American Record Guide

Independent Critics Reviewing Classical Recordings and Music in Concert

us $7.99
September/October 2011
09>
0 25274 84151 7

Over 500 Reviews

Searching for Music?

(Can't find it?)

Find it Here

hbdirect.com

Mention this coupon code or enter it upon checkout on our website and get

$5 off

an order of $75 or more!

coupon code arg5off

Enormous Selection
Exceptional Customer Service
State of the Art Website
Thousands of Sale Titles, Every Day
Toll Free Customer Service Line
Monthly Classical Newsletter publication

1-800-222-6872

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 1

Contents

Coming in the Next Issue:

Festivals Galore:
Bavarian State Opera
Bellingham
Cabrillo
Festival of the Sound
Glimmerglass
Music at Menlo
Ohio Light Opera
And Much More...

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 2

American Record Guide

Vol 74, No 5 September/October 2011 Our 76th Year of Publication

www.AmericanRecordGuide.com
e-mail: subs@americanrecordguide.com

Editor: Donald R Vroon

Editor, Music in Concert: Gil French

Art Director: Ray Hassard
Design & Layout: Lonnie Kunkel

Advertising: Elaine Fine (217) 345-4310

Reader Service: (513) 941-1116

CORRESPONDENTS

ATLANTA: James L Paulk
BOSTON: John W Ehrlich
BUFFALO: Herman Trotter
CHICAGO: John Von Rhein
CLEVELAND: Robert Finn
LOS ANGELES: Richard S Ginell
NEW YORK: Susan Brodie, Joseph Dalton, Leslie Kandell
SAN FRANCISCO: Jason Victor Serinus
SANTA FE: James A Van Sant
SEATTLE: Melinda Bargreen
LONDON: Edward Greenfield, Kate Molleson
CANADA: Bill Rankin

PAST EDITORS

Peter Hugh Reed 1935-57
James Lyons 1957-72
Milton Caine 1976-81
John Cronin 1981-83
Doris Chalfin 1983-85
Grace Wolf 1985-87

RECORD REVIEWERS

Paul L Althouse
Brent Auerbach
John W Barker
Carl Bauman
Alan Becker
William Bender
John Boyer
Charles E Brewer
Brian Buerkle
Ira Byelick
Stephen D Chakwin Jr
Ardella Crawford
Stephen Estep
Donald Feldman
Elaine Fine
Gil French
William J Gatens
Allen Gimbel
Todd Gorman
Philip Greenfield
Steven J Haller
Lawrence Hansen
Patrick Hanudel
James Harrington
Rob Haskins
Roger Hecht
David Jacobsen
Benjamin Katz
Kenneth Keaton
Barry Kilpatrick
Mark Koldys
Lindsay Koob
Kraig Lamper
Mark L Lehman
Vivian A Liff
Peter Loewen
Ralph V Lucano
Joseph Magil
Michael Mark
John P McKelvey
Donald E Metz
Catherine Moore
David W Moore
Robert A Moore
Kurt Moses
Don O'Connor
Charles H Parsons
David Radcliffe
David Schwartz
Jack Sullivan
Richard Traubner
Donald R Vroon

PHOTO CREDITS

Page 4: Photo by © Steve J. Sherman.
Page 8: Photo by J.Wrzesinski
Page 10: Photo by Bill Swerbenski
Page 11: Photo Courtesy of SFO
Page 12: Photo by Cory Weaver
Page 16 & 18: Phot by Tom Ligamari
Page 19 & 21: Photo by William Struhs
Page 22 & 23: Photos by BEMF.org
Page 24: Photo by Steve Cohn
Page 25: Photo by Lee Salem
Page 27: Photo by Mark Dellas
Page 28: Photo by unknown
Page 31: Photo by Twain Newhart
Page 36: Photo courtesy of Attacca
Page 40: Photo by Sussie Ahlberg
Page 38: Photo by Alastair Muir
Page 42: Photo by Scot Ferguson
Page 46: Photo by Bonnie Perkinson

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 3

Music in Concert highlights

September 7-14
Kent Nagano and the Montreal Symphony celebrate the gala opening of L'Adresse Symphonique, Montreal's new symphony hall, with works by three Quebec composers and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. Four nights later the Borodin Quartet performs Quartets Nos. 15 by Beethoven and Shostakovich. Then Nagano inaugurates the MSO's regular season with Joshua Bell (Glazounov and Tchaikovsky) and Messiaen's *Turangalila Symphony* with pianist Angela Hewitt.

September 9-10
Joana Carneiro leads the St Paul Chamber Orchestra in the world premiere of Nico Muhly's *Luminous Body*. Also on the program are works by Bach, Haydn, and Brahms at the Ordway Center.

September 10-30
The San Francisco Opera gives the world premiere of Christopher Theofanidis's *Heart of a Soldier* with Thomas Hampson, William Burden, and Melody Moore conducted by Patrick Summers and directed by Francesca Zambello at War Memorial Opera House.

September 14-15
The Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio perform yet another world premiere, Stanley Silverman's Piano Trio No. 2, on a program with Mozart's Trio, K 502, and Beethoven's *Archduke* at New York's 92nd Street Y (see a review of their Danielpour premiere in this issue).

September 23-30
David Robertson and the St Louis Symphony serve up two weekends of world premieres at Powell Hall: Steven Mackey's Piano Concerto with Orli Shaham plus Mahler's Symphony No. 1; then Edgar Meyer in his Double Bass Concerto No. 3 on a program with Copland's Suite from *The City* with film, plus Ives and Gershwin.

September 29
Sitarist Ravi Shankar (we can hope) celebrates his 91st birthday with a long-awaited, twice-postponed concert at Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles.

September 22-October 1
In his first two weeks as the Seattle Symphony's new music director, Ludovic Morlot conducts Zappa's *Dupree's Paradise*, Dutilleux's *Tree of Dreams* with Renaud Capuçon, Beethoven's *Eroica*, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, Gershwin's *American in Paris*, and Varese's *Ameriques* at Benaroya Hall.

October 4-8
The Brooklyn Academy of Music presents Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera* with stage direction and lighting conceived by Robert Wilson. The Berlin Ensemble accompanies the US premiere of this production.

October 6-11 and 14-16
Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra take Tchaikovsky's six symphonies (two per night) first to Carnegie Hall and then to the University of California-Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall. They add an extra night in New York with the winner of the 14th Tchaikovsky Competition plus works by Stravinsky and Shostakovich.

October 16
Pianist Louis Lortie celebrates Liszt's bicentennial with the complete *Years of Pilgrimage* at the Royal Conservatory's Koerner Hall in Toronto.

October 22-23
David Alan Miller leads the Albany Symphony in the world premiere of Kathryn Salfelder's Saxophone Concerto with Timothy McAllister, plus Kernis's *Concerto with Echoes* based on Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 (also on the program), and Mendelssohn's *Italian Symphony* at Troy Savings Bank Music Hall in Troy and Skidmore College's Zankel Music Center in Saratoga Springs.

AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE (ISSN 0003-0716) is published bimonthly for $43.00 a year for individuals ($55.00 for institutions) by Record Guide Productions, 4412 Braddock Street, Cincinnati OH 45204. *Phone:* (513) 941-1116
E-mail: subs@americanrecordguide.com *Web:* www.americanrecordguide.com Periodical postage paid at Cincinnati, Ohio.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to American Record Guide, 4412 Braddock Street, Cincinnati, OH 45204-1006
Student rates are available on request. Allow eight weeks for shipment of first copy. CANADIAN SUBSCRIPTIONS: add $12.00 postage; EUROPE: add $22.00 ALL OTHER COUNTRIES: add $27.00. All subscriptions must be paid with US dollars or credit card. Claims for missing issues should be made within six months of publication. Retail distribution by Ubiquity. Contents are indexed annually in the Nov/Dec or Jan/Feb issue and in The Music Index, The International Index to Music, and ProQuest Periodical Abstracts.

Copyright 2011 by Record Guide Productions. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA.

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 4

Carnegie's "Spring for Music" Festival

Seven Orchestras, Adventurous Programs

Carlos Kalmar conducts the Oregon Symphony

(The unique purpose and the principles for selecting orchestras that perform in the "Spring for Music" Festival, held in May at Carnegie Hall and now planned through 2013, is explained at: springformusic.com-/Mission.htm. Jack Sullivan attended six of this year's seven concerts; Joseph Dalton attended the middle one with the Dallas Symphony. —Editor)

Jack Sullivan

We hear so many grim stories about the state of symphony orchestras that it is heartening to report something good for a change. "Spring for Music" is a new annual series of adventurous programs performed by North American orchestras chosen by competition. The orchestras, both full-sized and chamber, played at Carnegie Hall, the gold standard for orchestral sound, over a hectic but exciting nine-day period in early May. All seats were $15 to $25, a brave attempt to lure younger audiences as well as local folk flown in from each region (1400 from Toledo, Ohio, alone for the Toledo Symphony). Instead of the usual overture-concerto-symphony formula, each program had to have a distinct architecture or theme, and there was a generous amount of contemporary music, much of it commissioned for the festival.

As a revelation of some regional orchestras and what they are capable of, "Spring for Music" was a series of wonderful surprises. It's one thing to hear local ensembles on obscure CDs, quite another to experience them at

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 5

Carnegie Hall cheered on by home supporters as well as curious New Yorkers who are used to hearing the Vienna Philharmonic and the Cleveland Orchestra again and again. Most of these bands never make it to Carnegie at all; indeed, the Oregon Symphony had never ventured west of the Mississippi (simply too expensive, one of the exhausted but happy players told me after their concert). Every orchestra I heard was good, and every one had a dramatically different sound, rebutting the cliche that all orchestras these days sound the same.

The Albany Symphony under David Alan Miller had the juiciest sonority. Their performance of Copland's *Appalachian Spring* in the rarely heard "complete" version was one of the most colorful and memorable I've heard in a very long time (two weeks later I could still hear it floating through my head). This is not just because the normally excised material supplied a dark and startling contrast to the serene folksiness of what we normally hear, as if *Connotations* or some other modernist Copland piece had suddenly invaded his pastoral style, but because Albany's luminous strings, forceful brass, and vivid winds took the work to a new level of poetry and theatricality.

The Toledo Symphony under Stefan Sanderling was more delicate and austere, ideally suited to whisper the mysterious tremolos in Shostakovich's Symphony No. 6; though, at the end, jeering woodwinds and thundering timpani showed they could make a big noise when they needed to. Sanderling brought out the jarring contrasts and discontinuities in this eccentric symphony with great skill.

On the same program was the rarely programmed *Every Good Boy Deserves Favor*, an absurdist lampooning of Soviet oppression by Tom Stoppard and André Previn. It went beautifully with the symphony, especially since Previn's music is a Shostakovich pastiche. This symphonic playlet from the late 1970s is a risk, requiring six actors and 94 players who only perform intermittently, since the "orchestra" exists in the head of a prisoner in a Soviet mental institution. Stoppard's brilliantly sardonic language was a treat (though the acting was only adequate), as were Previn's lively riffs on Shostakovich.

The presence of fans waving colored hankies, so obviously proud of their hometown bands, lent a festive, slightly goofy air to even the most challenging concerts, including the Oregon Symphony's somber wartime program. All the works in the first half were played without pause: Ives's *Unanswered Question*, so quiet in Carlos Kalmar's reading it was almost ineffable, faded into John Adams's *Wound Dresser*, a tender and poignant depiction of horror (surely Adams's most eloquent piece), its Whitman text subtly sung by Sanford Sylvan. It too ended quietly, but we were suddenly jolted out of our seats by the violent timpani and howling low brass of Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem*. After the break, the orchestra erupted into a cathartic, go-for-broke performance of Vaughan Williams's Symphony No. 4. The composer insisted it was not really a wartime testament, but this explosive reading suggested otherwise. The Toledo Symphony will play this same program as part of their 2011-12 season.

The new works at the festival, 18 by my count, were a decidedly mixed bag. The most glamorous premiere, *Carlos Drummond de Andrade Stories* by the jazz crossover celebrity Maria Schneider (who conducted the concert), sounded like air-brushed Villa-Lobos. It was certainly pleasant enough and was performed with silky authority by Dawn Upshaw and the St Paul Chamber Orchestra. Upshaw, who plans to be regular in the "Spring for Music" series, made a similar impression in Bartok's *Five Hungarian Folk Songs*. Her unrelenting earnestness, combined with a smooth arrangement for string orchestra by Richard Tognetti, drained these songs of Bartokian color and charm. This program, the only one without a theme, included an elegant performance of Stravinsky's Concerto in D and a vigorous account of Haydn's Symphony No. 104.

Melinda Wagner's *Little Moonhead*, an impressionist palette of seductive moods and colors, was by far the best of the "New Brandenburgs" presented by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. As demonstrated by her recent Trombone Concerto for the New York Philharmonic, Wagner is an eloquent, poetic voice in contemporary music. Also on the program were Aaron Jay Kernis's charming *Concerto with Echoes* (inspired by Brandenberg Concerto No. 6), Peter Maxwell Davies's dour and dreary *Sea Orpheus*, and Christopher Theofandis's gushy, minimalist *Muse*, which got a loud ovation from an otherwise frosty New York crowd (such a contrast to the heartland whoopers). Only Stephen Hartke and Paul Moravec, in the finales of *Brandenburg Autumn* and *Brandenburg Gate*, supplied the requisite neo-classical fizz for a Brandenburg evening. This was a long, difficult program to bring off, but Orpheus played with their usual finesse and authority. The Albany Symphony will pair the Kernis with the Bach No. 6 on an October concert.

The other series of new pieces was the Albany Symphony's "Spirituals Project" (not to be confused with Art Jones's educational project of the same name, which has been promoting spirituals for a dozen years): nine new "spirituals" commissioned by David Alan Miller, one instrumental work by George Tson-

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 6

takis for orchestra and solo "fiddler", and eight songs by John Harbison, Daniel Bernard Roumain, Bun-Ching Lam, Tania Leon, Donal Fox, Kevin Beavers, Richard Adams, and Stephen Dankner, all sung by the young African-American baritone De'Shon Myers. The fiddler, David Kitzis, stole the show in his procession from one end of Carnegie Hall to another, his violin resonating brilliantly and vanishing with ghostly shivers in Carnegie's remarkable acoustic.

In his announcement of this ambitious project, Miller complained about the lack of worthwhile symphonic spirituals besides Dvorak's; yet there is a legacy of "sorrow song" masterpieces by Delius, Tippett, and Zemlinsky, not to mention chamber works by Korngold and Coleridge-Taylor. For the most part, these blandly meandering arrangements did little to advance the tradition. The best ones were Harbison's playful 'Ain't Goin' to Study War No Mo', Adams's soulful 'Stan' Still, Jordan', and the finale, Dankner's 'Wade in de Water', which concluded the series with brilliant wa-wa effects from the Albany brass.

The final concert in this splendid festival was played by Kent Nagano and the Montreal Symphony, who appear with some regularity in Carnegie Hall. One expected them to be terrific, and they were. Their program, "The Evolution of the Symphony", was no such thing but, rather, a non-chronological juxtaposition of textures: Gabrieli's *Symphoniae Sacre*, Webern's Symphony, and Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, all interspersed with sinfonias by Bach lucidly played by Angela Hewitt, the whole thing culminating in a fast, gorgeously articulated Symphony No. 5 by Beethoven. It might seem odd to conclude an adventurous series with this chestnut, but we should remember that the Fifth was once regarded as the most adventurous symphony of all.

Joseph Dalton

The Dallas Symphony's May 11 concert at Carnegie Hall was the only one in the "Spring for Music" Festival that relied on a single work. *August 4, 1964* by composer Steven Stucky and librettist Gene Scheer was premiered in Dallas in September 2008. Best described as an oratorio, it commemorated the centennial of President Lyndon Johnson by centering on two pivotal events: the discovery in the Mississippi River of three murdered civil rights workers and a spurious "attack" on two American warships in the Gulf of Tonkin—they both occurred on the same day.

While the sheer scale of the work must surely be a point of pride for the DSO, the piece itself seemed a curious choice for a festival that served as a showcase for orchestras. With the huge all-volunteer Dallas Symphony Chorus and four vocal soloists, the orchestra, led by Music Director Jaap Van Zweden, was hardly prominent.

Over-arching, though, were the themes of race, war, and corruption that are still a long way from being resolved in the American psyche. Granted that's big stuff for an orchestra to take on; still, I never felt that the 80-minute piece elevated the discussion.

Scheer's libretto, drawing extensively on historical documents, deals with prejudice and murder in the south and cataclysmic events in southeast Asia, all amidst the mundaneness of a busy day in the White House. Almost none of it called out for music. Stucky's settings were either literal and obvious or melodramatic and overwrought.

For a tribute to LBJ, the creators didn't give the guy many points, casting him as someone at the mercy of events beyond his control and making decisions based on incomplete and inaccurate intelligence. A short scene early on nicely depicted several aspects of Johnson's persona, including his confident swagger, distaste for intellectuals, and slight paranoia. Baritone Rod Gilfrey used erratic bits of a Texan accent. Yet, as the piece progressed, the role seemed to fall uncomfortably into the upper reaches of his range. This, combined with a slow cadence to the words, shrank the president into someone uncomfortable in his office, if not his own skin.

Contrast this with tenor Vale Rideout as a shrieking, hysterical Chicken Little of a defense secretary (Robert McNamara). The other soloists, soprano Indira Mahajan and mezzo Kristine Jepson, portrayed the mothers of slain civil rights activists who mostly grieved and sobbed. All four principals were attired in dignified clothes from the early 60s. The text was projected, line by line, onto the wall above the stage.

It fell to the chorus and orchestra to briefly infuse the evening with poetry and eloquence. Near the opening, the chorus sang portions of a poem by Stephen Spender, set in a conservative style reminiscent of Randall Thompson. They were prepared by Donald Krehbiel, and they sang with outstanding clarity and warmth.

Less moving was a lengthy elegy for orchestra positioned at the dead center of the work. Though hushed and deftly scored, its modest melodic contours felt like little more than a respite amid the hollow frenzy of the night.

The 2012 "Spring for Music" Festival, May 7-12, will present the Alabama, Edmonton, Houston, Milwaukee, Nashville, and New Jersey orchestras.

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 7

Cracow's Mahler Festival

Discoveries Abound

Gil French


Pawl Przytocki

Last spring the Cracow Philharmonic commemorated the 100th anniversary of Mahler's death by having eight Central European orchestras perform his 10 symphonies. Consider it a "Spring for Mahler" Festival, a parallel to Carnegie Hall's "Spring for Music" festival (above). For me it was an occasion for a number of surprising discoveries.

I was last in Poland in 1987 when the arts, Catholicism, and Solidarity were the only vital means of protesting Communism's weakened but still firm grip on the country. While architectural restoration was advanced, cities were rather grey, tourism was strictly state-controlled, and alcoholism ravished 20-somethings still without hope of "a future".

What a change today! First, Poland is extremely prosperous. The middle class thrives. Cities are bright and impeccably clean (the Poles could teach the Chinese a thing or two about clean toilets!). Local and intercity public transportation is superb. Lodging is first-rate, with bounteous Central European breakfasts. Tourist spots, rich in history, are counterpointed by superb museums that contrast the present with the war years. The arts are thriving. And from Warsaw to Zakopane the countryside is beautiful.

The second major discovery: don't believe the guidebooks about Warsaw ("Warsaw can be hard work. It may not be the prettiest of Polish cities", says Lonely Planet). The restored Old Town-New Town tourist area speaks for itself, though prosperity has forced out street musicians, hawkers' stalls, and folk art. The superb tram and bus system gets you everywhere (a three-day pass costs only $5.80). The city is orderly and blessedly quiet—no horns, no loud music. A new interactive Chopin Museum can finally be visited without advanced reservations. The profundity of the Warsaw Uprising Museum can reduce anyone to tears. The Museum of the History of Polish Jews will open in 2012 (until 1939 Poland had the world's largest Jewish population). The Polish National Opera is world-class. And Antoni Wit closed the Warsaw Philharmonic's season with Mahler's Symphony No. 3, a concert I had to miss because of the festival three hours south.

The major discovery at the Mahler Festival was Pawel Przytocki (PAH-voh Psheh + TROT-sky without the R), general and artistic director

THE BEST
IN AMERICA'S CLASSICAL MUSIC
AND MORE...
www.albanyrecords.com
NEW RELEASES
PAUL CHIHARA
LOVE MUSIC
TROY1290
C. CURTIS SMITH
GOLD ARE MY FLOWERS
TROY1278
DON DAVIS
RÍO DE SANGRE
TROY1296/97
TIANSHU WANG
THE PIANO IN CHINA
TROY1289
TAMI LEE HUGHES
VIOLIN MUSIC BY AFRICAN-AMERICANS
TROY1293

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 8

of the Cracow Philharmonic and world-class Mahler conductor. When asked where his idea for the festival came from, he said, "From Mahler's biography". By selecting orchestras from Central European cities where Mahler himself conducted, Przytocki also created a platform to boost the reputation of his own orchestra that he has directed since March 2009, taking it thrice to Vienna's Musikverein and twice to Paris's Theatre du Chatelet.

The concluding June 19 concert of Symphony No. 8 was unquestionably the high point of the festival that began May 10. With the audience facing the rear of the cathedral-like St Catherine's Church in Cracow's Kazimierz (Jewish) quarter, Przytocki had the magnificent Cracow and Czech Philharmonic Choirs (165 singers) facing each other in stalls left and right, with the Cracow Philharmonic Boys', Leipzig MDR Children's, and Puellae Orantes Girl's Cathedral Choir (120 total) across the back facing him from under the choir loft where the organist and seven brass players were found. In front of the Cracow Philharmonic (expanded from 100 to 120) were the seven soloists, each so tonally rich and warm, broadly dynamic yet never strained, free of uncontrolled vibrato, and perfectly blended that they deserve listing: sopranos Barbara Kubiak (Polish), Urska Arlic Gololicic (Slovenian), and Iwona Socha (Polish); altos Jadwiga Rappé (Polish) and Ewa Marciniec (Polish); tenor Roman Sadnik (Viennese), baritone Adam Kruzel (Polish), and bass Peter Mikulas (Slovak).

Wide-screen monitors hidden behind massive pillars aided the coordination, but what clinched it was Przytocki's total intellectual grasp of the score's form, his attention to fine orchestral details otherwise easily lost in the resonant acoustics, his Gergiev-like awareness and eye-contact with each group, and, above all, his flexible forward thrust and tight rhythmic pulse. It took only about two minutes for ensemble to solidify. By the ends of both the 'Veni, Creator Spiritus' and Faust sections, the emotional effect was quite shattering, as I learned how to breathe again.

I had learned earlier to approach the festival's orchestras with trepidation, and this was my only chance to hear the Cracow Philharmonic. Not amorphously subsumed beneath the vocal forces and resonant acoustics, its intonation, quality of tone, tight ensemble, and the superb quality of its principal players justified its Vienna and Paris invitations.

Before I arrived in Cracow, Przytocki led his orchestra in Symphony No. 6, and Israeli Lior Shambadal led it in the *Resurrection Symphony*. A week before Mahler's Eighth, Przytocki substituted for the Wroclaw Philharmonic's Music Director Jacek Kaspszyk in Symphony No. 7. In the first two movements the orchestra itself seemed weak. Violins were lean, the seven growly string basses were hardly audible, trumpets and French horns had frequent clams, winds were exposed, and ensemble wasn't confident.

Suddenly in the third movement, with Przytocki's clarity, dynamism, consummate communications skills, and tight rhythmic control, this regional orchestra found its legs. Tight ensemble and accurate playing yielded delicate transparecy and flexibility that heaved and sighed—the same in the fourth as Przytocki shifted styles mid-measure, drawing ecstatic playing. By the finale the Wroclaw Phil was like a sports team that has found its groove, could do no wrong, and was sure of victory.

I didn't understand the degree of Przytocki's accomplishment until a week later when Kaspszyk appeared with his orchestra for the Cooke-Matthews version of Symphony No. 10. It sounded like a different orchestra; in fact, it was to some extent—certainly different string players and without No. 7's superb concertmaster. From the very opening unison viola line, I translated "Kaspszyk" as "joke". Every note was detached, almost every horn entrance was a fart, brass was crass, ensemble was a mess, and fortes screamed, as Kaspszyk buried his head in the score, gave jerky high-low gestures, and proved his lack of familiarity with and feeling for the score's magnificent scope and poignant lines. Judging from his biography and performance, Kaspszky, now 59, reached the down side of the mountain very early in his career.

In Symphony No. 5, Jiri Belohlavek, who becomes music director of the Czech Philharmonic for the second time in 2012, showed that he has firmly returned that great organ of an orchestra (in managerial and player turmoil for over a decade) to Rolls Royce status. Violas, cellos, and string bass sections each sound with one sumptuous tone. There must be a body-language code to belong to this still overwhelmingly male ensemble, their intense concentration and passion is so strong! Belohlavek's contrasts in the first two movements were devastating; the third was a bit heavy, especially with the Mack truck force of the principal French horn. The slow Adagio was as transparent and deeply moving as I've ever heard it. Only in the finale did the orchestra become so taken with its own weighty sound that it began to overwhelm the bright acoustics of Szymanowski Hall.

Another discovery was the work Belohlavek opened with, Sinfonietta, a graduation piece by 22-year-old Karel Ancerl, probably the most precocious, mature student work ever written. With the style, profundity, and counterpoint of Martinu's Double Concerto, plus the CPO's sonics and commitment, I couldn't understand the audience's barren response.

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 9

The other orchestras at the Festival all failed to compensate for the hall's brightness, illustrating the difference between power (Czech Phil) and loudness, caused by inferior instruments forced beyond their capacities by unsubtle musicians. Judging from his interpretation of *Songs of a Wayfarer* and Symphony No. 4, Aleksander Marcovic, born in Belgrade in 1972 and chief conductor of the Brno Philharmonic, has reached the down side of the mountain exceptionally early. Under his extremely angular conducting style, the orchestra looked bored, was poorly tuned, and had flatulent horns, unsubtle winds, weak ensemble, and a bashing timpanist. Marcovic attended only to the melody line, ignoring Mahler's wonderful counterpoint and inner details.

In *Wayfarer* Lithuanian baritone Vytautas Juozapaitis, with strained top notes and bottom notes beyond his range, must have thought he was at the Met, not in a bright 697-seat hall. Only Polish soprano Anna Pehlken, deliciously floating as she sang about a heavenly feast, drew quality out of Marcovic in the symphony's final movement.

In Symphony No. 1, despite mellow horns, Budapest's Hungarian National Philharmonic had wiry strings, hollow flutes, weak string basses, and a timpanist who absolutely bashed his instruments. None were helped by Music Director Zoltan Kocsis (the pianist), whose matter-of-factness seemed indifferent as he rushed through the work—with a six-minute 'Blumine' movement to boot—in 55 minutes. He didn't have a clue what this emotional masterpiece is all about.

In Symphony No. 9, despite raw percussion, harsh cymbals, awful bass drum, somewhat blatant French horns, and weak string basses, the Slovak Philharmonic (another mostly male bastion) had solid strings. What they really needed was a conductor sensitive to tone color, who could tame them in the hall's bright resonance. Instead, Alexander Rhabari, a short butterball Iranian and the only festival conductor who worked from memory, was all large, obvious gestures (two fingers means this, one point down means that, etc.) and details, details, details without forward motion. This has to have been the longest Mahler Ninth: the first movement took 33 minutes, the second 20. All trees, no forest. His metronomic pacing fit the third movement well enough. Only in the finale did he begin to develop some long arching lines.

Italian conductor Daniele Callegari is worth keeping an eye out for, especially if he returns to the Met. Aside from Przytocki, he was the only other festival conductor to get an orchestra to play "beyond itself". In Symphony No. 3 the Slovenian Philharmonic's lower strings were raw, woodwinds had a number of glitches, the principal trombone's tone wasn't secure—nor was the trumpet's. Yet textures were transparent, and, even with quick tempos, Callegari's forward flexible flow was well aimed and often buoyant. Ensemble was excellent. And by the end of the first and last massive movements, Mahler's emotional statement was delivered so powerfully that any glitches didn't count.

My other discovery was that most American regional orchestras (Buffalo, Rochester, the ones in the Carnegie "Spring for Music" Festival) far outclass most of the Central European orchestras I heard both in technical execution and musicality. Nor did the festival feel like one: the concerts weren't social events at all—people arrived, heard music, and left. They were also ritualistic: applause, followed by standing, followed by unison rhythmic clapping, and five curtain calls, even for Kaspszyk's excruciating Symphony No. 10. De gustibus.

Yet where other than in Poland is an airport (Warsaw's) named for a composer (Chopin)!

NEW RELEASES

Crystal Records: for 45 years, *"excellent performances of unusual & meritorious music."* – ARG

CD823: Eclecticism; Carolyn Hove, English Horn. Music by Beethoven, Ravel, Steinmetz, Morehead, Rathbun, Lane, & Rudin. Hove is solo English horn with Los Angeles Phil. She has a *"gorgeous, juicy sound"* (American Music Magazine)

CD769: Trumpet Concertos by Hummel, Arutiunian, & Tartini; plus Peaslee Nightsongs. John Holt, trumpet, is *"an elegant, sensitive artist with perfect technique and intonation"* (Gramophone). *"his tone and vibrato are beautiful"* (American Record Guide)

CD839: Viola and Organ: Carol and Catherine Rodland Duo. Premiere recordings for unusual viola-organ combination. Carol Rodland is viola prof. at Eastman. Catherine is organ artist at St. Olaf. *"imagination and professionalism"* (Intl. Rcd. Review)

$16.95 ea + $2/shipping per order. Send for free catalog.

® CRYSTAL RECORDS

28818 NE Hancock, Camas, WA 98607; phone 360-834-7022
order@crystalrecords.com; www.crystalrecords.com

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 10

MTT and the San Francisco Symphony

Mahler Recapped Before European Tour

Jason Victor Serinus

During the centenary of Gustav Mahler's death, Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony have gone to great lengths to bolster their reputation as a world-class "Mahler Orchestra". Following the recording of all the symphonies and song cycles in concert, which they released in hybrid SACD format, they've issued complete box sets on disc and (soon) vinyl. In addition, they prepared a two-part "Keeping Score" documentary, broadcast nationally in June on PBS and then released in DVD and Blu-Ray formats. They also programmed Mahler for their May 19-June 6 European tour of Prague, Vienna, Brussels, Essen, Luxembourg, Paris, Barcelona, Madrid, and Lisbon.

As a pre-tour "warm-up", the orchestra performed three of Mahler's symphonies in early May at their home base, Davies Symphony Hall. Starting with Symphony No. 9, SFS launched an ambitious nine-day mini-cycle that also included the glorious No. 2 and tragic No. 6.

The orchestra was in top form. My companion for No. 9, Raymond Bisha, Naxos's director of media relations for North America, has heard many an orchestra in his years as a classical musician and media professional. Yet he was struck by the uniform strength of the ensemble and the fact that he could hear no weak links. The playing was all of a piece.

It was also, in typical MTT fashion, bright, bold, filled with color, and impeccably controlled. The sound may not have that burnished aged-in-wood patina of some European orchestras, but neither is it "theatrical", as *Gramophone* suggested when it rated SFO as No. 13 in its survey of great orchestras (December 2008). Perhaps they consider "theatrical" anyone who follows in the footsteps of Leonard Bernstein, loves Stravinsky and Copland, and has championed the music of Gershwin and Jewish theatre.

If there is any truth in the assertion, it may refer to the fact that MTT, in his concern for structural coherence, does not always probe the emotional depths. That was certainly not the case with his emotionally riveting performance of No. 9. In no short order, a sense of tragedy overcame the Andante's lyrical opening. After an especially strong statement from offstage horns, startling drums and cymbals revealed Mahler at his most emotionally conflicted. The up-and-down topsy-turvy nature of his writing, cogently conveyed, so seized the audience that you could feel the relief as people caught their breath and adjusted themselves at the movement's conclusion.


Michael Tilson Thomas

In the second movement MTT skillfully conveyed the manic aspects of what Mahler termed the "comfortable *l„ndler*"; despite the beauty of more pastoral passages, it was impossible to escape the impression that happiness was fleeting. The biting horn opening of the Rondo-Burleske third movement paved the way for increasingly disturbing music. Even its most lyrical passages—the magical harp glissandos, for example—were soon overwhelmed by angst.

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 11

The beautiful, expansive opening of the final Adagio brought welcome but transitory relief. When Thomas (in a gesture I've rarely seen him use) opened his arms wide, the orchestra responded in kind, sounding as if they had fully opened their hearts to Mahler's plight. The emotion on the faces of many players further reflected their complete identification with the composer's struggle. Rather than the "grief gives way to peace, music and silence become one" ending that Michael Steinberg described in the program notes, the orchestra seemed to fade into nothingness. It was as though Mahler had totally surrendered to inevitable tragedy.

Although the beginning of the *Resurrection Symphony* sounded less self-consciously contrived than on SFSO's recording of it, the *marcato* cello attacks as the music got underway were precise to a fault. By contrast, the Andante Moderato (II) was so slow that it lacked lift. Music that wanted for a smile remained straight-faced. The third movement, which Mahler designated "in quietly flowing motion", built rapidly to a noisy conflagration. In the *Urlicht*, mezzo-soprano Jill Grove, replacing Sasha Cook, sang beautifully until the very end, which she cut a mite short.

The final choral movement was another mixed bag. Although the orchestra played as beautifully as ever, and the chorus sounded glorious, the passages denoting the coming of the light (the "resurrection") fell short of the mark. Soprano Karina Gauvin, who seemed ill at ease in the extremely long wait for her entrance, began exquisitely, then momentarily veered far off pitch. She recovered nicely, sang the repeat perfectly, and proceeded to open her voice in her duet with Grove to deliver some of the most beautifully impassioned, vibrant singing I've heard in a long time.

In the tremendous conclusion, the gates of heaven opened wide and blazing light poured forth. When I last heard Thomas perform this symphony at one of the recording sessions, the climax was a major disappointment. It felt as though, even with a huge chorus propelling him forward, he paused at the gates, averted his eyes, and declared, "I'm not yet ready." This time he moved forward, but without the orgasmic tension and release that make the Bernstein and Rattle recordings so thrilling. Everyone onstage seemed to give their all, but the effect was more visceral than uplifting.

The letdown continued at the performance of Symphony No. 6. When MTT conducted and recorded the symphony in September 2001, immediately after 9-11, we could feel the emotional involvement from first note to last. This time, the symphony's happier passages were more convincing than the tragic ones. Was he simply unwilling to revisit that week of intense shock and pain? For whatever reasons, the Sixth of 5-12 felt more beautifully played than deeply felt.

The San Francisco Orchestra

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 12

San Francisco Opera's Ring Cycle

Three Views

Andrea Silvestrelli (Hagen) with members of the San Francisco Opera chorus

(With the Music Critics Association holding its annual meeting last June during the first of San Francisco Opera's three Ring cycles, I asked three of ARG's writers to share their impressions. Susan Brodie covers opera often for ARG in her trips to Europe. Jason Victor Serinus, who lives in the Bay Area, knows the SF Opera well, including the single productions leading up to the complete cycle. And Richard S Ginell gave complete ARG coverage to Wagner's four operas in Los Angeles Opera's 2010-11 season. —Editor)

Susan Brodie

Francesca Zambello's Ring Cycle was originally a Washington National Opera production billed as a "Ring for America", but the company had to abandon the project for financial reasons before the final installment. San Francisco Opera seized the opportunity to complete the cycle for its first new production since 1999. It was a very good one, especially for American audiences, with just enough updating and topical relevance to tickle the intellect without thrusting the viewer into confusion or outrage.

Zambello has chosen American times and places for the settings and situations of the Nibelung myth. The Rhinemaidens were Gay 90s wenches and Alberich a gold prospector (Nibelheim is a gold mine). The gods, gathered in front of a construction site, were dressed like characters from *The Great Gatsby* (with hard hats), and their rainbow bridge to Valhalla is the gangplank to the Titanic. Hunding dwelled in a wood-frame hunting cabin straight out of *Deliverance*. Wotan was outargued by Fricka in a corporate boardroom. Brunnhilde's rock was modeled after fortifications at San Francisco's Presidio. Mime raised Siegfried in a camping trailer amply stocked with Coca-Cola and Rheingold beer. Fafner's lair was a chop shop, where Alberich, now a homeless off-the-grid terrorist living out of a shopping cart, kept watch while assembling Molotov cocktails. Gibichung Hall was a glass-walled Trump-worthy penthouse overlooking a polluted industrial skyline.

These settings served as cultural references to heighten an American viewer's connection with the themes of the work. There

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 13

was almost nothing in Zambello's staging that could be considered directorial excess. Beyond the redwood forests and parachuting WW I valkyries, this was a very traditional Ring.

Zambello's only major changes from the aborted Washington production involved a reworking of the projections, which for me proved to be the strongest cohesive element of the staging and probably the most American element, designed for a public accustomed to watching a screen. Most of the film imagery came from nature—clouds, rippling waves on the water's surface, rocks, forest—or from man-made urban or industrial scenes. Video was projected onto two full-stage-wide screens, one a scrim at the front of the proscenium that was raised during each scene to draw the audience closer to the action.

The dual-screen projections created depth and texture. Variations in the speed of movement increased Zambello's control of the viewer's experience. Projections were sometimes static, sometimes subtly moving, like a movie camera's slow close-up to suggest emotion. Orchestral intervals become background music for panoramic fly-over shots of movement through space or change of scenery, like the descent from the gods' domain to Nibelheim. As the story progressed, the projections underlined the environmental subtext with concrete imagery: the spilling of oil, the progressive despoiling of river or forest, the death of nature.

The film also leapt off the screen onto the stage in the form of special effects: a dazzling arc of sparks when Donner summoned thunder and lightning in *Rheingold*, a lightning strike as Siegmund pulled the sword from the tree in *Walkure*, an explosion when Siegfried broke the Wanderer's spear. The Magic Fire at the end of *Walkure* was the most stunning I've ever scene: real fire (requiring flame-retardant costumes and the presence of a fire marshal) surrounded Brunnhilde's rock, and projections of fire on both screens gave depth to the illusion. Dramatic shifts of stage lighting further clarifed Zambello's reading of the text with great specificity.

Even though this Ring was often staged in semi-abstract ways, Zambello dug to the emotional heart of every encounter, establishing intimacy and teasing out fresh feeling from small moments via carefully gauged small gestures and reactions. Each character interacted physically with the others, from a simple touch on the arm or clasping of hands to full embrace. This is by far the most touchy-feely Ring I've ever seen.

Wotan and Fricka were physically affectionate from their first appearance in *Rheingold* until the thwarted, angry Wotan flinched at his wife's touch in *Walkure*. Freia at first suffered the caresses of the smitten Fasolt with great unease but returned from captivity blissfully embracing him, clearly unhappy to return to the gods. Hunding and Sieglinde groped one another like teenagers. Brunnhilde breached the barrier between gods and men to embrace Siegmund at the moment she understood his love for Sieglinde. Fafner, once stabbed, descended from his trash compacter to express his (ultimate) pity and compassion for the fate of the uncomprehending Siegfried with a touch. Even Alberich and Wotan tussled *mano a mano* when they met in *Siegfried*. The constant physical engagement along with other aspects of Zambello's detailed direction infused humanity into these sometimes abstract mythological characters.

The theatrical and cinematic details were fascinating, but the success of a Ring cycle depends on the musical values. San Francisco's forces were solid but rarely rose to a thrilling level. *Rheingold* started with a lurch, as though someone had clumsily dropped the needle onto a vinyl record, and the pacing and dynamics showed limited nuance. The brass had difficulties in all four operas, and at least from my seat in the rightmost orchestra section there were strange balance problems.

Things did improve, however, over the course of the cycle. By the middle of *Walkure's* Act I the pacing became more expressive, with an urgency to the Siegmund-Sieglinde dialog that suggested lovemaking. By *Siegfried* the orchestra participated dramatically to a much greater degree. But the brass often weren't up to the task, and I heard a surprising number of intonation problems, not to mention a lack of coordination between stage and pit. The *Gotterdammerung* I heard in Paris three days later showed much greater precision and clarity of sound from the orchestra.

Casting was strong, given the voices available today. Nina Stemme was a fine and feisty Brunnhilde, though some signs of strain gave the impression of a singer not at her best. Mark Delavan's impetuous and detailed Wotan couldn't be bettered dramatically (most chilling moment: when he embraced the victorious Hunding and then nonchalantly broke his neck), but too often he was inaudible. Gordon Hawkins as Alberich was stronger both vocally and dramatically in *Siegfried* than *Walkure*. Both Siegfrieds—Jay Hunter Morris in *Siegfried* and Ian Storey in *Gotterdammerung*—looked and acted the part but had vocal problems. Brandon Jovanovich contributed youthful good looks and a strong tenor sound as Froh; in his role debut as Siegmund, he showed potential to become a Siegmund for our time. Andrea Silvestrelli was perhaps the most impressive voice in the production, a booming Fasolt (why not Fafner?) and a menacing Hagen. Melissa Citro played a knockout blonde-bimbo Gutrune (also Freia), though

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 14

vocal glamor was lacking. The Rhinemaidens—Stacey Tappan, Lauren McNeese, and Renee Tatum—sounded absolutely glorious.

Jason Victor Serinus

From June 14 to 19 San Francisco Opera presented the first of its three complete cycles of Wagner's Ring. Despite a less-than-perfect cast, the power of stage director Francesca Zambello's production, Michael Yeargan's sets, Jan Hartley and Katy Tucker's all-important projections, and the enveloping waves of Donald Runnicles's occasionally overpowering orchestral eloquence made for a haunting experience.

Much of the effectiveness of Zambello's production came from the sets and projections. All images were drawn from America's past and present. The production's unified vision owed much to its ever-engrossing projections, which contrasted the beauty of forests, canyons, water, and clouds with the ugliness of railroad tracks and soot-spewing smokestacks. What some conservative critics decried as a heavy-handed attempt to saddle Wagner's Ring with contemporary relevance instead brilliantly tapped into the audience's collective unconscious, bringing Wagner's messages of unbridled greed and abuse of the natural order to the fore.

Zambello's Ring remains, by her own admission, a work-in-process. The cycle's first three operas had their production premieres in Washington DC. Since then, she has changed emphasis. While the DC productions, taking their cue from the role the city plays in world affairs, centered on the misuse of political power, San Francisco's remounting drew on California's consciousness of nature and the environment to place more emphasis on despoliation.

In addition to reconceiving video and choreography for Act III of *Walkure*, Zambello also beefed up the conclusion of *Gotterdammerung*, which was first given in a stand-alone performance on June 5. That performance's very short-lived fizzle of a fire, which left cast members gazing off into the darkness of a bare, black stage, was given a much-needed boost of metaphorical lighter fluid by the time the opera reappeared in the complete cycle.

Zambello's meticulousness let no one get by with "stand and sing". Besides such wonders as the three perfect cartwheels and hilarious dance of Mime (the sensational David Cangelosi), Zambello's constant attention to the interplay of men and women added extra dimensions of meaning. Especially delicious were the ever-changing, often-hilarious facial expressions of Gutrune (Melissa Citro), whose droll Anna Nicole Smith-like posing compensated for wild upper notes. Just as notable were Sieglinde's (Anja Kampe) fluctuation between revulsion for Hunding (Daniel Sumegi) and futile attempts to turn him around through loving embrace, Gutrune's surprising interplay with Hagen in their brief TV-watching bed scene, and Wotan's brutality with Erda (Ronnita Miller) in their final interaction.

At the conclusion of the Immolation Scene, women briefly held the stage. After the Rhinemaidens and a very sympathetic Gutrune brought Siegfried's body to the unseen funeral pyre, the Rhinemaidens suffocated Hagen as a chorus of women watched Brunnhilde (Nina Stemme) descend to her death. Zambello's heart-touching testament to the transcendent power of sisterhood and later surprising affirmation of future resurrection linger in the memory as much as Stemme's astounding artistry.

A major vocal rebalancing act occurred between SFO's stand-alone premieres of *Siegfried* (May 29) and *Gotterdammerung* (June 5) and their complete cycle productions. Jay Hunter Morris, whose hardly-the-hero Siegfried had difficulty projecting over the orchestra on May 29, noticeably beefed up his sound for the cycle without running out of steam. Concurrently, the magnificent Stemme, who sang him into the ground on May 29, held her voice back until *Gotterdammerung's* climactic Immolation Scene. Only then did she sing with the breathtaking power and generosity of glorious tone of the individual premieres a few weeks before. Stemme's modulation was especially important on June 19 in *Gotterdammerung*, where Ian Storey as Siegfried progressively lost power owing to illness-induced dehydration. Only after treatment by a physician was he able to return to something resembling the heroic form he displayed on June 5.

Volumes could be written about Stemme's achievement. Despite short-shifting a few top notes and fudging her trills, her string of high Cs in her 'Hijatoho' entrance were dispatched with the carefree impetuosity of youth. The contrast with Delavan's performance—well-nuanced, but lacking in volume and physically congested—was unfortunate.

Just as disappointing was Brandon Jovanovich's deliciously hunky, initially promising Siegmund, which failed to build tension; his crucial interplay with Kampe had all the intimacy of lovemaking by cell phone. Indeed, besides Stemme, it was Stefan Margita's ever-insinuating Loge, Cangelosi's superbly sung and acted Mime, Silvestrelli's towering dark-voiced Hagen, Stacey Tappan's endearing Forest Bird, and the superbly bal-

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 15

anced Rhinemaidens trio (including Tappan) that deserve the most accolades.

Richard S Ginell

Last year, Los Angeles made its first homegrown attempt at staging a complete Wagner Ring cycle, beating upstate rival San Francisco to the punch, even though the SF Ring was launched a year before LA's. But in the end, San Francisco Opera, whose Ring performance tradition dates back to 1935, had the last word in almost every way. Here was a screwball concept with a huge emotional payoff because stage director Francesca Zambello took the trouble to develop her ideas along the lines of what Wagner wrote (what a novel notion!).

Whereas the LA stage director Achim Freyer didn't particularly care about Wagner's characters—or whether *you* cared about them, Zambello had her cast probe deeply into their personalities, virtues, faults, passions, and capacities for growth. Whereas Freyer set his Ring on some kind of cold, alien planet populated by hideous caricatures, Zambello's Ring—with its American settings from the 19th Century to the present and near future—connected with its intended audience on a familiar human level. Whereas Freyer's cast was hamstrung and straitjacketed by his rigid staging—sometimes no better than a concert performance with pictures, Zambello's singing actors were encouraged to develop all kinds of physical actions and nuances, large and small, that illuminated the storyline and libretto.

Zambello has said that her Ring conception evolved over time into a fable about the destruction of the environment. Indeed, *Rheingold* looked different from and felt more unified than the stand-alone performance in 2008. I sensed less emphasis on the California Gold Rush origins of the tale and more on the pristine natural world that is gradually darkened by civilization's pollution and waste as the cycle proceeded. There were cinematic references (the *West Side Story* Siegmund-Hunding street fight under a crumbling freeway overpass stands out), lots of weird humor (Siegfried slaying the 2-1/2-ton scrap-metal-compactor "dragon" by short-circuiting it with his sword; Gutrune and Alberich playing with a TV remote control in a modern, super-sleek Marriott-like hotel; the parachuting Valkyries), and recurring social themes (people who lost control of the ring often ended up homeless, when not dead).

Granted, Zambello indulged in a speculative agenda of having no less than three female characters (Freia, Sieglinde, and Gutrune) feeling attracted to dangerous men (Fasolt, Hunding, and Hagen). Yet, in Gutrune's case, I found that it contributed to the power of the production, as it set the stage for Gutrune's unusual development from a bored wanton vamp into a high-minded handmaiden to Brunnhilde's and the Rhinemaidens' redemption of the world. Indeed Zambello's conclusion to *Gotterdammerung* was quite touching—a small child planting a single sapling after the end of the gods, which, unlike Freyer's sickening dismantling of his set, meshed with what Wagner's music says. Zambello made us feel good walking out of the opera house, whereas with Freyer one regretted not packing those stale tomatoes one was saving for just the proper occasion.

Beyond the staging, there were two triumphant performances in this Ring that will be remembered for a long time. One came from the pit. While *Rheingold* was considerably better-paced and more emphatic in rhythm than the 2008 performance, Donald Runnicles kicked things into an even higher gear in the closing minutes of Act II of *Walkure*, and he rode that wave through the rest of the cycle. Probably his greatest moment occurred at the closing heights of the Brunnhilde-Siegfried love duet in *Gotterdammerung*; he took off in recklessly thrilling overdrive, nearly losing control, but his excellent orchestra saw it through. He was more of a racehorse than a brooding philosopher in this Ring, but there are few that are as good at it as he is these days.

The other big triumph was Nina Stemme as Brunnhilde, where the promise she showed in 2010s SFO *Walkure* blossomed in her first complete cycle. Here was a strong, ample-voiced, steady heldensoprano in a compact body, a playful tomboy Brunnhilde who never entirely lost that aspect even as she acquired wisdom and maturity.

Mark Delavan's now-and-then powerful Wotan did not eclipse memories of James Morris and Thomas Stewart from the 1985 SFO Ring; nor could either of the Siegfrieds (Jay Hunter Morris in *Siegfried* and the -indisposed Ian Storey in *Gotterdammerung*) keep pace with Stemme's Brunnhilde. But there were ample compensations elsewhere: Andrea Silvestrelli's genuine bass Hagen, Gordon Hawkins's burly bullying Alberich, David Cangelosi's almost lyrical Mime, and Anja Kampe's pointed, lustrous Sieglinde.

One could also single out Brandon Jovanovich's youthful Siegmund for cheers; but Los Angeles easily trumped San Francisco with its incomparable Placido Domingo as Siegfried. It was one of only a few instances where the LARing wasn't outpointed by the gripping competition from the Bay Area.

Sig01arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:46 PM Page 16

Ascension's New Pascal Quoirin Organ

French and Baroque Traditions on Display

Susan Brodie

Manton Memorial Organ, 3-Manual Mechanical Action Core Console

With the installation of the Manton Memorial Organ, the Church of the Ascension in Manhattan's Greenwich Village has enhanced its long tradition of musical and artistic excellence. On May 5 American Jon Gillick, a Messiaen specialist long associated with this church, inaugurated the new instrument with a concert of 19th and 20th Century French music on the larger of its two component organs.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 17

The design was developed by the firm of Pascal Quoirin of St-Didier, France, in conjunction with Gillock and Ascension Music Director Dennis Keene, who sought an instrument suitable for the widest possible repertoire. It is a novel two-in-one: a large electric-action four-manual French 19th-Century one and a smaller tracker-action three-manual baroque style organ. They share pipes. (A technical description with registration details and photographs are available on the builder's website: www.atelier-quoirin.com.)

The handsome consoles and pipes, at the front of the church, are decorated with stylized art nouveau trim that harmonizes with the sober yet rich Gothic revival interior of the church (a national historic landmark), remodeled in the 1880s by McKim, Meade, and White. Hand-carved birds decorating the pipe cases honor Olivier Messiaen, who drew inspiration from birdsong.

This concert was a good survey of music conceived for the classic French organ as developed by 19th-Century maker Aristide Cavaille-Coll, with its greatly expanded sound palette. The tradition is rigorous in the musical and instrumental skills demanded, dynastic in the succession of the most important organist jobs (giving access to the best instruments), and, with much of the music written for the Catholic church, rooted in faith. Composers represented on the program formed a roll call of the most important practitioners of this art.

For the concert the large, curved four-manual console was moved from its normal position at the front of the left aisle to sit in front of the altar with the keyboard facing the pews at a slight angle. Most organ recitalists play seated in an organ loft, almost invisible, so it was an unusual view. Gillock walked out, bowed modestly, turned his back, removed his jacket (revealing a spiffy brocade waistcoat), and slipped onto the bench to play.

Marcel Dupré's *Cortege and Litany* started softly, sounding like a processional heard through the doors of a country church. An opening four-note bell-like motif expanded to a folk-like theme that lent itself to shifting meters and an array of tone colors showing off the registrations, as the sound swelled to a powerful finish. It was followed by the more formally structured Prelude, Fugue, and Variation by Cesar Franck, which gave a fuller sense of the symphonic capabilities of the instrument as well as Gillock's nimble control of the pedals.

A trademark of the French organ school is improvisation; Conservatoire students still get a thorough grounding in keyboard harmony and counterpoint that enables them to improvise for unpredictable amounts of time during church services. Past masters of this art drew large audiences eager to hear their extended improvisations on a theme supplied to the soloist at the last minute. Transcriptions of two such improvisations, notated from recordings, gave the nod to Notre Dame organist Pierre Cochereau (1924-84), who crafted boldly dissonant variations on a lullaby by the organist Louis Vierne, and to Charles Tournemire (1870-1939), titulaire at St-Clothilde, whose colorful, episodic improvisations on the *Te Deum* were transcribed by his famous student Maurice Duruflé.

A second, longer piece from Franck's Opus 18, *Priere*, showed the more improvisational and expressive side of the disciplined contrapuntalist. A hymn-like opening moved into more lyrical rising figures; after a solo recitative on a trumpet stop, the opening theme returns, with more perfumed harmonies and embellishments. Its harmonies have a kinship with Fauré's sinuous but stable progressions, but Franck's more flamboyant colors were undoubtedly developed during his tenure as organist at St-Clothilde, home to a major Cavaille-Coll instrument. In this repertoire, those who have it flaunt it, and the composers who played major instruments took full advantage of their possibilities. Even more than other composers, Franck allowed the listener to taste the brass and reeds in a range of octaves, but all for expressive ends. With its careening emotional highs and lows and its wall-of-sound finish, this music puts the lie to the notion of French restraint. Gillock, to his credit, mixed registrations with taste as well as exuberance.

The final two pieces were excerpts from *La Nativité du Seigneur* by Olivier Messiaen, an inspiration for this organ's design. This relatively early collection already shows the composer's musical language, with palindromic rhythmic figures, bird-like twitterings, and polytonal harmonic progressions celestial in flavor. The music was well served by the instrument.

In some respects a large symphonic organ is overkill in a relatively small church like Ascension, only a fraction of the size of the Cathedral of Notre Dame or Messiaen's Trinité. In this space even a fortissimo climax with a long-held final chord lacks the thunderous, bone-tingling amplitude and the ethereal after-buzz of clashing overtones that linger in a larger, more resonant space (Ascension's reverberation time is only three seconds). But it's a gorgeous instrument that will have no shortage of recitalists eager to play it.

Organ music may never again see the rock star prestige enjoyed by the flamboyant Virgil Fox; but the Manton Memorial Organ, the first French symphonic organ built in New York in more than 50 years, should spark plenty of interest among people already steeped in this relatively esoteric world. The Bach concert later in the month on the smaller console should offer an interesting contrast.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 18

Leslie Kandell

In the life of a church, a new organ is a momentous and costly venture, calling for time-intensive study and choice of styles, fundraising, and introductory booklets with elegant photographs. The Church of the Ascension made significant indoor and outdoor renovations before the instrument's arrival and assembling; the organist world buzzed.

Ascension is Fifth Avenue's oldest church, dedicated in 1841. Its organist, Dennis Keene, insisted that the instrument's stature, pipes, and sound fit with Richard Upjohn's architecture, John Lafarge's huge altar mural, and windows of stained glass by Lafarge and Louis Comfort Tiffany. Churchgoers pay attention to surroundings because usually the console and player can barely be seen from the pews.

The Manton Memorial Organ is named for Sir Edwin and Lady Manton, philanthropic British parishioners and next-door neighbors. After scouring the United States and Europe for a builder, Keene chose the firm of Pascal Quoirin, near Dijon, France. The organ is the first French-built one in the United States, and a series of inaugural recitals and choral concerts took place in May and June.

The second recital—and first New York appearance by Francis Chapelet—was on the tracker. It was a program of baroque works from France, Spain (where Chapelet was a professor), and Germany. Germany won in a walk—how could it not, represented by Bach and Buxtehude?

Chapelet had a young assistant in tow (Bach always had a boy to help with registration—so did they all, really). The *Livre d'Orgue*, by Bach's contemporary Pierre Dumage, was instructive rather than inspired, but it displayed the instrument, starting with a commandingly full *plein jeu*. Each movement was preceded by a verse of the Magnificat in Gregorian chant, sung by the men of Cerddorion, a volunteer chorus.

The imposing Fugue revealed the lower manual trumpet stop; the trio, the upper manual small high stop. Other movements demonstrated ornaments, ostinatos with hands and feet, bass trumpet stop range, and breathy treble effects on manuals without pedals. It ended with predictable grandeur.

Musically, *Tiento par Alamire* by Juan Cabanilles didn't hold me at all, but it did show off brilliant reed overtones and horizontal trumpet.

The bar doesn't get any higher than Bach's late Prelude and *Wedge* Fugue, as well as the concert's concluding Prelude and *St Anne* Triple Fugue. I was transported to another world that had nothing to do with music criticism, except to suggest, "Why don't those other composers just go home?"

Registration in Buxtehude's *Come Holy Spirit* exposed an assertive nasal melody over a low muted accompaniment. Though the tremblant was audible, the fugue had immense clarity. Played again as an encore after the mighty Bach, it somehow sounded more French; Chapelet was having a master's good time.

So, thanks to devoted and varied contributors for a gift that doesn't so much usher in a new era for this church as it does a new dimension.

Manton Memorial Organ, 4-Manual Electric Action Console (left), 3-Manual Mechanical Action Core Console (right)

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 19

Spoleto USA

Renewed Venues, Renewed Spirit

Perry Tannenbaum

The Magic Flute
Marie Arnet as Pamina and Fabio Trumpy as Tamino

Just a few years ago, the venues at Spoleto Festival USA and the men leading their choral and chamber music programs had one glaring similarity: they were elderly and showing their age. Historical preservation is an ancient article of faith in Charleston, but when temperatures topped 95 degrees, keeping the faith could be oppressive for festival goers, particularly at Memminger Auditorium and Dock Street Theatre.

Then a refreshing wave of renovations began. In 2006 Memminger closed for two years. It returned with a sensational salvage of Anthony Davis's *Amidstad* in an arena staging that surrounded the infamous slave ship with audience and orchestra. Memminger's versatility also made it the home of the lunchtime chamber music series while the Dock Street venue underwent renovation. Dock Street, the hub of Spoleto's chamber music, small-scale opera, and theatre, returned in 2010 with quieter air conditioning and more comfortable seats. In 2012 Gaillard Auditorium will undergo a three-year remodeling, steering it in a radically retro course by shedding its airplane hangar ambiance and hearkening back to the rounder, more ornate opera halls of the Victorian Era with aisles in the middle and boxes on the sides, praise God!

Meanwhile, there has been an infusion of youth in the musical leadership. Geoff Nuttall, the flamboyant first violinist of the festival's resident string quartet, the St Lawrence, has succeeded the beloved Charles Wadsworth as director of chamber music. And John Kennedy, once confined to hosting the contemporary Music in Time series, has become the resident Festival Orchestra conductor, following Emmanuel Villaume's departure. Although Joseph Flummerfelt continues as director of choral activities, he no longer presides over the Westminster Choir concerts. Yet his participation actually increased this year. He led the choral-orchestral concert of Bruckner's *Te Deum* and Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* and authoritatively conducted *The Medium* by festival founder Gian Carlo Menotti.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 20

Mozart's *Magic Flute* offered a respite from the modernistic tilt of this year's Spoleto lineup. Emphasizing the comic, stage directors Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier tossed in liberal dollops of discordant Eurotrash. Baritone Ruben Drole made his entrance as Papageno accompanied by trained *un*caged birds—and with appropriately-named soprano Audrey Luna flying in as the Queen of the Night perched on a crescent moon. And when Tamino formally took his magic flute, *die zauberflöte* actually floated magically through the air.

Drole and Luna also sang better than Fabio Trümpy and Marie Arnet as Tamino and Pamina. Thanks to a supersized pair of platform shoes, bass-baritone Kevin Short was a 12-foot-tall Sarastro; his Masonic cult uniforms were sinister gray business suits. In Act II Leiser and Caurier poured on the dark magic, calling on Flying by Foy to give the Three Spirits flashier roles and supplying Pamina with a special lift when the trio visited her in her despondency.

Sottile Theatre, a College of Charleston property, had been out of the Spoleto mix since 2008. Now in mid-renovation, Leiser and Caurier made heavy use of its wonders by using the trapdoors through which the Queen of the Night vanished and Tamino re-entered and exited during his climactic trials. In his farcical despair Papageno was handsomely furnished with a rope that dangled comically from the fly loft; he was relieved by the arrival of a transformed Papagena clinging to the other end of that rope as she rose from below. Despite its drab Eurotrash detour and conductor Steven Sloane's lack of freshness, this staging was very human and much fun.

The Menotti peace offering at the renovated Dock Street Theatre showed off the facility's technical assets to better advantage than the theatrical productions mounted there. In fact, Flummerfelt's work with the Spoleto Orchestra, paired with John Pascoe's direction and production design, amounted to near-ideal advocacy of *The Medium*, the composer's most dramatic piece. Pascoe's set, with all sorts of surreal furnishings floating high above it, presented Madame Flora's seance parlor as a huge, dark warehouse space, lavishly rimmed with mirrors and ripe for haunting. Where the ghosts might come from became clear enough when the huge warehouse door slid open, and a bombed-out cityscape loomed Dresden-like in the background.

Pascoe's costumes faithfully picked up the postwar ambience, and the work's most notable aria, 'Monica's Waltz', chimed well with the gumbo of gothic and film-noir scenic elements.

Mezzo Barbara Dever combined the fire and harrowing vulnerabilities of Flora so naturally that, sometimes, it seemed Stephanie Blythe was performing. As Flora's daughter, soprano Jennifer Aylmer's delivery was short on youthful vitality or ruefulness. So was her rapport with her mother and mute pseudo-sibling, Toby. Menotti apparently had a weakness for delicate, debilitated boys like Toby; but this servant lad, infused with pathos by Gregg Mozgala, put an ice-pack on any romantic flames between him and Monica. The two teens worked best together in helping to dupe Flora's clientele in the opening scene. Stephen Bryant and Caitlin Lynch sang well enough as the couple that communes with their lost two-year-old son, but there was too little music or character development for them to excel. Even less was written for Jennifer Feinstein as Mrs Nolan, but I appreciated what she brought to the table when her gullibility was fed by Aylmer's sotto voce impersonation of her daughter. The message of *The Medium* could hardly have been better served, except that, English or not, the production screamed for supertitles.

Even more definitive was soprano Elizabeth Futral's performance in the title role of Kaija Saariaho's opera, *Emilie*. After a moody overture, adroitly led by Kennedy, Futral took the stage at Memminger and dominated it for the full 75 minutes. With a luxurious chaise on one side of the stage and a writing desk on the other, we were offered generous samplings of Emilie du Chatelet's amorous career and intellectual powers. She would soon die in childbirth, but her instincts told her she must complete her translation of Newton's *Principia* without delay. That's about all the tension that this monodrama can produce, except for all the beauties of Saariaho's sometimes turbulent, mesmerizing score.

The visuals by video designer Austin Switser lifted the lyricism of the spectacle to an even loftier realm. Projected onto a modernistic array of canvas triangles that set designer Neal Wilkinson brashly contrasted with period furnishings, these visuals ranged from Emilie's writings to male-female interactions, physics formulas, and Newton's calculations of solar bodies—a heady mix of powerpoint and movie. Switching abruptly from spoken to sung passages, and even from French to English, Futral was never upstaged by the light show that enveloped her. Truly exciting.

Now in his second year as chamber music director, Nuttall is doing things more *his* way. For the first time, the complete set of 11 programs was printed, but still without the performers' names. In a gray suit jacket that conjured up Robert E Lee, the dapper Nuttall also displayed a nuanced grasp of tradition. While his attire reminded us that Charleston was commemorating the opening of the Civil War 150 years ago, his introductory remarks lin-

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 21

gered on the festival's celebration of Menotti's centennial, reminding us that the concluding piece of the day, Schubert's String Quintet, was Menotti's invariable choice for concluding the festival he founded.

With Saariaho and composer-in-residence Osvaldo Golijov in the audience, Nuttall stamped Spoleto 2011 as the richest ever in modern chamber music. Four programs included at least one piece by Golijov, building up to the majestic *Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind*, played by clarinetist Todd Palmer and the St Lawrence Quartet. And if *Emilie* and a full Music in Time concert devoted to Saariaho weren't enough, another macabre peep at her work was offered in Program 2 with *Oi Kuu* (For the Moon), a duo where cellist Christopher Constanza had Palmer squeezing forth challenging multiphonics on a bass clarinet. The 11 programs also had works by Shostakovich, Cage, Barber, Britten, Ricky Ian Gordon, and Tom Johnson.

Program 10 was the most emblematic of the five I attended. It began with a piano quintet by Louise Farrenc (1804-75) that double bassist Anthony Manzo suggested because it has the same lineup as Schubert's *Trout Quintet* that he'd be playing on the final program. Each of Farrenc's four movements was a pleasant discovery, though the Scherzo, beginning with a Mendelssohnian thrust and culminating with Beethovenian agitation, was the most memorable.

Then Manzo was thrust into the spotlight with Johnson's *Failing: A Very Difficult Piece for Solo String Bass* and its entertaining recipe for failure: Manzo was not only obliged to play increasingly difficult music but was also required to *read* an increasingly dense text printed like song lyrics in his score, meditating with absurdist self-regard on the success he was having in achieving the failure that Johnson had ordained for him.

In the performance I had most eagerly awaited, violinist Livia Sohn and pianist Pedja Muzijevic took on Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*. In the opening *sturm und drang*, the duo matched up well against the magisterial account I had heard at the Savannah Music Festival ten weeks earlier from Daniel Hope and Sebastian Knauer. Sohn's phrasing was somewhat clipped by comparison, contrasts less keen, but her attack had its own noble ardor. In the Andante, Sohn seemed to lose the conviction necessary to sustain the movement. Even though Muzijevic grew in strength behind her, Sohn showed little sign of recovering her confidence and joy in the closing Presto.

Muzijevic's fire was unalloyed the following afternoon in Schubert's *Trout*, where he and Nuttall dominated in a zesty partnership.

EMILIE
Elizabeth Futral as Emilie du Chatelet

Beforehand baritone Tyler Duncan and pianist Inon Barnatan performed Schubert's song, basis for the quintet's fourth movement. Duncan's work was not done until he taught the melody to the audience and had us stand up and hum it.

If he hadn't put in that extra effort, Duncan would have been upstaged by bravura cellist Alisa Weilerstein (with Barnatan) performing Paganini's *Moses Phantasy* on a single string, achieving every effect possible from such scant means. Nuttall's colorful introduction—how Paganini composed it on a broken-down instrument while incarcerated, cunningly rigging it to spontaneously lose its strings in performance—immensely increased the pleasure. Our amazement might have increased if he had mentioned that the *Phantasy* had originally been composed for the more easily traversed violin. Maybe Weilerstein had kept that little secret to herself.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 22

Boston Early Music Festival

Dart and Deller Would Be Proud

John Ehrlich

The Boston-area air crackles with palpable anticipation in the days before each biyearly Boston Early Music Festival, and so it was last June at this world-class meeting of early music minds and artists.

There were the expected premiere of a long-neglected baroque opera, soloists and ensembles of many stripes, revivals of past performances, and exhibitions of instrument builders, music publishers, and other ancillary early music operations. There were late-night concerts for diehard connoisseurs intent on discovery. In short, from the June 12 opening night to the June 27 out-of-town final performance in Great Barrington, there was nonstop activity. The overall high level of proficiency and variety of repertoire would stagger a Thurston Dart or Alfred Deller, though they would have been pleased.

This year's North American baroque opera premiere was Agostino Steffani's *Niobe, Regina de Tebe*. The hero of the opera, whose story actually upstages the title queen, is her husband Anfione, a musician whose utterances are so potent that they charm the rocks of the countryside to form a protective phalanx about the city of Thebes. Philippe Jaroussky, the countertenor of prodigious vocal gifts who played Anfione, was particularly effective in the remarkable scene where he envisions a "palace of harmony" where he would retire from his kingly responsibilities, imagining the music of the spheres and the planets in their heavenly orbits. In a particularly telling musical gesture, Steffani offers an offstage consort of viols as the ethereal accompaniment. This stopped the show—a tribute to singer and composer both.

Soprano Amanda Forsythe handily performed the dramatically unsympathetic role of Niobe, who is vain and impolite to her courtly associates and thinks she is superior to the gods, which leads to her undoing. For her impertinences, the gods impassively hurl bolts of lightning earthward that fatally strike her three hapless children and turn Niobe into stone.

I was astonished by the melodic and dramatic gifts of this relatively unknown composer. It was handsomely staged by the very gifted designer Gilbert Blin, whose work seems only to improve with each festival (an interview with Blin can be viewed at http://classicalscene.com/2011/06/18/scene-for-bemf's-niobe/) and so well projected by the BEMF

Amanda Forsythe

Orchestra. The production was a testament to Stephen Stubbs and Paul O'Dette, who led the ensemble and continue to unearth worthy baroque operas.

The other baroque opera was Handel's 1718 chamber version of *Acis and Galatea*, which BEMF had first presented to great acclaim in 2009. Galatea, the wood nymph, is in love with the shepherd Acis. But the jealous one-eyed giant, Polyphemus, wants Galatea for himself. As happens so often when mortals dally with gods or seductive woodland creatures, tragedy ensues when the heatedly jealous Polyphemus hurls a large rock at Acis, who promptly expires. All is not lost, though, as Galatea, reminded that she has divine powers, grants Acis immortality, transforming his mortal remains into a burbling stream.

Soprano Teresa Wakim sang the role of Galatea elegantly and gracefully. She assumed positions on stage that looked as if they were lifted directly from an oil painting of the period. Tenor Aaron Sheehan sang and acted handsomely as Acis. Both had pleasingly light, lyric voices that were ideally suited to their roles and blended perfectly in duets. Baritone Douglas Williams was the amusing, terrifying, blustery Polyphemus, yet he sang with a pleasing elegance. Jason McStoots and Michael

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 23

Kelly, tenors of uncommon accomplishment in baroque style and tonal beauty, were the shepherds Damon and Corison. The costumes, designed by Anna Watkins, were sumptuous and richly adorned. Once again, Gilbert Blin's simple yet very artful stage set, rustically pastoral yet Versailles-like in its richness of clouds above and woods below, was a model of creating lushness with modest means.

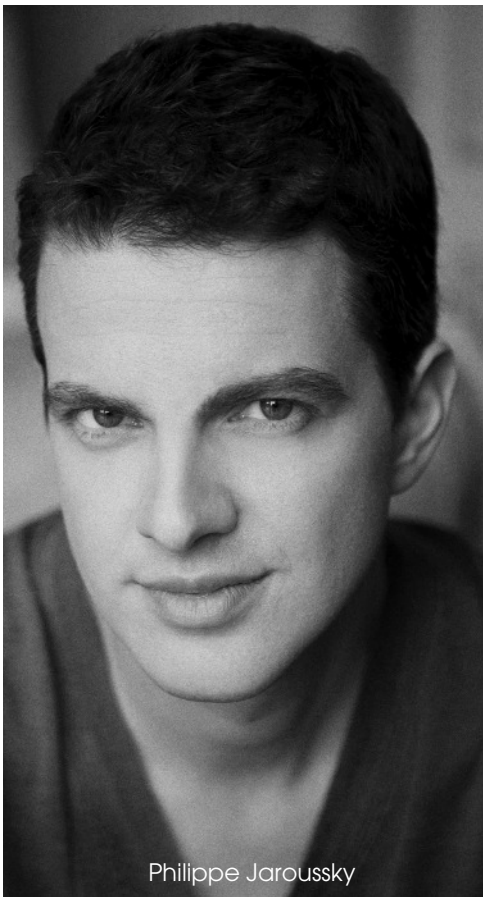
It would be hard to imagine a tighter and more colorful band of early instrumentalists than violinist Cynthia Roberts, cellist Phoebe Carrai, violonist Robert Nairn, bassoonist Mathieu Lussier, harpsichordist Avi Stein, archlutenist Paul O'Dette, and the extraordinary Gonzalo Ruiz and Kathryn Montoya playing oboes and recorders, all co-led by baroque violinist Robert Nealy and Stephen Stubbs, master of all things strummed and plucked from theorbo to guitar. And, what music! One gorgeous aria or chorus after another! The sheer fecundity of Handel's gifts of melody and drama was amazing.

Fortepianist Kristian Bezuidenhout and three members of the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra played Mozart at Jordan Hall with dazzling results. After a thoughtful, well-paced, deeply felt performance of the Fantasia, K 475, Bezuidenhout was joined by violinist Petra Müllejans, violist Gottfried von der Goltz, and cellist Kristin von der Goltz for Mozart's two piano quartets. Their joy was audible as well as visible; their ensemble was the product of one creative mind. The exquisite, richly voiced fortepiano, built by Rodney J Regier of Freeport, Maine, had an especially delectable pianissimo.

Two superb English vocal ensembles presented fascinating programs. The latest iteration of the King's Singers elicited the following well parsed statement from the Boston *Globe's* Matthew Guerrieri: "The King's Singers have been around for over 40 years, the Boston Early Music Festival for 30, but it took until Tuesday (June 14) to bring the two together. Though famous as free-range omnivores, crossing styles and genres, at the core of the Singers' sound is renaissance music, the basis of their BEMF debut."

Indeed! Their fascinating program interlaced the 1592 Italian collection of vocal works called *Il Trionfo di Dori* with madrigals drawn from the 1601 British publication *The Triumphs of Oriana* assembled by the great English madrigalist Thomas Morley. The works share an approach to their refrains: each of the Italian works closes with "Viva la bella Dori", while the parallel British refrain is "Long live fair Oriana".

The concert's second half brought forth Janequin's earthy *Cris de Paris* and his onomatopoetic *La Guerre*, where the singers recreated the sounds of battle to great and amusing effect. A King's Singers' specialty, Alessandro Striggio's *Gioco di Primiera*, was offered as a substantial encore, a tour de force where a vigorous Italian card game is theatrically reenacted with props.


Philippe Jaroussky

Offering a completely different sonority, Peter Philips's Tallis Scholars, with their honed, chaste, and pure sound, presented a program of the great Spanish renaissance master Tomas Luis de Victoria, including the *O Magnum Mysterium* Mass, the first three *Lamentations for Good Friday*, and—what for me was the evening's high point—the exquisite *Salve Regina*. They also performed music by Sebastian de Vivanco, a contemporary of Victoria: the *Magnificat Octavi Toni* and the motet 'Sicut Lilium'. I am not among those who think the Tallis Scholars the holy grail of renaissance choral singing. Too much straight-toned vocal production began to wear on me after an hour or so.

BEMF has already announced its next baroque opera for June 2013: Christoph Graupner's *Antiochus und Stratonica*. O'Dette, Stubbs, and Blin will return.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 24

Mighty Los Angeles Master Chorale

Triumphing in Brahms to Ellington

Richard S Ginell

The mighty Los Angeles Master Chorale does double service at Walt Disney Concert Hall, both as the chorus-of-choice for the Los Angeles Philharmonic and on its own concert series. Sometimes both functions coincide, and so Disney Hall was the place to hear the Master Chorale in two almost completely different settings in May.

One concert was part of a concept that the Phil's Gustavo Dudamel inherited from Esa-Pekka Salonen, the "Unbound" series, where complete symphonic cycles by the big names are juxtaposed with present-day works for contrast and context. But Dudamel's first attempt at this kind of programming, "Brahms Unbound", came unbound through no fault of his own. All three world premieres by blue-chip composers were cancelled: Henryk Gorecki died before he could finish his Symphony No. 4; Peter Lieberson lost his battle with lymphoma, leaving his Percussion Concerto unfinished; and Osvaldo Golijov couldn't meet the deadline for his Violin Concerto.

That left only Sofia Gubaidulina's strange, sprawling percussion concerto, *Glorious Percussion* (a US premiere), and Steven Mackey's *Beautiful Passing* from the originally announced contemporary lineup. And it was Mackey's work that was coupled with Brahms's *German Requiem* on May 12 for an evening-long meditation on the theme of death.

Mackey originally intended to write a rip-roaring, rock-em-sock-em violin concerto for Leila Josefowicz, but his mother's death in 2008 turned his muse inward. "Please tell everyone I had a beautiful passing" were his mother's last words, and, after Josefowicz was given serene multiple-stops and trills against jazzy, raucous orchestral backtalk based on the six-note New Jersey Transit ticket machine jingle (!), Mackey eventually managed to unite everyone into a lovely mellow reverie that gradually faded away. We weren't given a chance to find out if Mackey's music could stand on its own without hearing his touching story about the motivation for the piece. So in this stacked emotional deck, the concluding reverie went down best. The remarkable Josefowicz, increasingly our go-to person for new violin pieces, was in full command.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 25

Then Dudamel made a powerful case for the Requiem, conducting without a score as he does for just about every large-scale romantic work. When Brahms wanted the tempos slow, Dudamel added the word "molto" and slowed things down even more, while kicking up the pace in appropriate passages with an infectious vigor that drew parallels with Beethoven. There was even some wildness in the third movement fugue and the central rallying point of the sixth movement, held together by a firm rhythmic underpinning. There were a few idiosyncratic hesitations in the first two movements (one might have wanted more compassion and Zen there), but things evened out the rest of the way. Matthias Goerne's sonorous, solid, Rock-of-Ages baritone was in great form; while soprano Christine Schäfer sounded luminous in timbre but a bit uncertain in pitch at first. While the Philharmonic played well, and the organ pedals produced a satisfying deep rumble that vibrated pleasantly through Disney Hall's wood surfaces, the real star of this performance was the Master Chorale, rich-textured, dynamically sensitive, and outstanding in every department.

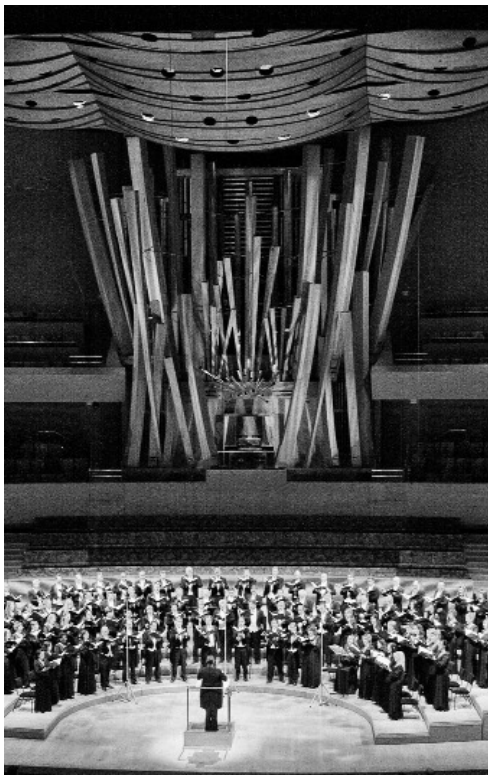
Shifting into a more life-affirming gear on its own series ten days later, the Master Chorale turned to Duke Ellington. In his last decade, feeling the tug of his sincere religious faith and impending mortality, Ellington assembled three "Sacred Concerts" from a pile of newly-composed pieces plus bits of this and that from various stages of his long career. These "Concerts" are an inimitable American goulash of many things—hot big-band jazz, gospel, Afro-Cuban rhythms, a cappella chorales, solo ruminations on piano or drums, even a concerto for tap dancer—all tied together with Ellington's harmonic and tone-color signatures, a brace of good tunes, and a big serving of showbiz.

Fusing jazz with Christianity was a hot industry in the mid-1960s, triggered in part by all of the "Is God dead?" talk and queries about whether the church was "relevant" anymore, so Ellington caught flak from both the jazz corner and hard-line religious figures.

The attacks left their mark. The trilogy was still one of the better-kept secrets of the Ellington catalog when Master Chorale Music Director Grant Gershon and jazz composer-conductor-Ellington buff James Newton presented their first Sacred Concert at Disney Hall in March 2004. For me, that concert was the high point of Gershon's tenure. When he and Newton did another last May, it was just as spine-tingling, exuberant, and emotional the second time.

