and delicate pizzicato basses. A duet that expresses simultaneously the cupbearer's joy and Zedekiah's embarrassment bespeaks Caldara's Venetian roots. Sala's limpidity adjoins sweetly to unfurling four-part strings in Joseph's humble acknowledgement of God's goodness, which sets things up perfectly for him to become Pharaoh's right-hand man saving the nation from famine. A couple of philosophising choruses, such as the closing comparison of Joseph to Christ offering us the bread of life, are sung a bit plainly by a choir of 18 voices – although otherwise Consort Maghini's warts-and-all live recording has plenty to offer. **David Vickers**

Clark

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button
Original West End Cast Recording
First Night (2173 27720-3 • 81')



I've followed this beautiful uplifting show from its inception at the postage-stamp Southwark Playhouse to its arrival in the West End and a well-deserved Olivier Award for Best New Musical. Its scale is small, its ambition huge, and its heart even bigger. Adapted from F Scott Fitzgerald's enchanting short story and reset on the Cornish coast, it chronicles the life in reverse of Benjamin Button from octogenarian baby to an end/beginning of life where memories cease to exist at all. As the song says: 'It's all just a matter of time.'

The key to its success is simple. Honesty. Every word, every bar of music is there for a purpose and truthful to a fault. There is an irresistible life-force about it, an urgency, an imperative, intensified by the fact that the 14-strong cast of thousands are actor/musicians whose connection with Darren Clark's score is physical. If you are in the auditorium there is an immediacy to both songs and storytelling. You are very much a part of the narrative. Jethro Compton's witty and incisive and poetic book draws you in, moment by moment, minute by minute, second by second. It's all just a matter of time indeed.

'The Western Wind' lays out the musical's stall – a robust, grass-roots folksiness writ large with high sophistication. 'The Kraken's Lullaby' and 'The Moon and the Sea' represent the lyrical essence of the show – gorgeously poetic both – but the sophistication and mystery of the tale are conveyed in archaic-sounding close-harmony passages that haunt the imagination and take us somewhere else altogether. The uplifting vocal counterpoint at the close of 'Where e're she looked at me' is a case in point. The exhilaration of first love was rarely so potently conveyed.

'Shippin' out tomorrow' and 'Rollin' away' are hard to listen to sitting down and 'Home' with its glorious reprise late in the show would gladden the most cynical heart. Then there's 'Time', the most haunting of melodies, which feels like it's the crux of the entire show.

No praise can be too high for the gifted ensemble giving their all on this exemplary cast album. Technically, atmospherically, it's as good as they come. I know someone who has seen the show over 40 times. I get that. And now they can relive it at home. Time and time again. **Edward Seckerson**

Handel

'Italian Cantatas & Arias'
Agrippina condotta a morire, HWV110[a]. Armida abbandonata, HWV105[a]. Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno, HWV46a[a] – Lascia la spina; Un pensiero nemico di pace; Pure del Cielo intelligenze eterne ... Tu del Ciel ministro eletto. Sinfonia in B flat, HWV339. Trio Sonata in A, Op 5 No 1 HWV396
[a]**Amanda Forsythe** *sop*
Opera Prima / Cristiano Contadin *va da gamba*
CPO (CPO555 616-2 • 76' • T/t)

Opera Prima is not an opera company but a chamber ensemble founded and directed by Cristiano Contadin, an Italian viola da gamba player. The group has already recorded cantatas by Carl Heinrich Graun with the American soprano Amanda Forsythe; and here she is in a well-balanced programme of music by Handel. The pieces on this album are early works, mostly composed when Handel was gaining experience in Italy. The two cantatas do not feature nymphs and shepherds but a single character drawn respectively from mythology and history. Both lament their fate in an outpouring of despair, rage and love.

Armida abbandonata is based on an episode in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, set at the time of the First Crusade. The pagan sorceress has been abandoned by the (unnamed) Christian knight Rinaldo. A narrator introduces the scene, strikingly accompanied only by arpeggios on the violin. We then hear Armida herself in 'Ah', crudele', with continuo but no violins, a slow aria with an impassioned middle section. In a second *accompagnato* she calls on the monsters of the deep to sink the ship in which her lover is escaping; this is followed by 'Venti, fermate', notable for its busy bass line, where she begs the winds and waves not to drown him. Talk about conflicted! The final aria is a siciliano, as Armida asks the god of love to help her cease to love the traitor.

Amanda Forsythe copes admirably with this emotional roller coaster, and she rises

Synergy Vocals present recent works by Steve Reich, Jacob's Ladder with the New York Philharmonic and Traveler's Prayer with the Colin Currie Group – see review overleaf

PHOTOGRAPHY: WILL PRIESTMAN

to the even greater challenge of *Agrippina condotta a morire*. As with *Armida*, the author is unknown. Agrippina has been condemned to death by her son, the emperor Nero, whose succession to the throne she had engineered: an example of the cynical phrase 'No good turn goes unpunished'. There is no narrator, nor an instrumental prelude: instead, Agrippina takes the stage with a *secco* recitative leading to the angry 'Orrida, oscura'. Here, Forsythe yields in vigour to Roberta Invernizzi, singing at lower pitch in Vol 7 of 'Italian Cantatas' (Glossa, 10/10). Come 'Renda cenere' her rage has increased, with some dazzling coloratura. In the central section (tracks 16-19), Handel employs arioso, and recitative both *secco* and *accompagnato*, as Agrippina veers between picturing a violent death for Nero and acknowledging her own maternal feelings. He then shows off his contrapuntal skills in 'Se infelice al mondo'. At the end, Agrippina accepts death in less than a minute of *secco* recitative. The cantata, virtually an operatic scena, is a minor masterpiece to which Forsythe does true justice.

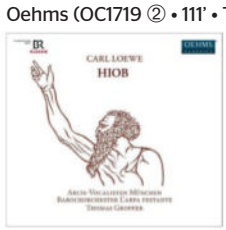
The excerpts from *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* start, oddly, with the final number of the piece. The violin solo is beautifully played by Federico Guglielmo; 'Un pensiero' includes some more excellent coloratura from Forsythe. 'Lascia la spina' (better known in its later guise as 'Lascia ch'io pianga' from the opera *Rinaldo*) benefits from its being taken quite briskly. The vocal delights are complemented by spirited performances of two trio sonatas, the second one derived in part from the Chandos Anthem No 5, *I will magnify thee*. A very neat package. **Richard Lawrence**

C Loewe

Hiob

Monika Mauch *sop* **Ulrike Malotta** *mez* **Georg Poplutz** *ten* **Dominik Wörner** *bass* **Arcis-Vocalisten, Munich; L'Arpa Festante Baroque Orchestra / Thomas Gropper** *bar*

Oehms (OC1719 ② • 111' • T)



Carl Loewe (1796-1869) is primarily remembered now, if at all, for his many songs, often setting texts also chosen by the likes of Schubert and Schumann, making for telling comparisons. It's easy to place, for example, interpretations of 'Erlkönig' by Schubert and Loewe side by side to demonstrate the younger man's greater genius, although Loewe's response to poetry is always personal and productive. There are larger works, too – concertos and chamber works – that are gradually being explored but light is only gradually being shone on his output of 18 oratorios: here L'Arpa Festante and Thomas Gropper follow up their recording of Loewe's 1847 *Das Sühnopfer des neuen Bundes* with the following year's *Hiob* ('Job').

Peter Quantrill identified 'Loewe's blend of hand-me-down Bach and Schumann' when reviewing the earlier oratorio (5/19), which is fair enough up to a point. There's a generous splash of Mendelssohn in there, too, and while the whole sweep of the work doesn't grip the way *Elijah* does (Mendelssohn had died the year before *Hiob* was completed), Loewe's invention has a way of holding the attention. A keen ear for orchestral colour and effect is made the more evident by the beauty of the playing by the period-instrument L'Arpa Festante, the woodwinds especially. And the involvement of soloists of the calibre of the likes of Mauch and Poplutz is proof enough that this is a minutely considered, high-quality product.

Comprehensive notes introducing Loewe and the project itself, plus a thoroughgoing synopsis, are included in German and English but there is no translation of the text. The performance is the thing, though,

and it's finely done. Those who enjoy peering into the less-explored corners of this repertory may find it hiust the hiob.
David Threasher

Reich

Jacob's Ladder[a]. Traveler's Prayer[b]
Synergy Vocals; [b]Colin Currie Group; [a]New York Philharmonic Orchestra / Jaap van Zweden
Nonesuch (7559 78991-2 • 31')
Recorded live at [b]Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall, May 21 & 22, 2023; [a]David Geffen Hall, Lincoln Center, New York, October 5 & 7, 2023
Previously issued on 7559 79041-8 (4/25)

Steve Reich's late style has been described by Timo Andres as possessing the qualities of 'calm self-assurance balanced with bold adventurousness'. There's plenty of evidence of both in the two recent works included on this latest Nonesuch release.

A spirit of bold adventurousness characterises *Jacob's Ladder*, which draws on four short verses from Genesis 28 to depict the biblical Jacob's dreamlike vision of a ladder connecting Heaven and Earth. The 20-minute work for 17 instrumentalists and four singers begins with a busy oscillating pulse-like figure (textbook Reich, one might say), which is presented in various guises throughout its five interconnected movements. Around this figure, the composer weaves a plethora of rising and falling melodic shapes and patterns, suggesting the ascending and descending motion of a ladder.

Jacob's Ladder also draws on these associations in far deeper and more nuanced ways. In the first and last sections, for example, lines and patterns are superposed and layered in such a way as to give the impression of several interacting temporal levels coexisting simultaneously. This technique, which can be traced to earlier works such as *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ* and *Eight Lines*, imparts a sense of stasis and movement that perfectly encapsulates the image of a ladder – rooted in its place yet functioning as a vehicle for movement up and down its many rungs.

If *Jacob's Ladder* is primarily about the journey, *Traveler's Prayer* is about its destination. Exuding the kind of 'calm self-assurance' referred to by Andres, the 13-minute work for 11 instrumentalists and four singers draws on short excerpts from Exodus, Genesis and Psalm 121 (two of which were previously used by Reich in another work, *WTC 9/11*) to depict not only the physical transition from one place to another but also the notion of travelling from this world to the next. *Traveler's Prayer* is somewhat unique in Reich's output in that it avoids any obvious sense of pulse, the music's floating, searching, meditative qualities vividly captured on this compelling performance by Synergy Vocals and the Colin Currie Group.

While the text and the voices that carry it disappear for prolonged periods during *Jacob's Ladder*, they remain front and centre throughout *Traveler's Prayer*. In both cases, the relationship between music and language, voice and text, remains central to Reich's creative outlook, whether sacred or secular, speech-based or sung. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

'Alma'

'Ibero-American Songs'
Bor Canción de cuna para dormir a Albertico. Rojo **Braga** Canções nordestinas do folclore brasileiro – No 1, Ó Kinimbá; No 5, Engenho novo **Costa** Os salgueiros, Op 7 No 1 **Ferro** La campesina. Rima **Figueroa** Promesas para que duermas **Fragoso** Ambalando o menino **Gilardi** Canción de cuna india **Grever** Alma mía. Te quiero dijiste **Guastavino** Milonga de dos hermanos **E Halffter** Ai que linda moça **Henrique** Uirapuru **Lorca** Canciones españolas antiguas – No 5, Las morillas de Jaén; No 8, Nana de Sevilla **Obradors** El vito **Ovalle** Azulão, Op 21 **Pablos** La noria **Pino** Cuatro preguntas **Sanjuán** Clavelitos
Julieth Lozano Rolong *sop* **João Araújo** *pf*
Somm (SOMMCD0706 • 55' • T/t)

Julieth Lozano Rolong won the Dame Kiri Te Kanawa Audience Prize at the 2023 Cardiff Singer of the World competition. This recital of Ibero-American songs is Rolong's recording debut, and with her warm tone, velvety legato and ability to characterise a song vividly and with imagination, it amply demonstrates the young Colombian soprano's appeal.

And what a richly varied programme she and her longtime musical partner João Araújo have put together here, drawing on songs from three continents and seven countries. Best of all, the majority of these *canciónes* were new to me, and at the same time their quality is remarkably consistent. Aficionados of Spanish song will certainly know Sanjuán's 'Clavelitos', as it was sung often and so charmingly by Victoria de los Ángeles. Rolong's interpretation is a little more giddy and playful but quite endearing in its own way. María Grever's 'Te quiero dijiste' is even more famous, with well-known versions by Nat King Cole, among others. Rolong gives it a tender caress and deftly avoids any hint of the saccharine.

There are too many gems in this recital to give a thorough account but I was especially taken with the lilting narrative of Brazilian Waldemar Henrique's 'Uirapuru' – and what an alluring storyteller Rolong is. Spanish composer María de Pablos's 'La noria' was another discovery with its sophisticated harmonic shading and unexpected tempo changes; it's a full dramatic scene in three and a half minutes. Various lullabies are sprinkled throughout, like Argentine Gilardo Gilardi's hushed 'Canción de cuna india', but there are also evocative nocturnes such as Columbian Jaime León Ferro's 'Rima', which Rolong sings ecstatically without losing its intimate character.

Pianist João Araújo is superb throughout. He finds the flamenco fire in Fernando Obradors's 'El vito', but also paints with piquant delicacy in Luis Carlos Figueroa's 'Promesas para que duermas'. Recorded in Manchester's Stoller Hall, the sound is well balanced, clear and atmospheric. Rolong and Araújo are definitely artists to watch and their debut programme abounds with treasurable discoveries. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

'Horizons'

L Boulanger Attente. Reflets **Canal** La flûte de jade **Chrétien** L'amoureuse des vagues. Dernier rêve!. Les matelots **Debussy** Chansons de Bilitis **Duparc** Au pays où se fait la guerre. La vie antérieure **Polignac** La flûte de jade – excs **Strohl** Bilitis – excs. La momie
Kitty Whately *mez* **Edwige Herchenroder** *pf*
Chandos (CHAN20324 • 78' • T/t)

'Warm night, moonlight, fragrance of plum trees', invokes the narrator at the start of Franz Toussaint's poem 'Vœu' ('Vow'). It's one of seven from his 1920 collection *La flûte de jade* – fashionably based on Chinese poetry – which was set to music by the French composer Marguerite Canal (1890-1978) and is recorded here for the first time. Toussaint's imagery will be familiar to anyone acquainted with early 20th-century French art song; Canal's colourful settings will not.

Nor are Canal's songs the only rarities on this thoughtfully programmed disc from British mezzo-soprano Kitty Whately and French pianist Edwige Herchenroder.

Julieth Lozano Rolong and pianist João Araújo present 'Alma', a selection of Ibero-American songs demonstrating the Colombian soprano's warm tone and velvety legato

PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES PAISLEY CHAPMAN

The premiere recordings of three songs by Hedwige Chrétien (1859-1944) appear alongside more, strangely fragmentary settings from *La flûte de jade* by Armande de Polignac (1876-1962, niece of the celebrated Paris-based philanthropist Winnaretta Singer, Princesse de Polignac) and various songs by Rita Strohl (1865-1941). Four of Strohl's settings of Pierre Louÿs's *Les chansons de Bilitis* contrast to fascinating effect with characterful accounts of Debussy's altogether better known *Chansons de Bilitis*, while two earlier songs by Henri Duparc offer something of a palate-cleanser amid so much turn-of-the-century diffuseness. For the most part, however, this disc is rooted firmly in a poetic world in which nature is erotically charged, the air is always perfumed and women are mysterious, largely silent beings.

The two opening songs by Lili Boulanger (1893-1918) showcase Whately's sumptuous mezzo – warm and dark in the lower register, hyper-focused in the upper notes, incisive throughout – while Herchenroder creates a lucid, crystalline sound on Potton Hall's Steinway Model D. Although the piano occasionally feels a little distant in the audio mix, the duo's intimate musical dialogue is obvious: Whately's expressive French consonants find their counterpart in Herchenroder's hyper-sensitive touch, while vivid vocal storytelling is compellingly balanced by coolness at the keyboard.

Amid the less familiar repertory, Strohl's songs stand out. Her 'La flûte de Pan' is strikingly sparse here and 'Roses dans la nuit' gently magical, while 'La chevelure' is voluptuous in its slow unfolding, the duet between the voice and piano extraordinarily delicate – markedly more sensual than Elsa Dreisig and Romain Louveau's recent account of Strohl's complete songs (La Boîte à Pépites, 11/23). The album is, in sum, a valuable reminder that there's more to French mélodies than the usual suspects – and that, at least in this repertory's real world, women had plenty to say. **Flora Willson**

'Love's Labyrinth'

F Caccini O che nuovo stupor[a] **Calestani** Damigella tutta bella[a] **Frescobaldi** Begli occhi[a]. Capriccio sopra un soggetto. Occhi che sete[a] **Guami** Soavissimi baci. Ricercare del primo tuono. Ricercare del secondo tuono **Luzzaschi** I mi son giovinetta[a]. O primavera[a] **Marenzio** Liquide perle Amor[a] **Marini** Amante legato[a] **Merula** Capriccio cromatico **Monteverdi** A un giro sol[a]. Ed è pur dunque vero[a]. O come sei gentile[a]. Quel augellin che canta[a]. Zefiro torna[a] **Rore** Beato me direi[a]

[a]**Faye Newton** *sop* **The Gonzaga Band**

Deux-Elles (DXL1213 • 65' • T/t)

The Gonzaga Band's labyrinthine expedition is inspired by musical culture at Ferrara during the reign of Duke Alfonso II d'Este – the 'musica secreta' of the Concerto delle Donne (accomplished female singer-instrumentalists supervised by Luzzaschi), Marenzio's visit in 1580 (his boss in Rome was the duke's brother) and the dissemination of controversial Monteverdi madrigals in the late 1590s before their publication. Jamie Savan's essay draws these facets together into a lucid narrative while illuminating aspects of the project's historically inspired artistry.

Faye Newton is slyly knowing in Vincenzo Calestani's 'Damigella tutta bella'; a man invites a lovely woman to refill his carafe of red wine to quench volcanic passion for her before it erupts. The dejection of lost happiness despite being surrounded by springtime is realised

exquisitely in Luzzaschi's 'O primavera gioventù de l'anno'. The soprano's graceful ornamentation in Cipriano de Rore's plaintive 'Beato me direi' is derived from Girolamo Dalla Casa's treatise (1584); Steven Devine plays the madrigal's lower parts on an ottavino spinet. Likewise, Marenzio's 'Liquide perle Amor' features smooth embellishments that Newton and Savan model after an arrangement by Giovanni Bassano (Dalla Casa's successor as leader of instrumentalists at St Mark's Basilica). Savan and Devine construct an instrumental impression of Gioseffo Guami's lost madrigal 'Soavissimi baci' by fusing together Bassano's ornamented version of the soprano part and anonymous keyboard tablature from a manuscript preserved in Wolfenbüttel.

Methods for transcribing Monteverdi's 'A un giro sol' and 'Quel augellin che canta' (both from Book 4) are modelled after manuscript arrangements of the composer's madrigals for two sopranos and keyboard brought to London by the singer Angelo Notari in about 1611. Admittedly, I hanker for the intertwined sensuality that two equitable soprano voices can offer in Monteverdi's 'O come sei gentile' (Book 7), but there is delightful music-making in Francesca Caccini's veneration of Christ's nativity ('O che nuovo stupor'), Frescobaldi's little duets 'Begli occhi' and 'Occhi che sete' and Biagio's canzonetta 'Amante legato'. The mazey journey's destination is two selections from Monteverdi's *Scherzi musicali* (1632): a scorned lover's melodramatic self-pity ('Ed è pur dunque vero') and playfulness in a quickfire ciacona ('Zefiro torna'). The textural ebb and flow of the album is enhanced by Devine using four replicas of 16th-century instruments in solo keyboard pieces by Luzzaschi, Frescobaldi and Merula. **David Vickers**

'Musik der Hansestädte, Vol 3'

'Musik aus dem alten Magdeburg'
M Agricola Ach Gott vom Himmel, sieh darein. Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott **Anonymous/Schein** Merk fleissig auf/ Warum betrübst du Dich mein Herz **Dressler** Fundamentum aliud nemo potest ponere. Lobet den Herrn, alle Heide. Quidquid erit tendem mea spes. Die Toren sprechen in ihrem Herzen/Es spricht der Unweisen Mund wohl **Grimm** Herr, unser Herrscher **Heintz** Nu bitten wir den Heiligen Geist **Schröter** Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr. O lux beata Trinitas. Verleih uns Frieden/Gib unserm Fürste **Siebenhaar** Ihr Kinder Israel **Weissensee** Cantate Domino. Nun sei dir Dank. Peccavi super numerum arenae maris

European Hanseatic Ensemble / Manfred Cordes
CPO (CPO555 710-2 • 69' • T/t)

Music in the town of Magdeburg during the early modern period is the theme of this charming recital devised by Manfred Cordes, best known as director of Weser-Renaissance. Nearly all the music heard here was composed by directors of music at one of its churches from the onset of the Reformation well into the following century. The most common form is single stanza-settings repeated over several verses, usually setting a chorale melody. One of the standout pieces in the early part of the programme is by Wolff Heintz, who knew Luther personally: his *Nu bitten wir den Heiligen Geist* begins nearly identically to a motet by Pierre de la Rue (*Plorer, gemir/ Requiem*), then continues in the manner of Senfl. It is meltingly lovely. Later the larger-scale, through-composed psalm-settings in both German and Latin by Weissensee, Grimm and Siebenhaar are well worth hearing, though for my sensibility nothing quite surpasses Heintz's little gem (I urge you to hear it). A poignant piece of programming sets verses from a broadsheet poem recording the town's tragic sack in 1631, in which 20,000 people are thought to have been killed (that the music is adapted from elsewhere doesn't lessen its impact). The concluding *Ihr Kinder Israel*, composed by Siebenhaar for the consecration of a wooden chapel more than a decade later (on the ruins of one of the churches that had been destroyed) rounds off the story more hopefully.