Ellington himself probably never encountered a chorus as unified, flexible, and glowing in sound as the Master Chorale—*and* they can really swing. They were driven by a power-house rhythm section with the same personnel as in 2004. The big band on hand, which Newton led with leaping gestures alongside Gershon's command of the voices, was stocked with skilled jazzers who played with wild abandon. Maybe this wasn't quite the authentic Ellington sound (it never could be, for the Duke wrote specifically for the quirks of his casually-curated collection of oddball soloists), but it could come amazingly close. And without a doubt, it was strong enough to rock the house.

This combination made every selection sound like a stand-alone masterpiece; a visibly awed Gershon exclaimed after three numbers, "We go from mountaintop to mountaintop." In some cases, they were able to surpass the performances on Ellington's own recordings. One in particular was the lyrically preachy 'Something 'Bout Believing' where the Master Chorale could illuminate inner harmonies that transformed the song into something sublime. There is a lot more from the Sacred Music concerts that this concert didn't cover, but Gershon and Newton chose most of the best stuff the first time out in 2004, and, with the exceptions of one deletion and two additions, they didn't tamper with success in 2011. As a result, there is now a second twin mountaintop in the Gershon era.



Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 26

Buffalo Phil: Premieres Without Pain

Tyberg Symphony, Hagen Concerto

Herman Trotter

The Buffalo Philharmonic's 75th anniversary season (Mar/Apr 2011) has been a festive one where Music Director JoAnn Falletta opened brilliantly with Midori in Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, followed by Elgar's Cello Concerto in Lynn Harrell's heartwarming performance, an electrifying Concerto for Orchestra by Lutoslawski, a spectacular *Planets* by Holst with projections of each planet, and Verdi's Requiem to conclude the season. But what left the most indelible memories in my mind was Falletta's quite remarkable feat of presenting, in consecutive programs, premieres of a significant symphony rediscovered and a new violin concerto that did not cost the orchestra a nickel.

Here's how: regular readers of ARG know that for several years Falletta and the BPO have been at the center of the emergence from total obscurity of works by Vienna-born composer Marcel Tyberg, who was put to death at Auschwitz on December 31, 1944, despite being a practicing Catholic with only 1/16th Jewish ancestry. His entire life's work, however, had been entrusted to the family of one of his composition students, Enrico Mihich, who eventually moved to Buffalo and became a world-renowned cancer researcher, all the while safeguarding Tyberg's scores in his attic.

When he shared this trove with JoAnn Falletta, it marked the beginning of Tyberg's emergence. She led the world premiere of his Symphony No. 3 (1943) in 2008 and recorded it for Naxos (Nov/Dec 2010). For the 75th anniversary Falletta chose to unveil his Symphony No. 2 (1931) on April 30.

Tyberg was by nature introverted and retiring, desperately concerned with composing but quite oblivious to any need to have his music published or even performed. After conductor Rafael Kubelik, a friend of the Tyberg family, saw his Symphony No. 2, he performed it in Prague sometime in the early 1930s with the Czech Philharmonic. Shortly before Kubelik died, he confirmed to Mihich that it was the world premiere, but any printed trace of the performance seems to have been obliterated by World War II. The BPO's performances constituted the Western hemisphere premiere, and the music fully justified Kubelik's high opinion of it.

Tyberg was a no-nonsense composer. His musical ideas are cogent, often absorbing, and are developed with a clear sense of logic that leads the listener, almost effortlessly, to their conclusion. Once Tyberg has stated his case, the music, without extraneous pomp or grandiosity, just says goodbye with a succinct, fascinating coda. This is warm, bracing music from the trailing edge of romanticism.

Symphony No. 2 is more expansive and perhaps a bit more from the heart than the more concise and pointed No. 3. The opening Allegro Appassionato speaks first in pianissimo spiccato strings, answered by brusque lower strings, and seems largely propelled by an elevated sense of ceremony. The rhythms and voicing seem pleasantly Brucknerian, and as the music unfolds there are lovely quiet connecting interludes in the winds and brassy declamations that develop into extended ruminations, capped by a quick quiet close.

The slow movement is the quintessence of its marking, "langsam". It is searchingly meditative with a mellow, pensive theme and some adventurous harmonies. It radiates a sense of purpose or direction and is guided by a strong inner voice and superbly balanced instrumental colors. A surprising descending string glissando leads to warm horn commentary and another aptly prompt conclusion.

The Scherzo has the overall feeling of a jolly, percolating piece that reaches a full boil, then signs off with a decisive flourish. It has a lilting five-note theme with a countering idea in high twittering winds, an interesting oompah effect in low winds that acts like a ground bass, and propulsive triplet rhythms that give a sense of continuous, inventive change.

The Finale is an athletic, energetic piece whose pensive prelude in warm strings leads to dramatic declamations and flourishes that break out first in a rather episodic fugal passage punctuated by unexpected pauses and later in full-fledged counterpoint that reflects Tyberg's love of the organ. It's music with a great striding tread, sweeping horn interjections, and dense orchestration that is never showy but always seems imaginative and just right. Tyberg's absolute assurance generates a toe-tapping excitement that finally yields to a quick pause, as if the orchestra were taking a deep breath before the joyous F major coda.

Falletta and the BPO seemed to project this conservative, engrossing symphony with an authority and complete conviction that sug-

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 27

gest it is well worth adding to the repertory. She speaks of Tyberg's music as belonging to the sound world of Schubert, Bruckner, and Mahler. While there is a clear allegiance to those composers, there is nothing plagiaristic in what we hear 67 years after Tyberg's death.

Viewed another way, Tyberg's output was relatively slight: four orchestral works, two each of chamber works, piano sonatas, and Masses, plus some 35 lieder. But as these works progressively emerge, they strike me as radiating a sure sense of conventional late 19th- and early 20th-Century style not too different from what listeners might experience if, say, the music of Dohnanyi, Reger, or Pfitzner had been lost and suddenly rediscovered in the 21st Century.

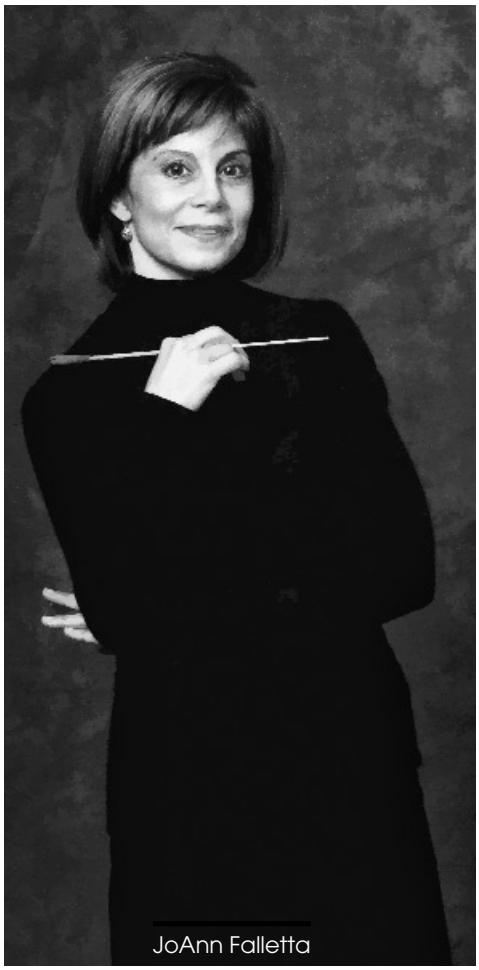
Two weeks later Falletta followed with the May 13 world premiere of a Violin Concerto by American composer Daron Hagen simply called *Songbook*, with Concertmaster Michael Ludwig as soloist. The title derives from the fact that the themes for each of the four movements were taken from two Irish and two American folk songs that Hagen's wife sang nightly to their young son at bedtime. Scored for solo violin, strings, harp, and percussion, the structure sounds complicated. The movements are listed as Variations, Chaconne, Passacaglia, and Variations, but most of the music falls quite easily on the ear.

It opens with a plaint to the tragic 1798 Irish uprising called 'The Croppy Boy', whose heart-warming, slow, melancholy theme on the violin is far more beautiful than the subject matter might suggest. Often underscored by a marimba, the violin leads the way through nine variations that are wholly tonal with only mild dissonance, but with increasingly dense textures, gradually subsiding to the original calm.

The brief Scherzo is a delight, based on a song about the great potato famine called 'The Praties'. Here the violin, harp, and snare drum almost play tag as they skitter with great animation and captivating rhythmic pulse through the hop-skipping variations to a quick but very satisfying conclusion.

The heart of this concerto is the Passacaglia on the American song 'Over Yandro'. Here the percussion is tacit, which helped me attend to the central importance in the overall structure. The violin limns a supplicating, reaching theme that manages to radiate both tenderness and angst over the course of the variations and their peaceful resolution.

The more complex Finale teases the listener with an extended violin solo leading to an agitated allegro where bits and pieces of the ubiquitous 'Amazing Grace' emerge, only gradually falling in place as the fully realized theme. Over restless orchestral and percussion


JoAnn Falletta

support, the variations grow in intensity and then, seemingly without preparation, just stop.

The performance seemed even more convincing on second hearing. As soloist Ludwig was absolutely secure and comfortable in the music's overall texture, which largely presented the violin as a true soloist but sometimes in more of a *concertante* role. The central movements were completely satisfying, but there were moments in the outer movements where the composer might want to reconsider some of the percussion-string balances and contrasts.

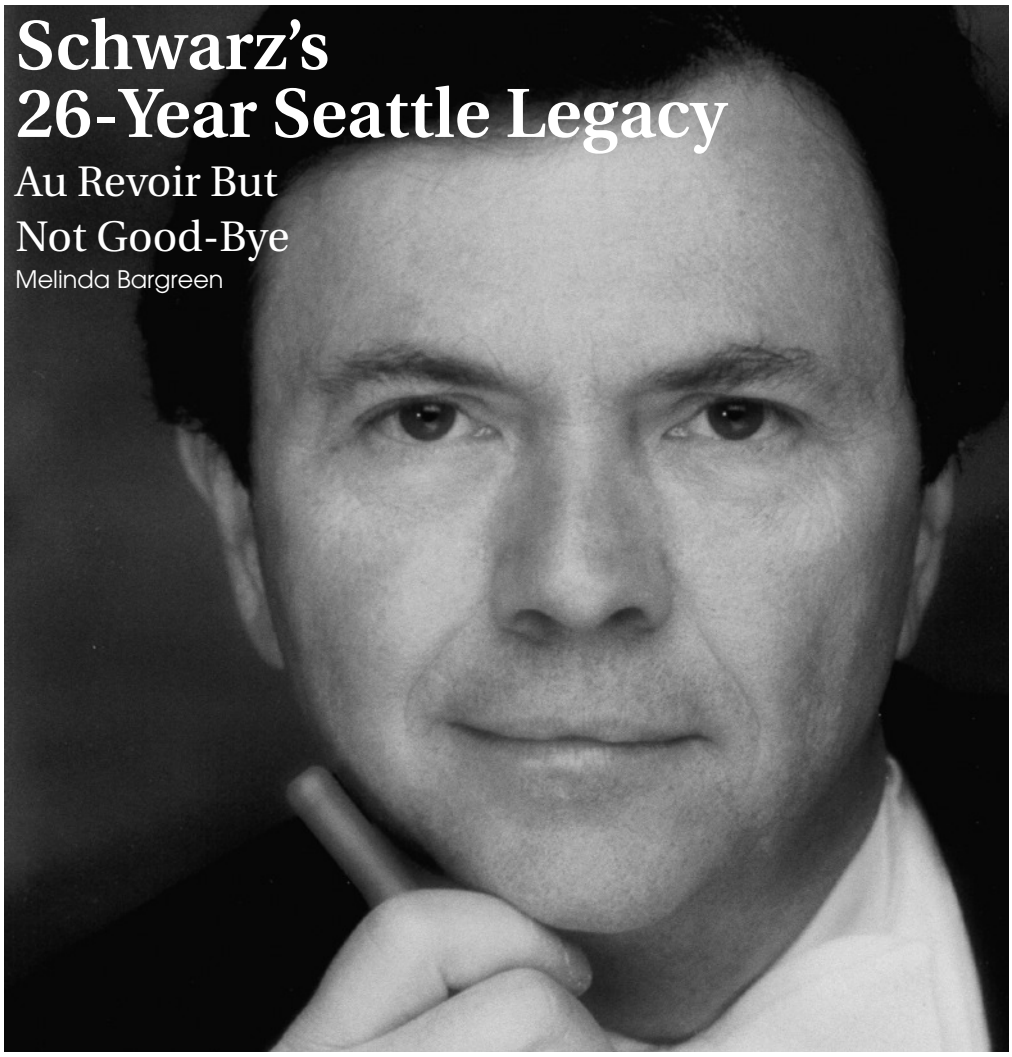
Of special note is the fact that *Songbook* was not a commissioned work but the fallout from a conversation among Ludwig, Hagen, and Falletta following the BPO's 2006 concert performance of Hagen's opera *Shining Brow* about Frank Lloyd Wright. Ludwig and Falletta in effect said "Hey, write us a violin concerto and make it tuneful." The result was *Songbook*.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 28

Schwarz's 26-Year Seattle Legacy

Au Revoir But Not Good-Bye

Melinda Bargreen



They've named a block of a downtown Seattle thoroughfare "Gerard Schwarz Place". They've named Schwarz an honorary one-star general. Marvin Hamlisch has written and performed a witty song in Schwarz's honor; 18 top composers have written short works for him to premiere; the Seattle community has penned congratulations in several big "autograph books"; and the array of pre- and post-concert galas, parties, and other events would challenge the stamina of a marathoner.

What a coda to Gerard Schwarz's 26 years as Seattle Symphony music director! His long tenure, which officially concluded with a set of June concerts that included Mahler's Symphony No. 2 *(Resurrection)* along with a Philip Glass premiere, is all the more remarkable because no one ever expected Schwarz to stay in Seattle for more than a short sojourn.

When he first came to Seattle as music advisor in 1983, Schwarz arrived to a shell-shocked orchestra and music community, following the death of the Seattle Symphony's Music Director Rainer Miedel from cancer. The orchestra and its finances were in disarray; the performance space (the former Seattle Opera House) was an acoustically diffuse barn of a hall that wasn't exactly conducive to a refined orchestral sound. Schwarz was hired to lead the orchestra during the search for Miedel's successor, but it became immediately clear to the orchestra and the community that the best successor just might be Schwarz himself.

"He'll never stay in Seattle!" was the mantra of knowledgeable observers on both coasts. After all, Schwarz was a New Yorker, originally a trumpet phenomenon who in 1972 became the New York Philharmonic's

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 29

youngest co-principal trumpet at age 25, and who left the orchestra five years later to pursue a conducting career. And pursue it he did, with tremendous energy. At the time he came to Seattle, Schwarz was the director of six organizations: the Mostly Mozart Festival, the New York Chamber Symphony (originally the New York "Y" Symphony), the contemporary Music Today series, New Jersey's Waterloo Festival, the Eliot Feld Dance Company, and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

Nobody expected Schwarz to spend much time in the Northwest corner of the country; nor did Schwarz himself. But gradually things changed. He married the former Jody Greitzer (daughter of New York Philharmonic principal violist Sol Greitzer), a flutist of considerable charm who became an immediate favorite in the Seattle music community. The couple settled into a condo overlooking the Seattle waterfront and the Pike Place Market, and in due course they welcomed two children, Gabriella, who now works for CNN, and Julian, now an increasingly busy solo cellist. (Schwarz also has two children, Alysandra Lal and Daniel Schwarz, from an earlier marriage.) Though Schwarz continued his globe-trotting ways (with music directorships as far afield as Liverpool and Tokyo), somehow the New Yorkers had become Seattleites.

Thanks to the trumpeter's earlier relationship with the Delos label, his new orchestra recorded a highly praised series of discs in that exciting new medium, the compact disc. More than 140 CDs on Delos and other labels were to follow, with 14 Grammy nominations and a lasting mark particularly in the repertoire of 20th Century symphonists (Hanson, Piston, Schuman, Diamond, and Hovhaness, among others).

It took many years for Schwarz to get his orchestra out of the old Opera House (increasingly gridlocked with concert dates by the Seattle Opera, Pacific Northwest Ballet, and visiting artists) and into a new concert hall. Schwarz's friends, philanthropists Jack and Becky Benaroya, launched that project with a $15 million gift; the result, Benaroya Hall, opened in 1998 to national acclaim for its acoustics and amenities. The hall, along with the gradual advent of several gifted new players, allowed Schwarz to raise significantly the quality of the orchestra.

It wasn't all a consistent hymn of praise, however. Discord gradually grew between the music director and several players who objected initially to what they considered his high-handed hiring of John Cerminaro as principal horn, over objections of the players' selection committee. A group of increasingly vocal dissident musicians expressed displeasure later, when the board voted in 2006 to renew Schwarz's contract through 2011. One violinist filed suit against the orchestra and music director (the suit was later dismissed, but not before drawing considerable attention in the New York Times). Two outspoken Schwarz loyalists in the orchestra reported vandalism incidents.

When Schwarz announced his decision to leave at the end of his contract in 2011, plans were set in motion for a blockbuster final season. Chief among the innovations was an unprecedented set of 18 short commissions by some of the country's finest composers, underscoring Schwarz's commitment to new American music: Augusta Read Thomas, Joseph Schwantner, Aaron Jay Kernis, Daron Hagen, Samuel Jones, David Stock, Bernard Rands, Gunther Schuller, Bright Sheng, Daniel Brewbaker, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Robert Beaser, Chen Yi, George Tsontakis, David Schiff, Richard Danielpour, Paul Schoenfield, and Philip Glass.

Many of these curtain-raisers, including the festive Zwilich work and the jazzy Schiff piece, used lots of brass as a tribute to this former trumpeter. The longer Samuel Jones work, *Reflections: Songs of Fathers and Daughters*, was an effective and evocative set of vignettes displaying Jones's imaginative harmonic structure and virtuoso scoring. The last of the commissions, Philip Glass's *Harmonium Mountain*, was in his familiar motive-oscillations minimalist style, breaking no ground but entertaining the audience well.

The finale's big piece, Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony*, demonstrated the feisty good health and the resounding brass section of the orchestra, as well as the conductor's ability to shape the score's smaller-scale, more intimate moments. Sustained and lengthy ovations before and after the program made it clear that the maestro had also connected powerfully with his audience.

People who worry about how the Seattle Symphony—which, like most orchestras today, is struggling with a deficit and the difficulty of fundraising in a tough economy—will fare in Schwarz's absence may be relieved to discover that he won't disappear entirely: he is staying on for several weeks each season as "conductor laureate". Also the artistic director of the Eastern Music Festival, Schwarz will devote his considerable energies to composition (he is currently working on a band piece for Cornell). He is also director-conductor of an educational TV-DVD series with an "All-Stars Orchestra" of the country's best players in great concert repertoire, in eight hour-long annual programs with many other enhancements. Don't look for any moss to grow on his baton.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 30

Edmonton's Summer Solstice Festival

Chamber Music for All Tastes

Bill Rankin

Edmonton is the most northerly city in North America with a population over a million, and those million people endure some of the harshest winter weather on the continent. So when the short summer season arrives, Edmontonians revel in festivals that recognize the resurrection of the human spirit.

In late June alone, there is a cluster of opera, visual arts, jazz, and improvisational theater festivals; but until four years ago, classical music fans felt deprived. University of Alberta piano professor Patricia Tao, a member of the Edmonton Chamber Music Society board, which brings renowned musicians to the city during the cold, dark winters, filled the classical music void with a three-day Summer Solstice Festival in 2008. This year's festival, June 24-26, included some of Canada's most distinguished musicians, several of whom won Junos (Canada's Grammys) in April.

Canadian ex-pat Lara St John, now running a thriving, eclectic violin career from New York, including her own record label, was this year's festival headliner. St John's affinity for the music of Romania and Hungary made her a natural for the first of three concerts with gypsy-inspired themes. Sounding anything but gypsy, the concert began with Haydn's Trio in G, with its Gypsy Rondo, played by Tao's Trio Voce, with cellist Marina Hoover and violinist Jasmine Lin, both of whom live in Chicago. The Haydn choice was clever because by the third movement a little of an ersatz Roma mood was established, opening up all sorts of possibilities.

Roman Borys, the Gyphon Trio's cellist, then joined Edmonton pianist Michael Massey for a slightly labored performance of Bartok's Rhapsody No. 1. Bartok will never make such a musical challenge feel more like play than work, but the result was professional and the control admirable. The Gryphon Trio's violinist, Annalee Patipatanakoon, and Tao then performed Ravel's *Tzigane*, showing that chamber music players are always happy to find a release for their inner soloist. Patipatanakoon delighted the audience of about 300 with the virtuosic flair and lyrical playfulness Ravel built into his display of gypsy fiddling.

Following a polished performance of Brahms's first five *Hungarian Dances* in their original piano four-hands version, played by husband and wife Angela Cheng and Alvin Chow, both Oberlin profs, St John took the stage with Massey to play two sections of New York composer Gene Pritsker's *Russian Evening Suite*, one of them 'Song', a world premiere. St John, for whom Pritsker wrote the suite, brought the necessary intensity and abandon to the Slavic-inspired music. Her performance of 'Falling', a jazz-tinged, rhythmically erratic movement with just enough melody on top to keep its Eastern European folk foundation in sight, set up nicely the evening's finale, a Michael Atkinson transcription of cimbalomist Toni Lordache's scintillatingly theatrical *Ca la Beaza*. The notions of chamber music covered by the program were vast and quite thrilling.

Saturday's program reflected two sides of Franz Liszt's musical personality, the better-known showman and the religious contemplative. In between the fiery opening 'Campanella' from the Paganini Etudes and the Mephisto Waltz No. 2 in Liszt's arrangement for piano four hands (Cheng and Chow), we heard music that soothed and saddened. The string quartet arrangement of *Angelus* with Patipatanakoon, St John, Borys, and local violist Charles Pilon, satisfied Tao's ambition to bring an assortment of excellent players together for some quickly prepared chamber music. The cohesion of the impromptu ensemble was impressive.

Tenor Anthony Flynn opened the second half with Liszt's Three Petrarch Sonnets. So huge was Flynn's sound that these love songs would have found the beloved's ear if she had been several villages away. His robust projection and warm timbre were impressive but not subtle enough—he had vocal heft to spare. Thousands of singers would kill, though, to fill a room like he can. (On Sunday in several songs from Schubert's *Schwanengesang*, he showed that he can tone it down for smaller effects.)

For me Saturday's highlight was Borys and Tao in Liszt's *Lugubre Gondola*. All weekend Borys demonstrated that music should not only sound fine. but that artists should look like they are moved by it. Lin too has a style that draws the listener into her performances without ostentation.

Sunday afternoon's program was the most conventional: the Schubert, Arensky's Trio No.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 31

1, and another demonstration of professional aplomb with St John, Patipatanakoon, Pilon, Borys, and Cheng giving a vivid performance of Schumann's Piano Quintet. While the fourth Summer Solstice Festival ended with music that appeals to chamber music fans everywhere, the treats were the less known repertoire, some of it written "just yesterday".

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 32

Fayetteville Chamber Music Festival The World Comes to Central Texas

Gil French

In Orzak's Cafe, a family restaurant in Fayetteville, Texas (population 258), while lunching on some southern fried chicken amidst scores of family photos, beer, street signs, antlers, cowboy hats, a bow and arrow, and folk crafts, I noticed a sign that said, "In a small town, there ain't much to see, but what you hear sure makes up for it."

What I was hearing May 17-21, across the street from Orzak's, was the second of two weeks of the fifth annual Fayetteville Chamber Music Festival in the Country Place Hotel, a restored 111-year-old building now on the National Register of Historic Places. Concerts are held in the Moravian Room, which measures 37 by 41 feet, with wood floor, 12 foot wood ceiling, windows on three sides, and one brick, one wood, and two plaster walls, decorated with nine large oil paintings by the owner. 99 padded folding wood chairs were two-thirds to four-fifths full for the concerts I heard.

Fayetteville, half-way between Houston and Austin in Texas's hill country—wide rolling hills festooned with trees, song birds, cattle ranches, and pickup trucks—was settled at the turn of the 20th Century by Germans and Czechs. But, as it was with our European ancestors, it is the recent "immigrants"—wealthy oilmen, lawyers, and bankers from Houston and other parts of the country, some with second homes, many with permanent ones—who import the art, music, paintings, sculpture, literature, and other pleasures they enjoyed before moving here, along with their penchant for conservation.

The movement began 40 years ago when pianist James Dick founded the Round Top Festival (Nov/Dec 2010) 17 miles north, transforming the area surrounding Texas's smallest town (Round Top, population now up to 90) into a community where the arts flourish and real estate prices are more than double what they are in Rochester NY (where I live).

Compared to the larger American summer festivals, Fayetteville's is an intimate affair with only five musicians the first week and six the second (three of them staying on), performing two weekends of Friday night, Saturday afternoon, and Saturday evening concerts. They lived, had breakfast, rehearsed, and performed under the same roof; the quiet and freedom from having to run someplace were perfect stress relievers for them.

The week I attended, Swedish clarinetist, festival founder, and Artistic Director Hakan Rosengren, 47, who became a resident of Round Top as a result of that festival, made his own festival a truly international affair. Returning Hungarian pianist Peter Nagy ("gy" like the "z" in "azure"), who turns 52 this year, was the festival's workhorse, playing in eight major works and becoming the principal negotiator about form, balance, style, and other details. His own performing style was intellectual rather than rapturous, with relatively low use of pedals.

Polish cellist Andrzej Bauer, 48, also a Fayetteville veteran, usually contributed to discussions last, always asking for more expression and blend. His broad range of tone colors, warmth, and remarkable combination of lyricism and articulation illuminated Bach's Solo Cello Suite No. 3, making it compelling and engaging. Those qualities plus a kaleidoscope of techniques, from huge portamentos and strings struck with the bow's wood to quick-stroked harmonics and two-handed pizzicatos, were on parade in his composition, *Duotone*, which seemed like 10 minutes of aimless noodling to me (the highly responsive audience disagreed).

The others were new to the festival, reflecting Rosengren's need to widen his own musical experiences by engaging some musicians he's never performed with (he's also the rare artist who devours new recordings). German violinist Tanja Becker-Bender, 33, dominated not just by virtuosic technique but by sheer volume. When the Moravian Room wasn't at least three-quarters full, the acoustics created an oppressive wall of sound, with her metallic tone the main offender (that flat 12-foot ceiling was the chief culprit). I was dumbfounded when told she was playing a Guarneri. But when the room was mostly full, she blended nicely with the others, though, like Nagy, her low-vibrato approach was more intellectual than rapturous.

Juan Miguel Hernandez, 26, whose father is half-black half-Dominican and mother is French Canadian, is a big-boned, long-armed, lean 6'4" Canadian with a viola custom-built to comfortably fit his frame. It's big and fat and produces a mellow, rich, well-projected sound that fits his romantic, expressive approach. He is a founding member of the Harlem Quartet, and he cares about balance and practicality. After others discussed possible approaches to passages, he was the one who would say, "So what are we going to do?" At one point, given

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 33

the room's acoustics and the soloistic tendencies of a few others, he amiably joked, "Should I go out and get some Q-tips so we could listen to one another?" Restraint and balances followed.

DaXun Zhang, born 29 years ago in Harbin, China, into a family with eight other string bass players connected to the city's symphony orchestra that was conducted for years by Gary Graffman's father, has lived in Austin for the past four years. He brought two instruments to the festival, one two months old and made in Cincinnati. One afternoon, rehearsing for a June concert, he used it as he played for me from memory his arrangement of Bach's Solo Cello Sonata No. 5. I recall only one error amidst a performance that had the same stunning attributes Bauer brought to Sonata No. 3. So I was surprised when his superb musicality failed him in Schubert's *Trout Quintet* as his older instrument merely grunted, giving no shape whatever to the repetitive, boring bass line. It takes a rare artist to make it truly expressive.

Earlier when Zhang performed his arrangement of the 'Meditation' from *Thais* with Nagy, he had severe intonation problems on his new bass. But then so did everyone at the afternoon concert. Even the avant-garde techniques in Bauer's *Duotone* couldn't disguise his bad intonations. And Rosengren, a sensitive, meticulous romanticist, was sharp most of the time in Schumann's three *Romances*. By performance time, he and Nagy had analyzed away his instinctive musicality heard at the first rehearsal, resulting in an angular, conjured interpretation.

The afternoon began with Bach's Sonata No. 4, S 1017, made excruciating by Becker-Bender's low use of vibrato and non-resonant metallic tone; Nagy put not an ounce of buoyancy into Bach's written-out keyboard part. The concert concluded with Brahms's Piano Quartet No. 1. After opening with shabby ensemble, the players were all afflicted with more sour tuning. True, it was humid, but tuning beforehand might have helped. Tempos were rushed. The violin and cello veritably screamed in the half-filled room; I had to concentrate to hear the viola. Only in the finale did they finally become a balanced "quartet", as they played the hell out of its Hungarian rhythms!

Big works made up the Friday and Saturday evening concerts. In Brahms's Violin Sonata No. 1 Becker-Bender and Nagy were equal partners. In the first movement phrases were perfectly peaked and very emotional, though they didn't play with abandon. It was their business-like efficiency and narrow use of tone color that made me lose interest in the other two movements.

I had never heard a good performance of any of Bruch's eight *Pieces* for clarinet, viola, and piano until now. In Nos. 2, 4, 5, and 7 Rosengren emerged from the ether, shaping lines with breathtaking nuance and lyricism, as Hernandez let his gorgeous dark tones (even in the treble register) melt into the clarinet line. The 'Romanian Melody' was moody with gypsy soul. And the fast movements were crisp and swift but never rushed, perfect music before intermission, when patrons enjoyed two kinds of German beer, compliments of Round Top Mercantile.

Maybe it was the beer, but Beethoven's *Archduke Trio* never sounded better! The playing was full-throated, yet balances were superb because the room was almost full and the players were truly a "trio". Bauer's cello was rich and warm. And Nagy was at his very best—one could tell that Beethoven is his soul brother as he made the piano ring with a richer use of pedal. Indeed, he was the one who in rehearsals shaped it so that the flow was totally engaging with just the right touch of rubato and integral transportation across Beethoven's seams. The second movement was a veritable Viennese waltz. In the Andante Cantabile the piano, the work's principal instrument, was supremely poetic. In the finale Nagy led with a rare moment of playfulness.

Saturday night Bauer's Bach solo was follow by Bartok's *Contrasts*. This was where Becker-Bender's strident tone paid off, as the violin and clarinet's contrary lines crossed each other, reaching for the lowest and high ends of their registers. The terraced, unrushed 'Verbunkos' was truly love. In the 'Piheno' Rosengren was utterly secure, but the violin had trouble with bowing pressure, and Nagy was too direct, never creating a gauze over his tone. The finale was unexpectedly too careful, lacking sufficient weight on the dance beats. Nagy was very dry; creating atmosphere is simply not his style.

The festival ended with a superb performance of Schubert's *Trout Quintet*. Becker-Bender, Hernandez, Bauer, and Nagy were all really "hot" and playful in the opening movement, hitting on just the right tempos. Nagy made the piano ring, though the forward tempo in the second movement did miss the underlying feeling of a lullaby. They gave rhythmic bounce to the next movement. The cello solo in one of the variations was very comforting. And the finale had a bright, easy, upturned, top-tapping style.

Here I was, in the middle of nowhere in a town where there is absolutely nothing to do, yet there was no spoon-feeding this festival's sophisticated audience. As I always say, if anyone thinks classical music is dying, the chamber music festivals, large and small, that sweep across America each summer (plus the 500 CDs reviewed in each issue of ARG) put that lie firmly to rest.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 34

Bang! You've Won

Montreal Music Competition

Robert Markow

The 24 competitors at the Tenth Montreal International Musical Competition, held from May 23 to June 3, included the usual lineup of candidates from Russia (3), the US (3), and Asian lands (8); but there was also representation from a few countries not often associated with top winners in the piano world, such as Switzerland, Australia, Israel, and Italy.

The Italian, Beatrice Rana, made it to the final round (with orchestra), and eventually went on to become not only the First Prize winner ($30,000) but also to win the People's Choice Award ($5,000) and the Award for the Best Performance of the Imposed Canadian Work (another $5,000). Rana thus walked away with a cool $40,000 plus a career development program worth another $20,000—not bad for an 18-year-old. But then, she was already an experienced hand at winning prizes at international events; this has been part of her life since she was 11.

There were other surprises. No Russian or Asian won any of the top prizes (Second and Third Prizes both went to Americans, Lindsay Garritson and Henri Kramer). Of the 24 pianists originally chosen to participate, four were Canadian but three of these were of Asian background (one was later replaced by a non-Asian—more on that later).

If you like statistics, there were 161 applications from 30 countries. Nearly a third of these were from South Korea (27) and China (24) together, with Canada (21) and the US (19) close behind. The total number of candidates in the course of the competition's ten years of existence stands at 2,000, or an average of 200 per year.

"Off-contest" activities included master classes with Jean-Philippe Collard and Arnaldo Cohen, "My First Piano Lesson" where total novices could give it a try, a "Piano Bar Happy Hour" at a local wine bar, and workshops for children called "Hammer Away!" that might have served as the theme for the entire competition.

In stark contrast to the jury's choices at last year's competition (for violin), the contestants who most impressed the judges this year seemed to be the ones who made the most noise. Artistic maturity, a hallmark of all of last year's winners, appeared to have little place in this year's line-up. In the semi-finals, banging was part of nearly every contestant's playing to some extent. The jury members were André

Beatrice Rana

Bourbeau (Canada, jury president), Arnaldo Cohen (Brazil), Jean-Philippe Collard (France), Mari Kodama (Japan), James Parker (Canada), Benjamin Pasternack (US), Imre Rohmann (Austria), and Lilya Zilberstein (Russia).

The sole pianist to avoid this pitfall entirely, Canada's Lucas Porter (the last-minute replacement), did not advance to the finals. Two others who brought more beauty than bang to their playing, Zheeyoung Moon and Jong Ho Won (both Koreans), got to the final round but were not top prize winners. Moon's performance of Schumann's *Humoresque* brimmed with elegance and poetry in a well-structured approach. Won too brought musical logic, a beautiful tone, and a wealth of dynamic nuance to Beethoven's Sonata No. 3, contrasting these qualities with an appropriately febrile Sonata No. 5 by Scriabin. In both works there was musicality in every note.

But the real artist in the group was Porter, who turned 20 just days before the competi-

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 35

tion opened. His program alone deserves comment: two modest, technically simple pieces (Egon Petri's arrangement of Bach's 'Sheep May Safely Graze' and a Haydn sonata) played with grace, poise, and delicate touch but without even a suggestion of the firestorm he would unleash in the Liszt sonata, where he poured forth great torrents of sound—without banging!—that truly enthralled; but he also reveled in the most exquisite pianissimos that nevertheless carried to the back of the hall. His double octaves may have been the fastest since Horowitz's, and even cleaner. Perhaps since Porter is also an accomplished composer, shape and structure were always evident in his playing. Why the jury knocked him out of the finals is anyone's guess.

I tried hard to find what so many others (not just the jury) liked about Rana's playing. But to me she made Chopin's Sonata No. 3 shapeless; Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit* lacked color and imagination; Bartok's *Out of Doors* was willfully crude. And Tchaikovsky's Concerto No. 1 was all sound and fury, played with too much pedal and not enough lyricism. The tone Rana drew from the instrument was hard and brittle. And could this lady ever bang! BANG! BANG! BANG! Not my kind of Tchaikovsky.

Rana is still just 18, so she has time to develop as a musician; one hopes she will find the time and the desire to do so. An indication that she has the potential was her repeat performance of the imposed Canadian work, David McIntyre's *Wild Innocence*, at the final gala concert. The five-minute piece, in the composer's own words, "makes room for the performer to display a world of touches, from warm to brilliant; various qualities of energy from light to driving; and a broad emotional palette". And so Rana did. There were passages of clanky, toccata-like playing, but also some beautifully managed lyrical episodes, charming and coy.

Overall it was a disappointing lot this year. Most of the candidates were quite obviously trying too hard; they looked and sounded like they were desperately competing: too much tension, too little spontaneity; too much noise, too little sensitivity. Some simply weren't ready for a major international competition.

Here and there sparks of genuine talent showed through, such as Dorel Golan's tastefully rendered Clementi and the lovely singing lines she brought to Chopin's Ballade No. 4, or the charm Yulia Chaplina evoked from Tchaikovsky's little gem of a 'Berceuse'. These gave hope that three years from now, when the next MIMC for piano rolls round (2012 is for voice, 2013 for violin), some of these same pianists will be back, but not banging.

Osaka's Competitions and Orchestras

American, Dutch, French, and Russian Winners

Robert Markow

When earthquakes shook buildings in eastern Japan last March (Japan's "3/11"), they also shook travelers' confidence in visiting a country where resulting radiation leaks from a nuclear power plant in Fukushima made daily headlines for weeks. But Fukushima is some 300 air miles from Osaka, where neither earthquake damage nor radiation occurred, so plans continued for the Seventh Osaka International Chamber Music Competition and Festa (May 17-25).

This triennial event, organized by the Japan Chamber Music Foundation and supported by big business and government (Panasonic, Suntory, Sumitomo, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc.) is quite possibly the most comprehensive in the world. It encompasses three independent, interlocking components, each with its own jury, its own set of prizes, and its own follow-up tour of ten Japanese cities for the first-prize winners. The three components are string quartets ("Section 1"), wind ensembles ("Section 2": woodwind quintets, brass quintets, and saxophone quartets), and a Festa (more on this later).

Cellist Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi presided over the juries for Sections 1 and 2. For nine days in May, Sections 1 and 2 underwent three rounds each, the Festa two. The prize money was generous: three million yen ($US 37,000) for the first prize winners in Sections 1 and 2, two million for the second prize winners, and one million for the third. Festa winners got a bit less.

Normally ten string quartets compete, though this year only six showed up owing to radiation worries. No clear winners or losers emerged from Round 1, so the jury sent all six on to Round 2. Four quartets made the cut to the final round, but there were still no clear choices to be made. Most quartets excelled in 20th Century repertory where youthful enthusiasm and an almost palpable energy were much in evidence, but their Haydn sometimes lacked formal structure, their Mendelssohn

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 36

elegance, their Beethoven Opus 18 proper phrasing. On the plus side, though, all the quartets had well-balanced sound, excellent ensemble, and unanimity of conception.

Then in the final round something clicked for the New York-based Attacca Quartet, formed at the Juilliard School in 2003. Their glowing account of Beethoven's Quartet No. 15 gave them the clear edge, and the otherworldly aura that emanated from the slow movement alone might have won them a first prize. Here was musical magic, the kind of playing that bespoke true artistic maturity and left me breathless.

The Attacca Quartet also gave the most searching interpretation of the required Japanese work, Toshiro Saruya's *Aither, the Beorht*, which offered ample opportunities for widely differing approaches. But only the Attacca discovered its inherent lyricism while also underscoring the conversational tone that sometimes approached acrimonious debate. The Attacca thus became the first American string quartet at the Osaka competition to win a first prize.

This competition is one of the few in its class to include both string quartets and wind ensembles (though only in certain years). The range of talent in Section 2 was considerably wider, the opportunities for discovery greater. The wind component was dominated by saxophone quartets (five of the ten ensembles), which collectively supplied both the most interesting repertory and the most outstanding performances.

Two saxophone quartets in particular stood out, the Melisma from Holland and the Morphing from France, but it was the Morphing Quartet that towered above all others and deservedly won a first prize. It is almost impossible to describe the perfection of their blend, balance, outstanding sensitivity, and huge range of dynamics from *pppppp* to *ffffff*. Their arrangement of Haydn's Quartet Op. 20:5 outclassed performances by string quartets in Section 1. The Morphings played as a single musical organism, and the effect was often mesmerizing. More amazing still, the ensemble was formed just eight months ago. Two woodwind quintets and three brass quintets also competed, but none came close to generating the excitement of the Morphings.

But what makes Osaka's competition really special is its unique Festa. While many competitions include an audience prize, it is usually a sideshow. In Osaka, it takes center stage and attracts the largest audience. One hundred or more local music lovers constitute the jury. The competitors are miscellaneous groups of two to six players and, unlike the ones in Sections 1 and 2, are unrestricted in age or in repertory. This year generated nearly 150 applications from 29 countries, and 20 groups from 11 countries were invited to attend. (Four cancelled owing to "3/11".) By far the most applications came from Russia (37), followed by Japan (27) and the US (17).

"Finding 100 jury members from the public at large is more difficult than you might imagine", says Megumi Morioka, manager of public relations at Izumi Hall, the competition's venue. "You need to be in a position to set aside three full days of your time, a luxury not given to many in workaholic Japan." Yet so effective has Festa become that a record 130 jury members participated this year.

The motley array of competitors included folk ensembles from Korea, Lithuania, Russia, and Poland; duos (piano, guitar, saxophone and piano, violin and guitar); and various larger ensembles. Half a dozen of these easily qualified for first prize. I would not have wished to cast a ballot myself, so rich were the choices.

In the end, though, the jury handed the two million yen ($US 25,000) Menuhin Gold Prize (Yehudi Menuhin conceived the Festa format) to Classic Without Borders, a stunning Russian trio of piano and two domras (lute-like plucked instruments). In their own arrangements of the finale of Mendelssohn's *Italian*

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 37

Symphony, Tchaikovsky's *Capriccio Italien*, and other works, they combined flair and showmanship with superb control and genuine musicianship. The virtuoso pianist (Dmitry Krivonosov) could easily sustain a solo career.

Festa's Silver Prize went to the Czech Republic's Nepomuk Quintet, an unorthodox assemblage of two violins, cello, double bass, and piano. They too create their own arrangements. Schubert's *Trout Quintet*, Dvorak's *Slavonic Dances*, and other pieces gave the audience a taste of what well-established professionals from central Europe can sound like (they play in the Vienna Philharmonic, Dresden Staatskapelle, etc)—sleek, elegant, supremely sensitive to niceties of phrasing, and boasting a pianist (Christian Pohl) who might well be a clone of Rudolf Serkin.

The Bronze Prize was won by an also engaging group with a difference, a woodwind quintet from Denmark called Carion (don't ask). This one has come up with the innovative idea of literally choreographing the music they play (all memorized), physically interacting with each other in a manner that visually expresses the music's structure. (Move over, Schenker.) Their intelligent and tasteful style definitely added a new dimension to Ligeti's playful, fascinating Six Bagatelles. Carion is considering bringing their visual insights even to Schoenberg's thorny, 12-tone Woodwind Quintet. Now *that's* something I'd like to see.

Festa was not only unique; it was fun, informal, lighthearted, and yielded a continuous succession of surprises. One never knew what to expect next. I heard *The Rite of Spring* played as thrillingly on two pianos as by any orchestra; I heard a soprano saxophone and piano duet that gave a whole new range of hues to 'Clair de Lune'; I heard a passionate piano trio by Arno Babadjanian played by an American-Armenian group that left me gasping.

Yes, there was big money to be won at Festa, but absent was the stress of the string quartet and wind ensemble competitions. The level was uniformly so high that there was scarcely an ensemble I would not eagerly go to hear in a full-length recital. Many are world-class acts.

800-seat Izumi Hall, where the competition was held, is unquestionably one of the world's most acoustically perfect concert venues, a hall that should win a first prize itself. All the more reason to look forward to the Eighth Osaka International Chamber Music Competition and Festa in 2014 (www.jcmf.or.jp).

Music critics can be incorrigible when it comes to taking busman's holidays. So for three of my nine days in Osaka, I also covered what I was told are the three leading orchestras in the area. The Osaka Philharmonic (one of four in the city itself) did not make a good showing, burdened with an inept German guest conductor, Alexander Liebreich. On his May 19 program of Prokofieff's *Classical Symphony* and *Alexander Nevsky*, he proved more adept at tracing beautiful gestures in the air than at keeping his forces balanced, taming the rough sound, or maintaining rhythmic control. Pianist Piotr Anderszewski saved the day with a ravishing account of Mozart's Concerto No. 20.

An altogether different experience awaited me in nearby Kyoto, exactly 29 minutes—not 30—from Osaka by fast train. The Kyoto Symphony gave its 546th subscription concert (they've been counting since 1956) with its much-loved music director Junichi Hirokami, who led one of the finest performances of Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2 I have ever heard. Technically it was spotless; musically it was awe-inspiring. From the opening notes of the sumptuous, dark, velvety cellos and basses, Hirokami shaped each phrase, episode, and movement with inexorable logic and forward motion, weaving the lines into a seamless, rich-textured web. Any western orchestra seeking a new music director could do no better than snap up this outstanding musician. (In fact, Hirokami served briefly as music director of the Columbus Symphony until a political brawl forced him out.)

My third busman's holiday took me to the Hyogo Prefecture Performing Arts Center Orchestra, which plays in the center's Grand Hall found in Nishinomiya, a kind of Japanese Beverly Hills nestled in the foothills between Osaka and Nara. The center, a symbol of renewal, opened a decade after a huge 1995 earthquake killed more than 6,400 people in the city of Kobe.

The orchestra is a good, entry-level professional ensemble, much like the New World Symphony, consisting mostly of Japanese but also a handful of foreigners (the Osaka Philharmonic and Kyoto Symphony were fully Japanese). The highly charismatic Michiyoshi Inoue led a program of Shostakovich Firsts, the Violin Concerto and the Symphony. What the orchestra lacked in polish it compensated for in youthful enthusiasm. As in Osaka and Kyoto, strings, especially violins, generally constituted the orchestra's finest players. Women greatly outnumbered men. Audiences were alert and quiet to a degree almost unknown in American concert halls. Dress was casual—surprising in a land where nearly every male office worker wears a dark suit.

At all three concerts in halls seating about 2,000, seats were almost sold out, and the complete gamut of age ranges was about also represented.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 38

Glyndebourne's First *Meistersinger*

Dressing Well (and Warmly) at Garsington

Edward Greenfield

Chorus ensemble

The great event at Glyndebourne this summer has been the company's first ever production of Wagner's grandest, most lyrical opera, *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*. The prime concern of stage director David McVicar was to eliminate any Nazi associations, not least in avoiding the portrayal of Beckmesser in anti-Semitic terms. He made Hans Sachs a beardless, handsome man, no longer a greybeard advocating "Holy German Art", but still a deeply thoughtful character.

McVicar updated the opera to the post-Napoleonic period represented in music by Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert. It worked well, with enough color in Vicki Mortimer's architecturally arched set to make you forget the updating and concentrate on the music—not hard when Gerald Finley made such a fine, sensitive Sachs, well matched by Johannes Martin Kranzle as Beckmesser—far from being a clown, he was more affecting for being a worthy member of the Masters' fraternity.

The irony is that, though some may feel that Glyndebourne has bitten off more than it can chew in tackling *Meistersinger*, it was Act III Scene 1 of this very piece that, in an intimate semi-amateur performance with piano in 1928 in the Organ Room, first gave John Christie, the festival's founder, the idea of presenting opera in the great country house he had recently inherited. He was wooed off his original idea of Wagner in favour of Mozart as the principal composer, particularly when he married the pretty young Eva of that first performance, Audrey Mildmay, who in 1934 became Glyndebourne's first Susanna in *Figaro*.

Glyndebourne has of course altered out of all recognition since those early days, particularly since Sir George Christie, son of the founder, had the bold idea of building a totally new, far grander theater, probably the most attractive of its size in Britain. The company's first essay in Wagner came with *Tristan and Isolde* in 2007 (counted a triumph) that saw the arrival of the leading Isolde of our time, Nina Stemme, who then was unknown outside her native Sweden. By contrast, the one disappointment in *Meistersinger* was Anna Gabler's indifferent portrayal of Eva. Otherwise the casting was excellent. Marco Jentzsch was a handsome, upstanding Walther, proud of his uniform. And Vladimir Jurowski, the company's long-standing music director, proved himself a splendid, urgent Wagnerian.

The great event at Garsington Opera was quite different. After 10 seasons at the original venue, following the death of founder Leonard Ingrams in 2005, his widow urged the company to move, which it has now done with more success than anyone could have predicted. The move has been to another great country-house estate 20 or so miles from Garsington in Wormsley in Buckinghamshire to the estate of

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 39

Mark Getty (the most anglophile of the great Getty family), where you even find a full-scale cricket ground central to the 25,000 acre estate.

For this new venue Robin Snell designed a removable pavilion, influenced by Japanese designs with glass walls that let the audience see the rolling countryside with many trees all around. Beautiful as the result is, the advice of early audiences was to dress as though for Scotland in winter, with heating totally inadequate, detracting from the sheer beauty of the place.

Not that the very first production of Mozart's *Magic Flute* (in English) was a complete success. Olivia Fuchs presented the opera in modern dress with Papageno in a ginger Mohican cut wearing a tartan kilt and entering on a bicycle. His arrival with attendants waving fishing lines with floating birds was one of the better effects, while Tamino in jeans and a flowered shirt was waylaid by a serpent represented by more extras, with a great red swathe of cloth swirling about.

Monastatos, like Papageno, wore a kilt but in black leather, matching the costume of his mistress, the Queen of Night, portrayed as a dominatrix along with the three Ladies. The Three Boys arrived in striped pajamas, while the Speaker looked like a university professor. Sarastro was also unimposing. Vocally, the casting was mixed, with Tamino and Pamina well sung by Robert Murray and Sophie Bevan, with William Berger a strong Papageno and the Three Boys and Three Ladies all singing well. Kim Sheehan as Queen of Night was bright and clear enough to make you forgive a few missed top notes, while American bass Evan Boyer was fine, though his lowest notes tended to disappear. Martin André got crisp playing and singing from the Garsington Orchestra and Chorus.

The second Garsington opera was Rossini's *Turk in Italy*, again a production in modern dress, this time directed by Martin Duncan with designs by Frances O'Connor. The character whose voice aptly stood out from the rest of the cast was the superb baritone Mark Stone as the Poet who, Pirandello-like, sought to manipulate the other characters in a plot of his devising. In the designs too the Poet stood out, consigned most of the time to a little office with chair and table high above the main stage.

First heard at La Scala in 1814, *Turk* was designedly quite differently from *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, which had preceded it, with the eponymous Turk of the title a rich Turkish prince on a voyage to Europe, here represented by a smooth character in blue blazer and turban, well sung by Quirijn de Lang. The principal heroine, the flirtatious Fiorilla, unhappily married to the elderly Geronio (Geoffrey Dolton), was Jennifer Nelsen, a bright, clear soprano precise in her coloratura, who in her acting overdid her attempts at seductiveness, squirming away in her bright scarlet form-fitting dress.

The other heroine, Zaida, the abandoned fiancee of Selim, was dressed as a gypsy, singing very seductively despite being overshadowed by Fiorilla. Add to these the light Rossini tenor David Alegret as Narciso, coping well with the high tessitura if hardly with mellifluous tone, and the mixture was complete, with couples shuffling partners, not least in a colorful fancy-dress ball in Act 2. Needless to say, all ended well with Selim again partnering with Zaida, and Fiorilla with Narciso, with only the forlorn Geronio left out. As with previous Garsington productions of Rossini, it was a splendid romp, vividly conducted by David Parry, who also played the fortepiano in recitatives.

The third Garsington opera was a rarity, Vivaldi's *Verita in Cimento*, translated as "Truth Put to the Test". First heard in 1720, this opera too has its Turkish flavor. David Freeman's quirky production with designs by Duncan Hayler offered stylized trees and shrubs in silver and white, with a great central oak extending its branches. Central to the involved story is the decision of the Sultan (tenor Paul Nilon) to switch his two sons, one born to his wife Rustena, regal in silver and white, the other to his favorite concubine Damira, in crimson. The complications are endless.

The two sons were both taken by countertenors: Zelim, son of Rustena, sung by James Laing, inoffensive in jacket of white teddy-bear fur, and the handsome Melindo, son of Damira, aggressive in tight black leather trousers, sung by Yaniv d'Or. Yet even with mezzo Jane Rigby as Rustena and soprano Diana Montague as Damira, both excellent singers, the member of the cast who shone out even more brightly was young Swedish soprano Ida Falk Winland as Rosana, heiress to a neighbouring sultanate. She dominated every scene where she appeared with her technically brilliant singing and charismatic acting.

As for the music, Vivaldi's invention is winning in its variety, not least in the many lively arias, plus one or two in tender minor keys, while descants from trumpet, recorder, or flute add colour. It makes you wonder why the piece has been so neglected over the centuries. Freeman's production ended with a coup de theatre in the final ensemble (by tradition the only one in the opera), when flames suddenly burst forth from the branches of the central tree—a magical moment. The vigorous performance of the Garsington Festival Orchestra was conducted by Laurence Cummings.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 40

Here & There

Appointments, Awards, & News

JoAnn Falletta will become principal conductor of the Ulster Orchestra in September with a three-year contract that includes concerts, recordings, broadcasts, and Proms appearances. In addition, she has renewed her contract for another three years (with an option for an additional two years) as music director of the Virginia Symphony in Norfolk, where she just completed her 20th season. Also, she recently extended her contract (begun in 1999) as Buffalo Philharmonic music director to 2016.

Ludovic Morlot, who succeeds Gerard Schwarz as music director of the Seattle Symphony this autumn, has also signed a five-year contract to become chief conductor of La Monnaie Opera in Brussels starting January 1, 2012, with an option to extend until 2019.

Violinist **Joshua Bell** has signed a three-year contract as the new music director of the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields.

Jonathan Crow, 33, has been appointed concertmaster of the Toronto Symphony. He was concertmaster of the Montreal Symphony from 2002 to 2006 and has performed often at the Montreal Chamber Music Festival (reviewed in this issue).

Stefan Sandering has given a three-year notice, as required by his contract, that he will not continue as music director of the Tampa Bay-St Petersburg-based Florida Orchestra when his contract expires in 2014. He is also principal conductor of the Toledo Symphony.

Jeffrey Kahane, music director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra since 1997, has extended his contract for another two years until 2014.

Jeff Tyzik, 60, principal pops conductor of the Rochester Philharmonic for the past 17 years, has extended his contract with the orchestra for another five years.

Jack Everly, principal pops conductor of the Indianapolis Symphony since 2002, has extended his contract with the orchestra until 2017.

Patrick Summers, music director of the Houston Grand Opera since 1998, has also been appointed the company's artistic director, and Perryn Leech has moved from chief operating officer to managing director, following the departure of General Director Anthony Freud to head the Chicago Lyric Opera.

Louis Langrée became chief conductor of the Camerata Salzburg this September with a five-year contract. He has been music director of Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival since 2002 and recently extended his contract there to 2014.

After 17 years **Emmanuelle Boisvert**, 47, has left her No. 1 position as concertmaster of the Detroit Symphony for the No. 4 associate concertmaster position with the Dallas Symphony, following Detroit's six-month strike that resulted in significant pay cuts.

Francesca Zambello has been appointed artistic advisor of the Washington National Opera. She holds the same post with the San Francisco Opera and is general and artistic director of the Glimmerglass Festival in upstate New York.

Bill Lively, 67, who began as president of the Dallas Symphony part-time on April 1 and was to begin full-time June 1, resigned suddenly on April 29 for health reasons. Doctors advised him to give up all professional responsibilities due to stress-related symptoms and a family history of serious strokes. David Hyslop, former CEO of the Minnesota Orchestra, St Louis Symphony, and Oregon Symphony, has signed on as interim DSO president.

Bruce Coppock has become managing director of the Cleveland Orchestra's Miami Residency that combines subscriptions concerts with educational collaborations and community engagement. He succeeds Sandi Macdonald, who has become president and CEO of the North Carolina Symphony. Coppock was formerly president of the St Paul Chamber Orchestra and executive director of the St Louis Symphony.

At the San Francisco Opera both General Director **David Gockley** and Music Director **Nicola Luisotti** have extended their contracts through 2016, which Gockley said will be his final year. He took firm aim at the "sleep-depriving" financial challenges facing the

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 41

company, whose contracts with its two principal unions expired in July.

In June **David Chambless Worters** suddenly resigned as president and CEO of the Van Cliburn Foundation after only six months on the job. He cited personal reasons, adding, "I don't have sufficient passion for this."

Anne Parsons, president of the Detroit Symphony and the object of much criticism during the orchestra's recent long strike, has extended her contract for three additional years with no pay raise or cut.

Michael Elliott, director of culture in London and former CEO of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, becomes CEO of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra on August 1, replacing Simon Wood, who became executive director of the Seattle Symphony in April. Elliott will work closely with Music Director Stephane Deneve and Peter Oundjian, who replaces Deneve in 2012.

Pianists **Conrad Tao**, 17, and **George Li**, 15, have been awarded the 2012 Gilmore Young Artist Award. Each receives $15,000 to further his career and education plus $10,000 to commission a new work, and both will perform at the 2012 Gilmore Festival in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Tao begins a combined degree program this autumn at Columbia University and the Juilliard School; Li attends the New England Conservatory's Preparatory Division.

At this year's Tchaikovsky International Competition in Moscow, Russian pianist **Daniil Trifonov** (a student at the Cleveland Institute), Armenian cellist **Narek Hakhnazaryan** (a student at the New England Conservatory), and two South Koreans, soprano **Sun Young Seo** and bass **Jong Min Park**, were gold medal winners. No violinist won gold; a Russian and an Israeli were awarded silver medals, and Americans **Nigel Armstrong** and **Eric Silberger** placed fourth and fifth. Also, Korean Yeol Eum Son, who came in second at the 2009 Van CliburnCompetition, was second prize winner in Moscow.

The **Kronos String Quartet** has been awarded two prizes: the 2011 Avery Fisher Prize of $75,000, given to American individuals or chamber ensembles for outstanding achievements and excellence in music; and in Sweden the 2011 Polar Music Prize of $155,000 "for revolutionizing the potential of the string quartet genre in both style and content".

In June **Pittsburgh Symphony** musicians settled on a new three-year contract beginning this September that includes a 9.7% wage reduction in the first year, a freeze the second, and a "wage opener" in the third. Also, retirement benefits have been changed for newer members, and there is more flexibility regarding electronic media.

The Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas, founded by Alondra de la Parra in 2004, has suspended operations for the 2011-12 season. It finished the 2010-11 season with a balanced budget but found the fundraising outlook for the new season to be "highly uncertain". Chairman Martin Lewis said the board considers this "the most responsible action when it comes to protecting the orchestra's future."

Obituaries

Czech violinist **Josef Suk**, 81, died on July 6 in Prague from prostate cancer. He was the grandson of the composer Josef Suk, who had married Dvorak's daughter. In addition to a famed solo career and many recordings, he founded the Suk Trio with cellist Josef Chuchro and pianist Jan Panenka in 1952 and the Suk Chamber Orchestra in 1974.

Bass **Giorgio Tozzi**, 88, who reigned at the Met from 1955 to 1975, died of a heart attack on May 30 in Bloomington IN, where he was on the faculty at Indiana University's School of Music. Born in Chicago, he played the Doctor in the premiere of Barber's *Vanessa* and also was the singing voice for *Rosanno Brazzi* in the movie South Pacific.

Cellist **Bernard Greenhouse**, 95, died in his sleep on May 13 at his Massachusetts home on Cape Cod. Born in Newark NJ, he founded the Beaux Arts Trio in 1955 along with violinist Daniel Guilet and pianist Menahem Pressler, with whom he played until 1987. He then continued to play and teach into his 90s.

Richard Holmes, 69, timpanist of the St Louis Symphony since 1969, died at home in Lake St Louis on June 5 from lung cancer. Music Director David Robertson said, "The timpanist precisely defines the rhythmic personality of the whole orchestra. Rick Holmes was perhaps the best rhythmic friend I ever had." Leonard Slatkin added, "In my mind, virtually all timpanists are judged by Rick's standards."

Johanna Fiedler, 65, daughter of conductor Arthur Fiedler and author of *Molto Agitato,* a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at the Metropolitan Opera based on her experiences as the Met's chief press liaison from 1975 to 1989, died at her home in Manhattan on May 27, following an extended illness.

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 42

Concerts Everywhere

St Louis Symphony

Rouse: Symphony 3 (world premiere)

You'd never know it from the advertising, but there was something else on the program May 5 at Powell Hall besides Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. For the St Louis Symphony's last concert of the season, Christopher Rouse was present for the world premiere of his Symphony No. 3, conducted by Music Director David Robertson.

According to Rouse, the unusual form of his symphony was patterned after Prokofieff's Symphony No. 2, which was inspired by Beethoven's final piano sonata. All three works have two main parts, an aggressive, declarative opening movement followed by a theme and variations.

Commentators on Rouse's music often use words like "exciting" or "energetic", and from the opening trumpet fanfare I heard what they mean. Unlike much new music, there are no extended excursions into serial techniques, agonized atonal ruminations, or dramatic expressionism. Instead it stays resolutely tonal; even the dissonances seem stimulating rather than grating. Rouse also offers many islands of consonance so a listener's musical GPS is always on target. The busy percussion section offers a constant underlying rhythmic pulse that is picked up by other instruments from time to time, takes hold, and doesn't let go.

The five variations in the second part vary in mood and style, beginning with a gentle, romantic statement of the theme on the English horn floating over a soft cushion of strings. Then in between a couple of snappy swinging variations (that include a "killer" clarinet passage) is one for strings alone with low bluesy opening bass lines that gradually work their way up through the high violins.

The final variation takes off like a rocket, as little flashes of texture from each section punctuate the orchestral fabric. The music eventually comes full circle, abruptly reprising the gentle English horn theme of the first variation, before charging to the end with the vigor of the first movement.

Rouse said he had no extra-musical subtext in mind, and this symphony is just fine

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 43

without one. The unique orchestrations and breezy lyricism seemed fresh, playful, and introspective rather than derivative, superficial, or coldly cerebral. The work, reminiscent of the formal clarity of Hindemith and at some points of the gentler minimalism of John Adams, has the primal energy of, yes, Prokofieff and Beethoven, and could easily become a programming staple.

Speaking of staples, in *Carmina Burana* soprano Cyndia Sieden had the right voice—clear and sweet with just the right touch of vibrato. David Adam Moore's rich baritone would have been even more impressive had he added a more confident personality to his character. Tenor Richard Troxell did a perfect turn as the roasting swan. The St Louis Children's Choirs sounded properly sweet and innocent, and the St Louis Symphony Chorus roared to life with crisp articulation and solid intonation. With a great orchestra and conductor at the top of their form, and a full house (including lots of enthusiastic young people), the concert was a satisfying conclusion to a highly effective season.

JOHN HUXHOLD

Washington DC

Thomas: Violin Concerto 3 (US Premiere)

The checklist of Christoph Eschenbach's first season as music director of the National Symphony and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts included three themes: orchestral song, three weeks' worth of material influenced by Indian culture, and new works commissioned by the NSO (a long-standing tradition). His final program of the 2010-11 season brought Augusta Read Thomas's Violin Concerto No. 3 (*Juggler in Paradise*), a NSO co-commission, to these shores for the first time.

Thomas and the NSO have a history that extends back to the Rostropovich era in 1992, when her Symphony No. 1 (*Air and Angels*) was given its world premiere. In less than 20 years the NSO has presented eight Thomas works—impressive for such a forward-thinking composer still in her 40s.

Juggler in Paradise, composed in 2008, is a challenging, engaging piece that, if anything, errs on the side of brevity. It is a single-movement arch barely 20 minutes in length, and it avoids empty bravura cliches from the soloist and assigns much of the orchestral color to six percussionists employing dozens of instruments, including nine triangles (the triangle gets the last word). Stravinsky and Varese are composers Thomas admires, and their inspiration was felt even in the bongo cadenza. Eight players in the back of the stage formed a semi-circular sound screen around the orchestra and soloist.

Violinist Jennifer Koh plunged into the music, making bold, decisive statements when the score called for them, and elsewhere going with the flow of dance rhythms, both earthy and metaphysical. Koh, who performed *Juggler* in 2009, was an experienced hand in how to coexist with an oddly-equipped orchestra. The consummate multi-tasker Eschenbach and the NSO kept the textures clear, the tempos lively, and the dynamics carefully balanced.

So why was the response disappointing? Start with the audience size, a mild turnout despite Thomas's reputation with the NSO. Perhaps the crowd expected a more dominant violin presence; maybe they were caught off guard by the way the concerto gradually expired. Concertos come with some preconceptions. A better designation for the piece would be "Juggler in Paradise for Violin and Orchestra". A pair of bracketing Schumann opuses, on their own, offered no guarantee of a packed house.

Eschenbach did at least supply another "first", the NSO's maiden voyage with the Overture to *Die Braut von Messina*, a dramatic, effective curtain raiser that Schumann wrote after his Symphony No. 2, the concluding and most substantial work on the bill. Whatever drama might have been lacking in Thomas's concerto, Eschenbach and the NSO compensated for it in their fiery Schumann collaborations.

It's far too early to predict how their relationship will grow. Ask retiring NSO trumpeter Adel Sanchez, who was honored at the June 9 concert for 42 years of dedicated service under six administrations. A single season is but a sprint for a marathon man.

CHARLES MCCARDELL

Berlin Philharmonic

Fleming, Hampson, and Thielemann

Richard Strauss occupies an ambiguous place in history that is all the more difficult to define when confronted with the breadth and versatility of his musical language. His somewhat pompous *Festmusik der Stadt Wien* for brass and timpani, premiered in 1943, inevitably conjures his complicity with the Nazi regime, while songs from his early period evoke an introspective, deeply musical individual who, after the war near the end of his life, may have looked at the world in despair from his Bavarian villa.

The Berlin Philharmonic presented an all-Strauss concert on May 5 at the Philharmonie

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 44

with soloists Renee Fleming and Thomas Hampson and guest conductor Christian Thielemann. With much of this season's program revolving around Russian repertoire, a return to the orchestra's native roots, led by a conductor who specializes in the late German romantics and brought to life by two of the world's most respected vocalists, made a musically probing evening.

Fleming's timbre has lost some of its luster and velvety sheen in recent years, but her interpretations of Strauss remain magnetically fresh and compelling. She created immediate intimacy with the audience for her first song, an orchestral adaptation of 'Traum Durch die Dämmerung', as she melted into the music's dusky lyricism. Thielemann elicited an unusually sleek and intense pianissimo from the orchestra.

In 'Gesang der Apollopriesterin', a dark, tormented work despite its celestial theme, Fleming revealed a lower range that has grown even richer in maturity, while her top notes were sometimes pinched. The swift, triumphant 'Winterliebe' was more flattering to her as she opened the song with bell-like tones and then revealed untarnished metal as she and the BPO wandered through emphatic, craggy melodies. Following enthusiastic applause, she and Thielemann offered the dreamy 'Waldseligkeit' as an encore.

Hampson gave just as gripping interpretations, sometimes inadvertently conjuring the spirit of Gustav Mahler. 'Pilgers Morgenlied', while glowing with romantic emotion, had a subtle touch of irony alongside the orchestra's forceful playing. The baritone gave careful attention to the poetic arc of 'Hymnus', accentuated by finely-crafted harmonic turns in the orchestra. In the nightmarish 'Notturno', he evoked palpable torment and deathly shadows with booming, enveloping tones. Against Hampson's impassioned singing, the eerie melodies of Concertmaster Daishin Kashimoto, while elegantly executed, left a somewhat cold impression.

Following a vigorous prelude to the third act of *Arabella*, Hampson and Fleming shared the stage with natural chemistry for two duets from the opera. Hampson was a steadfast, seductive Mandrynka, while Fleming conveyed a touch of youthful innocence. The orchestra carried the singers with taut phrases. Just as the emotive melodies of "und du wirst mein gebieter sein" lingered in the hall, the performers reprised the final two stanzas with plangent affection.

The concert, which opened with the Berlin Philharmonic's first performance ever of *Festmusik der Stadt Wien*, ended with Strauss's *Festival Prelude* for large orchestra and organ, written to inaugurate Vienna's Konzerthaus in 1913. The BPO's consistently refined playing was even further polished under Thielemann, yet lacked the burnished quality one notices under Music Director Simon Rattle.

As Berlin grows into an international city of the future, the concert was a throwback to another era.

REBECCA SCHMID

Hampton VA

Danielpour: *Inventions on a Marriage* (world premiere)

Some chamber musicians play together as married couples, but how many get to perform a piece written to celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary? That pleasure was enjoyed by violinist Jaime Laredo and cellist Sharon Robinson (husband and wife) along with pianist Joseph Kalichstein on May 21 at the American Theatre. The occasion, part of the Virginia Arts Festival, was the world premiere by the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio of Richard Danielpour's *Inventions on a Marriage*.

In pre-performance remarks, Danielpour called the short, seven-movement work "a set of musical snapshots of married life". Each movement carried a title: Mirror Image, Heroics, As You Were Sleeping, Argument, Reconciliation, Celebration, and Good Night. The entire work seemed to define the arc of a relationship.

Danielpour writes in a very accessible style with flashes of dissonance and an emotional accuracy that captured the different phases of a marriage. 'Heroics', with its rapid string passages, describes the frenetic pace of two people trying to balance busy lives with the responsibilities of marriage. 'Argument' with its tango-like melodies has the push-pull rough edge of two tempers sparring. And the violin melody in 'Good Night' brought out a dreamy, slightly sad quality, almost suggesting a couple in the final stages of their relationship looking back over a long life together.

Danielpour said the piece was not specific to Laredo and Robinson, but it was fun to observe their gestures as they made their way through it. Laredo smiled briefly at the close of the 'Argument', and the couple seemed especially in tune with the bittersweet sounds of 'Good Night' as the work drew to a close.

As a couple, they played beautifully, especially when weaving together Danielpour's melodic lines. Without any real fireworks, the piece has a comfortable, almost everyday feel that perfectly suggests what most marriages are all about.

That certainly wouldn't work for the tor-

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 45

mented personal life that Tchaikovsky lived; his more smber trio closed the program. Written as an elegy to his mentor, pianist and teacher Nikolai Rubinstein, the work is laid out in two large movements with the second a series of variations.

Giving this sprawling work a cohesive framework fell to Kalichstein, who emerged as the unspoken leader of the trio in taming what he described beforehand to the audience as an "inspired, touching, and difficult" work. His firm hands harnessed the almost symphonic chords and thick passages that Tchaikovsky built into the piece. Especially in the set of variations, he brought out the individual qualities of each with remarkable attention to dynamics, adding weight in one part and playfully skipping across the keys in another.

Laredo and Robison threw their own formidable abilities into this mix, and the results made for a riveting performance. Robinson pulled from her instrument a mournful tone that Tchaikovsky suggests as the theme of the work, and Laredo used carefully controlled playing to bring order to the composer's effusiveness.

The evening opened with Beethoven's Trio No. 2, a piece that Tchaikovsky could not have imagined writing. Stately and clean, the work begins with a soft piano melody that is repeated in the violin and cello. The KLR Trio seemed to feel very much at home with Beethoven's graceful work that gives each player an equal role. Kalichstein was a strong voice but playful as well, and the violin and cello took an almost reserved approach until all three players broke ahead like race horses in the final spirited movement.

DAVID NICHOLSON

Ojai Festival

Crumb: *The Winds of Destiny*

For over 50 years, the arched acoustical shell in Ojai's Libbey Bowl hovered over the likes of Aaron Copland, Pierre Boulez, Michael Tilson Thomas, and other luminaries who made music at the venerable, lovable Ojai Music Festival. But the shell grew old and dilapidated, infested with termites, beyond easy repair. So, with remarkable speed this little town (pop 8,226) managed to raise $3.93 million to build a new facility well in time for the 2011 Festival.

For a longtime festivalgoer, entering the new Libbey Bowl came as a bit of a shock. The surrounding grounds were reconfigured, crowned by a spiked arch, designed by the composer-inventor Trimpin, that plays music when you enter. Gone are the rustic wooden benches set in uneven asphalt and dirt; they're replaced by rows and rows of green plastic seats set in concrete. The sightlines are much better now owing to the steeper rake of the seating area and the relocation of obstructing tree trunks. The new shell is shaped like the old one, only bigger and turned slightly counter-clockwise so that it now faces the rear lawn directly instead of at an awkward angle (it's still tough for lawn people to see the stage, but we're told that the height of the lawn may be raised in the future). If you look straight ahead, the scene is familiar; but look around, and you are reminded of Ticketmaster and the other sterile encroachments of urban outdoor concert life.

One thing that doesn't change at Ojai is the adventurous bent of the programming. For the more-or-less official opening concert June 10, this year's Music Director Dawn Upshaw brought her frequent collaborator, professional provocateur Peter Sellars, to stage George Crumb's song cycle *The Winds Of Destiny*, where American folk songs and spirituals of the Civil War period and beyond are planted in Crumb's ethereally twinkling, crashing, haunting sound world.

Naturally, Sellars came with an agenda: protesting current US involvement in three wars. So he had Upshaw play the role of a returning Afghan war veteran whose sleep was constantly disrupted by flashbacks (with apologies to Esa-Pekka Salonen, the piece could have been retitled *Insomnia*). He also prefaced the long evening with a three-way discussion between himself, Crumb, and pianist Gilbert Kalish, and followed the Crumb cycle with an absorbing set of Afghani music by the Sakhi Ensemble (based in Fremont CA) that should have opened the concert.

Yet, despite the heavy-handed politically correct concept, Upshaw was brilliant, immersing herself completely in the premise, panting and moaning as if in extreme pain but also singing luminously at the drop of a hat. So were Kalish and the percussion ensemble Red Fish Blue Fish as they played the score with an aggressive ferocity and wistful drifting quality that went beyond any other performance of this work that I'm familiar with.

The performance was well amplified by the new sound system. And with the lights out, the dark night sky overhead, and the frogs and crickets adding to the night ambience that fed into the idea of disturbed dreams, the magical Ojai ambience took hold, undeterred by all that plastic and concrete.

RICHARD S GINELL

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 46

Los Angeles Phil New Music Group

Works by Kahane, Norman, and Mazzoli (world premieres)

John Adams, the creative chair for the Los Angeles Philharmonic's new music activities, made only one appearance in Walt Disney Concert Hall in the 2010-11 season on May 24, and not a note of his own music was heard. Instead, he generously devoted a Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group "Green Umbrella" program to world premieres by a trio of young composers born between 1979 and 1981, now clustered in Brooklyn, plus one work by Steven Mackey, an "oldster" at 55 who made the transition from rock 'n roll guitar to a Princeton professorship in only a decade. Besides conducting the three premieres with encouraging enthusiasm, Adams gave us an ingratiating peek into the workshop, musing how performances of new music often begin in chaos and self-doubt at the first rehearsal, gradually increase in confidence by the dress rehearsal, and work out fine at the actual concert.

The young composer who seemed to have the most self-confidence also had the most effective piece, perhaps even a breakthrough. He is Gabriel Kahane, whose bio doesn't try to conceal the fact that he is the son of well-known conductor-pianist Jeffrey Kahane. More important, in *Orinico Sketches*, his highly enjoyable song cycle based on his family history, he has figured out a way to merge credible classical music writing with a believable pop-music stance. The writing for a chamber ensemble was sophisticated, with beautifully formed inner voices constantly moving around, whether evoking the ocean waves of his grandmother's voyage to the New World or the Afro-Cuban beat of Havana where she first landed. Kahane alternated between piano and guitar, singing in a pop tenor voice that summoned the timbres of figures like Sting or James Taylor. There was no condescension, no posing as "hip"; this felt genuine.

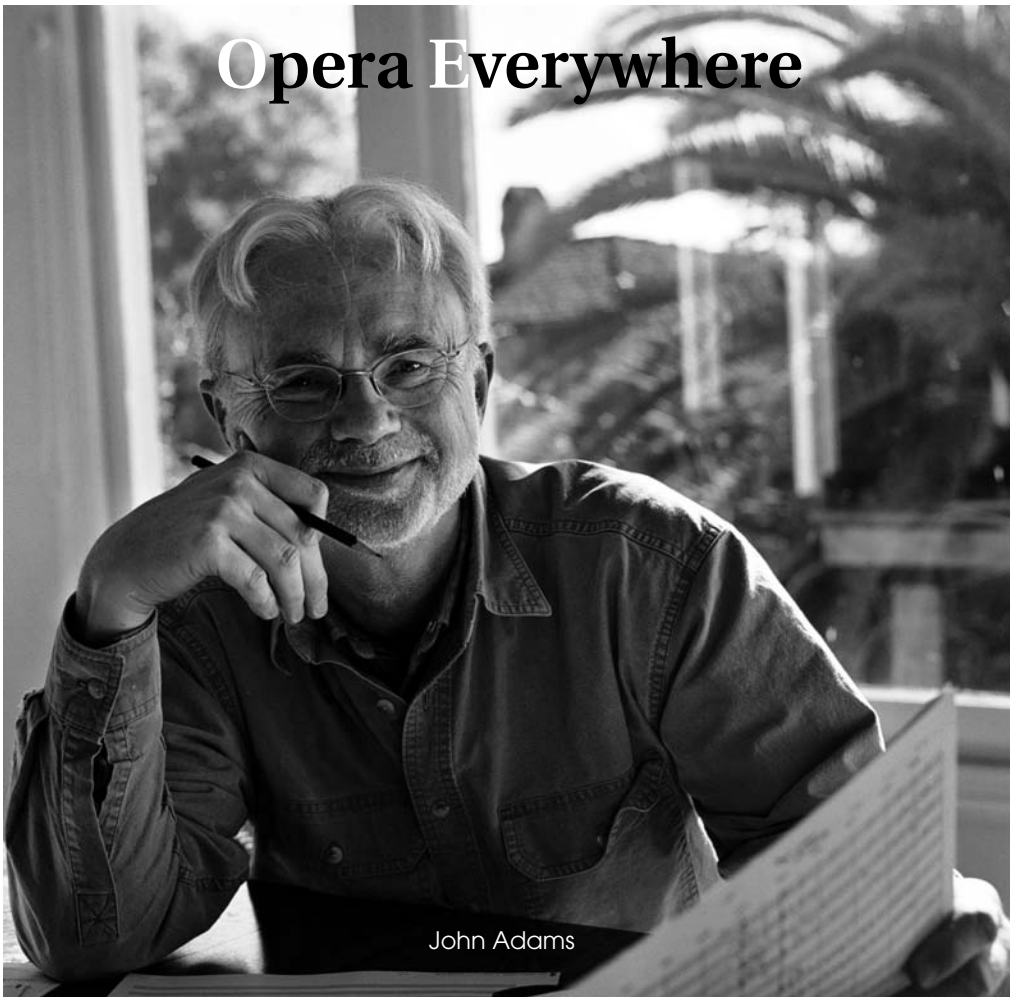
Missy Mazzoli and Andrew Norman did not hide their initial forebodings about their assignments, Mazzoli because she was asked to expand on Bach's ever-daunting Chaconne for solo violin, and Norman because he dearly wanted to write something worthy of a Disney Hall debut. Mazzoli's *Dissolve, O My Heart* opened with the first stentorian Bach chord and continued agreeably in his spirit, with Jennifer Koh skillfully riding the frequent modern slides and Bachian multiple-stops. Norman's *Try* opened with random craziness in search of a piece until the pianist, after a few tantrums, settled on a gentle downward motif and repeated it, but *Try* went flat. Perhaps he "tried" too hard.

Mackey's *Four Iconoclastic Episodes* amounted to a double concerto for his electric guitar, Koh's violin, and a string ensemble. Much of the time, Mackey ran through his extensive vocabulary of rock guitar techniques, mellow and edgy but mostly mellow, while Koh's part was mostly a showy display of traditional concerto virtuosity. The strings were often just along for the ride, not really engaged in the first three movements until the conclusions. As with Mackey's *Beautiful Passing* [see Ginell's article on the Los Angeles Master Chorale in this issue], the most inspired passage was the fade at the end.

RICHARD S GINELL

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 47

Opera Everywhere



John Adams

Opera Theatre of St Louis

Adams: *The Death of Klinghoffer*

John Adams's second opera, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, is based on the 1985 hijacking of the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro by four Palestinian Liberation Front terrorists who demanded the release of 50 Palestinians held in Israeli jails and murdered disabled American Jewish passenger Leon Klinghoffer in the process. The Opera Theatre of St Louis's June production, the work's first major revival since its 1991 premiere, was one of the most compelling, emotionally involving performances I've ever seen. As Marilyn Klinghoffer sings in the opera's final words, "I wanted to die."

Is *Klinghoffer* an opera or an oratorio? I think it really is an oratorio, but one of powerful emotion and intellectual intrigue. Adams based its form on the great Bach passions where extensive choral sections alternate with more operatic-like scenes with arias. The choruses represent the Israeli and Palestinian points of view evenhandedly; neither side escapes criticism or sympathy. Just as the choruses are extensive, so are the arias, most of them taking up an entire page or more. My only criticism is of Alice Goodman's extensively wordy libretto. Its complexity and the use of many unusual words make the text difficult to understand. The projected titles were a necessity.

To call the music minimalist is not quite correct. True, it is repetitive, particularly in the orchestra; yet, unlike Philip Glass's music, it is complex, melodic, and varied, more suited to the text and emotional situations. Tender emotion and violent outburst capture the ear.

There is not a lot one can do in staging the work, but stage director James Robinson did

Sig02arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 48

quite a bit. The opera began with a shocking coup de theatre. One sat a moment or two in complete darkness. A single shot rang out, then a brilliant light from above illuminated Klinghoffer's empty wheelchair as water cascaded over it from above. Lights out. Two massive black panels giving the appearance of the sides of a ship formed the background. A broad panel for projections of sea water, waves, etc, spanned the stage. The massive choruses of Palestinian and Israeli refugees, all carrying luggage, were symmetrically arranged and static, then burst into complex patterns.

The Act I finale was a startling vision of hate between the two choruses. When a small Israeli boy and a small Palestinian boy, both carrying peace branches, attempted to play together, they were violently separated with a wall of luggage built between them and the warring choruses. Also, the death of Klinghoffer was movingly portrayed by a terrorist slowly pushing the dead Klinghoffer in his wheelchair across the stage as the projection panel displayed a wheelchair submerged in water.

The performances were flawless. Two massive voices dominated: Nancy Maultsby (Mrs Marilyn Klinghoffer) and Brian Mulligan (Leon Klinghoffer). The ship's Captain was the capable Christopher Magiera. The Terrorists were a varied lot led by the rather subdued, creepy, Rambo-like Paul La Rosa. But it was tenor Matthew Di Battista (Molqi) who shattered the sonic sound barrier with his bright, brilliantly sung portrayal. Aubrey Allicock (as minor terrorist Maoud) and mezzo Laura Wilde (Omar) with her sensuous voice rounded out the group. A saucy British comedienne-dancer, Swiss grandmother, and Austrian women were delightfully portrayed by Lucy Schaufer.

The only concern I had beforehand was how the chorus would do ,given their extensive involvement. Nothing to fear. The 29-member chorus was outstanding! It was the collective heart of the opera (and the story). Kudos to Chorus Master Robert Ainsley. Michael Christie, using the new reduced orchestration, led members of the St Louis Symphony with plenty of delicacy, power, sweep, and emotion.

CHARLES H PARSONS

Opera Company of Philadelphia

Henze: *Phaedra* (US Premiere)

The Opera Company of Philadelphia's season closed in June with the US premiere of Hans Werner Henze's *Phaedra*. Its initial run played mostly to full houses, with some audience members returning at two added performances.

Director Robert Driver and his production team went for high-concept multi-media with sleek design elements. The results proved to be thrilling opera-theater very suited to OCP's developing chamber series, presented here at the Verizon Center's more intimate space, the Perelman Theater. In the initial Labyrinth scenes, Henze, using Greek oratorical conceits, has his characters singing directly to the audience instead of each other. This device could be shrill and worked against drawing one into the story. In contrast, Philippe Amand's gliding set and lighting design with its projections of harrowing physical and psychic landscapes was completely absorbing.

The high drama was drawn from the Phaedra plays by Euripides and Seneca, as well as symbolic allusions from Henze's life. The composer and librettist Christian Lehnert shortened the convoluted and steamy tale of Phaedra into a challenging five scenes in 90 minutes that condenses the lurid tale of the vanquishing of a mythical Minotaur, Phaedra's incestuous desire for her stepson Hippolyt, and the warring goddesses Aphrodite and Artemis. The death and rebirth of Hippolyt explores a universal story of outcasts that leaves sympathy even for the Minotaur. Indeed this is time-traveling, trans-cultural, androgynous Olympian soap opera.

The opera was composed in 2007, the year that Henze's partner of 40 years (Fausto Moroni) died. Driver interpreted part of the story from Henze's struggle for personal freedom and boldly used subtexts that reflected the composer's experience of being condemned by his father (a Nazi) for being gay and his self-liberation on the isle of Nemi, where he and Moroni lived.

Mezzo-soprano Tamara Mumford played Phaedra with clamorous vocal menace as she stalked Hypopolyt. She appeared in a nude body stocking with swirl piping around her breasts a la Theda Bara, and was pretty campy as she belted out Lehnert's lusty German dialog. But Driver framed it all with a seductive, dreamy theatricality, floating the singers around each other.

William Burden had a lot of tenor heavy lifting as Hippolyt, but started to reveal the "interiors" subtly, as he staggered from one torturous scene to another. He was most vibrant in his noble rejection of Phaedra and later in his transfiguration when, as the caged Virbius, he was freed with a kiss by Artemis. Elizabeth Reiter, a sultry soprano who just finished her training at the Curtis Institute, was just as commanding as the scheming, icy Aphrodite. Another winning touch by Driver had her shadowing Phaedra and mouthing her lines—an example of effective character counterpoint that added an unexpected emotional dimension.

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 49

The dreamscape was jarringly broken in Act II by the re-animation of Hippolyt into Virbius, which alludes to Henze's actual emergence from a two-month coma he suffered in 2005. Burden, now a zombie, was flopped around on a gurney as Monty-Python-esque visuals of body parts and grisly hardware loomed above him. This supplied some comic relief but seemed a bit loopy. Otherwise, the template of panels gliding in and out, or triangulating the projections of nature and of the scenes played out in silhouette, was fluidly executed—dazzling stagecraft achieved without overwhelming the music.

Giving the most dimension to a character both vocally and dramatically was Anthony Roth Costanza. Alternating faux-castrato and countertenor, his performance was a labyrinth of interpretive vocal skills that powerfully dispatched the complexities of Artemis—in platform sandals no less.

There are many stand-alone vocal passages, but too often they straight-jacket the singers with Henze's circular vocal lines that retreat into barky resolutions. In contrast, the appearance of the serene bass Jeremy Milner, playing Minotauros (not the monster one anticipated) in the finale, was an unexpected delight.

Compared to Henze's vocal lines, his orchestral template was more liberated, having narrative scope even with seeming nonsequiters. The atmospherics included an array of haunting effects—dizzying vibes, an architectonic piano, a vaulted cello, shadowy violin or oboe lines, and Japanese Noh theater cymbals, just to mention a few, all cohesively brought together by conductor Corrado Rovaris.

LEWIS WHITTINGTON

Long Beach Opera

Shostakovich: *Moscow, Cherry Town*

Nikita Khrushchev, whose term as the boss of the Soviet Union now seems like a relatively enlightened time between the eras of Stalinist terror and gray Brezhnev conformity, had a scheme. Apparently concerned about the plight of the average comrade, Khrushchev ordered the mass construction of cheap, five-story, concrete-block apartment buildings, whose units were doled out to the people amid tangles of red tape.

This scheme became a ripe topic for entertainment purposes, and who should be asked to contribute a score to one such project but the newly-rehabilitated Dmitri Shostakovich. *Moscow, Cherry Town* (Cheromushki), Shostakovich's first and only musical comedy, was the result; and Shostakovich fans who come to the score for the first time could be excused for wondering if the completion date, 1958, is wrong. (Actually, the crazed galop that underpins a Moscow taxi ride was lifted from the 1935 ballet *The Limpid Stream*.) The opera is a delightful, madcap, sometimes silly, tuneful, quote-filled, often waltz-driven romp of a score—a throwback to the wacky Shostakovich of the 1920s and early 30s before Stalin cracked down. Some of *Cheromushki* is a wildly satirical poke at the bureaucracy, but there is also an innocence about the piece, the triumph of love over the corrupt guys in charge. It remains a rarity in the catalog. There is an abridged recording from the British premiere, a "complete" recording on Chandos, and the 1963 Soviet film on DVD. So the intrepid iconoclasts at Long Beach Opera stepped into a large breach when they presented it. I caught a runout performance in Santa Monica's Barnum Hall the afternoon of May 22.

LBO general director-conductor Andreas Mitisek vigorously led a two-act, 13-piece pit-band version of the score, with some numbers deleted. Stage director Isabel Milenski resisted the temptation to update, setting the piece squarely in 1959 Moscow with an abstract all-purpose set of Soviet-constructivist architecture and symbols (including a large all-pervasive "eye" that was supposed to represent Big Brother). The cast, mostly young, spirited, and evenly-matched in voice, cavorted, despaired, plotted, and celebrated to a rhyme-happy English translation that sometimes made the libretto sound like Gilbert & Sullivan. The prevailing color of the lighting was, of course, red.

This remains in danger of being consigned to the tall pile of dated music-theatre works, what with some longueurs in the plot and its time-specific setting in a vanished political system (though it is true that young people, especially in the sky-high rental market of Los Angeles-Santa Monica, still have trouble finding their own places to live). But Long Beach Opera kept things moving along in a lively, bubbly, zesty production that illuminated a side of Shostakovich (composer of some of the most uproariously funny music ever written) that doesn't get much of a hearing.

RICHARD S GINELL

> Criticism is a necessity if the culture is to be protected from decay.
>
> —Roger Scruton
>
> That means all criticism is really about the whole culture.

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 50

Critical Convictions

Book Review

Voices of Stone and Steel: the Music of William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin

by Walter Simmons

Scarecrow Press, 425 pages (+CD)

As Walter Simmons points out in the introductory chapter of *Voices in the Wilderness*, his 2004 book on six American modern-romantic composers (May/June 2004), the narrative outline directing the typical history of American concert music since 1900 starts with provincial, tradition-bound imitations of European masters. As the new century progresses, American composers begin to find their own voice and assert their artistic independence and national pride. Copland, Harris, Gershwin, and others begin to incorporate homegrown vernacular music—jazz and folk tunes—into their works. But by midcentury an influential "new music" arrives from post-War Europe. Even Schoenberg's dodecaphony appears outdated to the proponents of this movement, who—claiming that tonality is "exhausted," that the old rhetoric is irrelevant to a post-War world—adopt the austere, cerebral serialism of Webern as their touchstone. Stockhausen leads the experimentalists, Boulez the more severe and brittle pointillists. The "new music" is quickly taken up by university-based composers and leads to an efflorescence of fragmentation, relentless chromaticism, kaleidoscopic instrumentation, sudden and extreme contrasts in dynamics and register, and all sorts of new performance techniques. Melodic lyricism and tonal harmonies—and the openly romantic emotion they convey—become passé, even scorned.

Meanwhile, the turn-of-the-century innovations of Ives are rediscovered and canonized as adumbrations of the newly ascendant avant-garde, as are the somewhat later experiments of Cowell, Ruggles, Crawford-Seeger, and Varese. All of these native forerunners and European eminences are seen to lead, by an inexorable teleological progression, to the dominance of serial techniques and other kinds of "contemporary" procedures, culminating in the 1950s and 60s in the rebarbative, complex, atonal, special-effects-heavy works and their accompanying ideologies of such commanding personalities as Elliott Carter, Milton Babbitt, George Crumb, John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Conlon Nancarrow. No matter that audiences hate the avant-garde—indeed, that's a big part of its validation; its best-known composers gain stature, fame, even notoriety; its lesser figures get professional approval and academic tenure.

And what of the many unenlightened composers who continue to write old-fashioned tonal music using the hallowed forms and procedures? Their efforts are denigrated by musical ideologues and taste-makers as quaint, anachronistic, or obsolete; their place in the story of modern American music is diminished to the merely incidental. Such music is, the up-to-date feel, at best merely peripheral to the grand narrative outlining the historically inevitable march to modernist supremacy; it is not to be taken as "serious" or "important".

Worship of the newest thing is very old, of course. In the 20th Century the high priest of musical modernism was Theodore Adorno, whose early and harshly doctrinaire promulgation of the view that tonality and traditional styles had outlived their usefulness (to be replaced by strict Schoenbergian dodecaphony) was hugely influential. Copland and other American "populists" merited only disdain, Adorno felt, in their hopeless pursuit of outworn ideals. By the late 1950s his dogmas had expanded their reach (and intensified their exclusivity) in such French critics as René Leibowitz and André Hodeir, the latter excoriating anything not adhering to the brittle pointillism of Boulez and Barraqué, specifically singling out (in his polemical screed *Since Debussy*) almost all modern-era American music as hopelessly irrelevant and reactionary. Most of it, he claimed indignantly, was no better than the hackneyed rubbish spewn out by such dinosaurs as Shostakovich.

Soon this denigration of tonal music spread to American critics wanting to keep up with the latest fashions. See, for example, the dismissal of Barber's "easygoing, sentimental" and "amusing" Violin Concerto in his 1966 *High Fidelity* review by the esteemed critic Alfred Frankenstein. Eric Salzman's widely used and admired *20th-Century Music: An Introduction* (1967, revised edition 1974) en-

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 51

dorsed this attitude with a bit more subtlety by simply concentrating on avant-garde developments. Everything else was secondary and therefore given only cursory (if any) attention. Academic journals such as *Perspectives in New Music* reflected the same bias for many decades. "New music" was atonal music, as any issue from the 1950s or 1960s will illustrate. (An added attraction was that serial techniques present seductive opportunities for impressively abstruse analysis.)

The view that avant-garde music represents progress, that it is the only proper goal of a natural and beneficial aesthetic evolution, superseding hidebound tonal, traditional music, remains persistent in American music criticism still, in for instance Kyle Gann's *American Music in the 20th Century*, published in 1997. Even Alex Ross, in his eloquent and impressive 2008 overview of modern music, *The Rest Is Noise*—which is particularly good in evoking the historical and cultural context of 20th Century music—is nevertheless strongly skewed toward "the progressive path from Debussy to Boulez and Cage" (as he puts it). American experimental composers are given far more space and attention than the more traditional figures, with the clear implication that they represent the dominant and more significant evolutionary strain.

Walter Simmons's *Voices in the Wilderness* was the first in a series of books with the overarching title *20th Century Traditionalists* intended to present a corrective to that story about modern American music. Simmons explicitly rejects both the teleological argument that "the evolution of the tonal system proceeded according to a linear progression that led inevitably to the dissolution of tonality" and the underlying assumption "that music is fruitfully studied as *any* sort of linear progression, with some hypothetical goal toward which all contenders are racing". Simmons's history of American music instead places much more value on the intrinsic and particular virtues, as well as the effect on actual concert audiences, of the music written by the many American composers who (in different ways) maintained their allegiance to traditional melody, harmony, textures, and forms, as well as to the warmth, engagement, and immediate, visceral effect these elements convey. Those composers also, of course, made many innovations, as all imaginative artists do, but for specific communicative reasons, not in service of an ideology of "originality" for its own sake. They refused to abandon the time-honored musical virtues of shapely melodic lines, tonal-based harmonic tension and release, clear formal logic, sensuous instrumental color, and the expressive purposes to which these qualities have traditionally been put—their frank appeal to pleasure, their immediate and obvious ability to arouse and ennoble human emotion.

Before going on I should add that just the fact that audiences hated so-called "new music" doesn't mean that all of it was bad. Much was, of course—as indeed could be said of the music in any stylistic idiom however new-fangled or old-fashioned. But "new music" was, at first, almost impossible to judge, so undifferentiated did it sound to its earliest audiences. With time it became clear that the idiom's trademark excesses and extremes quickly degenerated into cliches and (unintentional) self-parody, especially when taken up by the legions of Boulez's inferior imitators. Furthermore, its most devoted practitioners tended to run out of worthy ideas and lapse into silence early in their careers. Nevertheless there are many well-made and expressive compositions that employ atonality and avant-garde techniques, even of the iciest and most forbidding mode. I'm not arguing that a more traditional, tonality-based music is always or inevitably better—or somehow more "natural" or "proper"—than more difficult "new music". There are no doubt certain emotions that can only be conveyed by "contemporary" styles and devices. My point is that individual works in any and all styles should be judged, and their significance assessed, on the basis of their merits and not on rigid a priori ideological assumptions about what is or isn't fashionable or privileged by an imputed evolutionary inevitability. Nor should musical history be distorted by such assumptions. We need to take a longer view; no one today disparages JS Bach for being "old-fashioned"—which he was, by the standards of his own time.

Just such a "longer view" is what Simmons tries to encapsulate in the notion of "20th Century traditionalist". This, in Simmons's use of the term, is a wide, encompassing category. There are many different "traditions" and so many different varieties of "traditionalists". Fervent romantics like Bloch, Hanson, Barber, Creston, Giannini, and Flagello (discussed in *Voices in the Wilderness*) are one kind. Others are nationalist and populist composers like Copland, Harris, Gershwin; "multiculturalists" like Hovhaness and Harrison, who drew on exotic modes and tried to transmit non-Western emotional states; neoclassic composers influenced by Stravinsky and Hindemith like Piston and his students Harold Shapero, Irving Fine, and Ingolf Dahl; "modernist traditionalists" like Schuman, Persichetti, Mennin, and Diamond, whose bolder harmonic vocabulary expanded their range of expressive possibilities; and so-called "new romantic" composers like George Rochberg and John Corigliano who have since the 1970s reasserted the late-

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 52

romantic heritage of Strauss, Mahler, and Puccini.

All of these in-one-way-or-another "traditionalists" adopted and adapted in their works time-honored structural patterns and procedures, including tonally-derived harmony and classic outlines—passacaglia, fugue, sonata, theme-and-variations, rondo, and aria and dance forms. That, after all, is a considerable part of what it means to be a "traditionalist". But each group had distinct and differentiating characteristics, as of course did the individual composers themselves. For Simmons's second volume in his projected series he has singled out three "modernist traditionalist" composers who came to prominence in the 1940s and 50s—William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin—who he thinks exemplify (and indeed mark the summit) of this particular strand in tradition-based American composers of the past century. That all three were long associated (as teachers and administrators) with the Juilliard School of Music is a less important but by no means negligible point of connection among them.

Though all three were heralded during the early part of their careers as bold, strongly profiled personalities and brilliant craftsmen (which they certainly were), they suffered from a kind of two-sided neglect as more avant-garde figures came to prominence. Like such renowned figures as Stravinsky, Bartok, and Hindemith (whose music they learned from), they were more "modern" and adventurous (especially in their use of dissonance and chromaticism) than the more melodious, openly romantic Barber and Hanson, but they abstained from the post-Webernian pointillism and more extreme "contemporary" effects and procedures of the avant-garde (including doctrinaire serialism). As a result, typical concert audiences found them too difficult, and on the other hand "sophisticated" audiences (such as there were) found them too old-fashioned and lacking in cutting-edge caché. As Simmons points out, their explorations of a more searching and chromatic vocabulary and other recent techniques were disdained by the cognescenti as merely belated attempts to update their image, "while more conservative listeners failed to distinguish their work from that of the avant-garde and viewed such efforts as 'selling out'". As a result "their work was increasingly marginalized and supported by a dwindling number of advocates". Hence the need for a reappraisal of their achievement.

As in *Voices in the Wilderness*, each chapter in Simmons's new book offers offers a detailed biographical sketch, a description of individual stylistic features of each composer, an assessment of the important and representative works that identifies both strengths and weaknesses, and a depiction of the larger social and cultural context out of which the music arose. There are many and extensive quotations from critical opinions (often at some variance with each other) and hundreds of citations in the notes for each chapter, as well as bibliographies and discographies for each composer—and even a compact disc with works by all three of them.

Among the many pleasures and sources of enlightenment offered by the book are Simmons's penetrating (and sometimes surprising) comments about how the personalities of these composers were reflected in their music. He is particularly sensitive to the contradictions and mysteries that invest the complex relationship between the artist and his creations. Schuman, for example, like his music, was bold, assertive, confident of his own stature, impatient with academic dogma. He had both the inclination and assurance to compose large-scale, serious, imposing compositions—especially symphonies. There's no doubting the importance and striking individuality of his best works: the Third Symphony, Violin Concerto, and Fourth String Quartet all show his declamatory power, lofty eloquence, nervous tension, kinetic vigor, and the unmistakable stylistic fingerprints—the dramatic gestures, plangent clashing triads, rich yet transparent scoring, multi-layered polyphony—that make his music instantly recognizable. His muscular sprung rhythms and optimism are felt as "American", yet there is a strong tragic vein also in his music—for example, in the Sixth Symphony and *The Young Dead Soldiers*.

On the other hand Schuman is not, as Simmons notes, immune from accusations of rhetorical posturing: some commentators have found the sonorous but gloomy Eighth Symphony (which I love) more grandiose and oratorical than authentically felt. It elicits reactions "divided between those who hear it as a profound abstract statement and those who hear it as...straining to sound profound [with] parts that are stunning in their impact and others...the backdrop for something striking that never occurs". Curiously, even in his most pessimistic or post-tonal, chromatic music, Schuman often ended his works—however peculiar and incongruous this became—with a major triad. "One can only speculate as to the meaning of this practice for the composer. Was it a statement of loyalty to tonality? An inability to relinquish hope, or a spirit of optimism?"

The precociously gifted, likable, easy-going, generous, witty, astonishingly fluent, stylistically chameleonic Persichetti presents a

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 53

wonderful contrast to Schuman. There is no hint of self-importance in the man or his music, and though he wrote nine symphonies and many concerted works, big orchestral works don't dominate his output as they do for Schuman or Mennin. But Persichetti's facility and wide-ranging stylistic eclecticism (ranging from clear tonality to highly-fragmented atonality), along with a certain characteristic emotional coolness—a "classic" rather than "romantic" cast—have exacted a cost: his music lacks the strong individuality that would make it instantly identifiable, and as a result it's never gotten the attention from press, listeners, performers, and recording companies that Schuman's music has. Nevertheless there are riches in Persichetti's *oeuvre* that as Simmons points out are among the high-points in modern American music, including the cycle of 12 piano sonatas, the Concerto for Piano Four-Hands, the Third String Quartet, and the Fifth Symphony. These works evince "a summation of modern classicism" combining "a spirit of spontaneous improvisation with the definitiveness of total premeditation. The result is highly cerebral music with charm, wit, grace, tenderness, and dynamism".

Mennin, the third of this New York triad, is a very different sort of man and composer from both Schuman and Persichetti. Stern, aloof, and aristocratic in demeanor, he was a deeply private man. Behind his humorless, businesslike facade was an uncompromising dedication to his aesthetic goals; a seriousness and consistency of style, vision, and purpose; and a burning intensity (darkening into febrile obsessive mania and deep pessimism as he aged) that blazed forth in the rigorous, densely-woven counterpoint of his muscular allegros and grave, elegiac adagios. There is nothing frivolous about Mennin; he had absolutely no interest in writing "minor" or merely charming pieces, and his career exhibits a single-minded and "continuous process of compression and increasing intensification of expression" that, Simmons notes, recalls Bruckner (an astonishing comparison I would never have thought of, but—whatever one thinks of Mennin's symphonies—a very acute one). One consequence of Mennin's aesthetic and stylistic predilections is that he (unlike Schuman and Persichetti) doesn't sound particularly American, but instead is closer to such Europeans as Rubbra, Holmboe, and Simpson (and ultimately to Beethoven), composers who "develop abstract ideas logically and coherently, while seeming to allude to or address profound existential issues...without recourse to extramusical references, but as if from a lofty, somewhat depersonalized perspective". Mennin's symphonies are tough nuts to crack, for me as for many listeners. I still find them often impenetrable: too opaque and airless, too filled up with notes, and too lacking in clearly shaped and separated phrases that I can easily hold in memory. Still, Simmons's comments on his character helped me to approach them with a more open mind—and I've come to admire Mennin's 1957 Piano Concerto (recorded by John Ogdon) and his magnificent (though not yet commercially recorded) 1963 Piano Sonata.

Simmons's extraordinary ability to advocate for these composers yet see them whole, with all their virtues, difficulties, and failings, is a triumph of sensitivity and a lifetime spent in thoughtful listening, research, and adjudication. He loves these men and their music yet makes careful, nuanced discriminations about them, raises questions about their accomplishments (sometimes unanswerable), and gives full credit to the intricate and unfathomable workings of personality and circumstance that bring forth artistic creation. Together with the many detailed and perceptive analyses of individual works (strictly verbal—there are no music examples) it is this celestial balance of judgement and mercy, knowledge and enigma, light and dark, that makes *Voices of Stone and Steel* indispensable for anyone studying or simply curious about the achievement of these three distinguished and emblematic "modern traditionalist" American composers.

LEHMAN

Meet the Critic: Don O'Connor

Don O'Connor was born in London, England to Irish parents. He became a US citizen in 1954. In 1963 and 1964 he got his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Industrial Design from Syracuse University, where he also studied post-graduate level musicology.

He won five national kitchen and bath design awards and in 2007 was inducted into the National Kitchen and Bath Industry Hall of Fame.

His lifelong interest in classical music included a time as the music critic for the Syracuse Post-Standard (1967-1971) and the Syracuse Herald Journal (1971-1973). From 1977 to 1980 he wrote a local record review column. He joined ARG in 2006.

From 1974 to 1978, he was the tympanist and program annotator for the Susquehanna Valley (now Williamsport) Symphony Orchestra and from 1980 to 1985 choir director at St Peter Lutheran Church in Kreamer PA. He was also a contributor to the Millennium Edition of Groves Dictionary. His memberships included the Syracuse Cinephile Society, the Havergal Brian and Felix Draeseke Societies, and the Susquehanna Valley Art Society.

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 54

Guide to Records

ACTOR: *Saxophone Concerto; Dance Rhapsody; Horn Concerto; Opening Remarks; Celebration Overture*
Debra Richtmeyer, sax; Karol Nitran, hn; Slovak Symphony/ Kirk Trevor
Navona 5848—70 minutes

Lee Actor (b 1952) pursued parallel careers in composition and software engineering, working in the Silicon Valley video game industry while studying at San Jose State and UC-Berkeley. In 2001 he quit his day job to be a full-time composer. He is a multipurpose member of the Palo Alto Philharmonic: a member of the violin and percussion sections, assistant conductor since 2001, and composer-in-residence since 2002.

He writes good, very enjoyable music. 'Opening Remarks' (2009) is a six-minute program opener, full of energy, thematically taut, with propulsive drive until a quieter lyrical section, and with a winsome harmonic language. *Celebration Overture* (2007) began the Palo Alto Symphony's 20th season and preceded a performance of Beethoven's 9th. While it opens with an old movie-style fanfare, much of the 12-minute work is suspenseful. *Dance Rhapsody* (2010) is a 16-minute potpourri with a waltz, slow and fast tangos, and a fandango.

The 13-minute Horn Concerto won first prize in the 2007 International Horn Society composition contest. I is moderate in technical challenge and heroic in character. II is poignant with a passionate middle section, while III is a rousing rondo. It's a good piece, and the reading by Slovak Radio Symphony principal horn Karol Nitran is good, too. But close miking makes his tone seem a bit tubby, and we are too aware that his pitch seems a bit shaky in I.

The album opens with the serious and dramatic orchestral introduction to Actor's 22-minute, three-movement Saxophone Concerto (2009). II has a *film noir* sound that fits the saxophone well, and III has the character of a whirling tarantella. It's a terrific piece, and University of Illinois saxophone professor Debra Richtmeyer gives it a wonderful reading. She has the requisite technical skills and a flair for the dramatic, and she expertly walks the classical saxophone's timbre tightrope: playing with a mostly velvety tone, mostly avoiding the saxophone's rasp, but never sounding wimpy.

Kirk Trevor encourages fine playing.

KILPATRICK

ADAMS, JL: *4000 Holes; And Bells Remembered*
Callithumpian Consort/ Stephen Drury
Cold Blue 35—43 minutes

In *Four Thousand Holes* (2010), a trio for piano, percussion (vibraphone and orchestra bells), and synthesizer (what the composer calls "electronic aura"), John Luther Adams explores an extended progression of radiant, overlapping triads glowing with a resigned majesty until they support a slowly ascending line leading to an ecstatic climax that caps off its 32-minute journey. The effect is meditative and spiritual, absorbing, and probably in its essence more overwhelming than its modest scoring allows.

And Bells Remembered (2005), a shorter piece for a quintet of chimes, vibraphone, orchestra bells, bowed vibraphone, and bowed crotales, consists of quiet blocks of gently ringing overlapped pentatonic sonorities, giving the piece a somewhat Asian flavor. Unassuming and unlike the later piece relatively devoid of heat, the work goes about its business without undue complication.

GIMBEL

ALWYN: *Violin Concerto; Miss Julie Suite; Fanfare for a Joyful Occasion*
Lorraine McAslan, v; Liverpool Philharmonic/ David Lloyd-Jones
Naxos 570705—58 minutes

William Alwyn's Violin concerto is in three movements, with the first two a study in melodic, free-flowing lyricism. This is not the Alywn who composed those five dramatic, often sweeping cinematic symphonies, but one who is more intimate and searching. The concerto begins in a lively manner, but I adopts its true spirit when a yearning Elgarian theme takes over. From there on the violin goes on a reverie, often soaring over the orchestra like a bird looping over the countryside. It has a few bravura moments, but for the most part it allows the orchestra to handle the stirring interludes.

II is similar but slower, as if reviewing the thoughts of I at a reduced pace. The influence is more Vaughan Williams, especially in the folk-like tune in the violas near the end. Both movements end quietly with the violin at its highest and softest, and in the ending of I its most sublime. World War II was just hitting

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 55

Britain in 1939, and the sometimes troubled mood of these movements sounds like wistful gazing on more pleasant times in the past. The music is not English pastoralist, though. Alwyn was a 20th Century romantic, as his winding, exploring melodic lines and chromatic harmonies make clear.

III is the only fast movement—actually Allegro Moderato. It is also the main source of violin pyrotechnics, which its episodic structure makes room for. *Alla Marcia* is indicated, and it does exude the spirit of a British march. There are celebratory moments in the passages with chimes, but its wistful main tune keeps III from entirely breaking away from the reverie of I and II.

It is hard to believe this is just the second recording of the work and that it was performed in public only in a violin-piano arrangement with violinist Frederick Grinke with Clifford Curzon in 1940, a year after it was completed. Henry Wood looked into conducting it, but the BBC turned him down, and that was that until 1993, when violinist Lydia Mordkovitch recorded it with Richard Hickox for Chandos. Alwyn's Violin concerto is as accessible as any 20th Century work and for two movements an effective study in melody. The length of over a half-hour may be a problem. So may the similarity of the first two movements, though they are so lovely that I'd hardly call that a problem. Perhaps the piece is not showy enough to appeal to soloists.

Miss Julie (1976), Alwyn's last completed opera, is based on the play by August Strindberg. Philip Lane drew his *Miss Julie Suite* from all three acts of the opera. By relying heavily on the waltz theme to tie things together, Lane creates a dark, troubled, stormy, and spooky piece that recalls Ravel's *La Valse* with a touch of Bernard Herrmann. The result does not capture the entire essence of the opera, but this very dramatic suite is outstanding in its own right.

Alwyn wrote *Fanfare for a Joyful Occasion* (1958) in honor of percussionist James Blades—hence the lengthy display for percussion. That aside, the work combines brass writing typical of Walton and what sounds like a rallying of cinematic troops.

This new performance of the concerto is incisive and dramatic, with a strong emphasis on structure despite the music's flowing nature. McAslan's style is direct, with notes squarely articulated. Naxos's recording is clean, detailed, and clear cut, with a deep sound stage and the violin somewhat closely miked. The approach seems to say this music is so romantic and lyrical that we serve it best by presenting it clearly and with conviction. That works in I and II. The finale is good, but a performance so clearly delineated exposes its episodic structure a bit.

The only competition is Mordkovitch and Hickox. Hickox's textures are more blended and romantic, while his tempos are 3 minutes slower in I and II combined and a little faster in III. Mordkovitch plays with a singing, sweet tone and lyrical styling that is more loving and more of a reverie, and her articulations come closer to (but never achieve) *portamento*. McAslan is just as good but more upright. The Chandos performance reveals less detail but more emotional content, and I like the way the more polished London Philharmonic and Chandos's more blended and distant sound lend III more sweep and smooth its episodic nature. I like both, but Naxos's direct approach and the detail of its acoustic may serve better as a single recording and as an introduction to the piece. Naxos also gives us the only *Miss Julie Suite.* That makes it a must, even if you own the complete opera.

Andrew Knowles's excellent notes are comprehensive, detailed, and especially useful for their coverage of the *Miss Julie Suite.*

HECHT

ARCADELT: *Mass, Ave Regina Caelorum; Motets*

with pieces by Palestrina, De Silva
Musica Contexta; English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble/ Simon Ravens
Chandos 779—68 minutes

Since Candlemas (February 2) is not a well-known feast in many countries, the booklet notes should indicate how the Feast of the Purification, the introduction of the young Jesus to the Temple, and the role of the elder Simeon all tie together. This would explain why the music chosen here fits Candlemas so well. For example, Simeon's canticle is the Nunc Dimittis (here in a setting by Palestrina) and Simeon's description of Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles" is the reason for the association of the feast with candles and the origin of the word Candlemas. And in case you are wondering, yes, there IS a direct connection to Groundhog Day: see the matchless *Oxford Companion to the Year* (pp. 62-64) about the ancient roots of Candlemas as a day of weather prediction.

This splendid program contains the *Ave, Regina Caelorum* Mass and two motets by Jacques Arcadelt (c 1507-68), with the motet by Andreas De Silva (c 1475-c 1530) the Mass is based on. Four chant passages, two Palestrina motets, and one other by De Silva round out the program. The forces range from multi-part vocal and instrumental ensembles combined ('Pater Noster') to solo voice with brass ('Hodie

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 56

Beata Virgo Maria') to the reverse combination of solo brass with choir ('Agnus Dei') to a cappella singing. The performances, repertoire choices, and sequencing are first-rate, the contrasting textures animate the music, and the spirit is uplifting.

Notes, texts, translations. First recordings for all except the Palestrina pieces.

C MOORE

ARENSKY: *Caprices;* see GLAZOUNOV

ASENCIO: *Suite Valenciana; Col-lectici Intim; Suite Mistica;*
RODRIGO: *Invocacion & Danza;*
TARREGA: *Capricho Arabe; Recuerdos de la Alhambra*
Yorgos Arguiriadis, g LMG 2096—53 minutes

The link here is Valencia, one of Spain's largest cities, southwest of Barcelona, and home of the three composers. Like the Catalonians, the Valencians speak their own dialect. The notes are in Catalan, Spanish, and English.

Rodrigo and Tarrega are well known to any guitar lover, but Vicente Asencio less so. Most experienced players have heard or played one or two works, but his music isn't widely performed, so it was good to have a generous sample of three multi-movement works here. It deserves a wider audience.

Asencio studied with Turina and Ernesto Halffter, and was strongly influenced by Falla. These influences show in his music, especially Turina. Each of the three suites displays an interesting balance between folkloric influences, especially Andalusian, and modern compositional techniques. My favorite is the *Suite Mistica*—the three movements, 'Dipso', 'Getsemani', and 'Pentecostes' have a deep, almost prayerful character.

Greek guitarist and composer Yorgos Arguiriadis is an effective advocate for this music. His playing is stylish and accomplished, fiery or meditative as needed. But he is up against considerable competition in the Rodrigo and the Tarrega. His *Invocacion y Danza* is a fine performance, though it falls short of Scott Tennant's exquisite one on GHA—and even that is outclassed by Xuefei Yang's wild and spontaneous performance on EMI (M/J 2011). His Tarrega is dark and muscular—qualities not normally associated with Tarrega—but, for me, disfigured by an over-indulgent rubato.

KEATON

BABAJANYAN: *Piano Pieces;*
see RACHMANINOFF

BABELL: *Oboe Sonatas*
Karla Schroeter; Concert Royal Cologne
Musicaphon 56924 [SACD] 73 minutes

I typically don't pop in a recording of, say, 12 sonatas by the same (relatively unknown) composer unless I know it is really good music. And when I do, I have to work quite hard to find some level of enthusiasm. Now I know that this is really good music and performed really well.

My appreciation for what the musicians of Concert Royal Cologne have done here goes deeper. In the last three years I have reviewed two of their recordings, and each one has been higher quality than the last. Reflecting on the first review (Musicaphon 56889, Jan/Feb 2008), it almost seems that the musicians took some of my criticisms to heart. For example, Karla Schroeter seemed too intent on swelling through notes; it distracted me, and I lost appreciation for the performance. I also thought that the recording levels disproportionately elevated her sound over the accompaniment. Here, though, both problems have been fixed.

So, in this lovely collection of the baroque sonatas, whether listening to them as background or engaging yourself completely, you will find a depth to the music and their performance that yields various layers of appreciation. Like a perfectly manicured garden where not a flower or stem is out of place, no instrument overshadows the next. So, while listening to a program with nothing but one type of music has its demands, this one brings great rewards.

SCHWARTZ

BACH, CPE: *3 Cello Concertos*
Truls Mork; Les Violons du Roy/ Bernard Labadic
Virgin 69449—68 minutes

One thing that strikes this listener about the music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach is that with all his classical energy and lively rhythmic movement, he has an inherited sensitivity to harmonic emotion that contributes depth to his music. Particularly in the slow movements of all three of his cello concertos, the use of chromatic movement and voice-leading makes these works very special.

The energy and accuracy of Mork's performances puts them up with Anner Bylsma, Hidemi Suzuki, and Antonio Meneses. Labadic and the King's Violins contribute a great deal to the precision and energy here, and it is recorded with an immediacy that also helps. Excellent balance between orchestra and cello clinches a very positive recommendation.

D MOORE

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 57

BACH, JC: *Symphonies, opp 6, 9, 18; La Calamita Overture*
Netherlands Chamber Orchestra/ David Zinman
Newton 8002065 [2CD] 146 minutes

These recordings, made from 1974 to 1977 and originally released on Philips, made me ask, "Johann Christian Bach, where have you been all my life?" Here's wonderful, incredibly inventive music in performances that are simply the best.

Over the last decade, Zinman, who is now 75, has given fresh, contemporary performances of Beethoven's symphonies. But now I know why it was *his* tenure (1973-85) that has been the high point so far in the history of the Rochester Philharmonic. First, he has the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra playing with the Rolls Royce unanimity of tone, tuning, and ensemble of the very finest large orchestras from Vienna and Amsterdam to Prague and Chicago. Second, even 35 years ago he was using all the finest principles from early music scholarship and period performance practice: crisp articulation, upbeat energized rhythms, transparent textures, and a gossamer lightness even to the lower strings that enables counterpoint and harmonic shifts to move on their toes rather than their heels.

Above all, Zinman captures Bach's style with a can't-sit-still infectiousness that made me want to dance in the fast movements and sing in the slow middle ones. In all of these symphonies two fast movements frame a middle Andante. In III of Opus 18:4, made of up little rounds, as Bach repeats a phrase twice and then extends it the third time, Zinman propels each entry with a slight inflection, brightening the music as the textures add voices. Winds, especially the solo oboe, are as gorgeous as the strings; and the continuo player has such a subtlety that you hardly notice the harpsichord as it adds just a touch of color. In III of Opus 6:6 the player takes full advantage of the one place in these works where some really inventive, delightfully clever improvisation can stand out.

And it's not just the quick outer movements that Zinman shapes with convincing, flowing pace; in the slow movements he shifts to a caressing pseudo-romantic lyricism and expressively shaped lines that let the music breath and embrace you.

The music itself I never found boring, even after sitting through the six symphonies in Opus 6, three in Opus 9, and six more in Opus 18, plus the overture (also a mini-symphony with its fast-slow-fast form). In most cases Bach allows the choice of oboes or flutes; Zinman gives us oboes, with flutes added when called for. Add French horns and a rare trumpet or timpani, and from that meager pallet Bach invents the most imaginative tone colors, reminding me sometimes of Mahler. He develops sections with incredible variety, using memorable tunes, clever modulations, shifts in the course of a melody line from half-notes to 16th and 32nd notes.

In Opus 9:1 Bach gives long phrases first to strings alone, then doubles the line with woodwinds, then lets the woodwinds alone sail away with the melody. Opus 9:2 has the most sumptuous slow movement: muted violins over pizzicato strings with a faint muted harpsichord sounding like a guitar; then he adds French horns and finally woodwinds before returning to the simplicity of the muted violins over pizzicato. Opus 6:3 has an Andante whose walking style is straight out of Schubert's Ninth.

When all is said and done, the unteachable magic element in music is having the right style. You've either got it or you haven't. And here Zinman has it in spades, captured in the best engineering I've heard in ages—warm, ambient, natural, embracing, and best seat in the house.

By the way, there are frequent repeats in the scores of Opus 6, fewer in Opus 6, and only a couple in Opus 18. Zinman takes none of them, making some of the movements in Opus 6 feel very short. But with performances this good, it matters little.

FRENCH

BACH: *Solo Cello Suites*
Ophelie Gaillard
Aparte 17 [2CD] 140 minutes

Martin Rummel
Paladino 4 [2CD) 120 minutes

Helen Callus, va
Analekta 9968 [2CD] 133 minutes

It's an interesting month for the Bach suites. We have a new performance by Gaillard, who recorded them once before in 2000 (Ambroisie 9906, July/Aug 2002). Then there's Rummel, whom we will hear from again in this issue with his recording of Beethoven's cello works. And finally we have violist Callus playing them. Isn't it interesting, the differences in timing of these three sets? All the players take all the repeats, so what is the reason for this?

Starting at the top, Gaillard plays now with a remarkable involvement in all aspects of early music performance, including the improvisation that most cellists don't employ. She didn't do this in her earlier recording, but now she has made it an integral part of her performance, managing to improvise without destroying our awareness of what the original notes were. She interprets the bowings,

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 58

unclear in the "originals", sensitively, tending to slur scalewise passages and separate the ones that have arpeggios, resulting in increased harmonic clarity. She also has a tendency to hesitate before certain downbeats and divide passages into long-short units a la Francaise. That works for me sometimes but not always. Still, these performances show a great deal of musical imagination and technical polish. She tunes her A string down to G for Suite 5 and uses a five-stringed violoncello piccolo for Suite 6. Altogether, hers is a well balanced reading, up there with the best I have heard.

Rummel is a virtuoso in style. Both he and Callus employ the Johann Peter Kellner edition that contains a small number of different notes from the norm, particularly in Suite 6. Rummel is a rapid player but a generally expressive one, not as given to detail or introspection as one might wish, but with a technical enthusiasm and brilliance that helps make up for the lack of depth. He also likes to improvise, when his love for speed and gutsy sound doesn't override that desire. He appears to play Suite 5 with the A string tuned down, but seems to be playing Suite 6 on four strings, giving him almost no impetus to improvise. As the music gets more difficult, his tone gets scratchier and more irritating, though the notes are well handled. This is not one of my favorite readings, though it is technically remarkable and the more relaxed sections are beautiful.

Playing these suites on the viola works very well, of course, since the tuning of the strings is identical the cello's an octave higher. Callus plays with polish, in a modern style, with vibrato, She is utterly literal—no improvisation whatever. Unfortunately, she plays Suite 6 transcribed from D into G, meaning that she can play it without going as high as the cello but has to raise some of the lower passages. This kind of arrangement I can do without. Violists hate to play in high registers, and the sonority of this piece works well this way, but I miss the greater range of the original composition. This reading is superior to Michael Zaretsky on Artona (July/Aug 2005).

The vote goes clearly to Gaillard, though Rummel has attractive enthusiasm and great fingers and Callus has a fine sound that makes the music sound effortless and lyrical.

D MOORE

BACH: *French & English Suites*

Stefan Temmingh, rec; Domen Marincic, gamba; Axel Wolf, lute

Oehms 795—74 minutes

The selections on this recording were chosen to emphasize the lyrical aspects of Bach's writing. Arrangements were necessary because Bach wrote no solo music for the recorder. The second English Suite and French Suites 3 and 5 form the bulk of the program. Interspersed between the suites are solo pieces for viola da gamba and for lute.

I had high praise for Temmingh's last recording, a joyous romp in some Handel (Oehms 772; Jan/Feb). His playing, once again, is touching and masterly. The recorded sound is close and has a wonderful presence. The effect is intimate, like the three musicians are playing just for us. The choice to record this music with lute and gamba was based on the fundamentally intimate quality these instruments have.

The notes are titled "Vintage 1685—A Fresh Glass from a Good Year"; they explore the connections between wine and musical arrangements. It sounds ridiculous, but actually it is thought-provoking, and the last sentence brilliantly drives home the point.

This recording is a breath of fresh baroque air for anyone who needs it.

GORMAN

BACH: *Suites & Partitas*

Dom Andre Laberge

Analekta 9767—65 minutes

Here are four harpsichord transcriptions of pieces originally intended for lute, lute-harpsichord, and violin. The program opens with a suite in C minor for lute followed by a suite in E minor for the lute-harpsichord. The remaining pieces were originally for the violin: the Sonata in D minor, S 964, after the Sonata for Solo Violin, S 1003, and the Chaconne from the Partita for Solo Violin in D minor, S 1004. Dom Laberge plays with precision and ease. I enjoyed his strong yet gentle way of delineating larger musical forms. His ornamentation is fluid and always enhances the overall message of the music. He plays the Chaconne in G minor and the sound is majestic and full of gravity.

Dom Andre Laberge is Abbot and organist of the Benedictine Abbey of St-Benoit-du-Lac in Quebec. He appears in a photograph on the cover of the liner notes in monk's robes, sitting at the harpsichord with his head bowed, as if in prayer. His cross is concealed by the nameboard of the harpsichord. Open up the booklet and the friar appears in another photograph, smiling and laughing, his cross displayed

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 59

prominently on his chest. These images brought to my mind the first movement of Bach's Cantata 56, *Ich Will den Kreuzstab Gerne Tragen.*

KATZ

BACH: *Magnificat in D; Lutheran Masses (4)*
Barbara Bonney, Birgit Remmert, Rainer Trost, Olaf Bär; RIAS Chamber Choir; CPE Bach Chamber Orchestra/ Peter Schreier
Newton 8802057 [2CD] 133 minutes

This is a reissue of a recording made in November of 1993. It does not appear to have been reviewed in ARG then. Peter Schreier has assembled a very well matched quartet of soloists with an outstanding chamber choir and orchestra for performances that certainly are worth re-hearing.

All the works on this recording are settings of Latin liturgical texts imported from the Catholic to the Lutheran liturgy. Perhaps less obvious is the fact that the pieces as presented here are re-workings of earlier compositions. One of Bach's first festive works for Leipzig was the Magnificat in E-flat, first performed on Christmas Day of 1723. In addition to the Magnificat text, this work included four Christmas movements inserted between the verses. Some years later Bach reworked the piece, transposing it down to D, omitting the Christmas movements, and making some further revisions to the score to produce the familiar Magnificat in D recorded here.

The four Lutheran Masses are compiled from earlier cantata movements. Each is a setting of the Greek Kyrie and Latin Gloria texts. Each of the Glorias is cast as five movements. The outer movements are for chorus and the inner three are for solo voices. One of these is a duet ('Domine Deus' from the Mass in G, S 236). Some critics have disparaged these works as mere parodies. Oddly enough, a good part of the *Mass in B minor* consists of adaptations of cantata movements, and I do not recall critical disparagement of the work on that ground. The four Lutheran Masses are substantial works that display considerable care and skill in the selection and reworking of the earlier material. The presence of track timings in the booklet with the present recording induces the listener to take note of the nearly epigrammatic concision of the Magnificat movements as compared with the more broadly conceived cantata movements that are the basis of the four masses.

Although not specifically mentioned in the booklet, the instruments here sound modern, though the performance style has a crispness and articulation that one associates with period instrument performances. All four soloists have moderately hefty vocal tone, but they never sound ponderous or labored when executing Bach's most athletic vocal lines. And the chorus has more vocal heft than we might expect from choirs that specialize in early music, but the choral lines are always clearly delineated, no matter how intricate or rapid. One of many outstanding examples is the opening of the Gloria in the Mass in F (S 233).

On the whole these are solid, mainstream performances, mostly free of annoying mannerisms. My one complaint is that too many of the movements, especially final ones, tend to conclude with minimal ritardando and almost a coy lightness rather than a solid grounding. Such endings are just too cute for Bach. In other places Schreier's understatement can be very effective, as in the 'Omnes Generationes' chorus from the Magnificat. The harpsichord on this recording has a metallic tinkle that draws too much attention to itself for a continuo instrument. Worthy of special praise is the exquisitely subtle and sensitive rubato in the oboe d'amore obbligato of 'Quia Respexit'.

GATENS

BACH: *Partitas, all*
Irma Issakadze, p
Oehms 781 [2CD] 150 minutes

Ms Issakadze is a young Georgian pianist who studied in Munich and Hanover (with Vladimir Krainev), finishing in 2003. Unlike many Russian pianists I have heard, her sound is quite buoyant. She has no difficulty inflecting Bach with extreme phrasal rubato and sudden, dramatic changes. To name two, from the third partita (in A minor): the opening movement makes several subtle but convincing tempo changes, and various arrival points are lingered on as one might with, say, Chopin (the movement is called a "Fantasia", after all), while she heavily pedals certain chordal passages in the gigue, also to good effect. She savors Bach's polyphonic textures and will not hesitate to emphasize one of the inner voices (Minuet 2 of Partita 1); but the emphasis is never overdone (as it sometimes could be with Glenn Gould). I thoroughly enjoy the first disc (Partitas 1, 3, and 4); the performances of the remaining suites seem less deeply considered and in some cases nonsensical (as in the Rondeaux of Partita 2—willfully distorted and frenetic—and the Passepied from Partita 5, which is absurdly slow).

For comparison, I turned to Murray Perahia on Sony (July/Aug 2008); his playing is less dramatic but no less nuanced (Fantasia from Partita 3); sometimes tempos are slightly slower, which makes for more convincing phrasing (Praeambulum from Partita 5). All in all, Perahia's playing is more elegant and

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 60

suave. I can't imagine anyone could play Bach on the piano better than he.

HASKINS

BACH: *St John Passion*

Hans-Jörg Mammel, Evangelist; Matthias Vieweg, Christ; Maria Keohane & Helena Ek, s; Carlos Mena & Jan Börner, a; Jan Kobow, t; Stephan MacLeod, b; Ricercar Consort/ Philippe Pierlot

Mirare 136 [2CD] 114 minutes

In keeping with scholarly consensus, this performance of the *St John Passion* is given with slender forces: a small chamber orchestra and a grand total of eight voices to discharge all the solo and choral responsibilities. It is worth bearing in mind that the work was written for the Good Friday liturgy in Leipzig and would have been first performed from the west gallery of a church with forces no greater than these. The forces may be slender, but there is nothing weak or apologetic about their sound. This is in every way a powerful and imposing performance of a sacred masterpiece.

It would be hard to find fault on technical grounds with the quality of this performance. The singers and players are all first rate, and judging from the photographs in the booklet appear to be in their 30s and 40s. Their vocal production is clear and capable of power, but lithe enough to manage Bach's often athletic lines. Tenor Hans-Jörg Mammel is eloquent in his declamation as the Evangelist. Matthias Vieweg has the gravity needed for the role of Christ, but there is nothing turgid about his performance. Countertenor Carlos Mena is slightly overbalanced in 'Von den Stricken' in Part I, but one could hardly ask for a more heartrending 'Es ist Vollbracht' in Part II. Bass Stephan MacLeod is impressive in his bass arias, especially in 'Himmel Reisse' from the version of 1725.

Philippe Pierlot gives us essentially the first (1724) version of the work. There were at least three later versions. In 1725 Bach made some modifications and wrote three new substitute arias. He also concluded the work with the concerted chorale 'Christe, du Lamm Gottes' borrowed from Cantata 23 in place of the four-part chorale 'Ach Herr, Lass Dein Lieb Engelein'. Pierlot includes the 'Himmel Reisse' and the chorale 'Christe, du Lamm Gottes' in addition to the movements of the 1724 version. While they are not exactly redundant when used this way, I find that they interfere with the flow of the piece. Other recordings have included the 1725 additions as an appendix, and I think that the more advisable course. In 1732 Bach eliminated the new movements of 1725 and deleted two passages of narration taken from the Gospel of St Matthew. In his final version of 1749 Bach reverted to his original conception of the piece, but with some expansion in the instrumentation.

The pacing of the drama is always a challenge in the *St John Passion*. One school of thought views the narrative portions of the work as an opera of sorts to be projected with a theatrical intensity. It is worth noting that at least one of the Leipzig dignitaries who appointed Bach to his position specifically advised against writing theatrical church music. In the scenes that involve lively action or vehemence—the arrest in the garden and the mob outside the judgement hall—Pierlot gives us a fast-paced, almost breathless presentation. These scenes sound more prodded than urgent here. The theatrical approach is not necessarily the best. A reading, whether of words or music, does not have to be histrionic in order to be expressive. Elsewhere Pierlot allows a more considered pace in the unfolding of the story, and nowhere to better effect than in the two interrogations before Pilate—the scenes that in so many ways are the dramatic heart of the entire work.

On the whole, this is a very fine performance of a great work. Occasionally Pierlot allows movements to end with an almost off-hand lightness—for example, 'Ach, mein Sinn' from Part I—that sounds to me affectedly cute, but such moments are exceptional. I am pleased to report that the chorales are treated with the dignity and gravity they deserve.

GATENS

BACH: *Violin Sonatas 1-4*

James Ehnes; Luc Beausejour, hpsi

Analekta 9829—60 minutes

Our editor was very kind to send me this first volume of a two-volume set (I reviewed Volume 2 in July/Aug), so I now have all of Ehnes and Beausejour's superb Bach readings, and they are my modern-instrument readings of choice.

There is a wonderful excitement about the way Ehnes sustains long pitches, and some of the most engaging moments in this recording actually happen during sustained notes. He combines intelligent historical interpretation (good musicianship) with a rich vibrant (and vibrating) sound, and plays with a modern bow and a modernized instrument (the Ex-Marsick Stradivarius of 1715). The fast movements are exceedingly difficult to play cleanly and clearly. Actually, they are difficult to play at all, and they require at least as much technique as the solo sonatas and partitas. They also require a superb harpsichordist. Beausejour is able to match Ehnes's violin articulation and maintains momentum and excitement through Bach's landscape of puzzling counter-

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 61

point and odd harmonic progressions (without the aid of a reinforced continuo).

FINE

BALYOZOV: *3 Capriccios; Bestiary; 2 Children's Stories; Welcome, 20th Century; Mozart a la Schnittke; InVENTSions*
Ventseslav Nikolov, vc; Radoslav Nikolov, p
Gega 349—72 minutes

Rumen Balyozov (b 1949) is a Bulgarian cellist-composer who writes imaginative music with neat titles. His *Wedding Capriccio* for solo cello puts on both Mendelssohn and Wagner in semi-atonal guise in quite amusing fashion. *Bestiary* is a 25-minute suite for cello and piano covering descriptions of eight animals, from the sloth to the hippopotamus. *Children's Stories* is a tiny two-part suite for piano including vocal reactions by the pianist to what he is playing. It is very funny. *Welcome, 20th Century* for solo cello was actually written in welcome to the 21st Century and includes nods to jazz, dodecaphony, and modernism. This matter is covered in the liner notes in a dialog between composer and cellist that is worth the price of admission. There are at least four more possible movements to this suite, but I think the ones chosen are sufficient. Then comes a Capriccio on another occasion, *Mozart a la* for cello solo, followed by a *Moz-art a la Schnittke* for piano. Both pieces regale us with slightly distorted quotes from the master. *InVENTSions* is for cello (naturally, considering the performer's name) and piano, and the program ends with a Happy Birthday capriccio for cello alone.

All in all, this is a friendly program with a good deal of wit. As the cellist points out to the composer, "If you are alluding to higher sales, I can tell you right away that such albums are usually intended to be given as gifts, rather than to be sold." To which the composer responds. "I think I will easily survive this." I think he will. The playing is very good and so is the music.

D MOORE

BARTOK: *Sonata for 2 Pianos & Percussion;*
see STRAVINSKY & Collections

BAX: *Winter Legends; Saga Fragment; Morning Song; Maytime in Sussex*
Ashley Wass, p; Bournemouth Symphony/ James Judd
Naxos 572597—56 minutes

Bax wrote these piano-with-orchestra works for pianist Harriet Cohen, his lover and longtime companion. He completed *Winter Legends* in 1929, between the Second and Third Symphonies, and called it "a northern nature piece full of sea and pine forests and dark legends'. The plan was to dedicate it to Sibelius, but Bax switched to Cohen and dedicated the Fifth Symphony to the Finnish composer. Bax thought of *Winter Legends* as a sinfonia concertante, or even a symphony, with the piano as another orchestral instrument, emphasizing its percussive and chordal capabilities. Regarding the work's programmatic aspects, he wrote, "The listener may associate what he hears with any heroic tale or tales of the North...Some of these happenings may have taken place in the Arctic circle." If *Winter Legends* were a symphony, it would be well placed stylistically as well as chronologically between the Second and Third.

Bax described I as "not in sonata form, [but] rather...an assembling and fusion of various elements for the forging of a great climax". Pay attention to the opening tattoo in the percussion, for its rhythm is a major motif, repeated often. This rhapsodic movement imparts images of a trek across a Northern wilderness, with pauses for reflection that often touch on impressionism. The anger that marked Bax's first two symphonies had not entirely dissipated, but there are passages here and elsewhere of uplifted spirit and heroic triumph.

Lento opens with the piano lost in reflection. What follows, annotator Andrew Burn hears as a "dialog between the soloist and orchestra, as if a conversation around the winter fireside hearth". The piano dominates, with the orchestra offering commentary ranging from bright notes to a passage for muted middle strings. When the brass enter with a chant based on the tattoo, the piano picks it up first, then the rest of the orchestra. Suddenly the timpani roars, the piano returns to the big chord style of I, and the timpani marches forth like the leader of an expedition. The orchestra follows, but soon the dreamy music from I returns. The pull between the march and reflective music yields to the latter in the form of an extended section of Baxian pastoralism with horn and violin solos, impressionist strings, rolling pianism, etc. Finally, the piano strides in with more defined chords, and the movement ends quietly.

The finale opens with a mysterious tuba solo under piano arpeggios. After a short fanfare and stirring in the orchestra, the piano begins another powerful march. This one leads to several lively episodes alternating with mysterious chords in the violins. After quiet musing by piano, strings, and solos in the woodwinds and horn, the contrabassoon leads quietly to the Epilog, which, in Bax's words, "may...suggest the return of the sun and warm air from the south after the long northern winter".

Saga Fragment (1933) was Bax's response to Cohen's request for a piece for her Ameri-

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 62

can tour. He arranged it for piano and small orchestra from his one-movement Piano Quartet from 1922. This "savage little work much admired by Bartok" (Cohen) opens with short string chords, eerily anticipating the beginning of Bernard Herrmann's score to *Psycho,* and goes on to assume a tough Bartokian quality with a Baxian accent. The long Andante relaxes considerably in Bax's pastorale mood with a large part for solo violin. That is followed by a folkish dance for violas, accompanied by piano. The mood turns darker with piano accompanying muted trumpets and what sounds like an ominous gathering of the orchestra. When the viola dance returns it is of "more sinister character" (Burn) though it gives way to some light-hearted martiality before concluding with a bit of stridency that anticipates Lennox Berkeley.

Bax wrote *Morning Song: Maytime in Sussex* (1947) for Princess Elizabeth's 21st birthday—part of his duties as Master of the King's Musick. It is light-hearted "Spring" music, nothing deep, but certainly pleasant.

One must compare this performance of *Winter Legends* and the Chandos with pianist Margaret Fingerhut and the London Philharmonic conducted by Bryden Thomson. Both are first-rate and different enough for admirers to want both. Judd walks the line between symphony and tone poem. His tempos are faster—he takes five minutes less than Thomson. Pianist Wass is a muscular player, who digs into the notes to produce big, solid chords and a tone that is rich on the bottom and bright on top. He is most effective in the powerful sections and at catching the raw and heroic elements of the work—and slightly less so in the impressionist ones. Thomson predictably leans to a tone poem approach. He is more romantic, perhaps even impressionist, softer in articulation, and more French. His pianist, Fingerhut, follows suit with playing that is less heroic and more poetic. She doesn't lean into her notes so much as her touch floats over her passages, making notes a little longer and more blended. I sense she has to do this to make Thomson's slower tempos work. Naxos's sound is closer to the listener, more solid, articulated, and powerful, and more detailed than the distant and blended Chandos acoustic.

Andrew Burns's notes are up to Naxos's best standard and are especially good on *Winter Legends.*

HECHT

BECKER: *Sortie Solennelle; Cantilena; Toccata; Organ Sonatas 2+3; Supplication; Marche Triomphale: Ite Missa est*

Damin Spritzer, org
Raven 925—78 minutes

Damin Spritzer presents a new name to the professional organ world with this, her first recording. The very attractive performer is Associate Director of Music and Organist at the University Park United Methodist Church, Dallas. Her debut recording is a program of organ music by Rene Becker, the first recording of this little known composer. Becker (1882-1956) was born into a musical family, his father a noted organist in Alsace. In 1904 he came to America. Ms Spritzer researched Becker's life and compositions for her forthcoming dissertation at the University of North Texas.

The venue for this recording is the Church of Saint-Salomon-Saint-Gregoire, Pithiviers, France; the organ is a 3-72 Isnard, 1789 (Cavaillé-Coll, 1890, restored Cattiaux, 2008). A detailed history of the alterations to the instrument gives a clear picture of the changes from 1784 to 2008.

Becker's music seems to echo the styles of Dubois, with perhaps a bit of Boellmann, Guilmant, Vierne, and Mendelssohn. The selections are properly crafted (e.g. the use of ternary form in the sonatas). Boisterous pieces—*Sortie Solennelle* the Toccata, and *Marche Triomphale*—make appropriate accompaniment to ceremonial pomp. Becker seems at his best with the quieter works, especially the slow movements of the sonatas. They are lovely, though they border here and there on the saccharine.

Overall, a well engineered disc of a very talented organist. I would hope her next album has more variety.

METZ

BEETHOVEN: *Cello Sonatas; Variations*

Martin Rummel; Gerda Guttenberg, p
Paladino 11 [2CD] 142 minutes

David Geringas; Ian Fountain, p
Hänssler 93272 [3CD] 196 minutes

These two albums of Beethoven's cello music have some curious aspects. Rummel and Guttenberg were recorded in 2004 and 2006 and show a distinct change in attitude between the early sonatas and variations recorded on the earlier date and the Opus 69 and 102 sonatas recorded later when Rummel was developing into the aggressive personality evident in the 2010 recording of the Bach solo suites reviewed above. The later performances have a certain stubborn character about them, with some strangely exaggerated dynamics. Some

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 63

of this is explained in the odd liner notes, written by Wolfgang Lamprecht as a sort of free-association. He gives a number of opinions and quotes from the cellist, including "a nearly scientific precision, based not only on Jonathan del Mar's urtext edition but also on Nikolaus Harnoncourt's philosophy and Beethoven's manuscripts and the first editions of the works". Lamprecht also points out that these players have worked together for a long time and have a remarkable unity of approach. All of this is true, and these are highly interesting readings; but they are a bit laid back and lacking in humor and spontaneity. The variation sets on Handel's 'See, the conquering hero comes' and two different tunes from Mozart's *Magic Flute* are more unified in approach than usual, making them sound more mature than they sometimes do. The recorded sound is excellent.

Geringas and Fountain, on the other hand, sound very natural and inspired by the music—not by the idea of pointing out things you might not have heard before. Of course, one reason for making this monster collection is the fact that Geringas and Fountain are the editors of Henle's new edition of Beethoven's cello music. Among musicians that ranks very high for accuracy. The edition includes not only the original five sonatas but also the transcriptions by the composer of his horn sonata, Opus 17 and the String Trio, Opus 3, to which he gave a new opus number, 64. These are fine pieces, of course, though they do not replace their original scorings. On the other hand, the horn sonata does seem to gain a certain depth in this form, and the six-movement 42-minute string trio is well worth study. All in all, this is a collection worth investing in for the warmth of its interpretations as well as its completeness.

D MOORE

BEETHOVEN: *Christ on the Mount of Olives; Leonore Overture 2*

Ann Petersen, s; Adam Zdunikowski, t; Ole Stovring Larsen, b; Soranus Chorus; Torun Chamber Orchestra/ Knud Vad

Scandinavian 220557—68 minutes

This is one of those recordings that probably should never have been released. The vocal forces come from Soro, Denmark, where conductor Vad has led the chorus since 1967; the orchestra comes from Torun, Poland. The performance of the oratorio, here quaintly translated as "Christ on Olive Mountain", is certainly adequate if your standard is a good provincial performance.

Zdunikowski is an attractive tenor, but a little undernourished for the part. Soprano Petersen is also generally good, despite some out-of-tune singing in the big trio. The chorus sounds like a fine community chorus, but nothing more. The orchestra does well, but does not compete with better, larger groups. This shortcoming is very apparent in the *Leonore* Overture, which in the right hands can be a very thrilling piece. It is not here. And the sound is a bit distant and dull.

So, I think you can skip this. If you want the oratorio, Nagano's recording on Harmonia Mundi 901 802 would be a much safer bet.

ALTHOUSE

BEETHOVEN: *Diabelli Variations*

Paul Lewis

Harmonia Mundi 902071—53 minutes

A few years ago, I donated two of my three recordings of the Diabellis to my school library—Barenboim on Erato (Sept/Oct 1994) and Richter on Philips (Sept/Oct 1989)—thinking that I could do very well with just one: Brendel's 1990 for Philips. Paul Lewis gives Brendel a run for his money, but the differences are primarily ones of temperament and acoustics. Brendel's performance is very typical of his work in the 90s: the sound is clear, almost clinical; and the interpretation, while not quite as "by the book" as, say, his Beethoven sonatas from the same era, still seems almost too "proper".

Lewis's recording runs about the same amount of time as Brendel's, yet it seems more expansive. He often projects the inner voices (literal or implied) in a more convincing way than Brendel (Var. 7); takes more liberty with phrasing, to great expressive effect (the sudden turn to A minor in Var. 18); and, when the piece demands it, he makes more of the bizarre shifts of mood in a single variation (21). The recorded sound includes more ambiance, which benefits slow variations like 14 and 29-31.

Still, Brendel's characteristic restraint doesn't run counter to the spirit of this strange piece, loaded as it is with irony, wry humor, and compositional ingenuity. A work as great as the Diabelli Variations benefits from radically different approaches, and so I'll keep Lewis in my library.

HASKINS

BEETHOVEN: *Egmont*

Maria Bengtsson, s; Tobias Moretti, narr; Vienna Radio/ Bertrand de Billy

Oehms 767—47 minutes

Here is yet another recording of Beethoven's *Egmont* Music. I can't claim to have them all but this is the ninth that I have that includes both a soprano and a narrator. There are few that I would consider perfect. Some have narrators that have less than ideal voices, and oth-

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 64

ers have unsatisfactory sopranos. Some have more text than Beethoven actually set (Szell, De Billy, and Albrecht). Abravanel uses Netania Davrath, who isn't quite ideal as Clarchen, though Walter Reyer is one of the more satisfactory narrators. Szell's performance of the music is perhaps the greatest there is, and his soprano, Pilar Lorengar, is also one of the best; but I don't care for his narrator, Klaus-Jurgen Wussow. His performance of the overture is staggering. It lasts 11.29 compared to Abbado's 8.05! Most of the others are around 9.00, though De Billy at 7.46 is unbelievably quick.

Abbado's Berlin performance lacks the proper stature in the music, and his narrator, Bruno Ganz, is not ideal though better than some. Cheryl Studer is better than most of the sopranos. Heinz Bongartz with Elisabeth Breul, Horst Schulze, and the Staatskapelle Berlin give a good performance. My favorite recording is my first one: Hermann Scherchen for Westminster in about 1955 with Magda Laszlo, Fred Liewehr, and the Vienna State Opera Orchestra. The major factor is Liewehr's stunning reading. This new reading is near the bottom of my list. The narrator has too light a voice, the soprano is also less than satisfactory, and it's all much too quick. It is well recorded and has good notes.

BAUMAN

BEETHOVEN: *Fidelio*

Birgit Nilsson (Leonore), Jon Vickers (Florestan), Hermann Uhde (Pizzaro), Oskar Czerwenka (Rocco), Laurel Hurley (Marzelline), Charles Anthony (Jaquino); Metropolitan Opera/ Karl Böhm

Sony 85309 [2CD] 129 minutes

I reviewed in May/June a historic performance of *Fidelio* from the reopening of the newly reconstructed Vienna Opera in 1955 (it had been severely damaged by US bombs on January 23, 1945). That is not only an historic occasion but a historic performance, conducted by Böhm and compromised only slightly by sonic limitations of the time and the circumstances. Here we have the same Böhm at the helm, at the Met five years later, in 1960, with an equally powerful roster of singers.

The strength of the singing cast is compromised in several ways. The recording was obviously made at the old Met house at 39th and Broadway, a good locale acoustically, but with a relatively small orchestra pit, one that packed to the max could accommodate only about 70 players. This is on the small side for *Fidelio* and suffers in comparison with the spacious Vienna Opera, which holds the whole VPO comfortably—for this work about 95 musicians.

There is also the fact that the Met orchestra was, to put it mildly, not the VPO. Karl Böhm by this time has had three stints of two months or so to work on it—obviously one of the reasons why he was hired by his friend Rudolf Bing immediately after leaving Vienna abruptly in December 1956. I explored the situation online and found that he was critical of the Met horns to the extent that he tried to get one particularly recalcitrant player fired. Of course he failed, presumably because of the iron grip of the Musicians Union.

The problem surfaces in this recording in the very first bars of the overture, where the horns are terribly insecure, to put it as mildly as possible. Fortunately, they get warmed up thereafter, but they seldom reach the total security and refinement of their Viennese rivals. For example, though *Leonore III* is generally quite good, and hard to fault in detail, it does not quite reach the level of the Vienna performance, and it's not the conductor's fault. The audience is often noisy, and does not hesitate to applaud, so the continuity of the performance is often interrupted.

Birgit Nilsson offers a strong, indeed commanding performance as Leonore; she's if anything overqualified for the part. Jon Vickers also is most convincing as Florestan, strong vocally and totally in command in all aspects of this difficult role.

Oscar Czarwenka is convincing and strong vocally as Rocco. Hermann Uhde as Pizarro is sensitive and musically impeccable, though his voice lacks the strength and power demanded by the role. 'Ha, Welch ein Augenblick', for example, though sensitive and technically flawless, does not attain the power and authority demanded by the aria. Laurel Hurley and Charles Anthony are satisfactory, though not as wholly convincing as the others. The Met chorus performs splendidly, but with less than the conviction of the Vienna group.

So this recording is interesting and satisfying example of Karl Böhm's art at the Metropolitan, though it is excelled musically by the sense of presence, power, authority, sonic richness, and conviction of his Vienna performance on Orfeo 813102.

MCKELVEY

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Sonatas, all*

Jean Muller

Bella Musica 3113 [9CD] 651 minutes

I don't know what the impetus was for creating this release. Muller probably committed himself to presenting the full run of Beethoven sonatas at the Centre des Arts d'Ettelbruck in his native Luxembourg. Then it occurred to him: "Wait! What if I just go ahead and record the whole thing?" And that's what he did, warts and all.

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 65

I didn't really enjoy listening to a single one of the sonatas. Even in the best tracks, the playing always remains edgy and tense. The piano is too bright, newly entering voices are marked with too much accent, and the tempos and dynamics are too excitable. This all happens in the slower movements, too. Though a shade darker, none is expansive or sublime enough to qualify as a true adagio. Another problem is Muller's hit-and-miss handling of melody. There are times when everything comes together, as in II of the *Appassionata*. This movement is more than well sung; it is well scripted, with the full volume and energy of the music ebbing and flowing deliriously. Usually, though, the slow movement melodies are delivered in a monotone with noticeably clunky decorative figures. This is the case, for example, with II of the Fourth Sonata.

At worst, the music is barely listenable. All of the allegros are splashy, with many awkward transfers between the hands whenever running notes are involved. With any presto finale, you're pretty much guaranteed to hear at least a couple of flubbed chords. (III of the *Appassionata* has more howlers than I cared to count.) All this amounts to music that, though spirited, is not enjoyable. I will go so far as to credit Muller as a decent player with a bright style. His considerable finger strength especially in the left hand makes him a natural fit, technique-wise, for Beethoven. These are the only saving graces I could discern in the midst of playing that generally sounded rough and unready.

AUERBACH

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Sonatas 1-3, 15, 21, 31*
Lars Sellergren
Sterling 1672 [2CD] 2:09

Lars Sellergren taught piano at the Stockholm Royal College of Music while performing in concert and on radio and television broadcasts. These Beethoven performances have been mined from the archives of Swedish radio, so the sonics are variable. In the first three sonatas (taped in 1982) the piano sound that emerges from the tape hiss is not very enticing; sometimes it sounds as if the instrument needed tuning. Sonata 15 (from 1957) is also burdened with hiss and isn't even in stereo. Fidelity improves with 21 (the *Waldstein*) and 31, the most recent of the performances; but even here the dynamic range is limited. Whether this is attributable to the engineering or to restraint on the part of Mr Sellergren is difficult to say. But there's a lot more character to these works than emerges from these careful renditions, certain to be lost in a field thick with more distinguished recordings. Notes by the pianist, translated from Swedish, are more illuminating than the performances.

KOLDYS

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Sonatas 22, 24, & 29*
Idil Biret
IBA 571269—75 minutes

This release comes off a shade better than the last one I reviewed from Biret (May/June 2011). This time around, her *Hammerklavier* is cleaner in I and IV. The playing in these allegros is deliberate, but doesn't sound tired as before. I can see the advantages of this performance style: beyond making all the notes and lines eminently clear, there is a general sort of old-world charm in this more restrained, epic-length Beethoven. Still, I think Biret takes things too far. She makes only the barest effort to contrast soft with loud, and there are no effective sforzandos anywhere. The finale remains a contrapuntal exercise instead scaling the expressive heights, as it was meant to. III also suffers from expressive flatness, with the color remaining always the same.

The two other sonatas produce occasional pleasure, but neither as whole is a dramatic or interesting performance. The best thing that can be said about Sonata 22:I is that it projects a deep, soft and relaxed atmosphere. This occurs largely through the full, rounded tones in the bass registers and carefully measured tempos. II is played correctly as an agitated moderato, but somehow it lacks vitality. She does not work hard enough to differentiate the surface of this perpetual motion piece: there is no zip or humor, and barely any syncopation. Sonata 24:I is songful enough, but suffers from a general air of sluggishness and a lackluster conclusion. The usually joyful II is rendered in somewhat bleak tones—again: no levity to be found anywhere—with the added detriment of the continual blipped 16th pairs coming across like belligerent crushed-note figures.

AUERBACH

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Sonatas 30-32*
Penelope Crawford, fp
Musica Omnia 308—65 minutes

The fortepiano is a Conrad Graf, from Vienna in 1835, and Crawford currently teaches early performance practices at the University of Michigan. No mere academic, she not only brings a wealth of experience to her instrument, but performs Beethoven with all the creative energy and disciplined freedom one could wish for.

Because the instrument has both its admirers and detractors, the latter group need read no further. Her only one-disc competition comes from Ronald Brautigam, who has cou-

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 66

pled these last three sonatas with Sonata 28 (not reviewed).

I am a strong admirer of Brautigam's accomplishments, especially in these sonatas. Ms Crawford's performances, while quite different, can be strongly praised as well. With the splendid sound of her instrument and a recording that captures all of her subtleties and inflections, Beethoven is extremely well served.

Brautigam takes a more dramatic view of this music, with playing that offers strong dynamic contrast and little apology for the more aggressive sound of his instrument. Crawford's approach is a gentler one, with the sound of her instrument falling more gratefully on the ear. The Prestissimo of Sonata 30 clearly demonstrates this as, confronted with the opportunity to come crashing down, she never produces a harsh tone, though the music is certainly not underplayed. The theme-and-variations closing movement is stunningly beautiful, with deft contrasts between the variations and a display of some impressive technical agility.

Sonatas 31 and 32 offer further delights as Crawford continues to control her dynamics and phrasing with great aplomb. Above all is her ability to play very softly, thereby keeping the loudest passages in manageable proportions. Once again, it is in the final movement of Sonata 31 that her exquisite playing really shines. The sadness is almost palpable before the extended fugue steals in before returning to the initial depths. But this is short lived, as the fugue returns for the climax. This is a movement where all is well balanced and very well thought out here.

The two movements of Sonata 32 are a structural challenge for any artist. Crawford holds things together without making the music sound like a patch job. This is especially difficult to accomplish in the long Adagio molto semplice e cantabile. Her ability to color her phrases brings real distinction to the performance.

If Brautigam claims the ultimate prize by including an additional sonata, Crawford easily takes an honored place besides him in my affections. With excellent notes by Boston College Professor Jeremiah W McGrann and a stunning 1824 reproduction of a canvas by Caspar David Friedrich, the album should capture the imagination of all who value artistic presentation.

BECKER

BEETHOVEN: *Symphonies, all*

Sinead Mulhern, Carolin Masur, Dominik Wortig, Konstantin Wolff; Les Elements Choir; Chamber Philharmonic/ Emmanuel Krivine

Naive 5258 [5CD] 330 minutes

This offering is a lot better than it might appear at first. The Chambre Philharmonique is big enough at around 80 players to compete with large conventional orchestras, particularly in view of its absolutely first-class players. Naturally, you must live with the plaintive tone of gut strings and the limited spectrum of natural horns and trumpets—limitations that would make it impossible to play, for example, Bruckner 4—but they handle the Beethovens impressively, if not always with ease. But Emmanuel Krivine is less aggressive and fierce in matters of tempo and rhythmic flexibility than Norrington, Goodman, et al. So this set is, overall—with a single exception—worthy of your consideration.

The voluminous notes by Mr Krivine (b. 1947) outline his method in detail, and I will try only to hit the major items. I've reviewed quite a number of his earlier recordings, and some are very good. One of the finest is a splendid performance of *Scheherazade* with the Philharmonia on Denon about 15 years ago. He has been less active in recording in recent years. In a 1965 interview Karl Böhm apparently advised him to pursue a career as conductor. Böhm was not known for encouraging conducting hopefuls, though he played this role for a favored few, most conspicuously Sixten Ehrling and Herbert Kegel, who worked as his assistants.

Krivine in 1976 became permanent guest conductor of the Nouvel Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. In 1987 he became Music Director of the Lyon orchestra, where he remained until 2000. Since then he has become a familiar face on the world concert stage, in Europe as well as the US. He founded the Chambre Philharmonique in 2004 and has served as its conductor and music director since then.

I started off with Symphony 5, a work that many conductors seem to regard as a contest to see who can be the loudest, fastest, and angriest. The winners in this assault are LSO/Haitink, who murders it in 29 minutes, while Reiner and Norrington are runners-up at a distance substantial but hardly respectable. As I tried Krivine I thought, "well here comes another member of the club". But though he did not let the grass grow under his feet, I was wrong. At 32:36, he fashioned a performance that included all the expected repeats—even the rarely played exposition repeat in IV! Moreover, by a clever management of tempos,

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 67

he manages to make things sound slower than the numbers would suggest. In particular, the great C-major fanfare at the opening of the finale is weighty and definitely not too fast. It also follows a pattern found in Ansermet's Decca recording, of a generally fast framework wherein grand climaxes are given time to flower. It will not replace historic recordings by Weingartner, Furtwängler, and Böhm, but it's high up on the next short list, if you are not opposed to the sound of period instruments.

The *Eroica* shares these general outlines and occupies a similar place in the firmament of the many choices offered by the existing catalog. It is fast, but not excessively so, with a flexibility of tempo and dynamics that also summons the specter of the long gone but fondly remembered Weingartner. The horn solos in III, played on valveless instruments, are flawless. Overall time is 46:10.