Cordes once devoted a two-disc set to the music of the Thirty Years War, so that last touch isn't surprising, but it's worth saying a little about his Lübeck-based European Hanseatic Ensemble project, which draws together young vocalists and instrumentalists every year from across Europe, the best of whom are chosen to tour and record (here, six singers and nine players). The quality and polish of what they achieve absolutely stands comparison with Cordes's 'grown-up' ensemble (if I may put it like that). At times one might wish for a little more bite into certain phrases (like Weissensee's crunchy settings of the words 'Victoria' or 'irritavi iram tuam') or more bloom to particularly joyful pieces (such as his *Cantate Domino*), but both Cordes's initiative and its fruits here deserve applause and (by extension) an appreciative audience. The earworm that is Heintz's *Nu bitten wir* owes much to these young musicians' artistry. **Fabrice Fitch**

'Sacred Treasures of Rome'

Allegri Christus resurgens ex mortuis **F Anerio** Adoramus te Domine Jesu Christe **GF Anerio** O Maria gloriosa **Animuccia** O crux ave, spes unica **Giovanelli** Iubilate Deo **Marenzio** Magnificat octavi toni **Nanino** Adoramus te Christe **Palestrina** Canite tuba. Dum complerentur. Exsultate Deo. Peccantem me quotidie. Sicut cervus desiderat. Super flumina Babylonis. Tu es Petrus **Soriano** Regina caeli laetare
The London Oratory Schola Cantorum / Charles Cole
Hyperion (CDA68435 • 71' • T/t)

'Sacred Treasures of Rome' follows the template of last year's identically conceived 'Sacred Treasures of Venice' (5/24), a selection of well-known motets by the dominant figure (here, Palestrina substituting for Monteverdi) framing less-known ones by younger colleagues and successors. Unsurprisingly, the discoveries are found among the latter. Marenzio's through-composed *Magnificat* setting is particularly impressive, making the point that even a figure of first importance may suffer from the neglect of a significant part of his output. The choir has a solid presence and a secure core, with a treble sound that is both clear and expressive (try Soriano's *Regina caeli*). As in the Venetian disc, the recital's middle section, compiled with care and discernment, transcends mere novelty value and earns the recording a solid recommendation.

There are fine performances among the Palestrina motets, too (the second part of the famous *Sicut cervus* and the first parts of *Dum complerentur* or *Tu es Petrus*, the latter shorn of its continuation), but inevitably one listens with a more critical ear to more familiar repertory. My earlier reservations about the Venetian disc come into sharper focus this time around. While the wet acoustic and somewhat distanced recording smooth over imprecisions of ensemble, the basses are noticeably low in the mix, depriving the sonic image of some of its ballast. I also noted that the choir sounds generally more secure in extrovert mode; now I'd go further and say that the tempos taken for motets with solemn or mournful texts really are too slow for comfort, even when the ensemble is well controlled, as in *Peccantem me quotidie* or Animuccia's *O crux ave*; elsewhere – try the first part of *Sicut cervus* – they end up dragging to the point that pieces sound the same. (That tempo should be so

The London Oratory Schola Cantorum and Charles Cole explore 'Sacred Treasures of Rome', motets by Palestrina as well as his younger colleagues and successors

straightforwardly tied to affect seems to me a basic misperception, akin to supposing that major is invariably happy and minor invariably sad.) Nonetheless, I look forward to hearing more from this choir and its enterprising director. After Venice and Rome, where next?

Fabrice Fitch

'Sky of my Heart'

Byrd Ecce quam bonum. Mass for Four Voices – Agnus Dei[a] **Gibbons** The Silver Swan[a] **McGlade** Of the Father's love begotten **Moody** Canticum canticorum I **Moravec** Darest thou now, O soul. The Last Invocation **Muhly** My Days[a] **Naito** Tsuki no Waka **A Smith** Katarsis **Tavener** The Lamb

New York Polyphony; [a]LeStrange Viols

BIS (BIS2719 SACD • 63' • T/t)

Nico Muhly's *My Days* is the keystone of New York Polyphony's latest release – the track that unites the recording's two worlds. A 'ritualised memory piece', it brings together viols and voices in a homage to Orlando Gibbons and his musical milieu. Clustered around this centrepiece are a selection of contemporary and Tudor works: anthems, Mass movements, small and larger-scale pieces, sacred and secular. The effect is scattergun – a recital that stubbornly refuses to coalesce into a broader statement.

Commissioned by Fretwork (who have recently also recorded the piece for Signum – review to follow), *My Days* is sonic musical-theatre. Psalm 39 and Gibbons's autopsy report provide the starting points for a wonderfully strange, time-bending meditation that explores Gibbons's own textures and techniques through the wrong end of a smeared telescope. There's a grainy, blurry quality to music that rasps and gasps, drawing breath in still, chanted sections. Where Fretwork (joined by four solo singers) bring out the rapt clarity and arm's-length period distance of the piece, New York Polyphony and LeStrange Viols offer a more obviously inflected, dramatised account of a work that becomes more overtly unsettled, disquieting here.

The viols are deployed elsewhere in the *Agnus Dei* from Byrd's *Mass for Four Voices* (where they risk muddying the veteran American quartet's vocal counterpoint) as well as Gibbons's own *The Silver Swan*. The dancing, flexible freedom and interplay of voices liberated from accompaniment in Byrd's *Ecce quam bonum* stands in marked contrast, a reminder of the vertical balance and horizontal clarity of these fine singers.

The contemporary works are a bit of a mixed bag. Ivan Moody's *Canticum canticorum* are fragrant, effective miniatures – Song of Songs settings that offer gong-like waves of sound ('Descendi in hortum meum') and chant-inspired contemplation ('Surge propera amica mea') – and together with Akemi Naito's *Tsuki no Waka* reach back to Renaissance models for their inspiration. Becky McGlade's bluesy *Of the Father's heart begotten* risks sounding facile, trite when set alongside the simplicity of Taverner's *The Lamb* (a different beast as sung by solo voices: starker, less ingratiating), the crunchier chromatic interest of Paul Moravec's *The Last Invocation* or the sober restraint Andrew Smith's chant-infused *Katarsis*.

Without any obvious rationale it's unclear why these works belong together, or what they gain from mutual proximity.

Alexandra Coghlan

ONLINE CONCERTS & EVENTS

Charlotte Gardner explores a range of web-based concerts

Closely eyes-on chamber dynamics

'People of Hamburg, how are you?' Then louder, 'People of Hamburg, how are *you*?' And now, South African cellist and composer **Abel Selaocoe** gets the audience shout that he's after, and the audience itself, in Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, learns that this performance of his *Four Spirits* concerto, Selaocoe partnered by percussionist Bernhard Schimpelsberger and Aurora Orchestra, is not one they're going to be allowed to just passively receive – and later they will indeed be bidden to their feet and asked to sing. It's also not one over which they will be addressed even fleetingly in their own language, but with Selaocoe such an infectiously radiant onstage personality, perhaps they don't mind.

Four Spirits (2022) for cello, voice, percussion and orchestra (released this month on Warner Classics, with the same artists) is Selaocoe's usual flamboyant, rhythmically pulsing, sometimes timelessly floating, cross-genre blending of South African music ancient and modern with classical, jazz and other styles. Each of its four seamlessly flowing movements dwells on a different aspect of township life – ancestors, children, faith, community – although the music doesn't necessarily relate to its subject according to Western associations, so be prepared to just go with the flow. Selaocoe is the storyteller, and his lyrics – sometimes dispatched from his cello, other times from his feet; sometimes softly crooned in falsetto, other times room-fillingly wide and guttural in his bass depths – are a mix of Southern Sotho and Zulu languages. Much of his cello-playing is improvised, making each performance slightly different, and any partner orchestra that can't be fleet-footedly responsive and stylistically ambidextrous is toast.

Aurora is not toast. This is the multi-genre orchestra that has made memorising its calling card (and the concert's second half is indeed a smart, no-music Beethoven Symphony No 7), and the Elbphilharmonie's crisp filming captures both its musicians' closely eyes-on chamber dynamic with Selaocoe and their pleasure-taking ease across a linguistical range from mbaqanga to more Sollima-esque sound worlds. The filming also represents a golden opportunity for a close-up look at Selaocoe's own deft technique. Among standout moments is a virtuosic duet, moving from instruments to voices, between him and Schimpelsberger (19'50").

Staying in Germany, but chalk to the Elbphilharmomie's cheese, is a late-January programme from the **Berlin Philharmonic Octet**, comprising Philharmonic musicians Daishin Kashimoto and Romano Tommasini (violins), Amihai Grosz (viola), Christoph Igelbrink (cello), Esko Laine (double bass), Stefan Dohr (horn), Stefan Schweigert (bassoon) and Wenzel Fuchs (clarinet).

> Any partner orchestra that can't be fleet-footedly responsive and stylistically ambidextrous is toast

A selection of Schubert's *Moments musicaux* opens, transcribed from the piano by Hans Abrahamsen and premiered in 2021. Inspired both by Schubert's Octet and the 2019 Horn Concerto Abrahamsen was concurrently writing for Dohr, these skilful arrangements' beauty lies in their simplicity. There's been neither gilding of the lily nor the odd dash of modern harmonic pepper. Just simple, graceful, clean-lined, lucid-textured faithfulness, all accentuated here by the playing. Wolfgang Rihm's 15-minute, highly expressive Viennese-flavoured Sextet for clarinet, horn and string quartet (2014) carries, coincidentally no doubt, a faint but enjoyable shadow of the Schubert/Abrahamsen's concluding *Allegretto*.

Beethoven's early Septet in E flat major (minus Tommasini) then concludes their programme, the playing bringing out both Beethoven's easy-going divertimento-genre elegance and his higher emotional ambitions for the outer movements' slow introductions. Dashimoto and Grosz are great fun over the sparkling *Presto* finale, they're so clearly making merry.

Sticking with chamber music, London's Wigmore Hall hosted in February the 40th-anniversary concert from the **Young Classical Artists Trust** (YCAT), the prestigious management and artistic/career development programme for early-career musicians. Dedicated to the memory of British violinist Laura Samuel, who died in November aged 48, this concert brought together a stageful of YCAT artists past and present: violinists Sini Simonen (Castalian String Quartet) and Hana Chang, viola player Timothy Ridout, cellist Maciej Kułakowski, double bassist Dominic Seldis, pianist James Baillieu, oboist Armand Djikoloum, clarinettist Jonathan Leibovitz, bassoonist Amy Harman and horn player Ben Goldscheider.

With so many acclaimed soloists on their hands, many programmers would have gone down the gala route. YCAT director Alasdair Tait, though, grouped them into different constellations for two substantial chamber works, Schubert's Octet and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Nonet of 1894 (written and premiered, appropriately enough, when Coleridge-Taylor was still a student at the Royal College of Music), preceded by the UK premiere of *Microcosm*, a newly commissioned fanfare for all 10 artists by another YCAT beneficiary, British composer James B Wilson.

Microcosm opens on a chord instigated by the horn, on to which the other instrumentalists ripplingly layer their own contributions; and from this chord is drawn the remaining constantly texturally shifting music. Wilson himself describes it as 'like a seed containing the blueprint of a vast tree', and indeed it's that feel of organicism, couched in an atmosphere of mystical

Making merry: the Berlin Philharmonic Octet perform music by Schubert, Beethoven and Wolfgang Rihm at the city's Philharmonie

optimism, that holds engaging sway throughout. Its ear-pricking conclusion is a fading-out on rising and falling glissando string harmonics, sounding rather like the wind dispersing the next generation of seeds.

The Nonet comes weightily noble in its emulation of Brahms, and daintily, dancingly rhythmic in its folkier, more Dvořák-esque episodes. The Schubert's *Adagio* glows in a gorgeously tender, flowing reading, while its finale is a jauntily, bubblingly elegant, nimble affair. All night long, lovely solo spots flow thick and fast. Yet the concert's most noticeable aspect is ultimately that, despite these artists not all being regular collaborators, and having no doubt had but limited rehearsal time together, they look and sound as though they've been playing together all their lives. It's a striking advertisement for what it means to come from the artistically and humanly nourishing YCAT stable, and it's this, plus good audio capturing, that offsets the slightly less top-drawer picture quality.

Another recent young artists-centred Wigmore Hall event has been the International String Quartet Competition, won by Swedish-Norwegian quartet Opus13 – violinists Sonoko Miriam Welde (whose 2022 debut concerto disc was enthusiastically reviewed in *Gramophone* – LAWO, 1/22) and Edvard Erdal, viola player Albin Uusijärvi and cellist Daniel Thorell. That was in April, and in May, Opus13 went on to win first prize at the **Vibre! Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition**, along with the Contemporary Work Prize (for Kryštof Mařatka's competition commission *Amedea*, a stylistically wide-ranging work featuring evocations of viol consorts, primitive flutes and the wind, which I'd now love to hear programmed elsewhere), the Young Listeners' Prize and the Audience Prize. Opus13's prizewinner's recording for Mirare will appear in due course. In the meantime, you can capture some of the flavour of their finals performance on the competition website (some, because the sound quality is slightly less polished than the playing), and if you only watch one of Opus13's three works, make it Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*. In the room, this was a performance of a profundity and kaleidoscopic colour that would have been astounding from any ensemble, let alone a young one still making itself known. Devastatingly so for the variation movement. The final applause was ecstatic and tumultuous. Second prize then went, as it had done the previous month at Wigmore Hall, to the US's Terra Quartet, whose warmly natural and polished Mozart Quartet No 15 in D minor, K421, was the other finals highlight.

Longer-established young talent took to the **Rencontres Musicales d'Évian** festival stage in July for the second of three concerts presenting Ravel's complete chamber music, in honour of his 150th birth anniversary: violinist Pierre Fouchenneret, cellist Julia Hagen and pianists Guillaume Bellom and Arthur Hinnewinkel (fourth prize-winner this past June at the Queen Elisabeth Competition). On the menu, the Sonata for violin and cello, *Tzigane* – Fouchenneret accompanied by Hinnewinkel – and the Piano Trio now with Bellom at the ivories.

Beautifully captured and directed for medici.tv, this concert's highlights are its outer works. Fouchenneret and Hagen are a closely responsive duo over the violin-and-cello sonata – a reading that's as sensitive and nuanced as it is intense. The Piano Trio is equally gracefully multicoloured, all three musicians finely attuned to one another, and gliding organically from one section to the next with superb architectural handling. Among its many memorable moments is the meltingly tender *Modéré* duet between Fouchenneret and Hagen (42'48"). Their brightly shimmering *Animé* finale lives up to that performance stipulation, and squarely merits the equally *animé* ensuing applause. G

THE EVENTS

Selaocoe Four Spirits **Beethoven** Sym No 7
Selaocoe; Aurora Orch / Collon
elbphilharmonie.de

Beethoven. Rihm. Schubert
Berlin Philharmonic Octet
digitalconcerthall.com

YCAT 40th Anniversary Celebration Concert
ycat.co.uk

Vibre! Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition
youtube.com

Ravel Chamber Music **Fouchenneret, Hagen, Bellom, Hinnewinkel**
medici.tv

PHOTOGRAPHY: LENA LAINE

Opera

David Vickers hears the sole opera by Cavalli pupil Antonia Bembo:

'It demonstrates Bembo's unusual weaving of her native Venetian and adopted Parisian musical strands' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 84

Neil Fisher on a psychologically focused Macbeth from Barcelona:

'Tézier is undoubtedly the star here, providing a stream of elegant phrasing and fine bel canto–infused style' ▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 86

Bantock

The Seal-Woman

Yvonne Howard *mez* ..... Cailleach (Old Crone)
Catherine Carby *mez* ..... Seal-Woman
Catriona Hewitson *sop* ..... Seal-Sister
Seumas Begg *ten* ..... Islesman
Arthur Bruce *bar* ..... First Fisher
Christian Loizou *bass-bar* ..... Second Fisher/Water-Kelpie
Eve Pearson Maxwell *sop* **Caitlin Mackenzie, Amy Karensa** *mez* ..... Swan-Maidens
Orchestra of Scottish Opera / John Andrews
Retrospect Opera (RO012 ② • 137')
Includes synopsis and libretto

Granville Bantock was a good friend and champion of both Elgar and Sibelius and contributed enormously to the musical life of Birmingham. He helped to establish the City of Birmingham Orchestra in 1920 and was a committed supporter of its first conductor, Adrian Boult. Boult once wrote a memorable vignette of Bantock bursting into his office one morning full of enthusiasm for Schubert's great C major String Quintet, convinced that he'd discovered a masterpiece that nobody else could possibly be aware of! Boult tried to point out that it was reasonably well known in chamber music circles, but Bantock was already full of his next assignment – going to the market to buy his young daughter a 'pet' mongoose. The conductor's attempt to warn that the animal would happily consume the child was lost in the whirlwind of the composer's departure.

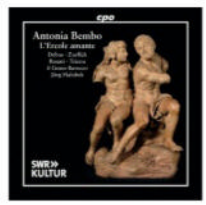
Something of this wild and naive enthusiasm can be detected behind the project he embarked upon in 1917 with Scottish musicologist Marjory Kennedy-Fraser to compose a Celtic folk-opera. *The Seal-Woman* finally came to the Birmingham stage in 1924 but initial attention soon dwindled and the work disappeared. A century later it has been admirably served by Retrospect Opera with this first complete recording. And recording is probably the only viable platform for this work today: trying to imagine how any director could stage the impossibly static action without unintended comedy is quite a challenge and even a concert performance would be similarly stymied by the hopelessly stiff and clumsy libretto. The problems lie partly in Bantock's willingness to trust so much of the work to Kennedy-Fraser in the first place without taking ruthless control of the written material himself. His main achievement seems to be the reasonably seamless sewing into the score of 20 *Songs of the Hebrides* as originally collected and arranged by Kennedy-Fraser herself. These often stand out nicely as a contrast to pretty bland surroundings but are themselves somewhat emasculated and lack the raw passion such music should have in transcription.

Given the heroic efforts behind this undertaking – and the superlative performances by all concerned – it would have been wonderful to hail a rediscovered masterpiece. Bantock's own music, however, is as faded as the words and the work is very much a Celtic twilight period piece that enjoyed a brief flicker of sunlight but which is today more a curiosity than a viable addition to the repertory. What does deserve to be rescued is the beautifully crafted Interlude before Act 2: 'An Eriscay Lullaby'. Of the singers I have to salute the young tenor Seumas Begg for his sterling portrayal of the hapless Islesman, and conductor John Andrews marshals his Scottish troops with brilliance. But for enthusiasts only, I fear. **Geraint Lewis**

Bembo

Ercole amante

Yannick Debus *bar* ..... Ercole
Alena Dantcheva *sop* ..... Deianira
Anita Rosati *sop* ..... Iole
David Tricou *ten* ..... Hyllo
Flore Van Meerssche *sop* ..... Giunone
Chelsea Marilyn Zurflüh *sop* ..... Venere/Pasithea
Arnaud Gluck *countertен* ..... Paggio
Andrés Montilla-Acurero *ten* ..... Licco
Hans Porten *bar* ..... Nettuno/Eutyro/Mercurio
Il Gusto Barocco / Jörg Halubek
CPO (CPO555 728-2 ② • 128')
Includes libretto and translation



Like Barbara Strozzi, the talented Venetian soprano Antonia Padoani Bembo (*c*1640-*c*1720) was taught by Cavalli. After suing unsuccessfully to divorce her philandering, profligate and abusive husband, she escaped to Paris. Louis XIV awarded her a pension and provided accommodation in a semi-cloistered women's refuge. Thereafter, she produced several neatly prepared manuscript collections of compositions dedicated to the Sun King (these are in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France). In 1707, already in her late 60s, Bembo wrote her only opera but had no apparent intention for it to be staged. She chose Francesco Buti's old libretto *Ercole amante*, first set nearly half a century earlier by her mentor Cavalli (Paris, 1662). Other than jettisoning Buti's prologue, the text in Bembo's manuscript is identical in every respect to the complete 1662 printed libretto. Claire Fontijn's pioneering study (Oxford, 2006) proposed that Bembo envisaged *Ercole amante* as a personal hypothesis of how to combine Italian and French musical styles – a synthesis described by François Couperin as *Les goûts réünis*.

This Stuttgart recording was made in conjunction with a concert reckoned to be the forsaken opera's premiere – although scrutiny of the original sources reveals that harpsichordist-conductor Jörg Halubek makes copious and detrimental cuts. Recitatives are shortened ruthlessly to less than their bare bones. The entire excision of Juno asking Pasithea and her husband Somnus if she may borrow his rod (so that the dangerously randy Hercules can be lulled asleep) means that the alluring preceding music for Pasithea and her retinue (Act 2 scene 6) becomes isolated from its purpose. Act 5 scene 1 is an *ombra* tour de force that should have four of

Ludovic Tézier and Martina Serafin in Macbeth from Barcelona, Christof Loy's production channelling the cinematic style of Hitchcock – see review overleaf

Hercules' victims in hell taking turns to exult at impending vengeance, but it is shredded down to merely a sliver for one spectral gloater. Nor do we hear a three-movement sinfonia (the only place where Bembo specified flutes) anticipating Juno's descent for the *lieto fine*. The concluding apotheosis of Hercules with his new bride Beauty and a chorus of Planets is reduced to almost nothing.

There remains just about enough to demonstrate Bembo's unusual weaving of her native Venetian and adopted Parisian musical strands. Il Gusto Barocco's small band play the overture, entrées and ritornellos adeptly. The composer seldom specified instrumentation so the Stuttgarters' revolving door of upper strings, flutes or oboes changing in quick succession is dictated by Halubek's artistic prerogatives (as is his anachronistic use of harp). Yannick Debus oscillates between Hercules' fleeting moments of heroic nobility and pompous infatuation for the captured Iole. There ought to have been threatening menace in the cruelty towards his wife Deianira and son Hyllus, and the portrayal of Hercules' agonised death is surprisingly tame (his lines are truncated severely). Alena Dantcheva has tragic decorum as the forlorn Deianira. The star-crossed lovers Iole and Hyllus are characterised fervently by Anita Rosati and David Tricou.

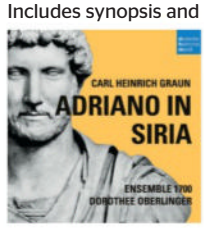
Chelsea Marilyn Zurflüh and Flore Van Meerssche sing attractively as the opponents Venus (Team Hercules) and Juno (Team Everyone Else). Zurflüh doubles up as Pasithea, whose song in the cavern of sleep proffers sweet intimacy, soothing flutes and a hushed chorus. Arnaud Gluck's perplexed Page is suitably nonchalant. Andrés Montilla-Acurero has little left intact of Lichas's role. Trimmed-down cameos for Mercury, Neptune (interceding to rescue Hyllus from drowning) and the ghost of Iole's murdered father Eurytus are taken by Hans Porten without much supernatural impact. A doleful quartet reacting to Hercules' horrible death is among Bembo's finest harmonic moments. The under-represented composer's talent emerges intriguingly from this abridged performance. Paris's Opéra Bastille has announced the work's first-ever fully staged production next year; perhaps this will do fuller justice to the material and its potential theatrical verve.

David Vickers

Graun

Adriano in Siria

Valer Sabadus *counterten* ..... Adriano
Bruno de Sá *counterten* ..... Farnaspe
Roberta Mameli *sop* ..... Emirena
Keri Fuge *sop* ..... Sabina
David Tricou *ten* ..... Osroa
Federico Fiorio *counterten* ..... Aquilio
Ensemble 1700 / Dorothee Oberlinger
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi (19658 81232-2 ③ • 156')
Recorded live at the Schlosstheater Neues Palais Sanssouci, Potsdam, Germany, June 8-10, 2024
Includes synopsis and Italian libretto



In his book *Italian Journeys*, Jonathan Keates pokes affectionate fun at the titles and characters of *opera seria*, one of his inventions being *Pastina in Brodo* by 'Tortellini'. And indeed there is something comical about the similar-sounding titles from classical history or myth: *Achille in Sciro*, *Catone in Utica*, *Enea in Italia*, *Arianna in Nasso*; not to mention, from a later age, Rossini's *Ciro in Babilonia* and *Aureliano in Palmira*. Librettos by Pietro Metastasio, the court poet in Vienna, were set many times over by composers of the 18th century. *Adriano in Siria* is one such: premiered with music by Caldara in 1732, it was tackled by Pergolesi and Hasse, among others, before Graun produced his version in 1746.

Carl Heinrich Graun, Kapellmeister at the court of Frederick the Great, composed some 25 operas for the opera house in Berlin that the music-loving king had built. *Adriano in Siria* follows the expected sequence of *secco* recitative and *da capo* aria, with a *coro* of the six soloists to top and tail, and a couple of *accompagnato* recitatives; there is also a duet to conclude the first of the three acts. The Emperor Hadrian

PHOTOGRAPHY: GRAN TEATRE DEL LICEU

has defeated the Parthians. The Parthian prince Farnaspe swears loyalty and asks Hadrian to release the princess Emirena, whom he loves. Hadrian loves her too, and further complications arise through the arrival of his own betrothed, Sabina; the machinations of Hadrian's sidekick Aquilio, who wants Sabina himself; and through Emirena's father, King Osroa who, disguised, is plotting revenge. Needless to say, all ends happily: Aquilio is forgiven, Hadrian confirms his love for Sabina, Farnaspe and Emirena are united, and Osroa gets his kingdom back.

Three of the four male characters are sung by male sopranos, which makes following the action quite challenging. The libretto is printed in the booklet, but the only translation is in German. A DVD of the stage production of which this is a recording might have been a better idea; but there is something to be said for just sitting back and enjoying this varied sequence of arias, many of them in the burgeoning *galant* style.

The character of Adriano is interestingly drawn. Torn between the two women, he questions his own right to govern: Graun passes up this good opportunity for an *accompagnato*, but he does follow with a reflective aria. Valer Sabadus sings the slow, long lines with a grave beauty; he is less successful in faster music, such as 'Barbaro, non comprendo', where his vigorous delivery comes close to yelping. Farnaspe, on the other hand, is given two *accompagnato* recitatives to himself, the second one preceding 'Se pur non moro', the long aria that concludes the middle act, which Bruno de Sá sings with poignant resignation.

The two women are excellent. Keri Fuge is appropriately forthright when Sabina upbraids Adriano in 'Ah ingrato!'. As Emirena, Roberta Mameli is fluent in the roulades of 'Per te d'eterni allori', the jolly aria that follows the clearing up of the misunderstanding between them. And the latter's duet with Farnaspe, 'Passi di me, ben mio', is so meltingly beautiful that you will want to play it again immediately. Osroa provides a welcome relief from all the high voices, though one feels he should be a bass rather than a tenor. 'Se ma piagato a morte' is one of Metastasio's metaphor arias, the mortally wounded lion represented by a pair of horns (also prominent elsewhere), which David Tricou sings with martial vitality. The lighter arias for the devious Aquilio are sung with graceful insouciance by Federico Fiorio.

The orchestra, which includes flutes and oboes as well as horns, plays stylishly for Dorothee Oberlinger. Her tempos are well judged, but she permits, or encourages, extravagant cadenzas from the singers. There is one drawback, in addition to the absence of an English translation. I referred above to *da capo* arias. Many arias end with no more than a repeat of the opening ritornello after the B section, suggesting that the *da capo* has been cut. With the B sections tending to be short, this gives a lopsided feel to the number concerned. That should not deter anyone from giving this unfamiliar opera a go. **Richard Lawrence**

Verdi

Macbeth

Ludovic Tézier *bar* ..... Macbeth
Martina Serafin *sop* ..... Lady Macbeth
Vitalij Kowaljow *bass* ..... Banco
Saimir Pirgu *ten* ..... Macduff
Albert Casals *ten* ..... Malcolm
Anna Puche *sop* ..... Lady-in-Waiting
David Sánchez *bass* ..... Doctor
Marc Canturri *bar* ..... Servant/Herald/Assassin
Chorus and Symphony Orchestra of the Gran Teatre del Liceu / Giampaolo Bisanti
Stage director **Christof Loy**
Video director **Fabrice Castanier**
C Major Entertainment (768908 ② DVD; 768804 Blu-ray • 152')
Recorded live 2016

This is a *Macbeth* that seems to spin directly out of the heat-oppressed brain of its main protagonist. We never leave the vast baronial hall in which the destructive fantasies of Ludovic Tézier's Scottish thane play out. And the palette is an unreal grey on grey, a decision taken by director Christof Loy and his colleague Jonas Dahlberg – credited as 'scenographer' rather than set designer – to create both a world of shadows and a filmic homage to a psychological thriller such as Hitchcock's *Rebecca*. 'What have you done', demand the Witches in their opening chorus. They are normally talking to each other about the night's activities, but here they interrogate Macbeth himself, Tezier's haunted reaction suggesting he's already knee-deep in blood. Last night he dreamt he went to Dunsinane …

This production from the Liceu in Barcelona was filmed in 2016, and Loy's staging wasn't new even then – it originated in Geneva in 2012. Exhumed rather like the spirits summoned by the Witches, it has the cerebral style that marks all of Loy's productions, but lacks a dash of the diabolical. Moustachioed witches in suits look like they could be undergraduates larking about at a 1930s Oxbridge summer ball; a *Giselle* parody for the ghostly ballet underwhelms. It would almost certainly have played better in the theatre, not least because the sombre palette makes it such a murky experience on DVD/Blu-ray – despite some good camerawork by video director Fabrice Castanier. Due to sound balance issues I also found the orchestra under Giampaolo Bisanti rather recessed, fading into the background despite some elegant playing from the Liceu orchestra.

In 2016 Tézier was just on the verge of a career phase that has seen him become one of the most desired Verdi baritones around. He's undoubtedly the star here, providing a stream of elegant phrasing and fine *bel canto*-infused style. This is the later version of *Macbeth* (hence the ballet) but concludes with the original ending, Macbeth's aria 'Mal per me', a decision that might not pay off histrionically but which provides Tézier with another imposing showpiece. Nonetheless, Loy's telescoped production asks a lot of him, and as an actor he doesn't always command the stage.

Martina Serafin's Lady Macbeth is by and large a disappointment: some cutting wordplay aside, she's often squally, sometimes out of tune and her coloratura is sketchy. An intense sleepwalking scene is sadly capped by an unwise lunge at a D flat. Vitalij Kowaljow is a strong Banco, however, and Saimir Pirgu makes the most of his aria as Macduff, which is stirringly and suavely delivered. A special shout-out to Marc Canturri, who skulks in the shadows in a hybrid role – servant, herald and assassin – and proves surprisingly arresting. **Neil Fisher**

Wagner

Der Ring des Nibelungen

Tomasz Konieczny *bass-bar* ..... Wotan/Wanderer
Camilla Nylund *sop* ..... Brünnhilde
Klaus Florian Vogt *ten* ..... Siegfried
Daniela Köhler *sop* ..... Sieglinde
Eric Cutler *ten* ..... Siegmund
Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke *ten* ..... Mime
Christopher Purves *bass* ..... Alberich
David Leigh *bass* ..... Hagen
Christof Fischesser *bass* ..... Hunding
Claudia Mahnke *mez* ..... Fricka
Anna Danik *mez* ..... Erda
Lauren Fagan *sop* ..... Gutrune
Daniel Schmutzhard *bar* ..... Gunther
Sarah Ferede *mez* ..... Waltraute
Zurich Opera House Chorus; Philharmonia Zürich / Gianandrea Noseda
Stage director **Andreas Homoki**
Video director **Tieni Burkhalter**
Accentus (ACC70656 ⑦ DVD; ACC60656 ④ Blu-ray • 15h 23' • s)
Recorded live, May 2024

Catriona Hewitson and Yvonne Howard star in Retrospect Opera's premiere recording of Granville Bantock's Celtic folk-opera The Seal-Woman – see review on page 84

When any new *Ring* cycle appears on DVD, Wagnerites know to be ready for something visually complicated. Instead, Andreas Homoki delivers radical simplicity. It's a less-is-more *Ring* cycle that begins with a white-on-white *Rheingold*, and maintains pretty much the same revolving set that acts more as a frame than an interpretation for Wagner's 16-hour saga. Those who have lived with *The Ring* for decades may well discover the piece anew – both in its glory and in its tedium. On the 'less' side, the production is low on spectacle. In fact, there really isn't much of that. Brünnhilde's sleeping rock in *Die Walküre* smoulders more than burns. The Forest Bird has flimsy wings. Siegfried's dragon only adequately fulfils its theatrical function. In its final moments, the Immolation Scene keeps cutting between stage and orchestra pit. No idea why.

These are not big drawbacks, especially considering that much of this epic – about the end of the ruling gods and the beginning of humanity – achieves a rare unity of expression: words, how they sit on vocal lines, how singers shade them, plus the orchestral support and video direction are all of a piece on a moment-by-moment basis. At times, the Zurich orchestra sounds underpowered until one realises that conductor Gianandrea Noseda isn't about to upset that unity with frequent grand flourishes of sound. When such moments are truly necessary, the orchestra does deliver. If there's one word for Noseda's conducting, it's 'articulate' in sharpening and revealing the dramatic purpose of the moment.

Vocal casting is well matched, with middle-weight voices whose interactions are so detailed that they seem to have learned the saga as theatre first and then added the music. One can't compare this cast to more typical Wagnerian singers; they're just not on the same spectrum. That primacy of text is a luxury that's possible in the 1100-seat Opernhaus Zürich, where vocal projection need not be a preoccupation. Singers concentrate on what any given scene is really about, and don't need a lot of high-concept bells and whistles to aid audience comprehension. With the added heat of live performance, there are a number of standard-setting Wagnerian characterisations and not always just on the merits of their singing. Camilla Nylund, for one, is a thinking person's Brünnhilde, with her silently expressed psychological evolution – captured clearly in camera close-ups – that strengthens future plot developments, since her character is the crossroads of the entire saga.

Of course, any *Ring* needs a coherent look. And here, other-worldly beings (Rhinemaidens, etc) exist in white plain clothes with platinum hair. The underclass are dishevelled and wear fur. The gods wear natty, somewhat modern suits and dresses. Siegmund and Sieglinde are plain and functional. The unusually barbaric Valkyries wear quasi-horse heads (unfortunately). Though much of *The Ring* takes place in outdoor netherworlds, most of this production is purposely indoors. An ever-present turntable allows characters to walk room to room, which can maintain a dynamic visual progression in scenes that are static on the surface but have interior action. The set-design architecture is spartan and dignified, which is sometimes a neutral support for the scene at hand but becomes startling at the climax of *Das Rheingold*: when the gods make their grand entrance into Valhalla, what arrives on the revolving stage is just a plain room with a

meeting table. It's empty, both literally and symbolically. The grand achievement and the machinations behind it weren't for nothing, but close to it.

This is not the first *Rheingold* clue that this world is declining. Rhinemaidens – who seem to be having a pyjama party – guard their gold with clueless nonchalance. Christopher Purves makes Alberich a villain of Shakespearean stature, singing like a god, looking utterly vile but energised by renouncing love. *Die Walküre* then becomes a study in love (and lack of it): marriage is a tentative alliance (Wotan and Fricka) while passion is an aberration (Siegmund and Sieglinde) that leaves the couple out in the snow (in one of the few outdoor scenes). The vocally ideal Eric Cutler captures Siegmund's renegade quality. As Sieglinde, Daniela Köhler conveys how much unforeseen love has driven her to breaking point. Two later emotional high points in this production are Brünnhilde's growing awareness of what love is (Nylund is great here) and Wotan's devastation at giving her up. Tomasz Konieczny's Wotan is theatrically magnetic and vocally fresh, though his emotional intensity at the end of *Die Walküre* makes one fear for his well-being. Footnote: in Act 3, even the 'Ho-jo-to-ho' battle cry is sung as something meaningful, as opposed to a quaint Nordic custom.

The world of the gods is in further ruin in *Siegfried* as these real humans (young bratty Siegfried and the scheming Mime) are in a world of overturned furniture that had been fashioned for large-size gods – ones who will soon cease to exist. Unfortunately, the production fails to solve the problem of so much stage time with unsavoury characters – ones that were likeable one opera back (Wotan) and will be likeable in the next opera (Siegfried). Even the infirm, vocally unruly Erda (Anna Danik) fails to generate much sympathy. Then there's the question of Klaus Florian Vogt as Siegfried. His clean, bright but less-than-hefty voice polarises audiences. Some have compared his boyish yet well-projected sound to an oboe reed powered by an air compressor. I love his Parsifal, and couldn't imagine him as Siegfried. But here he is, theatrically convincing (though he is in his 50s) yet in need of a better air compressor for the Forging Song.

Later, in *Götterdämmerung*, a greater assurance takes hold of Vogt, who sings with less vocal labour than I thought possible in this role. So I'm in. For smaller theatres, he's the Siegfried of choice. The Immolation Scene has his spirit resurrecting from his murdered body, urging on Brünnhilde while Nylund delivers phrase readings that make her sense of purpose more vivid than I've ever heard. Footnote: earlier in *Götterdämmerung*, you know the gods are doomed when Brünnhilde dismisses Waltraute's end-of-the-world warning, even when sung so charismatically as by Sarah Ferede. It's also hard to imagine Siegfried buying into a bromance engineered by Hagen, portrayed by ultra-malevolent dark-voiced David Leigh (also Fafner in *Siegfried*).

With mythology, it's not the plot but the archetypes behind it that count. And this *Ring* production indeed lends itself to the kind of open-ended interpretations that are the purpose of mythology. For that reason, this *Ring* DVD may be more durable than most. I confess that most *Ring* DVDs in my collection don't have many return viewings with the exception of the famous Patrice Chereau Bayreuth production (DG, 5/92) and Kasper Bech Holten's Copenhagen *Ring* (Decca, 4/09). But having seen much of this Zurich *Ring* already on medici.tv, returning to the finished DVD has yielded new insights. The promise of more to come makes return visits likely. **David Patrick Stearns**

G Williams

The Parlour

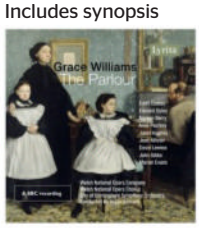
Edith Coates *contr* ..... Grandmama
Edward Byles *ten* ..... Papa
Noreen Berry *mez* ..... Mama
Anne Pashley *sop* ..... Louisa
Janet Hughes *sop* ..... Augusta
Jean Allister *mez* ..... Aunt Genevieve
David Lennox *ten* ..... Uncle Steve
John Gibbs *bar* ..... Doctor Charlton
Marian Evans *sop* ..... Rosalie

Welsh National Opera Company and Chorus; City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra / Bryan Balkwill

Lyrita (REAM1147 • 80')

Recorded live at the Odeon Theatre, Llandudno, August 18, 1966, and broadcast by BBC Radio on November 6, 1966

Includes synopsis



When Welsh National Opera finally premiered Grace Williams's only opera *The Parlour* in May 1966 (a work finished in 1961), it enjoyed considerable public and critical success. It went on to Llandudno for the summer season in August (where this BBC recording was made for broadcast in November) and returned to Cardiff in the autumn (before the Third Programme broadcast), when audiences were disappointingly small. It was a one-acter and shared the stage with Puccini's *Il tabarro* but was then dropped from the company's repertoire and the composer never saw it again in Wales: '*The Parlour* did work as an opera I think, but people simply did not come to it, although it got very good notices', she said a year before she died in 1977.

It is therefore good to hear the original cast and company together with the CBSO, who regularly played for the Cardiff and Llandudno seasons back in the day. *The Parlour* benefited from the stalwart WNO team of the time: Bryan Balkwill conducting, John Moody as producer with an acclaimed set, costumes and designs by Elizabeth Friendship, who happily survives her colleagues and has fond memories of this production and the team involved. Star of the show was Edith Coates as Grandmama – a formidable character-singer who'd created Auntie in *Peter Grimes* in 1945 and was the first She-Ancient in *The Midsummer Marriage* in 1955. The singers work well together as a team, are superbly supported by the already outstanding chorus and the whole is vividly theatrical in spirit.