No. 9 also benefits from these moderate performance practices. At 64 minutes he is very close to Weingartner's speed, and the treatment of individual movements is also similar, except for the inclusion of the repeat of the scherzo. The orchestra is flawless, the soloists and chorus also reasonably good, though the bass falls short of the ease and solidity of Richard Mayr for Weingartner or Gottlob Frick in Böhm's great Frankfurt performance on Archipel—the best of his six recorded performances.

To make a long story short, Symphonies 1, 2, 4, and 6 follow the same prescription set up by Weingartner and followed by Ansermet. Did you know that in the period when both were in Switzerland, Ansermet sought Weingartner's guidance about how the Beethoven and Brahms symphonies should be performed?

This leaves 7 and 8. It would be satisfying to report that they also follow these performance practices. Alas, it is not so! We're now back in the world of faster is better. In No. 7 it's not evident from the published timing of 38 minutes, for every possible repeat (along with some that aren't) is dutifully played; but trust me, without them it would last barely 30 minutes. BPO/Böhm (DG) at 37 minutes without all the optional repeats is obviously slower. Finally it is useful to observe that the final movement of No. 7 is marked *allegro con brio*. Con brio means merely with spirit, bravura, *not faster*. Had the composer wished a faster speed, he would have marked it *allegro molto e con brio* or some equivalent.

These performances are well served by Naive's engineers. The recordings are clear, transparent, and undistorted, with excellent balance and realism. The sound levels are higher than the norm by 2 or 3db, a matter easily compensated for on the playback end. You must really secure other performances of 7 and 8, but otherwise this set is easy to recommend to listeners whose ears are not offended by the sounds of period instruments.

MCKELVEY

BEETHOVEN: *Symphonies 4+7*
Flemish Philharmonic/ Philippe Herreweghe
Pentatone 5186 315 [SACD] 76 minutes

As I recall, Herreweghe made a period instruments recording of these works several years ago. He has apparently changed his thinking in the interim, for these recordings employ a large orchestra and conventional instruments. Moreover, his shaping of them is conventional, indeed conservative. I've no clue about what caused this radical change, but I support it in spades. The main advantage is in the SACD sound, which is spacious, detailed, and transparent to the extent that it has disappeared altogether, leaving only the performance itself.

Tempos are not too fast, particularly in the scherzos, as they are in many other recordings. For example, in Beethoven 7 the trio sections of III are not unduly hasty. But his tempo in the final movement of 4 is simply too fast. Weingartner performed this section to absolute perfection at a leisurely 7:33. Herreweghe's tempo, at 6:45 is 10 percent faster. Moreover, in both works he takes most of the possible repeats, which impedes their progress and makes them unnecessarily long.

The Antwerp-based orchestra is splendid and displays no technical flaw. These two performances are flawless in execution but less remarkable in conception. There are stereo recordings by Böhm, Krips, Walter, and Colin Davis (with the Staatskapelle Dresden) that excel this one artistically if not sonically.

MCKELVEY

BEETHOVEN: *Violin Concerto*
Gidon Kremer; Academy of St Martin in the Fields/ Neville Marriner
Newton 8802064—44 minutes

I reviewed this performance 29 years ago when it appeared on Philips LP. What distinguished it then (and now) were the cadenzas, which are by Alfred Schnittke (1934-98) and eclectic in style—that is, you can hear echoes of Bartok, Berg, Shostakovich, and Brahms, along with periods of modern dissonance. Back in the 80s I didn't like the juxtaposition of styles very much, since the essential core of Beethoven's message seemed violated by such shenanigans. The defense of Schnittke, if you want one, is (to quote the notes) that he believed "in the essential unity of musical thought through all the changes in style across the centuries".

Coming back to it, I still think the cadenzas

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 68

are more a curiosity than anything else, but I guess I don't find myself as "offended" as I was. Nonetheless, the first movement cadenza seems too long, and I still find the shifts between Beethoven and Schnittke too abrupt and unsettling. First time around I was happy with Kremer's playing and Marriner's orchestra, but now I find the first movement too static and lacking in expressive feeling. So, buy for the curiosity, but not if you're looking for a good standard performance of Beethoven's concerto.

ALTHOUSE

BESTOR: *Symphony 1; Requiem; Horn Concerto; The Long Goodbye*
Laura Klock, hn; William Hite, t; Cayuga Chamber Orchestra/ Lanfranco Marcelletti
Albany 1255—60 minutes

This is poignant and moving new music—personal, intimate, complex, and beautifully presented by university faculty musicians and a regional chamber orchestra. In my review (Nov/Dec 1995) of a previous collection of works by Charles Bestor, a former professor and department head at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, I said that he has a confident and distinctive voice and a command of sonority, texture, and flow of ideas. He passes easily between classical and jazz styles, and between tonal warmth and pungent dissonance. His music seems free and unforced; it goes where he wants to go.

Two of these works deal specifically with the death of Bestor's wife of Alzheimer's disease. An 11-minute Requiem is scored for tenor soloist and chamber orchestra, while *The Long Goodbye* is a four-movement work that ends with a very sad, polytonal setting of 'Now the Day is Over'. And while his wife's death is not the subject of *Three Ways of Looking at the Night*, Bestor's 24-minute Symphony 1 (1996), it is melancholy enough to fit the program perfectly.

Bestor's 10-minute Horn Concerto breaks from the program's theme. For me the listening experience is somewhat uncomfortable, and I think the recording setup—close miking of soloist Laura Klock—is to blame. Sometimes the solo material seems as if it is just one of the contrapuntal lines, and it would sound better if it were not so front-and-center. And while there is natural ambience in the orchestra's sound, there is none in the horn's. It's too intimate; we hear too many details.

The soloists (Ms Klock and the fine tenor William Hite) and conductor Lanfranco Marcelletti are faculty members at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Marcelletti is also music director of the Cayuga Chamber Orchestra, a fine ensemble based in Ithaca, New York. It is a pleasure to hear them play with such security, sensitivity, and expression. And Marcelletti does a superb job of holding this challenging new music together and making sense of it.

KILPATRICK

BIBER: *Vesperae Longiores ac Breviores*
Yale Schola Cantorum & Collegium Players/ Simon Carrington—Carus 83.348—59:30

This is a commercial reissue of a recording first released by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music in 2005. In my earlier review (Jan/Feb 2006), I did note that this is a modest performance by an excellent collegiate ensemble but that it probably does not represent Biber's practices at Salzburg Cathedral but a more modest church. The 24 singers of the Yale Schola Cantorum sometimes overpower the six string players (with organ) and there are some blemishes owing to the vagaries of concert performance. One thing I did notice on this reissue is that the ambient audience noise is much less evident. This is still a significant recording of these works and deserves the wider distribution that it will have from Carus.

BREWER

BLOCH, T: *Missa Cantate; Sancta Maria; Cold Song; Christ Hall Blues; Christ Hall Postlude*
Jorg Waschinski, s; Thomas Bloch, instruments; Jacques Duprez, va; David Coulter, musical saw; Paderewski Philharmonic/ Fernand Quattrocchi
Naxos 572489—66 minutes

French composer Thomas Bloch (b 1962) studied at the Paris Conservatory, where he concentrated on the rare instruments ondes Martenot, glass harmonica, and cristal Baschet. As a composer, he was influenced by the minimalists. And so, here we have minimalist-influenced music that involves rare instruments—and male soprano.

I was dubious and ready to dismiss this as gimmickry, but Thomas Bloch is a good composer and no slouch when it comes to playing these odd and very interesting instruments. His music won me over right away—it's beautiful music that you can lose yourself in. The 10-movement, 44-minute *Missa Cantate* (1999) is like an amalgam of Pärt (especially in I), Duruflé, and Fauré. The chord progressions are heavenly, and male soprano Jorg Waschinski has a lovely, very high voice. There are no rare instruments in this work; the Paderewski Philharmonic accompanies.

The rare instruments figure prominently in the rest of the pieces. In 'Sancta Maria' (1998), composer Bloch plays glass harmonica, cristal Baschet, keyboards, and crystal bells while Jacques Dupriez plays a mournful viola, and

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 69

Waschinski sings four overlapping parts. Waschinski's voice has a haunting, ethereal quality that matches the rare instruments amazingly well.

'Cold Song' (2009) is cristal Baschet and waterphone with seven tracks of Waschinski for six mesmerizing minutes. 'Christ Hall Blues' (1990, rev 2005) has a very spooky Recitativo and Aria, with the eerie sound of David Coulter's musical saw along with Bloch's cristal Baschet, glass harmonica, bells, and ondes Martenot. Waschinski sings 12 parts. The album ends with the somber, otherworldly 'Christ Hall Postlude' (2008) for crystal bells, cristal Baschet, and musical saw.

This is a fascinating and very unusual listening experience. See Bloch's web site (www.thomasbloch.net) for videos and information about these instruments.

KILPATRICK

BLOW: *Venus & Adonis*

Amanda Forsythe (Venus), Tyler Duncan (Adonis), Mireille Lebal (Cupid), Boston Early Music Festival/ Paul O'Dette, Stephen Stubbs

CPO 777614—65 minutes

Nowadays, when CD booklets are slipping into oblivion in favor of notes and lyrics to be downloaded off the Internet—or worse, no text at all—I feel compelled to say, first off, that this is one of the fattest and most satisfying booklets I've seen in a long time, complete with beautiful cover art.

And, in this case, the adage "you can't tell a book by its cover"—or a CD—is proved wrong. This is a beautiful release in every aspect. Recordings of this charming work have not been plentiful. For a thorough look at what was available a few years ago, I recommend John Barker's review of the Jacobs reading (Nov/Dec 1999—it was rereleased in 2008). The other three that he mentions—under Anthony Lewis, Anthony Rooley, and Charles Medlam—were all deleted at the time and still are, apparently. Two more performances besides this one are now available for a total of four: a rendition under Philip Pickett (apparently recently re-released) and a brand new recording under Elizabeth Kenny.

It's a little embarrassing to admit this, but I like *Venus and Adonis* better in terms of sheer listening pleasure than Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, which is often mentioned in the same breath as the opera in whose shadow *Venus and Adonis* lies. While both are tragedies, this work does not have the sinister elements of Purcell's; rather, despite its sad ending where boar-hunting Adonis dies as Venus laments her immortality, this opera is lighter hearted, with more humorous elements.

The choice of performers here is, by and large, superior. The two major players, Venus and Adonis, are quite youthful, which is fitting enough. The casting of Cupid remains a problem. The notes point out (as does Mr Barker in his review) that when this work was first performed, Cupid was sung by Lady Mary Tudor, who was probably no more than 10 years of age at the time. It's surprising that a boy chorister has not been cast in this role. A boy choir is used here for the little Cupids, and it's very effective and funny (especially when they're learning their "lessons").

Overall, though, this is a topnotch production, and I would not hesitate to recommend it for a first choice or only one for people who are less than die-hard collectors.

Rounding out the program is an ode for St Cecilia's Day, a dashing piece titled 'Welcome, ev'ry Guest'. Also included is a Ground in G minor (for two violins and continuo) and a roundelay from John Dryden 'Chloe found Amynatas Lying all in Tears', gorgeously sung as a male trio by two tenors—Jason McStoots and Zachary Wilder—and bass-baritone Douglas Williams.

A collector's delight and a superior release in every way.

CRAWFORD

BOISMORTIER: *6 Cello Sonatas; 2 Trio Sonatas*

David Bakamjian, vc; Brooklyn Baroque

Quill 1010—73 minutes

Joseph Bodin de Boismortier bears a certain resemblance to PDQ Bach since, according to the listing on this disc, his dates are 1789-1755. He was actually born in 1689, two years after Lully died. His contribution to instrumental music ended up second only to Telemann's in volume. At least from a cellist's point of view, his output of sonatas is decidedly ambiguous, since they were published as works for viol or bassoon as well and have been recorded that way.

I am acquainted with one other record of the cello sonatas, by Douglas McNames with Brandywine Baroque (Plectra 2007, May/June 2008). There are a good many duplications, and the general interpretations sound valid to the ear on both discs. McNames is a bit smoother in articulation where Bakamjian is a bit livelier, but both seem to take the music seriously and put it across with a second cello and usually a harpsichord. Certain movements are played without keyboard accompaniment. Bakamjian plays Op. 26:3-5 and Op. 50:1, 2, and 4 while McNames adds Op. 50:3 and another called Op. 50 Quarta that I can't identify. His program is all cello sonatas, while the one under review adds the trio sonatas, Op. 37:5 and Op. 50:6. Here we meet a problem,

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 70

since the baroque flute in the Brooklyn Baroque group plays distinctly flat, particularly in the slow movements. This tends to spoil what was otherwise a good cello program.

D MOORE

BOITO: *Mefistofele*
Ferruccio Furlanetto (Mefistofele), Giuseppe Filianoti (Faust), Dimitra Theodossiou (Margherita, Helen), Sonia Zaramella (Marta), Domenico Ghegghi (Wagner), Monica Minarelli (Pantalis); Teatro Massimo, Palermo/ Stefano Ranzani
Naxos 660248 [2CD] 2:14

A 2008 theatrical performance, this release has all the attendant pros and cons. The pros are some good singing, especially by the three leads. Filianoti's Faust has both power and sensitivity. It's a pleasure to hear this role sung rather than belted out. Furlanetto's Mefistofele is vigorously sung and acted, though I do wish he'd indulged the tradition of trying to whistle down El Supremo in the closing pages.

True, the music stacks the deck against Mefistofeles—the Angelics sing and Faust caves—but a real Adversary should go down fighting. Another asset is good cast interaction, which makes the garden scene coherent and Theodossiou in the prison scene deeply touching.

The cons include a lot of stage clatter and applause after every scene, plus some ragged ensemble. In the difficult children's choruses, the youngsters are audibly struggling. The orchestral accompaniment is routine, with poor brass tone quality and slack phrasing. The score does mark some of their fanfares "shrilly", but they're too flaccid even for that. This opera needs great brasses as much as Berlioz or Mahler, whose work it often matches in grandeur.

The sound is adequate, but lacks the element of space. In the Prologue, e.g., far older recordings have been more effective conveying the antiphonal fanfares echoing across the heavens. The shorter playing time is owing to a few small cuts. There's extensive cuing, but you'll have to go to www.naxos.com/libretto/660248htm for a complete libretto, in Italian only.

O'CONNOR

BOWEN: *Miniature Suite;* see DALE

BRAHMS: *Clarinet Quintet;*
WEBERN: *Quartet, op 22*
Marty Krystall, cl, sax; Richard Stoltzman, cl; Peter Serkin, p; Ida Kavafian; Cooker Quartet
Vivace 8802—58 minutes
(M Krystall, 1748 Roosevelt Ave, LA CA 90006)

The pairing of Brahms and Webern is a clever one, inviting a discussion of what these seemingly dissimilar composers actually have in common. In reality, though, this is more of a trip to the attic of noted Los Angeles reed player Marty Krystall. The Webern Quartet, Op. 22 for violin, clarinet, tenor saxophone, and piano was recorded in concert in 1974 with members of TASHI; and the Brahms Clarinet Quintet, Op. 115 was recorded in 2000 with the Cooker Quartet.

In between the headliners are three improvisations for tenor saxophone recorded in 1978 with TASHI pianist Peter Serkin. Krystall explains that the improvisations originated in a 1977 TASHI tour of the East Coast and that they were inspired by Stravinsky's *Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo* (1919) and the hunchbacked character Igor in the 1931 *Frankenstein* film. A year later, Serkin invited Krystall to Cal Arts to record them. Serkin placed a portable cassette recorder on a piano and then opened the dampers on the instrument to create overtones and an echo effect. In II and III Serkin joins in on the keyboard, adding subtle commentary.

The performances are spirited but wildly uneven. The Webern has plenty of post-romantic angst, but the woodwind playing often lacks clarity; and the tracks suffer from manipulation, perhaps to enhance the ensemble's extremes in dynamics. The improvisations may reflect the Third Stream mentality popular at the time, fusing jazz elements with abstract avant-garde language. Whatever the case, they are rarely inspiring; and while the liner notes explain the amateur recording, the performance comes across as little more than an esoteric college student jamming on his Conn saxophone in an empty second-rate recital hall.

The Brahms is more professional, even if it doesn't belong in the same league as more renowned performers. Krystall and the Cooker Quartet play with pleasant timbres, sincere phrasing and color, and good chamber awareness, and their product would be justly applauded at a Sunday afternoon church concert. Even so, Krystall needs more control and refinement, especially at loud volumes and in his high register. His articulation is curiously breathy and ineffective, as if he's afraid to touch the reed with his tongue, and his erratic intonation often creates problems. The quartet could use a bigger and richer romantic sound; their effort comes across as more appropriate for early Haydn, and if they ventured into the 19th Century, they might solve some of the more pressing balance questions.

HANUDEL

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 71

BRAHMS: *Quartet 1;*
SCHOENBERG: *Transfigured Night*
Amsterdam Sinfonietta/ Candida Thompson
Channel 30411 [SACD] 64 minutes

Pairing these works makes sense. Not only was Schoenberg a lifelong Brahms admirer, but his article 'Brahms the Progressive'—still one of the best ever written on that composer—uses examples from this quartet to support his case. Even devoted Brahms fans like Malcolm MacDonald regard the textures in his Quartet 1 as dense. Whether or not you agree, this arrangement by bassist Marijn van Prooijn is a treat for the ear and the intellect. Partly it's the playing of the Amsterdam Sinfonietta, but the sheer beauty of sound and wealth of detail it illuminates are a revelation.

Arnold Schoenberg built expression into his music via dynamics, phrasing, and voicing. In *Pierrot Lunaire* he cautioned against pumping his music up, noting that such addition often ends in subtraction. In *Transfigured Night,* the emotional content is so intense that it can easily become hysteria. Thus, Thompson's reading, which avoids just that, is deeply satisfying, with good pacing and balances. The recorded sound is as fine as the playing.

O'CONNOR

BRAHMS: *Serenade 1;*
FARRENC: *Nonet in E-flat*
Minerva Chamber Ensemble/ Kevin Geraldi
Centaur 3092—68 minutes

Brahms wrote his first serenade in the late 1850s for the court of Lippe-Detmold. The first version was a nonet for winds and strings, which Brahms destroyed after making later versions for orchestra. This nonet, though, was performed in Hamburg in 1859, probably (the notes tell us) in five movements; the first scherzo was added later. On this rather sketchy evidence Alan Boustead has reconstructed the piece as a five-movement nonet (flute, two clarinets, bassoon, horn, violin, viola, cello, and bass). We do not know how closely this conforms to Brahms's original conception, but Boustead's work is very convincing, even if it seems a little uncharacteristic for Brahms (who didn't leave us pieces mixing strings and winds like this). Larger chamber ensembles will want to get their hands on this fine arrangement.

Louise Farrenc (1804-75) through the influence of Hummel had knowledge of the chamber music of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven. She wrote extensively for piano (her instrument) as well as three symphonies and several well-regarded chamber works. Her Nonet was written in 1849 and achieved some renown. It is a quite well constructed piece with good thematic material and an imaginative use of the nine instruments. The first movement has particularly fine interplay among the voices, while the succeeding sections are more homophonic and more typical of romantic fare.

Both pieces are beautifully done by the Minerva Ensemble, which draws most of its members from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Congratulations to all for bringing two seldom heard works to light in such fine performances.

ALTHOUSE

BRAHMS: *Songs, Volume 2*
Christine Schäfer, s; Graham Johnson
Hyperion 33122—76 minutes

As in previous Graham Johnson productions, this contains a broad spectrum of the composer's works. They span many decades and include many songs that you probably won't know (or in my case don't remember!). 33 in all, they include the five short Ophelia songs (WoO22) and six *Mädchenlieder*, drawn from four opus numbers. The recital closes with six songs from the *Deutsche Volkslieder*.

The chief reason to buy this recording—and I would certainly encourage you to do so!—is the perceptive, informative liner notes by Johnson. He takes song poetry seriously and finds connections to the music that illuminate every piece and take you ever deeper into Brahms's world. Not every piece will yield up its beauties on first hearing, but Johnson will lead you quickly to greater understanding and appreciation.

Christine Schäfer sings well, but I wished after a time for more color and differentiation among the songs. It's a lovely voice, but not so beautiful (as with Elly Ameling) that you don't care if everything sounds the same! Johnson, as you would expect, is an expert partner. My complaints aside, if interested in lesser-known Brahms songs, you will find treasures here.

ALTHOUSE

BRAHMS: *Symphonies, all*
Netherlands Philharmonic; Radio Philharmonic/ Jaap van Zweden
Brilliant 94074 [3CD] 2:41

with *Haydn Variations & Tragic Overture*
Vienna Philharmonic/ Carlo Maria Giulini
Newton 8802063 [4CD] 3:43

with *Alto Rhapsody & Haydn Variations*
Berlin Symphony; Berlin Radio Chorus; Annette Markert
Profil 11019 [4CD] 3:31

Giulini was never a man in a hurry, either on the podium or in his career. As a young violist in the St Cecilia Academy Orchestra before WW II, he played under Bruno Walter, Wilhelm

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 72

Furtwangler, Fritz Reiner, Pierre Monteux, Stravinsky, Richard Strauss, Victor de Sabata, and Klemperer, not to mention plenty of local Italian conductors. He didn't like the dictatorial ones but loved and respected Walter, the maestro whose leadership style his own mature style most resembled. After the War, he led opera at La Scala and Covent Garden, made a debut with the Chicago Symphony in 1955 that led to a highly productive 25-year relationship, made his famous EMI recordings with the Philharmonia Orchestra, gave up opera entirely after the late 1960s because he detested opera house politics, and—rather a surprise to many—accepted the music directorship of the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1978. Despite a schedule that was more akin to a principal guest conductor and exemption from administrative duties (including fundraising schmoozing), he left the LA post in 1984 after his wife became ill. He never came back to the US and operated strictly as a guest conductor in Europe, not wanting to travel more than a day or two away from his wife. Fortunately, he made recordings for DG with the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonics, the Concertgebouw Orchestra, and an ensemble pulled from the ranks of the La Scala opera house orchestra.

Although Giulini could muster plenty of fire when needed—think of the Dvořak 7th with the Chicago Symphony or Verdi's *Don Carlo*—his performances often showed an otherworldly serenity and spiritual purity. They also became increasingly slower, as in these, set down from 1989 to 1991. Elderly conductors seem to take two tacks: the Toscanini approach is to whip up the tempos and play everything faster, to show that old age isn't slowing him down; the Klemperer approach seemed to be to slow everything down, to not want to let go of a note because he was afraid he may play it again.

Where such pacing from an ordinary conductor would lead to a deadly dull listening experience, Giulini keeps the line clear, the underlying pulse of the music strong while he revels in the remarkable inner detail of Brahms's scores. I'm not saying that sometimes he doesn't try the patience, but on balance one walks away from these performances consistently revitalized and refreshed. I'm not suggesting the Giulini Approach is the best for Brahms, but I dare a true lover of this music to walk away unmoved.

Symphonies 1 and 4 can handle a massive, heavy-duty approach, as can, perhaps, the nostalgic II of No 2. It works less well in III and the sunny, carefree IV of 2, or in 3, which can easily bog down into a tedious slog of thick textures and meandering pacing—as here. Things perk up a bit in the finale, but not enough. Some of this disappointment is assuaged by the *Haydn Variations* that fill out the program. Giulini imparts a warm, magisterial serenity to the initial statement of the original wind partita theme, lovingly traverses each variation, and builds to a grand, powerful finale.

Giulini recorded the First about a decade earlier with the Los Angeles Philharmonic; the LA Phil is not in the VPO's class, but the performance has more energy and the old fire of the Chicago Giulini, so I prefer it. He also recorded Symphony 2 in Los Angeles; I prefer the warmer, more genial, more *gemutlich* tone of the Vienna Phil.

His Brahms 4 with the Chicago Symphony from 1969 was hardly a house afire either, but the extra edge to the CSO's sound gives the performance an urgency and drama lacking here. Still, I can think of few conductors this side of Celibidache who could play the finale as slowly, yet with such devastating effect, as Giulini does here. The *Tragic* Overture is not as exciting as the performance he led in Los Angeles a decade earlier, yet the conductor still balances weight with urgency.

The Vienna Philharmonic has the perfect sound for Giulini's interpretations: rich, velvety, unstressed, brass not overwhelming strings; and DG's all-digital sound from the Big Hall of the Musikverein is superb. The high point of Giulini's sunset years will continue to be his Bruckner 8 with this orchestra and his devastating Beethoven Ninth with the Berlin Phil. Newton makes exploring this Brahms set more affordable than it was originally: it's selling for about 20 bucks.

In contrast, Jaap van Zweden may not be a young man in a hurry, but he does move his Brahms along a lot more expeditiously than Giulini. These are straightforward, mainstream performances, professional, polished, well played, and very well recorded. Although the two orchestras may not be in the class of the Concertgebouw, they do play satisfyingly well. This conductor knows how to balance the accelerator and the brake, letting us dally to see the important sights, yet getting us to our destination without lollygagging or snapping our necks with unexpected acceleration. It's Brahms you can get from any one of about four dozen other recordings. Nevertheless, these are "baseline" accounts that would be nice to turn to when you just want to hear the music without fussing or conductorial interpretation. It's OK, but does one really need this set when Giulini, Walter, Szell, Karajan, Furtwangler, Toscanini—how many other great Brahmsians can I name off the top of my head?—are readily available.

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 73

Now for Sanderling. Oh my. His actual timings run slightly faster, but he seems SO much slower—and duller—than Giulini. The Berlin Symphony, even when it is recorded in the Berlin Philharmonic's recording venue, the Jesus-Christuskirche, will not be mistaken for the Vienna Philharmonic. These recordings were laid down in 1990, so they're triple-D commercial productions. Sanderling was in his late 70s at the time (in fact, one year shy of his 100th birthday, he is still alive, though he retired from the podium in the early 2000s). He was a conductor of the Giulini generation, whose life experience reached back to the days when the great romantic era conductors were still active (he shared the conductorship of the Leningrad Philharmonic with Mravinsky for some years). So one might reasonably hope for some insights into the music brought on by a direct line to Brahms's own era.

Not the case, I'm afraid.

These are slow, tired performances, indifferently played and murkily recorded. Sanderling has his cult following among record collectors; they should not be deterred by my lack of enthusiasm. He tends to gloss over detail—maybe not helped by the somewhat distant recording acoustic—and the Berlin Symphony can't dazzle us with a glorious blanket of luscious sound. Symphony 1 is mostly heavy and cumbersome; 2 lacks Mozartean free spirits, lyrical effusion, and lilt. No 3? No dice. The Fourth is a heavy, hard-going, rough account. The *Alto Rhapsody* makes a nice interlude, well sung by Annette Markert, ably supported by the gentlemen of the radio chorus, but that's not a lot to justify a 4-disc set. It's also a bit heavy, murky, and Wagnerian—I never made the spiritual connection between this piece and the Norns from *Gotterdammerung.*

For mainstream listeners, either of the other two sets is a better choice.

HANSEN

BRAHMS: *Symphony 1;*
ELGAR: *Enigma Variations*
BBC Symphony/ Adrian Boult
ICA 5019—78 minutes

Sir Adrian Boult is often described as sound, correct, dedicated, but finally uninspired or even terminally boring. This release presents evidence that simultaneously supports and refutes this suggestion. The plusses are impeccable orchestral work by the BBC orchestra, vintage 1971 for Elgar and 1974 for Brahms, and stereo sound that is undistorted, well balanced, and reasonably detailed—quite good by the standards of its time, though not fully up to current levels.

As to interpretation, the Brahms is steady, correct in tempos and shaping of phrases and longer paragraphs, but lacking in conviction and individuality. It is just a little sleepy and boring. Karl Böhm and John Barbirolli (both with the VPO, on DG and EMI) at slower tempos manage to invest the work with a sense of progression, integrity, and overwhelming conviction and power altogether missing in Boult's reading. Ansermet's performance on Decca Eloquence, obviously inspired by Weingartner, is also very good. Finally, Boult himself, in a 1973 EMI recording, gives a much more tightly structured and convincing performance than this one.

The Elgar *Enigma* is a different story altogether. It is much more concise and tightly organized than the soggy Brahms. The tempos vary obviously from one episode to another, but are appropriate in all events. The recorded sound is brighter and more detailed than in the Brahms. Finally, the sound is enhanced by the pedal notes of the organ—played by G Thalben Ball—which contribute mightily to a thunderous conclusion, particularly if you employ a good subwoofer. I really can't think of a more thrilling performance. In the end, this release earns its price on the merits of the Elgar alone.

MCKELVEY

BRAHMS: *Violin Concerto;*
MENDELSSOHN: *Violin Concerto*
Henryk Szeryng; Concertgebouw Orchestra/ Bernard Haitink
Newton 8802053—70 minutes

Although one of the giants of the last century, Szeryng (1918-88) did not fit the typical role of virtuoso. His playing, rather, was thoughtful and musical with a minimum of flashiness. The Brahms, recorded in 1973, bears out this generalization. The tempos are on the slow side, and the spirit is more contemplative than confrontational. The first movement seems constrained in emotional range, though the coda after the cadenza (Joachim's) is very nice. And the finale sounds measured and needs a sense of gypsy abandon. The slow movement, though, is lovely and touching.

The Mendelssohn, recorded in 1976, is taken at a relaxed pace, and lots of subtle detail comes through. A performance like this will remind you of what an incredibly beautiful piece this is, warm and romantic. It is compromised, though, by Szeryng's sometimes unsteady tone and thin sound, particularly in the first movement. II is quite lovely, but the finale could use more energy (and a slightly faster tempo).

General listeners should pass it by.

ALTHOUSE

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 74

BRUBECK, C: *Danza del Soul;*
GANDOLFI: *Line Drawings;*
FOSS: *Central Park Reel*
Wendy Putnam, v; Owen Young, vc; Lawrence Wolfe, db; Thomas Martin, cl; Vylas Baksys, p; Daniel Bauch, perc—Reference 122—64 minutes

This is perhaps the most amusing release I've heard this month. It begins with Dave Brubeck's talented son Chris (b 1952) in a half-hour work that opens like Haydn's *Farewell* Symphony in reverse, in a movement called *Introductions and Flirtations* where all of the players listed above gradually arrive on stage, meet and interact musically with wit and variety. Then we have *The Loneliness of Secrets,* a slow movement, followed by *Celebracion de Vida,* a jazzy event to close. It is an imaginative and very positive composition, played with verve and recorded with clarity.

Michael Gandolfi (b 1956) then offers a series of five pieces for violin, clarinet, and piano written in the spirit of Picasso. Perhaps it is his proud announcement that he wrote each one in less than three days, but I find them a bit less engrossing than Brubeck; though undeniably amusing and enjoyable, there's a bit more repetition sometimes than my attention span can encompass, well played though they are.

The program closes with Lukas Foss's reel for violin and piano. This amusing piece really puts Putnam and Baksys through their jazz paces. This is a beautifully-played, up-mood program with pleasantly jazzy overtones.

D MOORE

BRUCH: *Violin Concerto 1; Romance; String Quintet*
Vadim Gluzman, Sandis Steinbergs, v; Maxim Rysanov, Ilze Klava, va; Reinis Birznieks, vc; Bergen Philharmonic/ Andrew Litton
BIS 1852 [SACD] 58 minutes

Gluzman plays beautifully in the Violin Concerto. The problem here is the interpretation. In a work filled with cadences, both he and Litton never miss an opportunity for a cadential retard. Tempos change constantly but don't relate to one another. Litton completely misses the charging, ecstatic build of the big orchestral passage in the first movement as he turns it into a smarmy, overblown series of chopped-up phrases. Tempos are all over the place in II as well. In III Gluzman can't quite articulate the triplet on the second beat followed by four eighth notes that ends the thematic opening phrase, and Litton's introduction to the second theme is again portentous rather than soaringly lyrical. The same treatment is given to the Romance, taken slower than the marked tempo of 69 beats per minute. It is also very frontal and forte for a "romance". The engineering is warm and balanced.

Only the String Quintet is of interest here. It's a well-written work in four movements with memorable melodies, solid structure, and superb writing for strings. In the opening introduction, I feared the players were going to turn the work into yet another formless, smarmy mess, but not so. Once they hit the main body of I, forward movement in a solid structure reigned. Only in III, a great Adagio with an extremely wide melodic range, do they fail to catch the rapture.

The sound in the Quintet, recorded in Germany, has more resonance than the orchestral works do. While the second violin is hard to hear sometimes, the interlacing of the players comes across very well, and the passages where Gluzman plays the melody against the other four players are extremely effective. There isn't a word in the liner notes on the Quintet's players. Gluzman, of course, is the lead violinist; Ilze Klava is listed on the Bergen Philharmonic's website as principal violist.

FRENCH

BUCHOLTZ: *Piano Pieces*
Marco Kraus—CPO 777635—56 minutes

Helen Buchholtz was an early 20th Century composer from Luxembourg, In reading the essay, I was struck by one particular word used to describe her piano sonatas. The word is "polished". Here we have some very polished piano works. They are well composed and developed appropriately. We are not dealing with an amateur, but yet I leave with very little.

The *Ballade* is certainly the best work, and the *Barcarolle* is also perceptive; it is reminiscent of Schumann. Sometimes this music is dark and deals with what I interpret as themes of solitude, which matches her personal life according to the essay. Marco Kraus can be too sentimental with this material, but overall gives a balanced performance.

I am not captivated by this music, but I also do not have anything to say that is particularly dismissive. I am left with a very unsettling combination of contentment and apathy—and I do not feel compelled to listen again.

JACOBSEN

BUSONI: Bach Transcriptions 2
Chromatic Fantasy & Fugue; Prelude & Fugue in E-flat (St Anne); 6 Choral Preludes; Little Prelude & Fugue in D
Maurizio Baglini, p—Tudor 7156—65 minutes

Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) wrote three times as much original music as transcriptions, but is perhaps still best remembered for

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 75

his arrangements and editions of Bach. With Bruno Mugellini and Egon Petri he edited 25 volumes of Bach's keyboard music and, over a 30-year period, published seven volumes of *Arrangements, Transcriptions, and Free Transcriptions*. Baglini recorded Volume 1 of this series in 2006 (Tudor 7139, Mar/Apr 2007). That was favorably reviewed in these pages, and I regularly listen to it. It was well worth the five-year wait for Volume 2. To the complete concert transcriptions of Bach, this disc adds one of Busoni's most interesting editorial efforts, the *Chromatic Fantasy & Fugue*. I found it very enlightening to compare my modern, scholarly edition of this masterpiece to the Busoni edition performed here. While there is little difference in the notation of the Fugue, the Fantasy has a number of sections that do not sound like the same piece.

Since keyboard players get very little guidance from Bach's manuscripts in terms of phrasing or dynamics, there are multitudinous editions with vastly different approaches to the music. Busoni's musical intellect makes his editions worth performance and analysis. In his essay, *Wert der Bearbeitung* (The of Arrangements, 1910), Busoni states "Every notation is already a transcription of an abstract thought. As soon as the pen takes over, the thought loses its original shape." Even though historically accurate performance practice has been in the forefront of both teaching and playing of Bach in the past few decades, Busoni's 100-year-old approach can now be viewed as just another historical performance practice. We rely on the pianism of Baglini to faithfully follow all of the markings, additions of notes, realization of ornaments, altering of harmonies that Busoni did. Through these exceptional performances, we can experience another era of pianistic performance.

Baglini (b. 1975) has studied with both Lazar Berman and Maurizio Pollini and is one of the finest young pianists before the public today. He has all the musicianship and technical expertise to be logically considered an Italian pianist in the line that goes back through Pollini and Michelangeli to Busoni. The massive sonorities called for by Busoni are never harsh. The intricate voices, so often doubled at the octave, still are shaped and phrased with all the skill one might expect of a great organist playing single notes. Special mention should be made of the excellent booklet notes and the spectacular sound of the Fazioli concert grand, recorded at the Fazioli Concert Hall. Taken all together, this is an essential release, and should be enjoyed in tandem with the earlier volume.

HARRINGTON

BUSONI: Liszt Transcriptions

Paganini Etudes; Hungarian Rhapsody 19; Mephisto Waltz; Fantasy & Fugue on Ad Nos, ad Salutarum Undam

Sandro Ivo Bartoli, p

Brilliant 94200—79 minutes

It is ironic that Liszt, who in the course of his career made hundreds of transcriptions and paraphrases, would eventually have his own original compositions subjected to the same treatment. But how strange it is—how presumptuous, really—for the upstart Busoni to concentrate his efforts on rewriting not the elder master's tone poems, but his solo piano pieces! This is not the first time I've heard the arguments supporting this misguided enterprise. Bartoli rehearses several of them in his program notes, claiming that new lines are revealed and that novel nuances are instilled when the pieces are viewed through Busoni's eyes. I accept only that these recompositions may have fit Busoni's technique better. Musically, the newer versions always sound *doctored*.

That said, it is impossible not to notice in spots how well Bartoli plays. These are extremely complicated and difficult works—essentially "showpieces squared" that two virtuosos designed for their own use—and they are delivered with aplomb. The playing is light, brisk, fiery, and clean. The second etude is a dazzling gem, full of humor. Those flourishes are perfection! The fourth, fifth, and sixth ones are also strong, with ample opportunity for him to show off his crisp octave work and smooth finger technique. The playing is glassy, but backed up with power: clearly this performer is not averse to digging deeply into the keys.

Aside from the etudes, the other track worth hearing is the fantasy and fugue on Meyerbeer's chorale. Since it started out as an organ work, I have no objection to hearing it translated to piano. Bartoli does a fine job with it, playing it straight and unromantically. But the music still overwhelms us with its power by virtue of its contrapuntal thickness and volume.

I rank the *Hungarian Rhapsody* third. He handles the extroverted passages well, but he is not very adept at building suspense in the recitative passages. In terms of pacing, it feels like the performance is all business. Each episode and transition is well constructed, but none feels particularly personable, and they rush by too quickly.

Despite the grace of a few bright spots, I cannot endorse this release. The sound quality and acoustics are poor, making the piano sound tinny and clunky. There is also the origi-

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 76

nal concern that not one of these pieces really is that great. I've always disliked Busoni's transcription of *Mephisto*, for instance, and here it goes over once more like a lead-filled balloon.

AUERBACH

CAGE: *Credo In US; Imaginary Landscapes*
Percussion Group Cincinnati
Mode 229—60 minutes

Cage made his first real mark as a composer of percussion music (his Clarinet Sonata notwithstanding). Percussion, for Cage, meant sounds that hadn't been domesticated by equal-tempered pitch space; soon afterward electronic sounds began to appeal to him for the same reason. This release collects all five of the *Imaginary Landscape* series and so gives a wonderful sense of Cage's music from around 1940 to 1952, when he turned to chance composition. It also claims to be the first recording to employ, in the first *Landscape*, the actual test-tone recordings and variable-speed turntables the work was composed for.

Steve Reich, John Rockwell, and many others hold that Cage's percussion music remains his best music. I find an early piece like *Credo in US* (for percussion, piano, and a performer equipped either with a radio or phonograph recordings of classical music) charming but comparatively unremarkable. It's fun to play, though, and the Percussion Group Cincinnati likes it so much that they include two performances (one with a single recording of Shostakovich 5 under Bernstein, the other with vintage recordings including Mengelberg's Beethoven *Eroica*). As for the second and third *Landscapes*, both influenced by Cage's distress over World War II, the pieces are sonically attractive but musically thin. (Cage probably sensed this, too, since the bulk of his music from the 1940s is very different in character.) There are also two realizations of *Imaginary Landscape No. 5*, where chance operations determine when and how long various excerpts from recordings will appear (the piece was originally used for a dance by Jean Erdmann). The first realization uses vintage jazz recordings; the second Cage compositions including *String Quartet in Four Parts*, *Roaratorio*, *Apartment House 1776*, and *Credo in US*.

The performances are stunning, the sound fantastic, and the liner notes informative and thought-provoking.

HASKINS

CALDARA: *La Conversione di Clodoveo Re di Francia*
Allyson McHardy (Clodoveo), Nathalie Paulin (Clotilde), Suzie LeBlanc (San Remigio), Matthew White (Uberto); Le Nouvel Opera/ Alexander Weimann—ATMA 2505 [2CD] 93 minutes

First performed in Rome in 1715, this oratorio tells of the pagan Clodoveo, King of the Franks. Over the years his Christian wife, Clotilde, has told her husband that hers is the only true God, but he has not understood the truth. The King departs for war, and on news of the army's defeat, Clotilde prays for Clodoveo's conversion yet fears his death. Having survived the fight, and rallying his scattered and depleted warriors, the King converts and is victorious. Reunited, the couple celebrates Clodoveo's baptism and offers thanksgiving to God.

Antonio Caldara (1670-1736) captures the dual love theme—mortal and divine adoration intermingle in the story—with soaring melodies, animated dialog, and florid arias. Unusual scoring, such as using only violin in unison with the solo voice for the hero's aria 'Come Cerva Che Ferita' (Like A Wounded Doe), points out key moments in the tale.

The Nouvel Opera ensemble plays with fine rhythmic balance and well-judged tempos: violins imitate trumpets' call to battle; recitatives and dialog are underlined effectively with varying instruments; drama and movement are well sustained. The singers convey many emotions: San Remigio's fervent and beautiful triple-meter aria 'Se Mesta L'Alma' on the contrasts between the hope-less and hope-filled soul, and Clodoveo's earnest declaration to spill blood on the battlefield to compensate for Clotilde's tears in 'Rasserenatevi' (with an inventive rippling accompaniment) are just two examples.

Especially towards the end of the oratorio, a lack of forward motion weakens the conviction of the interpretation. Part of this is that the ensemble, however fine, isn't quite large enough. Even three or four more players (say, two more violins, one cello, a second wind player) would be a much better match to the scale of the music and would allow the singers to sing out more. I kept increasing the volume to compensate, but that didn't help.

Notes, texts, translations. The Caldara discography is not large, and this is a welcome addition.

C MOORE

CAPRICORNUS: *Taffel-Lustmusic*
I Capricorni; Cantobaleno Quartet
Cornetto 10029—70 minutes

We get a glimpse of Samuel Capricornus's genius on this recording of works from the

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 77

1671 collection titled *Continuation der Neuen Wohl Angestimmten Taffel-Lustmusic*. Doris Blaich makes clear in her notes that scholars are not entirely certain of its authenticity, suggesting that Capricornus's authorship has been established on circumstantial evidence. For example, the collection of *Taffel-Lustmusic* takes its name from a famous building in Stuttgart known as the "Neue Lusthaus". Capricornus served as Kapellmeister to the Württemberg court in Stuttgart, and the music reflects typical aspects of Capricornus's style.

In his time, Capricornus's music was beloved in nearly every corner of Europe, as many publications and extant manuscripts indicate. Yet, when one considers the great German composers of the 17th Century, I doubt whether anyone now would put Capricornus in the same class as, say, Heinrich Schütz. On the basis of what we hear on this release, I would say that his modern reputation as a *kleinmeister* is not entirely warranted. The secular vocal pieces in Latin and German do sound a bit stodgy and lack some of Schütz's talent for expression. The singers sound lovely, but they haven't got as much to work with as the players. The string sonatas, on the other hand, are inspired examples of dissonant expression and virtuosic decoration. Notes and texts are in English.

LOEWEN

CHAUSSON: *Concert;* see MATHIEU

CHOPIN: *Piano Concertos*

Gianluca Luisi, Ensemble Concertant Frankfurt
MDG 903 1632—73 minutes

This is a performance of the Chopin piano concertos arranged for piano and string quartet. Let me assure you that this is the only way to listen to the concertos. Chopin probably heard these pieces as concertos, but his hearing may have been slightly misguided. Chopin is the master of the piano, but his competency in orchestral writing is non-existent. I always feel sympathy for the orchestra that performs these pieces, as after they play an introduction, the accompaniment is rather boring.

Luisi is a fascinating player, primarily because his virtuosity is so soulful. Even though he blazes thru demanding passages with great facility, his playing is casual and warm. He takes romantic playing to a different level. I must admit, some of his rubato is hugely overdone, but I sit at the edge of my seat, waiting for the resolution of century-long phrase endings that he holds onto forever—it is terribly exciting and authentic. Luisi is a spectacular Chopinist and pianist.

Ensemble Concertant Frankfurt does very well with this music. I enjoy the opening of the second concerto the most, where their playing is free and unapologetic, wonderfully energetic and engaged.

What I find most interesting about the string quartet arrangement of these pieces is the spirit of Schubert that suddenly becomes apparent, especially in the second concerto. It might be that the intimacy of a quartet underlines the rhetoric of the second concerto more effectively than an orchestra. The concerto celebrates evolution, negotiating between the early language of romanticism and a new romanticism of Chopin's invention. A large orchestra muffles this. The only movement where I miss the orchestra is 2:II. The low strings open with an atmospheric presence, forming a layer of clouds, which gently floats as the piano cuts through delicately. This effect is lost with the quartet, but that's a small price to pay for the overall picture of these performances, which are thoughtful and highly satisfying.

JACOBSEN

CHOPIN: *Piano Concerto 1;* see Collections

CHOPIN: *Piano Sonata 3; Nocturnes; Ballade in F minor; Polonaise-Fantasy*

Alexis Weissenberg
Hänssler 93710—68 minutes

This is an exquisite 1972 recital. The engineering is well done, and the playing is sublime. Of particular relevance to our current Chopin Renaissance are the C-sharp minor, Op.post and the C-minor Op.48:1 Nocturnes, and the sonata.

In the C-minor Nocturne, the rubato is perfect; every phrase is given nuanced care and attention, every give-and-take of time is carefully executed, and every great moment can stand in isolation. There simply is no careless passage. The large octave section before the "Dippio" movement, like the finale of the sonata, sounds desperate, yet is flawless. Weissenberg here never descends, to quote our Overview (July/Aug), to "bombastic and vulgar" playing like Horowitz.

I am also listening to the Third Sonata with joy. Argerich has long been my model of a solid performance, but Weissenberg makes it much more human performance—not as driven and rigid as Argerich. I also love Harasiewicz, for his radical and memorable interpretations. Weissenberg is just as memorable and does not allow his ego to take center stage, which Harasiewicz sometimes does.

The C-sharp minor Nocturne is extraordinary—luscious, poetic. and highly seductive. The D-flat is also wonderful, but the large *Con Forza* ornament towards the end is executed rather bizarrely—it sticks out like a sore thumb

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 78

from the texture. Another complaint I have is the tempo in the Ballade: why rush the opening? Let it come to life slowly and delicately. Save the drive and gymnastics for the end! Everything else, including the Polonaise-Fantasy, is exceptional.

JACOBSEN

CLEMENTI: *12 Monferrinas; Piano Sonatas in D, G minor*
Byron Schenkman
Centaur 3078—57 minutes

Byron Schenkman is gradually becoming known for his wide-ranging and elegantly played repertoire. In this recording made at WGBH in Boston he plays several Clementi works with great polish and considerable flair.

The 12 *Monferrinas* are dance movements in a popular Italian style that are quite enjoyable. The Sonata in G minor, also known as *Didone Abbandonata*, is a major four-movement work, and the Sonata in D is short piece that is also well written.

Good notes and a fine recording complete this attractive release.

BAUMAN

CLOUD: *Songs*
Deborah Raymond, Eileen Stempel, s; Judith Cloud, mz; Ricardo Periera, t; Tod Fitzpatrick, bar
Summit 562—72 minutes

This is the debut recital of seven vocal works by the Arizona singer-composer Judith Cloud. Texts are by Pablo Neruda, Elizabeth Bishop, Kathleen Raine, Betsy Andrews, and others. The various singers are only adequate (some have shockingly wobbly vibrato), but the music is evocative, pleasantly lyrical, and sensitive to the texts.

SULLIVAN

COLINA: *3 Cabinets of Wonder; Goyescana; Los Caprichos*
Michael Andriaccio, g; Anastasia Kitruk, v; London Symphony/ Ira Levin
Fleur de Son 57999—72 minutes

Another great discovery. Michael Colina is not a typical composer, with academic training. He grew up in North Carolina at the height of the civil rights struggle in the 60s. His father was Cuban, and he remembers a youth that was surrounded by Santeria ceremonial music along with popular rhythm and blues. He wrote mostly jazz and film music, and only turned to composing for orchestra eight years ago.

I heard the music before reading about its background, and the film score connection was obvious. His music is tonal, neo-romantic, lush, and energetic. His orchestration is amazing—he packs a lot into the music, yet it never seems too busy or too thick.

Los Caprichos is a purely orchestral work, inspired by the sketches of Francisco Goya by that name. The 11 movements are brief, some lasting only a minute or so. But that is the essence of Goya's sketches—each concocts a scene, often horrific or grotesque, in a critique of contemporary Spanish mores. Their emotional effect can be powerful, and Colina has captured that in a masterly fashion.

The other two works are concertos, one for violin and one for guitar. *Three Cabinets of Wonder*, for violinist Anastasia Kitruk, has three wildly imaginative scenes as programmatic underpinnings. The first movement, 'Fanny's Brother', is based on some incomplete sketches from Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, which Colina has re-imagined as a tribute to her beloved brother Felix. The slow movement, 'Buddha's Assassin', portrays the Buddha stalked in a Thai jungle by a being that becomes not his threat but his lover. 'Guardian of the Glowing' is also set in a jungle, a mystical encounter with such intensity that we run from it, though it represents enlightenment that we will now never obtain. The images are strange and wonderful, and so is the music.

Goyescana was written for the distinguished gutiarist Michael Andriaccio. The images here are less mystical, but no less evocative. The opening movement is a tango, 'Fantasma Azul' (blue ghost), with themes that recur in the final movement, 'Goyescana'. That last movement quotes 'La Maja de Goya' briefly in the cadenza, but the real heart is in the beautiful melody of the second movement, 'Serenata'. Colina writes that this was a memory of his childhood visits to Cuba.

Performances are uniformly excellent. The London Symphony under Ira Levin sounds glorious. Violinist Kitruk's playing is not only technically secure, but she conveys the mystic intensity of Colina's imagery beautifully. And Andriaccio's performance is, as expected, excellent. He brings a mature musicality to this music and plays with real joy.

I am particularly excited to discover a new, and very fine, work for guitar and orchestra—too many recent guitar concertos struggle with the problem of balance by pretending it can all be fixed in the studio, and have little hope of frequent performance. Colina's *Goyescana* has just the right balance and has plenty of beautiful themes and a great solo part. I hope others take up the work soon.

KEATON

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 79

COMPERE: *music;* see OCKEGHEM

CONSTANTINIDES: *Quartets (3); Dedications; Preludes; Elegy*
Sinfonietta Quartet; Nevsky Quartet; Valcour Quartet
Centaur 3037—61 minutes

Dinos Constantinides is an American composer now based in Louisiana. The liner notes offer a long list of his performances and awards, along with blurbs from critics. He has a fair amount of music on records, though this is the first I've heard of it. But these six works for string quartet have not prompted me to seek out anything else by him.

The music is an uncomfortable melange of effusive sentiment draped in luxuriant tonal attire—imagine dreary, debased, drug-addled late-Schubert quartets with themes drawn from lugubrious Greek popular songs—and harsh-sounding atonal interruptions and superimpositions laced with jabbing lunges, grating discords, glassy tone-clusters, raucous squealings, slithery glissandos, and various other modish effects. In addition the music is often incoherent, with one episode following another in a seemingly random sequence, as if narrated by a dithering but insistent drunk. Tempos are mostly slow, with little relief from the prevailing aura of mournful solemnity. Textures (whether harmonically conventional or "contemporary")—especially in these leaden, intonation-challenged performances and Centaur's muddy and recessed but still piercing sonics—are heavily plush and viscous. With the exception of the outer movements of the three Preludes—short, simple, modally harmonized hymn-like folk tunes—I found little to enjoy in this music despite the composer's evident sincerity.

LEHMAN

COOMAN: *Preludes; Piano Pieces*
Donna Amato
Altarus 9015—65 minutes

Carson Cooman's Nine Preludes (2007) were written for Marilyn Nonken, but are played here by frequent Cooman collaborator Donna Amato. They are in a harmonically very free, basically conservative style, with vague wisps of tonality floating through on occasion; but the tonal constructions are in general pretty fuzzy.

The set opens with an homage to Brahms (very beautiful, and the best piece here), and goes on to refer to other friends and influences like Donald Martino, Richard Wilson, and Michael Finnissy. Prokofieff seems to be an influence (in 8, especially), but most of the pieces are in a somewhat generic academic style, not very striking in character and not notably memorable—a condition particularly evident in the finale, which is said to recapitulate material from the preceding eight Preludes.

The remainder of the program has seven piano pieces written between 2006 and 2009. A couple are inspired by material from the Renaissance (Alonso, Marenzio). Rameau is said to be an inspiration for a 'Lullaby', but neither his work cited nor the Marenzio appear literally (lucky for them, since they don't have to endure what poor Alonso is put through in the ridiculous *Concert Piece after La Tricotea* of 2006). William Bland and Max Lifchitz get dedications, and Vincent Persichetti is said to be behind 2007's *Summer Solstice*. The program closes with a lively if bombastic *Toccata* on Appalachian-style folk tunes.

Ms Amato does her best with this weak material, but she's not very engagingly recorded.

GIMBEL

CORIGLIANO: *Piano Pieces*
Ursula Oppens, Jerome Lowenthal
Cedille 123—60 minutes

Five pieces for one and two pianos by John Corigliano. This release may be considered an upgrade over Andrew Russo's well-played but less complete 2006 program on Black Box 1106 (N/D 2006), which duplicates some, but not all, of these pieces.

Winging It (2007-8), the program's title piece, is new. These are three Corigliano "Improvisations for Piano" captured on a MIDI synthesizer and then "doctored" rhythmically by collaborator Mark Baechle to supply versions performable by Ms Oppens, to whom the piece is dedicated. There is a humorous march, a dreamy slow movement, and a rumbly finale—which, as it turns out, combine to make an entertaining virtuoso concert piece. This is its first recording.

Jerome Lowenthal joins Ms Oppens for *Chiaroscuro* (1997), the piece for two pianos tuned a quarter tone apart last heard on the Black Box release with Russo and collaborator Steven Heyman (N/D 2006). I mentioned in that review that performances of the work were sure to be few and far between owing to the tuning demands, but here's another one. The clarity of the tuning seems even more vivid here for some reason. Both are well played and conceived.

1985's *Fantasia on an Ostinato* has been recorded before in its version for piano solo, including Mr Russo on the Black Box release. The disposition of the repetitions of the patterns in the central section is left up to the performer, so performances may differ, particu-

Sig03arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:48 PM Page 80

larly in length, though Russo and Oppens take about the same time. Both performances are suitably hallucinatory.

Kaleidoscope (1959), for two pianos, was written when Corigliano was a student at Columbia in Otto Luening's composition class. Spirited and filled with youthful energy and Bernsteinian lyricism, the piece demonstrates once again what a precious talent Corigliano had as a young man.

The program closes with 1976's *Etude Fantasy*, also recorded by Russo. This forbidding group of interrelated etudes has been well served on records; and, as would be expected, Oppens offers a formidable contribution.

This will likely be the standard reference for this repertoire for some time to come. Notes by the composer.

GIMBEL

CRUMB: *Makrokosmos, all*
Berlin PianoPercussion
Telos 93 [2CD] 126 minutes

Except for the humor, Crumb reminds me very much of Flannery O'Connor, the great Southern writer whose novels and stories are suffused with the mysterious—and yet all too familiar—landscape of small towns and farmland, as well as an aspiration toward a mystical spirituality. Crumb's compositional voice was influenced, too, by the sense of limitless possibilities commonly felt in the later 1960s and 1970s: his music contains quotations from Bach, Chopin, and others, along with melodies resembling Eastern music and a number of gestures that draw from a vast storehouse of 20th Century sounds. All these elements appear and reappear so often, and in such a straightforward manner, that it's easy to understand why some people find his music comes dangerously close to kitsch. (The same people would probably have felt the same about Berlioz in 1830.) I imagine that a discerning listener, as familiar with the individual moments of Crumb as many are, say, with Mahler's tightly-woven skein of references in his symphonies, savor the multiple appearances of his familiar ideas for the countless new perspectives they give to his work as a whole.

I am not (yet) such a listener, but I have no trouble lauding the times when I sense that this large, unruly universe of sounds comes together to make an absolutely stunning emotional impression, as in the final movement of *Music for a Summer Evening*, where pentatonic melodies of Crumb's own design suddenly coalesce with the quotations of Bach's D-sharp-minor fugue from WTC II and then gradually evaporate into a stillness that recalls nothing so much as the glorious ending of Mahler's *Lied von der Erde*.

These concert performances are everything I could ask from an artistic account of Crumb's music; I marvel at the tonal variety and extreme control in soft passages commanded by Ya-ou Xie, who performed the two books of the solo *Makrokosmos* and also performs in *Summer Evening*. While other pianists have contributed just as stunning performances of the solo pieces (David Burge and Margaret Leng Tan spring readily to mind), the musicians of Berlin PianoPercussion are every bit as fine; and the collection of all four works in a single set makes the package even more attractive.

HASKINS

CZERNOWIN: *Shifting Gravity; Winter Songs 3*
Diotima Quartet; Nikel Ensemble; Ascolta/Jonathan Stockhammer; Ensemble Courage/Titus Engel; Ipke Starke, electronics
Wergo 6726—57 minutes

Chaya Czernowin (b 1957) is a composer of sounds. She, according to the liner notes by Jorn Peter Hiekel, "distances herself from conventional expressivity". She deals more with the "replicating processes of DNA molecules". To give her her own due, "I believe the most beautiful thing there is, is to gaze into the inner darkness." This she does by almost disguising the sounds of every instrument she writes for, from continuous loud scratching for strings, grunting trombones, sliding up and down and generally avoiding anything that might be considered melodic. This is not to say that her music is all loud or unpleasant in effect; but it is all abstract, not only in tonality but in the very sounds produced. The notes continually stress a relationship to the music of Robert Schumann. I don't understand that. Czernowin isn't even writing notes. How can this relate to someone who did? It doesn't seem fair to Schumann.

If this attracts you, go for it! It is played with sensitive involvement (I think) and it is, shall we say, different.

D MOORE

DALE: *Piano Sonata; Prunella; Night Fancies;*
BOWEN: *Miniature Suite in C*
Danny Driver—Hyperion 67827— 65 minutes

I welcomed Mark Bebbington's recording of Dale's youthful sonata just recently (Mar/Apr 2011). Here, just a few months later is yet another recording of this monumental work, a staple of many pianists in the first half of the 20th Century. Driver adds two additional short works by Dale, as well as Bowen's brief suite, which has yet to make it to Joop Celis's series for Chandos.

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 81

Dale's sonata, written when he was 17 and dedicated to Bowen, is a massive work—here given 11 tracks where Chandos takes 10 (Hyperion divides Variation 7 into Prestissimo and Andante). While it bears influences from a host of romantic composers, nothing is merely imitative. Choosing between these two excellent recordings would not be easy.

Bebbington plays with more romantic ardor and encompasses a wider spectrum of imaginative touches and phrase shaping in the opening movement. Driver is more classically poised and pushes the movement along with greater certainty. The slow movement, scherzo, and finale bring delights from both performers, while Driver brings greater flash and virtuosity to the faster variations of the scherzo.

To complicate things further, Bebbington includes the only recording of William Hurlstone's Chopin-like Sonata in F minor. Driver's additional pieces include 'Prunella' a wistful, nostalgic miniature not unlike Elgar's light music, and *Night Fancies*, a mostly gentle essay that eventually becomes a wild caprice with echoes of the middle of the slow movement from Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto.

Bowen's Miniature Suite has three short movements and charm aplenty. This is light music totally without pretense and played with just the right touch of whimsical delight. The Finale is a whirlwind of brilliantly lit froth.

Excellent notes, fine sound. Buy both, but do not miss the Hurlstone.

BECKER

DANZI & TAFFANEL: *Wind Quintets*
Soni Ventorum—Crystal 251—65 minutes

This is a re-release of 1975 and 1978 recordings. Soni Ventorum was loosely formed while some of its members were in high school and before they attended the Curtis Institute. During its more than 40 years performing with various personnel, the quintet became an institution and, without question, influenced the level of artistic excellence for all woodwind quintets to follow.

Danzi's quintets get considerably less attention from musicians today than they did when these recordings were made, perhaps because there is now so much more repertoire. They are commonly an essential part of the woodwind performance curriculum at schools and conservatories.

A good complement to these early 19th Century works is the late 19th Century quintet of Taffanel. See Collections for a new recording of this work by Quintet Chantily. One expects newer recordings to have the best players and to somehow be better. This is the case with the Chantily recording, but not by a wide margin. The Soni Ventorum quintet was at their peak when they recorded this, and the performers were the country's best. Only a few timbral differences exist between a few of the instruments, and they are merely the result of evolving concepts of tone production.

Had it not been for Soni Ventorum, who performed these works with such style and refinement, the music might not have inspired contemporary woodwind quintet compositions.

SCHWARTZ

DAVIS: *The French Lieutenant's Woman; Pride and Prejudice; Cranford; Hotel du Lac*
Philharmonia Orchestra/ Carl Davis
Carl Davis 10—77 minutes

"Heroines in Music" is the theme that unites these scores, refashioned for concert performance and newly recorded in sumptuous sound. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is the only theatrical film here, and it's regarded as one of Davis's best efforts. It's played by a mostly string orchestra set against a quartet of solo performers. If you know your Vaughan Williams you won't find this concept especially ground-breaking, but it works beautifully for Davis. The eight movements make for a more affecting listening experience than the film's soundtrack, where the intimate score was repeatedly interrupted by source music (extraneous snippets of now-dated party music).

Pride and Prejudice is the best of the television scores. The three-movement suite begins with whooping horns and Mozartean piano runs (played to perfection by Melvyn Tan) and is one of the composer's own favorite pieces. There's a pseudo-classical-era sound to much of this music, furthered by brief quotes from Mozart and Cherubini.

The seven-movement suite from *Cranford* (and the sequel *Return to Cranford*) has a 19th-Century feel, along with dramatic scoring for the emotional ups and downs of the story. From *Hotel Du Lac* Davis has chosen his 'Nocturne', here arranged for full orchestra; the guitar solo is given to the piano but the alto saxophone part remains. At first it sounds treacly, but it quickly improves, though at nearly 11 minutes it's a bit long-winded.

The Philharmonia sounds ideal in these works, and the string soloists (Matthew Trusler, Patrick Savage, Lawrence Power, Jonathan Aasgaard) deserve special praise.

KOLDYS

Search
Any current subscriber can search the Cumulative Index on our website for composer or performer or label or number or name of the piece. Follow the instructions.

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 82

DEBUSSY: *Early Piano Duets*
Adrienne Soos & Ivo Hagg
Naxos 572385—75 minutes

Debussy's piano music for four hands, whether at one or two pianos, has come my way for review with increasing regularity; and a number of these works can be considered mainstream repertoire for piano duo teams. I have also admired previous discs by the excellent Swiss duo piano team of Soos and Hagg. They have made somewhat of a specialty of finding obscure works (Moscheles & Weber, Hungaroton 32492, Nov/Dec 2008; Honegger & Messiaen, Guild 7331, May/June 2010) and then giving us great performances that have made me wonder why the repertoire is not better known. Such is the case here. These are all works for two pianists at one piano, composed in the 1880s (Debussy's late teens and early 20s). Most are projected orchestral works that were never orchestrated: Symphony in B minor, Intermezzo, Divertissement, *Overture Diane, Le Triomphe de Bacchus*. Two are duet versions of orchestral works (*L'enfant Prodigue* excerpts and *Printemps*).

The youthful energy and excitement to these virtuoso works is perfectly realized by Soos and Haag. Duets were a favorite pastime of the young Debussy, especially in his years in Italy. He often programmed them in his concerts and was unquestionably a great pianist. Soos and Haag have been a team for over 15 years and have recorded much of this music before (in 1995, Pan 510 076, not reviewed). I have not heard that release, but, given all of the superb qualities of the new recording (2009), I can only hope for more Debussy from this duo.

HARRINGTON

DEBUSSY: *Suite Bergamasque; Petite Suite; Printemps; En Blanc et Noir; Symphony*
Lyon Orchestra/ Jun Markl
Naxos 572583—74 minutes

The sixth volume of the Debussy series with Jun Markl and the Lyon orchestra is a set of orchestral transcriptions carried out by the composer's colleagues and later arrangers. The first four are fairly standard repertoire for orchestra.

If you have been pleased with this wonderful series, there is no reason not to acquire this new entry. The performers continue to display a flair for Debussy, lending his music elegance, grace, saturated colors, and enthusiasm, while Markl's tempos and pacing are unerring. I would give this volume a try even if you don't care for the works. They are not exactly on my Debussy hit parade, but a smile appeared on my face at the first notes of *Suite Bergamasque* and remained there. This is a real mood lifter.

Suite Bergamasque (1905—the dates in this review are of the piano compositions) is based on Verlaine's *Fêtes Galantes*. 'Claire de Lune' was orchestrated by Andre Caplet; Gustave Cloez arranged the other three. Notice the delightful turns of woodwind phrases in the Prelude. The Minuet is so elegant that it reminds me of Ravel. 'Claire de Lune' is sweet and moving, but devoid of the indulgence that drags down some performances.

Petite Suite (1889) was originally a piano duet. Henri Busser orchestrated the familiar version. This lyrical performance fits the title with gentility and a touch of the childlike.

Debussy wrote *Printemps* (1887) to fulfill part of his obligations as winner of the Prix de Rome. The original was lost in a fire at the publisher's, but Busser reconstructed it, working with the composer from a piano duet score. The Academie des Beaux-Arts warned of its "impressionism", and they were correct: good for Debussy. I've always wondered why this colorful portrait of Spring is not more popular. It's one of the composer's most engaging works.

En Blanc et Noir (1915 for two pianos) was written during the war and orchestrated in 2002 by English composer Robin Holloway. The modern orchestration may explain its overt and bright-toned character. I is a call to patriotism. 'Lent Sombre' is dedicated to a friend killed in the war: note the reference to Germany in the quotation of 'Ein Feste Burg'. III is a praise of summer.

Debussy took a stab at writing a symphony in 1880. He completed only one movement, was not happy with that, and went no further. (Many people believe *La Mer* qualifies as a symphony). He sent a score to Nadezhda von Meck in Russia, who hoped to hear him play it, but apparently never did. The score survived, and a two-piano score was published in 1933. Tony Finno's orchestration turned the single movement into three: a lively I, a *cantabile* II, and a march finale. No hint of the impressionist to come is heard in this attractive little bit of romanticism. If anything, its clear-toned nature, at least in this orchestration, makes it sound almost English sometimes.

Good notes. Great sound.

HECHT

DELIUS: *Appalachia; Song of the High Hills*
BBC Symphony & Chorus/ Andrew Davis
Chandos 5088 [SACD] 64 minutes

Almost 20 years have passed since Davis first demonstrated his Delius credentials in a stunning program for Teldec's British Line series.

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 83

That program is still available, and at a much reduced price. Davis, a Vice President of the Delius Society, now presents us with more Delius, along with the promise of additional recordings to come in the composer's 2012 Bicentennial Year.

Appalachia: Variations on an Old Slave Song is Delius's tribute to North America, or more particularly, to the deep South he knew in his days as an orange grower in Florida and as a violin teacher in Danville, Virginia. As Andrew Burn's thorough notes point out, it is based on a song he heard the black tobacco factory workers singing in Danville. The lament about being "sold down the river" reflects the sadness that split families and lovers, though the final choral peroration takes a more positive note as "the dawn will soon be breaking".

Add the excellent Davis to a list that includes Hickox, Beecham, and Barbirolli. It is a most sensitive interpretation, and one where the variations follow each other without pause. Baritone Andrew Rapp is an effective singer and avoids sounding like he's singing an oratorio, though some day I would like to hear the brief part sung by a negro. The choral contribution is atmospheric, and the orchestra, given a slightly distant perspective, reasonably detailed. The bass-shy SACD recording is not as sympathetic to the timpani as I would have liked, and the emotional thrust of the music is sometimes compromised as a result. There is also a general lack of warmth to the sound, and the volume needs a hefty boost, but so do many SACD recordings. For first choice I would incline towards the Hickox, where the 1977 sound comes up as fresh as the day it was issued.

A more serious problem occurs in the *Song of the High Hills*, inspired by the mountains of the composer's beloved Norway. The performance at 28:34 veers towards the slower side of the spectrum, though Fenby tops this at an almost unheard-of 29:43. Like Fenby, the distant recording lends atmosphere, but the all-important timpani again fail to do more than suggest their presence, and the thunder is always kept at bay. In the climaxes the sound flattens out, as if Davis's engineers had decided to allow no further growth and bloom beyond the contained fortissimo limits they have set.

Soprano Olivia Robinson and tenor Christopher Bowen handle the wordless roles very well; they seem to almost imperceptibly emerge from the choral mass. They do, however, seem to increase in volume towards a more forward placement than I would have preferred. Sir Andrew obviously loves this music, and he is most effective at molding phrases and keeping it from contemplative meandering. Still, a slightly more forward perspective for the orchestra would have lent greater expressivity to the wind solos, and to what could have been the lush and rippling sounds of the harp.

Of the other recordings, it's too bad that Beecham's monaural efforts are let down by sound of little splendor, though few manage the quiet magic the way he does. Sir Charles Groves's recording sounds much improved on its reissue and will probably find its way to the shelves of any true Delian since it fills out his set of the opera *Koanga*. Forced to choose, I would probably choose Eric Fenby on Unicorn. As the composer's amanuensis for several years, his interpretation carries a special validity and importance. This newcomer is also an essential purchase despite my grumblings. Delius admirers are for once given an abundance of excellent choices.

BECKER

DILLON: *Violin Pieces*

Danielle Belen; David Fung, p
Naxos 559644—61 minutes

Nine violin works by Lawrence Dillon (b. 1959), written from 1983 to 2008. Mr Dillon, the youngest composer to have earned a Juilliard doctorate (as a student of Vincent Persichetti), currently teaches at the North Carolina School of the Arts. He has stated his wish "to connect with the classical music heritage", a respectable project that should be welcomed by many listeners.

The opening track, *Mister Blister* (2006), properly belongs with *15 Minutes*, a collection of 15 one-minute solo violin pieces. *Facade* (1983), written while he was still a student at Juilliard, thumbs his nose at the modernist faculty with a corny 19th Century salon waltz, contrasted with a modern-musicky middle section that prompts a faintly nauseating recap. 'Bacchus Chaconne' (1991), for violin and viola (Jean-Miguel Hernandez here), came about owing to a cancelled cello concerto commission. The five-minute piece opens with a despondent but very beautiful canon and ends with a sarcastically rock-ish chaconne.

The 2008 Violin Sonata (with piano) is in three movements and is the most substantial piece on the program. Subtitled *Motion*, the piece plays its neoromantic card skillfully. The first movement works with an obsessive triplet rhythm. II divides between impassioned dissonance and mysterious quietude, with heavenly harp strumming in between. The finale ups the energy level and ends with "wildly antic homages to early rock-and-roll" (I would say "mildly"). There is another extended quiet

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 84

middle section. The piece was originally for flute and piano—this is a transcription.

Spring Passing (1997) is a transcription of a song dealing with the composer's mother's response to his father's untimely death. It is scored here for marimba (Stan Muncy) and piano. It is appropriately moving, but might be more so with sung text (which is included in the notes).

15 Minutes (2006) is a set of one minute pieces for solo violin, humorous, and well written for the instrument. They end with a Chopin-esque 'Minute March'.

Another transcription closes out the program. *The Voice* (2008) is an arrangement of an aria from a 2001 opera, text included: beautiful and expressive, it makes one wonder what the opera is like.

All told, the scraps that make up this program give the impression of a serious and talented composer, though one will have to look elsewhere for more substantial examples (check indexes). Ms Belen is a fine player, and Mr Dillon's work fits her well.

GIMBEL

DURON: *Tonos Humanos*

Musica Ficta

Musica Ficta 7—72:47

This selection of *tonos humanos* (secular art songs), *tonos divinos* (sacred songs), and an excerpt from a zarzuela by Sebastian Duron makes an excellent companion to the recent recording of the Guerra Manuscript (July/Aug, p 252), which included in addition to a few anonymous works only songs by Juan Hidalgo and José Marin. Duron's songs are filled with the same infectious rhythms and playful texts, and this anthology offers a broad sample of his songs in many different moods. Various Hispanic instrumental works by Martin y Coll, Gaspar Sanz, Santiago de Murcia, and Diego Xarava are supplied as interludes between the songs.

The excellence of this same ensemble in their recording of baroque music from Bogota (May/June 2011: 221) is evident on this new recording, though I would observe that Carlos Serrano is not as proficient on *bajon* (early bassoon) as he is on recorder. Two extra singers and three viola da gambists are added to the performances of three songs in honor of the Holy Sacrament, and this offers some additional variety.

As in the earlier recording, Jairo Serrano's interpretation of these songs is very effective, though the long reverberation of the Abbey of St Meinrad, where the recording was made, while acceptable for the instrumental selections, it is quite distracting in the songs. This intimate chamber repertoire should be recorded in a more appropriate venue. While all the improvised accompaniments and interludes by the members of Musica Ficta are all very well done and never distracting, I still have a slight preference for the simpler approach of the recording of the Guerra Manuscript—just voice and harp. The booklet offers an extensive introduction to Duron and his songs, with full texts and translations, though the English is sometimes a bit stilted and unclear.

BREWER

DUSSEK: *Piano Concertos in G minor, B-flat; Tableau Marie Antoinette*

Andrea Staier, fp; Jean-Michel Forest, narr; Concerto Koln

Capriccio 5072—67 minutes

This same disc was issued by Capriccio as 10444 in 1992. I have long cherished it. It was part of a series called *Piano Concertos of Beethoven's Time*.

Dussek, born in 1760 and died in 1812, was Czech-educated before moving west. He settled in Belgium, the Netherlands, and France before fleeing to England in 1789, where he remained for 10 years. He eventually returned to Paris in Napoleon's time.

Dussek wrote a good number of piano concertos; I have seven. These two are among his most brilliant ones and display his fondness for John Broadwood's 5-1/2 octave instrument built for him. Also included is a recitation, with piano accompaniment, based on the execution of Marie Antoinette of France. This probably won't interest collectors as much as the concertos, but it is interesting to hear once or twice.

Andreas Staier plays marvelously and is well accompanied by Concerto Koln on period instruments. Good notes are again supplied.

BAUMAN

ELGAR: *The Violin Music*

Marat Bisengaliev; Benjamin Frith, p; Camilla Bisengalieva, ob; West Kazakhstan Philharmonic/ Bundit Ungrangsee

Naxos 572643 [3CD] 194 minutes

Two of the discs in this set are reissues of Black Box recordings (J/F 2001 & N/D 2001), and the new material is the Violin Concerto, the Serenade, and a short fugue for violin and oboe.

I find the reading of the concerto rather clinical. Bisengaliev's violin playing is strong and secure, but this reading doesn't present the piece as something that can stand up to its reputation as one of the great violin concertos. Perhaps it has something to do with the winds of the West Kazakhstan Philharmonic, which are not up to the level of the strings. The Sere-

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 85

nade, which, of course, doesn't have a solo violin, is really quite nice.

FINE

ELGAR: *Enigma;* see BRAHMS

ELLING: *String Quartets; Piano Quintet*
Engergard Quartet; Nil Andres Mortensen, p
Simax 1304—64 minutes

Catharimus Elling (1858-1942) is a Norwegian composer, a lesser-known contemporary of Grieg. His music is certainly enjoyable, but not captivating. He got his start as a music critic, which makes me somewhat sympathetic. He is a huge fan of Grieg's work and reviewed his music enthusiastically. This resulted in a letter of recommendation from Grieg to encourage Elling's composition training and the start of a long friendship.

This music is enjoyable but quite conservative for the time, the Piano Quintet in particular (1901). Sometimes it is delightful, but everything about it had been conveyed 40 years before—and said more effectively. The first movement is rather adolescent. I hear talent but very little sophistication. Some of the melodies are innovative but they go nowhere. Even if this music is a very early "neo-romantic" idiom, it just does nothing with what seems to be a very obvious approach to composing. Rachmaninoff's work is a perfect example of what I think Elling is trying to achieve here. Rachmaninoff holds on to a "traditional" idiom, but he never lets it get in the way of his innovation and reshaping of language. Rachmaninoff's music is "dated" perhaps, but in many ways entirely new and revolutionary.

The string quartets are better—classical in form, and they keep me interested. The A-minor Quartet evokes Haydn meeting an early Schumann. It gets bogged down in a long-winded exposition. Some of Elling's ideas have great potential but development is lacking.

The ensemble is really involved in this music—I hear that clearly. Some sections are impressive—the second movement of the Piano Quintet, for example. But I expected more.

JACOBSEN

FACCO: *Violin Concerto;* see VIVALDI
FARRENC: *Nonet;* see BRAHMS

FAURE: *Barcarolles; Romances sans Paroles*
Charles Owen, p
Avie 2240—63 minutes

People either hate or love the Fauré Barcarolles. If played plainly and literally, they can be rather boring. But Charles Owen really makes them into beautiful swaying songs of romanticism.

I'll just get this out of the way: The A section of the first Barcarolle sounds like a slow version of the Chimney song from Mary Poppins—it drives me crazy. But the second section is gorgeous. The F-sharp minor is certainly one of the best, and Owen's playing is filled with life. His pedaling through all these performances is particularly memorable for his precise attack and tasteful coloring. Also worth noting is his exceptional playing of the E-flat; his left hand sounds like rapidly falling drops from recently melted ice—vigorously sparkling as they explode on the ground.

The *Romances sans Paroles*, Fauré's Op. 17, are also nicely done. Charles Owen is a wonderful pianist. I am still enthralled by his playing. It is remarkably simple and honest. He understands the flowing nature of the music, and while he maintains an impressive legato, he never lets it turn to mush or that underwater-mezzoforte thing people often descend to. If you are looking to add the complete Barcarolles to your collection, this is it.

JACOBSEN

FEINBERG: *Violin Sonata;* see KREIN

FERKO: *Stabat Mater*
Juliana Rambaldi, s; Choral Arts/ Robert Bode
Rezound 5019—54 minutes

The day I discovered Frank Ferko's transcendental *Stabat Mater* nearly a decade ago was a happy one indeed; I couldn't stop listening to Cedille's excellent recording of it for at least a week. From his glowing review (M/A 2001), Mr Bond felt the same way. I've often wondered since why we haven't gotten more recordings of this glorious work, as most knowledgeable contemporary choral aficionados consider Ferko one of America's handful of truly great choral composers. I was thus thrilled to get this particularly luminous and celestial-sounding rendition from a most accomplished Seattle choir.

Ferko creates his unique brand of choral magic by means of a particularly effective synthesis of ancient and modern forms and styles. In distinctly contemporary context, the seasoned choral listener will hear echoes of chant, organum, canon, Renaissance polyphony, and baroque counterpoint. He further employs a staggering variety of tonal schemes, including ancient church modes, standard major and minor keys, chromaticism, and exotic scales (whole-tone, octatonic). Of the work's 25 text-settings, only one (No. 13) is strictly atonal. One of the composer's avowed goals in this music (from his own revealing notes) was to create and sustain a constant interplay

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 86

between whole steps and half steps. However he did it, the end result is a constantly shifting, kaleidoscopic array of beguiling harmonic colors and effects. With such different tonal approaches to each separate text-setting, more's the wonder that Ferko achieves such consistency of deep sacred sentiment and sheer beauty.

The work's basic text is the classic 13th Century Latin hymn (in 20 stanzas) by Franciscan friar Jacopone da Todi, describing the Virgin Mary's searing emotions as she bears grieving witness to her son's agony and death on the cross. But Ferko seeks to update and amplify the basic theme of a mother's outrageous loss of her child with five additional interpolated texts in English that speak of human losses most of us have experienced in the course of our lives—whether from war, disease, murder, suicide, or tragic accidents.

Performance quality is beyond reproach. Mr Bode draws absolutely ravishing and emotionally wrenching singing from his choir; their rich, smooth sonorities gain a particularly ethereal bloom in the heavenly acoustics of Seattle's St James Cathedral—where this recording was made in concert. Soprano soloist Juliana Rambaldi is superb. The Cedille recording—from His Majestie's Clerks, a slightly smaller ensemble—offers a slightly more transparent and purer-sounding account, with somewhat clearer separation between the choral parts. But this choir's tonal opulence and sacred intensity sets their performance apart.