The story is based on Maupassant's *En famille* of 1881 and Williams transferred the action to a British seaside town in that Victorian era – it could well be the Barry she remembered from her pre-Great War childhood. She wrote her own libretto, not from choice but because her commission fee from the Welsh Committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1959 didn't run to employing a librettist: she did a formidably successful job and her words come across clearly. Choosing Maupassant may point to a connection with *Albert Herring* of 1947 but Grace had been a close friend of Britten's and in the early '50s she'd been his first choice as amanuensis – her affinity and admiration were natural and instinctive. Yet her own voice shines through powerfully and this realistically recorded performance, albeit in rather rough sound to modern ears, fills an important gap in her steadily growing discography. **Geraint Lewis**

'Dolce concento'

'Les Italiens à Paris sous Louis XIV'

Anonymous Baptiste est fils d'une meunière **Bembo** Ha! Que l'absence est un cruel martyre **Campra** La Carnaval de Venise – Canaries; SInfonia, 'Orfeo nell'inferi'. Les fêtes venitiennes – Air des Polichinelles; Chaconne; Marche de la Fortune **Cavalli** Xerse – Fiamma che accesa fu **T de Gatti** Coronis – Ouverture; Air. Scylla – Air; Où vais-je? Qu'ai je fait!; Rigaudons **Guido** S'armi pure invitta e fiera **La Barre** Le vénitienne – Gigue **Lorenzani** Ben

Camilla Nylund as Brünnhilde leads a strong cast for Wagner's Ring cycle, in a new production from Zurich Opera directed by Andreas Homoki – see review on page 86

PHOTOGRAPHY: MONIKA RITTERSHAUS

ti sta folle mio cuore. Nicandro e Fileno – Lassa far che degg'io **Lully** Atys – Quand le péril est agréable. Ballet de Xerse – Ouverture; Gigue pour Bacchus; Rondeau pour les mesmes **Stuck** Héraclite et Démocrite – Pleurez, mes tristes yeux. Méléagre – C'est ici le brillant séjour; Divin Père de l'harmonie; Prélude de Diane. Pur ti connobbi (excs)

La Palatine / Marie Théoleyre *sop*
Guillaume Haldenwang *hpd*
Harmonia Mundi (HMN91 6120 • 62')
Includes texts and translations

It's strange how rarely the title of an album is translated. 'Dolce concento' is a phrase from one the cantatas here, given in the booklet as 'sweet harmony'. No problem with the sub-heading, 'Les Italiens à Paris', but here we are offered more – or is it less? – than it seems. It's stretching a point to describe Campra, born in Aix-en-Provence, as Italian; on the other hand his friend Jean-Baptiste Stuck, though of German descent, was born in Leghorn. Like Lully (born in Florence), Stuck was christened Giovanni Battista; and it was Lully who dominated music at court until his death in 1687. This enjoyable recording starts and finishes with Lully, the programme divided into three 'acts', chronological rather than dramatic.

La Palatine, founded in 2019, is a flexible ensemble named after Liselotte, the German princess married to 'Monsieur', the king's brother. The line-up here consists of single strings and percussion, with a continuo group of, variously, harpsichord, theorbo, guitar and triple harp. Fourteen of the 25 tracks are instrumental, many of them lasting a minute or less. Some of the pieces, vocal or instrumental, are taken from stage works; others are from collections of cantatas or arias.

Lully composed the ballet music for a staging of Cavalli's *Xerse*, mounted at the Louvre in 1660 as part of the celebrations of Louis XIV's wedding. The album begins with a sturdy account of the Overture, followed by an aria from the opera itself. This is sung by Amastre, who enters, disguised as a soldier, in search of her errant betrothed, Xerxes. There's a bittersweet lilt to the minor key 'Fiamma che accesa fu' that Marie Théoleyre catches well. The Air and Rigaudons from *Scylla* by Theobaldo di Gatti are enlivened respectively by castanets and drum. In 'Où vais-je? Qu'ai-je fait?', Scylla is remorseful at betraying her father. Both here and in the recitative and aria from Paolo Lorenzani's *Nicandro e Fileno*, the intensity of the string ensemble is not quite matched by the singer's bright tones. In 'S'armi pure invitta e fiera' by Giovanni Antonio Guido, Théoleyre's coloratura is mightily impressive; and Josef Žák's violin is kept equally busy.

The booklet fails throughout to identify the characters. But a bit of digging has revealed that the excerpts from the Prologue to Stuck's *Méléagre* are both sung by the allegorical figure of Italy. 'C'est ici le brillant séjour' is accompanied only by the continuo; while 'Divin Père de l'harmonie', slow, rapt and richly scored, is beautifully done by singer and players. The aria section of the cantata *Pur ti connobbi* is introduced by the expressive viola da gamba of Noémie Lenhof. 'Pleurez, mes tristes yeux' from another cantata, *Héraclite et Démocrite*, features suspensions in the violins over a walking bass.

This is a well-executed, tantalising glimpse of unfamiliar pieces. I would certainly like to hear more of di Gatti, Lorenzani and Stuck. As I said above, the album ends, as it began, with Lully: a bawdy song about the composer's reputation. **Richard Lawrence**

REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

Ciccolini's complete Erato recordings

Jed Distler dives into an essential collection issued to mark the pianist's centenary

Throughout his long career, Aldo Ciccolini (1925-2015) enchanted generations of music lovers while inspiring generations of piano students, many of whom would go on to distinguished careers in their own right, such as Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Nicholas Angelich and Artur Pizarro. Born in Naples on August 15, 1925, Ciccolini began studies at the Naples Conservatory, where he made his debut at 16 at the city's Teatro di San Carlo. In 1949 he tied for first place in the Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud Competition. Later he based his career in France, where he became a naturalised citizen and taught for years at the Paris Conservatoire.

In 2009 EMI brought out a 56-disc box-set containing all the recordings Ciccolini made for the label between 1950 and 1991. Erato now repackages the collection in original-jacket facsimiles, along with four additional discs. Information about contents, recording dates and venues is to be found on each disc sleeve, while a 33-page booklet provides an index by composer that allows one to locate selections easily, plus informative annotations by Laurent Muraro. I only wish that Erato had retained the EMI edition's more extensive booklet offerings, which included an affectionate biographical essay by Olivier Bellamy and Ciccolini's own comments about the composers, plus touching tributes from Angelich, Thibaudet and Philippe Cassard.

Based on each disc's copyright information, the Erato transfers appear to be identical to those in the 2009 EMI set, all of which were superior to previous CD editions, although the quality of engineering varies widely from session to session – inevitably, perhaps, given the Ciccolini discography's four-decade-plus span. Still, the collection's sheer stylistic breadth and range of repertoire will surprise those who've only known Ciccolini for his best-selling Satie recordings.

His first 1950 EMI sessions featured four lovingly nuanced Scarlatti sonatas that he remade four years later, presaging the leaner sparkle of his 1962 Scarlatti album selections. The sec timbre and feeling for dance characterising Ciccolini's 1963 Bach Inventions and Sinfonias grow on you over repeated hearings: sample the E flat and C major Sinfonias' deliciously turned ornaments or the E major Sinfonia's curvaceous legato and you'll get what I mean. Of the eight Mozart sonatas Ciccolini recorded for EMI, I prefer the C major K309, D major K311 and F major K533/494 for their outer movements' unfettered brio over the relatively smaller-scaled E flat K282 and F major K332 performances. His later Mozart recordings revealed more stylish simplicity, as heard in a 1981 collection of five variation sets. Indeed, it's interesting comparing the pianist's more sectionalised, virtuoso-orientated 1958 'Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman' Variations alongside the 1981 remake's sharper articulation and better-unified tempo relationships.

The harsh patina of his Schubert Impromptus and A major D664 Sonata make me wonder if these performances are better than they sound, although Ciccolini's finicky, short-breathed phrasing stops the Schubert B flat D960 Sonata in its tracks much of the time. On the other hand, he plays Chopin's Waltzes to the manner born, favouring brisk yet never hectic tempos, bristling passagework and a seductively silken legato; this is one of the best integral Chopin Waltz cycles in the catalogue. The pianist's virile, sometimes aggressive manner in a selection of Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*, the *Ballade* in G minor and the early Op 7 Sonata evoke the hardy spirit of Grieg's own recorded self-interpretations. While Ciccolini didn't set down for EMI much of his Schumann repertoire apart from the excellent *Waldszenen*, Op 82, *Kinderszenen*, Op 15, and the relatively rare *Intermezzos*, Op 4, he recorded all of Brahms's late piano pieces from Op 76 through Op 119 in 1968. The engineering is a bit drab and murky here, but that takes nothing away from Ciccolini's direct yet flexible, texturally transparent and contrapuntally cognisant readings.

If anything, Liszt's music opened up Ciccolini's expressive and tonal reserves to a broader degree in the stereo *Années de pèlerinage*, the rarely played Ballade No 1 and the stunning *St Francis Legends*. Not many pianists took on Liszt's *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* as a complete cycle in the second half of the 20th century, yet Ciccolini recorded it twice for EMI. I prefer the fluency and sound of his 1968 version to the 1990 remake, although better still are two

inspired live performances that privately circulate among piano mavens: one from September 12, 2003, in Paris, the other from the Amsterdam Concertgebouw on June 26, 2011.

Erik Satie's reputation as a musical maverick and non-comformist (a hippie before his time, so to speak) struck a chord with music lovers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As such, the time was ripe for Ciccolini to record almost all of Satie's solo piano works, as well as to overdub himself in selected piano duet works, just as he had done in an earlier, one-off mono Satie release. There's none of Reinbert de Leeuw's 'look ma, slow hands' posturings, no *Gymnopédies* and *Gnossiennes* pumped up and weighed down with interpretative baggage: Ciccolini simply plays the music straight and makes it move, from the dashing character pieces in *Sports et divertissements* and lilting *Nocturnes* to the static, ceremonial *Ogives*, meditative *Sonneries de la Rose + Croix* and the strangely elegant *Sarabandes*. I prefer these recordings' warmer sound to the relatively hollow, glassy effect of Ciccolini's 1980s digital Satie remakes, which are a tad more scrupulous regarding the composer's phrasings and dynamics.

Aldo Ciccolini is celebrated in a 60-disc set of his EMI recordings from 1950-91 and more

With the exception of the *Pavane*, Ciccolini recorded no other solo Ravel for EMI, although the elegant reserve he brings to Ravel's two concertos fits Jean Martinon's dapper orchestral framework like a glove. His 1991 Debussy cycle may be an acquired taste for some listeners: Ciccolini's pungent, hard-nosed sonority doesn't really jibe with the composer's 'hammerless piano' ideal, while Ciccolini avoids sensuality where it's most needed, such as in 'La puerta del vino' (from *Préludes*, Book 2) or his slow and static 'Hommage à Rameau' (*Images*, Book 1). More often than not, however, Ciccolini's forceful, masculine way with the *Préludes*, *Images*, *Estampes*, *Pour le piano*, *Children's Corner* and sundry short works provides an antidote to swimmier, softer-edged readings that purport to be authentically 'impressionistic'. Actually the word 'expressionism' best describes Ciccolini's blunt, Prokofievian recreations of the 12 *Études*.

Other French composers, however, found an ideal champion in Ciccolini. He proved a loving and stylish advocate for the virtually unknown yet charming and thoroughly idiomatic keyboard output of Massenet and Séverac. I love his nimble-fingered Chabrier, where Ciccolini makes *Bourrée fantasque* sounds easier to play than it actually is, while he tears into Camille Chevillard's hefty 'de-orchestration' of *España* like a famished tiger. And it's also nice to hear the familiar *Scherzo-valse* in context with the nine *Pièces pittoresques* that precede it. While contemporaneous Saint-Saëns concerto cycles by Collard/Previn and Rogé/Dutoit had better sound and smoother orchestral execution, the Ciccolini/Serge Baudo traversals abound with character and a dry-point crispness that better suits the composer's neoclassical aesthetic. The pianist strips all turgid traces from Franck's solo and concerted works, and simply sparkles in the first and better of his two recordings of d'Indy's *Symphony on a Mountain Air*.

> The collection's range will surprise those who've only known Ciccolini for his best-selling Satie recordings

Then there is Ciccolini's delightful Rossini recital: I consider Rossini to be an honorary French piano-music composer, since he wrote many of his insouciant 'Sins of my old age' pieces for his famous Paris salons. Perhaps the pianist's multi-layered Albéniz *Iberia* and Granados *Goyescas* are not so idiomatically accentuated as you'd expect, but his sultry renditions of Albéniz's Piano Concerto in A minor, Alexis de Castillon's D major Concerto and Falla's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* certainly are. Rehearing Ciccolini's Mussorgsky *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Rachmaninov Second Concerto and both Tchaikovsky First Concerto recordings, it's too bad that this pianist didn't record more Russian music. We do, though, have generous samplings of Ciccolini's prowess as a collaborative pianist. He provides a solid base for Janine Micheau's attractive, peppercorn soprano in a well-curated Debussy group, while Jean-Christophe Benoît's light-timbred baritone is perfectly suited to Ravel's prismatic sound world, especially in the *Histoires naturelles*. Little needs to be said about the classic 1969 Satie mélodies collection with soprano Mady Mesplé, baritone Gabriel Bacquier and tenor Nicolai Gedda in prime voice. And Ciccolini's assured yet never overpowering command of the difficult piano parts in the cello sonatas of Rachmaninov and Chopin complements the easy elegance of Paul Tortelier's cello artistry.

The four 'new' discs include two Salieri concertos that ooze charm, abetted by Claudio Scimone and his alert I Solisti Veneti, originally issued by Fonit Cetra in 1978. Ugly reverberant sound hampers a previously unreleased 2010 encores recital, but archival recordings preserving selections from recitals held in Nohant in 1972 and 1982 fall easier on the ear. Here Ciccolini sprints through Schumann's Sonata No 3 and *Carnaval*, clearly enjoying every moment. Schubert's *Drei Klavierstücke*, D946, stand out for the pianist's expansive shaping of the *Allegretto*, but his Chopin Barcarolle meanders. However, Ciccolini's 82-year-old fingers sound half a century younger in refulgent 2008 accounts of Beethoven's Third and Fourth Concertos (the former opts for the Reinecke cadenza, the latter uses the first and more familiar Beethoven option), recorded live in Greece, with sturdy support from Myron Michailidis and the Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra.

In sum, those who have the time and inclination to invest in and explore this collection will surely find Aldo Ciccolini's generous and well-rounded artistry engaging and rewarding. If you missed the 2009 EMI box, don't lose this second chance to acquire Ciccolini en masse. G

THE RECORDINGS

The Complete Erato Recordings
Aldo Ciccolini
Erato (60 CDs) 2173 26120-6

PHOTOGRAPHY: JEAN MAINBOURG

The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by jazzwise

Art Hirahara

Peace Unknown

Posi-tone

This septet takes on a variety of compositions by pianist Hirahara, and – with arrangements coming from him and other members of the group – it is a truly collective effort. It sets out quite deliberately to reflect different aural landscapes, although to some extent the content groups into either slow and ruminative, or fast and buoyant. There's some fine ensemble playing and inventive individual soloing to be heard on the latter, particularly 'Brooklyn Express' and 'Two Cubes'.

The piece that sits between the extremes is the relaxed mid-tempo 'The More Things Change', with fine solos from trumpeter Alex Sipiagin and saxophonist Patrick Cornelius in particular, as well as a hummable head. There are fewer hummable melodic elements in the slower pieces, though there is a lovely reflective melody at the start of 'Drawing with Light' but the other slower works all offer some fine opportunities for solos, with Hirahara and Cornelius outstanding. And, never putting a foot (or beat) wrong anywhere on the album, bassist Boris Kozlov and drummer Rudy Royston are an impeccable rhythm team. **Alyn Shipton**

Ant Law

Unified Theories

Self-release/bandcamp

Part of the thrill of following guitarist Ant Law has been his restless collaborations with a range of artists and styles. But with Unified Theories there's a strong sense of Law as leader and composer melding all those voices into a coherent whole. Law could have opened Unified Theories with a dramatic burst of rock edged virtuosity or one of his math-jazz complexities. But he has the confidence now to ease in with the subtleties of 'From A to Z', a Latin-laced acoustic guitar tune with singer Brigitte Beraha in Luciana Souza mode.

This is ensemble playing of the highest order delivered with a light touch that belies its virtuosity. Law loves his knotty musical paradoxes and puzzles and happily explicates them live. But he and the band (and this is a real 'band' project) are now way beyond the smoke and mirrors of earlier outings.

The consistency of interaction, the discipline to not over-play, the sheer pleasure in the interactions (drummer Ernesto Simpson's presence is vital in this respect) make *Unified Theories* Law's most relaxed yet equally authoritative release yet. **Andy Robson**

World Music

Brought to you by SONGLINES

Naïssam Jalal

Souffles

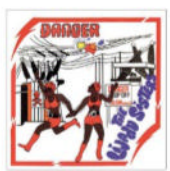
Les Couleurs du Son

French-Syrian flute player and singer Jalal follows up her stunning 2023 album *Healing Rituals* with this set of wind duets. She's joined by eight renowned musicians from the worlds of jazz and improvised music on various saxophones, clarinets and trombone, each collaborator contributing to one piece. By their nature, duets are very intimate and vulnerable, just two melody lines supporting and complementing each other as they tell a story together. With a different pairing on each, these pieces all have a different personality – some bold and intense, some delicate – but they all flow together, finding a midpoint between European art music and jazz, with subtleties borrowed from the Levant. Saxophonist Archie Shepp's guest spot is the headliner, but my favourite comes from Yom, whose avant-klezmer clarinet twists beautifully around Jalal's Arabic-inspired vocals. With these ruminations on breath, melody and intimate creative relationships, Jalal shows her immense musical intelligence and inspired vision. **Jim Hickson**

The Lijadu Sisters

Danger

Numero Group



Originally released in 1976, *Danger* fuses Afrobeat, funk and psychedelic soul with biting political and social commentary sweetly delivered through charming trademark harmonies. The Nigerian duo – identical twins Taiwo and the late Kehinde Lijadu – were trailblazers in Nigeria's 1970s male-dominated pop scene. Though they found success in their time, the sisters spent decades battling exploitation, unpaid royalties, and uncredited sampling. Shortly after Kehinde's passing in 2019, Taiwo finally regained control over their catalogue in 2021 and partnered with archival label Numero Group for a full reissue campaign. *Danger* is worth revisiting for the remaster alone; Biddy Wright's original arrangements are now clearer and more dynamic, allowing every instrumental layer to breathe beneath the twins' unique vocals. *Danger* is timeless, remaining strikingly relevant today in both its messages and diverse musicality. This new remaster restores the album's power, and it's a relief to see their legacy finally handled with care, giving their groundbreaking sound the recognition and reach it has long deserved. **Lucy Hallam**

BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan dips into conductor collections devoted to three larger-than-life personalities

I've some pretty special collections for you this month, the first needing little in the way of detailed critical comment (in general) but an urgent recommendation. To this day **Thomas Beecham** has his fans and his detractors, largely because his outsize musical personality ranged from exquisite delicacy (much of his incomparable Delius) to characterful but occasionally portentous Haydn, here represented by *The Seasons* (with soprano Elsie Morison and tenor Alexander Young captured in their vocal prime) and deliciously pointed accounts of the Symphonies Nos 99-104, stereo recordings (the terrain covered by this fine-sounding collection), the earlier 'London' Symphonies having been recorded by Beecham in mono only. Who but Beecham could make the first movement of Balakirev's First Symphony sound so meaningfully argumentative or Liszt's *Faust Symphony* (again with Young in fine voice) so vividly reflective of its three 'character portrayals'? For this single-disc reissue Beecham's emotively potent account of the tone poem *Orpheus* is added, bringing the disc's playing time well over the 80-minute mark.

One of the glories of this set is the playing of Beecham's hand-picked Royal Philharmonic, an elite instrumental amalgam that approximates in its effect augmented chamber music of the first order. Works such as selected Schubert symphonies (Nos 3, 5 and 6), Symphonies by Lalo, Bizet, Mozart (the most expressive account of the *Jupiter* you're ever likely to hear) and Beethoven (a dancing Seventh and a textually observant Second – note the keenly played accents in the Trio of the Minuet), as well as Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*, Rimsky's *Sheherazade*, the delightful Handel arrangements (especially the 'orchestral suite' *Love in Bath*, with its cameo reference to the *Largo* near the close and a Hornpipe that blasts 'Rule, Britannia!'), extended excerpts from *Solomon* (with Morison, Young and John Cameron), not to mention Bizet's *Carmen* with Victoria de los Ángeles and Nicolai Gedda, deliciously turned if without the fire that keeps André Cluytens's 1950 Paris version with Solange Michel and Raoul Jobin on a front burner (Naxos), Mozart's colourful Singspiel *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (with bass Gottlob Frick on cracking form) and numerous Beecham 'lollipops' give you some idea of what a generous box of goodies this is. Beecham's music-making was primarily about love – love not only for the music but also of the performers and his audiences, which makes for magical listening. Also included, fascinating if spatially limited experimental stereo recordings from the pre-war era (LPO) and rehearsal fragments.