If you don't know Ferko's wondrous choral music (he also writes amazing music for organ), this recording is sure to make a convert of you. Check out his shimmering *Hildegard Motets* (N/D 1996) while you're at it.

KOOB

FEVRIER: *Pieces de Clavecin*

Charlotte Mattax Moersch
Centaur 3084 [2CD] 98 minutes

Harpsichordist and organist Pierre Fevrier (1699-1760) came from a musical family. His father was an organist and his cousin, Charles Noblet, was harpsichordist at the Paris Opera. Fevrier's harpsichord students included the celebrated Claude-Benigne Balbastre (1727-99). Fevrier published two books of harpsichord music in 1734 and 1735. The influence of Rameau is evident in pieces like 'Le Labyrinthe' (the figurations bring to mind Rameau's 'L'Egyptienne') and the fugue of the third suite; its theme is reminiscent of 'La Forqueray' from Rameau's *Pieces de Clavecin en Concerts*. Fevrier includes fugues in his second and third suites. The fugue was very uncommon in French harpsichord music. I imagine Fevrier's beautiful fugues might have gone a long way in convincing the 18th Century French public that the harpsichord was just as fit for contrapuntal music as the organ. Mattax makes a lovely transparent sound at the harpsichord and plays with a great deal of grace.

KATZ

FORQUERAY: *Harpsichord Pieces*

Michael Borgstede
Brilliant 94108 [2CD] 151 minutes

Borgstede's playing is fresh, beautiful, and rhetorical. He has a superb sense of narrative. In 'La Clement' flowers of sound bloom from his fingers, and he deploys the rondeau after each couplet like the moral of a fable. The whole piece feels like a collection of fables, each different but with the same moral. In 'La Mandoline' he paints a vivid picture of that instrument by differentiating between plucked and "strummed" sounds (though the harpsichord really only plucks). And what a joyful burst of sound at the end! 'La Mandoline' is the music I imagine Watteau's commedia characters would be playing, if one could hear that music. It is full of simplicity, modesty, humor, and love. Borgstede's reading of 'La Jupiter' is an astounding feat of characterization. This Jupiter can barely handle his own strength. When he finally gets around to throwing thunderbolts the gesture is not so far removed from a two-year-old's wild tantrum.

This release is profoundly rewarding. The sound of the harpsichord, tuned in A = 392, in a temperament ordinaire after Rameau (1726) is rich and earthy. One need only look at the character markings for the pieces to find apt descriptors for Borgstede's interpretation: spirit, lightness, nobility, aplomb.

KATZ

FURTOK: *Double Bass Quartets 2+5; 3 Pieces for 4 Basses*

Boguslaw Furtok, Cristian Braica, Simon Backhaus, Ulrich Franck, db
Zuk 333—64 minutes

The Frankfurt Radio Symphony has a rather marvelous bass section that has developed a repertoire of their own. They call themselves the Flying Basses. Here we have them playing some works written by their leader, Boguslaw Furtok, from 2002 to 2006. This would be hard to guess by the music; the idiom sounds earlier—anything from Schubert up to WW I. It is undeniably beautiful music, and the use of four basses definitely brings us up to the present day; but you will find no dissonances for their own sake, no minimalism, and the formal structures are basically 19th Century. As a sneaky romantic at heart I enjoy it quite thoroughly. In fact, I hope that they will see fit to

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 87

record the other three Furtok bass quartets soon. They are grand pieces and are played with an easy flair that makes one stop thinking of the instrument as an ungainly elephant. It becomes a virtuoso in its own right.

D MOORE

GAL: *Symphony 3;*
SCHUMANN: *Symphony 3*
Orchestra of the Swan/ Kenneth Woods
Avie 2230—68 minutes

This is the first recording in a projected cycle of all four of Hans Gal's symphonies—none of them, as far as I can tell, ever before recorded. Why on earth then does Avie pair Gal's heretofore unknown Third Symphony with Schumann's Third? Why not include what all who buy this disc will want: an additional Gal symphony? Is Avie this obtuse, or greedy?

Gal (1890-1987) was a superb but backwards-looking craftsman who fled his native Austria when the Nazis came to power and settled in England where, by a cruel irony, he was imprisoned during the Second World War in an English internment camp as a suspicious alien. Of course (as he himself pointed out) he got vastly more humane treatment than the Nazis would have offered. But still.

Several programs of Gal's chamber and piano music have been issued in the past few years, but the only other orchestral music on CD that I've seen until now is the *Triptych* and two violin concertos on Avie 2146—all very nicely played and recorded, but not among Gal's best efforts: too bland and placid to make much of an impression. Likewise his *Idyllikon* (also for orchestra) on the Amadeo LP doesn't have a strong enough profile to prompt me to return to it. That's the typical pitfall of staunch musical conservatives who pointedly reject most modern-era developments—like Gal, who wrote carefully reassuring tonal music following classic procedures very much in the tradition of Mozart, Schumann, Brahms, and Dvořak, with some later importations from such unthreatening figures as Saint-Saens and Fauré.

Not surprising, then, that Gal's musical personality is decorous and gentlemanly; he avoids anything excessive or self-dramatizing, tragic or erotic, grand or monumental. Instead he is sunny, serene, chaste, contemplative, wistful, whimsical, celebratory, or merry. Despite these self-imposed limitations Gal could and did write some very good music, if not consistently. His 24 Preludes and Fugues, now available in two recordings (Pan 51041, Nov/Dec 2002 & Avie 2064, May/June 2006) are excellent—and among his most daring works, with some piquant touches that sound just a bit like Prokofieff or Hindemith. (Gal was an exceptionally lucid and elegant contrapuntalist.)

One notices faint echoes of Zemlinsky and Strauss, as well as Mahler's Fourth Symphony—his most pastoral and innocent—in Gal's nicely written 1952 Third (in three movements lasting 35 minutes). But there's little of the romantic heroism that, for instance, infused the responses of more emotional composers like Shostakovich to the global conflict all had recently lived through. This isn't to say that Gal's symphony isn't, in part, quite serious—it does incorporate, in the first movement, considerable (though never harsh) turbulence and struggle; but these are sharply controlled and limited in scope and power; and the lyrical, palliative impulse dominates and encloses them. What remains in mind are gentle melodies, delicate harmonic shadings, sensuous but transparent scorings, and a sense of verdant natural beauty—a Viennese expatriate's version of English pastoralism, perhaps. The musical flow is untroubled and unforced—"organic", in a word—and carries the listener along from one felicitous turn of phrase to the next.

Anyone who enjoys the old-fashioned, well-made symphonies of Miaskovsky, or Stenhammar, or Alfano, or (the recently rediscovered) Weingartner, or many another polite 20th Century composer who remained comfortable speaking a late-Victorian-era language, would most likely enjoy Gal's Third, especially in this dulcet performance (by the Stratford-on-Avon-based Orchestra of the Swan) and clear, richly glowing sonics from Avie.

LEHMAN

GANDOLFI: *Line Drawings;* see BRUBECK

GAUBERT: *Flute Pieces;*
DEBUSSY: *Syrinx*
Immanuel Davis, fl; Kathe Jarka, vc; Timothy Lovelace, p—MSR 1356—59 minutes

Philippe Gaubert (1879-1941) was a French composer, performer, teacher, and conductor whose career peaked in the interwar period. He wrote in all genres, including the most important one, flute music. This disc offers a sample of his pieces performed on official instruments of the Paris Conservatory. It was this particular sound Gaubert became accustomed to when he was a student there in the 1890s. The flute timbre is almost indistinguishable from what we recognize today, while the piano (an 1899 Erard) mostly sounds different, depending on the writing. Although the differences won't jump out at you, these instruments suit the music in subtle ways. I was immediately struck by the clarity and voicing of the piano part. The

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 88

liner notes point out that Erard made both pianos and harps, and the rapid, harp-like decay of their pianos contrasts with the long decay of a modern Steinway.

Since flutists are universally schooled in the merits of the French aesthetic, it would be immediately apparent if Davis got anything wrong. His playing (on a Louis Lot) epitomizes French style. Flexibility is the key word that comes to my mind, along with an effortlessness and accuracy that I think were central to Gaubert's own playing. Davis navigates the instrument's various registers with ease and excellent intonation and control.

This program includes the Sonatas 1 and 3, *Fantaisie*, and *Nocturne et Allegro Scherzando*. Like his other chamber music, Gaubert's *Three Watercolors* for flute, cello, and piano (1915) are not heard often enough—and this reading leaves you willing to play them again. All his music sounds wholly French. The final movement of the third sonata opens in canon with a Franckian nod. It sums up Gaubert's style to say you would truly need a heart of stone to dislike any of it.

The instruments are picked up closely, in a way that is direct and not resonant, so the overall sound is more raw and honest than produced. The intention was surely to present the instruments with clarity and to preserve the clarity of the music. It makes for very pleasant listening, and the flute and cello are splendid together. Mr Lovelace [who used to write for ARG] knows just when to push forth and hold back, both in loudness and in tempo.

As part of the standard repertory, Gaubert's flute pieces are often recorded in collections with music by his contemporaries. His output has been surveyed at greater length by Susan Milan (Chandos 8981; Jan/Feb 1992) and Fenwick Smith (three releases on Naxos; see our Index). Nonetheless, this is a worthwhile and welcome addition to the Gaubert discography.

GORMAN

GETTY: *Plump Jack Overture; Ancestor Suite; Homework Suite; Tiefer und Tiefer; Fiddler of Ballykeel; Raise the Colors*
Academy of St Martin in the Fields/ Neville Marriner—Pentatone 5186 356—60 minutes

Gordon Getty (b 1933) is a San Francisco-based businessman, the son of oil tycoon J Paul Getty. He is also a fine composer who speaks a very tonal language. This collection of orchestral works shows that, while vocal music is Getty's specialty, he obviously has no trouble working with instruments.

The 12-minute Overture to *Plump Jack* (Shakespeare's nickname for Falstaff) is a collection of loosely connected themes and episodes, some contemplative, others dramatic, all easy on the ears. *Ancestor Suite* (2009) is a ballet score written for the Russian National Orchestra. The 12-movement, 36-minute work is about Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher*, where the living (Poe and friends) meet the immortal members of the Usher family at a ball. Much of the time, you'd swear you are hearing 19th-Century ballet music, but the interesting twists and turns are contemporary.

'Tiefer und Tiefer' (Deeper and Deeper, 1991) is a haunting little waltz. *Homework Suite* is an orchestrated version of a piano piece Getty wrote in 1964; its five little movements are character-pieces with solo lines for oboe, piccolo, violin, English horn, and harp. 'The Fiddler of Ballykeel' and 'Raise the Colors' salute Getty's Irish roots.

If you want new music that sounds old yet fresh, this is for you. Polished readings.

KILPATRICK

GIBBS: *Violin Pieces*
Robert Atchison; Olga Dudnik, p
Guild 7353—73 minutes

The only piece that I am somewhat compelled by in this collection is the Sonata in E. It is the most seriously thought-out of all. The Three Pieces are very charming and sensitive. Most of these pieces seem to be pastoral meditations and have a distinctly English sound. Bartok seems to be an influence on Gibbs, particularly in 'March Wind', whose opening closely resembles the Violin Concerto. The players are OK.

As for everything else, I just do not get it. Some of the melodies are painfully obvious and dumb, like the opening of the *Phantasy*, Op. 5. I think if Gibbs would have started with the arpeggio accompaniment that appears later in the piece rather than the clumsy stomping of the piano the effect would be less offensive. Other pieces are just bizarre. The 'Prelude' in the Suite, Op. 101, for example. What is it? It has absolutely no direction. The rest of the Suite is just as tedious. I suspect Gibbs was trying to write a neo-baroque violin suite in the style of Bach.

JACOBSEN

GILARDINO: *Concerto di Oliena; 8 Transcendental Etudes*
Cristiano Porqueddu, g; Ermanno Brignolo Asti/ Sardinia Chamber Orchestra
Brilliant 9208—67 minutes

This is Gilardino's third concerto for guitar and orchestra. His music is bold and intense—often beautiful and evocative, always challenging. He once said that, in years past, there were no guitarists who had the ability to perform his

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 89

music properly. Those days are over, and in Cristiano Porqueddu he has a virtuoso fully capable of realizing his demands.

This was evident in Porqueddu's earlier recording of Gilardino's massive set of *Studi di Virtuosita e di Trancendenza*. The title was taken from Liszt, but instead of one set of a dozen Transcendental Etudes, Gilardano wrote five—a set of 60 works, nearly all programmatic, each exploring a different challenge or set of challenges for guitar. Porqueddu's recording of that huge work (N/D 2009), on five discs, was on my Critic's Choice list of 2009, and it remains one of the greatest guitar recordings I've ever encountered. He plays Gilardino's music as if he wrote it himself—none of the considerable demands are beyond him. If you don't know those works from the complete recording, here is your chance to sample a set of eight, drawn from each of the five books. If you enjoy them, I urge you to seek out the full set on Brilliant.

The concerto is a fascinating work. The music hovers in and out of tonality, with an expressionist character. The orchestra is actually a large chamber ensemble, one player to a part. The double reeds sound so absolutely even in their notes that sometimes I could have sworn they were synthesized. The work is in the standard fast-slow-fast arrangement, and problems of balance between guitar and orchestra are met mostly by having the guitar alternate, rather than play with the orchestra. Each of the three movements is based, to some extent, on repeating pitch patterns like an ostinato, used as a foundation for development. Gilardino says that he wrote the work without reliance on any philosophical, mathematical, or pictorial foundations. The latter claim is quite evident—though he describes the namesake town of Oliena with a pastoral affection, the music is mostly intense and even angry, when not brooding.

These are great performances of fascinating music. If you're up for the challenge, it's worth your efforts. Brilliant should, however, seek out some better translators. The notes have some interesting references to a "kettle of drums" and to "arches without divides, to allow for a chamber execution with only one arch per section". The "arch" is surely a mistranslation of the Italian *arci*, referring to bowed strings.

KEATON

GINASTERA: *Cello Concertos*
Mark Kosower; Bamberg Symphony/ Lothar Zagrosek
Naxos 572372—69 minutes

Alberto Ginastera (1916-83) wrote his first cello concerto in 1968, his second in 1980. They are both about 34 minutes long in these performances and are highly colorful works, the second written for performance by Ginastera's wife Aurora Natola, who has issued several recordings of his works, including these two concertos (Pieran 34, Sept/Oct 2009). Not to be outdone, Kosower has also made a disc of the cello-piano works (Naxos 570569), and he includes at least one piece that Natola missed.

Natola was at something of a disadvantage, since she was not young when she recorded these works; Kosower is more solid technically. His Concerto 2 is taken from an exciting performance. Concerto 1 was done in the same hall, but without an audience. Concerto 1 is rather a grim work, very difficult to play, but an event for the listener. Concerto 2 shows more popular influences. Both are fine compositions that take us to other worlds of sound and feeling. These are very good readings that make a deep impression.

D MOORE

GLASS & SUSO: *The Screens+*
Martin Goldray conducting
Orange Mountain 66—59 minutes

Jean Genet's play *The Screens*, as Philip Glass explains in his liner notes, "takes place in the early 1960s in Algeria during the revolutionary struggle for independence from France" and combines "themes of colonialism, exploitation, and the European notion of 'Arab-ness'". When Joanne Akalaitis directed a production of it in Minneapolis, she hoped to have incidental music written by the African composer Foday Musa Suso in collaboration with a Western composer. Glass, who had known Suso since the early 1980s, volunteered. The result is one of the most satisfying scores of Glass's career. The two men, Glass reports, actually worked together, contributing ideas or continuations as they proceeded; the result sometimes sounds like Glass, sometimes like Suso, but never simply like one or the other. No texts or translations for the pieces sung by Suso. I just saw that the original CD (distributed by Point Music) now sells for anywhere from $55 to almost $200; this release contains all the original music from the Point Release as well as two tracks from concert performances.

HASKINS

GLAZOUNOV: *Piano Sonatas 1+2;*
LIADOV: *Polish Variations;*
ARENSKY: *6 Caprices*
Martin Cousin
Somm 100—77 minutes

The Russian Piano Sonata is one of my favorite genres. So it is with a little shame that I acknowledge that the two Glazounov works

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 90

were not familiar to me before this came along. Written together in 1901, they just predate some of my favorites—Balakirev (1905), Rachmaninoff 1 (1908), Scriabin 4 (1903)—but sound different. With almost a complete lack of Russian characteristics, these could easily be mistaken for central European works, heavily under the influence of Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt.

The piano sonata by Sinding (1909) was also brought to mind as I listened to this. The Liadov *Variations* and the Arensky *Caprices* are very much in the same vein—melodic, very tonal, in a romantic idiom, and totally charming, but not at all in keeping with the Russian nationalist compositional goals of Balakirev and his "Mighty Handful", who were contemporaries of Glazounov. Some of the Liadov Variations are very reminiscent of Chopin Etudes in style, and one might very well expect that, given the Polish theme. Of the enchanting Arensky Caprices, the fifth is clearly based on Chopin's most famous Nocturne in E-flat Op. 9:2.

The sonatas are big works, each in three movements and over 25 minutes long. Initially I was a bit cool towards them, but Cousin's technically secure and beautiful performances won me over. This is absolutely gorgeous playing of works that are quite difficult, with page after page of nasty figurations tossed off seemingly without effort. While Cousins might disagree with that statement, the auditory effect is not one of someone struggling with the notes. His engaging performances make the most of the big romantic sweep. I definitely feel the need to become well acquainted with these sonatas, and can't think of a better way than with this marvelous recording.

HARRINGTON

GODARD: *Symphonie Orientale; Piano Concerto 1; Introduction & Allegro*
Victor Sangiorgio, Royal Scottish Orchestra/ Martin Yates

Dutton 7274—70 minutes

Just as "Turkish" or "Janissary" music seized the imagination of composers in the 18th Century—one need only think of Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, Haydn's *Military* Symphony, or for that matter the *alla marcia* section of the final movement of Beethoven's Ninth—so too in the 19th Century were artists of every persuasion drawn to the Orient, and to (as one writer wryly puts it) "the mysterious, the fabulous, the forbidden, the sensuously erotic…everything that aroused European imagination but that the narrow morality of the 19th Century prohibited". In 1820 Victor Hugo inflamed French sensibilities with *Les Orientales*, and five years later Delacroix with his *Women of Algiers*—just like Mozart before him—celebrated the languorous charms of the harem. In the concert hall we may think first of Felicien David, whose grand "Ode Symphonie" *Le Desert* in 1844 helped open the door to Orientalism in French music, followed five years later by the "Oriental symphony in five pictures" *Le Selam* (The Greeting) by Louis Etienne Ernest Reyer, who modeled his symphony closely after David's. (If you have the September/October 1992 issue on your shelf, you can read reviews of both scores as released by Capriccio.)

The fact that Benjamin Godard was able to achieve such a triumphant success with his *Symphonie Orientale* written 35 years later in 1884 shows what a great draw "Turkish music" continued to be for many years to come—annotator John Warrack perceptively likens it to Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Scheherazade* written in 1888. Even if that's your only reference point, you'll surely welcome this brilliantly conceived example of Orientalism *a la Française*.

Godard prefaced each section of the symphony (there are five in all) with a poem, starting out with Leconte de Lisle's *Les Elephants* for 'Arabia'—not exactly an elephant stomping ground. (Were there wild elephants roaming Arabia a hundred years ago?) Godard aptly images the pachyderm caravan shuffling along the sands, beginning with the heavy tread of the basses set against string tremolos a la D'Indy and continually gaining strength, then waning in intensity. Here the obvious cognate is Moussorgsky's heavily laden oxcart ('Bydlo') from *Pictures at an Exhibition*, just as the ensuing Chinoiserie ('China') after Auguste de Ch*ƒ*tillon with its chirping woodwinds and piquant touches of percussion calls to mind Moussorgsky's 'Unhatched Chicks' if perhaps via Gliere's *Red Poppy*. I'm pleased to have in my collection a concert performance by New York City's Jupiter Symphony under its excellent conductor (and oboist *par excellence*) Gerard Reuter, who gets what Godard is after a lot better than Martin Yates, allowing the great beasts a full two minutes longer to reach their destination (that's also why I still count Reiner's *Pictures* as my favorite!).

Even more curious than Godard's Arabian elephants is the third movement, where the Orient is expanded to include Greece—a vignette from Victor Hugo's *Orientales* subtitled 'Sara la Baigneuse' (also set memorably by Berlioz)—yet it might just as easily be a Venetian *barcarolle*, a gentle rocking rhythm adorned by woodwind filigrees that limns the fair Sara swinging indolently in a hammock while bathing in the waters of a fountain drawn from Athens's Illyssus, the river that flows through the city. But there's no question

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 91

Persia is essential to our Oriental travelog, and IV, setting a poem by Godard himself, tells of 'Le Rêve de la Nikia', a beautiful young Persian girl who dreams of reigning as Queen over some distant land. Godard entrusts the soulful solo to the oboe, who in turn defers to the clarinet yet returns near the close (after a rather stormy scene) where he plays Don Quixote to the nattering bassoon's Sancho Panza.

But Godard saves the big brass (and I do mean big!) for the closing 'Marche Turque'. Another of Godard's quatrains praising Allah sets the scene. Clearly these Turks are clad in their most formidable battle gear, and you won't hear anything approaching the wit and effervescence of either Beethoven's or Mozart's quickstep. Truly this is a feast for the brass, who resound from far and near—I was beginning to wonder if Godard actually called for an offstage band, but finally resigned myself to the fact that the raucous effect was directly traceable to the slapdash playing of the Scottish brasses who sound like they came straight from some Glasgow pub, unfortunately made even worse by the echo-ridden hall. But this music surely must have come like manna from Heaven to the absolutely glorious Jupiter Symphony brass, who without ever sounding anything less than refined and absolutely professional, simply throw it out to the enthusiastic audience with such joy that you can tell they're really having a blast. Oh, how I wish they might open up their vault of concert performances to the world. I can at least point you to their website, www.jupitersymphony.com. Still, the Scots make enough of a racket that I imagine your neighbors will come a'knocking at your door just the same.

Since the 'Berceuse' from *Jocelyn*—once standard fare on "pops" programs—has apparently become passe, most record buyers these days are likely to know Godard mainly from his *Concerto Romantique* (May/June 2008)—hardly a stretch for a student of Vieuxtemps—yet he also composed prolifically for the piano, including two concertos. The First Concerto, in A minor, saw the light of day nine years before the symphony and like the Brahms B-flat is cast in four movements rather than the usual three. A pensive introduction sets up a four-note motto that will pervade the opening movement, soon taken up effusively by the soloist; and there's a secondary motif that sounds very much like its counterpart in the finale of Anton Rubinstein's Fourth Concerto written 11 years before. A free-wheeling "Fantasia" in E major forms something of a movement within a movement, while frequent outbursts by the brass seem to have elbowed their way in from the Berlioz *Requiem*—unfortunately just as raw as in the symphony. A Mendelssohnian Scherzo follows, and one might wish Victor Sangiorgio could "trip the light fantastic"; unfortunately he seems to trip over his own shoelaces, gawky and prosaic. Here I happily turned to my German aircheck with Gerhard Puchelt, who is far more nimble and light of foot; and he also manages to keep III from turning into a funeral cortege as it does here. But once Sangiorgio gets to the finale he handily trumps Puchelt with an urgent and sparkling account of this delightful romp, spelled by a "Papageno" motif (or is it "Papagena"?) that soon spills over into witty passagework for the soloist. You might expect more of the same from the Introduction and Allegro, but here the music suggests Saint-Saens, most of all *Africa* (actually written 11 years later) until Godard piles on the cymbals and bass drum and it sounds like a carnival cootch dance. Sangiorgio takes the opening Lento quite slowly, saving up his energy for Godard's exhilarating development.

Sound tends to thicken in loud passages, and Martin Yates's apparent proclivity for letting the brasses (especially the trumpets) go hog wild doesn't help any. Just the same, I hope Sangiorgio and Dutton plan to follow up with Godard's Second Piano Concerto; and a generous look at Felicien David's other symphonies would be welcome too.

HALLER

GODOWSKY: *Java Suite;*
SAINT-SAENS: *Danse Macabre*
Carl Petersson, p
Sterling 1671—57 minutes

The *Java Suite* is Godowsky's journey through "distant lands" and an account of his fascination with "strange people". Most of this music is repetitive and filled with aimless whirlwinds of virtuosity. Most of these pieces are not that interesting. Just when you think something meaningful is going to be said, in comes overstated, with rapid arpeggios in the upper register of the piano to remind us we are far away. Some of Godowsky's harmonic language is interesting, but most of the virtuosity is distracting fluff. If you think early Liszt can be over-the-top, make way for Godowsky.

Carl Petersson is quite good. His playing is captivating, and he is good at introspective music. He should give the Debussy Preludes a go. His playing of the *Danse Macabre* is OK. He certainly executes the showman element of the piece effectively. I have always thought that such a large piece—conceptually—does not belong on the piano. It's too loud.

JACOBSEN

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 92

GOMPPER: *Violin Concerto; Ikon; Flip; Spirals*
Wolfgang David, Peter Zazofsky,v; Royal Philharmonic/ Emmanuel Siffert
Naxos 559637—71 minutes

David Gompper is an Academy Award-winning American composer. He has worked internationally as a pianist, conductor, and composer. This is the first time I have heard his music, and I am very impressed. I feel refreshed that such exceptional music is still composed in these times of artistic apathy.

The incredible Wolfgang David takes the stage with the Violin Concerto. This Austrian violinist is extraordinary. His playing is exceptionally rich and opulent and can also be frighteningly delicate and distant when necessary.

The concerto begins with a violent solo violin gesture that explodes into a dense texture, Stravinskian in quality. The violin dances around to a very American tune, yet reflects a staple 20th Century violin concerto. Shostakovich seems to be of influence in passages of very involved counterpoint in the winds, which serve as support for the cadenza-like passages in the violin—as in the Op. 99 scherzo. The frantic exchange is interrupted by a beautifully meditative section. As the agitation begins to brew once more, the desperate counterpoint between the strings and winds comes to a drastic halt with a booming brass call that melts back into a meditative vision. The ending seems to be in the style of Shostakovich—this time, the end of the Fourth Symphony.

The second movement is an agonizing moment, with a never-ending violin line that reaches a transformative climax. III is certainly the high point of this piece. I cannot get enough! I am listening obsessively to the riveting ending. Again, it seems to redefine, yet celebrate the great violin concertos with sounds of Bartok and Shostakovich. David Gompper also does something rather rare these days: compose a good tune; it's glorious.

The other pieces are also very satisfying—especially the emotionally charmed *Ikon* and *Spirals*, inspired by the Fibonacci sequence.

What an absolute delight!

JACOBSEN

GOULD: *Freedom Fanfare; St Lawrence Suite; Jericho Rhapsody; Clarinet Derivations; Band Symphony 4*
Stephanie Zelnick, cl; University of Kansas Wind Ensemble/ Scott Weiss
Naxos 572629—62 minutes

This collection of concert band works by Morton Gould (1913-96) has introduced me to several works I wish I had played back in my band days. The UK Wind Ensemble's exciting reading of 'Fanfare for Freedom', composed in 1942 for the Cincinnati Symphony, has all the block triads well balanced and in tune. From the same period is the 12-minute *Jericho Rhapsody* (1941), based on 'Joshua Fit the Battle' and in eight lively, creative sections that correspond with events in the Biblical story. Also quite attractive is *Saint Lawrence Suite* (1958), in four movements, each opening with a two-trumpet fanfare (symbolizing US-Canadian cooperation), and each with much quiet playing. It is good to hear Gould's Symphony 4 (1952), subtitled *West Point*, composed for that institution's sesquicentennial. In two movements, the work opens with a seemingly long (though only 12 minutes) 'Epitaphs' and concludes with the uplifting 'Marches'.

The program also includes *Derivations for Clarinet* (1955), given a smooth, swinging reading by University of Kansas clarinet professor Stephanie Zelnick. She is miked quite closely, and other musicians seem to move in and out of proximity. Apparently the engineers played an active role in how this piece sounds—but it sounds good.

Scott Weiss, director of bands at the University of Kansas since 2007, has his ensemble operating at a high level. I hear lots of great moments and no weaknesses. Fine playing and music-making!

KILPATRICK

GOUNOD: Sacred Music
Missae Breves 5+7; Noël; Bethleem; 7 Words of Christ on the Cross; Evening Service (Anglican); Pater Noster
Raphaela Mayhous, s; Christa Bonhoff, a; Tobias Götting, org; I Vocalisti Chamber Choir/ Hans-Joachim Lustig
Carus 83161—65 minutes

Requiem in C; Mass in C minor
Charlotte Müller-Perrier, Valerie Bonnard, Christophe Einhorn, Christian Immler; Vocal & Instrumental Ensemble of Lausanne/ Michel Corboz
Mirare 129—63 minutes

Charles Gounod (1818-93) could be passionate about church music, and he was not shy when it came to expressing his strongly held convictions about it. He was an ally of Charles Bordes (1863-1909) in seeking the reform and elevation of church music in France to the standing it had enjoyed before the Revolution. He deplored the sentimental popular church music of his day, described in a letter of 1892 to Bordes as "the mush of romance and all the sweets of piety" (toutes les guimauves de la romance et toutes les sucreries de pieté). His exemplars were Palestrina and Bach. Much of

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 93

Gounod's vast output of church music should be viewed in the light of his work with amateur choirs as well as his zeal for reform.

Most of the music on the Carus disc could be described as liturgical *gebrauchsmusik*: works conceived in scale and character to be suitable for the ordinary parish mass and modest enough in their technical demands to be accessible to amateur singers. In all, Gounod wrote more than 20 mass settings. Ten are designated Brief Masses. Eight are more ambitious technically and larger in scale and are designated Solemn Masses. These include the well-known *St Cecilia Mass*. Four of Gounod's masses are Requiems.

The Carus recording includes two Missae Breves with organ accompaniment, both in the key of C. Missa Brevis 7 was first published in 1877 for two equal voices and organ. The version recorded here dates from 1890 and is recast for soprano and alto soloists and a four-part mixed choir with organ. In place of 'Benedictus qui Venit' after the Sanctus there is a setting of the Eucharistic hymn 'O Salutaris Hostia'. Missa Brevis 5 is for TBB soloists and a three-part men's choir (also TBB) with organ. It was first published in 1871, and on its reissue in 1892 the designation "aux seminaires" was added to the title. The warmth of Gounod's writing for lower voices is especially attractive. Both masses are predominantly homophonic and neither includes a setting of the Creed.

During his years in Rome (1840-42) Gounod was profoundly influenced by the music of Palestrina. His understanding of the vocal-polyphonic idiom is eloquently displayed in *The Seven Words of Christ on the Cross* for unaccompanied choir and a quartet of soloists. Much of the work could pass for early music—if not Palestrina himself, then perhaps Allegri or Anerio. Two notable departures from the historic idiom are the chromatic setting of the word "Sitio" (I thirst) and the final movement, where Gounod allows himself more 19th-Century harmonic writing.

Mendelssohn and Gounod were among the few non-English composers to make direct contributions to the Anglican cathedral repertory. (Excerpts from oratorios sung as anthems don't count, and composers like Handel or Berthold Tours, who were of foreign birth but settled permanently in England, are in a slightly different category.) The Carus recording includes an Evening Service (Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis, using the English text of the *Book of Common Prayer*) that dates from 1872, when Gounod was living in England. It is a concise, mainly chordal setting in what I would describe as the Victorian short service idiom. One may detect the influence of composers like SS Wesley and Henry Smart. A simple but eloquent 'Pater Noster' and two charming Christmas pieces with French texts complete the program. One of these, 'Bethleem' (1882), is claimed as a world premiere recording, as are Missa Brevis 5 and 'Pater Noster'.

I Vocalisti, founded in 1991, is a 30-voice choir of young singers from northern Germany. Their choral sound is delicate and refined with a fresh and youthful character that is well suited to the present repertory. There are flaws in their English diction in the Evening Service, and I suspect a native French speaker could find similar faults in the two Christmas songs, but on the whole these are very fine performances that exhibit this unfamiliar repertory to good advantage.

The recording by Michel Corboz and his Lausanne Ensemble from Mirare presents two larger-scale liturgical works by Gounod. The Requiem in C was written in memory of the composer's grandson, Maurice Gounod, who died at the age of five in January of 1889. Although Gounod considered the work complete in 1891, he continued to revise it until February of 1893 when he submitted the score to the Societé des Concerts du Conservatoire. He died in October of that year. The Requiem had its first performances at the Paris Conservatoire on Good Friday and Holy Saturday (March 23 & 24) of 1894. In October of that year it was performed as part of an official memorial concert at La Madeleine on the first anniversary of the composer's death. Gabriel Fauré directed that performance, and among those in attendance were Ambroise Thomas and Giuseppe Verdi.

Gounod authorized his colleague Henri Büsser (1872-1973; yes, he died a little over two weeks shy of his 102nd birthday) to produce versions of the work apart from the full orchestral score. The version heard on the present recording is for a quartet of soloists, mixed choir, string quintet, harp, and organ. Program annotator Michel Daudin writes that this version achieves the best balance between the dramatic character of the work and its intimate feeling. Presumably this reflects Corboz's judgement. It is a work that springs from a deeply personal grief that seems to be reflected in the music. An understated 'Dies Irae' may sound like a contradiction in terms, and while Gounod's setting is not without moments of intense menace, it is also notable for its quiet penitence. It is very different from the melodramatic ferocity of Verdi. Daudin suggests that Gounod's Requiem may have been a key influence on Fauré.

The Choral Mass in G minor is the fourth of Gounod's big masses. It was first performed

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 94

in Reims Cathedral on June 24, 1888 at the beatification of Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, who had been a canon of Reims. It may be significant that in February of that year, at a festival in Angers, Gounod met the great plainsong scholar Dom Joseph Pothier of Solesmes Abbey, who urged the composer to write a mass based on Gregorian themes. Gounod visited Solesmes and was highly impressed with the flowing style of plainsong chanting there in contrast with the slow and ponderous delivery then common elsewhere. The mass is based on the intonation of Credo IV. It is treated not as a cantus firmus but as a motto that pervades the work.

The mass is scored for a mixed choir and small choir organ in dialog with the large organ in the west gallery. In contrast with the *Seven Words*, it is not a close imitation of early music, but the vocal-polyphonic style is clearly Gounod's point of departure. On the whole, the work sounds unmistakably of the 19th Century. It expresses the liturgical text but with a ceremonial objectivity that contrasts with the highly personal flavor of the Requiem.

Michel Corboz founded the Lausanne Vocal Ensemble in 1961. They enjoy a distinguished reputation for their concert performances and more than 100 recordings. As heard here the choral discipline and tone are exemplary. It is a somewhat more robust sound and perhaps not quite as youthful in character as I Vocalisti. The two choirs are about the same size.

My only real complaint concerns the organ. It appears that the organ parts of the *Messe Chorale* have been realized on a single instrument, as only one organist is listed among the players. A photograph in the booklet shows a small two-manual organ that is evidently the one used here. It has a lovely, warm flute tone, but its chorus is thin and weak. It may be satisfactory for the organ writing in Büsser's scoring of the Requiem, but it is hopelessly inadequate as a stand-in for a large west gallery organ. Gounod's writing presupposes the imposing power, richness, and spaciousness of a large French romantic organ speaking into a vast interior. After all, the piece was intended for Reims Cathedral.

Readers who wish to explore more of Gounod's shorter sacred vocal works may like to consider a recording I reviewed a few years ago by the choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, under the direction of Geoffrey Webber (Centaur 2848; May/June 2008).

GATENS

GRAENER: *Trios*

Hyperion Trio; Albrecht Pöhl, bar
CPO 777 599—63 minutes

Paul Graener (1872-1944) is certainly a genius who deserves to be better-known in the greater classical music community. As suggested in the essay, there is a reason he is almost unknown today. He was a Nazi with a lot of influence as the vice-president of Reichmusikkammer, the regime's "good German music" association. He became vice-president after conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler refused his appointment in protest of the ban on Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*. Of course, a more notable member of Reichmusikkammer was the president and Nazi critic, Richard Strauss, who took the post primarily to protect his Jewish daughter-in-law. Before that post, Graener was a widely known composer, conductor, and professor. He was president of the Salzburg Mozarteum, taught composition at the Leipzig Conservatory, and was director of the Haymarket Theatre in London. I encourage you to research this fascinating man. Perhaps most curious is that his career took off in London, where he acquired British citizenship in 1909, a small fact the Nazi leadership was unaware of when he rose to prominence in the party in the 1930s.

I am thrilled that a world-class ensemble like the Hyperion Trio is recording and performing this important music. Their musicality is admirable.

The Suite for Piano Trio is a dazzling three-movement miniature (8 minutes)—an exciting and colorful piece, narrating a story of youth and innovation. The first movement reminds us of the many nature walks we take with Schubert in his art songs. II is a mediation on the expansive landscapes of Beethoven, while III is a brief and spontaneous eruption, only possible through the language of Schumann.

The Second Trio, *Kammermusikdichtung*, is a one-movement work that truly points out the brilliance and talent of this composer. Like the Piano Suite it is quintessentially German. The opening is brilliant, a dramatic sweeping gesture, Brahmsian in quality.

The third trio is entirely different. Here I hear an orchestral Graener. It is definitely the work of a late German romantic. His music seems to be a melting pot of the German idiom, weaving together a language of the greats. The rhetoric of Bruckner runs through it, while the most vulnerable passages exemplify the anxiety and harmonic maturity of Strauss. French impressionism is also present.

The last trio, *Theodor-Storm-Musik*, is profound. Graener moves through a varied array of musical languages, gestures of anti-roman-

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 95

ticism as well as elements of late expressionism. After numerous hearings, this piece still manages to catch me off guard. Well into the piece—near the end—emerges a reference to the late Brahms Intermezzos. Albrecht Pöhl sings the famous text, 'Es liegen Wald und Heide'. It ends in spectacular tragedy. As in Schubert's 'Erlkönig', there is no question at the end that it is over.

JACOBSEN

GRAINGER: *Shepherd's Hey; Gamelan Anklung; Irish Tune From County Derry; The Lonely Desert Man Sees the Tents of the Happy Tribes; Eastern Intermezzo; Crying for the Moon; Arrival Platform Humlet; Bahariyale V. Palaniyandi; Sailor's Song; Sekar Gadung; Under a Bridge; Country Gardens ;*
BACH: *Blithe Bells;*
DEBUSSY: *Pagodas;*
GARDINER: *London Bridge;*
RAVEL: *La Vallee des Cloches*
WOOF!

Move 3222—54 minutes

Percy Grainger arranged these works for percussion ensemble but never published them. They have recently been rediscovered and WOOF!—an Australian percussion ensemble—has a habit of performing them. They even use the staff bells and stella marimba that Grainger had built for him.

To be honest, although I like Grainger, these arrangements leave me cold. They are well played, very well annotated, and nicely recorded. Fine, if you are fond of percussion, but I'll take the piano.

BAUMAN

GRAUN: *Montezuma*
Encarnacion Vazquez (Montezuma), Dorothea Wirtz (Eupaforice), Conchita Julian (Tezeuco), Lourdes Ambriz (Pilpatoe), Angelica Uribe Sanchez (Erissena), Maria Luisa Tamez (Cortes), Ana Caridad Acosta (Narves); Cantica Nova; German Chamber Academy/ Johannes Goritzki

Capriccio 7085 [2CD] 134 minutes

This 1992 performance of Carl Heinrich Graun's 1755 opera might seem a bit old-fashioned by today's standards of performing baroque and early classical works: male roles sung by female singers (no countertenors to take on castrato parts) and a non-period instrument orchestra. Written to be performed before Frederick the Great, who was the librettist (did Frederick see himself in this part?), *Montezuma* mixes fact with lots of fiction. Cortes is a deceitful bad guy who brings the peace-loving Montezuma and the Aztec empire to ruin. And of course Montezuma has a love interest: his adoring wife Eupaforice.

This was an important opera in its day. Carl Heinrich Graun, who died four years after its premiere, composed a melodic score dominated by secco recitative-aria format. Not all of the set pieces are in *da capo* form, at least as heard here. In this recording things seem a bit stilted; and a certain sameness seems to dominate singers, chorus, orchestra, and conductor. A newer recording is needed. There's no real drama in the proceedings. Everyone is walking on egg shells. But the performers do get points for voices able to cope with music that sometimes sounds like Handel minus his most fiendish vocal demands.

Orchestral playing and conducting are very competent but also, like the singers, lacks the fire to make these attractive tunes sound like they have some drama in them. Libretto without English translation; but there are background notes.

MARK

GREGSON: *Chamber Orchestra Pieces; Trombone Concerto; 2 Pictures; Song for Chris*
Peter Moore, trb; Guy Johnston, vc; BBC Concert Orchestra/ Bramwell Tovey

Chandos 10627—71 minutes

English composer Edward Gregson (b 1945) is probably known best by brass players, since he has enriched their modest repertories with fine concertos and ensemble works. I first became aware of him in the early 1980s when his jaunty Tuba Concerto made a hit. Then William Richardson presented the Trombone Concerto (Jan/Feb 1990: 125) with piano accompaniment. To my knowledge, the 1979 work has no other recordings, so this one by Peter Moore and the BBC Concert Orchestra is most welcome. The 16-minute, single-movement work has a melodic motif that undergoes various transformations and orchestral textures that allow the soloist to be heard with ease. What makes this recording unusual is that the soloist is 14 years old (violin and piano prodigies are more common than brass ones). Peter Moore was named BBC Young Musician of the Year at age 12 in 2008. He seems to have it all: consistently full yet clear tone quality, fine technical skill, and easy high register. He sports a variety of articulation, and he plays with musical understanding and heartfelt expression.

Also quite young (the BBC Young Musician of the Year in 2000) is cellist Guy Johnston, soloist in *A Song for Chris* (2007). Composed for Gregson's Northern College of Music colleague Christopher Rowland, who was dying of cancer, the 18-minute, four-movement work opens quietly, takes on form and energy, and ends optimistically. Fine recorded sound allows us to hear details of cellist Johnston's

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 96

tone, which sounds especially vibrant in the unaccompanied moments.

Two works for chamber orchestra complete the program. Music for Chamber Orchestra (1968) has the then 22-year-old composer reflecting on Shostakovich's Symphony 5. The Two Pictures for String Orchestra were composed with 13 years between them. BBC violist Timothy Welch is the fine soloist in 'Goddess' (2009), a response to a painting by Dorothy Bradford. Its most striking moment—intense, overlapping, descending minor scales—brings to mind Arvo Pärt's *Cantus In Memory of Benjamin Britten*. Gregson describes 'Stepping Out' (1996) as "John Adams meets Shostakovich, with a bit of Gregson thrown in".

KILPATRICK

GRIEG: *Symphonic Dances; Peer Gynt Suites; Funeral March*
Cologne Radio Orchestra/ Eivind Aadland
Audite 92651 [SACD] 73:22

This is a beautiful recording. The Cologne orchestra has a gorgeous sound, the engineers convey it perfectly, the conductor loves the music and never rushes thru anything. I was impressed right away by the slow tempos. All four Symphonic Dances are slower than Jarvi in Gothenburg. The first is especially good at this speed. The second—always the most popular—sounds luscious here. My Jarvi recording (DG) has developed irritating "swish" sounds that I cannot remove, so I was glad for a new recording.

The Funeral March is the familiar one for Richard Nordraak.

The *Peer Gynt* Suites (pronounced Pair Jint, by the way) are also among the best I've heard. While I was comparing timings to all the other recordings I have, I noticed that this conductor is slower than all—except Beecham, whose *Peer Gynt* has always been my favorite. Beecham and Mr Aadland take about the same tempos, but both are slower than anyone else—and the music can take it. (Barbirolli was also slow.) Beecham does more of the *Peer Gynt* music but only one of the Symphonic Dances (No. 2). As with most of what Beecham conducted, he is peerless—but this comes very close. And this has the best sound I've ever heard in this music—and that is partly the terrific orchestra. What rich string sound! By the way, there is no singer for Solveig's Song.

Solveig's Song comes before Peer's homecoming in the incidental music, but in Suite 2 here it comes after—it ends the suite. Some conductors do it the other way around—seems logical—but it was Grieg himself who published Suite 2 in this order. He wanted it to end quietly.

Mr Aadland grew up on Grieg as a violinist in the Bergen area; he was also concertmaster of the Bergen Philharmonic for many years. He seems to feel this music like a true Norwegian, and he claims to know all the folk tunes and rhythms from childhood, because his father played Norwegian folk music on a Hardanger fiddle. It seems to me that the main thing operating here is a great love and respect for the music. Too many conductors treat it as something light and forgettable.

VROON

GRIFFES: *Piano Pieces*
Solungga Fang-Tzu Liu
Centaur 2971—75 minutes

For someone wanting a one-disc selection of the composer's piano music this will do nicely, though Joseph Smith's superior interpretations (now available again) should not be forgotten. If you want all of the music try Michael Lewin's two Naxos discs—good, if not outstanding performances. Liu, initially from Taiwan, is now a part of the US scene, and has the skill and technique to bring these pieces off. Ideally they could benefit from a little more imagination.

The *Pleasure-Dome of Kubla Khan* may surprise some since it differs in many respects from the composer's later orchestral version. While it still has more than a wisp of perfumed elegance, the composer's later ideas are infinitely more inventive and structurally far more sound. While sumptuously done, Lewin's more straightforward approach has none of the overindulgence of this new entry.

The rather unusual one-movement sonata has had many advocates over the years. Liu easily matches them and has been given excellent sound to boot. Lewin, with sound of less depth and richness, delivers in this piece as well. The powerful ideas and unexpected dissonances from semitones and augmented seconds make their presence felt in both performances.

Roman Sketches, which includes 'The White Peacock', is probably the best known of the composer's piano works. Liu easily carries full honors here in a performance of sensitivity and beguiling color. That is also the case with the other movements from this suite.

The *Three Tone Poems*, Op.5, and *Fantasy Pieces* Op.6 also benefit from Ms Liu's languorous treatment. For the most part, these impressionist pieces gain from her slightly slower tempos and richer, deeper sound. Once one is immersed in Lewin's performances, they too have much to offer, including many additional pieces well worth having. Liu will join Lewis on my Griffes shelves, but I do have that luxury.

BECKER

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 97

HALFFTER, R: *Chamber Music*
Soloists of the Madrid orchestra
Naxos 572418—69 minutes

Here we have Part 2 of a phenomenal collection of chamber music by Spanish composer Rodolfo Halffter. Halffter's music is quite varied, strikingly different as you move through his early, middle, and late periods. I lean towards his early period. His late works, such as *Espinicio*, Op. 42, included here, are not very interesting and seem to lack direction. His middle period—pieces like *Laberinto*—have that sort-of-tonal, sort-of-not, modernist sound. It reminds me very much of the first Shostakovich Piano Sonata and the *Aphorisms*, Op.13—his most unattractive works.

I am most impressed with the guitarist, Miguel Angel Jimenez, from his vibrant, pure, and clean sound to his magnificent "subito pianos". Also extraordinary is the playing of harpist Beatriz Millan; the *Tres Piezas Breves,* Op.13a, are perhaps the best on the program. The *Divertimento*, Op. 7a, is a masterly work. It reflects Halffter's time in Mexico. What I find most interesting is this: I have never been a big fan of "Latin" classical music—if we can call it that—because composers tend to throw a Latin rhythm into a piece and it sounds inauthentic. Colombian Cumbia and Brazilian Samba were composed for drums and rattles—not symphony orchestras. In the *Divertimento* however, the sound is authentic. Halffter allows the simplicity of the music to shine. This is a marvelous introduction to Spanish chamber music.

JACOBSEN

HARTMANN, E: *Nordic & German Songs*
Iben Vestergard, s; Cathrine Penderup, p
Danacord 712 [2CD] 125 minutes

Danish composer Emil Hartmann (1836-98), the son of JPE Hartmann, deserves a wider audience than he now enjoys. His songs are beautifully crafted and give much enjoyment, but he needs better advocacy than this. Soprano Iben Vestergard does her best, but she does not have a voice of sufficient calibre to warrant two hours of listening. A choral section leader, yes, perhaps an album of duets, but heard alone she only just reaches the level of a professional, and certainly not the level of a soloist. Her voice is just too thin and lacking in body.

Pianist Cathrine Penderup plays well, and her piano is vividly recorded. In an album of Hartmann's piano works she would have managed to pull it off, but she can't rescue this effort by herself.

BOYER

HASSE: *Requiem in C; Miserere in C minor*
Johanna Winkel & Marie Luise Werneburg, s; Wiebke Lehmkuhl & Marlen Herzog, a; Colin Balzer, t; Cornelius Uhle, b; Dresden Chamber Choir & Orchestra/ Hans-Christoph Rademann
Carus 83349—70 minutes

Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783) was probably the most famous and most celebrated composer of his day. He was one of the last pupils of Alessandro Scarlatti in Naples and soon acquired a reputation as a composer of Italian opera. In 1733 Elector Frederick Augustus II of Saxony appointed Hasse to the post of Kapellmeister at the Dresden court. He retained this position until 1763, the year the Elector died. The Requiem in C was written for the funeral and was performed each year until 1850 on the anniversary of the Elector's death.

Hasse was certainly not a prisoner of the Dresden court. He had ample opportunities to visit Italy and other European musical centers, often for extended periods. Concurrently with his position in Dresden he was the director of music at the Ospedale degli Incurabili in Venice, one of the celebrated orphanages of that city noted for the musical training and artistry of their residents. The Miserere on this recording was written for the young ladies of the Incurabili. A surviving manuscript proves that the arrangement for mixed voices heard here is Hasse's own.

The quiet trumpets and timpani in the introduction to the opening movement of the Requiem remind us that it was written for a court solemnity. On the whole, the musical idiom does not stray far from the 18th-Century operatic stage. The Dies Irae in particular has a certain operatic vehemence. The Requiem is a thoroughly professional and mellifluous piece of writing by a master of his art who knows how to write effectively for the human voice. I cannot describe the piece as movingly profound. It will not make us forget the Mozart Requiem. The Miserere is elegant and graceful, but not really an evocation of the intensely penitential character of the text.

This is a concert recording from September of 2010 at St Mary's Church, Marienberg, as part of the Erzgebirge Music Festival. The choral discipline is very fine, and while none of the soloists has what I would call a big voice, they display a purity and refinement of tone that admirably suits the repertory. The soloists are not exactly overbalanced, but I suspect their sound would have been more prominent in a studio recording.

While the Dresden Chamber Choir has a distinguished reputation for a wide-ranging repertory, it is hardly surprising that they should devote special attention to composers

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 98

who served the Dresden court, from Heinrich Schütz to the generation of Heinichen, Zelenka, and Hasse. They have also recorded of Hasse's Requiem in E-flat, written in 1763 for the funeral of Frederick Augustus II's successor. It is paired with another Miserere (Carus 83.175; May/June 2006).

GATENS

HAYDN: *Harpsichord & Violin Concerto in F; Violin Concerto in G; Sinfonia Concertante*

Emanuel Borok, v; Fyodor Stroganov, hpsi; Alexander Gotgelf, vc; Olga Tomilova, ob; Mikhail Furman, bn; Kremlin Chamber Orchestra/ Misha Rachlevsky & Emanuel Borok

Eroica 3293—57 minutes

This Russian production is quite satisfactory aside from slightly dry, close sound and notes that completely ignore Haydn. Emanuel Borok has lived in the USA for some years and has been associate concertmaster of the Boston Symphony and concertmaster of the Dallas Symphony. Misha Rachlevsky has also lived in the USA, where he founded the New American Chamber Orchestra in 1984. After 1991 he returned to Russia and organized the Kremlin Chamber Orchestra. The other soloists are mostly Russian educated. All play Haydn well on modern instruments. If you want this combination of works you should be well satisfied.

BAUMAN

HAYDN: *Piano Sonatas 18, 35, 37, 44, 47*

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet

Chandos 10668—68 minutes

Bavouzet, born in 1962, is new to me. He has recorded the complete piano works of Debussy and Ravel; concertos by Pierné, Ravel, and Bartok; and works by Liszt, Ohana, and Schumann. He was a protege of Georg Solti.

French pianism can be a good match for Haydn. The clarity, careful voicing, and attention to rhetoric going back to the French harpsichord masters serve Haydn's drama and contrapuntal writing well. Heavy tone is not often helpful in Haydn's music and not often characteristic of French playing. Also, there was a hint that good things might be on this disc. The earliest recording by Bavouzet that I was able to find out about was a Haydn disc from 1991 that had a lovely performance of the great two-movement Sonata 48 in C.

As it happened, the first sonata here is a different C major piece, No. 35. Though the two works are very different, it was instantly clear that Bavouzet has used the last 20 years well and still is very attuned to Haydn.

All the sonatas here are first-rate pieces (Haydn's piano sonatas are, overall, better than Mozart's), but I will take a closer look at one of the greatest of all, 44 in G minor. G minor is not a common key for Haydn. It was Mozart's special key for tragic music, but for Haydn that was F minor. Haydn sometimes wrote mock-tragic music in G minor, perhaps to tease Mozart (think of the opening of Symphony 83). This sonata, though, was written in 1765-7, when Mozart was about ten years old and he and Haydn were at least 15 years away from meeting.

The first movement starts with a gloomy theme that repeats itself like an obsessive thought. After a little bit of contrasting material, Haydn starts to take his opening theme apart and vary the moods widely as each fragment seems to take on its own character: a song fragment, a march, and so on. As the movement goes into its development section, about 3:30 into the track, the fragments begin to build up tension with short melodies in the right hand answered by arpeggios from the left, then arpeggios in the right with responsive fragments in the left, on to what sounds like a Schumann or Beethoven gathering storm. Haydn takes the music through a wide range of moods in a short time until he comes to a dramatic pause at 5:30. The recap that follows is even stranger and wider-ranging. Nothing sounds quite as one would expect from what had gone before; everything is subtly off and unsettling. There's a quasi-vocal cadenza and Haydn brings things to a gloomy end.

The next movement (this is a two-movement work) is a minuet. Haydn was the king of minuets, and this is another great one. It's in G minor, of course, and its main theme has a kind of skip-step rhythm to it and a chromatic sigh. The trio is in the major, of course, but doesn't sound reassuring—more like the jumpy spirit of the minuet is trying, very hard, to calm itself down. The seeds of Mahler are in this music.

Of course, as David Hurwitz once said so well, all of Western music after Haydn is either a further development of what he started or a response to it.

As I have become steeped in Haydn's music in all genres, it has become clear to me that, like the music of many of the great baroque composers, his music reaches back to before there was what we think of as music, to the music and rhythms of speech through the art of rhetoric. If you read what Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian wrote about how to express yourself in speech, you will be well on the way to understanding how to make Haydn's keyboard music speak. I have no reason to think that Haydn's education actually encompassed these authors in any depth, but the intellectual life of Europe from Medieval times through the Enlightenment and beyond rested on three subjects that were taught as the basis

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 99

for all further learning: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. To go on to the deeper learning of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, you had to have the basic language skills, the mechanics of how ideas are put together, and the mechanics of how to express yourself in a persuasive way. It was only after these seven arts were mastered that you could go count yourself ready to tackle the complexities of philosophy and theology.

Haydn's education, from what we know of it, would have been a practical one. He became part of the boychoir at St Stephen's in Vienna at age 8. He would have encountered rhetorical principles in his basic education and in the music he studied and performed.

The notion, common in some circles not very long ago, and still with us in various disguises, that pre-romantic composers expected their music to be performed in some kind of Asperger-syndrome style, devoid of overt expression or even inflection, seems to me contrary to everything we know about human beings in those times. They were full of emotions and vitality; and the elite, who listened to, performed, and sometimes wrote art music were trained in composing and delivering speeches and other formal utterances. They would be taught about pauses, changes in pace, changes in volume, and so on. It seems misguided to believe that they delivered their words one way, their music in a very different one.

So the best Haydn keyboard players, at least, recognize the principles of persuasive speech that apply to his music and use them in their performances. It's no accident that Haydn is the composer of pauses.

Bavouzet joins Andras Schiff at the top of the list of keyboard performers who have assimilated Haydn's musical language and can speak it eloquently. His approach to the first movement of the G-minor Sonata is a model of how such things should be played. He knows when to press forward, when to relax, when to attend to color (what he does with the arpeggios when Haydn begins to play with his theme fragments in the first movement development is a wonderful application of sound and texture), when to dry things out to build for the next overt expression. Like all of the best French pianists he seems to have dozens of different staccato, legato, and in-between articulations at hand; and he uses them with unfailing taste. Schiff is his equal in these maaters, though his basic keyboard sound is a little broader-toned and he likes bigger gestures. Schiff's buildup to the first pause is almost a Beethoven piling-on of sound. Bavouzet is quiet. Both are superb.

I can't go on enough about how endlessly great this music is. In Sonata 37 in D the slow movement is a kind of short chorale. Terse. Mysterious. Beethoven's music comes from this place. So does Schubert's.

The pianist adds his own note on performance to the fine program notes. He writes about repeats and ornamentation, both of which he has thought carefully about. He winds up in a sensible place on both of them. He repeats when the repetition makes sense, for example in first-movement expositions, and feels free to ornament in a discreet and tasteful way.

The piano sound is lovely.

This was an hour of pleasure. It's the second in a Haydn series. I am going to find the first one and keep an eye out for the others. So should you.

CHAKWIN

HAYDN: *The Seasons*

Miah Persson, s; Jeremy Ovenden, t; Andrew Foster-Williams, bar; London Symphony & Chorus/ Colin Davis

LSO 708 [2SACD] 129 minutes

Hilde Gueden, s; Waldemar Kmentt, t; Walter Berry, b; Vienna Singakademie & Philharmonic/ Karl Bohm

Melodram 40087 [2CD] 123 minutes

Böhm recorded *Die Jahreszeiten* in the studio for DG, and that is still one of the best Big Band accounts you can buy. Solti and Beecham in English join it on the top rung. Sawallisch (July/Aug 2010) is a notch-and-a-half below them. So why on earth would you want this 1965 concert performance caught in faded, far-off sound? True, these soloists come off pretty well; but with Janowitz, Schreier, and Talvela having joined Böhm in the studio, where's the incentive to dig into the archives? Orchestral sound is distant and opaque, while the choir's contribution is substandard, both technically and sonically. So if for some reason you'd care to own a Haydn oratorio where the big choruses are the weakest element, here you go. There are no notes, libretto or translations either, in case you still care.

Needless to say, the LSO is one of the biggest of the Big Bands; but there's nothing ponderous about Colin Davis's approach, which is lithe and very energetic. Some may feel that other conductors (Beecham!) have established more vivid emotional connections with the libretto. This 'Komm, holder Lenz' might be a little too zippy to conjure up the gentle greening of a world in springtime. In 'Juchhe', the autumnal ode to the glory of the grape, the singers sound more breathless with excitement than tipsy with joy. But for overall brio, this is Haydn to be reckoned with. Davis tends to keep the counterpoint under wraps as the various choruses begin, but has it bloom-

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 100

ing splendidly when it counts. The choir is fine. Complementing their singing is some of the finest playing you'll ever hear: fragrant woodwinds, golden horns, incisive strings, and nifty ruffles and flourishes from the harpsichord. Haydn's accompaniments to his choral writing are nothing short of miraculous; and when playing of this caliber is combined with superb engineering, you wind up with exquisite displays of melodic and harmonic embroidery. For those special touches alone, this is a *Jahreszeiten* worth acquiring.

I wish I liked the soloists better. Best of the three is the lighter-than-usual bass who's impressively dexterous when Haydn trots out the coloratura. (He's terrific in *Autumn* when the dog races toward the hunter's prey. Some of the tubbier voices get into trouble there.) The soprano can be quite good, especially in 'Licht und Leben', her wintry cavatina. But I miss the radiant charm and flair for storytelling we get from the likes of Barbara Bonney (Gardiner), Marlis Petersen (Jacobs), Genia Kuhmeier (Harnoncourt) and, of course, Gundula Janowitz, who cooed her way through the score so gorgeously with Böhm. The tenor is spirited, but nasal and way too bright. Notes, texts, and translations are included in a first-rate booklet. While this may not be the *Seasons* for all seasons, there are so many things to admire and enjoy it's impossible not to recommend it.

GREENFIELD

HAYDN: *Quartet, op 54:1;* see MOZART

HENSEL: *Quartet;*
MENDELSSOHN: *Quartet 6; 4 Pieces*
Merel Quartet
Genuin 11204—70 minutes

There are dozens of excellent recordings of Felix Mendelssohn's Four Pieces, published as Op. 81, and even more of his last Quartet, Op. 80, the piece he wrote in memory of his sister Fanny Hensel; but there are relatively few available recordings of Hensel's String Quartet, a piece she wrote in 1834. (I know of one other—M/J 2000.)

Fanny's brother criticized the liberties she took with form, and the movement he liked best, the Scherzo, sounds like something he would write (or wished he had written). Fanny's response to her brother, as printed in the liner notes, shows a great deal of self-deprecation concerning her "ability to sustain ideas properly and give them the necessary consistency". Her music, however, contradicts her self-criticism. And, in the hands and arms of the Merel Quartet, we can continue to be delighted with the continual surprises (more than 500, so far) that have made their way out of the Mendelssohn family archives.

It's loosely based on Beethoven's *Harp* Quartet. (R. Larry Todd discusses the work at length in *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn*, published by Oxford University Press in 2010.) The Merel Quartet plays this as a piece of forward-thinking music written by an extraordinary composer working in the generation after Beethoven. She had an adoring little brother who also composed exceedingly well, as you can hear.

FINE

HONEGGER: *Cello Concerto;* see MARTINU

HOWELLS: *Piano Quartet; String Quartet; Clarinet Quintet*
Patricia Calman, Harriet Davies, v; Nick Barr, va; David Daniels, vc; Michael Collins, cl; Andrew West, p
Metier 92003—53 minutes

Much like Russian nationalism two decades earlier and American nationalism two decades later, English nationalism at the dawn of the 20th Century involved a breaking away from German models and an embrace of native songs, sounds, and dialects. English efforts, though, developed during a difficult transition in Western music. They quickly fell behind modernist whirlwinds, and by the end of World War II they were dismissed as quaint. While Russian and American nationalists are still towering figures in the repertoire, English nationalists remain an afterthought from a busy period, living on only in vocal music, band music, and chamber music.

Nevertheless, some leading British musicians maintain that English nationalism still has a place on contemporary concert programs. On this 2007 release, originally recorded in 1992, clarinetist Michael Collins, pianist Andrew West, and the Lyric Quartet present three early chamber works of Herbert Howells (1892-1983). A favorite pupil of the German-trained Charles Stanford at the Royal College of Music in London, Howells was considered the most promising talent of the British generation of composers that came of age during World War I. Like George Butterworth and Gerald Finzi, Howells skillfully balanced traditional form with English pastoralism and folk song; and like Gordon Jacob, he admired English Renaissance and baroque music. His teacher, though, had the greatest influence; no matter the source of his materials, Howells infused his works with warm romantic lyricism.

The program begins with the highly atmospheric Piano Quartet in A minor, Op. 21 (1916), a full-length three-movement work that

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 101

weaves several English folk melodies into its formal structure and bears a dedication to a specific place in the English countryside. The *Phantasy Quartet*, Op. 25 (1917) refers to the old Elizabethan single movement instrumental piece with several contrasting sections, but after all the energetic dances it dies away with a solemn Piu Lento. The concluding Rhapsodic Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet, Op. 31 (1919) is another single-movement work that ends with a slow meditation. It is unified not by a grand architectural scheme, but by only two ideas: an energetic motive in the strings and a beautiful melody in the clarinet.

Collins, West, and the Lyric Quartet give thoroughly professional and profoundly moving performances that simmer with romantic angst, succumb completely to moments of intense contemplation, and have lively rhythmic episodes and the occasional tangy dissonance.

The Quartet is a superb team that balances classical formality with folk playing, and West has unrivalled touch and color, especially when he begins the kind of quiet passage that words cannot express. Collins achieves a British timbre that is unusually rich and clear, matching the dark hue of the strings, phrasing with great color and sincerity, and making the fade-out in the closing measures of the Clarinet Quintet poignant and unforgettable.

HANUDEL

HOWELLS: *Winchester Service; Jubilate Deo; Thee Will I Love; Rhapsody 4; Come, my Soul; Te Deum; Coventry Antiphon; A Flourish for a Bidding; Antiphon; The Fear of the Lord; Exultate*

Deo Simon Bell, org; Winchester Cathedral Choir/ Andrew Lumsden

Hyperion 67853—69 minutes

Herbert Howells (1892-1983) is better known for his earlier (1940-1950) choral compositions than for ones from his later years. This recording was done in the hope that a broader acquaintance with the selections heard here (1958-1976) might spark interest in his later pieces from choirs and choral leaders. The choir is configured 16-5-4-5; the organ is a 4-79 stop, 101-rank Willis (1851), Harrison & Harrison (1988).

Winchester Service from 1967 is Howells's contribution of Evensong canticles for one of the three choirs making up the Southern Cathedral Festival (Salisbury, Chichester, Winchester), an annual musical feast to balance the much older Three Choirs Festival (Gloucester, Worcester, Hereford). The Service includes many of the chromatic turns characteristic of his music. Don't expect too many hushed, soothing passages. Both the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis maintain and finish with bold strokes.

Jubilate Deo, *Exultate Deo*, and *Te Deum* are predictably assertive. The most attractive selections here are *Winchester Service*, 'Come, my Soul', 'Thee I Will Love', and 'The Fear of the Lord'. For most of the louder pieces, the text seldom becomes intelligible—it doesn't help that Winchester is the longest British cathedral. Considerable echo does help in the subdued passages. Sometimes the organ stops, and the closing cadence can be heard as in 'Thee Will I Love', which concludes with a very drawn-out pianissimo. Another gem is the closing of 'The Fear of the Lord', with a suddenly quiet last line that ends with an unexpected but beautiful chord. Both organ solos are full of fury and not really attractive. The choral pieces demand choristers capable of performing close interval and shifting harmonies. The Winchester Choir is certainly up to the task, but just about everything heard on this recording is LOUD. Enunciation needs a good deal of repair. Without the texts in the liner notes, you'll have a hard time knowing what the words are. I think this will appeal mostly to fans of Howells's music and fans of this choir.

METZ

HUGHES: *Shift; Slow Motion Blackbird*

Chris Hughes, electronics

Helium 2—60 minutes

Chris Hughes is a percussionist and record producer whose list of professional accomplishments includes drumming with Adam and the Ants, co-writing the Tears for Fears megahit 'Everybody Wants to Rule the World', and producing the band's first two albums. His father took him to see the European premiere of Steve Reich's *Drumming* in 1972, and since then he has been hooked.

Shift, a four-movement composition that draws on material from Reich's *Drumming* and *Violin Phase*, first appeared in 1994 and has been remastered for its current release. The best term for this music is ambient; Hughes recreates Reich's phasing process deftly with recording technology and subtly enhances the rhythmic elan of Reich's music by adding other percussion instruments and, here and there, ever so slightly accentuating its natural tendency to groove or swing.

Slow Motion Blackbird takes its cue from Reich's *Slow Motion Sound* and perhaps from *Different Trains*: the melody of bird song is tracked by a synthesizer and harmonized; then the entire recording is slowed down for repeated iterations without altering the pitch of the original. It only lasts about 6 minutes—I wish

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 102

he'd extended it for at least 6 more. *From Piano Phase* is similar to *Shift*, but includes substantial passages from each of *Piano Phase's* original three sections. The last track, *Pendulum Music*, seems more of a throwaway than the others, but never mind.

I used to think that the close relationship of minimalism and then-current pop music was a sign of musical health for both worlds and augured a new kind of listener now on the scene. The new listeners are definitely here to stay and—with more than a little luck—they'll expand their passions past Reich and into all sorts of other classical music from the present and the past. That's my hope, anyway. As much as I like Steve Reich's music, I think people should get past the idea that there should be only one style of contemporary music and one composer to laud as "the best".

HASKINS

INCE: *Hot, Red, Cold, Vibrant; Symphony 5; Requiem without Words; Before Infrared*
Anil Kirkyildiz, Tülay Uyar, Olca Kuntasal, s; Levent Gündüz, t; Güvenc Dagüstün, bar; Selva Erdener, voice; Turkish Ministry of Culture Choir; Bilkent Symphony/ Kamran Ince

Naxos 572653—76 minutes

The Third and Fourth Symphonies of Turkish-American composer Kamran Ince (b. 1960) appeared a few years ago on a Naxos release (557588, N/D 2005). Admirers of that release might want to think twice before investing in this one.

It opens with *Hot, Red, Cold, Vibrant* (1992), said to have the "explicit intent [to] capture the driving energy of rock on [Ince's] own terms". I don't have the slightest idea what this piece has to do with "rock", but I don't question his intent. The piece is tonal, repetitious, throbbing, loud, has some shrieks in the high winds, some drum thuds, and some vaguely bluesy melody. Maybe that's what he means. It is also painfully out of tune as played by this dreadful orchestra, which has about as much energy as a bad high school orchestra trying to get through a piece they can't handle.

The Fifth Symphony (2005) stays with the pop-culture theme as it is dedicated to Turkey's apparently fabled Galatasaray football (i.e. soccer) team. This is a four-movement, 33-minute deeply felt, almost religious homage to the team. The text, printed here in English, is unintentionally hilarious when matched up with the beautiful, entirely overwrought score. What does one make of attempts to set lines like "Let's compete to be European and defeat the non-Turkish teams" or "Prepare for the show, Be ready in the stands, dress suitably in two colors" or "There is so much space in our hearts for our love for you. Galatasaray"?

Requiem without Words (2004) is for the victims of the 2003 terror bombings in Istanbul. Sustained minor harmony, whining wailings from a female "ethnic voice", chest-thumping bass drum poundings, and later some corny movie music will try the endurance of all but the most masochistic listeners. We should all sympathize with the emotions involved, but this crass 20-minute exhibition borders on the obscene.

This unfortunate program closes with *Before Infrared* (1986), a Disney-esque sunrise scene that might make an effective overture, though the literature already has plenty such pieces and this one doesn't offer a great deal of serious competition. It's the best piece here, if that's any consolation.

GIMBEL

IRELAND: *Piano Pieces 3*
Mark Bebbington—Somm 99—76 minutes

Completing his survey of Ireland's attractive piano music, Bebbington has turned up yet another unrecorded piece. The First Rhapsody is an early work dating from 1906. Special credit is due the John Ireland Trust for allowing this student work to be performed and recorded. As pointed out in the excellent notes by Bruce Phillips of the Trust, it owes a strong debt to Liszt and Rachmaninoff in an assertiveness and virtuosity not readily apparent in his later music. At over 12 minutes, it's a substantial piece, the longest in this program, and its inclusion helps to make Bebbington the preferred artist when deciding which set to purchase, though few would give its derivative musical values high marks.

As with the first two volumes (J/A 2009, M/A 2010) Bebbington continues to distinguish himself in the performance and recording of this repertory. The records contents (below) fill in the remaining Ireland gaps, and make it a mandatory purchase for all enthusiasts:
Rhapsody (1915)
Two Pieces: February's Child, Aubade
Four Pieces: The Undertone, Obsession, Holy Boy, Fire of Spring
Four Preludes
Ballade of London Nights
Almond Trees
Three Dances: Gypsy, Country, Reapers
Prelude in E-flat
First Rhapsody

With due respect for Eric Parkin's pioneering effort, it comes down to either the complete or the more complete. Both take three discs, and both performers show much sympathy for this composer's expressive, sometimes

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 103

wistful, sometimes impressionist, and always beautiful music. Somm's recording easily wins in the engineering department.

BECKER

JADIN: *3 Quartets*
Franz Joseph Quartet
ATMA 2610—66 minutes

Hyacinthe Jadin lived only from 1776 to 1800 and has been largely forgotten today. He died of tuberculosis, after living his life in Paris and Versailles.

Based on these recorded performances I must say that Jadin's music seems rather boring. Part of this response may be because the music is played on excessively thin sounding period instruments that I find difficult to listen to—and usually don't.

Decent notes and sound are supplied.

BAUMAN

JANITSCH: *Chamber Sonatas II*
Notturna/ Christopher Palameta
ATMA 2638—55 minutes

As Christopher Palameta reports in his notes, it is presumed that Johann Gottlieb Janitsch (1708-63) composed his *sonate da camera* for a series of *freitagsakademien* that he held in his own home in Berlin while serving as *contraviolonist* at the court of Frederick the Great. The sonatas on this release come from his Opusses 1, 3, and 7 composed between 1752 and the end of his life. Some of them come from among the 13 sonatas that were rediscovered in Kiev, where they had been taken during the Second World War. Most of the sonatas are in three-movement form, similar to ones by Quantz. The instrumentation is sometimes a bit unusual, as Palameta tells us, calling for curious combinations of oboes, violins, traverso, and continuo. It all adds to the excitement. Janitsch's style fits right in with his contemporaries, down to the learned-sounding fugato passages.

These sonatas are quite a revelation. They remind me a lot of the chamber music of Telemann and Fasch. The playing here is excellent and nuanced. I love to hear the baroque oboe and oboe d'amore played so well. The notes are well written and full of useful information.

LOEWEN

KAKABADSE: *Phantom Listeners; Arabian Rhapsody Suite; Mermaid; Russian Tableaux; Song of the Shirt*
Kit Hesketh-Harvey, narr; Emma Brain-Gabbott, s; Clare McCaldin, mz; musicians/ George Vass
Naxos 572524—75 minutes

Lydia Kakabadse, of Georgian, Russian, Greek, and Austrian ancestry, was born in 1955 and grew up in England; she must be the only composer over the age of 4, living or dead, who doesn't have a Wikipedia entry—I was trying to find out where she was actually born. Her music is not terribly inventive in scoring, melodic ideas, structure, or development. Even the texts are of little import: *The Mermaid* is based on her own fairy tale about a mermaid who befriends ocean animals, gets captured by pirates and rescued by her friends—a story remarkable for its absence of any drama from its characterless characters. Her music isn't unpleasant at all, but it's memorable only because it's forgettable. I have the feeling she would make a decent arranger, because her music sounds playable and well balanced; but if I were a cellist or bassist, I'd go crazy having to play in *Russian Tableaux* (which sounds little different from *Arabian Rhapsody Suite*).

The narrator seems to think that adding a tremor to his voice will communicate tension. Clare McCaldin's diction in *The Mermaid* is particularly good and her voice grounded and pleasant; her phrasing is very musical—I've heard few singers who can sing 4-against-3 rhythms and keep them from sounding square. The instrumentalists, too, play with elegance, charm, and good technique. Notes are in English; there are three pages of musicians' biographies in lieu of texts and translations.

ESTEP

KISSINE: *Zerkalo;* see TCHAIKOVSKY

KORNGOLD: *Suite, op 23;*
MACMILLAN: *Charpentier Variations*
Jonathan Swartz, Mark Fewer, v; Andres Diaz, vc; Wendy Chen, p—Soundset 1033—52 minutes

Groteske is the title of this disc. It is also the name of the middle and longest movement in the Korngold suite. Both of these compositions are scored for two violins, cello, and piano. The idiom of both is somewhat similar, basically late romantic and very expressive. Kieren MacMillan was born in 1969 and studied at Rice University with Paul Cooper and Samuel Jones before moving to Toronto. His *Fantasy Variations* was commissioned by Swartz. Its idiom closely resembles the Korngold in its deep feeling and basic romanticism, though MacMillan is clearly happy in a number of historical idioms as well. The way he manages to mingle these without losing our sense of his own personality is quite remarkable and attractive.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957) is famous for his film scores but maintains a reputation among musicians as a composer of serious music. This 33-minute piece is a prime example, full of imagination and passion. It

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 104

was written for piano left hand in 1928, commissioned by Paul Wittgenstein, who had lost his right hand in WW I. It is in five movements, beginning with a Prelude & Fugue that sound like anything but—a waltz that seems, in this performance, at least, to be in the slow American style rather than the Viennese of the Strausses. Then comes 'Groteske', a scherzo of sorts, followed by one of Korngold's Opus 22 songs, and ending with a theme and variations. It is a strong work that repays listening. The variations help to pull the program together, since it opened with MacMillan's 19-minute set.

Altogether, this is a very enjoyable coupling, played with warmth and stylistic unity by these musicians. My only regret is that the program is so short. If it is specifically the Korngold suite that attracts you, it has been recorded several times before with more music attached, mostly by Korngold. This reading is somewhat faster than the others, and is excitingly played, though one would hesitate to recommend it over such luminaries as Leon Fleisher, piano, Joseph Silverstein and Jaimie Laredo, violins, and Yo-yo Ma, cello (Sony 48253, Nov/Dec 1998). That comes with Franz Schmidt's Piano Quintet, also written for Wittgenstein. Another fine reading is by the Schubert ensemble of London, coupled with Korngold's own Piano Quintet (ASV 1047, May/June 1999). Both of these works are also to be heard on a three-disc collection including numerous Korngold songs sung by Anne Sofie von Otter with Bengt Forsberg and friends (DG 459631, May/June 1999). Arved Ashby was enthusiastic, particularly about the Sony release, though the DG is good and the song performances are a must. Carl Bauman was not happy with the ASV, though his major complaint was about the music rather than the performances. But you see that this release is really about the MacMillan variations. Your move!

D MOORE

KORNGOLD: *Symphony; Little Dance in the Olden Style*
Helsinki Philharmonic/ John Storgards
Ondine 1182—62 minutes

Recently (Mar/Apr 2011) I noted that Marc Albrecht's recording of this symphony on Pentatone viewed it as a 20th Century work. Storgards sees it as 19th Century, with plusher textures and slightly slower pacing. It runs about three minutes longer than Albrecht's. Though I prefer the 20th Century model, the work can support both viewpoints.

Anyone who does like the more traditional approach will very much enjoy this recording, especially the slow movement, where Storgards builds the music to a stunning climax. (The intensity of this passage was so powerful that, as a lifelong admirer of FDR, the dedicatee of this symphony, I recalled the physical sense of loss we felt over his death when I was a kid in England.) The Little Dance is a cute trifle, here in its first recording. Though scored for a small orchestra, it shows Korngold's usual ingenuity with color. Performances and recorded sound are both excellent.

O'CONNOR

KREIN: *Violin Sonata; Poem;*
FEINBERG: *Sonata*
Ilona Then-Bergh, v; Michael Schafer, p
Genuin 11203—61 minutes

Grigorij Krein (1879-1957)—not to be confused with either his contemporary Alexander Krein or the younger Julian Krein—also, like him, Russian composers—hasn't shown up on my radar screen before. He wrote in a late-late-romantic style somewhat influenced, the notes assert, by Scriabin and Reger, though his music is closer, perhaps, to early Szymanowski, Florent Schmitt, and Ernst Bloch.

The Violin Sonata in G, from 1913, is rhapsodic, dreamy, opulent, and quite beautiful, spinning out its iridescent harmonies and glittering figurations with delectable freshness and verve. Its perfumed luxury and continual reaching for erotic ecstasies is characteristic of "decadent" art, though beneath the surface of its 20-minute, two-movement layout, one senses a persuasive and coherent formal unity of theme and mood.

Krein's 9-minute *Poem*, from about 1920, adds an exotic tint to his musical palette, with florid, "Hebraic" melodies and quasi-modal chorales. This too is a lovely work of its kind, full of bright colors and striking textures (in both instruments) though more relaxed and expansive in mood than the intense sonata.

Samuil Feinberg (1890-1962) was better known in his native Russia as a pianist and teacher than composer, though he wrote a lot, especially for piano, a fair amount of it now recorded (see our index for reviews). Like Krein he was a late-late-romantic influenced by Scriabin, as well as Rachmaninoff, Busoni, and Szymanowski. Judging by his piano sonatas (recorded on BIS) and by the comments on his piano concertos by ARG's reviewers, Feinberg's music is typically bloated, cluttered, and bombastic, with torrents of notes that overwhelm any sense of clear shape or direction. Still, on the rare occasions when he writes with clarity and restraint—usually in his shorter, more modest efforts—he can produce engaging music of considerable delicacy and expressiveness.