Beecham was a recreative musician, primarily via his many arrangements and (mostly Handelian) reorchestrations, whereas the Finnish maestro **Leif Segerstam** outstripped Beecham's adored Joseph Haydn more than three times over on the symphonic front. Segerstam's symphonic output exceeded the 350 mark, but when it comes to music by other composers his many recordings attest to a rare sense of inner perception. 'Segerstam in Aarhaus' (where he played a major conductorial role between 2018 and 2022) sheds illumination on some significant symphonic music. His unfolding of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony climaxes with two cymbal clashes in the second-movement *Adagio* whereas the prominent Wagner tubas near the end of that same movement have rarely made such a strong impression, certainly not on disc. When it comes to Bruckner's Fourth Symphony, the performance's highlight is undoubtedly the finale, which assumes a level of grandeur reminiscent of Celibidache in Munich. Possibly the set's most interesting disc is the third, which follows the thrilling midway point in Smetana's *Má vlast* – 'Šárka' – with often theatrical music by the Danish composer Rued Langgaard, his highly original Fifth Symphony, *Nature of the Steppes* ('Summer Legend Drama') in its second version, where Segerstam's involvement with this gripping 22-minute score is palpable. 'Šárka' follows on from the first two movements of *Má vlast* (the rest is not included, at least not as part of the present programme) but it's a fascinating interpretation, fiery to start with, though the latter sections of the score are slower than usual. Likewise the opening tone poem 'Vyšehrad', which runs to 17'24" (Václav Talich and the Czech PO in 1954 – Supraphon, Naxos – clock up a more urgent 14'10"). Segerstam's view of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony again chooses a leisurely route, the avian clarinet at the close of the 'Scene by the Brook' tweaked appropriately notation-wise. This is thoughtful music-making, with plenty of interpretative ideas to get your teeth into, well played and agreeably recorded. Let's hope there's more to come from the same source.

Beecham and Segerstam tended to venture, metaphorically speaking, between the staves, whereas **Herbert von Karajan** was essentially a master of sound whose performances and recordings were visited by textural beauty and/or drama. Karajan recorded Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* initially with the Philharmonia, drawing praise in these pages (4/55) with the words 'the orchestral playing and recording alike are superb'. Meloclassic's release of an August live recording from the 1954 Lucerne Festival is similarly endowed, with an extra degree of spontaneity added. The same concert includes Strauss's *Don Juan*, also available as recorded on tour in Turin a couple of months later (Urania). Karajan's way of unleashing the score's passion holds the attention from start to finish and the Philharmonia's playing is magnificent. More interesting still, from the same Lucerne concert, is Mozart's Concerto No 23 in A, K488, with that seasoned Mozartian Walter Gieseking as soloist, studio-recorded by these artists earlier but with an extra degree of fizz and infinitely better sound on this new live version. Immaculately pronounced radio announcements (in German, French and Italian) are separately tracked, and therefore easily dispensable. G

THE RECORDINGS

Complete Stereo Recordings on Warner Classics Thomas Beecham
Warner Classics (35 CDs) 2173 24089-1

Segerstam in Aarhus Leif Segerstam
Danacord ④ DACOCD941/4

The Lucerne Concert 1954
Walter Gieseking, Herbert von Karajan
Meloclassic ② MC5007

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

Strings attached

Among high-ranking cellists in the first half of the 20th century, Barcelona-born **Gaspar Cassadó** was a memorable player, his interpretation of Dvořák's Concerto easily as distinctive as that of his compatriot Pablo Casals, given the evidence of various extant recordings (versions under Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt on Telefunken and Jonel Perlea on Vox spring to mind), but a 1954 live recording with the Hessian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Karl Böhm, although less than pristine in the orchestral department, is both enlivening and achingly beautiful, Cassadó's expressive portamentos always used to musical effect (sample near the beginning of the first movement). The finale's long farewell has rarely been more feelingly played and although Böhm isn't the first conductor one thinks of in relation to this particular masterpiece, his handling of the orchestral score generates plenty of drama. Cassadó the virtuoso races in straight after the concerto with his own lightning-fast *Danse du diable vert* (the brilliant outer sections and the warmly sung core of the piece make for a striking contrast), and there are also shorter works by Granados and Halffter. Chopin's Cello Sonata (with pianist Helmuth Barth, recorded in 1955) combines elegance and palpable emotion, and there are enjoyable performances (under Louis de Froment) of concertos by Lalo (in D minor) and Haydn (No 2). The one dud is Cassadó's overworked orchestration of Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata, which trades simple lyricism for empty busyness (with unnecessary bits added). I'm amazed that a conductor of Hans Rosbaud's stature had anything to do with it. Still, that's merely one item (a 1944 recording) on a programme that in general is representative of Cassadó's considerable art.

Cassadó recorded chamber music with Yehudi Menuhin and Louis Kentner (Warner Classics), whereas a major soloist from an earlier generation, the English violinist Albert Sammons, took the lead

Pierre Monteux: a natural in Ravel with the New York Philharmonic

chair for the **London String Quartet** when it was formed in 1908. Sammons left the quartet with the onset of the First World War to be replaced by James Levey, who leads on the earliest recordings in Pristine Classical's beautifully refurbished 'Columbia Electrics, Vol 1', which opens with a taut, dramatically played 1925 recording of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* Quartet (the contrast between forcefully projected shorter notes and a singing legato maximises the music's dialogic qualities) and some deeply lyrical music by Frank Bridge recorded during the same year, the *Three Idylls* and *An Irish Melody* (the 'Londonderry Air'), where you sense the Londoners exploring the music as they proceed through its expressively complex pages. Schubert's String Quintet and *Trout* Quintet (both set down in 1928, by which time the tonally sweet violinist John Pennington had replaced Levey) feature, respectively, the Belgian-born, Paris-trained concert cellist Horace Britt, who was also a cellist with the Elman Quartet in the 1920s and (rightly) praised by a *New York Times* critic for his 'warm and beautiful tone', and the Irish-born pianist Ethel Hobday (née Sharpe), whose studies in Vienna brought her into the social and professional company of Brahms in his last years. Both performances relate high levels of spontaneity, as does Schubert's *Quartettsatz* (recorded in 1927), which opens the second disc. Later live recordings by the quartet – employing different personnel formations – are featured in the highly desirable set 'The London String Quartet: 1917-1951 Recordings' (Music & Arts – see Replay from November 2011, where I describe the set as 'revelatory' and itemise much of what is included). Whether any of these items will feature by Pristine once they've finished with the Columbias, I can't tell you.

Returning to **Albert Sammons**, Biddulph's programme of sonata recordings from 1916-17 with the pianist William Murdoch conveys the essence of Sammons's playing style – his individual use of portamento and vibrato (fairly fast and expressive), his agility at speed, his warm though never overbearing tone and his seamless phrasing (well matched by Murdoch's keyboard fluency) – which in essence survives the limitations of the acoustic recording process. Timings-wise you might initially wonder how on earth Biddulph has managed to fit all this music on to a single disc, but it soon becomes apparent that such generosity is facilitated by a whole host of musical cuts.

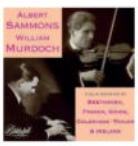
The two best-known Beethoven sonatas, the *Spring* and the *Kreutzer*, come off well – at least what we have of them does (the *Kreutzer* is substantially cut) – the highlight being the *Spring*'s playful Scherzo. The first two movements of César Franck's Sonata feature, most notably, a tenderly expressed account of the opening *Allegretto ben moderato* (Murdoch went on to re-record the whole sonata with violinist Arthur Catterall) and there are two movements from Grieg's Third Sonata (in C minor), the *Allegretto espressivo alla romanza* second movement being especially memorable. All four movements are cut. Moving closer to home, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Dvořákian D minor Sonata is as far as I can tell played complete (the

performance has a racy edge to it) whereas Ireland's Second Sonata in A minor, which Sammons premiered and went on to re-record with the composer at the piano in 1929, isn't. This is a classic case of needing to listen 'through' old sound but it's worth the effort, and Jonathan Woolf's booklet notes, to which I am indebted, are superb. For example, Woolf informs us that Columbia re-recorded all the sonatas programmed here, excepting the Grieg, with Catterall and Murdoch. So how about a Biddulph reissue to facilitate musical comparisons? Would be fascinating.

THE RECORDING

Concert Tours 1944-1961
Gaspar Cassadó
Meloclassic ② MC3019

Columbia Electrics, Vol 1
London String Quartet
Pristine Classical ② PACM127



Beethoven. Franck. Grieg, etc
Violin Sonatas **Albert Sammons, William Murdoch**
Biddulph 85055-2

A masterly Belgian trio

In Replay for the February 2001 edition of *Gramophone* I welcomed Biddulph's all-Bach CD featuring violinist Alfred Dubois (Arthur Grumiaux's teacher) partnered by pianist Marcel Maas, the whole programme (including the last three of the six Violin and Clavier Sonatas, BWV1014-19) 'discreetly expressive and sensitively phrased'. Much the same might be said of the recordings that Dubois made as a member of the Trio de la Cour de Belgique ('Belgian Court Trio'), playing alongside cellist Maurice Dambois and pianist Émile Bosquet. The main works featured include Mozart's Piano Trio No 4 in E, K542, Dubois singing the sweetest of top lines, the whole ensemble leaning this way or that as a single player might, the finale in particular a model of Classical elegance (Bosquet's contribution is especially nimble). The autumnal shades of Schumann's Third Piano Trio in G minor have rarely sounded more poetic than here, the songlike first movement thematically distinctive, as are the players' personalities, whether individual or blended. In the second movement violin and cello all but embrace (this is Schumann at his most lyrical) and for the fourth-movement finale Schumann seems to have Florestan and Eusebius in mind, representing the duality of his personality. Franck's Trio in F sharp minor, Op 1 No 1, opens with an exquisitely sombre *Andante con moto* before galloping off to a vigorous *Allegro molto* setting sail towards the *Allegro maestoso* finale. There aren't many Op 1s of this quality, bar Bach's keyboard Partitas (the first of his works to be published under his own direction, that is). Saint-Saëns's First Piano Trio opens to a smiley *Allegro vivace*, the playing lithe and personable, much as it is elsewhere in this delightful piece. The Belgian cellist, conductor and composer Fernand Quinet (1898-1971) packs a fair amount of action into his 3'38" *Chorale*, which ends unexpectedly. The rest of the disc is happily filled out by Turina's enriching First Trio and fiddle solos where Dubois is accompanied by Fernand Goeyens. Debussy's *La plus que lent* is pure magic. Tully Potter contributes typically informed notes for this well-transferred and musically rewarding programme.

THE RECORDING

Mozart. Schumann, etc
Piano Trios **Trio de la Cour de Belgique**
Biddulph ② 85058-2

Aristocratic Frenchmen

Pierre Monteux's Ravel recordings with the LSO – most notably the complete ballets *Ma Mère l'Oye* for Philips (now Decca) and *Daphnis et Chloé* (Decca) – are considered by many to be immovable benchmarks. Pristine's excellent remastering of the April 1959 *Daphnis* recording ('Monteux Conducts Ravel, Vol 2' – PASC744) is now joined by live recordings from a few weeks earlier of the First and Second Suites featuring the New York Philharmonic, transferred as an Ambient Stereo XR remaster, its musical highlights the playfully erotic 'Pantomime' from the Second Suite and the closing 'Danse générale'. The principal differences concern the divergent sounds of the two orchestras, the LSO bright and transparent (certainly as recorded under John Culshaw's expert production team), the NYPO (as reproduced via this broadcast) heavier, almost bullish at times. The same album also includes *Rapsodie espagnole* (the closing 'Feria' being best) and a fresh, unaffected account of a Monteux Ravel rarity, *Le tombeau de Couperin*, the elegant Menuet third movement serving as a good sampling point. Ravel admired Monteux's non-interventionist approach to his music, played as written rather than 'interpreted', which is appropriate given that what we need to hear is so beautifully (and vividly) scored. The only major omission on the New York CD is the chorus for *Daphnis*, a role taken on the LSO disc of the complete ballet by the Royal Opera House Chorus. That I suppose has to be a first choice, but the New York concert is musically compelling and also includes Joseph Szigeti playing the somewhat rambling *Rêverie et caprice* by Berlioz, similar in essence to his Columbia recording under Constant Lambert.

THE RECORDING

Monteux Conducts Ravel, Vol 1
Pristine Classical PASC738

Firkušný under the stars

Back in the 1950s when it came to discussing recordings of Debussy's piano music and 'the beauties of touch, pedalling and inflection' (Andrew Porter, 11/57), the name Walter Gieseking was the obvious reference point. Still is in many respects. But there were other viewpoints: Aldo Ciccolini (Warner Classics, newly reissued – see page 90) was an upcoming colourist and there was the Czech pianist Rudolf Firkušný, whose Debussy recordings for the Capitol label promoted a crisp attack, rhythmic élan and copious atmosphere without a heavily pedalled smokescreen. In the context of the current programme, *Suite bergamasque* includes a beautifully shaped 'Clair de lune', where in spite of the immense darkness every star glistens brightly. *Children's Corner* has a Disneyesque lightness about it without ever suggesting caricature (even in the closing 'Cakewalk'); likewise the two wholesome *Arabesques*, while 'La cathédrale engloutie' rises from the depths with Spielbergian grandeur. 'Reflets dans l'eau' also works wonderfully well, Firkušný's touch here everything one could wish for, and Andrew Rose has liberated the original tapes from an all-pervading dullness of tone to something brighter and more vivid. Next please, Pristine, could we have Ambient Stereo XR remasters of Firkušný's wonderful Capitol disc of Smetana's *Czech Dances*? G

THE RECORDING

Firkušný Plays Debussy
Pristine Classical PAKM095

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

Classics RECONSIDERED

Mark Pullinger and **Alexandra Coghlan** return to the first recording of Poulenc's Dialogues des Carmélites, conducted by Pierre Dervaux and first released in France in 1958

Poulenc

Dialogues des Carmélites

Duval, Crespin *sops* **Scharley** *mez* **Berton** *sop* **Depraz** *bass* **Gorr** *mez* **Finel** *ten* **Fourrier** *sop* **et al**
Paris Opera Ch and Orch / Pierre Dervaux

Warner Classics

… Bernanos's *Dialogues* [on which the libretto is based] are polished, spare and beautiful. Almost every sentence is charged with significance, and its relevance to the inner theme is sometimes to be grasped only on third or fourth reading. Poulenc, by using a leitmotif technique, has made these significances more explicit, sometimes with an almost irritating effect of highlighting. His music is as difficult to describe as ever. I jotted down Monteverdi and Mussorgsky as influences (having forgotten that they were dedicatees of the score). Other self-acknowledged influences are Debussy (evident) and Verdi (more obscure). There is also a richly Franckian prayer for the nuns and their almoner. To quote David Drew: for all this 'the music is always identifiable as Poulenc's, but one asks oneself if on that account alone it has any *real* identity'. I don't know. But the more I think about the work, look at the score, mentally rehear the music I've been listening to, the finer it seems. There are many passages, sustained ones, too, which are of high inspiration. In others, the sheer business of fashioning a grand opera seems to have got in the way of simple, direct expression. The interludes (added later to cover scene-changes; they do not appear in the vocal score, but are included in the recording) often seem to me essentially empty 'effects music'. But on balance I would rate *The Carmelites* very high, and recommend everyone to try to hear these records – not in excerpt, but with libretto or score, as a complete and cumulative experience. (There is a French libretto with the set; an English one is published by Ricordi.) Bernanos and Poulenc define only the inner core of each character and for this reason the recording lacks the vividness of the Covent Garden performance, which was very strongly characterised in externals too. Here only the Constance of Liliane Berton emerges as a vivid personality; the others, even Blanche, are somewhat neutral, and the listener's imagination must fill them out into personages. It is almost as if these French singers and conductor had taken the work a little too much in their stride. Denise Scharley's powerful colouring of the Old Prioress is something of an exception, but both Rita Gorr and Régine Crespin are disappointing, expressive only in superficials. Denise Duval, as Blanche, has some beautifully judged phrases, though she cannot conceal a certain unsuitable confidence in her timbre; several passages seem to call for a softer grain. Miss Crespin seems taxed by the high tessitura of her role (indeed she often transposes it down), and the sound of the higher notes, whether as a result of the recording or not, is strained. Otherwise the recording is satisfactory and well balanced. I would not describe it as in sum an imaginative performance of the opera, but rather as a thoroughly professional and accomplished piece of work. **Andrew Porter** (3/62)

Mark Pullinger Andrew Porter's original review focuses very much on the work itself, naturally enough, as it's the opera's first recording. Only the last portion deals with the performance in hand, offering a damned-with-faint-praise 'satisfactory' verdict. Unlike readers in the 1960s, I was not introduced to Poulenc's opera through this recording. I arrived at it some years later, on acquiring Kent Nagano's 1990 Lyon recording. Alexandra, when did you first encounter it?

Alexandra Coghlan 'A thoroughly professional and accomplished piece of work' covers a multitude of sins in Porter's rather equivocal review! Limited university budgets meant that, even as late as 2000, this was still my first encounter with *Dialogues des Carmélites* – the only option to borrow from the faculty library – and one that subsequently led me to the Nagano, now very much my go-to. But I confess to sharing quite a few of Porter's reservations on relistening to this recording. It's thrilling, of course, to get a snapshot of the opera's 'original' cast and especially Denise Duval, who would prove such an inspiration for Poulenc, but – whether by intention or by accident – her Blanche is hard to love. There's a lack of freshness to the voice that, added to some steely delivery and occasionally wild moments at the top, makes her hysteria less palatable. How do you feel about her development from ingénue to martyr in Duval's account?

MP Despite the opera being premiered (in Italian) in Milan (January 1957), the cast of the French premiere (June 1957) is very much regarded as the 'original' cast. Poulenc was certainly writing for these singers, particularly Duval, so it's of great historical value to hear practically the same cast (apart from the Chevalier and the Chaplain) recorded just seven months later, in January 1958. Duval was so important to Poulenc, who wrote Blanche, Elle (*La voix humaine*) and Thérèse (*Les mamelles de Tirésias*) for her. Who would sing all three of those roles now? I find Duval's Blanche rather one-dimensional. In short, there's not much development in her character, sounding, as you say, too steely from the outset, which doesn't really give her anywhere to go.

Pierre Dervaux in 1958, a few weeks after he made this recording; he'd also conducted the French premiere in 1957

Porter observing 'a certain unsuitable confidence in her timbre' pretty much nails it. How do you find her intonation?

AC Intonation is a bit of an issue for me throughout – in the orchestra, most notably the strings, and in certain voices.

MP The woodwind tuning is pretty tart as well! It's not a major barrier, but it's certainly playing that's of its time and place.

AC That initial 'Mon père, il n'est pas d'incident' from Duval sits under the note fairly persistently, and gets pretty wild at the top – a bit of an ongoing theme as the action intensifies. The text is brilliantly clear throughout. There's no faulting the clarity of diction, which does a lot of dramatic heavy-lifting – but any sense of vocal character development seems lost in the technical challenge of the role. When she starts almost waspishly, and has a peevish rather than an anxious edge to her delivery in the laundry scene with Sister Constance, we tend to doubt her own self-doubt, leaving her – as you say – nowhere to go by the end. The closing 'Deo patria' lacks that transformative radiance I'd hope for, a tone that shows us the musical truth of her actions. The other big name in this cast is, of course, fellow French soprano Régine Crespin, still fairly early on in her career here, as the new prioress, Madame Lidoine. What do you make of her?

MP I like Crespin a lot. The voice is wonderfully fresh and pliable. I can't see where Porter is coming from with his 'expressive only in superficials' dismissal of her and Rita Gorr's Mother Marie. Indeed, Duval reservations aside, I like the rest of the cast a lot. How do you get on with Liliane Berton's Sister Constance?

AC Ha ha! I've got a listening note apropos of Berton in Act 1 scene 3 that she's 'charming without being unbearable'!

MP True, although the role isn't quite as annoying as the ever-chirpy Sophie in *Werther*!

AC Constance is such a tricky part: all that girlish naivety and sweetness without tipping over into being cloying or twee, and I think Berton nails it. There's a wonderful momentum through her first monologue, 'Tiens! Voilà notre gros fer à repasser' (partly thanks to Dervaux, who really drives it forwards), and she emerges as this whirling dervish of energy and activity. It sets up a really effective contrast to her Act 2 mirror conversation with Blanche, when they get to the crux of the opera: can a person take someone else's death upon themselves? That has such poise, and we get a glimpse of a different girl – a woman, suddenly, at that moment.