Feinberg's 1960 Violin Sonata, written very

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 105

late in his life, is one of the best works I've heard by him. One reason is surely because—though it lasts 26 minutes—there are five sharply contrasted movements of moderate length, and, especially in the first three of these, the composer resists his impulse to pad and thicken his music. Moreover the piano writing—too often excessive in Feinberg—is here quite lucid and disciplined, greatly improved by the composer's adoption of a neo-classic (rather than excessive and heroically romantic) sense of proportion and poise.

The first three movements are shapely and concise: I is a solemn, neo-baroque prelude of imposing nobility; II is an incisive, muscular, vaulting scherzo in six-eight time; III is a slow, halting, rather melancholy andante. IV and V are longer (7 minutes each), with more variety in tempo and emotion and more development and internal contrasts. Both rework ideas from the earlier movements, quite touchingly in places, V eventuating in a sonorous, broadly phrased recapitulation and bravura coda.

Especially as rendered here, superbly played by Ilona Then-Bergh and Michael Schäfer and nicely recorded by Genuin, these works by Grigorij Krein and Samuil Feinberg are likely to interest all lovers of early-modern-era violin music.

LEHMAN

KUMMER: *Chamber Music*
Red Cedar—Fleur de Son 58008—64 minutes

Gaspard Kummer (1795-1870) was a German flutist-composer whose music has faded from popularity since he died. He wrote a number of chamber works. Here we have the Serenades for flute, viola, and guitar, Opp. 81 & 83, the Divertimento for two flutes and guitar, Op. 92:2, and the Quintet, Op. 75 for two flutes, viola, cello, and guitar. The two Serenades differ in size and ambition, with Op. 83 the better. The Op. 81 and the Divertimento are salon music, and the Quintet falls in the middle.

Kummer uses held notes in all these pieces; another stylistic hallmark is homophony. This is conventional music, but at its best—the inner movements of the quintet, for instance—it offers plenty of reward.

This is a performance on period instruments. The playing is excellent, and the tone qualities are charming. The viola sound is often thin and stringy, the guitar is soft and has little resonance. There is generally no vibrato. Yet I do like it. One thing I don't: the staccatos for all in I of the Serenade, Op. 81 are just too thin (meant to sound playful). The intonation is spot on, and so is all the technique. The balance leaves the guitar just a little out of the texture. This is not the kind of guitar writing found in modern flute and guitar pieces that calls for a lot of tone colors; the guitar is there primarily for harmonic support.

Flutists Jan Boland and Douglas Worthen carry this program, playing as one. Superb notes by guitarist John Dowdall and Boland trace the players' history with this music to discoveries at the Library of Congress in 1980 and 1999.

Iowa-based Red Cedar Chamber Music have recorded eight other CDs for Fleur de Son, including one titled 'Three Guys Named Mo'; we've covered seven of those eight, including the Mozart-Molitor-Molino program. The last recording we covered of music similar to this was a European group playing Molino (CPO 777448; Sept/Oct 2010), and it too was commendable.

GORMAN

LAITMAN: *Vedem; Fathers*
Music of Remembrance—Naxos 559685—61 mins

Music of Remembrance is a musical organization dedicated to remembering Holocaust musicians and their art, found in Seattle, Washington. They have made at least four other CDs for Naxos. This one contains a 49-minute chamber oratorio on the subject of a clandestine magazine called *Vedem* (Czech for "In the Lead"), put together by the boys in Home 1 of Terezin's concentration camp every week between 1942 and 1944 and containing articles and poetry by the children, most of whom were eventually killed.

Mina Miller, founder and artistic director of Music of Remembrance and pianist here, commissioned Lori Laitman (b 1955) to compose this work. Laitman brought in poet David Mason to put together a libretto from the 800 pages of material hidden away by one of the boys, brought back to Prague after the liberation and published in a book called *We are Children Just the Same,* published in 1995.

The text as presented in the oratorio is a mix of description and poetry about the situation of the children and their reactions to it. It is most moving and leads me to wonder whether we human beings are really better than the other animals. We have some very destructive instincts that continue to kill off some of our most valuable citizens just because we don't agree with some of their views. We can blame the Germans for the holocaust, but that doesn't let the rest of us off the hook.

Laitman's music is smooth as a glove and suits the material to a T. It is warmly and simply romantic in idiom and lets the text do the talking. The only complaint I have about the production is that one must follow the text in the liner notes in order to understand it, partly because Angela Niederloh has an odd way of

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 106

pronouncing certain words that makes it impossible to follow the text by ear. One should follow it by eye for other reasons as well, since it is the only way one can be sure whose text one is listening to, Mason's or the children's. Ross Hauck, the tenor, has a nice bright voice and the choir is beautifully balanced. There are also numerous child soloists who are a joy to hear.

Fathers is a short song cycle based on poems by Sri Lankan poet Anne Ranasinghe and Russian poet David Vogel, both of whom disappeared under the Nazis. It is a sequel to a previous cycle called *Daughters* and is scored for piano trio and mezzo-soprano, again sung by Niederloh. Another fine expression of feeling, it completes this program effectively. Despite my reservations about her diction, Niederloh is a good singer and this is an important release.

D MOORE

LANGGAARD: *Piano Pieces 2*

Berit Johansen Tange

DaCapo 6220565 [SACD] 64 minutes

Rued Langgaard was born in Copenhagen and lived from 1893-1952; he studied composition with his father, Siegfried, and counterpoint briefly with Carl Nielsen. He wrote 16 symphonies, an opera called *Antichrist* (DaCapo 6220523, M/A 2007), and various other pieces. Volume 1 of the piano works, also with Tange, was reviewed by Mr Becker (DaCapo 8226025, S/O 2005).

These pieces are a mixed bag of miniatures that remind me sometimes of Schumann (the *Little Summer Memories*) or Messiaen (*Music of the Abyss*, the first section of which ends with disconcertingly out-of-place major arpeggios). 'Album Leaf', written when he was 11, is a touching little piece. Most of the album, though, is either pleasant but bland—or too insistent. Tange plays well, but the music is forgettable.

ESTEP

LEFKOWITZ: *With/Without; Duo; (Sur)Real (Cine-)Music 1; Surfer's Guide for the Perplexed; E Duo Unum; Canonical Variations; Fashionable Suite*

Julie Long, Jennifer Roth, fl; Ryan Zwahlen, ob; Jennifer Stevenson, Ralph Williams, Jonathan Sacdalan, cl; Daphne Chen, Julian Hallmark, v; Paul Coletti, Silu Fei, va; Carter Dewberry, vc; Walter Ponce, Stella Maksoudian, Jeanette-Louise Yaryan, Jeri-Mae G, Satolti, p; Buzz Gravelle, Sam Vierra, g; Andrea Thiele, hp

Albany 1247— 79 minutes

Music of Contradictions is the overall title of this release. David Lefkowitz is a native of New York City who has been through Eastman, Cornell, and the University of Pennsylvania, working with Samuel Adler, Joseph Schwantner, George Crumb, and Karel Husa. The music that results is not so much contradictory as it is a blend of styles and sources held together by a strong personality. The most curious composition is the first one listed. This derives from a ballet score for *Desire under the Elms* where a work for flute, cello, and harp is played either as solos, duos, or trio, each of which is played in the course of the evening-long ballet. Here we are treated to the trio and the flute-cello duo as well as the solo parts for flute and harp, each interspersed between the other works in the program. The harp part is mostly repetitive figures that rather turn me off, but the other three versions are more varied. I am not impressed by the cellist's intonation in the duo.

The program opens with a nine-minute Duo for two pianos, an effective piece of energy and sensitivity. Then flute, violin, and two guitars give us (Cine-)Music 1, subtitled *The Chase Through Escher's Metamorphosen.* The titles are considerably more complex than the outgoing and lovely music they intend to describe. The *Surfer's Guide* is subtitled *Jonah on the Raging Sea,* though how this is supposed to relate to the colorful but hardly raging chamber piece it accompanies is anyone's guess. Ah, that must be one of the contradictions!

E Duo Unum is for two violas playing in hocket together. It is a great sound, though there is a bit of a repetition problem. *Canonical Variations* is for two clarinets. I rather expected more minimalism, but they are actually quite varied and entertaining. Finally we have two movements from a *Fashionable Suite* for piano solo, again on the simplistic side. Taken as a whole, Lefkowitz could do with a bit more contradiction in his style. His music is written in a pleasant idiom but it gets too close to minimalism too often for me to feel wholehearted about it.

D MOORE

LEIGHTON: *Partita; Elegy; Solo Cello Sonata; Alleluia Pascha Nostrum*

Raphael Wallfisch, vc; Raphael Terroni, p

BMS 439—61 minutes

(www.britishmusicsociety.co.uk or phone 01708 224795. Credit cards not accepted.)

Kenneth Leighton (1929-88) wrote music of lyrical beauty from the beginning of his career. His Elegy, Opus 5 stems from an early cello sonata written in 1949 and has a romantic vocal mood that was on the way out in post-WW II music and is all the more welcome today.

The Partita, Opus 35 with piano, is less overtly tonal but just as lyrical, beginning

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 107

again with an elegy, then a scherzo, and ending with a theme and variations. The Solo Cello Sonata dates from 1967 and is an effective blend of poise and activity demonstrating Wallfisch's warm tone. Here I wish he had been somewhat more careful to make audible all of the inner notes in chordal passages. I think we are missing something in clarity of harmony in the last movement, 'Flourish, Chaconne and Coda'.

Finally, we have a 14-minute work again with piano, *Alleluia Pascha Nostrum,* written in 1985, a particularly beautiful piece where the composer bids us and the cello farewell in a most moving way. This is an important release, well played and recorded in a warm sound. The material is not duplicated elsewhere, to my knowledge, and it is a most enjoyable addition to the cello literature.

D MOORE

LEIGHTON: Organ Works

Et Resurrexit; Fantasies on Hymn Tunes (3); Dublin Festival Mass

Greg Morris
Naxos 572601—70 minutes

Kenneth Leighton was one of the most important composers of sacred choral and organ music in the 20th Century, though he is perhaps not as highly regarded outside his native Britain as he deserves to be. The present recording gives two of his major organ works and three selections from a set of shorter pieces.

The three-movement suite *Et Resurrexit* dates from 1966. The composer stated that his object was "to give musical expression to the individual's struggle for belief in the resurrection". It seems to me that a great deal of Leighton's music embodies a spiritual and emotional struggle towards a victory that is hard-won. The music is often ferociously dissonant but never gratuitously ugly. The anguished harmony and counterpoint are always moving toward a final goal that cannot be reached any other way. That is certainly true of this work that begins with a brief movement to present the theme that pervades the whole. It is followed by a fantasy that freely develops the theme, and finally a fugue that concludes in triumph, though even here the concluding major chord contains a raised fourth degree that seems both to recall the struggle and intensify the triumph as a mere common chord would not.

This is followed by the last three of Leighton's *Six Fantasies on Hymn Tunes*, Opus 72 (1975). The three tunes are the Irish melody 'St Columba', the plainsong hymn 'Veni Emmanuel', and the psalm tune 'Hanover' generally attributed to William Croft. Leighton's pieces are not conventional chorale preludes but free improvisations on the tunes, even though fantasies sometimes include an intact presentation of the melody.

Missa de Gloria, Opus 82, also known as *Dublin Festival Mass* was commissioned for the Dublin International Organ Festival and first performed at St Patrick's Cathedral in 1980. It is a large-scale suite for organ based on the Sarum plainchants for Easter Day. The movements are named for the sung items of the Ordinary of the Mass, and Leighton's music closely follows the structure and character of the liturgical texts. For instance, the Gloria is in three contrasting sections that reflect the distinct divisions of the Latin text, and these are reinforced with quotations and development of the corresponding plainsong motives. The suite concludes with a characteristic Leighton toccata on the chant for 'Ite Missa Est'.

Since 2006, Greg Morris has been associate organist at the Temple Church in London. Before that he was assistant director of music at Blackburn Cathedral, where this was recorded. The instrument was built in 1969 by the firm of JW Walker & Sons of Ruislip, and rebuilt in 2002 by Wood of Huddersfield. It is a generously endowed four-manual organ with a good variety of tone colors in a coherent tonal design. As recorded here the sound is spacious and powerful, even if somewhat distant as is so often the case with English cathedral organs. The strings sound rather chilly to me, but that often suits the severity of Leighton's quieter writing, as does the plaintive quality of the soft reeds. Morris's playing is authoritative and more than equal to Leighton's virtuosic demands. Furthermore, this is clearly an instrument the artist knows well and can use to the greatest effect.

GATENS

LEIGHTON: *St Thomas Mass;*
see MACMILLAN

LENTZ: *Ingwe*

Zane Banks, g
Naxos 572483—60 minutes

Here's another piece composed for electric guitar—in this instance a single, hour-long work for solo electric guitar. I've been getting more of these, and there really is no reason why composers shouldn't use the range of sounds that can be produced on electric guitar. Most effective of the works I've heard was a concerto by Michael Nicollela, *Ten Years Passed* (M/J 2011). *Ingwe* is nothing if not ambitious, but you'll have to judge whether its reach has exceeded its grasp.

Georges Lentz trained in Europe before

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 108

emigrating to Australia in 1990. His work tends to be grandiose, inspired by religious imagery (since 1994 he has worked on a cycle of compositions collectively titled *Caeli Enarrant...*, "The Heavens are telling"). He is also inspired by nature, which in Australia is vast and overwhelming, and by Australia's aboriginal cultures. The title of this work means "night" in the Aranda language. The notes make no mention of it, but I can't help thinking that it is also a reference to the heavy metal guitarist Yngwie Malmsteen, whose name has the same pronunciation, and whose development of virtuoso technique is surely the model for much of this work. Malmsteen actually brought a number of students to classical guitar and classical music, and even performed the Paganini *Caprices* on electric guitar.

But for all the grandiose, metaphysical claims the notes make about this piece, it is mainly an extension of techniques on electric guitar that were pioneered by Jimi Hendrix and developed and extended by Jimmy Page, Malmsteen, and others. It opens with 11 minutes of the sort of thing that might have been done by any of these players in an extended solo improvisation. Tempos are fluid (the notes say that there are four beats in every bar, but each beat might be a different duration—I'm afraid I don't get that). And we've got bent notes, feedback, screaming scales, low-register dissonances, and power chords (open fifths and octaves at extreme volume—the device that produced a generation of young players who couldn't distinguish between major and minor). Softer passages use tapping effects, playing by lightly brushing the strings, playing beyond the fingerboard, or playing with a bow to sustain the sound (Page originally used an actual bow—apparently it's done electronically now). We also hear harmonics and passages that play with the volume control to eliminate the initial attack and produce the illusion of sustained sounds. There are passages of extreme crescendos, created by the amplification. The close of the work is a series of pounding notes on the lowest string, which is gradually lowered in its tuning until it ceases to vibrate and only rattles.

The structure of the work is coherent, and if you find the concept interesting, you may want to hear this. Guitarist Zane Banks performs like an expert. He is trained in classical and jazz guitar and is active in the new music scene (not pop) in Australia. For me it went on far too long (as did some of those metal solos back in the day). Maybe I'm showing my age, but I just wanted to yell out "turn down that damned guitar!"

KEATON

LIADOV: *Polish Variations;* see GLAZOUNOV

LISZT: *Années de Pelerinage I*

Tomas Dratva, p
Oehms 786—59 minutes

The selling point of this release is not the soloist or the music, but the piano. The instrument is Wagner's Steinway grand (Op. 34304) in Haus Wahnfried in Bayreuth. Dating originally from 1876, it has had a lot of work since then: it was overhauled completely in 1979. It is in good shape now. Based on its sound alone I would never have guessed its age.

What I noticed most was that the instrument Dratva selected is not fully up to the task of handling Liszt. The recording has an overall pale quality resulting largely from the piano's inability to go beyond a certain volume. 'Orage', for example, never gets truly loud. Instead, it is a claustrophobia-inducing performance that sounds as if it were being played by a computer running Finale or Sibelius. 'Vallée d'Obermann' is also disappointingly flat. While some problems can be attributed to the instrument's limitations, the performer exhibits some notable weaknesses too. In 'Au Lac de Wallenstadt', the melodies often trail off; in the 'Pastorale', the two contrasting themes are played with the exact same character. Most of 'Au Bord d'une Source' is under tempo, including the end.

Dratva's strongest attributes are his delicate-yet-full tone quality and his ability to pull back expressively for effect. In isolated instances these are effective, but would be more so if they were complemented by a larger array of tricks. Aside from the historical significance of the piano, then, little else sets this Liszt release apart from the rest.

AUERBACH

LISZT: *Années de Pelerinage, all*

Julian Gorus, p—Hänssler 98627 [3CD] 187 mins

This release is remarkable more for its slick packaging and ambitious program than for the playing. Gorus does show promise as a Liszt performer. He has, for example, sufficient strength and stamina to rocket through the *Dante Sonata*. And he has sufficient courage to both experiment and succeed with unusual interpretations: the restless tempo he chooses for the 'Chapelle de Guillaume Tell' imparts a much clearer sense of the piece than the noncommittal, hesitant approach favored by many others.

Yet despite all that, too many factors remain that conspire to scuttle this project. One of these is the piano, which is soft and blurry and has a damper pedal that roughly brushes the strings. Another is the meandering

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 109

and aimless quality of the softer, introspective pieces. There are plenty of pretty textures on hand, such as in the 'Canzone' from the supplement to Year 2 and for all the water-themed numbers from Year 1. These do not sufficiently compensate us for the sublime works that fall flat owing to incoherent melodies, among them 'Les Cloches de Geneve', 'Sonnet 123', and 'Angelus'. The more aggressive numbers do not rescue Gorus's case either. As engaging as they may be at first, later hearings diminish their luster.

AUERBACH

LISZT: *Concertos 1+2; Hungarian Rhapsody 6; Valse Oubliee 1; Petrarch Sonnet 104;*
SCHUMANN: *Romance 2; Novelette 1;*
FALLA: *Miller's Dance;*
GUION: *The Harmonica Player*
Byron Janis; Moscow Philharmonic/ Kiril Kondrashin; Moscow Radio Symphony/ Gennady Rozhdestvensky
Newton 8802058—64 minutes

The concertos were recorded in Moscow in June, 1962; Janis was wrapping up his triumphal tour and Mercury brought its Living Presence equipment to the USSR rather than trusting the sonics to Melodiya. Mr Manildi was enthusiastic over the first appearance on silver disc (M/A 1991), praising the Horowitzian virtuosity tempered by "tonal subtlety and a true sense of Lisztian style". These were often compared to the highly-regarded Richter performances (Overview, J/A 1990) but I don't think the latter are as imaginative or colorful. Certainly Philips couldn't match Mercury's vivid, you-are-there sonics, one of the label's earliest 35mm film recordings. The Russian orchestras are not always refined, and I'm not about to part with Pennario and Leibowitz (RCA). But these Janis performances rank with the very best and deserve to be made widely available again.

The concertos can also be found in a four-record "Janis Edition" from Brilliant (9182) that adds concertos by Rachmaninoff, Prokofieff, Schumann, and Tchaikovsky, along with Moussorgsky's *Pictures*. The set can be had at a bargain price, but you won't get the encores included here. Mr Manildi considered them "exceptional" and I concur, particularly the dazzling *Hungarian Rhapsody* and a first-class *Petrarch Sonnet*.

KOLDYS

LISZT: *Bellini & Verdi Paraphrases*
Giovanni Bellucci, p—Lontano 690748—63 mins

This is astonishing playing. Almost everything Bellucci does feels almost impossibly grand in scale, and by this I mean the passion, volume, technique, and artistic vision alike. All these positive qualities are gilded further by an amazing studio sound, a straight through-the-center tone that has no edge. It's intensely vivid without ever becoming too bright.

The offering from *Norma* is beautiful in all ways—in the "as powerful as a force of nature" way as much as it is in the "poignant and tender adagio" way. The piano has an especially vocal quality: for a demonstration one need only listen to the aria passages starting at 8:30. The paraphrase of *Don Carlos* illustrates another of his strong suits, the way he projects colors. The low, rumbling passages appearing at the center of the piece are as deep and black as night, yet are apt at any moment to dissolve into blissful, optimistic melodies guided forward by stirring accompaniments. Of course, in skipping to that section I do not mean to minimize the striking effect created by the bombastic, waltz-like opening. The music is forceful and driven, delightfully dry and sharp while still sounding full and orchestral.

This release truly is a bounty of near-perfect moments. In addition to the ones I've mentioned are the magnificent squalls in *Norma* and *Rigoletto* that sweep the full length of the keyboard as the volume grows ever louder. *Aida* is an essay of grace, restraint, and suspense that culminates in an impossibly soft, vanishing ending.

For fans of Liszt's paraphrases, it probably does not get any better than this. Bellucci's playing is powerful, deep, and smart. He is always placing something of musical interest before us, such that these lengthy pieces—which stretch out interminably when lesser musicians sleepwalk through them—pass by in a few breathless moments. Though ARG has remained strangely mute about this pianist, the magazine *Diapason* has declared this very release to be one of the ten best ever of Liszt's piano music. I am not prepared to follow them all the way. I will go so far as to agree that it is a must buy for any serious pianophile who likes Liszt, opera, or over the top romantic piano. It is not necessary for you to like all three, though: checking just one of those boxes qualifies you as a good consumer target for this tremendously fine offering.

AUERBACH

LISZT: *Wagner & Weber Transcriptions*
Steven Mayer, p
Naxos 570562—68 minutes

The main reason I am writing this review is to warn readers not to expect too much. In contrast to paraphrases that might infuse the original tunes with new sensibilities and textures, these are transcriptions, pure and simple. I

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 110

recommend them to you only if you really enjoy hearing pianists interpret opera music.

As to the merits of the release itself, I am pleased to report that it is of high quality. The sound is outstanding. All the tones are pure and sweet, with not a single ugly strike to be found anywhere. Mayer's technique is well suited to this difficult and ornate music: the scale work and flourishes are outstanding. In addition there are a few truly impressive moments, such as the concluding minutes of 'Am Stillen Herd' from *Meistersinger*, where the initially soft tones grow imperceptibly into the thundering chords of the final cadence. Another highly satisfying experience is supplied by the 'Entry of the Guests' from Tannhäuser. This, one of the few works exhibiting any real zip, was scored modestly enough by Wagner that it translates directly into a piano piece of some interest. Most of the other the music cruises by cleanly and evenly. While not always thrilling (there is not a hint of urgency to the Venusberg music), this program is at least consistently enjoyable.

AUERBACH

LISZT: *Piano Sonata; Ave Maria; Hungarian Rhapsody 12; 2 Verdi Paraphrases*
Gabor Farkas
Warner 69284—66 minutes

Farkas, a Hungarian, has won a number of national and international competitions, including first places at the National Piano Competition of the Hungarian Radio and the Bartok competition in Baden bei Wien as well as third at the Liszt International in Budapest. He has a polished style, with evenness seemingly prized above all. That is actually somewhat of a drawback for Liszt, where occasional growling (this is meant metaphorically) is merited. It also makes for decidedly cool interpretations of some of this composer's headiest, most mercurial works.

The Sonata in B minor starts off with nice, crisp tones that have appreciable power behind them. Things go downhill from there, though, with humdrum passages appearing with growing regularity. For example, nearly all of the many eingangs separating the episodes float disappointingly without purpose. So many wasted opportunities to wax rhapsodic! Later, at the climax of the lyrical episode directly preceding the final fugue, the intensity of the melody drops off precipitously—precisely one note after the peak is reached. As for that fugue, though it moves briskly and effervesces in the highest registers, it failed to excite me. All in all, this is a solid performance of this sonata that fails to distinguish itself from the mainstream. Perhaps that is why he programmed it to appear last.

The other works on the program are better, but not by much. The *Ave Maria* benefits from a supremely light touch; the pure sonic experience of it is fantastic. The Hungarian Rhapsody absolutely *flies*: the late stages are full of light and vivacious playing coupled with a soft, calliope touch. It triumphs as a showpiece, giving evidence that we really do have a talented performer on our hands. On the other hand, the *Miserere* is done well but dispassionately. It's not that this isn't good playing. The problem is how far it is from Bellucci (above). So it is solid but not world-class Liszt.

AUERBACH

LISZT: *Petrarch Sonnets; Dante Sonata; Legend of Saint Francis; Aida, Il Trovatore, Rigoletto Paraphrases*
Daniel Barenboim, p
Warner 69785—75 minutes

Barenboim made this all-Liszt recital an Italian affair. The design is cleverer than that, though. By beginning with the sonnets and closing with the paraphrases, he opens and closes with the vocally conceived repertoire, reserving the middle for two flashy, pianistic works. It all hangs together brilliantly, and the music-making is of high caliber all the way through.

About the only thing I didn't love on this release is the piano's sound, which is hot and a little hollow. The balance didn't seem right either, with the quiet sounds coming off too quiet and sometimes ruining the intimacy. I can lodge few complaints with the performance, though, especially in the first three and last three numbers. 'Sonnet 47' is unabashedly lyric: the depth and force of the melody call to mind the idea of a stage singer with deep lungs. There is a more restrained mood in 'Sonnet 104', which I was initially tempted to label as a sign of boredom. On deeper reflection, I came to view it more favorably as symptomatic of a calmer, mystical reading. This short set of works is rounded out by 'Sonnet 123', which swells impressively through its length, seemingly climbing higher with the introduction of each new melodic pitch. The end is especially dramatic. It simultaneously exudes stasis and tension—when is that appoggiatura going to resolve?—before landing on that last, delightful, ringing chord.

A perfect counterbalance to these works is supplied by the Verdi paraphrases. The vocal lines in *Aida* are consummately shaped. What impressed me more, though, is that the interjections of flowing arpeggio material are all riveting, too. Never just killing time, Barenboim is relentlessly expressive. The works based on *Il Trovatore* and *Rigoletto* are spectacular showpieces. The former is remarkable for its dramatic, dark colors and rich baritone melodies, the latter for its speed and intensity.

I've concentrated my efforts so far in

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 111

describing the outer portions of the recital because that is where the most striking music lies. Barenboim does an admirable job with *St Francis of Assisi*, taking great care to set the peaceful scene between the ecstatic friar and the warbling birds. On the one hand it stands as a world-class lesson in proper leggiero technique. On the other, this struck me as a long-winded and gimmicky piece. The *Dante Sonata* is the only work that actually fizzles a bit, a result of him holding back on every climax except for the final one. This is only a very brief lull in quality, though. Just about everywhere else, Barenboim is golden.

AUERBACH

LISZT: *Benediction de Dieu dans la Solitude; Don Giovanni Fantasy; Liebestraum 3; Polonaise 2; Rhapsodie Espagnole; Jeux d'eaux a la Villa d'Este*
Arto Satukangas, p
Alba 303 [SACD] 65 minutes

Satukangas is a Finnish pianist who, though having played on several continents, has remained most active and famous near home. His only noted win at a significant competition, for example, was in 1979 at the Maj Lind Competition in Helsinki. This present offering will not likely garner him appreciably more attention from the international community. It is not that it isn't done well. He has a polished and pleasant sound that is put to good use primarily in the opening polonaise. While the opening is satisfyingly crisp, it is actually the soft, expressive passages that are the most impressive. He gets a remarkably large variety of colors in this bonbon of a work.

The problem, here and elsewhere, is that the music fails to catch fire. In privileging evenness and restraint, the refrains of the polonaise come off as too light. The undulating accompaniment from the opening of the *Benediction* is suave, but doesn't shimmer. In the *Rhapsodie Espagnole*, minutes go by where there is plenty of volume and speed, but the intensity level remains stubbornly flat. The lighter episodes are charming, in particular the Chabrier-like one that rockets by in triplet 16th notes. But the ending registers as only a minor event: strangely, it seems to get softer as each new theme enters, almost as if the music were suffering from a bout of shyness.

I can detect no glaring weaknesses in Satukangas's technical playing, but it remains wanting in expressiveness. The best Liszt playing in this round remains a three-way tie between De la Salle, Barenboim, and Bellucci.

AUERBACH

LISZT: *Ballade 2; Dante Sonata; Funerailles; Mazeppa; Transcriptions of Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, Wagner*
Lise de la Salle, p
Naive 5267—77 minutes

This pianist is steadily emerging as one of the great talents of her generation. Margaret Barela praised her Bach for its intelligence, imagination, and poise (Sept/Oct 2005), and James Harrington marveled at her Prokofieff for its vitality and power (Sept/Oct 2007). And all this for projects completed well before she reached the age of 20! Here she returns with a Liszt offering that, while not as unequivocal a success as those earlier efforts, is certainly worth taking note of.

De la Salle's playing in unimpeachable in almost all respects. She boasts an uncommon technique that is more than up to the task of handling Liszt's most difficult scores. In other words, her capacities far exceed the classic requirements of smooth scale work, supple arpeggios, and fast tremolos. Among them are her vast reserves of power and the astounding quickness of her hands. For example, she blazes through the leap-based episodes of *Mazeppa* like no one I've heard. I was further bowled over by two different spots in *Funerailles*. The initial section is delivered with about same energy and volume as a full orchestra belting out the overture to Prokofieff's *Romeo and Juliet*. The march near the work's conclusion absolutely gleams: again, few players could hope to match her vibrant sound and relentless forward momentum.

At the same time, I do not regard this release an unqualified success. Her tone, for one thing, is too monochromatic. The piano she uses is consistently dark and full, and it facilitates her incredible release technique. As wonderful as that is, it made me miss the sharper, more brittle timbres that are necessary for creating drama in the frenzied parts of longer works like the second ballade. Another problem is her program, which sprinkles in minor transcriptions—Mozart's 'Lachrymosa' from the *Requiem*, Schubert's 'Ständchen', and Schumann's 'Widmung'—among the anchoring works. These works, having no real connection to types of sentiment expressed in original works by Liszt, create potholes in this otherwise serious program.

I judge this release in the end to be extremely good. De la Salle's Liszt is extremely polished and dependable. While there are not many lyric surprises on hand, the playing as a whole is too good to really pass up. It even has an additional attribute especially suggestive of its world-class heritage: it grows on you. The inimitable way she releases notes, or links them sinuously as in the opening of the *Dante*

Sig04arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 112

Sonata, echo in the mind long after listening. I can recall her sound vividly to mind even now.

AUERBACH

LISZT: *Au Lac de Wallenstadt; Ballade 2; Consolations; Hungarian Rhapsody 3; Petrarch Sonnet 104; Valse Oubliee 1; Waldesrauschen*

Nelson Freire, p—Decca 4782728—58 minutes

Freire is an international superstar of the keyboard who, according to the vast literature of reviews of his releases, it seems can do no wrong. I approached this release with high expectations (based in part on my familiarity with his superlative work with Chopin), but I am somewhat perplexed by it. Everything about the design and execution of the product indicates that I should like it, but I do not. As to why, I think the main culprit is the piano, which sounds like it has been miked too close. In the upper registers, anything louder than a mezzo forte registers as a hammered note. Whenever Freire puts effort in to bringing out the main melody, it sounds as if he's trying too hard.

The imbalance between melody and supporting harmony is great enough to derail some of the more significant offerings, including the second ballade. The left hand rumbling at the opening is too quiet; it is also too bright, making this music evocative of nothing. The first important climax near 5:00 is a halfhearted affair marked by very dry attacks and too little power. In 'Sonnet 104' the lyrical melody is plunked out too hard. Fortunately it is at least shaped well, with many expressive dynamic curves. Where the work gets more agitated near the end, the scrabbling loud chords sound forced and not very beautiful. Again, it sounds as if he's trying too hard.

One can find a few notable tracks that are beyond reproach. The Third Hungarian Rhapsody is wonderful all the way through. The start is all bold, fat tones. Soon after the color shifts and we enter the world of the exotic scales. The notes materialize and run off like water droplets and slide about with a seductive, dangerous air. Other great moments appear in the center of the *Consolations*. The third one adopts a very tender sound, incredibly sostenuto and liquid. Midway through it begins to get even better: the addition of more voices doesn't disrupt the overall serene atmosphere, and the releases become even more delicate. No. 4 is just as good. It is a subtle, reserved, and poignant work highly reminiscent of Schumann's 'Der Dichter Spricht', and Freire delivers it with all the solemnity and grace that it deserves.

These few moments are a testament to this artist's limitless talent. I only wish there were more of them gracing the full release. For anyone who goes ahead and purchases this, I recommend listening to it in your car to take some of the edge off the sound. No matter where I tried listening, though, I was never able to completely shake it.

AUERBACH

LISZT: *Piano Concerto 2;* see SCHUMANN

LOEWE: *20 Songs & Ballads*

Florian Boesch, bar; Roger Vignoles
Hyperion 67866—61 minutes

If the tendency in voice recitals these days is to sprinkle some rarities in amidst the chestnuts, this recording breaks the trend. All the Loewe favorites are here—ballads like 'Erlkönig' and 'Edward'; cute songs like 'Hinkende Jamben' and 'Die Wandelne Glocke'; even sappy pieces like 'Die Uhr'.

Florian Boesch is a fine singer, a bass-baritone in color even though the lowest notes are weak. He also characterizes well, particularly in the ballads where he has a horrific story to tell. Roger Vignoles's accompaniments are as fine as you would expect from the seasoned pianist; he does a great job with the challenging conclusion to 'Odins Meeresritt'.

This is an ideal introduction to Loewe. Most of the good pieces are here in excellent performances, and the production is helped no small amount by the inclusion of good notes and texts in German and English.

ALTHOUSE

LOEWE: *9 Songs;*
SCHUMANN: *Liederkreis, op 39*

Henk Neven, bar; Hans Eijsackers
Onyx 4052—61 minutes

Neven is a young Dutch baritone, a 2003 graduate from the Conservatory of Amsterdam; this is his first commercial recording. He has a fine voice, somewhat rugged in texture, but with a wide range of color and dynamics. I would like a little more freedom in his high notes, but basically his technique is in good shape.

The lovely Schumann cycle is very nicely done, with careful, imaginative treatment of text, but I will admit that the loveliest moments (e.g. in 'Mondnacht') don't have the same magic that other singers bring to it. More satisfying are the Loewe songs—mostly familiar ones—where the rugged, (should I say blue-collar?) quality of his voice contributes to the story-telling in the ballads. His 'Hinkende Jamben' (which Hotter did so well) is a touching example of his fine characterization; and longer works like 'Tom der Reimer', 'Herr Oluf', and 'Odins Meeresritt' have just the right amount of narrative tone. Neven is very capably accompanied by Hans Eijsackers, who

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 113

earns his pay with a wonderful 'Odins Meeresritt'. In short, a very nice debut record and a name to look for in the future.

If you look for this recording, it carries the title *Auf einer Burg* (the seventh song in the Schumann cycle). Texts in German and English.

ALTHOUSE

LULLY: *Bellerophon*

Les Talens Lyriques/ Christophe Rousset
Aparte 15 [2CD] 2:13:46

When *Bellerophon* was first given in 1679, Lully was still coping with the dismissal of Philippe Quinault from court for injudicious allusions to the King's mistress, Madame de Montespan, in his libretto for *Isis*. When Louis XIV requested a new opera for 1679, the task of creating a new libretto fell to Thomas Corneille, who had never written the text for a complete opera before. Corneille was still upset by the failure of *Psyché* in 1678, a work he had to adapt for Lully in three weeks—it had caused him to considered never writing another libretto. When pressed, Corneille finally suggested the legend of the Greek hero, Bellerophon, who, while riding on the winged-horse Pegasus, had conquered the fire-breathing Chimaera. (Corneille later wrote the libretto for Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Medee*, which has a number of similarities with *Bellerophon*.) While the compositional process did cause occasional strain between the composer and librettist, the subject allowed Louis XIV to identify himself with the hero (and be suitably lauded in the prologue) and during its initial nine-month run, it was a clear success, and it was often revived in the 18th Century. It was also the first of Lully's *tragedies lyriques* to appear in print.

The music of *Bellerophon* also marked a change in Lully's style, including a more colorful orchestration, his first use of accompanied recitative, extensive use of the chorus, and the establishment of a harmonious balance between the need for the ballet and the dramatic flow. All of these innovative qualities are evident in this, the premiere recording of *Bellerophon*. While I believe Rousset occasionally pushes the tempo too much, there is a clear excitement through the whole opera and a strong sense of musical flow. This contrasts strongly with the more stately interpretation modeled by William Christie's *Atys* (Nov/Dec 1987) and followed in a number of other recordings of Lully operas.

All of the soloists are well chosen, especially Cyril Auvity for Bellerophon, Celine Scheen for the love interest, Philonoë, and Jean Teitgen for a number of the bass roles, including Apollo in the prologue and the magician Amisodar. Rousset also has the advantage of an orchestra filled with responsive musicians who sensitively support the singers. If I had to chose just two examples from the many on this recording of Rousset's success, one would be the second-act air for Amisodar, where he is accompanied by the full string section in deep, dark tones as the stage is transformed into a horrible rocky prison. My second would be the extended description of Bellerophon's combat by the off-stage chorus in Act IV. I would question Rousset's occasional use of organ and percussion in a number of passages in the opera, but in this he is only following the current performance fashions and has the good taste to keep both within bounds.

While I love Lully operas and admire many of the earlier recordings, this may be actually the first I would recommend to anyone unfamiliar with Lully's style who wished to fully experience the musical drama of these essential compositions.

BREWER

MACMILLAN: *Laudi alla Vergine Maria; Song of the Lamb; Invocation; Cantos Sagrados*
LEIGHTON: *God's Grandeur; St Thomas Mass; Quam Dilecta*

David Saint, org; Birmingham Conservatory Chamber Choir/ Paul Spicer
Regent 348—75 minutes

James MacMillan (b 1959) studied composition with Kenneth Leighton (1929-88) at the University of Edinburgh, so these are works of teacher and pupil. Many are claimed as first recordings: Leighton's *St Thomas Mass* and 'Quam Dilecta'; MacMillan's 'Laudi alla Vergine Maria', 'Song of the Lamb', and 'Invocation'.

Most of the pieces here can be better described as concert music with a sacred theme than as church music intended to be performed in the context of a liturgy. The principal exception is Leighton's Mass (1962), commissioned by the Friends of Canterbury Cathedral to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the consecration of St Thomas Becket as Archbishop of Canterbury. It is a setting of the English texts from the Book of Common Prayer, so the Gloria comes as the final movement. MacMillan's 'Song of the Lamb' (2008) and Leighton's 'Quam Dilecta' (1967) could conceivably be sung as anthems, but they are too ambitious for any run-of-the-mill occasion.

'God's Grandeur' (1957) is Leighton's setting for unaccompanied choir of a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins. MacMillan's 'Laudi alla Vergine Maria' (2004) sets a passage from Dante's *Paradiso* for double choir and soloists. The concluding "Ave" contains a sly reference

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 114

to a well-known melody from Gilbert & Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance* that would almost certainly elude the listener unless alerted beforehand. The piece was jointly commissioned by the Chapter of Winchester Cathedral and the Netherlands Chamber Choir. 'Invocation' (2006) is a setting for unaccompanied double choir of the English translation of a poem by Karol Wojtyla (later Pope John Paul II). It was commissioned by the BBC for the Oriel Singers, who gave the first performance at the Cheltenham Music Festival.

MacMillan's *Cantos Sagrados* (1990) has a more political connotation, as it springs from the composer's interest in liberation theology applied to the circumstances in Latin America. In this substantial three-movement work, MacMillan combines English translations of poems by Ariel Dorfman and Ana Maria Mendoza with Latin liturgical texts. The work is deliberately dramatic, even gut-wrenching, but there is always a danger in such pieces that the subservience of art to an ideological agenda will result in propaganda or posturing. I cannot say that the composer entirely escapes this pitfall.

A variety of influences is apparent in MacMillan's musical language. Early in his career he was influenced by the avant garde, especially in its Polish form as represented by Lutoslawski and Penderecki. Leighton gave him a solid grounding in traditional harmony and counterpoint, and the contrapuntal element in particular is an important part of his style, as it was for Leighton himself. More recently MacMillan has displayed an affinity for the musical flavors of his native Scotland. Several of the pieces here show that in their melodic ornamentation. Varied and arresting harmonic and textural colors are a conspicuous part of his vocabulary, but his harmonies often seem static, produced chiefly for their color, where Leighton's harmony more often sounds goal-driven and forward-moving.

The Birmingham Conservatory Chamber Choir is a group of 24 students. Their performances here are technically accomplished and highly disciplined. They seem to be able to adapt their sound to the character of the music they are performing. In Leighton's 'God's Grandeur', for instance, the sound may be youthful, but it is not a close imitation of the English cathedral sound. In contrast, their sound is far more churchly in the Mass. Occasionally the choral tone is brash at climaxes; some of the male singers push the tone too hard at the expense of choral blend. On the whole, these are fine performances and the disc should be acquired by admirers of either composer.

GATENS

MACMILLAN: *Jubilate Deo; Serenity; Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis; Tremunt Videntes Angeli; On Love; Here in Hiding; Give me Justice; The Lamb Has Come for us from the House of David; Tombeau de Georges Rouault*

Jonathan Vaughn, org; Wells Cathedral Choir/ Matthew Owens

Hyperion 67867—79 minutes

James MacMillan (b 1959) appears to be a hot item these days. In July/August we reviewed two concerts of his works in New York. The present program is entirely works by him, and it is worth noting that there is no duplication of repertory between it and the Leighton-MacMillan disc (above).

The present program runs the gamut from fairly straightforward works with triadic harmony, sometimes within the capabilities of amateur choirs, and works of daunting complexity both in terms of technical virtuosity and in musical language. Program annotator Paul Spicer points out that MacMillan is adept at tailoring the technical demands of his music to the abilities of the performers without any compromise in aesthetic integrity. Two of the pieces were written as recently as 2009, and they represent perhaps the extreme ends of the range I have described.

'Jubilate Deo' was written for Wells Cathedral and first performed in May of 2009. It is a curiously grim setting of a text that begins "O Be Joyful in the Lord". The grimness derives from the composer's obsession with the execution in Texas of a convicted murderer the composer had befriended for reasons he cannot fully explain. There is barely a mention of the elderly woman murdered in her home in a robbery in 1993. In writing about Kenneth Leighton, I have mentioned that his harmony can be fiercely dissonant but without gratuitous ugliness. I cannot say the same of MacMillan.

The other piece of 2009 is 'Serenity', written for the 150th anniversary of St Aloysius College in Glasgow, where the composer's children attended. The text is a combination of the Latin Eucharistic hymn 'O Salutaris Hostia' by St Thomas Aquinas with the famous 'Serenity Prayer' attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr. Here the harmony is mostly triadic and conventional, with a straightforward melody that includes some of the composer's trademark ornamentation.

The large-scale Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis (1999) was the result of two separate commissions. The Magnificat, originally with orchestra, was commissioned by the BBC for the first of their Choral Evensong broadcasts of 2000. The Nunc Dimittis was commissioned by Winchester Cathedral and first performed with the

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 115

organ version of the Magnificat in July 15 of that year, the feast of St Swithun, Bishop of Winchester (d 862). The Magnificat is mostly quiet, with the choir singing slow-moving triadic harmony punctuated by Messiaen-style bird song in the organ—perhaps a bit too much like Messiaen for comfort. Jarringly loud and dissonant chords begin the doxology.

'Tremunt Videntes Angeli' (2002), written for the dedication of the Millennium Window in St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, is for eight-part choir. The harmony moves very slowly and mysteriously with a feeling of time standing still that reminds me of certain pieces by Sir John Tavener (but with a Scottish accent). The text consists of three stanzas of the Ascensiontide office hymn 'Aeterne Rex Altissime'.

'On Love' (1984), text by Khalil Gibran, is for solo soprano and organ, written for the wedding of friends of the composer. 'Here in Hiding' (1993) is for unaccompanied male-voice quartet (ATTB) and was commissioned by the Hilliard Ensemble. The text is a conflation, even a jumble of the Latin hymn 'Adoro Te' by St Thomas Aquinas with Gerard Manley Hopkins's English translation of it. On this recording it is nearly impossible to follow the printed text because of the conflation and because of the very reverberant acoustic of Wells Cathedral. As the work was written for professional singers, no quarter is given in its technical demands.

'Give Me Justice' (2003) is one of the more accessible and straightforward pieces on the program. It is a setting of the liturgical Introit for the Fifth Sunday in Lent. It is a harmonized free chant punctuated by a refrain in the form of a unison chant over a pedal, again reminiscent of Tavener. The earliest work here is 'The Lamb Has Come for Us from the House of David' (1979). It was written for an ordination and sets a text by the Fourth-Century St Ephrem.

The final work on the program is for solo organ: 'Le Tombeau de Georges Rouault' (2003), written for Thomas Trotter. It is a tribute to the French painter, much admired by the composer for "the way he embraces the divine by using quite ordinary, mundane, and profane images—of clowns and prostitutes, etc." The piece consists of variations and developments of a strange melody whose character is defined by the interval of the minor ninth. It is a virtuoso showpiece that ranges from quiet apprehension to brash rowdiness.

The performances by the Wells Cathedral Choir leave nothing to be desired technically. The same is true for organist Jonathan Vaughn, who has his hands full with many of the accompaniments, let alone the solo organ piece. 'Jubilate Deo', 'Serenity', 'On Love', and 'Le Tombeau de Georges Rouault' are claimed here as first recordings. It is also the first recording of the organ version of the Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis. Admirers of the composer will certainly want this.

GATENS

MACMILLAN: *Charpentier Variations;*
see KORNGOLD

MADERNA: *Ausstrahlung; Biogramma; Grande Aulodia*
Carole Sidney Louis, s; Thaddeus Watson, fl; Michael Sieg, ob; Frankfurt Radio Symphony/ Arturo Tamayo
Neos 10935—73 minutes

Bruno Maderna (1920-73) was born in Venice and, after World War II, was a conductor, composer, and teacher. For much of his career he practiced and taught the 12-tone composition technique. The works offered here, composed not long before he died, call for spontaneous decisions by conductor and performers about what will be played when.

Ausstrahlung (Emanation, 1971) is scored for female voice, flute, oboe, orchestra, and pre-recorded tape. Ancient texts are read (by the singer and by others on the tape) in Persian, Indian, English, French, German, and Italian. Seven pieces of music ("emanations")—some completely composed, others indeterminate—are performed in an order determined by the conductor. The music and readings take place simultaneously but seem to have little to do with each other. It is as if we're listening to music in one room while the radio is on in another. And while the texts are lofty, the fact that most listeners do not speak or read multiple languages means that the texts (included but not translated in the notes) are really just collections of sounds. Their subject matter has no bearing on the listening experience—they could just as well be from Dr Seuss or the morning newspapers. It is a very strange and complex work, and it goes on for 34 minutes.

The other pieces are strange, too, and they have entertaining program notes. *Biogramma* (1972) is based on "highly divergent compositional procedures ranging between the extremes of maximum freedom and maximum rigor". Silences separate events where "horizontal sound-surfaces alternate with vertical blocks of sonority; moments of great timbral compression alternate with others of scattered and discontinuous texture". In other words, the 12-minute orchestral piece is all about contrasts. How goes the listening experience? Well, it is just a collection of abstract sounds and events, some nebulous and surreal, others grating. Occasionally we can hear things that

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 116

might be called melodies, but mostly we hear random pitches and timbres.

Grande Aulodia (1970) is a 27-minute work for flute, oboe, and orchestra. Some events are composer-prescribed, others improvised or aleatoric. Some listeners may be entranced, but others will find it a waste of time.

KILPATRICK

MAHLER: *Kindertotenlieder;*
WAGNER: *Wesendonck Songs;*
WOLF: *3 Möricke Lieder*
Waltraud Meier, mz; Orchestre de Paris/ Daniel Barenboim—Warner 67539—56 minutes

This is a reissuel it was reviewed by Mr Vroon in November/December 1990. He liked it more than I do, though Meier is a singer (and vocal actor) that I've admired for many years, especially in her Wagner roles. She's been one of the best Isoldes since Birgit Nilsson (and I can't think of the others); so it's no surprise that her performance of the *Wesendonck Songs* are superb here. They suit her voice, and perhaps her personality, better than the Mahler and Wolf selections. 'Schmerzen' and 'Träume', were studies for *Tristan und Isolde*; and all are here given the full operatic treatment, but so are, alas, the Mahler and Wolf.

Meier's singing of the *Kindertotenlieder* lacks the haunting sense of intimacy that Kathleen Ferrier brought to these sad songs; her rich contralto made her the ideal singer of this music. She is a more subtle and more expressive interpreter than Meier, and she colors the words better. Other notable recordings were made by Janet Baker, Christa Ludwig, and, of course, Fischer-Dieskau. As for the Wolf songs, I wonder who orchestrated them; the notes can't say, since there are no notes. But the results also sound like excerpts from a Wagner opera, the orchestra almost covers the singer, and the words get lost. It would have been better if Barenboim, who is, after all, a very distinguished pianist, had accompanied Meier at the piano. Sometimes more is less. No texts.

MOSES

MAHLER: *Das Lied von der Erde*
Timothy Sparks, t; Ellen Williams, mz; Duraleigh Chamber Players/ Scott Tilley
Centaur 3044—60 minutes

Siegfried Jerusalem, t; Waltraud Meier, mz; Chicago Symphony/ Daniel Barenboim
Warner 67540—60 minutes

Siegfried Jerusalem; Cornelia Kallisch; SW German Radio/ Michael Gielen
Hänssler 93269—63:31

We have reviewed around 50 CD recordings of this. Some of them, like the first one here, are Schoenberg's chamber reduction. I wouldn't bother with them. I cannot understand why, in the age of recordings, anyone would bother with any kind of reduction. No Beethoven symphonies for two pianos for me! And Mahler is one of the great writers for a full orchestra and knows exactly what to do to make delicate passages delicate—no need for a reduced group of instruments. What's more, I can't stand either soloist on the Centaur.

Siegfried Jerusalem turns up in the other two recordings, both made in 1992, when his voice was pretty good. But he sounds much better for Barenboim than for Gielen. The Barenboim was reviewed here by Kurt Moses (July/Aug 1992), who said it was good enough to be ranked with the very greatest ones. Even the sound is among the best ever. "This work is a symphony of songs, and its orchestral score is one of Mahler's most original and imaginative; every detail deserves to be heard clearly and is here." No orchestra has ever played this better on a recording. Barenboim is a cooler, less romantic interpreter than Bernstein or Walter or Klemperer, but he lets the music unfold naturally—and that works well. Some passages are as good as you will hear anywhere. Meier has a fresh and sensuous voice—she was the world's best Wagnerian mezzo at the time.

Gielen is slower all around, his orchestra excellent, his mezzo rather laid back and even nondescript. Gielen alone can make a Mahler recording great, when it's only a symphony; but the singers don't help here.

In this contest there is a clear winner: the low-priced Warner reissue of the Chicago Erato under Barenboim. It still ranks as one of the three or four greatest.

VROON

MARTIN: *Der Sturm (The Tempest)*
Robert Holl (Prospero), Christine Buffle (Miranda), Simon O'Neill (Fernando), Dennis Wilgenhof (Caliban), James Gilchrist (Antonio), Andreas Macco (Gonzalo); Netherlands Radio/ Thierry Fischer
Hyperion 67821 [3CD] 153 minutes

This is the Swiss composer Frank Martin's first opera, composed when he was already 60 years old. He had by then written a significant amount of music for the theater as well as church works, including *Le Vin Herbé*, a version of the Tristan legend. That was first staged at Salzburg in 1948, and it has been repeated there several times. Encouraged by his success, he composed a number of vocal works and finally, in 1952, without waiting for a commission, he began to compose *Der Sturm*, a musical setting of the Shakespeare play that uses the German translation by Schlegel, slightly cut, as its libretto.

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 117

The music is through-composed; there are no arias or recitatives and no breaks in the orchestral score except for the division into three acts. It's thoroughly modern and lacks melodic content; it seems to use Schoenberg's 12-tone serial technique. The music is expressive but only in a general way; it doesn't identify the characters of the play or tell us much about their emotions. For that, we must still read Shakespeare. This opera is, to a considerable extent, a play with music rather than an opera. (This is true of many "modern" operas.) Some of the fairy-like atmosphere of the play is suggested, primarily, by the assignment of Ariel's lines to the chorus; its music is charming and easy on the ears. There's sometimes a striking resemblance to some of the choral music in Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I wish that could be said of the rest of the score.

Robert Hall, as Prospero, is the dominant singer in this cast (the role was intended for F-D). His powerful, vibrant baritone is pleasing even when the music isn't. His German diction is impeccable. As his daughter Miranda, Christine Buffle shows us a pretty voice that is not always steady. When it is, it's quite lovely. The heldentenor Simon O'Neill as Fernando, Miranda's beloved, has a solid voice but it turns edgy in dramatic passages and so loses its appeal. Most of the other soloists are adequate.

The orchestral music, often powerful, is dominated by brass and percussion; the Dutch orchestra handles it well under Fischer's energetic leadership. The world premiere of the opera was given at the Vienna State Opera in 1956, conducted by Ernest Ansermet. Text and translation are included.

MOSES

MARTINU: *Cello Concerto 1;* **HINDEMITH; HONEGGER:** *Cello Concertos*
Johannes Moser; German Radio Saarbrücken/ Christoph Poppen—Hänssler 93276—63 minutes

This is a nicely balanced program containing three 20th Century cello concertos that relate to each other very comfortably. This is Bohuslav Martinu's first concerto for cello and chamber orchestra, written originally in 1930 and revised for a larger orchestra in 1939 and 1955, not to be confused with his earlier 1924 Concertino for cello and winds. It is a lovely concatenation of his early brio with the greater breadth of his later works.

Paul Hindemith's concerto is from 1940, not to be confused with his much earlier effort from 1916. This also is from his mature years of compositional grandeur and power and is a fine example of these qualities. After these, Arthur Honegger's 1929 Concerto is a miniature, little more than half as long as its companions but just as memorable in melodies and technique.

These are demanding pieces for both soloist and orchestra. Moser and Poppen handle them with elan, and one is left with a very positive feeling about the project. There have been numerous recordings of each of these pieces, but if you haven't already gotten them, these are some of the most polished readings I know. They are also three of the most listenable cello concertos of their time.

D MOORE

MARTINU: *Songs 1*
Jana Wallingerova, mz; Giorgio Koukl, p
Naxos 572588—79 minutes

Giorgio Koukl recently gave us the complete Martinu solo piano music on Naxos. At first I was doubtful about an Italian sounding name playing Martinu but it turned out that he was born and began his musical education in Prague. He is an ideal Martinu pianist.

Jana Wallingerova is a Czech mezzo-soprano, who, typically, has a bit more vibrato than I would prefer but sings Martinu with considerable gusto and good inflection.

There are 41 songs here. Naxos offers good notes and a superb recording. No texts are supplied but they are available on the internet. This collection of early Martinu songs is an ideal start of the complete set at a bargain price.

BAUMAN

MATHIEU: *Trio; Piano Quintet;*
CHAUSSON: *Concert*
Alain Lefevre, p; David Lefevre, v; Alcan Quartet
Analekta 9286—78 minutes

Andre Mathieu's music always looked backward. Though he lived from 1929 to 1968 his music has more in common with Fauré and Ravel than any of his contemporaries. Although most would consider it historically insignificant for this very reason—and that may very well be true—it is still beautiful, well written, thoroughly enjoyable music. In performances like these the appeal is obvious and immediate. The piano trio and the piano quintet, both two-movement works, are passionate and sumptuous, and these are lush, romantic performances.

Chausson's *Concert* is considered one of his best works, and it is striking and rich. Virtuosic in the extreme, it pits violin and piano soloists against string quartet—almost in the manner of a double concerto—and alternates moving climaxes with music of tender sensitivity and beauty. The texture is thick but never heavy. After an opening movement full of

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 118

emotional indecision there is a graceful 'Sicilienne', then a 'Grave' of extreme pathos and lyricism. The Finale is virtuosic and fiery—a fitting end.

BYELICK

MENDELSSOHN: *Elijah*

Michael Volle (Elijah); Andrea Rost, Letizia Scherrer, s; Marjana Lipovsek, a; Herbert Lippert, Thomas Cooley, t; Bavarian Radio/ Wolfgang Sawallisch—Profil 7019 [2CD] 121 minutes

Both English and German audiences have a claim on *Elijah*. The first performance (1846), conducted by the composer, was in English even though the music had originally been set to German text. Mendelssohn probably would have considered it a German piece, but English-speaking countries have long embraced it as second only to *Messiah*. So we have recordings in both languages, and this one is in German.

Performances of *Elijah* always run the danger of becoming sanctimonious, syrupy and, for me, finally dull. The score has, it would seem, countless opportunities for little touches and lingering; and the better, more dramatic performances always seem to be quickly paced. This certainly is the case with Sawallisch. The conductor made an earlier recording in the 1980s that moved well and captured the drama, even though it was hampered by a wobbly Theo Adam. This recording, made in 2001, is in the same mold (with Michael Volle a better Elijah than Adam). The drama moves swiftly, always holding your attention and keeping you involved. Volle has a good understanding of the title role, and the large chorus and other soloists are also satisfying. This recording, then, makes a fine alternative to Masur's (also German) with the Israeli Philharmonic and Alistair Miles as Elijah. The notes here are tri-lingual, but text is in German only.

The question, though, is whether you want *Elijah* in German. For English our recent Overview (N/D 2008) recommended Hickox (Chandos), Marriner (Philips), and Ormandy (RCA).

ALTHOUSE

WORD POLICE: Palette, Palate, Pallet

These three words are pronounced about the same (like imminent and immanent) but are quite distinct. A pallet is a bed, usually narrow and hard. The palate is the roof of the mouth but also refers to the sense of taste. A palette is a board where a painter mixes colors. Computer spell-checks can't prevent errors like the one on page 236 in January/February ("her variegated color palate"). And an editor who tends to pronounce questionable words to himself might not catch it either. Alert readers always do!

MENDELSSOHN: *Quartet 6;* see HENSEL; *Violin Concerto;* see BRAHMS

MESSIAEN: *Petites Esquisses d'Oiseaux; Preludes; 4 Etudes de Rythme; Nativite du Seigneur; Banquet Celeste; Apparition de l'Eglise Eternelle; Poemes pour Mi; Chants de Terre et de Ciel; Quartet for the End of Time; 5 Rechants; Visions de l'Amen; Offrandes Oubilees; Hymne au Sainte Sacrement; 20 Regards sur l'Enfant Jesus; Harawi; Turangalila Symphony; Catalogue d'Oiseaux; Fauvette des Jardins; Reveil des Oiseaux; Couleurs de la Cite Celeste; Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum; Ascension; 3 Petite Liturgies; Meditations sur le Mystere de la Sainte-Trinite; Des Canyons aux Etoiles; 7 Haikai*

Yvonne Loriod, Pierre Laurent-Aimard, Katia & Marielle Labeque, Marie-Madeleine Petit, p; Olivier Messiaen, Marie-Claire Alain, org; Jeanne Loriod, Dominique Kim, Ondes Martenot; Maria Oran, Rachel Yakar, s; Huguette Fernandez, v; Guy Deplus, cl; Jacques Nielz, vc; ORTF Orchestra, Ensemble Ars Nova/ Marius Constant; Berlin Philharmonic, French National Orchestra/ Kent Nagano; RTF Choir & Chamber Orchestra/ Marcel Couraud; Strasbourg Instrumental & Percussion Group, Orchestre du Domaine Musical/ Pierre Boulez

Warner 62162 [18CD] 19:32

This set is called the Messiaen Edition; it came out in 1988 but has been unavailable for years. There is a 310-page booklet in English and French with texts and translations, and most of the notes are by the composer. One of the discs is an hour-long interview in French with Claude Samuel, translated in the booklet; there's also a printed interview with Yvonne Loriod. Many of these recordings were supervised by Messiaen himself; they've all been issued previously, but only a few have been reviewed in these pages. Several major works were not included: *Chronochromie, Eclairs sur l'Au-dela, La Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur Jesus-Christ, Oiseaux Exotiques, Concert a Quatre,* and the opera *St Francis of Assisi.*

Yvonne Loriod plays the *Petites Esquisses d'Oiseaux* in a straightforward manner; some of the Preludes have more shape and phrasing to them, but the *Quatre Etudes de Rythme* are almost hammered, on an almost-in-tune instrument. Hakon Austbo has a lighter touch (Naxos 554090, M/J 2000), and his *Etudes* make a lot more sense to me (his piano is bassy and more distant-sounding, though).

I fell in love with the Peter Serkin recording of *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jesus* years ago, and rejoiced greatly when RCA finally reissued it (RCA 62316, M/A 2005); Serkin had an excellent blend of mystery, respect, delight, and forward movement—and enough personality to

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 119

keep it interesting but not to overpower the writing. His 'View of the Virgin' and 'View of the Spirit of Joy' are two of my favorite things on record. Loriod's account from 1975 sounds like it was recorded under a blanket and then passed through a few generations of carelessly stored tape; the engineering on the Serkin isn't the best, but this is noticeably worse—his is echoey, hers is echoey, boomy, and sometimes rattly. Her 'Exchange', one long crescendo, is quite powerful, and 'View of the Virgin' is as attractive as Serkin's. 'View of the Son by the Son' is wide-eyed, full of wonder, and 'View of the Heights' is brilliant and coherent. Her 'View of the Spirit of Joy' is possibly more energetic than Serkin's, but the boomy bass hurts it—a shame, because it is really exciting! A mid-cycle comment: I've always respected Messiaen for this piece: there's so much unity yet so much variety; just before the bird songs get to be too much, there's a familiar cadence or theme, or something to break up the texture. The first of the two discs of the *Vingt Regards* ends not with 'Spirit of Joy' (10 in the set) but with 11, 'First Communion of the Virgin', which brings you partway down off the mountain before you hear the noise of the next disc being loaded. 'The All-Powerful Word' is almost overpowering, but never brutal; the imitation of the carillon that begins 'Noel' makes you feel like you're right up in the bell tower, and 'The Kiss of the Infant Jesus' is unbelievably tender. When I got to 'View of the Awesome Unction', it struck me how Loriod's playing of each movement suits the titles perfectly. This is an astounding recording—it's too bad the sound isn't better. (Arved Ashby reached similar conclusions—N/D 1988.)

Harawi, from 1945, is new to me: it's the first of the "Tristan trilogy", which takes human love, especially the story of Tristan and Yseult, as its subject. The other two parts are *Turangalila* and *Cinq Rechants*); the title is a Quechua word that means a type of love song ending with the death of the lovers. This cycle is nearly an hour long, full of strange poetry, occasional Quechua words and images, the expected bird songs and cyclic themes, onomatopoeia (how unusual to hear the voice accompany the piano on a "drum"), and a world of romantic and spiritual intensity. Rachel Yakar is accompanied by Yvonne Loriod; Yakar is clear and expressive, always sure of herself, never stretched beyond comfort. Her flexibility is most impressive and her musicality unquestionable. This recording has been deleted for a while and pricey. I only wish it had been recorded in a small recital hall instead of a studio—the acoustic is dry, though it affects the piano more than the voice.

Marie-Claire Alain recorded *La Nativité du Seigneur, Le Banquet Celeste* and *Apparition de l'Eglise Eternelle* on the organ at the Hofkirche, Lucerne. I have listened to precious little of Messiaen's organ music, and that was ages ago. *La Nativité*, nine meditations for the Christmas season, is pulling me in, though. My observations may be obvious to some, but hearing Messiaen when he's able to combine the long tones a piano can't produce with more intimacy than the orchestra can afford, while submitting the result to the organ's religiosity—this is giving me a brand new window into his writing. Somehow, between the bird calls, Hindu and non-retrogradable rhythms, and all the things that would have turned into mere systems in the pen of someone lesser, Messiaen never let go of his spiritual humanity and humor—music history has only a few examples of composers who wrote this much unique music that was nearly always genius. Even fewer could give their pieces these titles and have the music describe them so completely.

La Fauvette des Jardins (Garden Warbler) is a single-movement 35-minute piece for piano, a massive tone poem of a day on the Matheysine Plateau, in sight of the Grand Serre mountain. Bird songs, flora and fauna, sun and storm abound. Yvonne Loriod's instrument is a little bassy again, but the sound is rich, much better than before. Loriod is the soloist in *Reveil des Oiseaux*, with Nagano conducting the French National Orchestra. The playing is stellar and the awakening process very convincing.

Arved Ashby wrote that *Turangalila-Symphonie* "promises to become Messiaen's most enduring work, by virtue of its crazy, Dionysian abandon and overwhelming orchestral display" (N/D 1992), and it seems performances have become more frequent, even in the Midwest: the Cincinnati Symphony premiere was in 2001, and they programmed it again earlier this year. (It has its detractors: Jack Daugherty, Oxford, Ohio's Sol Hurok, memorably called it Turanga-Looney-Tunes.) And it is brilliant and bizarre, an absurd panoply of peacock orchestration, humor, sensuality, attention-grabbing themes, an occasional melody you can whistle, steamy strings, and more; even the space-age sound of the Ondes Martenot has aged well, at least as well as the theremin in Khachaturian's Piano Concerto. (Allen Gimbel says, "flying saucers really don't belong in such a timeless and deeply-felt vision".) The Nagano recording here, with the Berlin Philharmonic, Pierre-Laurent Aimard, and Dominique Kim (Ondes Martenot), wasn't made under Messiaen's direct supervision—the Chung on DG was, and in the liner notes the composer declared it the definitive account. Also, Nagano uses the 1990 Revised

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 120

Messiaen Edition. The sound is even more colorful and vivid, and Nagano cuts five minutes off Chung's total time ('Jardin du Sommeil d'Amour' is two minutes faster and almost indelicate). As Mr Gimbel (J/A 2001) said, this is a very German interpretation of a very French text; he also described the DG sound of the Chung as pinched and emaciated—I wouldn't go that far, but the Nagano is more luxurious. I prefer Nagano's view of *Turangalila* from east of the Rhine.

Catalogue d'Oiseaux: 163 minutes, 13 pieces in honor of 13 French provinces, with the names of the provinces' most typical birds for their titles. Yvonne Loriod is the pianist again; this was recorded in 1970 at Notre Dame of Liban, a very reverberant space that makes every splice apparent—in 'Alpine Chough' there are several only seconds apart, quite noticeable through headphones. There's also occasional traffic noise. Messiaen never shies away from the violence in nature: 'The Buzzard' has a part where six carrion crows attack the bird for its prey. Perhaps because so much of her playing is so blunt already, Loriod does not put that across. Ashby noted in his review of the Austbo (Fidelio 8827, J/A 1989) that a common problem with performances of this is indifference to Messiaen's dynamic markings, especially the range from *p* to *mf*; too much of this doesn't dip below *mf*. A thought: the fewer the bird songs, the better the piece, generally; I've found in listening to this set that the more literal the notation and the greater the frequency, the sooner the pieces wear out their welcome. I've enjoyed Sorabji's four-hour *Opus Clavicembalisticum* (in spite of the two half-hour, death-by-eighth-notes fugues), but I'm not sure I could make it through the *Catalogue* in one sitting. It's a good thing Messiaen didn't have a Twitter account.

Boulez conducted the premiere of *Couleurs de la Cité Celeste* in 1964; here he leads the Groupe Instrumental a Percussion de Strasbourg and the Orchestre du Domaine Musical, with Loriod on piano. The brass don't have all the skill of the Germans I just heard in *Turangalila*; sometimes they sound like a synthesizer. Mr Ashby reviewed the reissue (Sony 68332, J/A 1996) and preferred Salonen's reading (partly because of a bad mix and partly because of tape hiss). Maybe they've cleaned this one up, because I don't hear tape hiss. The sound is bright and nearly too crystalline.

Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum, from the same session, is vastly different from Boulez's Cleveland Orchestra recording (DG)—the latter is more in tune; here the balance between sections is better, but often the voicing *inside* a section is not. Ashby agreed that Cleveland's winds and brass are more immaculate, but stated quite firmly that the Strasbourg is the most inspiring.

L'Ascension is with the ORTF under Marius Constant. I is a rich brass chorale, where Jesus is praying, "Father, the hour is come. Glorify your Son, so that your Son may glorify you." II is titled 'Serene Alleluias of a Soul Desiring Heaven' and contains harmonies unexpected from Messiaen: the solo winds circle freely around each other, with intervals and swirling orchestral effects I've never heard in his writing before. The playing here is bold but serene. Parts of III sound more like Ravel than Messiaen. It's one of his earlier works, completed in 1933, and there are ideas here I wish he hadn't let go of as he matured. The orchestra has that classic mid-century French shine to it—this is from 1966.

The *Trois Petite Liturgies de la Presence Divine* are aggressive concert pieces (written for the *Concerts de la Pleaide*), not meditative church pieces; Marcel Couraud conducts the ORTF Chamber Orchestra, the women of the ORTF Choir, Yvonne Loriod (piano) and Jeanne Loriod (Ondes Martenot). I would gladly trade the maracas for a more present Ondes Martenot, which I heard once, barely, in 33 minutes. There are some of the same chords and melodies as in *Turangalila*. As Mr Ashby said in his review of the London Sinfonietta recording (Virgin, J/A 1992), "III, *Psalmodie*, is one of the weirdest things Messiaen has done...[it] begins as a sort of ecclesiastical, vulgate, proto-rap." The words, by the composer, are mystical and strange, full of color and odd expressions, some from the Bible, some from himself. It is an impressive piece, one that provoked "accusations of vulgarity and sacrilege" (Ashby). The women are a little flat sometimes, and there is some distortion in the louder, higher sections.

Messiaen recorded the *Meditations sur le Mystere de la Sainte-Trinité* at the Eglise de la Sainte-Trinité, Paris, in June, 1972. He took the B-A-C-H idea even further and constructed a complex musical alphabet so he could represent all 26 letters, and literally wrote out text as music, including words from the Mass and from Aquinas. You can hear repetitions of some leitmotifs, but the result is a synapse-twisting garble for most of I, which ends in roars of chords. II begins with a plainchant theme followed by chunks of notes that jolt between consonance and dissonance. Donald Metz said, "the first four sections are extremely demanding to attend to, but Meditations 5-8 contain some haunting, intimate passages and portions that make them more approachable" (J/A 1992), and that is true—they are much more coherent. The sound is perfect, not muddy at all.

Messiaen wrote *Poemes pour Mi* in 1936 for

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 121

his first wife, Claire Delbos, who was a violinist and also a composer. They had just moved into a summer house at the foot of the French Alps, surrounded by mountains, lakes, and his beloved birds. The poems view young love and the occasional grotesqueness of life in the shadow of the cross. Maria Oran is the soprano, accompanied by Yvonne Loriod. Oran has a strong, healthy voice and terrific diction; she performs these comfortably if monodynamically. The sound is pretty dry, but the musicians are balanced appropriately; Loriod's playing could be smoother.

Chants de Terre et de Ciel followed a few years later, dealing more with the joys of fatherhood: Olivier and Claire begat Pascal. The writing in both sets is vintage Messiaen: no surprises, really, and thanks to the straight-edged performance, no magic either.

The Labeque sisters give us a low-level recording of *Visions de l'Amen* in a rather dry studio on pianos that sound like they haven't seen climate control in several months. Dynamics (and touch), other than the opening crescendo, are not subtle in the least, but there's more excitement and urgency than others have had. The out-of-tune state results in a gamelan-like sound sometimes, though, and you'd swear they used some percussion instruments at the beginning. Even in the hushed, *Jardin*-like 'Amen of Desire', the edges of the notes are steely. The final Amen of the Consummation is rigid.

The strings of the ORTF, under Constant, sound digitized in *Les Offrandes Oubliées* and *Hymne au Saint Sacrament*, but the explosion after *Offrande's* first part, 'The Cross', is nearly enough to startle those thoughts out of you. The sound is so tightly centered it is almost mono, and there are some disconcerting artifacts audible even in the loudest passages: it sounds like a news program was picked up on the tape! All that (and shallow acoustic) aside, this orchestra eviscerates you with their insane vigor; the slow part, 'The Eucharist', that follows the violence of 'Sin', is spooky yet peace-giving. This was Messiaen's first piece performed by an orchestra, and the one that put him in the public eye. Heady stuff from a 22-year-old! It's hard to believe these works were recorded five years after *L'Ascension* by the same musicians. They're both a little dry, but the engineering on the older recording is much better.

Des Canyons aux Etoiles is Messiaen's longest orchestral piece, about 92 minutes; it's a depiction of Bryce Canyon in Utah, Zion Park, Zion itself, the stars, the Resurrection, and, of course, birds. Yvonne Loriod and Ensemble Ars Nova with Marius Constant recorded this in 1973, and the sonics are dated; it's very clear, especially the brass and xylophone, but the piano is too closely miked, resulting in some distortion. The piece is haughtier, drier, pricklier than *Turangalila*—the swoops of the Ondes Martenot have been replaced with wind and sand machines; lush strings make a rare appearance in 'The Resurrected and the Song of the Star Aldebaran'—this is more like The Desert of Love's Sleep, with constellations clanging off one another overhead, ecstatic desolation, and majesty instead of laughter. The orchestra is solid, other than the horn player's wobbly tone; in keeping with the running theme of this set, the playing steers clear of subtlety. *Sept Haikai* are well-played, with a bright, almost piercing sound.

With only the *Quartet for the End of Time* and *Cinq Rechants* left to review, I hit Messiaen overload. After several hours of errands, I decided to listen to the renowned Tashi recording of the *Quartet* in its entirety before I got to any more of this set. I'm halfway through the 'Abyss of the Birds' as I type, and hearing non-French playing has given me some desperately needed refreshing. I've concluded that the French, especially Yvonne Loriod, are often not the best Messiaen interpreters. Perhaps my opinions are heterodox, but after listening to good portions of all these albums, I need subtlety, dynamic shadings (for all of Messiaen's love for color, his approved interpretations are often monochromatic), and some rounded piano tone. Tashi is getting into my soul in a way nothing, *nothing*, on this set has. I come from a very intense strain ("strain" having more than one meaning) of Independent Fundamentalist Baptists: the pulpit-pounding, shouting, aisle-running, fire-and-brimstone, King-James-Only kind. There's a lot that I like: I think our interpretations of the major doctrines (what's in the Apostles' Creed) are accurate. But the extraneous stuff has become almost unbearable, the majoring on minors, the divisive posturing, the legalism. After listening to this set, I feel like I've just sat through a week-long revival or campmeeting, listening to preachers of the junkyard-dog stripe preaching many things I agree with, but in such a blunt and abrasive way that I've become exhausted. Hearing Tashi is like listening to a preacher who is a true shepherd of the flock, minister to me with grace, care, and affection. He's saying a lot of the same truths, but there's a universe of difference between the approaches.

The *Quartet* from this set began with a pleasant tone, but the pounding and distortion came back. Marie-Madeleine Petit doesn't sound as brusque as Loriod, but the loud parts are still harsh. Guy Deplus has a less pure tone

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 122

than Tashi's Stoltzman, and the long high notes at the beginning of 'Abyss of the Birds' are obnoxious, with the overtones threatening the integrity of the main note—it sounds like he put his clarinet through a flange gate and cranked up the treble. Still, this is worlds better than a lot of what I've heard in the last few days: there's more tenderness and subtlety, and a genuine sense of meditation in 'Praise to the Eternity of Jesus'.

Cinq Rechants is for three each of sopranos, contraltos, tenors, and basses; Messiaen uses the voices to create some percussive and orchestral effects. The title is an homage to Claude le Jeune's *Printemps*; the verses are called *chants* and the choruses *rechants*. The textural contrasts, unusual noises, slides, angular harmonies, and a language that's half-French, half-invented, all make this cycle very interesting. The singers sound dated (1968, but better than a Columbia LP of Gesualdo from the same era I recently bought) but they have a lot of feeling and a good sense of what to do with the dynamics. I'm glad that I'm ending my time with this release with something new to me, and something I'll return to.

ESTEP

MOMPOU: *Musica Callada; Secreto*

Jenny Lin, p
Steinway 30004—75 minutes

I am a huge fan of Jenny Lin. My first introduction to her extraordinary talents was with her recording of the Shostakovich Preludes and Fugues Op.87. Lin plays very well the introspective miniatures of the four books titled *Musica Callada*.

In the short but exceptional program notes by David Lewis he writes, "*Musica Callada* won critical acclaim following Mompou's death, most notably from John Rockwell, who referred to Mompou as an "early minimalist." Lewis summarizes Mompou's "minimalism", commenting that it is not the minimalism of Glass or Young, as it has no relation to 12-tone idiom of Webern in the case of Young or to non-Western traditions in the case of Glass. It is, however, influenced by Satie and reminiscent of Ravel and Debussy.

This music is simple—simple in its transparency, nakedness, and unsettling purity. Its harmonic and rhetorical concepts are incredibly complex, however. Lin's sensitivity leaves me haunted. The engineering and the piano are exceptional—bringing to life this very "silent music" is no easy task.

Included is also 'Secreto' from *Impresiones Intimas*, a much earlier work. It is one of my favorites here. It is certainly more Spanish, and leaves me yearning for the music of the Spanish romantics.

Mompou's music is both serious and very moving, especially in the hands of Jenny Lin. All four books are wonderful visions of white and simplicity. And while some speak of peace, many are dark and disturbing, yet remain strikingly beautiful.

JACOBSEN

MOZART: *Don Giovanni*

Nicola Ulivieri (Giovanni), Anna Samuil (Anna), Maria Luigia Borsi (Elvira), Maurizio Muraro (Leporello), Dmitri Korchak (Ottavio), Chen Reiss (Zerlina), Simon Orfila (Masetto), Marco Spotti (Commendatore); New Israeli Vocal Ensemble; Israel Philharmonic/ Zubin Mehta

Helicon 9627 [3CD] 164 minutes

CD *Don Giovannis* often offer an embarrassment of riches; this is a very crowded field. So this concert recording, from 2009 in Tel Aviv, is up against stiff competition. The Israel Philharmonic's music director for life, Mr Mehta, is in charge. Mehta can be a fine opera conductor, especially in Verdi and Puccini, but perhaps in an effort to keep things from dragging, he favors brisk, sometimes over-accented tempos. He's somewhat gentler with lyrical, more reflective moments, though they have an edgy quality to them. At least his singers seem to be comfortable.

The Israel Philharmonic in recent years seems to have gone from a great orchestra to an uneven ensemble—sometimes fine playing, sometimes rather rough and ready. That's the case here. There are some fine singers in the cast, and they all sound like they're doing their darndest to perform with involvement. (Hebrew and Yiddish words pop up from time to time, including an "Oi vey" or two.). Nicola Ulivieri boasts an attractive basso cantante sound, but he doesn't delve into the title role all that deeply. (Remember how Siepi made everything sound as natural as breathing?) Maurizio Muraro as Leporello shows more personality, with an attractive bass voice somewhat darker than Ulivieri's. The other men sing well enough but aren't especially dynamic. (Ottavio is a wimp, and Don Giovanni's guest isn't all that menacing.) There are no female standouts either. Samuil has no fire, no anger in Anna's vengeance aria or anywhere else. She's sometimes unremittingly lugubrious. Some strain can be heard. Ms Borsi doesn't play Elvira as a comical shrew and is able to sound sympathetic. If only she did more with the words and had more variety of tone. Chen Reiss's Zerlina is pleasant to hear but short on charm.

An essay and synopsis but no libretto, but *Don Giovanni* is familiar enough to surmount these faults.

MARK

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 123

MOZART: *Piano Concertos 20+27*

Mitsuko Uchida; Cleveland Orchestra
Decca 15498—66 minutes

It's been a quarter century since Uchida was making her name with Mozart, both the complete sonatas and most of the concertos. At the time, compared with the older generation of Mozarteans, her playing was notable for its articulation and energy, though some found her reticent and inflexible. Now she sounds very much mainstream, and her playing is as good as ever. She still obviously values clarity of texture, and all the movements have a sense of forward movement, but the music is also admirably shaped and shaded. There is nothing mechanical about her playing, but some listeners may want stronger expression, particularly in the D-minor. If you remember our Overview (M/J 2008) and now see Mozart playing on the Perahia-Brendel continuum—that is to say, from subtle to straightforward—Uchida is in the middle, but closer to Perahia. She plays a modern piano, but with a light touch, gorgeous tone, and always in an appropriate expressive range for Mozart.