MP Berton is wonderful, and Porter rightly singles her out for praise, her 'vivid personality' earning one of his few plaudits. It's such a tricky role to cast, and I'm often suspicious of successful Constances who go on to attempt Blanche.

AC I'm more on the fence with Crespin than you. There are some lovely moments, where the voice really opens out (her 'Ave Maria' contributions; her 'Mes filles, voilà' in the prison cell has such luscious warmth); but there's often a lack of legato which pulls me up short, a strange lumpiness that contrasts with Gorr's darker but much more sustained tone and musicality. We've left aside Denise Scharley's Prioress, I notice – that death scene is always such a difficult listen! How did she do, for you?

MP These days I'm so used to hearing sopranos who are, to put it mildly, a little past their prime as Madame de Croissy that it's something of an aural shock to encounter Scharley's fresh contralto. She was only 41 when this recording was made and it makes an audible difference. There's still plenty of character there in her acerbic delivery, and her death – the 'wrong death', according to Constance's conjecture – delivers on the harrowing front.

AC Agreed. It's good to hear a voice in its prime in this powerful set piece. There's a darkness to the bottom of her register, and she brings a wonderfully erratic, almost feral quality to her death scene that banishes any thought of youth and health! Xavier Depraz as the Marquis is another unexpectedly young piece of casting – unquestionably robust, with a richly mellow, burnished tone. He almost makes up for a rather disappointing Chevalier in Paul Finel.

MP Presumably Jean Giraudeau, who sang in the French premiere, was unavailable … We're left with Pierre Dervaux (an underrated conductor). There's no mention in the booklet that this recording was made in the presence of the composer, or that it comes with his stamp of approval, but I imagine that Poulenc would have been very happy with what Dervaux achieves here. I do wonder about that guillotine, though. It sounds quite … woody, in a chopping board fashion. Give me Nagano's chilling slicer any time!

AC I'm glad you've said that about Dervaux. Despite some issues with tuning, his pacing is very exciting (especially that absolutely metronomic beginning – others, including Nagano, play fast and loose with the first marking – which then finds its inevitable equal-and-opposite in the closing march to the scaffold). The effect is always theatrical and immediate. That guillotine is definitely in need of a good sharpening, however.

MP Yes, that final *Salve regina* always gives me goosebumps, especially when allied to a great staging. Ultimately, this recording is always going to be important for historical reasons – how often do you get to hear an 'original cast' in a great opera? – but has long been superseded by Nagano. G

PHOTOGRAPHY: KEYSTONE PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Books

David Patrick Stearns recommends a biography of a great singer:

'Flagstad's world shut out knowledge of what was going on around her, and eventually what was happening to her'

Nigel Simeone enjoys a detailed survey of a conductor's career:

'Roger Allen gives accounts of events that not only bring them strikingly to life but make one long for the gift of time travel'

The Voice of the Century

Kirsten Flagstad
By Ingeborg Solbrekken
Translated by Anne Bruce
Indiana University Press, 308pp, PB, £32
ISBN 978-0-25307-202-3

The Nazi Nightingale? They actually called her that? Most Wagnerians know that the great soprano Kirsten Flagstad had some rehabilitation challenges after the Second World War. But the cruel, protracted post-war accusations encompassed the years for which she is now best remembered, as documented in detail in this newly translated book. Though all periods of Flagstad's life are touched upon, Ingeborg Solbrekken's emphasis is on the psychological threads and social context that led to Flagstad's vilification.

Why this book? Why now? In the past decade or so Flagstad's discography has emerged with greater clarity, thanks to modern remasterings, warranting a renewed curiosity about the story behind the rich, huge voice that, as late as the 1958 recording sessions for *Das Rheingold*, left the Vienna Philharmonic and Georg Solti astonished. Much of this information has been around for years – the book itself was first published in 2021 in Norwegian – but the contextual understanding is new. Also, the kind of disinformation wars that swirled around Flagstad during the years of her best singing now mirror our 21st-century world more than ever. Then there are the questions about staying or leaving one's home in the face of unsympathetic politics.

Flagstad (1895-1962) was an easy target. Her young-adult self would have been happy to be a stay-at-home wife and mother in Norway, but she sang operetta for reasons more financial than inspirational. Oslo was far from the cosmopolitan centre that it is now. Yet with prodding from her mother and second husband, she found herself at the age of 40 becoming – almost overnight – far more than the most famous opera singer since Enrico Caruso. After promising encounters with the Bayreuth Festival, the Metropolitan Opera more or less threw a net over her. Following her 1935 debut, she was credited with saving the financially beleaguered Met and giving inspiration to Depression-era America. It helped that a number of great Wagner singers (some Jewish) had fled Europe and landed at the Met – Alexander Kipnis, for one, who also helped make contacts for Flagstad before leaving Europe. Surrounded by dream-cast colleagues, Flagstad was the linchpin of what is now considered a Wagnerian golden era. Her fame was unprecedented, as was her visibility.

This is where Solbrekken's story departs from the usual perception of Flagstad's life from 1935 to 1941. Those six years that changed the music world were more fraught than blessed for her. The schedule of huge Wagnerian roles and concerts, every two or three days, seems not to have taken the slightest toll on the voice but taxed everything else – her mental and physical health, duty to family – to its limits. She had the most strictly guarded dressing room in the opera world after performances, when she needed ample time to decompress. Her world was clearly circumscribed and shut out knowledge of what was going on around her, and eventually what was happening to her. Consequences were particularly steep when Norwegian diplomats were turned away from meeting her. Being the greatest international celebrity from Norway since Viking explorer Leif Ericsson, she faced extramusical expectations she couldn't or wouldn't fill. Disappointment – and a sense that she wasn't a proper Norwegian – fuelled later subversive smear campaigns.

Two major characters come into play at this point in the story: Flagstad's second husband, the industrialist Henry Johansen, who was not the most beloved public figure in Oslo, and Norwegian ambassador Wilhelm Munthe de Morgenstierne, who felt repeatedly snubbed by pre-war Flagstad (Solbrekken characterises him as a narcissist) and played up her German-language repertoire after her country had been invaded by Hitler. Husband Johansen gave her detractors plenty of fodder with accusations of profiteering from Nazis, even though he later funnelled such profits to resistance fighters. The tipping point was Flagstad's return to occupied Norway at Johansen's insistence. In doing so, she spent the war years disappearing into rural Norway and otherwise ducking demands for her to sing at Nazi events. Johansen was in and out of jail in the years before his death in 1946. She narrowly escaped trial, was stripped of everything she owned and, upon returning to New York financially destitute, faced booing audiences and accusatory Walter Winchell columns full of falsehoods supplied by the Morgenstierne-dominated Norwegian embassy. Some of the more outrageous stories had Flagstad flying in Hitler's private plane. Meanwhile, musicians with proven Nazi affiliations were breezing into New York without harassment.

It's here that Flagstad becomes a modern counterpart to the Old Testament figure of Job, right down to the skin sores that, in her case, came from painful psoriasis that dogged her off and on almost to the end of her days. Flagstad was no saint. She had her petty diva feuds and perhaps held some unseemly, provincial social views. What happened to Flagstad, however, wasn't karmic revenge but diplomatic sadism. Under these conditions (sometimes better, sometimes worse) she sang her electrifying La Scala *Ring* cycle under Wilhelm Furtwängler, made her classic recording of *Tristan und Isolde* and premiered Strauss's *Four Last Songs*. As late as 1959, when all was supposedly forgiven, Flagstad's relationship with King Olav at the Norwegian National Opera opening was frosty at best.

In these sections of the book, the reportage goes into high gear, quoting from Flagstad's diaries as well as top-secret diplomatic memos and telegrams. It's a staggering achievement, helped partly by Solbrekken's having written two previous Flagstad books and being an expert in Second World War Norwegian history, as

well as being a playwright. The author is laudably transparent when hitting informational blank spots. Her sharply detailed passages of historic context stop short of claiming to know what people were thinking. But the crucial question of why Flagstad stuck by her husband (and made her near-fatal 1941 return to Norway) is given a far-reaching, comparative treatment with a case history of the unconditional devotion that Winifred Wagner at Bayreuth had for Adolf Hitler. Flagstad's husband was morally far above that, but we understand that loyalty can be maintained through highly selective perception of powerful male personalities. Political views tend to be perceived in black and white. Most often, however, such views are highly nuanced and dictated by a social context that's not fully understood in retrospect. Who's to judge?

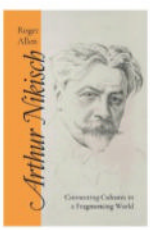
David Patrick Stearns

A newly translated book explores the life and work of soprano Kirsten Flagstad

Arthur Nikisch

Connecting Cultures in a Fragmenting World
By Roger Allen

Boydell Press, 213pp, HB, £85; eBook, £19.99
ISBN 978-1-83765-004-0



This is a most welcome book: a comprehensive study of Arthur Nikisch's remarkable career, which took him from Leipzig to London, Berlin to Boston and Budapest to Moscow. Nowadays, he's perhaps best remembered for his 1913 recording of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and for teaching Václav Talich, Albert Coates and Adrian Boult. Renowned for his elegant and economical technique, what Allen demonstrates so convincingly is how significant Nikisch's influence was on the musical life of two continents, with a repertoire that extended far beyond what might be expected of a German musician who grew up in the shadow of Wagner.

Nikisch was famously responsible for the world premiere of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony in Leipzig (December 30, 1884) – an event that brought Bruckner one of his greatest public successes during his lifetime. But it's easy to forget that Nikisch was only 29 years old at the time. Having been a child prodigy, he began his studies at the Vienna Conservatory in 1866, aged 11, and was subsequently engaged as a violinist in the Vienna Philharmonic and played in the orchestra for the first Bayreuth Festival. These formative years are documented meticulously by Allen, whose writing is an ideal combination of fluent prose (the book is immensely readable) and a careful eye for detail. Chapter 3, discussing Nikisch's 'Encounters with Wagner', is particularly fascinating. As well as playing Wagner's music under the composer's direction, he also took part in Wagner's celebrated performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (May 22, 1872) to mark the laying of the foundation stone of the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth. As Allen observes, 'the effect of this intoxicating … occasion on an impressionable 16-year-old student violinist in the person of Arthur Nikisch can only be imagined'. Nikisch later wrote that with Wagner, 'his gestures were alone music itself'.

It was in Leipzig that Nikisch gained invaluable experience in the opera house, and his later visits to London to conduct Wagner drew enormous praise. His *Tristan* at Covent Garden achieved well-nigh legendary status, although in *Die Meistersinger* there was a view that Hans Richter got to the heart of the work even more completely. One of the most enjoyable features of Allen's book is its ability to give accounts of these events that not only bring them strikingly to life but also make one long for the gift of time travel. Later recollections by Boult and others of Nikisch's mesmeric effect on orchestras and audiences are developed with reports from the contemporary press and other musical colleagues. More often than not, it seems, a Nikisch concert was a memorable event. And in the opera house he could be even better. (As an aside, the schoolboy Adrian Boult noted in his diaries after the Covent Garden *Tristan und Isolde* in 1907: 'Nikisch magnificent. He's wonderful at concerts but in opera he's perfectly extraordinary.')

One of the most interesting aspects of this absorbing book is the detailed examination of Nikisch's repertoire. Anyone with a particular interest in British music may well recall that Nikisch conducted the premiere of Butterworth's *A Shropshire Lad* at the 1913 Leeds Festival, but the marathon programme on which it appeared makes for remarkable reading: starting at 11am on October 2, 1913, the first half comprised Verdi's *Requiem* (later described by one of the LSO's front-desk violinists as 'one of the great musical events of my life'); the second half began with the Butterworth, followed by Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. The other three Nikisch programmes at Leeds that week were just as generous and included substantial works by Tchaikovsky, Strauss and Wagner. In Leipzig and Berlin (as well as London), Nikisch's championing of Elgar made an important contribution to the composer's growing international success – discussed thoroughly here, as are Nikisch's performances of Ethel Smyth and Joseph Holbrooke.

The Beethoven Fifth from 1913 is Nikisch's most famous recording, but it's probably not fully representative. As Allen writes, Nikisch's strengths were 'improvisatory rather than architectural', and that comes through more persuasively in Berlioz's *Carnaval romain*, made with the Berlin Philharmonic in February 1920 (and curiously missing from Allen's discography, though it's readily discoverable on YouTube), or in his glorious piano accompaniments for Elena Gerhardt.

A few minor slips aside (on page 151 there's discussion of a recording of the *Magic Flute* Overture when it's actually *Figaro*), this is a well-produced book. The cover price for the hardback edition may deter potential readers, but I urge them to explore the reasonably priced eBook. Roger's Allen's fine account of Nikisch's career should interest anyone fascinated by this charismatic musician – or by the history of conducting more generally. Warmly recommended. **Nigel Simeone**

PHOTOGRAPHY: GRANGER / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Debussy's Le martyre de Saint Sébastien

Debussy's sensuously beautiful music for D'Annunzio's ambivalent mystery play has been well served on recordings. **Tim Ashley** chooses his favourite from among the many available versions

Le martyre de Saint Sébastien was first performed in Paris on May 22, 1911. A 'mystery in five mansions' (or miracle play in five acts), written in French by Gabriele D'Annunzio with incidental music by Debussy, it was intended as a vehicle for Ida Rubinstein, D'Annunzio's occasional lover. The elaborate text, in octosyllabic verse, brings religious and sensual experience into alignment, to which Debussy responded with music of great ecstatic beauty and emotional ambivalence. Sebastian, the handsome captain of Rome's imperial archers and favourite of the emperor Diocletian, condemned, on conversion to Christianity, to be shot by his own men, has long been central to gay male iconography, and though neither Debussy nor D'Annunzio is known to have had a same-sex relationship, the homoerotic undertow is unmistakable.

BROTHERS

It was with an almost amorous letter, however, in November 1910, that D'Annunzio solicited Debussy's willingness to compose the score. 'One faraway day … Gabriel Mourey [a mutual friend] spoke to me of yourself and Tristan in accents profound. I knew you and loved you already … Do you love my poetry?' 'How could I not love your poetry?' was Debussy's response. 'The thought of working with you puts me already into some sort of fever.' D'Annunzio, living in France after fleeing his Italian creditors, had encountered Rubinstein earlier that year after a performance of Mikhail Fokine's ballet *Cléopâtre* given by Diaghilev's company, from which she was anxious to break free and start out on her own in a repertory that embraced acting as well as dance. Hankering after writing about the Saint for some time, and not from religious motives (an unashamed sensualist, he is known to have compared love bites on his own and his partners' bodies to Sebastian's wounds), he found his final inspiration in Rubinstein's androgynous beauty. They called each other 'brother', and *frère*, significantly perhaps, is the first word we hear sung by the Christian twins Marc and Marcellien after Debussy's Prelude has died away.

Le martyre de Saint Sébastien was written as a vehicle for Ida Rubinstein (right) with music by Debussy (left)

The score was written in haste in March and April of 1911. While he worked, Debussy studied Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli*, its influence felt in the polyphonic choruses for Sebastian's beatific vision in Act 1 after he dances unharmed on hot coals, and again in the final act as his soul is welcomed into Paradise, music that leaves the chromatic longings of this world behind, and which some interpreters have found difficult to integrate successfully into the rest of the work. André Caplet, who conducted the premiere, orchestrated parts of Acts 2 to 4, though few would argue the scoring sounds inauthentic. There is no reason to doubt Debussy's emotional involvement: he wept openly on hearing the first run-through.

CONTROVERSIES

Reactions to the premiere differed. Many found Rubinstein's Russian accent impenetrable. The decadent *fin de siècle* tropes of D'Annunzio's language were widely considered outdated, though Proust, who hated the score ('a few farts'), thought the text a remarkable achievement for a non-native French speaker. Alfred Bruneau, who admired it enormously, found it 'hieratic and fanciful, religious and voluptuous'. At four hours, however,

PHOTOGRAPHY: BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian – by brothers Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo, from the mid-1470s – presents Sebastian and his tormentors

Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht had a long association with Debussy's score

the work was deemed overlong, and substantial cuts were made during the first run.

Six days beforehand, meanwhile, D'Annunzio's output was placed on the Vatican Index, and the Archbishop of Paris forbade Catholics from attending. That the Saint was played by a woman and a Jew is frequently cited as the cause, but the Church was well aware that sacrilege had long been integral to D'Annunzio's depictions of religion, and *Le martyre* repeatedly links Christianity with the cult of the dying and resurrected Adonis. Sebastian, who dies voluntarily in Christ's name to be reborn, becomes a new Adonis in the eyes of the world, identified as their god by the latter's aroused followers when he mimes Christ's Passion before Diocletian's court. The erotic element, coloured by the sadomasochistic streak that pervades D'Annunzio's work, is inescapable. 'Celui qui plus profondément me blesse, plus profondément m'aime', Sebastian exhorts his archers, faced with killing the man they love ('Nous allons donc tuer notre amour!'), and his martyrdom is punctuated by ecstatic cries of 'Encore!' as the arrows penetrate.

Le martyre is often compared with *Parsifal* and its relation to Wagner is complex. D'Annunzio was a committed Wagnerite, and the two works share a common language of faith and desire, blood and wounding. There are narrative similarities in Sebastian's Act 2 encounter with the ambiguous figure of the *Fille malade des fièvres*, part Kundry, part Amfortas, who bears Christ's shroud but suffers with an unhealed wound, inflicted, for some past 'impurity', by a fallen angel. Echoes of *Parsifal*'s Act 3 Prelude are detectable, meanwhile, in the halting rhythms and striving chromaticism of Sebastian's mime of the Passion, while the Act 4 Prelude, with its solo cor anglais mourning in a void, inevitably recalls *Tristan*, though Debussy's prominent use of the instrument throughout gives the score much of its beauty and at times faintly acrid colour.

Le martyre did not vanish from the stage after 1911, as is sometimes thought. Rubinstein toured it regularly with her own company until 1931, scoring an immense success at La Scala in 1926 under Toscanini, by which time D'Annunzio, now a war hero, had embarked on the complex relationship with fascism that subsequently tarnished his reputation. Meanwhile, the two concert editions we most frequently hear appeared in 1912. The first, by Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht, chorusmaster at the premiere, links the incidental music with a narration drawn from Sebastian's speeches, spoken often by women, sometimes by men, occasionally reworked, omitted or replaced by conductors. At Debussy's request, meanwhile, Caplet prepared the orchestral Symphonic Fragments, arranging some vocal passages in the process and drawing on music from Acts 1 (the Prelude and Sebastian's 'Danse extatique' on hot coals), 3 (his mime of the Passion and the Adoniast Women of Byblos's first chorus) and 4 (the Prelude and Sebastian's vision of Christ as shepherd just before his martyrdom).

In either version, the score has remarkable unity, thanks to Debussy's repeated use of ascending and descending chords in parallel fifths, a recurrent 10-note arpeggio derived from repetitions of Sebastian's name, and an undulating woodwind theme associated with Christ. The orchestra is large (six horns, very prominent) and the vocal writing in the original (for one or more sopranos, two altos and multiple choirs) astonishingly beautiful. The following examination of its discography covers recordings of both versions. Performances of the Fragments that add additional music from the original have been included, though individual movements recorded separately have not.

BEGINNINGS

It seems appropriate to start with **Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht** given his association with *Le martyre* from the outset. Two performances survive in sound, the first released in the UK by Ducretet Thomson in 1955, the second, a live broadcast from the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1960, available from Naïve. In each case the forces are the same – the Orchestre National doubled as the theatre's orchestra – and Inghelbrecht uses a male Sebastian in André Falcon. In both, one of the fanfares that form the Act 3 Prelude is relocated to the beginning of the work (Inghelbrecht is alone in doing this). In 1960 the spoken text is substantially longer, giving greater narrative and dramatic coherence.

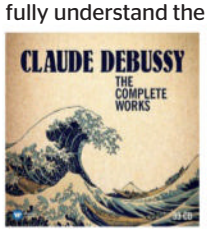
The first performance is better played (there's an awkward moment of ragged

COMPLETENESS

Orch Nat de la Radiodiffusion Française / André Cluytens

Warner Classics (33 CDs) 9029 57367-5

Cluytens gives us the incidental music with D'Annunzio's play, albeit cut, allowing us to fully understand the complex relationship between text and music in the original work. It's compellingly acted, beautifully played and sung, and as close to completeness as we are ever likely to get.



ORIGINS

Orch National / Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht

Naïve V4855

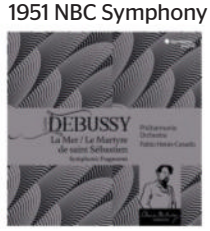
Inghelbrecht's long association with *Le martyre* dated back to the first production, for which he was chorusmaster, and his live 1960 Paris performance burns with fierce intensity. The choral singing is glorious, and André Falcon is by turns ecstatic, fanatical and unnervingly sexual as the Saint.

FRAGMENTS

Philh Orch / Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi HMM90 2310

The Fragments present a difficult choice between between Pablo Heras-Casado with the Philharmonia and Guido Cantelli's 1951 NBC Symphony broadcast. Both are outstanding, though Heras-Casado's immaculate integration of the sensual with the religious just gives him the edge over Cantelli's darker worldliness.



SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1951	[F]NBC SO / **Guido Cantelli**	Testament ④ SBT4 1336 (7/04)
1953	[F]New York PO / **Guido Cantelli**	Music & Arts CD1140
1954	[C]Orch Nat de la Radiodiffusion Française / **André Cluytens**	Warner Classics (33 CDs) 9029 57367-5 (7/17, 4/18)
1954	[C]Suisse Romande Orch / **Ernest Ansermet**	Decca ② 433 400-2DMO2 (6/55, 6/93)
1954	[F]Philh Orch / **Guido Cantelli**	Warner Classics ⑨ 679043-2 (3/55)
1954	[F]Philh Orch / **Guido Cantelli**	ICA Classics ICAC5081 (12/12)
***c*1954**	[C]Orch Nat de la Radiodiffusion Française / **Désiré-Émile Ingelbrecht**	Testament SBT1214 (3/55, 3/02)
1956	[C]Boston SO / **Charles Munch**	RCA GD60684 (11/68)
1959	[C]Philadelphia Orch / **Eugene Ormandy**	Sony Cassical (88 CDs) 19439 97743-2 (12/62, 12/23)
1960	[C]Orch National / **Désiré-Émile Ingelbrecht**	Naïve V4855
1962	[C]New York PO / **Leonard Bernstein**	Sony Classical SMK60596 (3/99)
1963	[F]LSO / **Pierre Monteux**	Decca ⑦ 475 7798DC7 (11/64)
1977	[F]Orch de Paris / **Daniel Barenboim**	DG 435 069-2GGA (10/77)
1982	[F]NDR SO / **Günter Wand**	RCA Red Seal 74321 72788-2 (6/00)
1985	[F]Rotterdam PO / **James Conlon**	Warner Classics (33 CDs) 9029 57367-5
1989	[F]Montreal PO / **Charles Dutoit**	Decca 430 240-2DH (2/91)
1991	[C]LSO / **Michael Tilson Thomas**	Sony Classical SK48240 (3/93)
1992	[F]BRT PO, Brussels / **Alexander Rahbari**	Naxos 8 550505 (11/93)
1994	[F]Los Angeles PO / **Esa-Pekka Salonen**	Sony Classical SK58952 (12/94)
1997	[C]New York PO / **Kurt Masur**	New York Philharmonic ⑩ NYP0103 (1/02)
2002	[F]Orch der Beethovenhalle Bonn / **Marc Soustrot**	Dabringhaus und Grimm MDG337 1099-2
2005	[C]SWR SO, Baden-Baden & Freiburg / **Sylvain Cambreling**	SWR Music SWR19149CD
2009	[F]Orch Nat de Lyon / **Jun Märkl**	Naxos 8 572297 (11/10)
2009	[C]Orch Nat de France / **Daniele Gatti**	Radio France FRF007
2018	[F]Philh Orch / **Pablo Heras-Casado**	Harmonia Mundi HMM90 2310 (7/18)
2020	[F]French Rad PO / **Mikko Franck**	Alpha ALPHA777 (7/22)

Key: [C]complete score; [F]Symphonic Fragments

orchestral ensemble near the end in 1960), the second better sung. The 1955 set is dramatically gripping and very beautiful (the woodwind are ravishing at the start), but the 1960 performance has even greater intensity, with spiritual and sensual elements more finely balanced and a real lustre in the choral singing. The martyrdom itself, unfolding over a churning ostinato that gradually gains speed, is relentless and truly disquieting. Falcon, though moving in 1955, matches Inghelbrecht's deeper commitment here, passionate throughout, his cries of 'Encore!' queasily rapturous and very unnerving.

Inghelbrecht was by no means the first to record *Le martyre*, however. The year 1952 saw the release of a performance on Allegro with Victor Alessandro conducting the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra and Chorale, a rather solid affair, though it opened ears to the work at the time. And by 1954, **Guido Cantelli** had established himself as a defining interpreter of the Fragments, giving us an astonishing four versions in all. Two live performances allow us to hear him in New York. The first, with a rather dry-sounding NBC Symphony in 1951, is immensely powerful, moody and arcane, the moaning woodwind well nigh explicit in the 'Danse extatique', the cor anglais solo from Act 4 really bleak and bitter, a prelude to something dreadful. In 1953 the New York Philharmonic sound warmer, though the performance in comparison is altogether more detached. Cantelli's studio recording with the Philharmonia from June 1954, however, is unquestionably superb, the textural sensuousness very much to the fore, and attaining genuine sublimity at the close. It was made ahead of a performance broadcast from the Edinburgh Festival later that year, released by ICA Classics in 2012. The orchestral sound is less translucent, the sensuousness now edging back towards sensuality, the sense of darkness and yearning more profound.

André Clutyens marries words and music

The year 1954 also saw the only attempt to date to give us play and incidental music something like complete with **André Cluytens**'s recording, originally for Columbia. The text is cut, roughly by a fifth, but we get unique insights into the complex relationship between words and score: first in the way the music heightens dramatic and emotional tension by proliferating as the work progresses; and secondly as to how Debussy and D'Annunzio allow the divine, whether Christian or Adoniast, to sing while mankind speaks. The cast is excellent, with Véra Korène unswerving and visionary as the Saint, and the great María Casares as the *Fille malade des fièvres*, while Rita Gorr and Solange Michel are among the soloists as Marc and Marcellien. Cluytens conducts with remarkable passion, and the choral singing, while not quite equalling Inghelbrecht's 1960 performance in finesse, is superbly focused. The recording overloads a bit at the climaxes and the tolling bells that underpin the spoken Prologue are both unnecessary and too loud, but it remains an outstanding achievement.

MAESTROS

The versions by **Ernest Ansermet** and **Charles Munch**, released in 1955 and 1956 respectively, should perhaps be considered together. Both conductors cut the final chorus of Act 3, and Munch also cuts part of the Act 4 processional where the mourning Women of Byblos bear away Sebastian's body for burial. In Ansermet's case one suspects an attempt to find a new concert approach to the original score as he gives the work with no narrator, and in the context the cut does indeed improve its shape despite the musical loss. His performance has an almost pagan physicality and in-your-face immediacy, enhanced by glorious playing from the OSR, and vivid, closely recorded sound. Suzanne Danco, his soprano soloist, is well nigh matchless. Ansermet falters, however, in the final act, where speeds become slow, the choral singing staid and solemn. Paradise seems dull after what has gone before.

Munch, as one might expect, is less volatile, more considered. Nothing is blatant, and sex and spirit are bound tightly together in understatement. Though he jettisons the cries of 'Encore!', Munch speaks the narration himself, mature sounding, beautiful, quietly heart-rending: the spoken text was omitted from some reissues, a huge mistake. The Boston

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROGER-VIOLLET · ARENAPAL / MICHEL NEUMEISTER

Symphony's playing, at once sensual and chaste, is marvellous (though the horns sound distant and echoey), while the New England Conservatory Chorus, exceptional in their beauty, control and dynamic subtlety, give us some of the finest choral singing of any available version. Soprano Phyllis Curtin runs Danco close, and the ending takes your breath away. Munch opts for a big rallentando just before the ecstatic final union of Sebastian's soul with Christ ('Je suis une âme, Seigneur, une âme dans ton sein'), which becomes the goal, you suddenly realise, to which the performance has been leading us all along. It's almost unbearably moving, and a wonderful recording, despite the cuts.

Neither **Eugene Ormandy** in Philadelphia in 1959 nor **Leonard Bernstein** in New York in 1962 achieve the same exaltation. Ormandy is admirably eloquent and thoughtful, if occasionally lacking momentum, the orchestral and choral sound always finely focused, warm yet clear. He has a superb Sebastian in Vera Zorina, though his soprano, the usually excellent Hilde Güden, is not at her best here. Bernstein, in contrast, attempts something radical that doesn't always work. The singing is in French, the narration in English and using Bernstein's own adaptation, divided between his wife, Felicia Montealegre as Sebastian, and Fritz Weaver, entrusted with a precis of plot and stage directions, as well as playing other roles. Bernstein uses more D'Annunzio than we usually hear, including the crucial Act 3 dialogue between Saint and Emperor, but he also has Weaver speaking over music where no speech is actually intended. Starting out cool and almost too squeaky clean, the performance gains in power as it goes, and the martyrdom itself, where Montealegre works herself up into near frenzy, is terrifying. But as a totality, it doesn't really hang together.

In 1963, meanwhile, **Pierre Monteux** and the LSO made the first studio recording of the Fragments since Cantelli's. The 'Danse extatique', less blatant than the latter (or for that matter Ansermet or Inghelbrecht), builds with measured steadiness to a tremendous climax when the music of Paradise is heard at its close. And the quiet sadness that pervades the final movement is deeply affecting. From this point onwards, however, the history of the work's discography begins to change, as recordings become fewer and further between, and performances of the Fragments proliferate while those of the complete score decline.

A NEW FIN DE SIÈCLE

Fourteen years separate Monteux from **Daniel Barenboim**'s 1977 Fragments with the Orchestre de Paris, to which the Act 3 fanfares have been added as a postlude. The juxtaposition doesn't ideally work, as Debussy's brutal evocation of Roman might, so telling in the complete score, now feels stylistically adrift from what precedes it. Barenboim teases out the textures with exacting finesse but the detail comes at the price of momentum in a performance that dawdles for some 27 minutes, when most versions of the Fragments last around 22.

The three recordings that follow are all preferable. The Wagnerian echoes are much to the fore in **Günter Wand**'s live account from Hamburg in 1982, magnificently controlled, the orchestral sound rich and dark, yet beautifully textured and wonderfully alert to shifts in colour. **James Conlon**, with the Rotterdam Philharmonic in 1985, is warm and fluid, the woodwind sounding genuinely prayerful at the start, the strings more sensual later on. The mime of the Passion could yearn a bit more, but an eerie quiet pervades the opening of the last movement and sends shivers down your spine. **Charles Dutoit**, with a close yet spacious recording in Montreal in 1989, has something of Barenboim's clarity but maintains greater momentum. The 'Danse extatique', taken slowly, gathers inexorable tension, though the climax, when we reach it, is solemn rather than exultant. The mime of the Passion re-establishes the intensity only to lose it fractionally in the final movement, where the cor anglais solo could be more darkly expressive than it is.

Pablo Heras-Casado combines the sensual with the religious

Michael Tilson Thomas's 1991 recording of the complete score with the LSO and Chorus, the first in nearly 30 years and hugely admired when it appeared, presents the work on an immense scale, steering it towards post-Romantic grandeur and tacitly reminding us that Debussy was writing for the largest forces he was ever to deploy. The recording, deemed state-of-the-art at the time, might now strike some as engineered over an almost unnaturally wide dynamic range, though it is unquestionably powerful with its opulent textures and hieratic choral panoplies. The soloists – Sylvia McNair, Ann Murray and Nathalie Stutzmann – sound gorgeous. Tilson Thomas is vividly dramatic, and has a superb Sebastian in Leslie Caron, the mixture of devotion and rapture finely done, the martyrdom itself unnervingly intense.

Alexander Rahbari with the Belgian Radio Orchestra in 1992 and **Esa-Pekka Salonen** with the Los Angeles Philharmonic two years later revert to the Fragments. With reverberant yet vivid recorded sound, Rahbari reminds us of Ansermet's pagan immediacy. The opening is particularly fine, with the woodwind poised and reflective, and the strings drifting upwards rapt and exquisite. There's something of the blatant quality of Cantelli's 1951 performance, too, in the sexual way the 'Danse extatique' gathers tension. Salonen is more restrained, the opening timeless and devotional, the 'Danse extatique' all the more powerful for being held Munch-like in check. The playing, all filigree strings and woodwind, is exquisite in its finesse but Salonen is unsparing in the final movement, where the cor anglais hovers in real penumbral gloom.

We return to the complete score for **Kurt Masur**'s live 1997 performance with the Westminster Symphony Chorus and New York Philharmonic, released on the orchestra's own label in 2002, an interpretation in which dramatic pressure and urgency are paramount. Speeds are on the fast side, sometimes unduly so, particularly in the Women of Byblos's processional, less a funeral march than a jogtrot here. But the playing is exemplary, the choral singing by turns rapt and elated, and Masur has another fine soprano soloist in Elizabeth Norberg-Schulz. His Sebastian is the late, great Maria Ewing, fierce, fanatical, obsessive, and bringing to it much of the dogged intensity

that characterised her operatic performances.

THE 21st CENTURY

Recordings of the Fragments by **Marc Soustrot** and of the complete score by **Sylvain Cambreling** usher us into the present century. Soustrot with Bonn's Beethovenhalle Orchestra is altogether too cool and dispassionate for my taste, despite finely focused playing. Cambreling, on the other hand, who conducted the work on one of its rare post-war appearances in the theatre (at La Scala in 1986, in a production directed and choreographed by Maurice Béjart), subjects it to a radical rethink. Some of D'Annunzio's French text is preserved in scenes such as the 'Danse extatique', though the Saint is oddly silent during his martyrdom (you want the words here), where Cambreling is nevertheless at his most powerful. The linking narration, however, is replaced by a new text in German by Martin Mosebach that meditates on the origins of Sebastian's name and legend, compares Christ not only with Adonis but with other dying and reborn gods of antiquity (Osiris, Dionysus), and analyses the phenomenon of martyrdom both in psychological terms and as a bearing of witness to prejudice and atrocity. Dörte Lyssewski, at home in both languages, delivers all this with passionate dignity. Things have been overhauled musically, too. Aware that Debussy was studying Palestrina while working on the score, Cambreling replaces the big choral forces we usually hear with the crystal-clear Collegium Vocale Gent, immeasurably heightening our awareness of the debt to Renaissance polyphony, in the final act above all. It's never less than fascinating, if very idiosyncratic.

With **Jun Märkl**'s and **Daniele Gatti**'s 2009 recordings of the Fragments and complete score respectively, we are on surer editorial ground. With the Lyon Orchestra on splendid form, Märkl adds not only the Act 3 fanfares but the Prelude to Act 2, summoning up the Magic Chamber where Sebastian first encounters seven Norn-like Sorceresses representing the astrological planets, and then the *Fille malade des fièvres*. Following on from the Fragments, played with deep intensity and great attention to textural detail, the passage has a balefully sexy glitter reminiscent of both Ansermet's and Munch's treatments of the same scene. When we come to the fanfares, though, Märkl, like Barenboim, still doesn't quite convince us that they work away from the complete score.

Charles Munch gives a moving account of Debussy's music

Gatti, meanwhile, in a live performance from French Radio, is broodingly dark, with an almost operatic sweep, and grand in scale, albeit not as overtly opulent as Tilson Thomas. The soloists are good but not great, though the chorus sound resplendent, the orchestra deep and rich. Isabelle Huppert is luxury casting as the Saint yet curiously disappointing, never as convincing as Munch in moments of quiet fervour, but elsewhere seemingly unwilling to go to extremes like Falcon, Caron or Ewing, and the martyrdom itself feels oddly underplayed.

Pablo Heras-Casado's Philharmonia recording of the Fragments, meanwhile, was released in 2018 to mark the centenary of Debussy's death. This is a most distinguished achievement. Few interpretations hold the disparate elements in quite such perfect balance, and throughout we genuinely feel we are contemplating a slowly unfolding mystery in which the sensual and the numinous are fused and indistinguishable. It's all achieved, Munch-like, through understatement and restraint, and the playing is ravishing in the way it combines an almost tangible physicality with unearthly beauty. It's not eclipsed by the most recent recording, from **Mikko Franck** and the French Radio Philharmonic, superb though that is with its warmth, fervour and grace, an interpretation tipped towards sensuality, played with extraordinary lustre.

A SUMMING UP

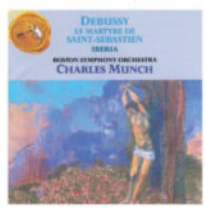
Selecting an individual recording is not easy, and much depends on whether you prefer the Fragments over the complete score or vice versa. Cantelli and Heras-Casado arguably dig deeper into the former than other interpreters, and the choice ultimately lies between Cantelli's 1951 NBC broadcast and Heras-Casado's centenary performance. Cantelli achieves a dark intensity, unmatched by any other conductor, though Heras-Casado's more reflective exploration of sexuality and grace, sprit and sense, leads, I think, to greater depths of emotion and meaning.

The benchmark recordings of the complete score, meanwhile, all date from between 1954 and 1960. This is not to deny the impact or integrity of later versions, and indeed Tilson Thomas's opulence, Masur's theatricality and Cambreling's radicalism are compelling and have much to tell us. But earlier performances offer greater insights, and I would not want to be without Cluytens's near completeness, or Inghelbrecht's authoritative grasp, above all in 1960, of a work integral to his career as a conductor and which he did so much to preserve and champion. But despite his cuts to the score, it is Munch, marvellously balancing sensuality and spirit, who moves me most, and whose recording – just – is my first choice. G

MY TOP CHOICE

Boston SO / Charles Munch
RCA GD60684

Munch's recording is breathtaking despite cuts to the score. He speaks D'Annunzio's text himself with heart-rending dignity at the centre of a wonderfully played and sung interpretation, in which sound and emotion, understated eroticism



and deep spiritual understanding are woven together into a flawlessly integrated whole. It's astonishingly beautiful and very, very moving.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GRANGER - BRIDGEMAN IMAGES / WALDEMAR KAMER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HIGH FIDELITY

THE TECHNOLOGY THAT MAKES THE MOST OF YOUR MUSIC

THIS MONTH Classic active speakers from a 50-year-old British company; soundbars built for music, too; and it may be a chart-topper – but is it real?
Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

SEPTEMBER TEST RECORDINGS

A beautifully open, atmospheric and vibrant sound makes the most of these Campra choral works on Pentatone from Les Arts Florissants and William Christie

Power, detail and fine recorded ambience on the latest outing for organist Anna Lapwood, with some lovely arrangements and sensational playing

ESSAY

Is it real, or is it AI?

One of the current sensations of the Spotify playlists turns out to be a creation entirely produced by AI: is this going to change the way we all consume music?

A total of 1.25 million Spotify streams (at the time of writing) is pretty impressive for a hitherto unknown artist, and you'd understand completely if the performers in question were fairly chuffed, and already thinking of ways to capitalise on their success.

Trouble is, The Velvet Sundown don't actually exist, and neither did they compose, perform or produce the music creating such a buzz on the streaming service. In fact, the band is entirely an AI creation at the behest of some simple prompts, from the images on their stream to the music itself, which may also explain the instant availability of a 'back catalogue', and the fact more releases were (at the time of writing) on the way.

On its X account, The Velvet Sundown comes clean, saying that, 'All characters, stories, music, voices and lyrics are original creations generated with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools employed as creative instruments. Any resemblance to actual places, events or persons – living or deceased – is purely coincidental and unintentional. Not quite human. Not quite machine. The Velvet Sundown lives somewhere in between.'

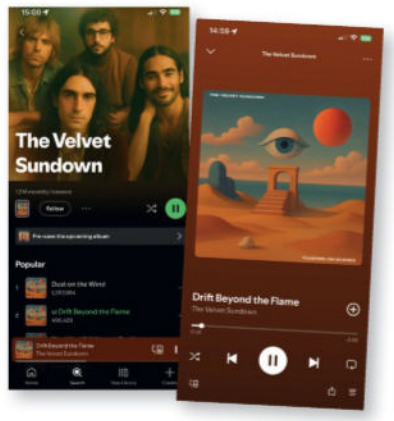
Understandably there has been some concern, although it's hardly news that AI has been used in the past to enhance real – ie human – performances, or 'clean up' recordings during remastering: there have been petitions to restrict its use in creative media, with the likes of Sir Elton John calling for greater regulation, not least in the way actual recordings are being used to 'train' AI to improve its abilities.

I realise I just used the term 'actual', but is this latest cause célèbre any less actual than music composed and performed by humans? After all, any listener to mainstream rock and pop music can be under few illusions that what appears in the finished recording sounds like what was heard in the studio, though purist audiophiles may crave that 'played as live straight to disc' purity.

Even in the live music world, it's not unknown for singers to be lip-synching to pre-recorded vocal track, or indeed for live rock concert recordings to be 'sweetened' with some studio overdubs after the event.