Her handling of the Cleveland Orchestra is stylish, but there are moments, such as the very beginning of the D-minor, where the playing is slack. There may be benefits to conducting from the keyboard, but in balance I would prefer a separate conductor. You could simply get Uchida's earlier recordings with Jeffrey Tate. She plays Beethoven's cadenzas in the D-minor (none from Mozart survive) and Mozart's in the B-flat. If you feel the concertos need more personality than Uchida offers, look to Brendel or Ashkenazy, but in its own way and in spite of orchestral problems, this is very satisfying.

ALTHOUSE

MOZART: *Quartets 4, 17, 22*

Jerusalem Quartet
Harmonia Mundi 902076—77 minutes

I am truly spoiled by ARG this issue; I got to review a lot of Mozart—a lot of exceptional Mozart. This one is a necessity. The Jerusalem Quartet is simply a breath of fresh air and, indeed, they are an attractive bunch. Their interpretations of Haydn and Schubert have been widely praised and I suspect their Mozart will be as well.

I would consider them Mozart traditionalists, as they are not trying to get too creative—a good thing. They balance sophisticated and classical form with tasteful vibrato. If you enjoy elegantly played Mozart, this is it.

The program opens with No. 4 (K 157); its incantations of youth introduce these players well. II always surprises me, as it is hard to comprehend that a 17-year old child composed such perfect music. I am enthralled by this group. They play the Adagio as if not wanting to disturb it; they keep their distance and very respectfully narrate a dim vision. They simply do what they are told by Mozart, and the effect is brilliant.

No. 17, *The Hunt*, is just as precise and elegant. Again, this ensemble's talent is certainly evident in slow movements. The Adagio is pure, clear, and simple. Nothing else is needed. The heart-wrenching melody just is. The finale is a bit slow but very convincing.

No. 22, the other B-flat, ends this performance as I am reminded of a tortured Mozart, literally dying at this point but still holding on to hope.

These pieces are so popular that I often hear them played very unimaginatively and standardized. The Jerusalem Quartet does not do that, but they do not try to reinvent the wheel either. Rather, they reintroduce us to the profound simplicity and even plainness of Mozart's genius.

JACOBSEN

MOZART: *Quartets 22+23*

Klenke Quartet—Profil 4031—51 minutes

I praised the Jerusalem Quartet as "Mozart traditionalists" who demonstrate that plainness and simplicity are important in performing Mozart. By plain I do not mean boring, and by simple I certainly do not mean calculated. But that is what I hear with Klenke Quartet—a boring and calculated performance.

This is simply not good. Their phrasing is rigid and cold. Slow down! Breathe! I am almost at a panic attack with the Finale of 23. Their notion of dynamics is also odd—"fortes" suddenly appear, intrusively, while "pianos" serve as the default dynamic for when the phrase ends and they are not sure it has. Do not waste your time with this!

JACOBSEN

MOZART: *Quartets 14+15*

Casal Quartet
Telos 124 [2CD] 176 minutes

This a beautifully packaged set. One disc has a performance of 14 and 15; the second has a repeat of 14 with what seems to be very detailed commentary sections before each movement. These are titled "ammanerung", meaning "approach", where Swiss musicologist and author, Urs Frauchiger unpacks and reflects on Mozart's process while composing the masterly D-minor Quartet. I say, it "seems to be very detailed commentary", because it is all in

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 124

German—including the program notes and essay.

What I can review confidently is the Casal Quartet. They give a nuanced performance, historically conscious and precise. Sometimes they lack drive. But overall, I hear emotion, lovely vibrato, and elegance. If you know German, I suspect this is worth exploring.

JACOBSEN

MOZART: *Quartets 10+19;*
HAYDN: *Quartet, op 54:1*
Amati Quartet—Divox 20401—61 minutes

Spectacular. This is standard Amati playing, bursting with energy, yet chillingly precise and accurate. Amati has a strong international reputation. These three quartets are standards, and although No. 10 is done very well, the Haydn and the Mozart 19 are the stars of these performances.

The Finale of the Haydn is breathtaking; the suddenness of the theme is communicated extraordinarily through Amati's solid sense of time and rhythm. The Allegretto is sublime. It was one of the first pieces to capture my heart as a young boy in New Jersey listening to the classical station on summer nights. Will Zimmermann—first violin—leaves me feeling nostalgic with his magical melody shaping and vibrato.

The *Dissonance* Quartet (19) is perfectly balanced. It is such an easy piece to play badly. We either hear a completely romanticized performance or a dead one, where performers are afraid of vibrato because they are playing "classical" music. Amati indulges in the quartet's milky opening—beautiful legato—but somehow also sounds dry and distant—a wonderful effect. There is some truly tender playing, euphoric, but also anxious and even desperate. I am almost in tears.

The programming of this disc is not random, but inspired. The essay, by Wolfgang Fuhrmann, outlines the history of "Haydn influencing Mozart and Mozart influencing Haydn". Listening to the disc from beginning to end, I hear a similarity in language, a connection, a bond between the two masters. They are both among the most notable and revolutionary in the string quartet form. Amati's Mozart and Haydn are always reliable.

JACOBSEN

MOZART: *Sacred Arias*
Concentus Musicus/ Nikolaus Harnoncourt
Warner 67538 [2CD] 126 minutes

This very enjoyable survey of Mozart's sacred arias is apparently one of two recent Teldec releases that repackage past performances of Mozart's sacred music by Nikolaus Harnoncourt and his trusty original-instruments band, Concentus Musicus Wien, in support of assorted soloists and choirs. The other release is considerably more substantial: a 13-CD set of Mozart's complete sacred music from the same forces that includes everything heard here. The recordings are from 1982 to 1993. That will be reviewed in the next issue.

You may recall that Harnoncourt founded CMW in 1953, just as musicologists were getting serious about researching ancient instruments as well as performance techniques and styles. CMW is THE pioneering original-instruments ensemble that pretty much got the period performance (PP) ball rolling, ushering in the explosive international PP craze of the next several decades. That, in turn, gave rise to the inevitable backlash from several prominent corners of the musical establishment.

The critical barbs long directed at Harnoncourt include allegations of highly idiosyncratic and recklessly distorted approaches—both sonically and interpretively. I am neither clearly for nor against PP—though I consider it an important musical movement. Truly great music can easily withstand a wide range of sonic, stylistic, and interpretive treatments. And I consider Harnoncourt's treatments (most of the time) to be as valid and rewarding as anyone else's—if not more so.

In support of that contention, I offer as "Exhibit 1" the consistent quality of the soloists. These include (among other worthies) sopranos Barbara Bonney, Charlotte Margiono, and Joan Rodgers; alto Jadwiga Rappe; tenors Josef Protschka and Deon van der Walt; plus basses Hakan Hagegard and Laszlo Polgar. "Exhibit 2" is the excellent choirs employed: the Vienna State Opera Chorus and the Arnold Schoenberg Choir—again, among others. These forces—ably supported by CMW—rarely fail to achieve engaging and spiritually uplifting performances of superior technical quality.

The excerpts encompass not only solo arias, but purely choral movements and ensemble passages—for example, the 'Lacrymosa' and 'Benedictus' movements from the *Requiem*. Several selections—like the 'Laudate Dominun' aria from the *Solemn Vespers*—combine solo and choral elements. Arias from Mozart's better-known later works—like the K 427 Mass in C minor—alternate with lesser-known pieces from his early years at the Salzburg court. The selections are invariably well chosen: there's hardly a track that isn't worth hearing.

The digital recording quality is a bit variable, but generally excellent. The trifold booklet contains only track listings and the associated artists—no notes or texts. And don't let

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 125

the album's back-panel's work listings confuse you: they're given in different order than in the booklet.

KOOB

NIELSEN: *Symphony 3; Helios; Silken Shoe on Golden Last; Lower Your Head, O Flower; Paraphrase on Nearer My God to Thee*
Eva Hess-Thayson, s; Jan Lund, t; Liverpool Philharmonic/ Douglas Bostock
Scandinavian 220563—66 minutes

This was formerly Volume 2 of Classico's series of Carl Nielsen symphonies conducted by Douglas Bostock. ARG did not review the original, though the recording of the symphony was favorably mentioned in our *Nielsen Overview* (May/June 2004). I liked what I heard of that series, but this is my first acquaintance with its Third Symphony, and my feelings are mixed. For one thing, it does not sound like a work whose nickname is *Espansiva*. It is generally a no-nonsense reading that is quick, direct, and exciting, with clean lines, vigorous rhythm, clearly defined counterpoint. Everything moves forward with no slight breath pauses before phrases. There are no doubts, no hesitation, and little reflection, nuance, or breadth of tone.

Those characteristics exist in their purest form in I. The stuttering opening chords are fast and short like a machine gun or teletype machine. Tempos are fast and stay that way, save for a called-for slower speed at the second theme. Pacing is propulsive, high-spirited, and often rollicking, but it is also relentless and mechanical. And it doesn't dance.

The Andante Pastorale doesn't sound rushed, but it's not pastoral either. The opening dialog between the string line and the accompanying chords in the horns and bassoon is good. Woodwinds produce clear tone and clean lines, and the strings play their big chords with urgency; but Bostock's tossing off the turn at the end of phrases sounds flippant. He need not ritard, but *some* shaping is required. When the brass join a string entrance later, they display muscle but could sound fuller. The vocal section should be darker and more mysterious. The tenor sounds too close, though the real problem may be that his voice is too operatic for the other-worldly sound called for. The more distant soprano is more winning. (As a supplement, this release includes the only recording of II with Nielsen's option of clarinet and trombone standing in for soprano and tenor. While hardly objectionable, the instruments are no replacement for the voices as far as atmosphere is concerned.)

Because of the Andante's quickish tempo, the Allegretto un Poco for a moment sounds like a continuation, though it recovers quickly enough, if with a tempo that is slightly hurried. Bostock's spirit and energy are admirable, but they come at the cost of deftness and lift.

The Finale responds best to Bostock's direct approach. In fact, he allows Nielsen's broad melodies to expand a little, which serves the performance well and leaves a good impression.

Helios maintains Bostock's direct approach, but the conductor relaxes more while keeping a Sibelian sparseness of texture. It is nothing special, but it works if you're of a mind for it. The short vocal pieces are straightforward and well sung. The most novel item is *Paraphrase on Nearer my God to Thee*, Nielsen's short portrait of the sinking of the Titanic. The hymn is said to be the music played by a string quartet on the deck as the ship went down. Nielsen goes all out—more like blows up—when the ship explodes. I wouldn't play this movement too loudly. Don't say I didn't warn you.

The Liverpool Philharmonic plays well enough, with clean, smallish tone, neat woodwinds, polished horns, and sweet violins: the lack of breadth and weight I write off as a residue of Bostock's design. Still, it does not produce the joy and exuberance of Danish orchestras, my favorite with Nielsen, or the polish and elan of the London ensembles.

There are things to enjoy in this Third Symphony, particularly in the outer movements (assuming you respond to Bostock's I), but I prefer more insight, breadth, and room for phrases to breathe. For a performance along the lines of Bostock's (which I'm told is similar to the classics by Eric Tuxen and Thomas Jensen), the closest I know is Schonwandt, which I prefer. Schonwandt is slower than Bostock in I, as well as lighter and more relaxed, but he does produce a clean-cut, neoclassical interpretation. I also like Berglund, Bernstein, Ahronovitch—all with Danish orchestras—as well as Blomstedt's second recording, with San Francisco. (Blomstedt's earlier Nielsen traversal, with a Danish orchestra, is not as good as the San Francisco, but there is much to be said for it.) Consult the *Nielsen Overview* for more thoughts. Be advised that it finds Schonwandt "shadowy and unsettled", while I think *Overview* favorite Chung is heavy-handed.

The sound on this reissue is good but not great. Knud Ketting wrote the notes for the Classico release, and they were probably far better than the unsigned cursory writings supplied here (which include nothing about *Paraphrase*).

HECHT

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 126

NOVAK, PZ: *Preludes & Fugues*
William Howard, p—Champs Hill 16—76 minutes

Moravian Pavel Zemek Novak (b. 1957) studied in Brno with a pupil of Janacek's, in London (briefly) with George Benjamin, and later in Paris with Gerard Grisey. He currently teaches at the Conservatory in Brno.

These are by no means preludes and fugues in any traditional sense. In fact, there is very little explicit counterpoint in them at all. Instead, they open with brief "subjects", sometimes harmonized or accompanied, that are imitated once at the fifth (the procedure is usually obscured, or what the subject actually is is hard to identify), and there is no development or even obvious repetition.

The set is divided into four books, the first two based on the Old Testament, the last two on the New (the composer is a devout Roman Catholic). The genre is extremely telescoped—the pieces tend to be short and express their vastness without temporal length. Sometimes the explanations don't match up precisely with what I hear. Fugue 6 ('King David') is said to consist of just seven notes, the subject being the first note, the second the answer, the next two the development, and the last three the recapitulation. Now, that's minimalism! There is a short, slow series of chords first, followed by those single notes. It's very striking, but how this is a 'Fugue' is lost on me. Some of the Preludes do illustrate their biblical topics memorably: 3, 'The Flood', and 5, 'The Burning Bush', are vivid.

Book 2 indulges in bits of quotation and reference: Scarlatti is credited for being behind two of the pieces (those, and the Scarlatti pieces involved, are unidentified). 10 quotes from Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and offers five variations with rhythmic allusions to the second movement of Beethoven's kast piano sonata (allusions to the *Hammerklavier* pop up in Prelude and Fugue 12 and leak into the next Book). Book 3 (titled 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us') opens with a subject that becomes the basis for a set of variations. 18 sets 'The Seven Last Words' with those words written into the score.

Book 4 ('Landscapes of the Lamb') substitutes 'Fugues and Postludes' for 'Preludes and Fugues'. The first 10 of these juxtapose aggressive fanfares with meditative echoes, forming what amounts to a series of double variations. 24 strings together the whole set's subjects in a continuous line, adding a new one as a final elliptical flourish.

I am following composer David Matthews's notes closely, since it is impossible to understand what is going on in this fascinating if highly irregular work without a score and substantial explanatory scholarship. That's not to say that the piece is not arresting in and of itself. Mr Matthews has no doubt that this is "one of the finest piano works of our time". It is certainly one of the most interesting, and I look forward to learning more about it as time goes on. Pianist Howard executes his formidable task with assured technique and glowing tone. Listeners with interest in contemporary piano music (not to mention pianists) should not miss this.

GIMBEL

NYMAN: *Facing Goya*
Michael Nyman Band/ Michael Nyman
MN 121 [2CD] 134 minutes

Reissue of Warner 45342, reviewed by Charles Parsons (May/June 2003). The opera concerns an art dealer who looks for Goya's skull, which had disappeared sometime before 1878; her intention is to reunite it with his body because he "is the man in [her] life". Along the way (Acts 1 and 2), she time travels to a 19th Century craniometry lab and a 1930s European (probably German) art gallery; the people she encounters debate the worth of craniometry as a measure of character and potential as well as the ethical implications of eugenics. In Act 3 she takes Goya's skull to a 1980s cloning lab and, after some debate, sells his DNA in the hopes that the secret of his genius can be reproduced. In Act 4, Goya (who has appeared briefly in other scenes) confronts the art dealer and the businessman who hopes to profit from his DNA; after further debate, Goya and the art dealer have a final dialog and the latter, now depressed about her decision and disillusioned by her hero, smashes the skull. The opera ends as Goya gathers the pieces and begins tenderly to reassemble them.

Needless to say, this is an opera driven more by ideas than by character and character development, and that has been one of the chief criticisms leveled at it. Nevertheless, the characters debating these issues do represent a number of viewpoints, and one can glean quite a bit about their (perhaps archetypal) natures from how these viewpoints are expressed, and, sometimes, from the music (passages in Act 2 mentioning Hitler, for instance, contain some of Nyman's most dissonant music). The rest of the music resembles a kaleidoscope that shows musical images both from Nyman's own musical past (a prominent theme from his *Gattaca* soundtrack for instance, appears when the biotech lab is introduced) and other composers (one critic recognizes a quote from Beethoven when Goya appears in the final act); tempos shift regularly and compellingly; the vocal lines tend toward very slow declamation, and (as Mr

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 127

Parsons observed) they are difficult to understand, possibly because the balance between instruments and vocals is very near equal. *Pace* Parsons, however, the music is neither always tonal nor always merry, and has quite a bit of variety. Neither would I say the opera is "dramatically inert". It's definitely not, say, *Tosca*, but it's far more operatic than, say, Adams's *Death of Klinghoffer* (May/June 1993), which is more like an oratorio and about as dramatic as Handel's *Acis and Galatea*. (By the way, Mr Parsons pronounced this opera a work that would restore one's faith in contemporary opera. Chacun a son gout.)

The ideas in *Facing Goya* are well worth considering and they are eminently part of today's human condition. If they are presented in an unorthodox fashion, well, I'm more willing to think that theater is changing, less willing to invoke an older (and less relevant) dramaturgical standard to judge its supposed problems.

HASKINS

OCKEGHEM & COMPERE: *Musiques au Temps d'Anne de France*
La Main Harmonique/ Frederic Betous
Ligia 202217—64 minutes

This is a delightful recording of some very pretty French polyphonic songs by two of the greatest masters active around the turn of the 16th Century. The premise behind this release is that Anne de France may have employed these composers while she was Duchess of the Bourbon court of Beaujeu. The program consists mainly of virelais and chanson-motets by Johannes Ockeghem and Loysete Compere and Alexander Agricola, who may have been his students. One additional song by Johannes Ghiselin, 'O florens rosa', is played by instruments alone.

It is impossible to distinguish between the quality of works and their performance here, because they are all so beautiful. Ockeghem's 'Mort, Tu as Navré de Ton Dart/Miserere' deserves special mention, though. Besides its sensitive performance, it is a work of great historic importance, having been composed on the death of Ockeghem's own mentor, Gilles Binchois. The chanson-motet mentions Binchois by name over a quotation from the Requiem Mass in the tenor. Ockeghem also indulges in some clever references to Binchois's rather dated style of Burgundian composition, with its use of under-third cadences, etc. Compere's 'Plaine d'Ennuy/Anima Mea' also makes reference to outdated uses, but I am not clear on its purpose.

I really like the instrumental interludes and introductions. These are not composed, of course, but improvised; they add tremendously to the performance. The notes are in English, but not the texts.

LOEWEN

PEJACEVIC: *Symphony; Phantasie Concertante*
Volker Banfield, p; Rhineland Orchestra/ Ari Rasilainen
CPO 777418—63 minutes

Dora Pejacevic was born in 1885 in Budapest but moved to Zagreb in Croatia, where her father, a member of a noble Croatian family, became governor. Her mother, a Hungarian countess and a fine pianist, gave Dora her first piano lessons, and she began composing at age 12. Later, her parents sent her to study in Dresden and Munich, where she became an accomplished pianist and violinist. She also studied composition, though to a great extent she was self-taught in that area. She was a person of great curiosity and initiative who made the rounds of intellectuals like Karl Kraus, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Maximilian Vanka. Her music was played fairly often, and she performed regularly on both her instruments. Her greatest period of creativity was during the Great War. She died in 1923 at the age of 38.

Pejacevic's romantic style puts strong emphasis on melody with an Eastern European or Russian tint. Her music is rich, colorful—quite ruddy in a way—as well as cinematic and emotional. Its vigor is remarkable, even in slow movements. Her structures are traditional but quite free because of the linear way she develops motifs with counterpoint, expansion, etc. Most of those motifs are based on a dropping interval and a short-long rhythm. The drop has the effect of a sigh or a swoon typical of the future Hollywood, and the rhythm works as a springboard. There is a touch of the improvisatory to her music that gives the impression that she derived a real joy from writing for the orchestra. She was a tonal composer whose harmonies were chromatic, modulated often, and sometimes employed a whole-tone scale. There may also be a folk element, but without knowing something about Croatian folk music, I cannot be certain. Many composers come to mind when listening: *Richard Strauss and early* Scriabin especially, with doses of Dvořak, Moussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Tchaikovsky, and even Wagner and Mendelssohn. Mahler may belong on this list, but it is hard to point to an example. Because Pejacevic's romanticism looks backward, not forward, I do not liken her to post-Mahlerians like Zemlinsky, Schreker, and Schoeck. For all these influences, her music has a distinctive voice, and if one wants to conjure a "Balkan sound", hers may be it. She deserved better in terms of reputation, but like many early 20th

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 128

Century romantics, she was plowed under by the nihilism and disgust generated by the Great War.

The Symphony in F-sharp minor (1917) begins aggressively with a fanfare and a passage of downward dissonant chords. A stormy movement seems on the horizon, but what we get is a well-structured romantic ramble in the best sense of the term. Strauss comes quickly to mind, but Scriabin does not wait long, though the main motif, introduced in the horns, suggests Rimsky-Korsakoff. Its development dominates the movement. Several climaxes are Russian in flavor, but Strauss returns when the music exhibits more drama and conflict in the last sections. The ending resembles the overt nature of the opening but with less strife and more triumph.

The gorgeous Andante Sostenuto opens with a modal English horn solo singing hauntingly over a softly trodding low brass passacaglia. This theme gains strength only to be succeeded by a more "agile and undulating" (the notes) melody that takes us from Moussorgsky to Tchaikovsky. After a clashing climax, a lone bass clarinet restates the opening theme. Pejacevic imaginatively combines the two melodies before the English horn closes the movement over soft chords.

The scherzo opens like a village dance with occasional demonic coloring. The second section is slower, more mysterious, and spooky, producing images of fairies and goblins, with a touch of Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and low horn calls adding a rustic atmosphere.

The final Allegro Appassionato is stormy, vigorous, and lyrical at the beginning followed by a flowing second subject that sounds as if drawn from the main motif from I. Pejacevic spins out a variety of ideas before combining the main theme of this movement with the first theme from II, culminating triumphantly but with ominous overtones.

The Phantasie Concertante (1919) is one of those cinematic pieces where the orchestra rhapsodizes, rising and falling, developing ideas in similar fashion to the first movement of the symphony, while the piano (sometimes furiously) fills in textures and goes on long virtuosic rides of its own. This is piano-and-orchestra writing in the grandest of romantic traditions—a real showpiece. Think of a flamboyant white-tuxedo-clad heart-throb soloist (which is what this piece requires) playing with an orchestra that is quite busy in its own right. CPO has done a great service (as it so often does) in bringing us what I believe are the first recordings of this fine composer's music. More are promised. I can imagine a lusher sound both from the orchestra and the engineers—particularly in bass reproduction—but the playing and sound we get will more than do. Rasilainen's interpretation seems on the money, and pianist Volker Banfield produces a muscular tone with panache in the Phantasie. Koraljka Kos's notes do a good job with the composer and her music. If you want to know more about Pejacevic, seek out a documentary called *Countess Dora* from 1993.

HECHT

PERGOLESI: *Stabat Mater; Nel Chiuso Centro; Sinfonia to La Conversione die San Guglielmo; Questo e il Piano*
Anna Netrebko, s; Marianna Pizzolato, mz; St Cecilia Academy Orchestra/ Antonio Pappano
DG 15444—72 minutes

Pergolesi was only 26 when he died, but he left behind a considerable body of work, including his much-recorded, brief comic opera, *La Serva Padrona*, and his undisputed masterpiece, a setting of the Stabat Mater. Anna Netrebko, perhaps taking a cue from the musical explorations of Cecilia Bartoli, is stepping out of her usual repertory to participate in this "Tribute to Pergolesi", joined by the young mezzo Marianna Pizzolato. They each sing a secular cantata, then join in the Stabat Mater. The orchestra too has its chance to shine in a very brief overture. The two cantatas make easy listening: vigorous, florid vocal lines, very well crafted and not extended enough to wear out their welcome but not particularly memorable either. The ladies are up to their demands, as they are to the Stabat Mater. This performance is, by modern standards, on the heavy, operatic side, and it seems even weightier because both soloists have dark voices, easy to hear but not strongly contrasted. I wish they were quicker on the draw, so to speak, with all the trills; but they have the tragic measure of the piece and they never trivialize it. Pappano is an enthusiastic partner for them.

If I wanted this type of Stabat Mater, I'd sooner choose the even :lovelier and more agile Freni and Berganza on DG. The two rarities, *Nel Chiuso Centro* (based on the Orpheus and Eurydice story) and *Questo e il Piano* (the complaint of a jilted lover), take up about half an hour of the playing time, so Pergolesi seekers will have to decide if that's enough justification to buy this. Fans of Netrebko will probably want it anyway. The sound is excellent, but no texts are supplied, though they can be found at the DG website.

LUCANO

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 129

PERSICHETTI: *Band Divertimento; Masquerade; Pageant; Band Symphony; Psalm; Parable IX*
Illinois State University Wind Symphony/ Stephen Steele—Albany 1253—70 minutes

I have never really been moved or excited by the music of Vincent Persichetti (1915-87), but there is no question that his dozen or so works for concert band constitute an important part of its literature. They give individual musicians standard, approachable things to do while challenging ensembles with modern harmonies and intricate rhythms.

I am aware of three Persichetti band collections. The best one is by the London Symphony winds, a Naxos bargain. Also excellent is the one by Eugene Corporon's fine wind ensembles at the University of North Texas and Cincinnati College-Conservatory (Sept/Oct 2006). Stephen Steele's young Illinois State musicians might not quite be in that league, but they are very good. Intonation is fine most of the time, and solos are secure, expressive, and skillfully delivered.

KILPATRICK

PETROV: *Creation of the World Suites 1+3; Master & Margarita; Farewell to...*
Maria Lyudko, s; St Petersburg Philharmonic, Chamber Orchestra, State Kapella Symphony/ Yuri Temirkanov, Edward Serov, Alexander Dmitriev, Alexander Tchernushenko
Northern Flowers 9983—72 minutes

Andrei Petrov (1930-2006) was born in Leningrad to a father who was a doctor and an artist mother. The family lived in Siberia during World War II. After they returned to Leningrad, the young Petrov attended the Rimsky-Korsakoff School of Music and the Leningrad Conservatory. His early pieces were mostly ballets and other programmatic works. In the 1960s he turned to scoring films and is probably best known in the West for those efforts, particularly *The Blue Bird,* which was produced through Soviet-American cooperation. Later he wrote more abstract instrumental works, including three symphonies. He served as the head of the St Petersburg Composers' Union from 1964 and as president of the St Petersburg Philharmonic Society from 1998. He won many prizes including the honor of a small newly discovered planet named for him in 1994.

At first hearing, Petrov is a "kitchen sink" composer, often throwing everything but that proverbial item into a work. In fact, he resorts to that technique mostly in fast and loud passages (which are sometimes derivative, as well). His slower passages are often quite beautiful and would not be out of place with second- or third-drawer efforts from the post-Mahler romantics. Alas, they are always interrupted by that sinkful of explosive percussion, screaming brasses, wailing woodwinds, and maniacal strings. Some of his sink passages are clever and well crafted—most would work in a film score—but I cannot escape the notion that Petrov was just trying to be "with it". The effect is inspiration broken up by the hackneyed.

Master and Margarita (1985), based on the novel by Mikhail Bulgakov, is a fantasia that he called a "symphony in free form" and is one of several Petrov works based on artistic figures. It begins with a somber string bass solo that spreads darkly through the string section. There follows several passages of instruments calling (or screaming) to each other, interrupted twice by percussion. A furious string section releases an outpouring of trumpets and horns over a wave of thundering percussion. A contemplative Mahlerian passage that includes a beautiful oboe solo and bells is swept away by an orchestral tidal wave of chortling bassoons and clarinets, roaring horns, chugging strings, etc. Everything comes to a halt but for the organ, sounding at first like an old TV soap opera before evolving into something more sophisticated, sad and sentimental. The orchestra rises to a climax with grinding brass chords, and the middle and low strings spread out like a wave. After a childlike tune in the strings and harp, what sounds like an *ondes martinet* fades into the distance.

Farewell to... (2005) begins like Ives's *Unanswered Question,* with strings moving chordally, their top notes forming the melody. This leads to a flute and horn duet and a quiet interval of percussion and heavy string chords. The sink takes over with piano and high hat cymbals, glissando strings, and a string bass that takes us to a *West Side Story*-type gym, though one less spiffy than Bernstein's. A hurdy-gurdy motif from the organ then turns into a string canon—not a bad development, literally. With the entry of the *"ondes-martinot"* I'm "watching" a 1950s space movie. The day is saved by soprano Maria Lyudko beautifully singing lines from a poem in *Dr Zhivago.* After a solo flute picks up her melody with sneers from a muted trombone, the opening material returns to a quiet ending.

Creation of the World (1971) is Petrov's most famous work of the three, but I find it the weakest. *Creation* may work as a ballet—it was produced internationally, with Mikhail Baryshnikov starring in some performances—but musically it *is* the kitchen sink. The first suite begins with 'Angels' Round Dance', based on a little tune in the woodwinds, but that is kicked aside by a flatulent contrabas-

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 130

soon, car horns, Bronx cheers, and whatnot. After charging brass triplets, the xylophone maintains the tune with smirking simplicity before the onslaught resumes. Part II begins as a string hymn, but soon a jazzy trombone solo leads to a wild dance with riffs and wild percussion. The revelers shake off the craziness with a hymn before another jazzy ride leads to a snide ending. The Third Suite begins with a weird semi-jazzy and very clever Ivesian "variations on a major scale" (my term). That culminates in a rousing hymn suitable to a barn raising. The next section plays on 'Cool' from *West Side Story* (Petrov should have written "Thanks, Lenny" in the score), while 'The Merry Chase' combines Prokofieff's *Romeo and Juliet* with the humor of Poulenc and Milhaud. 'Ave, Eve' is Broadway schmaltz.

This mix of styles frustrated me, but it may appeal to some listeners. Playing and sound serve it well. The notes read like overwritten hagiography from the Soviet era.

HECHT

PLEYEL: *Trios in C, E minor, A, F minor*
Trio 1790—CPO 777 544—72 minutes

There is a fair number of recent recordings of Ignatz Pleyel (1757-1831)—fitting, considering his high standing in his lifetime. A student of Haydn, he was hired in London to compete with Haydn in the 1790s. The resulting rivalry was good humored and affectionate, with each including some of the others works in his concerts.

He wrote about 50 piano trios, most in the 1790s. (This was before establishing his music publishing house and piano factory, which came after his return to France.)

These trios are all well written and include several Scottish themes, since they were commissioned by George Thomson, the Scot who also commissioned trios from Beethoven, Kozeluch, Haydn, Hummel, and Weber.

Trio 1790 is the foremost German organization of period instruments. They play very well, though with a rather thin tone. Good notes and a splendid recording.

BAUMAN

PROKOFIEFF: *Symphonies, all*
French National Orchestra/ Mstislav Rostropovich—Warner 69675 [4CD] 281 minutes

Rostropovich is known for slow, expansive tempos and a romantic, broad treatment even of harsh or sharp-edged works. He lives up to that reputation in this reissue of an Erato set from the 1980s. Tempos range from very slow to the slow side of normal. Textures are weighty and built up from a powerful bass. Attacks tend to be soft and broad. What makes these performances work (assuming you think they do) is their elegance, grace, and the ability of conductor and orchestra to sustain line and intensity despite the lack of bite wit, irony, and brutality that we associate with Prokofieff.

The French National Orchestra is on the top of its game with beautifully colored strings, bright woodwinds, and strong brass. French orchestras are known for the soloistic tendencies of their players; and that, combined with Rostropovich's slow tempos and the engineering, adds up to a lot of nice detail. At the risk of oversimplification, you can call these performances a blend of Russian breadth with French color. Erato's big open soundstage with a lot of bass serves them well.

1. Elegant, slow, and serious are the watchwords. The first movement seems reluctant to find its way, but eventually does. Either that, or I adjusted. The dotted theme in I picks up surprising majesty as it gains volume at this slow tempo. II is balletic, like a dancer gliding across the floor. IV comes in closest to a standard tempo. In doing so, it points to what many will consider a weakness of the entire set—a lack of rhythmic energy that is somewhat hidden by that remarkable ability of the orchestra to sustain the line at slow tempos.

2. Rostropovich's softening romantic approach works well in a piece that would seem to resist it. Apparently, there is so much steel already built in that searching for beauty of line and tone yields rewards, especially in the multifaceted II. The tempos are not that slow, and Rostropovich handles the motor rhythms so that things chug along. Annotator David Nice contends that under the "right conductor the eminently singable tunes buried in the wreckage of [I] should come across loud and clear". Rostropovich proves him right. He is also very good in the slow music from II, which is clean and atmospheric. The same goes for the light-hearted variations that follow. The tough march ending gets its due, and the final chords are nicely open and balanced. I liked this reading of my least favorite Prokofieff symphony as much as I would like anyone's, but it might not please people who insist on more harshness in the first movement.

3. The Third Symphony is energetic, spiky, hotly atmospheric, lush, lyrical, and complex. Because it combines the composer's aggressive and romantic sides so thoroughly, it presents problems to a one-sided approach like Rostropovich's. To an extent, he is able to maintain the required structural balance, but this is still an odd interpretation. Sometimes it seems to meander, and instrumental levels are unusual here and there. Still, there is plenty of color and more fire than the rest of the set would suggest, particularly in III, where, relatively speaking, Rostropovich unleashes a fury. The sound is a little less open, vibrant, and

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 131

impressive than in the other symphonies, but it's still quite good.

4. The Fourth was a commission for the Boston Symphony's 50th Anniversary, so it is surprising that Prokofieff essentially tossed the piece off by plugging in a lot of material from his ballet, *The Prodigal Son.* The result is not a bad work, but as the *Prokofieff Overview* wrote, it lacks the "hysterical tension of the previous symphonies [and it also is missing] drama and hardly seems symphonic much of the time". Rostropovich's performance is OK, but the Fourth's balletic and often witty nature takes a hit from Rostropovich's style and slow tempos. The opening is serenely beautiful, promising much; and indeed, I has some life and is the best performed of the movements. In II, the line moves nicely despite a tempo that is too slow for the content. The slower parts of III have a musing effect, so that is pleasing enough. The spiky Finale suffers most, save for the brash trombone outbursts.

Prokofieff revised the Fourth in 1947, fattening it up, adding material, and increasing its length by half. (The opus numbers are 47 for the original and 112 for the revision.) Judging from this performance, I assume that Rostropovich prefers the revision: it certainly takes to his approach better than the original. It is one of the best performances in the set, particularly in a second movement that is wonderfully warm and dreamy. The string tone is rich and colorful, I don't mind the slow tempos at all, and the sound is especially good.

5. The Fifth is not as slow as usual, but is otherwise true to type. It is a war symphony, and this is one of its darker, more brooding, and menacing (though not brutal) readings. The opening is typically slow, but things pick up at the second subject, and inner detail is revealing. Excellent orchestral balances lend a thoughtful aspect—more so than in some of the other readings here, where beauty and richness are so dominant. The growling bass is important and telling; and the very slow, percussive ending sounds like the artillery barrage that it is. II is not that slow, but there is still plenty of detail; the trio is stylish with excellent horn work, and there is some rare bite in the low muted trumpets. III is the core of the performance—a slow and dreamy funeral march that is steady, deadly, and in a way, Mahlerian. The dirge becomes very powerful toward the end, like a slow 'Mars' from Holst's *Planets.* The Finale is more standard in tempo, and while the low passages in the second half are strong, the movement is a little anticlimactic after its powerful predecessor.

6. This "beautiful" Sixth is definitely not for everyone. Tempos are very slow, with the accent on dark, contemplative lyricism and *gravitas,* but not mass. Like the Fifth but more so, the Sixth is built from the bottom up; and that is emphasized, with real breadth in the low strings and the bass trombone-tuba pairing, with weight applied to fill it out. II is so slow that III feels like an Olympic sprint in comparison. It is actually slightly slow, but it is nicely turned and supplies the required lightening up and release in its context better than several recordings. Many people will say that Rostropovich has this piece all wrong, but it works if you are of a mind for it.

7. This is a large scale, grand reading that is rich, lyrical, and more serious than most. It is one of the best of the set and one of my favorite Sevenths, period. I is slow, but not terribly so, and the tempo reveals interesting inner lines in the strings. II opens powerfully, the midsection is colorful especially in the basses, the oboe solo is nicely dark, and the ending is muscular with a lot of bass drum. III opens with wonderful string tone that is maintained all the way through. IV is leisurely, yet powerful, and moves along well to the original quiet ending.

The notes are of moderate length, but they tell us some interesting things about Prokofieff and these works.

This set makes as good a case for an overtly romantic approach to Prokofieff as I've heard. I would limit recommendation to listeners who are seeking something along these lines, never cared for these works but might in this kind of approach, or are looking for something different to supplement to their Prokofieff collection. I am in Category 3. Anyone else should probably avoid them.

I know of eight other sets and have heard parts of all but Martinon's Vox. My favorites are Kitaenko (the most powerful; often slower than Rostropovich, but more probing, muscular, and brutal, with great playing from Gurzenich Orchestra); Gergiev (neutral and mainstream); Kosler (mainstream, sleek, sometimes too laid back, with a great Czech Philharmonic), and Weller (big, warm, too smoothed over for some, but excellent analog sound).

Jarvi is undercharacterized, sometimes uncertain, with a good, not great, Scottish National Orchestra. Kuchar's somewhat crude performances were inexpensive stopgaps when they came out in the 1990s, but are now dispensable. What I've heard of Ozawa is dead and clueless.

The *Overview* did not recommend a particular set. Looking through the reviews, Mr Vroon loved Kitaenko and said it revised his thoughts on these pieces (Jan/Feb 2009, a long review worth consulting). He did not care for Ozawa. John McKelvey (Sept/Oct 1996) loved

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 132

Weller, ranking it slightly ahead of Kosler, and did not care for Jarvi or Martinon. Mr Godell's favorite was Weller, followed by Jarvi (but not 1 and 5, which precludes buying as a set), noting the conductor's ability to allow even the brutal passages to sing (Jan/Feb 1999). We never reviewed Gergiev.

HECHT

RACHMANINOFF: *Corelli Variations*
with *Elegie, op 3:1; Preludes, op 3:2; op 23:2,4,5,6; op 32:2,3,4,5,10,12*
Vassily Primakov, p
Bridge 9348—77 minutes

with *Sonata 2; Vocalise; 6 Duets, op 11*
Antonio Pompa-Baldi, Emanuela Friscioni, p
Centaur 3062—75 minutes

with **BACH-BUSONI:** *Chaconne;* **RAVEL:** *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales;* **STRAVINSKY:** *Petrouchka movements*
Freddy Kempf, p—BIS 1810—64 minutes

Rachmaninoff's last major work for solo piano has been called by Vladimir Ashkenazy "perhaps his most perfect work". It has been a staple of his repertoire all through his career. With three recordings (2 on LP only: EMI 1813 and London 7236 or Decca 6996; CD: Decca 417671 or 455234) along with a DVD discussion and complete performance (Ashkenazy: Master Musician by Christopher Nupen, Allegro 9, Mar/Apr 2009), I admit that I learned this work through Ashkenazy's performances and consider his readings without peer. It is also special to me because I've had the opportunity to hold the manuscript in my hands (at the Library of Congress) and observe the markings made for publication and even a correction or two glued and pasted in.

Written in France in the summer of 1931, these Variations represent a significant change in compositional style from the Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 39, Rachmaninoff's previous solo piano opus and his last composition written in Russia. There is an economy of means and less redundancy in his expression of emotion in all of his works written in the last dozen years of his life. The piano writing is clearer and cleaner than in the big works from the middle of his life.

Fritz Kreisler recommended the original Corelli Violin Sonata (Op. 5:12) to Rachmaninoff, and it is not a stretch to imagine the two privately reading through it. Corelli used an old, well-known tune called *La Folia* as his theme and followed it by 23 variations. Rachmaninoff was well-acquainted with this old tune, as it figures prominently in Liszt's *Rhapsodie Espagnole* a work he played often in recital. Rachmaninoff took Corelli's setting of 'La Folia' verbatim as his theme, following it with 20 variations and a coda. In between variations 13 and 14, he inserts an unusual Intermezzo, based loosely on the theme, highly ornamented in a baroque manner, and interrupted by three cadenzas, the last of which leads into variation 14. It is so strikingly different that it serves as a break in the normal flow of variations. It also allows the work, so far solidly in D minor, to move far afield to D-flat major for a simple variation—a statement of the theme in a major key. This is followed by the most beautiful variation of the set, a delicate nocturne that shows us that while his compositional technique was evolving, Rachmaninoff was still a master of melody.

It is often noted that this work is the precursor to the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*; the works share many similarities. The very famous (and beautiful) 18th variation from the Paganini work (his next opus) is also in the key of D-flat major. Both works follow their romantic D-flat variation with an immediate return to the home key, much quicker tempos and virtuosic writing in the remaining variations leading to the end. Unlike the fireworks that end the Paganini work, the Corelli coda returns to beauty, with an ambiguous alternation between D major and minor and a very quiet ending back in the minor key.

Primakov's all-Rachmaninoff program is built around an excellent performance of the Variations. His is the poet's Rachmaninoff, each piece unhurried and lovingly crafted. I have enjoyed other Primakov discs, and miss some of the excitement that I found in his youthful concert recordings reviewed a couple of issues ago (Bridge 9322, May/June 2011). Here everything is carefully crafted, and I dare say slower than most other recordings (both the variations and preludes). Each is worth study for the excellent legato phrasing and voicing control Primakov is a master of. Since there are no breakneck speeds or "throw caution to the wind" moments, there is also a scarcity of exciting spots. Four of the preludes he selected here are ones that I also have performed, but with different tempos. Primakov can conjure up wonderful sounds, and the slower, melodious variations and preludes can't be beat.

Antonio Pompa-Baldi also offers an all-Rachmaninoff program. I'll only speak of the Variations here and deal with Sonata 2 later. His is a fine, well-balanced performance with good attention to details, but not so much that it gets in the way of the flow of the music. Of the five releases covered in this and the next Rachmaninoff review, Pompa-Baldi is the most enjoyable. Much of this has to do with the other works, but the Variations are as solid and musical as I could hope for, and Centaur's production values (recording and booklet qualities) are excellent.

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 133

Freddy Kempf first came to my attention a decade ago via an ARG review of his Rachmaninoff Sonata 2 and Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 39 (BIS 1042, Jan/Feb 2001). This great-sounding SACD recital opens with a fine performance of the Variations. If I am very picky, I would find a little fault with Variation 8 (too slow), Variation 13 (over-pedaled), the Intermezzo and Variation 17 (brittle, too loud melody with not enough legato). On the other hand it is, overall, the best performance of this group, the most exciting performance, and only the opening piece of four 20th Century masterpieces on this program. I have heard several performances of the great Bach-Busoni *Chaconne* in the past year, but none as engaging as this. I did find the back-to-back programming of two large works in the key of D minor a choice I would not have made. The following work, Ravel's *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales,* is one of the more restrained of the French master's large scale works. Its lack of overt virtuosity and Schubertian delicacy are well played by Kempf, who should have placed it second in the program. The spectacular *Petrouchka* is so suited to Kempf's strengths that it alone would make this release worth getting. He doesn't quite knock Pollini's DG recording out of first place, but he's solidly in second place for best recorded performance of this very difficult piece.

HARRINGTON

RACHMANINOFF: *Piano Concertos 1+4; Paganini Rhapsody*
Simon Trpceski, Liverpool Philharmonic/ Vasily Petrenko—Avie 2191—77 minutes

There is no magic or romance here.

All the notes are present; all is played accurately. But the listener is left unmoved. There is no majesty; there is no swell of passion, no build-up of feeling. It is sterile and cold. It is English, even if the conductor is Russian.

Further comment would be superfluous.

VROON

RACHMANINOFF: *Piano Sonata 2*

with **SCHUMANN:** *Carnaval;* **CHOPIN:** *Polonaise-Fantasy*
Anastasia Voltchok
Genuin 11201 59 minutes

with **ABRAMYAN:** *4 Preludes;* **BABAJANYAN:** *Capriccio; Improvisation; Folksong; Elegy; Poem*
Sona Shaboyan—Gallo 1321—55 minutes

Following the completion of the *Variations on a Theme of Corelli* (see above review), Rachmaninoff began revising his Piano Sonata 2. "I look at my early works and see how much there is that is superfluous. Even in the sonata so many voices are moving simultaneously and it is too long. Chopin's Sonata is 19 minutes long and says everything." So Rachmaninoff set about applying his new leaner compositional techniques to the 1913 sonata. Any note or section not deemed essential was subject to revision or outright deletion. What works well in the Corelli Variations does not always fit a work composed in the heart of Rachmaninoff's big, complex, virtuoso middle period. Consider the Piano Concerto 3, Opus 32 Preludes, and Etudes-Tableaux and remember that the original sonata (Op. 36) came from the same time. The revision was not effective for Rachmaninoff the pianist, and after a few years it fell from his repertoire.

The success of this work, now one of the most recorded piano sonatas written in the 20th Century, has to be attributed to Vladimir Horowitz. He had learned the original version while still living in Russia, and he looked at the revised version and approached Rachmaninoff about combining it with the original. With the composer's blessing, he set about his task, relying more on the original than the revision, but taking freely from both. The third version was completed only a couple of months before Rachmaninoff's death, and it is not known whether or not he ever had the opportunity to review what Horowitz had done. It was certainly his performances over the years, always guaranteed to produce a standing ovation, that kept the work alive. As editions of both the original and revised version became readily available, so too were detailed essays on what Horowitz had done in his combined version.

It is the revised version that we most often hear on recordings and in concert. While the original comes around about one in four times, the Horowitz or similar combinations that were popular in the last quarter of the 20th Century seem to be going away. It should be noted that, while the revised version is significantly less difficult than the original, many passages are exactly the same, and a complete virtuoso technique is required to perform either version. The three recordings here are all of the 1931 revised version, and each is fully satisfying. I might quibble about a passage here and there, but the reader would be best served by selecting the disc where the other works are most to their liking.

Antonio Pompa-Baldi's (see earlier review) Sonata 2 earns very high marks for the number of inner voices he brings out. Considering that I have probably listened to 20 different recordings of this work in the past year, someone who brings something new to their performance is always appreciated. Sometimes the inner voice is given prominence to the detriment of the main voice, especially in the sec-

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 134

ond movement. Pompa-Baldi is an Italian pianist who currently lives and teaches in Cleveland. His biography, discography, competition prizes, and concert schedule are quite impressive (www.pompa-baldi.com) and I imagine that he makes a fantastic teacher. His own transcription of the famous *Vocalise* is included and simply presents the voice and piano parts combined and exquisitely voiced. He is joined by his talented wife (also a professor of piano at the Cleveland Institute of Music) in Rachmaninoff's piano duet. While these are not considered among his greatest works, they have been making more and more appearances on CDs and even in concert halls in the past decade. They are fun to learn and perform and are quite well received by audiences. They may lack compositional sophistication that calls for detailed analysis, but given as good a performance as they get here they are very enjoyable. Of the five discs covered in this and the previous Rachmaninoff review, Pompa-Baldi would be the first one I would purchase if I were not fortunate enough to have them all.

Anastasia Voltchok combines a fine performance of the sonata with a very good Schumann *Carnaval* and Chopin *Polonaise-Fantasy*. Here I found the Schumann to be the best performance. All of the mercurial musings embodied in these miniature masterpieces are played to the hilt by Voltchok. *Carnaval* had its first concert performance played by Liszt and its first recording by Rachmaninoff. Here it is followed by a late Chopin masterpiece, which is also given a strong performance. The sonata, at just under 20 minutes, is the quickest of the three dealt with here. That might be deceptive if you just listened to the final big tune and coda, where she is more deliberate than the others with a big ritard into the final Presto. She gives us the most beautiful second movement, too. The long build-up to the first climax is perfectly paced. After the cadenza, as the big sustained sonority fades away, the final page begins out of the vanishing sound haze in what can only be described as a perfect manner.

Sona Shaboyan is an exciting young Armenian pianist who places the sonata between two groups of shorter Armenian pieces by Abramyan and Babajanyan (which I've also seen spelled Babadjanian). The four Preludes by Abramyan are from a complete set of 24 and most definitely worth hearing. The Babajanyan are in more of a "Pops" idiom, such as Khachaturian's famous 'Sabre Dance'. There is a clear modal Russian oriental flavor to these enjoyable pieces. Rachmaninoff's sonata is well voiced and has a great flow. Melodies and counter melodies are balanced, and her bravura is engaging. My only criticism is in the final pages, at the final Presto, 27 bars from the end. The headlong rush to the end begins with four two-bar phrases, and Shaboyan uses a lot of pedal and makes them muddy. A very small criticism for a wonderfully executed performance. I am quite impressed with the piano sound here as well as some good and well-translated booklet notes. I'll look forward to more from both the label and the pianist.

HARRINGTON

RACHMANINOFF: *Vespers*

Lotte Hovman, a; Poul Emborg, t; Copenhagen Oratorio Choir/ Torsten Mariegaard

Scandinavian 220576—56 minutes

Here's a very nice rendition of Rachmaninoff's ever-popular *Vespers*, bringing the number of recordings I've covered for ARG to ten. It's an apparent reissue under licence of a 2002 recording that never came our way. I like to keep in touch with this glorious music; being a choral "basso profundo", I invariably dig out my dog-eared score and sing along at least once as I listen to each new recording—in part to reassure myself that age hasn't yet robbed me of all those low notes that form this work's foundation. Besides, what better way to experience music than from the inside out? The only thing that beats listening to great choral music is singing it.

I find little, if any real fault with this account. The Copenhagen Oratorio Choir is made up of two reputable chamber choirs—Pegasus and Terpsichore (I'm familiar with the latter)—both led by Mr Mariegaard, the conductor here. Their combined singing is smooth, sonorous, and technically assured. Their bass section, while lacking the seismic rumble of real Russian "oktavists", anchors the music admirably. Interpretively, Mariegaard emphasizes the work's more meditative qualities.

Yet I miss the Slavic intensity that you get from choirs that specialize in music of the Orthodox tradition. While most of the performances I've reviewed are from non-Russian ensembles, the Brilliant label offers an idiomatically convincing, yet refined account from a fine Ukrainian choir under Yevhen Savchuk (J/A 2005); the same review compares that one to another top pick of mine: a particularly radiant, yet very different performance from the Dale Warland Singers. But my all-time favorite remains Paul Hillier's shattering reading, with his Estonian Philharmonic Chamber choir, on Harmonia Mundi (S/O 2005).

Still, the performance at hand is most enjoyable, and its low price (under $10) makes it a good choice for the budget-conscious listener. Recording quality is very good; we get brief notes and bios, but no texts.

KOOB

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 135

RACHMANINOFF: *Paganini Rhapsody;* see SAINT-SAENS

RAJTER: *Orchestral Works*

Janacek Philharmonic/ David Porcelijn
CPO 777574—75 minutes

Ludovit Rajter (1906-2000) was well known as a conductor and teacher but much less so for his compositions. Though Slovakian by birth he spent much of his career in Hungary and only later in (what had become) Czechoslovakia. His music was rather old-fashioned when it first appeared in the early 1930s—very much in the manner of the Hungarians of the generation preceding his, notably Leo Weiner, Kodaly, and (his teacher) Dohnanyi. Though he continued to write into his 90s he retained his tonal, East-European conservative style. There are folk-style tunes aplenty (though with the rough edges rounded off and *sans* Bartokian asperities) and a few faint echoes of Janacek, but the five works here (one gathers they are representative of his orchestral output) are for the most part genial, melody-rich works that would have been easily digested by contemporaneous audiences. Think a somewhat tamed-down, more heavily scored *Hary Janos* with a little less personality and sass to get an idea of Rajter's typical manner—or, if you know it, Leo Weiner's *Hungarian Folk Song Suite*.

Included are Divertimento from 1932, Symphonic Suite from 1933, Suite from the ballet *Pozsonyi May Festival* from 1938, Sinfonietta from 1993, and *Impressionist Rhapsody* from 1995. Most listeners will enjoy these unassuming, appealing, lively pieces with no problem. Movements tend to be unfussy and modestly proportioned. Just don't expect anything cerebral or profound. Rajter has little interest in the extensive symphonic working-out of thematic ideas or dramatic conflict; he aims simply to please, charm, and edify without strain or struggle. Indeed much here would fit very comfortably onto a Proms concert—certainly the delightful eight dances excerpted from *Pozsonyi May Festival*.

Performances and sonics are, as we've come to expect from CPO and its distinguished artists, excellent.

LEHMAN

REBAY: *Clarinet & Guitar*

Luigi Magistrelli & Massimo Laura
Brilliant 94171—76 minutes

Milan Conservatory clarinet professor Luigi Magistrelli and La Scala guitarist Massimo Laura have done much to illuminate the little known repertoire for clarinet and guitar. Here, in a series of recordings from 2005 and 2006, they offer the entire clarinet and guitar portfolio of early 20th Century Viennese composer Ferdinand Rebay (1880-1953). Although Rebay studied with eminent teachers at the Vienna Conservatory, including pianist Joseph Hofmann and composer Robert Fuchs, he never achieved the fame of other students past and present; and while he wrote music at a time of modernist upheaval, he preferred the boundaries he knew as a youth. He served as a choral director and a piano teacher and produced strongly tuneful and folk-influenced pieces in a romantic and neo-classical idiom. His music for clarinet and guitar include three multi-movement sonatas, a set of three small recital pieces, and a brief theme-and-variations on a melody by Chopin.

As heirs to the Italian treble-dominated tradition, Magistrelli and Laura offer knowledgeable and heartfelt renditions, but the simple melodies and the transparent textures also leave them little room to hide. Most of the problems lie with Magistrelli, who cannot overcome his German set-up to complement his otherwise delightful phrasing. His sound lacks vibrancy and ring; he often has intonation problems; his tongue sometimes bounces off the reed; and he often presses too much, always preferring to be an extrovert when a more delicate and understated approach would work better. Laura understands this, but he defers to Magistrelli too much, and the result is often a pleasant guitar line far in the background and a dominating clarinet presence, even when the guitar has the melody.

Nevertheless, Rebay comes across as a bonafide minor master, boasting all the craft of his better-known contemporaries and lacking only in name recognition. His melodic gifts and skillful handling of the melody-harmony framework between these two seemingly very different instruments make his library a wellspring for both serious concerts and light chamber recitals.

HANUDEL

REGER: *Violin Concerto; Romances; Aria*

Kolja Lessing; Göttingen Symphony/ Christoph-Mathias Mueller—Telos 97—79 minutes

In this performance of the concerto, we hear violinist Adolf Busch's 1938 re-orchestration of its accompaniment. I understand Busch's trepidation—Reger's scores look like he got paid by the note. But his re-scoring doesn't sound greatly different from Reger's own. I suspect conductors and recording engineers on other recordings have kept a close eye on balances. Furthermore, in the heavier tutti passages, the soloist is often silent.

For most listeners, a greater drawback will be the excessive length of the piece. Reger

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 136

sometimes lacked a sense of scale. My favorite of his works, the Symphonic Prologue to a Tragedy, lasts 32 minutes. (It is a stupendous achievement—really a great one-movement symphony.) The piece originally ran 50 minutes, but apparently even Reger flinched at the prospect of an overture lasting nearly an hour.

The concerto needed similar revision; it's simply too long. The first movement alone is nearly half an hour, with much of the solo part given to what sounds like endless noodling of rhythmically monotonous pattern work. Things pick up in the finale. It has a peppy theme, with an elegantly contrasted second subject; but even here you soon get the picture of a composer who simply won't weed the garden.

The shorter works are more contemplative and quite beautiful in their understated eloquence. Kolja Lessing makes the most of the music. His excellent playing in the violin's lower register is particularly attractive in the Romances and Aria, as they exploit that part of its range so movingly.

O'CONNOR

REICH: *Electric Counterpoint; Vermont Counterpoint; 6 Marimbas*
Kuniko, perc—Linn 385 [SACD] 41 minutes

Kuniko is an exciting and expressive percussionist who has performed a great variety of 20th Century music. She has made idiomatic arrangements of two pieces from Reich's "Counterpoint" series (*Electric Counterpoint* was originally scored for guitars; *Vermont Counterpoint*, for flutes) and produces a delightful multitracked recording of *Six Marimbas*. I cannot fault the ingenuity and care of the arrangements and am awed by her technique and musicality. Unfortunately, the percussion instruments she uses (including steel drums and marimbas) obligate her to transpose much of *Electric Counterpoint* up an octave, and I miss the solid foundation for the harmony that the lower notes supply in the original. On the other hand, the *Vermont* arrangement (scored for vibes) improves on the flute original in many ways, not least in rhythmic incisiveness.

HASKINS

RONTGEN: *Violin Concertos 1+3; Ballad*
Liza Ferschtman; Rheinland-Pfalz Philharmonic/ David Porcelijn
CPO 777 437—74 minutes

These are traditional works of high quality. In Concerto 1 (1902), the soloist has the first word—and most of the others. The accompaniment furnishes good support with some unusual darkly colored harmonic progressions. Like several Rontgen pieces, the finale uses a Dutch folk song as its basis. The general effect is like an updated Mendelssohn, charm included.

Concerto 3 (1931) is more conservative, austere even. I'd describe the music as a controlled rhapsody. It's thoughtful in mood, but the brief, lively finale wraps it up in style.

The Ballad (1918), an autumnal piece, sounds like a symphonic poem with an elaborate violin part. Rontgen's biographer Jurjen Vis theorizes that it may express his relief at the ending of World War I. (Though he lived mostly in Holland, Rontgen was always sentimental about his German homeland. In the 1920s he used to visit the exiled Kaiser at Doorn.) The music makes skilful use of the harp in its accompaniment. The great English analyst Donald Francis Tovey once wrote that nobody should be foolish enough to use a harp in a violin concerto. Rontgen proves him wrong, but as he and Rontgen were good friends, Tovey no doubt made allowances.

This likeable music stretches the soloist every bit as much as many far less graceful offerings, and with a far more entertaining effect. Soloist Ferschtman clears every hurdle with a strong, sweet tone, not only in the extremes of range, but while negotiating some drastic leaps of register. Porcelijn's conducting displays sympathy in breadth and depth. Justin Davidson described violin concertos as "an unfair contest where the underdog always wins". Here everybody wins.

O'CONNOR

ROSLAVETS: *Piano Pieces;* see SCRIABIN

ROSSI: *Cleopatra*
Dimitra Theodossiou (Cleopatra), Alessandro Liberatore (Marc Antony), Paolo Pecchioli (Caesar); Macerata Sferisterio Festival/ David Crescenzi
Naxos 660291

In March/April I expressed mild enjoyment of the DVD of Rossi's opera. It's a restrained work with more drama in the recitatives than in the arias. The music is innocent enough—no great outbursts of emotion, no "take home tunes". It's all very professional, finely crafted, pleasantly enjoyable, but hardly memorable.

If one simply has to have a recording of *Cleopatra* go for the video. It's attractive enough to distract the ear, but the park-and-bark staging does not help.

PARSONS

ROSSINI: *Arias*
Julia Lezhneva, s; Sinfonia Varsovia/ Marc Minkowski—Naive 5221—58 minutes

Russian-born Julia Lezhneva is only 22 years old, yet she has chalked up an impressive

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 137

number of credits, including with the Rossini festival in Pesaro and master classes given by the great Rossini interpreter, Teresa Berganza. I like her; she's very promising and may well have a future in Rossini operas.

There is a rich, dark quality to her lyric soprano that enables her to cope quite well with the *Cenerentola* rondo, a mezzo aria. But her voice can easily manage the uppermost reaches of the soprano aria without losing beauty of tone. Hers is indeed a lovely sound with no awkward glitches. Ms Lezhneva could use more variety of expression and vocal colors from time to time. *Semiramide's* 'Bel raggio', for example, needs more sparkle. She sounds very comfortable and confident in these arias.

Shame on Naive for not making this recording 15 to 20 minutes longer. Marc Minkowski, perhaps best known for his recordings of baroque repertory and classical and romantic French operas, is a very supportive colleague. The Sinfonia Varsovia (Minkowski is its music director) plays with sparkle and grace for the arias, but sparkle is only intermittently present in Minkowski's sometimes deliberate pacing of the *Cenerentola* Overture. Bios, texts, and translations.

MARK

ROSSINI: *Petite Messe Solennelle; Dal Tuo Stellato Soglio*
Katia Ricciarelli, Margarita Zimmermann, Jose Carreras, Samuel Ramey; Craig Sheppard, Paul Berkowitz, p; Richard Nunn, harmonium; Ambrosian Singers/ Claudio Scimone
Newton 8802059 [2CD] 85 minutes

Thanks to this release, we now have first-rate performances of Rossini's 80-minute oddball tailored to fit small, medium, and large -sized tastes. An intimate and jaunty approach was taken by Rolf Beck and his South German Chorus on a Berlin issue we liked very much (Jan/Feb 2001). On a more expansive scale, there's Marcus Creed and the 37 singers of his RIAS Chamber Choir who whisked the work out of the Paris salon it was written for and into the concert hall as the band—a pair of 19th Century Pleyels and an 1869 Debain harmonium—played on. And now, re-entering the arena, are Maestro Scimone and company who went before the microphones 28 years ago to accord Rossini's original version of the Mass the most operatically-charged performance of all.

No question that Scimone's grand, *molto drammatico* approach takes us even further away from that salon. But the keyboard accompaniment combined with a tasteful sense of restraint keeps the work sounding enough like the liturgical curio Rossini intended. Besides, it's all brought off with so much flair that the finished product is impossible to resist. Ramey sounds like the voice of God, but a deity with enough spring in his vocal step to move smartly through the registers and blend nicely with his colleagues. Ricciarelli delivers an attractive 'O salutaris hostia', and croons gorgeously with the mezzo in a gently rippling 'Qui tollis'. Carreras was very much in "Old Carreras" form in 1983, delivering his 'Domine Deus' with such power and feeling he could continue into Verdi's 'Ingemisco' without missing a step.

I have no idea how many Ambrosians were on duty for Scimone, but the ensemble sounds larger than Creed's. They are very good, though they don't convey the spiritually rapt *innigkeit* the RIAS choir achieved in the 'Christe eleison' when they turned Rossini into a direct descendant of Palestrina and Byrd. But their two big fugues—'Cum sancto spiritu' and 'Et vitam venturi'—really jump for joy.

Everything sounds terrific, thanks to astute work from the Erato engineers of yesteryear. Adding to the joy is a delightfully slushy performance of the choral prayer from *Mose in Egitto*, with Ruggero Raimondi, June Anderson, Sandra Browne, and Salvatore Fisichella doing the solo honors. This is where notes and a libretto (neither is supplied) would have helped the most.

If I had to pick one reading of the *PMS* to live with, it would be Marcus Creed. The harmonium, which adds so much to the individuality of the piece, is more prominent there, plus I like the vivacity of his oratorio-scaled soloists. Nifty choral touches, such as an imaginative change of articulation in the middle of the 'Et vitam' counterpoint, help make it extra special (Harmonia Mundi 901724; July/Aug 2001). But whether you choose small, medium, or large, do stay with the work in its original format, which is more distinctive and interesting than the overblown orchestrated version Rossini crafted a few years after. That way, the *PMS* won't sound like anything else—as it definitely shouldn't.

GREENFIELD

ROTA: *Symphony 3; Divertimento Concertante; Concerto Soiree*
Barry Douglas, p; Davide Botto, db; Filarmonica 900/ Gianandrea Noseda
Chandos 10669—62 minutes

I liked Nino Rota's first two symphonies a lot for their charm and feel of spring (Chandos 10546, N/D 2009), but most of this program is disappointing. The *Concerto Soiree*, for piano and orchestra, reminds me of one of the magnificent visual jokes in Val Kilmer's hilarious 1984 movie *Top Secret*: German soldiers on

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 138

jeeps and motorcycles are hurriedly leaving a military compound; on the right side of the screen, a soldier is flagging them to turn to your left—until the camera pulls back and instead of a battalion, you see the same seven or eight vehicles driving in a circle. When the Concerto starts, you think, "Oh boy, we're going somewhere, somewhere worthwhile", but there is repetition instead of development. The piece reminds me of a lesser version of Gavin Bryars's *Fiancailles* (which I love), but sunnier, and with oboes; maybe I should like it on its own terms, but I expect better things of Rota.

In I of the *Divertimento Concertante*, for double bass and orchestra, Rota tried to construct the melody from arpeggios that should have been relegated to the cadenza; II, 'Marcia', also over-uses them as thematic material. III and IV are more interesting, partly because of a nice climax in III and some fascinating chromatic turns in IV. But the double bass's voice simply isn't strong enough to carry concerto material; when I first played this in my car, it sounded like they recorded the soloist from backstage.

Symphony No. 3 is much better; it was written nearly 20 years after the first two symphonies. It's neoclassical, with a formally structured first movement; II is a fetching adagio—what struck me the most are the trills, which sound nearly baroque for a few measures, then turn into something mysterious. Rota's writing is tonal but chromatic, and the symphonies have many interesting ideas and solid development. I hear little hints of Prokofieff in his writing, in the lightness of the music and the puckish orchestration; some of the harmonic progressions in IV are echoes of the last movement of Prokofieff's *Classical Symphony*. If you liked Symphonies 1 and 2, you may like this one even better—there's more variety and depth. The sound is excellent, crisp and rich; there are a few minor intonation problems, but overall the orchestra plays quite well. Notes in English, French, and Italian.

ESTEP

RUDERS: *Piano Concerto 2; Bel Canto; Serenade on the Shores of the Cosmic Ocean*
Rune Tonsgaard Sorensen, v; Vassily Primakov, p; Mikko Luoma, acc; iO Qt; Norwegian Radio Orchestra/ Thomas Sondergard

Bridge 9336—64 minutes

Volume 6 in Bridge's Poul Ruders series.

The Second Piano Concerto (2009-2010) opens with a sweet, gentle solo but almost immediately goes on to nastier business. The slow movement interrupts meandering diatonic introspection with hideous blasts of crassness. The wild finale has cartoon-like bombast in its outer sections and a brief spell of that gentle music at its center. "Lots of fun for everybody", says the composer.

Bel Canto (2004) is a six-minute solo violin piece written for that year's Carl Nielsen Violin Competition. Essentially lyrical, as the title suggests, it comes across as a sort of dreamy cadenza to a nonexistent violin concerto. The effect is unconvincing.

Serenade on the Shores of the Cosmic Ocean (2004), inspired by Carl Sagan, is a nine-movement suite for accordion and string quartet. The mostly brief pieces explore the moon, the sun, and the Milky Way with quotations from Darwin, Shakespeare, and Sagan himself and a nod to Joseph Conrad for good measure. Accordion and string quartet proves an interesting blend. The music spans a variety of textures and moods, from explosive (1) to expressive (5), quietly soulful (6) to grotesque (7). Ruders has a loyal following. His fans will want to investigate.

GIMBEL

RUTTER: *Gloria; Magnificat; Te Deum*
Elizabeth Cragg, s; Tom Winpenny, org; Ensemble DeChorum, St Alban's Cathedral Choir/ Andrew Lucas

Naxos 572653—65 minutes

The *Gloria* is given a deft performance that's a bit too small and careful to rival Rutter's own. But the delightful *Magnificat* is as good as any. Cleobury (EMI) did it well but this is better; lighter, brighter, and more sumptuously recorded. The 'Esurientes', which might be the loveliest Rutter interlude of all, is sung gorgeously by soprano Elizabeth Cragg. (Cleobury used a choirboy, with predictably pale results.) Here the work is heard in the composer's scaled-down version for choir, organ, and chamber orchestra. If the jacket hadn't mentioned it, I wouldn't have noticed. (Or cared, for that matter.) The 8-minute *Te Deum* also goes well. Here's hoping these folks get a crack at Rutter's Requiem with the same engineering crew in tow. English and Latin texts are supplied. For the *Magnificat*, exit Cleobury and enter Lucas.

GREENFIELD

SAINT-SAENS: *Piano Concerto 2;*
RACHMANINOFF: *Paganini Rhapsody;*
LISZT: *Hungarian Fantasy*
Elisso Bolkvadze, Tbilisi Symphony/ Jansug Kakhidze

Cascavelle 3151—66 minutes

These recordings have been around for nearly 20 years. They first appeared on Infinity Classics, a super-budget label created by Sony to

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 139

compete with Pilz, LaserLight, et al. Though the list price was set at $4.98, they sold in many stores for as little as $2.99. Cascavelle's reissue is at full price.

Is it worth it? Ms Bolkvadze is a competent pianist, but these are rather dull run-throughs. In the Saint-Saens II lacks any playfulness, while III is earthbound. The abysmal Tbilisi orchestra is at its worst in the Liszt—it plods lifelessly until the final pages, where Ms Bolkvadze and Maestro Kakhidze go horribly out of sync. And there's nothing very rhapsodic in the Rachmaninoff, where some glaring orchestral bloopers give the performance an amateur-hour feel. Perhaps the substandard playing of the Tbilisi ensemble explains why the balances are so ridiculous in the Saint-Saens and the Rachmaninoff. The orchestra sounds like it's at the other end of the hall, while the piano is in your lap.

I'm a firm believer in the theory that exceptional performances can be found in unlikely corners, but these are exceptionally bad.

KOLDYS

SARASATE: *Fantasy on Magic Flute; on Faust; Navarra; Muineiras; Barcarolle Venitienne; Introduction et Caprice-Jota*
Tianwa Yang, v; Navarra Symphony/ Ernest Martinez Izquierdo
Naxos 572275—59 minutes

In my review of the second volume of this set (M/A 2008), I described Tianwa Yang's playing as "perfect", a word I reserve for only the rarest of circumstances and the rarest of violinists. I have to use it again for this recording. In addition to perfection, this third volume is full of surprise and delight; surprise because aside from 'Navarra' all the music is new to me, and delight because I love it all.

The orchestra is as present as the soloist on this recording, and Izquierdo brings out all the delightful details of wind writing in the orchestrations, particularly in the Mozart Fantasy and the Faust Fantasy. Yang plays both solo violin parts in 'Navarra', but she does each using a different Vuillaume violin. One is her Vuillaume, and the other is the Vuillaume that Sarasate played. I don't even want to think about how Sean Lewis, the remarkable engineer, was able to make this work. Then again, he wasn't working with an ordinary virtuoso or an ordinary orchestra.

This is the third volume of eight. I'm already looking forward to Volume 4, which I hope Yang records with the same orchestra and engineer.

FINE

SCARLATTI: *Sonatas*
Alexandre Tharaud, p
Virgin 42016—71 minutes

Tharaud has a supple touch. He allows the sound of the piano to bloom and breath, especially in the slower sonatas, where his messa di voce would make Caccini proud. The fast sonatas reveal a dissonance between Tharaud and the instrument. The ceiling of the piano's sound and threshold Tharaud (or perhaps Scarlatti) is pushing toward exist on parallel lines, most of the time. In K 141, the tension between the pianist and the piano becomes a source of inspiration and energy. In that sonata, Tharaud and the piano meet halfway. This is an honest recording that does not whitewash or ignore the peculiar challenges of performing Scarlatti on the modern piano.

KATZ

SCARLATTI: *Sonatas*
Alberto Mesirca, g—Paladino 3—80 minutes

Jan Sommer, Per Dybro, g
Scandinavian 220572—56 minutes

Two new releases devoted to Scarlatti transcriptions, one particularly wonderful. A little more than a year ago, I reviewed a performance by Luigi Attademo on Brilliant (M/J 2010) and remarked that entire discs devoted to Scarlatti on guitar were rather rare. Ask and ye shall receive. The next issue I got another by Steven Marchionda (J/A 2010), with a completely different program and a completely different approach. Now here are two more, again with transcriptions mostly by the players, and only two duplications (K 109 and K 466).

Mesirca's performance is the best of the four. Indeed, this the best Scarlatti I've ever heard on solo guitar. It even rivals the magnificent Assad brothers' recording on Nonesuch—and they had the advantage of two guitars. This is sparkling playing. Passage work is tossed off effortlessly, no matter how rapid; ornamentation is graceful and elegant, perfectly and stylishly realized. He has a wonderful range of dynamics and color and a flawless tone. He has obviously listened to Kirkpatrick's advice that one should not let the tonal restrictions of Scarlatti's harpsichord restrict the range of expression on an instrument with a wider palate. He can express melancholy and mystery when the music requires it, but he is best in passages of sheer joy and exuberance—and that, for me, is what Scarlatti does best.

I might have had a more positive response to the Sommer and Dybro recording if this weren't up for a side-to-side review. Their performance is certainly enjoyable—they also have a lovely tone and a nice dynamic range.

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 140

Ensemble is good, and they play with ease except in the most demanding passages, where they can't match Mesirca's virtuosity. Their approach to ornamentation is old-fashioned—the sort of thing Segovia might have used. It's more 19th Century than baroque, so if that annoys you, you'd best avoid this release. Notes are scant, and there is a short bio of Sommer, though no mention of his partner.

Still, they also have a nice sense of joy here, and there are few duplications between the two recordings, so if you love Scarlatti on the guitar, you won't regret getting both. But you certainly should seek out Mesirca's outstanding record.

KEATON

SCHARWENKA: *Piano Concerto 4; Mataswintha Overture; Andante Religioso; Polish National Dances (3)*
François Xavier Poizat, Poznan Philharmonic/ Lukasz Borowicz

Naxos 572637—67 minutes

"Energy, harmonic interest, strong rhythm, many beautiful melodies, and much Polish national character—all that and much more is to be found in the music of Franz Xaver Scharwenka", writes HV Hamilton in the pages of Grove's (Fifth Edition). Reviewing Seta Tanyel's Collins CD of Scharwenka's First Piano Concerto (July/Aug 1992), Donald Manildi reminds us that this sort of effusive, heart-on-sleeve keyboard writing is "an exhilarating celebration of what the piano can really sound like when a skilled virtuoso-composer produces a brilliant vehicle aimed at nothing more (or less) than the pure enjoyment of soloist and audience"—a sentiment I was pleased to echo on reviewing Ms Tanyel's splendid follow-up of 2 and 3 five years later (May/June 1997).

Why then is his music played so seldom in concert these days? The only piece you're likely to recognize from recital programs is the 'Polish National Dance', Op. 3:1, one of the three offered here. Like Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C-sharp minor and Paderewski's Minuet in G this one piece came to be not only Scharwenka's "calling card" but also his curse, the one piece audiences clamored to hear. Certainly Scharwenka took great pride in his Polish heritage; and even when he strays far from home, as in the tarantella that caps the Fourth Concerto, his music is always highly emotional, deeply felt, and by any standard fully equal to anything by his far better known compatriots, Chopin and Paderewski.

In the Fourth Concerto Scharwenka compels attention right away with a massive orchestral tutti ending with a drum roll—reversing the order set by Brahms in his D-minor Concerto—that soon develops into a melody vaguely redolent of the Dvořak concerto written some 30 years before. There's a broadly nostalgic episode with rippling keyboard configurations that will no doubt remind you of Liszt before the opening movement—by far the longest of the four—closes out in suitably dramatic style.

The Intermezzo, Allegretto molto tranquillo, starts out in the manner of a courtly minuet, with an unmistakable Gallic quality that suggests Saint-Saens; but it turns quite stormy midway in, with echoes of the very opening theme (something of a "motto" apparently) flailing about with abandon. Somber Wagnerian trombones introduce the dark Lento, which allows both soloist and audience time for respite and reflection before the grumbling bassoons lead into the finale, where the stark "motto" is miraculously transformed into a mercurial tarantella that offers the soloist little chance to catch his breath, alternating with a hearty, galumphing secondary theme before everyone rushes to the final bar, once again spewing clear Lisztian cascades right and left. How such a fine piece could remain almost unknown to modern-day audiences I find difficult to understand.

And I might add it's also difficult to understand why Seta Tanyel never completed her Scharwenka concerto survey after the great success of the first two entries. Perhaps that decision was made for her by Hyperion—who later reissued 2 and 3 in their "Romantic Piano Concerto" series (Nov/Dec 2003): they already had a perfectly good performance by Stephen Hough in their catalog (Jan/Feb 1996). The two recordings—not just the performances—could scarcely be more different. Grenoble-born pianist François Xaver Poizat may not be a Pole, but he plays this music as you might expect Paderewski or maybe even Scharwenka himself to play it. Certainly the "veritable orgies of virtuosity" the composer found in the final tarantella pose no difficulty for Poizat, and yet at such a reckless pace one can only marvel that the strings don't break under the strain. Hough, without suppressing the boisterous quality of the music in the least, gives you just enough space between the notes to bring out the inherent humor of the dance. An even clearer distinction may be found whenever Scharwenka waxes lyrical, as you can hear in the second subject of the opening movement: Poizat positively swoons over it, while his glacial account of the Lento—9:22 next to 7:24 for Hough—turns every melody into a disjointed series of notes. From a sonic standpoint, the auditorium of Adam Mickiewicz University where this recording was made seems fairly diffuse; certainly Lawrence Foster and his Birmingham players register with far greater

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 141

effect and detail on Hyperion, while the massive sound of Hough's instrument far surpasses anything put forth by Poizat. (Neither company identifies the manufacturer, but I'm willing to bet Hough is playing a Steinway and Poizat is not.)

Apparently the Polish engineers moved the mike a lot closer to Poizat when he was playing the three dances; I programmed them to come after the 'Andante Religioso' and had to jump up and turn down the sound. More to the point, why didn't Naxos have Poizat offer more of them? (There are 16 in all.) Everyone who attends solo recitals with any regularity knows No. 1 (in E-flat minor), a heady mazurka; No. 8 in B-flat minor is charming and coquettish, and No. 15 in B-flat closes out the program in a veritable explosion of octave passagework that like the finale of the concerto would seem to me as a non-pianist well-nigh impossible, yet for Poizat is clearly mere child's play.

Scharwenka's 'Andante Religioso' would have made a splendid encore or "lollipop" for Beecham, had he but known of it. It's the composer's own arrangement of the slow movement from his Cello Sonata for strings *divisi*, harp, and organ and may well remind you of the famous 'Air on the G String' from Bach's Third Suite. This warmly expressive episode is played beautifully here by the Poznan strings; yet once again they are to some extent stymied by the diffuse engineering and you can hardly even feel, let alone hear the organ—unlike the Sterling with Christopher Fifield and the Gävle Symphony that accompanies the only extant recording of Scharwenka's C-minor Symphony (Sept/Oct 2004).

If you made it all way through our exhaustive Overview of overtures, it should come as no surprise that for me the *real* find here is the one to *Mataswintha*, Scharwenka's only opera, perhaps dating from the late 1890s when the composer opened up a branch of his highly esteemed Berlin school of music in New York City. But despite great critical praise when it played at the Met, it soon faded into oblivion. It opens amid evocative horn calls and builds to a grand chorale in the brass before ebbing once again very much in the manner of *Lohengrin*. I'm happy to finally set aside my ancient aircheck with the Detroit Symphony under Karl Krueger, as this marvelous account by the Poznan players is all anyone could ask for.

HALLER

SCHMITT: *Piano Quintet; A Tour d'Anches*
Berlin Soloists Ensemble
Naxos 570489—74 minutes

Florent Schmitt (1870-1958) avoided labels of all sorts. His early music, like this piano quintet, reminds me of a Gallic Richard Strauss: the three movements in the 58-minute work bristle with thematic material and dense, sinewy polyphonic textures. *A Tour d'Anches* (1939-43)—for piano, oboe, clarinet, and bassoon—is more spare, less chromatic, and very witty. It's hard to imagine two pieces from the same composer that differ as much as these.

The performances and sound engineering are first-rate, and Naxos's price makes the disc a justifiable frivolous purchase for people looking slightly off the beaten path for early 20th Century French music.

HASKINS

SCHMITT: *La Tragedie de Salomé; Psalm 47; Le Palais Hanté*
Sao Paulo Symphony & Choir/ Yan Pascal Tortelier—Chandos 5090 [SACD] 68 minutes

Yan Pascal Tortelier and the Sao Paulo Symphony (he's now their Principal Conductor) are, it must be said, coming to the table rather late with their pairing of Florent Schmitt's *Tragedie de Salome* and the blockbuster *Psalm 47* previously coupled by Thierry Fischer for Hyperion (Mar/Apr 2008), Marek Janowski on Warner (Jan/Feb 2007; Sept/Oct 1990) and before them Jean Martinon for EMI—the gold standard for anyone wanting to have both works on one CD. Nor has *Salomé* exactly gone begging, with separate recordings by Paul Paray (Mercury; Mar/Apr 1995, p 229), Antonio de Almeida (ReDiscovery; was RCA) and more recently Sascha Goetzel (Onyx; July/Aug 2010) and Yannick Nezet-Seguin (May/June 2011).