And who's to say many a recording hasn't been enhanced with an ambience pinched from a famous studio or concert-hall? After all, multichannel AV receivers have long offered a variety of hall effects to 'enhance' what's being played, and I remember Yamaha, for example, having a battery of ambiences available based on measurements taken of specific venues, from intimate jazz clubs to some of the world's most famous auditoria.

Without a doubt, AI is getting faster, smarter and more affordable, and while some of its uses are obvious – Donald Trump as The Pope, for example – others are using it with greater subtlety to bend the facts, or even create entire alternative truths. Originally, AI fakes were pretty obvious; now, one often can't be so sure.



The unreal The Velvet Sundown – the beginning of a new era of AI-created music?

The thing is, where does the creative use of the tools available end, and deception begin? For decades, cinemagoers have seen and accepted spectacle in Hollywood blockbusters the logical mind knows cannot be real, so what's different in listening to a performance supposedly taking place in a recreated concert hall? Or a performer seemingly giving a recital clearly impossible, due to geography or chronology?

Yes, there's a spot of devil's advocate in those last questions, and I'm not in any way condoning this kind of fakery when it's passed off as real, but the technology does raise some intriguing possibilities. After all, many of us are now familiar with pulling up a recording from an online streaming service, or even just saying 'Alexa, play me …', so is it such a leap to imagine asking a music system to play a piece performed on a specific instrument in a certain location and have the system generate it on the fly?

Whatever you feel about the whole situation, it's hard not to 'what if …?' the possibilities; and now this particular genie is out of the bottle, it will be a real struggle to get it back in.

ATC SCM20ASL

This British company has an enviable reputation for active loudspeakers – in an age of streaming players, could its latest compact model have even greater relevance?

ATC SCM20ASL

Type Two-way active standmount speaker
Price from £6495/pr
Drivers 25mm soft-dome tweeter, 15cm mid/bass driver
Amplification (each speaker) 50W for treble, 200W for mid/bass
Crossover point 2.2kHz
Frequency response 55Hz-25kHz (-6dB)
Inputs Three-pin female XLR balanced on each speaker, IEC mains input
Dimensions (HxWxD) 45x25x41cm

atc.audio

From its base in rural Gloucestershire, ATC has been making active speakers longer than most: with a major presence in both pro and domestic hi-fi, it celebrated its 50th anniversary last year with a limited run of its SCM20ASL speaker finished in corporate dark blue, and now is opening up the model to a wider audience with a 'standard' version, available in a range of finishes: real wood veneers, painted satin finishes and high gloss lacquers.

Although widely adopted in professional audio applications, active loudspeakers for a long time have been something of an acquired taste among hi-fi enthusiasts. The familiar set-up of an amplifier driving loudspeakers via long speaker cables is much more common in most markets, but active speakers pack all the amplification into the speakers themselves, with an active crossover feeding dedicated amplifiers for each drive unit, so that each amp/driver combination is only handling a specific frequency range, giving greater control and clarity.

The SCM20SL is already the company's flagship two-way standmount speaker in its £3999 passive version, designed to be driven by an external amplifier; the '-ASL' active version, starting at £6495 depending on finish, adds the company's 250W 'Amp Pack' module, which has a 50W amp for the treble drive unit, and 200W for the mid/bass unit, plus the active crossover. As such, it represents the entry-level model in the company's active speaker range, which runs all the way up to the huge SCM300ASLT floorstanders, starting well north of £50,000/pr.

ATCs are all about presence and resolution, really bringing the performances to life, something they do time after time

The SCM20ASL may be relatively compact, standing around 45cm tall, but it's as hefty as you might expect given the presence of the amplifier package, 24.3kg per speaker. And the entire speaker is handbuilt, from the in-house drive units to the cabinet, which uses thick, dense panels, with internal bracing for rigidity and damping pads to stop resonances. A wide range of finishes is available, including the 'Pippy Oak' of the review sample – an £800 option – and the whole enterprise has a superb feeling of solidity and quality.

Magnetically attached grilles are provided, and removing them reveals the two ATC-made drive units in the matte black front baffle. Those drivers are a 25mm soft-dome tweeter and a 15cm mid/bass unit, and the cabinet is a sealed design, the lack of a port making it easier to position due to reduced interaction with any walls around it.

Connections are provided in the form of an IEC mains input and a three-pin balanced XLR socket, the amp module also having controls for sensitivity and a bass shelf adjustment, this allowing a little increase or decrease of the bass level to tune the speaker to the room and personal tastes.

There's nothing new or revolutionary here, but it's interesting that the changing music playback landscape could well have made speakers like this more relevant for a greater number of customers. Whereas once such speakers were found connected to dedicated preamplifiers, to which a system's source components were connected, there's now a growing range of network players incorporating preamps and their own volume controls, making them ideal for use straight into active speakers.

That enables music stored on a local network to be played, along with a choice of high-quality streaming service, and the ATC speakers would combine with such a player to make a relatively compact, simple system, albeit one with compromise on sound quality. It could just be the time for speakers such as these to go mainstream in the high-end, just as simpler all-in-one 'system in speaker' devices have become popular at the more affordable end of the market.

In fact, with a suitable network player in harness, all one needs add to the ATCs is a pair of substantial stands able to bear the weight of the speakers, and long interconnect runs to connect each speaker. Several specialist stand companies make suitable stands for the SCM20ASL speakers, for which one should probably budget £300+ a pair, but choosing cables will be much simpler: the studio heritage

SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The ATCs will work well with a range of network music players, including ...

EVERSOLO DMP-A6

The EverSolo DMP-A6 Master Edition would be an excellent front end for the ATCs, offering fine performance and value for money

NAIM NSC 222

Moving upmarket, the Naim NSC 222 streaming preamp offers a fabulous level of insight and musicality, and can be upgraded with the NPX 300 power supply

of the speakers, and their XLR inputs, mean that a whole world of cables designed for professional use are available.

That may sound expensive, especially given the lengths of cable required if you want to keep your system's 'front end' some distance from the speakers, and yes, you can spend a fortune on XLR-terminate cables. However, for testing a pair of pro-use cables were pressed into use, and performed very well indeed. Total cost? Less than £40 for a 10m pair of cables, which should be long enough for most rooms.

PERFORMANCE

The network player to hand for listening to the ATCs was the excellent new RS151 from HiFi Rose, and it soon became clear that, with this accomplished machine providing the music, operating the entire system was just about as easy as choosing content on a mobile phone – which is just what I did, drawing on my network library as well as high-resolution streams from the likes of Qobuz and Tidal.

Immediately apparent was that the ATCs sound superb: they may only claim bass down to around 55Hz, and are designed for use in small-to-medium-sized rooms – which means they'll suit most domestic listening spaces – but the dynamics and definition on offer here are superb across a wide range of music.

With the immaculately-recorded recent release of Mozart piano sonatas by Angela Hewitt, the ability of the speakers, set up with a slight toe-in, to create an entirely convincing image of the instrument, with both scale and finesse, is wonderful. That sense of the instrument in the room with you, and the walls of the listening space pushing out to represent the recorded ambience, is as impressive as the clarity of each note in the 'Ah, vous dirai-je Maman' variations, really bringing out the brilliance of both scoring and playing.

Go into crossover territory with the inestimable organist Anna Lapwood's take on 'Angels', from her *Firedove* album, and that sense of an ethereal instrument filling a huge space – in this case Nidaros Cathedral, Trondheim – is conveyed thrillingly, as are the vocals of Lapwood's Pembroke College Choir and the organ in Bob Dylan's 'Make you Feel My Love'. It's another magical album from Lapwood, and a fine showcase for the ATC speakers.

Again, the ATCs are all about presence and resolution, really bringing the performances to life, something they do time after time, displaying their appeal as a unique twist on the small(ish) speakers solution. They also deliver a superb sense of intimacy with Magdalena Kožená and Mitsuko Uchida's 'L'extase' recital of Debussy and Messiaen, and are spellbinding with the King's College London recording of Rachmaninov's *Vespers*, with its glowing, dynamic sound.

The SCM20ASLs couldn't be better suited to the streamed music age: there's an appealing purity to speakers such as these, connected to a network player via relatively simple interconnect run. The look of the speakers may be classic, especially in those real-wood finishes, but this is in every way a very modern system solution. G

Or you could try ...

PMC Active twenty5

Active speakers remain in the minority in the hi-fi arena, but there are alternatives to the ATCs. If you're looking for a different bookshelf/standmount design, try the PMC Active twenty5 range, which combines the long-established designs with a slot-in amp pack to create a full active design. The Active twenty5 22i is a two-way design, with an active crossover and 200W of amplification built in. Read more at **pmc-speakers.com**

LS60 Wireless

Want an all-in-one 'system in speakers' set-up? Look no further than the LS60 Wireless, the flagship of KEF's wireless speaker line-up, complete with onboard streaming, the latest version of the company's 'point source' Uni-Q driver and four bass units in each speaker, all driven by 1400W of internal amplification. And the slender floorstanding columns come in a range of attractive finishes, including a striking Royal Blue. For more information see **uk.kef.com**

Focal Diva Utopia

Aiming really high, the floorstanding Focal Diva Utopia combines no fewer than seven drivers (including four side-firing woofers), all driven by 400W of amplification developed in conjunction with Naim, which also supplies the onboard streaming platform. Finished in a striking grey felt cladding, the speakers can be driven by the easy-to-use Focal & Naim app. Get all the details at **focal.com**

THE GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

Soundbars with extras

Once just a means of boosting your TV sound, in recent times these all-in-one speaker systems have expanded their appeal with enhanced sound, greater connectivity and the ability to stream all your music

Look at the advertising from the big box-shifting merchants and you'd be forgiven for thinking the main role of a soundbar is as a sweetener to encourage you to buy a new TV: just as a pair of earphones or a smartwatch is often the bonus when you buy a phone, so many TV deals come complete with a soundbar from the same manufacturer. And it's not hard to see the appeal; although much work has gone into improving the sound of the speakers built into what seem to be ever-slimmer screens, to the point that the big Samsung at home not only plays concerts rather well, but can also create a sense of surround and off-screen effects, there's no substitute for boosting up the audio with a slender bar containing more drive units and onboard amplification.

Mounted on the wall beneath the screen, or sitting below it on a TV stand, these slender bars can make a viable alternative to a conventional combination of an AV receiver and multichannel speaker system, using clever digital signal processing to give the impression of sound coming from all around the room, without all the clutter and cabling required in a full-scale home cinema set-up.

True, they're best used in relatively modest rooms – for which read most typical living spaces – and may require some extra reinforcement to deliver that big 'action movie' bass (for which many models come as standard with a standalone subwoofer you can hide away, or have one available as an option, both connected wirelessly), but set up with a little care, the effect can be compelling. And that goes for day-to-day TV viewing, concert transmissions and even those big Hollywood blockbusters – which is why these products are such a popular add-on for the ever-larger screens we seem to be buying, as they can deliver a scale of sound to match the huge images.

But modern soundbars go further than that: these days they can be as much a part of a music system – or indeed self-contained music players – as home cinema devices. For example, the Sonos range, best-known as a multiroom music system, offers a choice of three soundbars, starting with the very affordable Ray, and going up to the Arc Ultra model, complete with Dolby Atmos built in. Using no fewer than seven tweeters, six mid/bass units and a four-motor dual-membrane bass driver, all driven by 15 built-in amplifiers, it's able to deliver 9.1.4-channel sound through direct and reflected sound, creating an almost uncanny impression of sound coming to the listener from every direction. For those who struggle to hear dialogue there's onboard speech enhancement, while the company's Trueplay technology will measure the acoustics of the room, and adjust equalisation to suit

KEF's new XIO Soundbar draws heavily on the technology of the company's high-end audio speakers, and its in-house streaming system, to emphasise music as well as home cinema sound

Want an even bigger sound? The Arc Ultra will link up wirelessly with a Sonos Sub for more bass, and extra Era 300 speakers for discrete surround effects – and of course it has full music-streaming capability onboard, all controlled from an app on a smartphone or tablet.

The Denon Home system offers similar streaming and wireless surround facilities, using the HEOS multiroom system. The compact Sound Bar 550 has Dolby Atmos built-in for 3D surround, and uses a total of nine drive units powered by a four-channel internal amplifier, and has Bluetooth as well as wired and Wi-Fi network connectivity. You can use it as it is to give single-unit music playback and surround sound, or add on extra Denon Home wireless speakers to create a more conventional multichannel system, for example with a pair of the little Home 150 speakers for surrounds, and the Home Subwoofer to extend the bass.

And like the Sonos soundbars, the Denon Home system will integrate with a wider range of networked music products, from wireless speakers in other rooms to interface devices or amplifiers usable in more conventional hi-fi systems elsewhere in the home.

The HEOS system also extends to a number of hi-fi products from Denon and stablemate Marantz, and similar thinking informs the BluOS system, which takes in the Bluesound Pulse+ soundbar, and can connect to a range of speakers from the brand, as well as hi-fi separates and systems from sister company NAD.

If you need any more convincing that the hi-fi industry is taking the crossover between soundbars and music systems very seriously, look no further than the recently-launched KEF XIO soundbar, which uses six miniature versions of the company's celebrated UniQ driver as part of an array also including two back-to-back bass units developed from the compact but powerful KC62 and KC92 subwoofers.

Set up in a 5.1.2 configuration and using 12 Class D amplifiers, all controlled by a version of KEF's Music Integrity Engine digital signal processing, the XIO can deliver Dolby Atmos soundtracks, and also stream services including Tidal, Amazon Music, Qobuz, Deezer and more, using a version of the W2 Wireless Platform used in the company's LS Wireless Collection speakers.

Maybe it's time to start taking soundbars seriously … G

REVIEWS INDEX

Alar Karis

The President of Estonia on discovering opera, Arvo Pärt, and his country's musical life

My mother was very fond of classical music, and thought that her son should also start from a very early stage to get acquainted with it. So she took me to see opera – my first was Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and I remember I even cried! But I also remember that sitting behind me was a couple of elderly ladies who were discussing why this mother was bringing such a young boy to the opera who wouldn't understand a thing about it, and I was very upset by that – and perhaps because of it, as a protest, I went to all the operas I could!

It was the time of the Cold War, and the only contemporary music we could catch was classical – LPs of rock and other styles were difficult to get. But classical music was there: Mario Lanza and some of the other singers which did the job at that time that Bocelli and others are doing in ours. We had vinyls, and I could listen from my radio, and it did influence me. Van Cliburn had won the Tchaikovsky competition in 1958, and we had his recording, and maybe that's why I ended up learning piano. We didn't have a piano at home, but there was one at the institute where my mother worked as a researcher, and I'd go before and after school to practice – but if you don't have a piano at home it's very difficult, so I stopped after a year or so. Later on at school my music teacher told me I should start learning violin, so I switched to that for a while. All of these experiences together brought me to classical music at a very early stage.

Also at the time, Riga Cathedral, in Latvia, had organ concerts, and together with my mother's colleagues we'd go by bus – a four- or five-hour drive – to listen, twice a year. Recently, when President, my Latvian colleagues made me a surprise – when I was in Riga they asked me to come to the Cathedral, where they held a 20-minute concert on the organ, just for us!

I liked Vivaldi, Bach and Handel and so forth, but of course different kinds of music too. When I was a young researcher living in the Netherlands I did not have enough money to buy classical music CDs, because they were much more expensive than other styles, but close to my house there was a shop where you could rent a CD for a week. In the mid-'90s I also remember an album called *Us and Them* – symphonic music based on Pink Floyd recorded by the London Philharmonic, which had a certain influence on me.

The Estonian National Song Celebration is something we're very proud of. Actually, we stole the idea in the 19th century from Germans and developed it further – the first festival was held in 1869. There are tens of thousands of singers and almost 100,000 people watching and singing together with the choirs. This year's festival was in July and it was raining from morning until evening but nobody left – we were all sitting there singing, proud and happy.

THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Arvo Pärt Spiegel im Speigel
Benjamin Hudson *vn/va*, **Sebastian Klinger** *vc*, **Jürgen Kruse** *pf* Brilliant Classics ● 90010
One of my favourite pieces: this recent LP has different versions of it, plus other works too.

Wherever you go, even if people don't know where Estonia is, they definitely know Arvo Pärt. We are now celebrating his 90th birthday, and there are concerts around the world. He's one of my favourite composers; I first became aware of his music through one of his tunes in a movie about love and peasant life in Estonia in the 19th century or early 20th century. The Arvo Pärt Centre is close to our capital but in the middle of a forest. There's a chapel there as he is very influenced by Orthodox music, and also an exhibition space where you can just sit and look at his scores. It's a very special place.

I try to attend most of the important classical music performances in Estonia. If the President is present, it does help to open some doors, to encourage more and more people to start listening to classical music. I'm trying to convince the younger generation that it is important to go to these concerts and that the earlier you start to know or understand classical music, the better it is. Then you are somehow attached to this music your whole life.

For a small nation like Estonia there are so many good composers, players and conductors per capita, and we are very proud of that! There's also a generation of young composers, conductors and players now emerging, and this gives me confidence that it will continue, and that another Arvo Pärt will come about at some point. G

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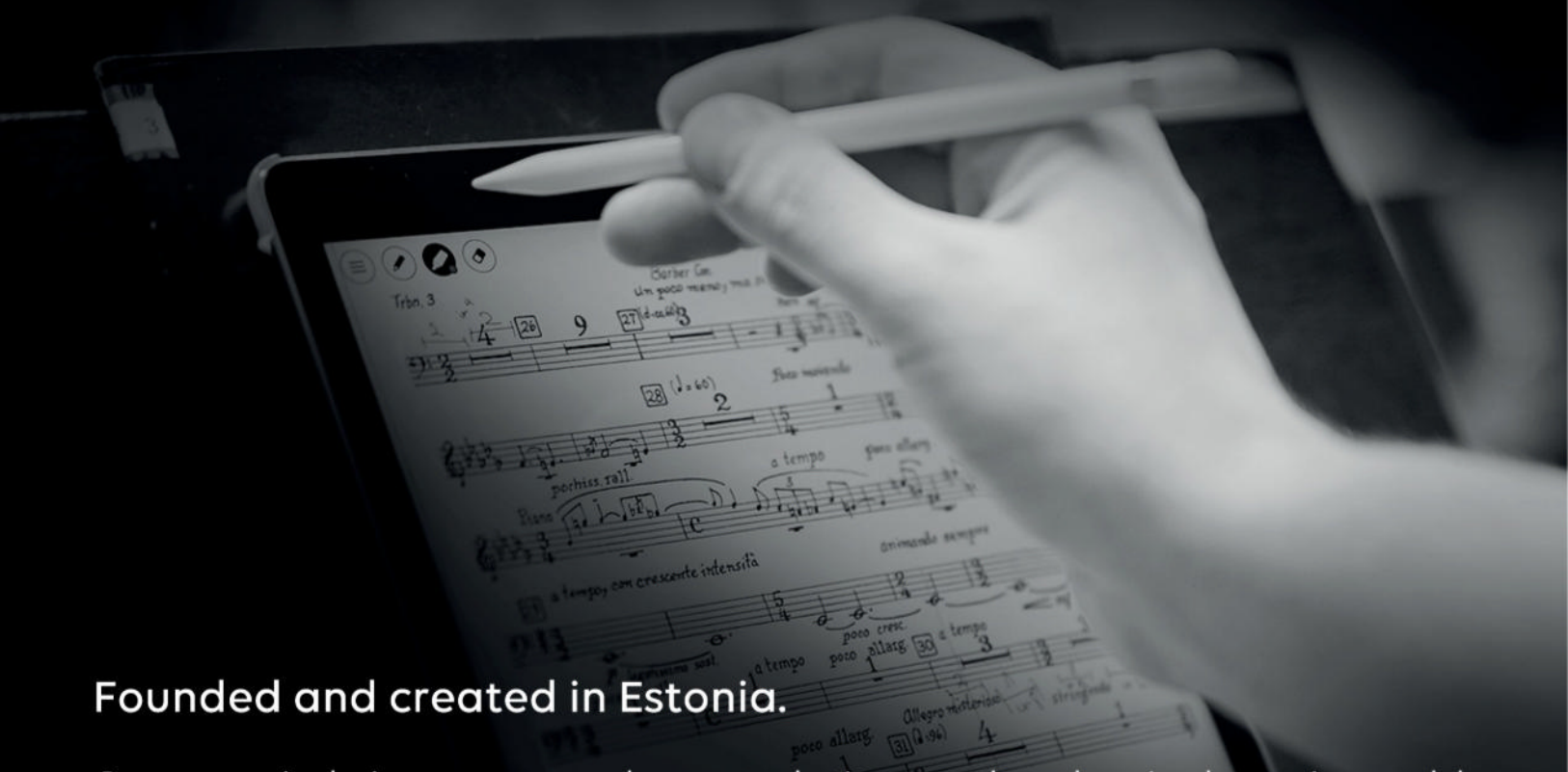

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