What does this Salomé have that the others don't? Well, more singers for one thing. In the atmospheric central episode, 'Les Enchantements sur la Mer' Schmitt calls for a haunting siren call from the abyss, and many recordings offer a distant soprano voice—among them Fischer, Martinon, Janowski, and De Almeida. Yet it would appear the composer encouraged multiple voices, and so here we have a cohort of two sopranos and six mezzos whose wonderfully evocative melisma suggests that the Aurora Borealis (or some Eastern counterpart) has somehow taken human form. (Paray, Nezet-Seguin, and Goetzel substitute an oboe, also sanctioned by the composer, though considerably less effective.) In such serene imagery Tortelier is clearly in his element, and the concluding 'Danse des Eclairs' and 'Danse de l'Effroi' at his torrential pace could have been mightily effective were it not for the immensely resonant Sao Paulo hall that swallows up all manner of critical detail, including (I'm sorry to say) the forceful low brass that you can hear far better on most other recordings. Tortelier really presses his men until things threaten to get out of hand, and in the

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 142

final pages they pretty much do. If it's Salomé you're after, oboe or not, it's the Paray I return to most often, while for many listeners Fischer's sumptuous sound may trump his languorous tempos.

But if *Salomé* is all you know, the massive spectacle that is *Psaume 47* will surely come as a revelation. Mr Hansen's awestruck description (in his review of the Hyperion) is just as over the top as the music: "blazing brass fanfares, thundering organ, pounding drums, cascading strings, and exuberant chorus"—I wish you could hear all that in this recording. But even more than *Salomé, Psaume 47* is rendered as a thrilling, yet thoroughly homogeneous wash of sound, with wind detail all but indistinguishable and the choir totally incomprehensible even with libretto in hand. You hear trumpets to the left of you, trumpets to the right of you, but what the other players might be doing is anyone's guess—at least played over a normal CD player. Maybe SACD sorts everything out, but why make the non-SACD owner pay for a poor miking job?

I switched to the Hyperion and heard *so* much more; indeed even at more measured tempos Thierry Fischer makes this the thrilling experience it's supposed to be. Even the Janowski (at considerably faster tempos) that dates back to 1989 and suffered from horribly phlegmatic sound on Erato sounds better than this in Warner's radically superior remastering that Mr French praised to the skies—and on buying the remake after reading his review I must enthusiastically concur. Yet for me all pale next to Jean Martinon's driving and immensely exciting EMI (49748) that goes all the way back to 1973 and boasts some truly heroic organ playing from Gaston Litaize. I'll grant you Martinon's solo violinist in the almost sinfully rich central section cannot match Fischer's lustrous soloist, who might even rival the fair Scheherazade; still, he seems rather more seductive than Tortelier's man. In the ensuing vocal solo both Fischer's Jennifer Walker and Martinon's Andrea Guiot are more fresh-voiced and buoyant than the matronly Susan Bullock heard here. (It's odd that neither the Chandos nor the Warner translation bears any relation whatever to the French words proclaiming our Lord's great love for Jacob. The others get it right.) If you're fortunate enough to have the Martinon in your collection, hang onto it.

Filling out the program is something of a rarity, the evocative essay *Le Palais Hanté* (The Haunted Palace) after Edgar Allen Poe, setting a poem that the tortured Roderick sings to the strains of a guitar in Poe's masterpiece, *The Fall of the House of Usher*. In his never-completed opera on the subject Debussy included the poem, and you may have the EMI under Georges Prêtre that combined the Schmitt and Debussy essays with André Caplet's *Masque de la Mort Rouge* (Masque of the Red Death) (Jan/Feb 1994). Much of it is gloomy and pensive, as you would expect from Poe, beginning with an almost Tristanesque sound and a soliloquy from the bass clarinet that clearly presages *Salomé*; sudden outbursts alternate with a broadly lyrical passage that lulls the King and his court into complacency, before "evil things, in robes of sorrow" storm the palace in force, "a hideous throng (that) rush out forever and laugh—but smile no more". While sonics could be more pellucid, the dark, dank colors perfectly suit this music, and Tortelier at far more gripping tempos creates a *frisson* of excitement, a tingling along your spine that Prêtre with his relentless treatment and crude ensemble cannot begin to match. You may come to the feast for *Salomé* or *Psaume 47*; but Tortelier's marvelously atmospheric Palais Hanté is the real main course of this repast.

HALLER

SCHNITTKE: *Concerto for Chorus; Requiem; 2 Organ Pieces*
Daniel Munkholm Bruun, org; Hymnia Chamber Choir/ Flemming Windekilde
Scandinavian 220591 [2CD] 84 minutes

The *Choir Concerto* is Schnittke's true choral masterwork—a set of four Lamentations inspired by the writing of Gregory of Narek, a 10th Century Armenian poet. Some of the time, the composer is busy creating great, imposing walls of sound in the manner of Rachmaninoff and other composers in the grand tradition of the Eastern church. Elsewhere, he's fashioning grating dissonances from which participants break off, leaving stiller, smaller voices in their wake. It is, in short, an *echt* Russian work requiring the full Slavonic treatment—which, frankly, it doesn't get from this small (25 singers), capable, distantly recorded Danish choir.

For the real thing, head for Valery Polyansky and the Russian State Symphonic Cappella (Chandos 9332, July/Aug 1995) who continue to trump the field. A more recent one comes from New York's Choir of St Ignatius Loyola (MSR 1251, Sept/Oct 2009) who do some terrific things with the music and are caught in rich, reverberant sound that dwarfs the engineering accorded these earnest but overmatched Danes.

More enticing is the 36-minute Requiem scored for choir, soloists, a pair of trumpets, electric guitar and bass, celeste, organ, piano, and percussion. Again there's a better performance to be had; a real hair-raiser from the

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 143

Swedish Radio Choir under Tonu Kaljuste on Caprice 2515 (July/Aug 1996). But this one has its moments too, with eerie, sometimes menacing sounds emanating from a murky sound stage that actually adds to the atmosphere of the performance. If this 'Dies Irae' doesn't make you jump, dial 911. The two bits for organ are pretty much along for the ride. (I guess even the King of Instruments gets stuck with some busywork now and again.)

Brief, perfunctory notes are included, but texts and translations are not. What we get, then, is one-stop shopping for two worthy contemporary pieces. While neither performance is a first choice, some might appreciate the convenience.

GREENFIELD

SCHNITTKE: *Sketches*
Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra/ Andrei Chistiakov
Brilliant 9215—52 minutes

Listening to the music from the 1985 ballet *Sketches* (Esquisses) is like watching Terrence Malick's film *The Tree of Life*, a kaleidoscope of sounds (images) but mercifully minus the portentous, inflated moralizing. In other words, Schnittke knows enough not to take himself seriously.

The liner notes describe the music best. It's based on characters from Gogol, "common and petty, trashy, filthy, with everything that has been crumpled and bruised and thrown into the street". It involves "the abundant use of the most widely known dance types and the introduction of grotesque variants of the intonations of Russian urban folk music. The orchestra is handled with inexhaustible imagination. The usual instruments are supplemented with two electric guitars (solo and bass), a flexatone, and a prepared piano."

The essentially tonal music couldn't help but (1) make my feet tap and (2) make me laugh out loud at the incredible display of imaginative sounds—electric organ (or was it guitar or flexatone?), percussion (tuned or otherwise), little blips, squeaks, honks, piano glissandos, etc., as the music swirls with waltzes, marches, comical shifts of tempo, hilarious rubatos, quotes from Beethoven, Mozart, and Tchaikovsky, and on and on. Sometimes it reminded me of Shostakovich's airy suites, sometimes of the entrance to the Shrovetide Fair parade in *Petrouchka*.

Sketches is an entertainment; each of the 22 movements is played with consummate styles (plural) as Chistiakov and his superb orchestra give marvelous flow and form to each section, no matter how short. Recorded in Moscow in 1996, the engineering is ripe and balanced, even with the electric instruments. Yes, my mind began to wander after about 40 minutes, but so what! Here's the perfect budget-priced album for the person who thinks he knows it all, thinks he has everything, or is in need of a good laugh. I'd love to see what Mark Morris would do with this ballet!

FRENCH

SCHOENBERG: *Quartet 3; Scherzo in F; Presto in C; Chamber Symphony*
Prazak Quartet; Jaromir Klepac, p
Praga 255 278 [SACD] 65 minutes

It always strikes me to hear the voice of the immortal master (Schoenberg) composing such brilliance in the idioms that he was so intent on destroying. This is certainly the Viennese Schoenberg. Both the *Scherzo* and *Presto* are fine examples of the German tradition that he so loved—a German spirit that he could not stand to be without, a German idiom that he was so passionately trying to transform. Yet, as Schoenberg left the musical language and structure he inherited, I hear, especially in the Third Quartet, a reluctance to lose a part of himself—a culture, a tradition, a community, a sense of belonging.

The *Scherzo* is a masterly example of counterpoint and tonal sophistication. The *Presto* is an obvious homage to Beethoven, playful and bursting with joy and brilliance. The *Chamber Symphony Op.9*, arranged by Webern in 1923 for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano (played here by string quartet and piano) is another youthful work that is more reflective of a romantic tradition. While the richness of a Brahms symphony seems to set the landscape, the obsessive counterpoint and piercingly rhythmic gestures assault (beautifully) and interrupt the romantic "idea", if you will; yet, the synthesis of this internalized argument creates a harmonic wholeness and unity.

The Third Quartet is the piece that points out most clearly Schoenberg's struggle to understand the two worlds that he composed in and his refusal to accept how incredibly similar they were.

The Prazak Quartet is lustrous and highly distinguished in these performances. I review the Fred Sherry Quartet below, and both ensembles give ground-breaking performances of this piece. I am more taken by Fred Sherry Quartet in the Intermezzo, while the Prazak projects a melancholy in first movement that I think is missing with Fred Sherry Quartet. Regardless, both performances are spectacular. Naxos is certainly more of a bargain, but the *Scherzo* and *Presto* are also a must.

JACOBSEN

Sig05arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:49 PM Page 144

SCHOENBERG: *Quartets 3+4; Phantasy*
Fred Sherry Quartet; Rolf Schulte, v; Christopher Oldfather, p
Naxos 557533—75 minutes

Naxos has been recording Schoenberg for quite some time with Robert Craft. While I enjoy the reasonable pricing and their commitment to making classical music more accessible, they are hit or miss, especially with Schoenberg. Here we have one of their latest, and it is a hit!

Before I listen, I think of the difficulty of this music and the level of musicianship that is required just to get through it. To then hear the Fred Sherry Quartet take this music to a level that is clearly beyond notes is a joy. Everything about 3 is perfect. The articulation in the Intermezzo is some of the most driven, clear, and crisp I have ever heard. The Rondo is a transcendent moment that I think many musicians dream of only achieving once. These musicians certainly do. Their playing is filled with life, determination, and uncompromising drive. They know what they want, and I fear, as I listen, that the unapologetic character of Schoenberg will get the best of them, whether technically or rhetorically—yet it never happens. They own this music.

Cellist Fred Sherry is remarkable, but the entire group is a stunning example of what musicians can do with this music. The opening of 4 leaves me shaken. Also on this disc is the *Phantasy for Violin and Piano Accompaniment*. I am not sure why. The playing is nice enough, but I am not moved by it in the slightest.

The engineering is superb.

JACOBSEN

SCHOENBERG: *Transfigured Night;* see BRAHMS;
Variations; see TCHAIKOVSKY

SCHOENDORFF: *La Dolce Vista Mass; Usquequo Domine Mass; Magnificat Sexti Toni; Veni Sancte Spiritus; Te Decet Hymnus;* **DE MONTE:** *La Dolce Vista; Usquequo Domine; Magnificat Quarti Toni*
Cinquecento Renaissance Vokal
Hyperion 67854—60 minutes

Although Philipp Schoendorff (1565-c. 1617) was only a child when he left his native Liege in the 1570s, he was following a generations-long tradition among his countrymen. We often read about the great Netherlandish exodus of musicians who headed to Italy in this era to seek their fame and fortune, but the imperial court in Vienna was also a common destination. For some 30 years Schoendorff served three successive emperors as a singer, trumpeter, and composer. While in Vienna, Schoendorff studied with senior musicians at court who also hailed from Liege and its environs. This accounts for Schoendorff's complete grasp of the Netherlandish polyphonic style that we hear on this recording. The program includes two of Schoendorff's early parody Masses, a five-voice Magnificat, and settings based on chant of 'Veni Sancte Spiritus' and 'Te Decet Hymnus'.

The programmatic connection between Schoendorff and Philippe de Monte on this release illustrates a crucial relationship between these composers and their music. As the youngest composer at court, Schoendorff appears to have been eager to honor the imperial chapel master by parodying his compositions in his two masses. De Monte's madrigal 'La Dolce Vista' from 1569 is the model for one, and his motet 'Usquequo Domine' from 1587 is the source for the other.

Cinquecento Renaissance Vokal performs De Monte's polyphonic models and Schoendorff's parody masses in sequence in order to give us the best view of the connection between the works. The parody is most obvious at the beginning of the mass movements. Otherwise, the masses are quite independent of their models.

The singing here is absolutely gorgeous. This group demonstrates their grasp of the Netherlandish polyphonic style in their facility with this dense material. Like master weavers, they handle the delicate interplay between contrapuntal parts and dovetailing with perfect ease. The shifts that occur between polyphony and homophony are also handled quite organically—that is, they show in their pleasing phrases how one texture grows naturally out of the other. Notes and texts are in English.

LOEWEN

SCHUBERT: *Piano Sonatas, D 537+664; Wanderer Fantasy*
Eldar Nebolsin
Naxos 572459—62 minutes

It takes a few moments for the ear to adjust to the in-your-face, brittle, and strident sonics supplied by the Naxos engineers. Once acclimated, these are pleasant, straightforward Schubert performances. Nebolsin certainly has the technique and musicality not to be thwarted by any of the composer's daunting challenges.

The Allegretto quasi andantino from D 537 is particularly felicitous, and the final Allegro vivace has sparkling articulation. The same can be said for D 664, but the aggressive sound does tend to get in the way.

The famous *Wanderer Fantasy*, long a favorite of pianists, is played with vigor and stunning control, especially in the more taxing

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 145

passages. Nebolsin is able to move ahead without slowing down for the real challenges, especially in the concluding fugal Allegro. But despite some fine playing, this is really not that competitive given the superior sound of many other performances.

BECKER

SCHUBERT: *Symphonies, all*

Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields/ Marriner
Newton 8002033 [6CD] 365 minutes

The heading here understates the case. This is not only all of Schubert's symphonies, it's all plus. Thanks to Brian Newbould, we get not only the canonical 8 (1-6, 8 and 9), but Symphony 7, Symphony 10, and a pair of substantial symphonic fragments. This means that you are going to wind up buying two more discs than usual for a Schubert symphony set, but Newton has issued this set at a very modest price ($29 or so), so why think twice? You can probably get Karajan's set of Schubert symphonies for about $19, Böhm's for about the same price, Barenboim for about $30, Abbado about $23, and Harnoncourt's for $19 used and $32 new.

I wanted to write this review in a way that put Marriner in perspective in performance style with detailed comparisons, but realized that this wasn't necessary. This could be summarized in a useful way.

The Academy, although founded without record label support in 1959, has functioned as the de facto house ensemble for a series of record labels since the early 1960s. Under Marriner, a violinist from the London Symphony who studied conducting with Pierre Monteux, it developed a kind of generalized style: streamlined, really well played, superficially exciting, emotionally cool. It also gathered very skilled players who could record almost anything in one or two takes, which meant that the recording process was very efficient. And so the Academy with its streamlined style prospered.

Schubert is a composer whose works encompass almost Rossini-like lightness and motor rhythms and deep feeling expressed in strange harmonies and song-like melodic lines.

Marriner is fine with the extroverted side of Schubert, and his orchestra is really quite good. He blows Böhm (who is mostly dull and pedantic) and Barenboim (who goes back and forth among slack, too aggressive, and too portentous) out of the water. He doesn't match the sheer joy of the early symphonies or the power of the late ones under Karajan or the odd, but compelling rhetoric of the Harnoncourt performances (not to mention the charm of individual performances by the likes of Beecham and Walter); but as a mainstream, plain-vanilla set of Schubert symphonies, this is more than acceptable.

The two extra symphonies don't add much to the picture. The notes, oddly enough, ignore them. Both have lovely melodies and striking harmonies. Most haunting to me is the last movement of 10, which seems to come from the haunted world of late Schubert, but all too often the music just doesn't sound like Schubert. It sounds like some odd mixture of Beethoven and Weber, the next channel over from real Schubert. Newbould has Schubert's orchestral language down nicely, but the music itself sounds not-quite-cooked.

Symphony 8 is no longer unfinished here. There's a scherzo that's nothing special and a finale drawn from the *Rosamunde* music.

The fragments are more of the same: some striking ideas, some good orchestration—not quite there, though one of them is practically a symphony in its own right.

My sense of the fragments is that I understand why they weren't finished. Newbould speaks Schubert's language, but that doesn't mean that what he has found is necessarily worth saying.

If you can have only one set of the Schubert symphonies, go for Karajan, or perhaps Abbado. This set is a good backup for the extra materials and decent, but unremarkable performances of the standard works.

CHAKWIN

SCHUBERT: *Symphony 9*

Budapest Festival Orchestra/ Ivan Fischer
Channel 31111 [SACD] 69:47

Flemish Philharmonic/ Philippe Herreweghe
Pentatone 5186372 [SACD] 57:49

The timing reflects the fill on the Channel disc: five German Dances. The Ninth takes Ivan Fischer about 55 minutes.

Mr Fischer has entered the ranks of "period performance practice" lately. Here he has fussed over natural horns, narrow-bore trombones, and small C clarinets—and, naturally, there is no vibrato and no legato. The playing is stark and raw and detached. There is no warmth, polish, or expression. The violins squeak where they should sing. The recording is cold and dry.

Mr Herreweghe always had one foot in the PPP world, so it is no surprise that he also encourages detached playing with little warmth or expression. But he has a big advantage in the hall—Queen Elisabeth Hall in Antwerp. It puts a nice halo of space around the instruments, and the lack of vibrato here is much less distressing than with Mr Fischer. In fact, it sounds to me as if the orchestra plays its

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 146

usual instruments and sometimes falls back on normal playing habits, too—including some vibrato and expression. The interpretation can still be stark and plosive, though—and Herreweghe is nothing if not eccentric.

Both take so many repeats in the Scherzo that you end up screaming. Will they ever get to that lovely trio? We're talking three or four minutes longer than ALL the traditional recordings. Fischer's I is fast; Herreweghe's Andante (II) is fast.

Neither will please anyone who likes the rich Viennese interpretations of people like Böhm and Walter and Furtwangler. In fact, I can't figure out whom they will please. I would never have grown to love this music if this were the way I had heard it.

VROON

SCHUMANN: *Album For the Young*

Alessandra Ammara, p
Arts 47756 [SACD] 74 minutes

Consisting of 43 short pieces for children, this might seem a strange choice for her second Schumann album. While other recordings exist, some quite good, these gentle, uncomplicated essays require advocacy, sensitivity, and determination not to make of them more than they are. Of course, what pianist can forget early learning days wrestling with 'Wild Horseman' or 'Happy Farmer'?

As with her other new Schumann disc (below), this one gives us a first-rate view of these simple, but not simplistic pieces. The sound is mellow and cozy, Roberto Prosseda's notes superior to much of what passes these days. Score another for Ammara: I cannot think of a recording I would recommend before this one.

BECKER

SCHUMANN: *Carnaval; Davidsbundlertanze*

Alessandra Ammara, p
Arts 47755 [SACD] 69 minutes

A plush, warm, and cozy sound from the engineers. It falls gratefully on the ear, but does require a substantial volume boost to make its full effect. As with Ammara's recording of Chopin's Ballads, her Schumann playing is really something special—something to make one sit up and take notice. Dynamic contrasts abound, and she often makes use of subito piano (suddenly soft). Since she has the rare ability to let the piano speak at very low volumes, few would be troubled by her refined, but certainly not understated performance. With always clear and undistorted playing, total avoidance of artifice, and plentiful color, the full nature of *Carnaval* blooms most beautifully.

With spare use of pedal, the left hand sounds in bold relief. Nothing is ever blurred, and Schumann's character studies sound ever fresh. Individual sections, such as 'Reconnaissance' and 'Pantalon et Colombine', are amazing feats of technical control; and Ammara's judicious use of rubato could serve as a model of how to do it without affectation. This *Carnaval* will make you smile, admire, and wonder that something new to say about an old brew is still possible.

Davidsbundlertanze, once rarely performed, has been making its presence felt more often in the past several decades. To Ammara, the finale of *Carnaval* 'Marche des Davidsbundler' has a direct relationship to these dances and seems almost a lead in to the work. Her approach is similar though more reflective, and her playing endlessly fascinating as this once dormant major composition takes on a new life.

While her gentle caressing of the individual dances sets out in new directions, there is no lack of tension or forward momentum. This is the Schumann of multiple personalities and emotions laid bare for us to explore and discover for ourselves. No matter how many performances you already might have of these works, the special treasures you will find here are of unique value. The notes are perceptive, and the sound beyond reproach. Dare I ask for more Schumann?

BECKER

SCHUMANN: *Dichterliebe; Liederkreis, op 24;*
SCHUMANN,C: *3 Songs*

Maximilian Schmitt, t; Gerold Huber, p
Oehms 819—57 minutes

Maximilian Schmitt is a young German tenor with a few recordings to his credit (Haydn *Creation* under Jacobs and the *St Matthew Passion* with Chailly), but this is his first solo recital. This program is tied together by the poetry—all pieces have a text by Heine. Schmitt has an especially lovely voice, well controlled and even from top to bottom. He sings the songs beautifully, well in tune, and with fine diction. The problem for me is that he rarely goes beyond the goal of beautiful singing to color his sound and bring more of the emotional message home. There is too little sense of regret at love lost, too little acknowledgement that so much of Heine is ironic. The poet leads you in one direction, then devastates you with some kind of twist. Here's an example (condensed) from *Dichterliebe*:

When I look into your eyes,
All my cares disappear.

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 147

But when you say: "I love you",
Then I must cry bitterly.

Ironic twists like this need to be reflected by the singer, and my sense is that Schmitt hasn't lived with this music long enough. Nonetheless, this is such a lovely voice that I'm sure we'll hear from him more in the future, and I look forward to his development. The accompaniments by Gerold Huber are detailed and supply a lot of the commentary I missed in the singer. Bilingual notes, but in view of the importance of Heine's texts it is unfortunate the poems are not translated. Should you look for this recording, it carries the title *Trämend Wandle ich bei Tag*.

ALTHOUSE

SCHUMANN: *Manfred*
Martin Schwab (Manfred), Sigrid Plundrich (Astarte), Michelle Breedt (Nemesis), Johannes Chum (Chamois Hunter), Florian Boesch (Abbot), Vienna Singverein, Tonkunstler Orchestra/ Bruno Weil

Preiser 90788 [SACD] 69 minutes

When it comes to romanticism, we love its paintings and music, but except for scholars, most of its literature is truly a closed book. An instance would be Lord Byron. It's hard nowadays to imagine even bookworms slogging through his more ambitious poetic concoctions, or that they were once best-sellers. His *Manfred*, though little read now, inspired a slew of composers from Tchaikovsky to Friedrich Nietzsche and, of course, Robert Schumann. This record has his complete incidental music to Byron's dramatic poem.

Schumann's overture has always been considered one of his masterpieces, but much of the rest of the music is also on a high plane, including 'The Exorcism of the Spirits' and 'Ahriman's Hymn'. Schumann used his most colorful orchestra, including the piccolo, English horn, tuba, and harp with impressive and *ex*pressive results. (The myth that Schumann couldn't orchestrate deserved a stake through its heart 150 years ago.) The cowbells in the Alpine Cowherd's solo, however, are studio additions, and not for the better—they distinctly sound like brake-drums.

The orchestral playing is sensitive to Schumann's style, with good tone quality. Weil conducts with fine phrasing and sensitive dynamic shading. The solo singers are competent. Martin Schwab narrates with sincere feeling and clear diction. The spoken text, which only takes about 15 minutes, is an adaptation of Byron by the German writer Christian Lackner. For what it's worth, my German isn't that great, but I was still able to follow the action from the notes and performance. An English text is supposedly available from www.tonkuenstler.at/manfred, but, as often happens on websites, you have to clear away a jungle of PR kudzu. I found it easier simply to bring up Byron's original on Google.

O'CONNOR

SCHUMANN: *Piano Concerto; Introduction & Allegro Appassionato;*
LISZT: *Piano Concerto 2*
Etsuko Hirose; Orchestre de Pau Pays de Bearn/ Faycal Karoui

Mirare 135—68 minutes

Pau is a French commune on the northern edge of the Pyrenees. It is the capital of the Bearn region and only 50 Km from the Spanish border. In addition, they have a particularly fine orchestra—not a big one in the string department, but impressive in all other ways. Their French conductor, Faycal Karoui, has been with them since 2002 and has largely been credited for the orchestra's excellence.

Japanese pianist Etsuko Hirose won First Prize at the Martha Argerich Competition in 1999, which launched her solo career. Armed with this information it only remains to play the recording and be transfixed, as I was, by performances that enter into an enchanted land, reserved for a very few.

Liszt's Piano Concerto 2 is not always the easiest concerto to bring off. The form, sometimes referred to as "The adventures of a melody", requires the utmost in phrasing ability, control of rubato, and delicacy of tonal palette. While it treads close to bombast, in the right hands it never crosses into that realm. Hirose knows just what to do and when to do it. Her performance, aided by Karoui's control of his glorious sounding ensemble, sends this right to the top, alongside Richter—but with superior sound. All of the poetry, the composer's extraordinary creative genius, and the life-giving force of the music is realized to a degree rarely experienced.

Schumann's concerto is, in the eyes of many, the quintessential romantic piano concerto. Over the years it has been fortunate, as many artists have revealed its secrets. Hirose is among those who have been able to accomplish this, and the Pau orchestra has given her ideal accompaniment—from the sweet, supple clarinet solos to the expressive and true intonation of the strings. The gentle qualities of the music have been revealed by Leon Fleisher, Stephen Kovacevich, Wilhelm Kempff, Dinu Lipatti, and Radu Lupu, to name several that come to mind first.

As an added incentive, Hirose includes Schumann's *Introduction and Allegro Appassionato* in a performance of near incomparable loveliness. Special kudos to the first clarinet and French horn in their exquisite open-

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 148

ing solos, and to the balance of the entire orchestra when the Allegro takes flight. Add to the many excellences a recording of great transparency and some fascinating notes, and you have a not-to-be-missed entry for any discriminating music lover.

BECKER

SCHUMANN: *Piano Concerto; Introduction & Allegro Appassionato; Introduction & Allegro;*
SCHUMANN, C: *Concerto Movement*
Oleg Marshev, South Jutland Symphony/ Vladimir Ziva
Danacord 688—74 minutes

Oleg Marshev's curt handling of the concerto's opening pages signals his no-nonsense approach. The smallish orchestra and slightly dry acoustics add to the businesslike air. In II Marshev's phrasing is a bit awkward in spots, while III proceeds with unsmiling efficiency. The pianist shows more warmth in the other two Schumann works, and if you're looking for all three pieces on one record I'd rate this a notch above Jando (Naxos; J/A 2005). Of course Serkin and Ormandy excelled in this music, but no CD couples all three works (a British Sony did, but it's long deleted).

What none of the competitors offer is the concerto movement from Clara Wieck Schumann (in F minor, not to be confused with her Concerto in A minor). The composer only completed 175 bars; the rest was realized by Jozef de Beenhouwer. Stylistically it's extremely similar to Chopin's concerto in the same key, only not so memorable. Beenhouwer goes through the motions, but this unoriginal imitation of Chopin is no match for the real thing. The performers turn in an earnest reading, and like the rest of the program it's captured in unassuming, natural sonics.

KOLDYS

SCHUMANN: *Piano Quartet;*
THALBERG: *Trio in A*
Atlantis Trio & Ensemble
Musica Omnia 211—58 minutes

Richard Hickox made recordings with Collegium Musicum 90, a period group, where you'd hardly guess the group wasn't the Academy of St Martin in the Fields (modern instruments). This Schumann recording, though, is *very* period-sounding, and, fine though the playing is, your decision will probably rest on your response to the sound. The nasal string sound with sparing vibrato is very prominent, but even more striking are the pianos. The Schumann uses an 1835 Conrad Graf, made in Vienna, while the Thalberg has a London-built Erard from around 1868. The Graf in particular has a thin, clunky sound and doesn't produce a good legato.

The members the Trio are violinist Jaap Schröder, cellist Enid Sutherland, and fortepianist Penelope Crawford; they are joined in the Schumann by violist Daniel Foster. Their playing is excellent—sensitive, but propelled with a good measure of expressiveness. If you are partial to the sound of period instruments, this would be a fine acquisition because the playing is first rate. If you're not wholly sold on the sound, though, you'll not be able to drive it out of your mind.

A word should be said about the Thalberg. His name always shows up in discussions of piano virtuosos—particularly his rivalry with Liszt—but his compositions have been largely ignored. This trio, though, is quite a fine piece, far from a virtuoso showcase. The ideas are interesting, and his harmonic language is sophisticated and full of surprises.

A fine recording, then, but you have to want period sound.

ALTHOUSE

SCHUMANN: *Piano Sonata 1; Fantasy in C*
Jin Ju
MDG 947 1681 [SACD] 68 minutes

This Shanghai-born pianist takes much pride in having performed in Vatican City before Pope Benedict XVI and an audience of thousands in 2009. She was also the recipient of the third prize in the 2002 International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow. At present she is on the faculty of Beijing Central Conservatory and is a professor at the International Piano Academy of Imola, Italy.

As a Schumann interpreter she makes a notable impression on this record with a sane and beautifully proportioned Fantasy in C. Since the competition in this work is so intense, it would be foolish to claim any special superiority for her interpretation. Suffice it to say that anyone wanting this work, or this particular coupling, would not go wrong. It is splendidly recorded as well.

In the sonata her handling of rubato moves to the fore. The subsidiary theme of the first movement is gently coaxed with the most expressive of means, and her Allegro vivace is well controlled, yet capricious and strong. The brief 'Aria' is effectively held back until the 'Scherzo e Intermezzo' takes off with energy and strong accents. She effectively ties all the strands together in the finale.

I would definitely applaud this recital had I heard it in performance. Would I rise for a standing ovation? Probably not.

BECKER

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 149

SCHUMANN: *Requiem; Der Konigssohn; Nachtlied*
Sibylla Rubens, Ingeborg Danz, Christoph Pregardien, Adolph Seidel, Yorck Felix Speer; Saarbrücken Radio/ Georg Grün
Hänssler 93270—72:20

It's not easy to find recordings of Schumann's Requiem, and it's rather nice music, if rather austere. EMI issued a recording led by Bernhard Klee and made in Dusseldorf, where Schumann led his choirs (Nov/Dec 2004). If you have that, the new one is not better. It's a little slower and heavier, and I think I prefer that; the Dies Irae is less frantic here, more gloomy—and I think I prefer that, too. But there is little difference between the two. If the EMI is still available somewhere, you may prefer it because of the coupling of the Mass led by Sawallisch. (The Mass is Opus 147, the Requiem Opus 148. They are a pair.)

Whether you buy this will depend largely on whether you want *Der Königssohn*, a ballad for soloists, chorus, and orchestra that lasts about 25 minutes and seems rare on records. Schumann wrote four of these ballads; this is the first. The choral music sounds very German, especially the parts for men alone. You may be reminded of *Pilgrimage of the Rose* or *Paradise and the Peri*, though neither of those is a "ballad" (and they are much longer). I find myself in the mood for music like this now and then, but not often. It's not main course stuff; it's side dishes.

The other side dish—the obvious one, the *Nachtlied*—gets rather dramatic for a night song. It's ten minutes, and the choir sings almost the whole time but there are only three short stanzas. Slow tempos are only part of the explanation.

The package says on the outside, "Booklet in German and English". Be not deceived; the texts are not given in English, but only in the original languages (Latin and German).

VROON

SCHUMANN: *Trios*
Peter Laul, p; Ilya Gringolts, v; Dmitri Kouzov, vc
Onyx 4072—84 minutes

Earlier this year (Jan/Feb) I reviewed the fantastic Benvenue Fortepiano Trio playing two of the trios. They are still the best I have heard. This performance is a mixed bag. Sometimes the playing is stunningly beautiful and together—the second movement of the F major, for example. Other times it is careless, like the opening of the D minor. It sounds as if they are not sure that they have started playing.

I am disappointed with Ilya Gringolts's performance. He is especially quiet and laid back, the wrong attitude to have with this music. Peter Laul has the correct intensity, but neither Gringolts nor Kouzov seem to respond in a timely manner. There are sections where Laul is just banging away and the balance is all over the place. In the final movement of the D minor they finally get into it. How could they not? They are playing perhaps the highest quality music the 19th Century produced. I simply expect more from such international players.

The G minor is far too relaxed and lazy. But in the second movement of the D minor their playing is brilliant. These performances are very inconsistent.

Overall, I am not terribly impressed. The playing is good, but only because these are highly skilled and sophisticated players, not because their hearts are in it. These pieces need more desperation, yearning—insanity, even. They require full-body playing—something they are capable of but do rarely. The Finale of D minor is a perfect example of the tremendous talent they have. I wish I could hear that type of driving vitality in all the trios.

JACOBSEN

SCHUMANN: *Violin Sonatas;*
SCHUMANN,C: *Romances*
Bruno Monteiro; Joao Paulo Santos, p
Centaur 3086—59 minutes

These performances are interesting. Bruno Monteiro plays with many mannerisms of an era long past. He uses frequent portamentos and sparse vibrato, as you would expect to hear from contemporaries of the Schumanns. Also, this duo's tempos are ideal; they never let the music's energy wind down, and they use effective rubato. Monteiro has a perfect sense of how the music must flow, and that is what I nearly always complain about in recordings of these sonatas.

The Three Romances by Clara Schumann are, if not quite up to the level of her husband's, very good music that violinists might consider adding to their recitals.

Listening to this would be like going back in time to hear a performance by a mid-19th century virtuoso if it weren't for a certain fly in the ointment—Monteiro's technique. His intonation is often flawed, and his attacks and bowing are extremely coarse. There are even passages where he cannot play all the notes, and this is hardly virtuoso music. The impression I have of Monteiro is of a violinist who lacks the technique needed to realize his artistic vision, and that is tragic. Joao Paulo Santos is a vigorous yet considerate partner. Mediocre sound.

MAGIL

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 150

SCHUMANN: *Liederkreis, op 39;*
see LOEWE; *Symphony 3;* see GAL

SCHUTTER: *Mass; Bap Nos;*
HENKING: *Ich Bin ein Schwebendes Luftblatt;*
JANACEK: *Otce Nas*
Michael Feyfar, t; Susanne Doll, org; Vera Schneider, hp; Cappella Nova/ Rafael Immoos
Guild 7349—63 minutes

A week ago, Janacek's *Otce Nas*—his setting of the Lord's Prayer—was unknown to me. Now we're old friends, because here's the second recording of that 16-minute mini-oratorio to have crossed my path. Once again it's performed nicely, this time by a chamber choir from Basel, Switzerland. It differs in two ways from the other account, which you can find in the *Pater Noster* anthology reviewed in Collections. First, it's performed in Czech, and the other is in German. Second, this one is more lyrical, especially in the gentle crooning of the solo tenor. (By comparison, the other fellow's "Dein Reich" hits you like a ton of liturgical bricks.)

Both performances are worthy, and Janacek is a must-hear. So perhaps your decision will be influenced by what's on the surrounding programs. On the other, it's different settings of the Lord's Prayer crafted by Cherubini, Liszt, Nicolai, *et al*. Here it's contemporary Swiss fare sung with proprietary affection by the 20 voices of the Cappella.

Meinrad Schutter (1910-2006) was a Zurich-based composer whose serviceable Mass and 'Bap Nos' (Our Father) could be of interest if you're in the market for something sacred and new. Christian Henking's 'I Am a Floating Reed' for harp and 16 voice parts is more aggressively dissonant, with undulating tone clusters and sharp intakes of breath depicting a soul's journey through the netherworld between life and death. It's interesting without leaving you transfixed to the point of craving repeated encounters. Four prayerful minutes of Gregorian chant also are included, along with full notes, bios, and translations. There are your options. Whichever program you pick, go find Janacek.

GREENFIELD

SCHUTZ: *St Matthew Passion*
Ars Nova Copenhagen/ Paul Hillier
Da Capo 8226094—55 minutes

Schütz's decision to set the Passion according to St Matthew for solo voices alone, without instrumental accompaniment, runs contrary to the prevailing baroque aesthetic (and his own tendency), which favored concertante arrangements for a variety of instruments—basso continuo at the very least. There are a few outbursts of imitative choral writing for choruses of priests and the "Multitude", as the Scriptural drama requires. They amount to short German motets, as Daniel Melamed writes in his notes. The rest of Schütz's *St Matthew Passion* draws our attention intensely to the drama through the bare vocal line and, hence, the singer's talent for declamatory recitative.

Julian Podger, as the Evangelist, bears the weight of the task heroically, though Jacob Bloch Jespersen as Christ and Tomas Medici as Peter contribute substantially to the dramatic range of the piece.

It is quite a remarkable experience—exciting, really—and so much more taxing for a listener, to concentrate intensely on the changing drama of a theatrical piece through small nuances in the unaccompanied singing voice. And how much more satisfying as a result are the choral passages that begin, intercede, and especially close the drama. It is an exhilarating performance, to say the least. Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

SCRIABIN: *Sonata-Fantasia 2; 2 Poems, op 32; 5 Preludes, op 74; 3 Etudes, op 65;*
ROSLAVETS: *Sonata 2; 2 Poems; 5 Preludes; 3 Etudes*
Anya Alexeyev, p
Marquis 81415—73 minutes

Under the title *Parallels*, this compares the piano music of Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) and Nicolai Roslavets (1881-1944). What becomes quite apparent after listening is that Roslavets's compositions build on the harmonic and textural innovations we generally attribute to Scriabin. The "mystic" chord of Scriabin was a chromatically altered dominant chord arranged in fourths while the "synthetic" chord of Roslavets was a hexachord of dominant-13th origins. Very complex rhythms and quick shifts of dynamics and texture can be found all through this music. Both composers use as many as three or four staves to notate their music. The difficulty of just sorting everything out and choreographing how two hands will divide all the material is significant. High marks go to Alexeyev for her creative selection of identical sets of pieces, presenting Scriabin followed immediately by the corresponding Roslavets piece. The format makes Roslavets sound like the modern composer and Scriabin the older master.

I suppose it is a sign of the times when we are directed to a website for the complete liner notes. There I found a very good essay by Anna Ferrenc on the relationship between the music of these composers. I'm sure it reduces the production costs by eliminating the booklet and printing what can reasonably fit on CD

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 151

packaging, which here is a paper folder that opens up. My eyesight is not what it once was, and I have a love-hate relationship with most CD booklets. As here, they can contain a well written essay or even be a treasure trove of information. In almost all cases, they are in print small enough to make me suffer for my information. Since I really don't like reading anything beyond a paragraph or two online, printing out Ferrenc's essay does eliminate the problem of small print.

While all of the Scriabin is readily available on numerous recordings, the Roslavets pieces are not so plentiful. All of the Roslavets pieces on this program are also available on Marc-Andre Hamelin's highly regarded disc (Hyperion 66926, Jan/Feb 1998), along with many others. If this appeals to you, and you want more, I would most definitely recommend Hamelin. You should start here, though, since this music is not everyone's cup of tea and this is a fine sample of both composers, performed with all the skill and insight you could imagine. For you, this also might be just the right quantity of music an old professor of mine once referred to as Russian Impressionism. I have plenty and will always want more, but none of it is as well ordered for comparative purposes. Alexeyev's pianism is world-class, and the superb sound qualities make this disc an easy recommendation.

HARRINGTON

SHAPIRA: *Concierto Latino*
Ittai Shapira, v; London Serenata/ Krzysztof Chorzelski
Champs Hill 20—26 minutes

Mr Shapira is a fine concert violinist who, as the liner notes report, premiered Shulamit Ran's violin concerto and also appeared before 55 million people in Jerry Lewis's annual telethon to support muscular dystrophy research and treatment. His concerto follows on the heels of a violent gang assault he suffered; in its aftermath, musical thoughts occurred to him and, in the process of writing them down, allowed him to retrieve actual memories of the event and aided in his overall recovery.

For the most part, the work offers Shapira a vehicle for his exciting virtuosity with very little compelling musical content; the composition is rhapsodic—honestly, much too rhapsodic—and the orchestration, while competent, rarely goes beyond simple two- and three-part textures. Imagine Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole* hazily recalled by a great soloist while a pianist plunks out an ad hoc accompaniment, and you have a good idea of what this piece sounds like.

HASKINS

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Piano Concertos; Piano Quintet*
Martin Helmchen, p; Pieter Schoeman, Vesselin Gellev, v; Alexander Zemtsov, va; Kristina Blaumane, vc; London Philharmonic/ Vladimir Jurowski
LPO 53—76 minutes

These are crisp, tight, snappy, razor-sharp accounts of these lovely works. The recorded sound is first rate—about the best you can get from a standard CD. Is anything about this production better than the same program with Yefim Bronfman on the piano and the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Esa Pekka Salonen (Mar/Apr 2000)? Not really. Should you pass up this release and hold out for Bronfman-Salonen? Probably not. These performances are highly satisfying.

HANSEN

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Quartets 4, 11, 14*
Hagen Quartet
Newton 8802056—71 minutes

This is a rerelease of the Hagen Quartet playing these three very different quartets. They appeared originally on DG. The Hagen paints a very different picture of Shostakovich than the Emerson or Borodin. They paint a more introspective, dark, and plain narrative, particularly in the Fourth. I lean towards the more economical sound of Hagen in the Fourth, because it more accurately reflects the subject matter. The finale should be slow. This group is known for taking risks, and they defend them brilliantly. Their playing of 14 is worth noting. There is genius in these performances.

JACOBSEN

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Symphonies* (all)
Galina Vishnevskaya, s; Mark Reshetin, Nicola Ghiuselev, b; Washington Choral Arts, London Voices; National Symphony, London Symphony, Academic Symphony of Moscow/ Mstislav Rostropovich
Warner 64177 [12CD] 11:44

Rostropovich needs little introduction here; he was a Titan of a musician, a close friend of Shostakovich, and a respected conductor, cellist, and sometimes pianist. He studied at the Moscow Conservatory under Shostakovich and Prokofieff, and both composers wrote major works for him. We reviewed most of these releases from 1989 to 1996 (Teldec released this same collection in a 1998 box set).
1: NSO, Teldec 90849, N/D 1994 (Cook)
2+3: LSO, London Voices, Teldec 90853, J/F 1995 (Hansen)
4: NSO, Teldec 76261, J/F 1993 (Vroon)

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 152

B NSO, Teldec 94557, M/J 1996 (Hansen)
6: LSO, Teldec, no review
7: NSO, Erato 45414, S/O 1990 (Ginsburg)
8: NSO, Teldec 74719, J/F 1993 (Cook)
9: NSO, Teldec 90849, N/D 1994 (Cook)
10: LSO, Teldec 74529, N/D 1992 (Bauman)
11: NSO, Teldec 76262, J/F 1994 (Cook)
12: LSO, Teldec, no review
13: NSO, Ghiuselev, Men of the CASW, Erato 75529, N/D 1989 (Ginsburg)
14: ASOM, Vishnevskaya, Reshetin, Melodiya 241, M/J 1992 (Ginsburg)
15: LSO, Teldec 74560, N/D 1992 (Bauman)

Paul Cook was not too impressed with Symphony **1**, noting an unsteady percussionist, a snare drum that sounds like a paper plate, and flat engineering. I hear a vivacious, youthful first movement, and good, spacious sound. II dashes ahead wondrously, and the clarinetist's tone is nice and woody; there's not much mystery in the slow theme (there is some in III, though), but neither does it dawdle. There's a perfect sense of expectation in the slow part that begins IV, especially when it quiets down.

2 and **3** are well represented. Lawrence Hansen's perceptive review asked how Rostropovich, who greeted the fall of the Soviet Union with great joy, could stomach these works in praise of Lenin and the Revolution. But when you read the texts of 2, at least, you may see what Mr Hansen saw: "Shostakovich inadvertently stumbled on one of the greatest and cruellest ironies of human nature...: when the oppressed gain control, they become even more reactionary, brutal oppressors." He then asks, "Did Rostropovich have this in mind as he conducted this music?" The first several lines could be about any form of political and economic oppression. Shostakovich starts 2 almost without form and void, and what comes out of it is not light, but what sounds like a chamber-like, dissonant rewriting of the humor in 1; that grows more turbulent, becoming a mob's thousand voices, a muddle that is halted and unified by Lenin's timpani. As Mr Hansen says, 3 is an intense, driving account, much better than the Gergiev I also reviewed for this issue.

On **4**'s release, our Editor called it the best you could buy; at that point, the Ormandy was only available on vinyl, and the sound wasn't comparable to this. I still go back to Neeme Jarvi's Chandos recording as my favorite; here, I is stiffer, didactic in a brutal way, the Apollo to Jarvi's Dionysius. Mr Vroon noted that the NSO was consistently better than the LSO, but even so was still amazed at this. There is a haughty sweep to this—it doesn't get as down-and-dirty as Jarvi, but I am very happy to have this interpretation. The fugue is very precise, and comes to a very disturbing, violent end. The sonics are clear, but not spacious enough for my taste.

Mr Hansen on **5**: "Rostropovich tends toward a lean, lithe, wiry, brisk, driving 5th...[not engaging] in exaggeration or [milking] the work for profundity by letting the gloomy, slow passages outstay their welcome." That said, I is slower than I've heard it in a while, but it's still quite effective. Call me a heretic, but I've gotten burnt out on the Fifth; though I would just as soon get it over with quickly, I can't help but be drawn in by Slava's pacing. II is by far the heaviest I've ever heard; usually it's a light, mocking break in the mood, but here it's a "model parody of brainless, plodding, forced, phony Social-Realist festiveness"; the tempo pull-backs before the hunting horn measures are weighty indeed. I can also hear long brass notes in the background that I've never noticed in any other recording. Rostropovich takes the ironic, not the triumphant, approach in IV, and "lays bare the hollow, brain-dead, soulless core of Soviet festivity—just what the composer ordered".

6 (and 12) has been weighed and found wanting, whereas 2 and 3 are often left completely unweighed—mere symphoniganda. 6 is lopsided, but I do like it; I remember playing it for Todd Gorman, our flute reviewer, back in graduate school, and after listening intently to all of I, he didn't even want to listen to II and III, he was so affected. Rostropovich nails 6: this is really good! He lets I speak for itself, giving it the proper pacing and balance; all the soloists are very involved. II and III are clean, brilliant, and hilarious—I think they're some of the most genuinely happy music Shostakovich wrote; it's as if he said, "You think the last movement of 5 was triumphant? No! I'm going to put joy and triumph at the end of this lumpy symphony where you'll have to search for it."

James Ginsburg wrote of **7** that the NSO did not supply the virtuoso playing the score demands (this is the same orchestra that the Editor praised three years later) and that Rostropovich didn't have the interpretive imagination or technical conducting skill of a Bernstein or Haitink. Just now, I got into my library, turned on my laptop, and started listening to this while I organized ARG back issues and other references. I forgot I was listening to Shostakovich—the symphony sounded like a tone poem of a summer's day. I've never heard the opening of I played so pleasantly; even the march sounds lovely—and that is most emphatically not what should be happening here. And the snare drum, oh, the travestied snare drum—it is dreadfully out of sync for the first few repetitions of the march. II and III have all the personality of a big toe.

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 153

Paul Cook liked **8** except some missing venom in the Allegretto. About a third of the way in, I looks a little lost for a few minutes, but the mid-movement climax is excellent. Some of II sounds stilted—I've noticed over the course of listening to this set that Rostropovich's conducting of the march-like sections has that result; it's not mincing, but it sounds like it's being very particular—the same soldiers, but on parade in Red Square instead of shoveling bodies into the Babi Yar ravine. In III there is more "non troppo" than "Allegro". Mr Cook said, "Rostropovich gets all the drama, all the sorrow", but things are a little too tidy to get my complete approval. The ending of V is dramatically fulfilling, but there's still not enough tension in the rest of the movement. The sound on this one is resplendent, though!

Cook thought Rostropovich sounded comfortable with the "jubilant pacing" of **9**; I find it slow—I've never liked these down-tempo performances of I (it's marked Allegro, not Allegretto). There is a glaring missed note in the violins about 40 seconds in, and the tempo is as unpredictable as a squirrel dodging an oncoming car. The end sounds like several of the string players nearly lost their grip on their bows. II has some sour notes in it; III is decent, but it's as if the orchestra is standing on the sidelines, watching the excitement happen elsewhere. I would take the Petrenko (Naxos 572167, M/A 2010) any day, or the Levi (Telarc 80215, J/A 1990), which was my introduction to Shostakovich.

My first thought as **10** began was, "It's very creepy, but the volume is so quiet!" Then I opened Carl Bauman's review and read, "...[this] is cut at a very low level that requires a major boost in volume to achieve good projection." The Overview puts Ormandy and Kitaenko (SACD) at the top of the list; their first movements are longer than this, which is 25:37 (Maxim Shostakovich is three minutes shorter)—Rostropovich has excellent control over the orchestra's dynamics, but the playing just takes too long. Something odd happens with the engineering in II: the strings sound like a fan was put in front of the microphone, the snare drum almost drowns out the orchestra at its first entrance, and the brass are distant. At the first big tutti, the balance is entirely off. III again drags its feet—expansiveness is fine, but mere slowness is not. Bauman said that the winds have intonation problems, and I noticed them most in the beginning of IV. I do like the rest of the movement for its vitality, but the ensemble nearly falls apart in a few places. I love Paavo Jarvi's Telarc recording (M/J 2009) more than anything I've heard before or since, and I can't let a review of the Tenth go by without mentioning the composer's own two-out-of-tune-pianos recording with Moisei Vainberg on Russian Revelation; it's deleted, but available used, and the audio is on YouTube.com (search for Shostakovich Weinberg 10). It's a blistering performance, and I find myself more thrilled by it than by most orchestral recordings.

Mr Cook's review of **11** was mixed; he thought that key moments of orchestral balance are weak, but said the dramatic material sounded very good, especially in the rousing conclusion. Slava's tempo again is slow; he takes nearly three minutes longer than the excellent Petrenko (Naxos 572082, J/A 2009), but it works here. The transition into II has the wretched urgency it needs, and there's some excellent dynamic detail, but the wind blowing over the massacred bodies at the end isn't subtle enough. IV is so insistent that it's almost impetuous; Rostropovich's leading has that particularity I mentioned before, but it suits the proceedings here. The English horn solo in the quiet section, over the string pizzicatos, is very note-to-note for much of it, almost bringing the movement to a complete demise. The ending would make up for it but for one anticlimactic thing: the bells aren't nearly loud enough. Rostropovich redid this with the LSO, and our Editor found it much better, with glorious playing and sound (Nov/Dec 2002).

12 is more a string of four symphonic sketches than a symphony, I'll admit, and use of the melodies barely crosses the line from repetition to development. It's not unenjoyable, however, and is still more inspired than some of Shostakovich's film music, which it often resembles. I love the grand feeling of the 5/4 theme in I, but the other theme gets pounded into the ground—I think I've finally escaped it in II, but it keeps poking its head out from behind the scenery. By the time III bursts out singing it at the top of its lungs, I'm ready to impale my speakers. I have to say, the orchestra plays this (on the same disc as 6) quite well—the acoustics are perfectly suited to it, there's a good sheen to the strings, the brass are balanced, and the players sound involved.

It's odd that Rostropovich's **13** wasn't mentioned in the Overview; Mr Ginsburg viewed it as a solid performance, but "somewhat underplayed and presented in a slightly distant acoustic". He preferred Haitink's sonically stunning recording, crushing waves of sound, and Marius Rintzler's more intensely dark-toned bass. And Ghiuselev is brighter than several Russian basses I've heard, though I would word it as not singing from the back of the throat. Sure, the playing could be deeper and blacker, but it's a very good recording,

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 154

and, as the Overview says about the Sinaisky, "some may prefer it for its slight detachment, since this can be hard music to take". It's been several years since I've listened to 13, and I will probably unearth my Masur next time.

14 will be reason enough for many to buy this set: it's been deleted (though not impossible to find) for a while; it's a concert recording with the same singers who sang the premiere under Barshai only a few years before. The strings at the opening sound hoarse from mourning, and Reshetin has the perfect sound, just dark enough to give it the Russian feel without sounding too regional. He doesn't strain at the high notes, and has enough vocal control to phrase them exquisitely. The double basses are gritty but not rough, full of menace. Vishnevskaya is clear and accurat, and almost unbearably frightening. The sound is close-up but not harsh.

Mr Bauman's opinion of **15** was that it is clean, rather dry, and under-rehearsed, though there are many pleasing individual touches. The ensemble has some mishaps, and there are imbalances that should have been fixed, but what drives me the craziest is the string playing—it's not completely detached between notes, but neither is it smooth. I've heard a lot of that over these hours of listening, and it's a very annoying mannerism. After the whip snaps, about a minute and a half before the end of I, the brass's entrance sounds like they barely woke up in the nick of time. The Overview remarks that this performance can be distended sometimes, and I have the feeling II was in the author's mind when he wrote that, but I still find it effective and devastating. III wobbles but doesn't fall down, and the cartoonish brass sighs are hilarious; and, finally, there's some smooth string playing! Oh, the opening of IV is gloomy, and there's a tenderness in between the tragedy and the tongue-in-cheek parts. Rostropovich lets the symphony speak for itself, which is a necessity. I was nearly in tears at the echoes of Symphony 4.

This set is a bargain at $40, worth it for 14 especially. The booklet has seven pages of notes on the symphonies, and only two paragraphs on Rostropovich. There are transliterated Russian and translated English texts.

ESTEP

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Symphonies 3+10*

Mariinsky/ Valery Gergiev
Mariinsky 511 [SACD] 80 minutes

I reviewed Vasily Petrenko's recording of Shostakovich's Symphonies 1 and 3 last issue (Naxos 572396) and was impressed with the Third, noting the lovely introduction and the abstract writing later on that foreshadows what he would do in the Fourth. This Gergiev recording is perfunctory—not bad, just that the orchestra rarely sounds committed to the piece. The flute at the end of I sounds exhausted! This piece does take some elbow grease to make it attractive, and the players simply don't have it in I and II. The chorus is robust in III, but some of the orchestra's rhythms sound shaky.

This No. 10 doesn't quite match what Paavo Jarvi and the Cincinnatians gave us (Telarc 80702, M/J 2009). Here the opening doesn't have Jarvi's portent, and the climax in the middle of I is anemic rather than febrile. Gergiev's II is only 17 seconds longer than Jarvi's, but it makes a vast difference; the rests between the opening chords in the Jarvi are as threatening as the chords themselves, the phrasing is much more subtle, the energy markedly higher, and the fire all-consuming. Even the Telarc engineering is better, resulting in a richer sound than in this SACD. III and the opening of IV are restful instead of mourning—not the right mood for this. The low end of the sound is lacking, and the important timpani part at the end is muffled. Jarvi's performance beats this into a cocked hat. Notes in Russian, English, and German; texts in Russian and English.

ESTEP

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Trios; Blok Songs*

Susan Gritton, s; Florestan Trio
Hyperion 67834—62 minutes

The one-movement Trio No 1 is a work of distinctly varying moods written in Shostakovich's student years. It's mostly of interest for a taste of his mature voice.

From the alpha, we go zooming ahead to, nearly, the omega—the Blok Romances written in 1967. Fortunately, Hyperion includes transliterated texts with English translations, so we can follow what's going on in this spare, gloomy, gray music. Shostakovich was often depressed in his final years, and it shows here. All three of the instruments are deployed only in the last song; the first three songs are for each instrument alone with the voice; the fourth has cello and piano, the fifth violin and piano, and the sixth violin and cello. Miss Gritton sings expressively, without stridency, and brings plenty of punch to the sometimes oblique texts. I like her approach a bit more than Gun-Brit Barkmin in the Zurich Trio recording (Mar/Apr 2007).

The program ends with "The" Shostakovich Piano Trio, No. 2, written during WW II. The Florestan Trio gives a solid performance, but I wasn't fully drawn into it. I kept thinking about the Borodin Trio's dark, brooding, intense account (Chandos) and the old, gritty Serebryakov-Vaiman-Rostropovich account

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 155

(Sept/Oct 1993). Both of those performances squeeze more pungency and awkward humor out of the ethnic themes that also figure prominently in the later Quartet No. 8. The players here acquit themselves well, but they are a bit short on bite and sardonic vigor in the finale.

HANSEN

SIBELIUS: *Lemminkainen Legends; Finlandia; Luonnotar; The Bard; En Saga; Pohjola's Daughter; Dryad; Spring Song; Tapiola; Oceanides, Night Ride & Sunrise*
Mare Jogeva, s; Moscow Philharmonic/ Vassily Sinaisky
Brilliant 9212 [3CD] 159 minutes

The idea of a collection of these popular tone poems played by a Russian orchestra and conductor is fascinating. Before 1917, Sibelius's Finland was a duchy governed by Russia, and I recall reading that the Finn's music was popular in the Soviet Union as well as today's Russia. The Moscow Philharmonic has been sounding good recently, and I've liked what I've heard from conductor Sinaisky.

Until now. Conductor and orchestra both sound unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and wrongheaded about this music. They turn a deaf ear to its subtleties and mysteries and lay on a hand that is heavy and often clumsy as if trying to "Russify" it. The effort doesn't work. John Barbirolli could romanticize this music and get away with it (and did he ever). So could Lorin Maazel in those fine old LPs with the Vienna Philharmonic. Herbert von Karajan had some interesting things to say in his own romantic way, and there is much to enjoy in Leonard Bernstein's emoting. All employed a vision and discipline not evident here.

My notes are full of terms like "honky oboes", "flutes not crystalline enough", "kind of sour", string tone "steely", "not very subtle", and "unatmospheric". Another problem is the brass. Good Sibelius brass sound is neat, bracing, and slightly bright. There are suitable variants, but that old Russian tone with its heavy slow vibrato is not one of them. The Moscow brass has lost a lot of that character in recent years, but enough was present in 1991 when these recordings were made to prove annoying—and unSibelian.

The best performance is *Dryad,* probably because of its quasi-Russian character. Soprano Mare Jogeva saves *Luonnotar.* She's not idiomatic, but her bright sound works, and the orchestra responded. Unfortunately, too much is like *Night Ride and Sunrise,* a stunning work when done right, but here just kind of clumpy. In fact, I never made it to sunrise.

HECHT

SIBELIUS: *Symphony 2; Karelia Suite*
New Zealand Symphony/ Pietari Inkinen
Naxos 572704—62 minutes

This is a thoroughly good performance of Sibelius 2 and *Karelia*. In tempos and interpretive gestures it is flawless. The orchestra is excellent. Not a note, a turn of phrase, or any detail of execution is out of place. It is cold but not excessively so, a thin current of warmth emerging occasionally. The Naxos sound is clear, cool, and full of detail. It is well balanced, not grossly distorted or too fiercely straight. If you go for it you'll be pleased, not the least in view of the moderate price.

But the best is the enemy of the merely good. Unfortunately for Naxos, Sir John Barbirolli, with not a drop of Finnish blood in his veins, tackled this work head on, loved it to death, and mesmerized the Royal Philharmonic on one occasion (for Testament)—and the Halle on another (for EMI, in a low cost 5CD integral edition)—into giving wild, colorful and passionate recorded performances so persuasive that it is unlikely that they will ever be equaled. He accomplishes this in a framework that is more flexible and varied than Inkinen's, though not grossly distorted. Moreover, if you go for the EMI integral edition you'll have recordings of the other six that are almost as great as No. 2.

MCKELVEY

SIBELIUS: *Quartet;* see SMETANA

SIERRA, A: *Chamber & Piano Pieces*
Vassily Primakov, p; Daedalus Quartet; International Contemporary Ensemble/ Jayce Ogren
Bridge 9343—73 minutes

The many entries in ARG's cumulative index for "Sierra" refer to Roberto Sierra. Now comes Arlene Sierra, American-born (in 1970) but German raised and currently based in Wales, to join the (Sierra) club.

Six recent compositions (2001-08) present a conspectus of her compositional personality. *Cicada Shell*, *Colmena*, and *Ballistae* are for largish chamber ensembles; *Surrounded Ground* is for clarinet, piano, and string quartet; *Two Neruda Odes* are settings for soprano, cello, and piano (texts not included); and *Birds and Insects, Book I* is for solo piano. Together they make an impression of brilliance, ambition, technical assurance, and dedication to an unyielding modernism. The language is fully chromatic, gestures are rapid-fire and sharply etched, rhythms spring-loaded and biting, instrumental combinations prickly and twittery, with precise articulations and prismatic colors that glint and refract like sunlight splin-

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 156

tering off a glacier. Moods range from fiercely martial and aggressive to ironic, minatory, darkly burlesque, or hieratic and remote. Slow sections are sometimes spare, with notes pared down to hieroglyphic significance or spun-out into intricate tendrils of sputtering, florid wandering. Faster music tends to pile up motives into ostinato-driven clockwork, as in the first half of *Cicada Shell*, a sort of atonal, complexified retro-fit of Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat*—indeed, not far sometimes from the atonal complexifications of Stravinsky's own late music.

I admired and often took pleasure in this music, but though rewarding, it also demands a lot from the listener and too much of it at once can be wearisome. Better not to try taking in too much of it at a sitting. It has mechanical torque but little polite conversation, lots of striking incidental detail but oblique formal logic, daunting intelligence but much less sensibility, plenty of fire but very little warmth. It is distinctly (and, one gathers from the booklet's explication of the titles of Sierra's pieces, intentionally) untouched by humane compassion. Instead the composer is inspired by (indeed fixated on) military hardware and tactics, insect societies, and abstract processes.

Performances are superb and sonics demonstration-quality: bright, vivid, detailed, immediate, and powerful, with exceptionally wide dynamics (pristine high piano and flute, tectonic low bass drum).

LEHMAN

SIERRA: *Saxophone Concerto; Caribbean Rhapsody*
James Carter, sax; Regina Carter, Patricia Tomasini, Chala Yancy, v; Ron Lawrence, va; Akua Dixon, vc; Kenny Davis, db; Sinfonia Varsovia/ Giancarlo Guerrero

Decca 15472—45 minutes

Collaboration in music is centuries old, but billing can be a knotty question. In opera, the composer often superseded the librettist in status, but in musical theater, the team concept was more accepted. In the realm of the concerto, a master instrumentalist could inspire and influence its writing; but in the end, the composer's name went on the title page. In this media-driven era, some solo artists offer more pictures, biographies, and promotional materials than information about the composers and their works.

In this album, Detroit-born jazz saxophonist James Carter is front and center, and the also famous Roberto Sierra seems relegated to second place. Sierra does have room to talk about how he wrote both his Saxophone Concerto (2002) and his saxophone, solo violin, and string quintet work *Caribbean Rhapsody* (2010) for Carter, often leaving room for improvisation; but the layout is mostly about Carter and his collaborators. Credit is justly given: the renowned jazz violinist Regina Carter (cousin to James), the Akua Dixon String Quintet, the Sinfonia Varsovia Orchestra of Poland, and Nashville Symphony music director Giancarlo Guerrero all play integral roles. Curiously, though, Sierra and his creations appear to be on the same level.

Nevertheless, as much as James Carter shapes the music with his breathtaking artistry and technique, the composer's voice rises to the top. In the concerto Sierra creates a stunning Gershwinesque soundscape, full of motive-driven themes, sumptuous orchestral color, dreamy post-romantic harmonies, and infectious rhythmic episodes. Carter brings all his jazz experience to the table, yet he knows when to melt into a classically sculpted passage, and he knows where to push the envelope. Indeed, and perhaps appropriately, several passages go well beyond what the symphonic jazz composers of the 1920s and 1930s could have ever imagined, calling to mind bebop, cool jazz, Latin jazz, and fusion.

The *Caribbean Rhapsody* is a double chamber concerto, a dialog between saxophone and violin, played by James and Regina, with the backdrop of the string quintet. The first half is a gorgeous post-romantic bolero, somewhat reminiscent of Satie, but the second half turns into a salsa contest. The most dramatic moment occurs when the quintet drops out for a jaw-dropping showdown between James and Regina, that, even if still notated on the page, sizzles and pops with the air of spontaneity. When the excitement dies down to an attention-grabbing pianissimo, the quintet enters with a catchy bossa nova that brings the conflict to a happy toe-tapping end.

James follows the concerto and the rhapsody each with an unaccompanied solo improvised with themes from the preceding work. The concerto postlude is for tenor saxophone, and the rhapsody postlude is for soprano saxophone. As brilliant and enjoyable as they are, any one of Sierra's thrilling codas would have been a more logical send-off for the audience. Moreover, the Sinfonia Varsovia and the Akua Dixon Quintet are amazing supporting casts, thoroughly professional in their work, and they deserve as much acclaim as the composer and the soloists.

HANUDEL

Roberto Sierra teams up with jazz saxophonist James Carter in this fusion extravaganza. Carter is referred to by Sierra as "the Paganini of the saxophone", and aficionados of that

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 157

instrument will surely not want to miss this. Other listeners might not want to be in too much of a hurry.

The concerto is for saxophones; the plural refers to soprano and tenor saxophones, one player (Carter). The promising first movement turns Milhaud up a notch, filled with elegant ideas and fearsome virtuosity. The pretty slow movement is a somewhat cheesy chaconne with the soloist contributing some bluesy wrong notes. The finale begins as an energetic rondo, but quickly degenerates into what the audience was really waiting for, a classical music-busting rock 'n roll blues that sounds as if Lawrence Welk hijacked the podium with Jerry Lee Lewis in tow. It sounds ridiculous, and naturally had to be repeated at its premiere. As with most of these efforts, the total package will please mostly presenters and classical music-hating pops audiences. Therefore, it was a stupendous success.

The solo parts seem mostly improvised in *Caribbean Rhapsody* (no date, but the notes say it's "new"). It sounds like everyone's having a ball.

As with most nonclassical releases, the performer gets the headline, at least on the hyperbole-laden review copy.

GIMBEL

SMALL: *Lullaby of War; Renoir's Feast; 3 Etudes in Sound*
Soheil Nasseri, p; Martin Rayner, narr
Naxos 559649—64 minutes

Haskell Small (b. 1948) is equally accomplished as both a pianist and composer (he counts among his teachers Leon Fleisher and Vincent Persichetti). The sound of his music is resolutely eclectic, though in the main he uses a slightly dissonant idiom (the building blocks are often extended triads), straightforward—even conservative—rhythms, and traditional ideas about form and musical development. The newest piece on this release, *Lullaby of War* (2007), was written for its performer here, the young American Soheil Nasseri. Six poems critical of war (beautifully read by Martin Rayner) alternate with musical utterances for the solo piano. Pianist and reader remain apart—probably the best way to approach these poems with their extreme subtleties of language. (Naxos doesn't print the texts, but they are available online.)

Renoir's Feast (2005), commissioned by the Philips Collection, is a suite of miniatures designed as a kind of response to Renoir's *Luncheon of The Boating Party*; it is somewhat lighter in tone, also virtuosic for the piano soloist, and does not overstay its welcome.

The final work—*Three Etudes in Sound* (1993)—engages me more than the others: the musical materials are more coherent, more tightly controlled, and the three-movement work also makes more sense as a whole than the other two. Mr Nasseri, who has the skill and insight to do almost any music he wishes, is a passionate advocate for these works and is to be commended for devoting so much of his career to new music. (In all, he's commissioned 9 pieces and premiered 24.)

HASKINS

SMETANA: *Quartets;*
SIBELIUS: *Quartet*
Dante Quartet
Hyperion 67845—78 minutes

The Dante Quartet is a British Ensemble that was formed about 15 years ago and recently has won several top awards. From their names I gather that they are of Polish, French, and British backgrounds. The playing time on this recording is certainly attractive, and they play well enough that I can well understand why someone might buy this. The playing on half a dozen Czech recordings is better but not enough to compensate for the fact that most have just the two Smetana quartets on them.

In the case of Sibelius's (last, main) quartet, this reading is one of the best available.

Good sound and notes.

BAUMAN

SOMERS: *Stereophony; Piano Concerto 2; Those Silent, Awe-Filled Spaces*
Robert Silverman, p; Toronto Symphony/ Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Victor Feldbrill; Esprit Orchestra/ Alex Pauk—Centrediscs 15911—71 minutes

I have heard quite a bit of music by Canadian composer Harry Somers (1925-99) in recent years (Nov/Dec 2009, May/June 2010). This album offers orchestral works in concert readings. Jukka-Pekka Saraste leads the Toronto Symphony in a 1997 account of *Stereophony* (1963), where musicians were placed in specific spots around the hall. Given its antiphonal, clarion-call brass opening, one might wonder if Somers was recalling Gabrieli—or Britten's 'Fanfare for St Edmundsbury'. Somers is not concerned with ensemble togetherness; he wants things to be unsynchronized. And so, when woodwinds, strings, and percussion join the fray—when they are each playing their own materials at their own tempos—the 14-minute piece seems like controlled chaos. From time to time, tuttis give way to allow soloists and small groups to be heard. The ending shimmers and fades out.

Along the same abstract, multilayered, modernist, often strident vein is the 12-minute *Those Silent, Awe-Filled Spaces* (1978), heard in a 2004 reading with Alex Pauk conducting the Esprit Orchestra.

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 158

The big piece is Piano Concerto 2 (1956), and it is really big—a three-movement, 48-minute behemoth. In I, though the musical language is mostly atonal, there are a few tonal elements that help to ease the listening experience from time to time. There are big, chaotic passages and quiet, intimate ones (with coughs and rumbling trucks to remind us that this is a concert in Toronto's Massey Hall). A spectacular II has big, sweeping melodies and impressive sonorities. I don't know if there are three movements or four, because four are listed on the program and indexed on the disc, but only three are mentioned and discussed in the notes. No matter. The music wages tonal-vs-atonal battles until its bombastic ending. Robert Silverman is the excellent pianist; Victor Feldbrill conducted the Toronto Symphony in this 1978 recording.

KILPATRICK

SOR: *Guitar Fantasias*

Stefano Palamidessi
Brilliant 93960 [3CD] 212 minutes

Sor composed 14 *Fantasias* for solo guitar. That term is not well defined; composers since the Renaissance have used it to indicate a work with a free form, almost as if it were improvised. Sor's are more or less consistent. Each is a multi-movement composition, usually two or three, beginning with a slow and meditative opening movement (8 of the 14 open with an Andante largo), followed often by a set of variations. Even those are usually moderately slow—only one has a marking faster than allegretto.

You won't find fireworks here. These works are contemplative, not showy. You will find many passages of intense beauty, and more contrapuntal work and harmonic audacity than is usually the case with this composer. I am happy to have all the works in a set, in excellent performances, though hearing it as a set was a bit of a trial. One would never perform three hours plus of such restrained music without contrasting material.

Sor, unlike his Golden Age contemporaries such as Giuliani and Aguado, did compose for more than the guitar—two operas, seven ballet scores, three symphonies, some piano music, some choral music. He studied widely, and some of that broader background is evident here.

What is also evident is Sor's cosmopolitan career. He fled his native Spain when his Napoleonic sympathies made his life there uncomfortable, and relocated in Paris. He married a ballet dancer and followed her career to, among other places, St Petersburg in Russia. He was friends with many of the great musicians of his day, and many of these works are dedicated to some of these luminaries—two to guitarist Aguado, one to Regondi, and others to pianists Kalkbrenner and Pleyel, and violinist Francesco Vaccari. Sor's final work for guitar, the *Fantasia Elegiaca*, was written in memory of pianist Charlotte Beslay, a friend of Chopin and Rossini.

The *fantasias* are augmented with a single-movement work, *La Calme, Caprice*, along with a serenade and a concert piece, both multi-movement works in the style of the fantasias. Sor evidently found this formal arrangement attractive. His major works for two guitars also follow this pattern.

Stefano Palamidessi has an active European career, though there is no mention in his biography of his performing outside Europe except for trips to Israel. He seems to be something of a Sor specialist, not only as a performer but as a teacher and scholar. One of his books is dedicated to a detailed analysis of Sor's studies. His excellent notes (in an sometimes awkward translation) are informative and useful. His performances are excellent—tasteful, elegant, expressive. He has a lovely tone and a thorough technical command. Again, these works are no celebration of virtuosity, but of a different, perhaps higher, plane of expression, and he has the good taste not to attempt to insert fireworks where there is no need for it.

KEATON

SPOHR: *Der Alchymist*

Bernd Weikl (Vasquez), Moran Abouloff (Inez), Jorg Durmuller (Alonzo), Jan Zinkler (Ramiro), Susanna Putters (Paola); Braunschweig Theater/ Christian Frolich
Oehms 923 [3CD] 132 minutes

Ramiro, who is still loved by his former lover Paola, loves Inez, the daughter of the alchemist Vasquez. But Inez loves Alonzo. A vengeful Paola warns Alonzo of Ramiro's interest in Inez, who rejects Ramiro's wooing. And so begins a complex plot that results in Vasquez, through Ramiro's plotting, being brought before the Inquisition. Eventually all ends well. Inez and Alonzo are together, Vasquez is freed from prison by Alonzo, who wounds the dastardly Ramiro in a duel, and Paola gets herself to a nunnery.

It's an absurd unashamedly melodramatic work based on a Washington Irving novel, but at least in Spohr's 1830 opera credulity isn't strained in the manner of Weber's *Euryanthe* or Schumann's *Genoveva*. In an interview in this set's booklet, Maestro Frolich speaks of *Der Alchymist* as if it's a great example of German operatic romanticism. If that's the case, a stronger performance is needed to prove it. Spohr composed some attractive symphonies,

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 159

concertos, and chamber music; but this mixture of set pieces, spoken dialog, melodrama, and recitative (Wagner's early *Das Liebesverbot* also has all of these elements) struck me as tedious listening. If only Weber had been its composer. Librettist Carl Pfeiffer's lines are often dull as dishwater, and Spohr's music is sometimes pleasant but never memorable.

Veteran Bernd Weikl, in his upper 60s when this 2009 recording was made, lacks his former vocal luster, but he speaks and sings with great authority—the only singer in the cast who's fully into his role. A pity Vasquez isn't a huge singing part. The ladies are all right in their not very demanding roles, but Ms Abouloff could use more vocal weight, and Ms Putters as Paolina seems to be struggling to make her character (a kinder, gentler combination of Weber's Eglantine and Wagner's Ortrud) come alive. I think she too needs more vocal weight. Durmuller isn't an especially villainous bad guy; he has a weak lower range.

Frolich may believe *Der Alchymist* is an unjustly neglected great opera, but a stronger performance is needed to convince me. Libretto in German only.

MARK

STOCKHAUSEN: *Piano Works*
Elisabeth Klein
Scandinavian 220555—69 minutes

Here is a well-filled disc of Stockhausen piano music, strongly performed and recorded. The latest work, *Tierkreis* from 1975-77, is a series of 12 melodies for the zodiac. By far the most listenable offering on the program, it has a delicate melancholy and attenuated lyricism; it's a specimen of what the notes call the composer's "new friendliness". Another way of saying this is that the earlier avant-garde pieces are unfriendly. Klavierstuck IX consists of a chord repeated 139 times, then 83 more followed by a rapid series of grace notes. V, from 1954, is a foreboding piece full of trills, with moments of hesitant tonality. Several works are specimens of the music of chance that was so fashionable half a century ago. XI consists of 19 different groups, the order chosen at the performance, so each account is different. Elisabeth Klein, a master of contemporary European music, plays with icy authority in brilliant sound.

SULLIVAN

STORACE: *Harpsichord Pieces*
Naoko Akutagawa
Naxos 572209—64 minutes

Akutagawa is a secure and poised player. I appreciate her stylish ornamentation in the Corrente and her finely-honed sense of Frescobaldian timing in the Toccata in F. She presents a strong case for Storace's less widely-performed works like the Toccata, the passamezzo pieces, and Partite Sopra Il Cinque Passi. She has chosen to alter certain accidentals that in the original score are much more dissonant. This is a matter of personal taste and discretion.

KATZ

STRAUSS,J: *The Goddess of Reason*
Veronika Groiss, Isabella Ma-Zach, s; Manfred Equiluz, Kirlianit Cortes, Franz Fodinger, Wolfgang Veith, t; Andreas Mittermeier, Nicolas Legoux, b; Slovak Sinfonietta/ Christian Pollack
Naxos 660280 [2CD] 125 minutes

This is a very strange Johann Strauss II operetta, and the last one he wrote. *Die Göttin der Vernunft* was not composed altogether willingly. Strauss may have gone into a contract with his librettists, Willner and Buchbinder, but once confronted with the plot and the lyrics, he sought eagerly to be released from his contract.

The final operetta from the Waltz King is chock-a-block with marches and a few waltzes. The story takes place in a French town near the German border, at the time of the French Revolution. Although there is some business with mistaken identity involving a countess, the plot has little involvement with the Reign of Terror then taking place in Paris. It more resembles a French operetta of the late 1890s, with a military garrison close to a girls' school and the typical entanglements that follow.

There's a lot of military music, from the Act I 'Kommt her!' to the finale tribute to the hussars; and one gets the requisite march strains rather often. There are entrance songs for various captains, a trio for three Jacobins with a march coda, and finales that end with marches. Not that these finales are terribly memorable.

The waltzes pop up, of course, and some of them are most attractive. In the second act—by far the strongest of the three—there's a duet for Captain Robert and the countess that begins with a violin solo that sounds like humming bees around a rose bush and ends fairly passionately with a waltz strain. The next number was intended as the real take-home waltz: a tribute by an ageing landowner to his 'Wild Time of Youth'. It's nice, but hardly in the same league as the triumphant waltzes from *Die Fledermaus*, *Eine Nacht in Venedig*, or *Gypsy Baron*. But just to make sure you don't forget it, it turns up as an entr'acte before the final act.

A female duet in the second act is appealing, as is another march, sung by the countess, swearing allegiance to the army. A further duet

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 160

for Jacquelin, a caricaturist, and Ernestine, a former grisette, has a wistful elegance. And it is very well sung by Isabella Ma-Zach and Wolfgang Veith.

Die Göttin der Vernunft played the Theater an der Wien a mere 36 times and was promptly forgotten. But a decade later the music was extracted and put together with a new libretto, called *Reiche Mädchen* (Rich Girls), which played at the Raimundtheater. This was a much greater success, thanks probably to the great Alexander Girardi in a leading part.

It is obvious that Strauss had little interest in the libretto, which, fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your mood, is not included here. I didn't have a copy to follow the lyrics or the dialog. Naxos does supply a synopsis. What's odd is that at least one of the librettists, Willner, became much more accomplished later on, supplying many librettos for Franz Lehar and many other composers. Among the hits he wrote were *The Count of Luxembourg* and *Das Dreimäderlhaus*. Strauss of course regained his stature with the next operetta, *Wiener Blut*, adapted from his music and still played everywhere.

We can thank the Johann Strauss Edition of his works for this endeavor, which was reconstructed and then recorded in Slovakia with the participation of the Johann Strauss Society of Great Britain. Peter Kemp, from that society, wrote the fine notes. The orchestra, under Christian Pollack (who also arranged the reconstruction of the original score), gives a real shimmer to the music; and the soloists are excellent.

As a filler, the dance arrangements from this operetta are included, as recorded previously on the Marco Polo label.

TRAUBNER

STRAUSS: *Piano Quartet; Cello Sonata; Capriccio Sextet*

Michal Kanka, vc; Miguel Borges Coelho, p; Prazak Quartet

Praga 250275 [SACD] 75 minutes

I never got past my initial impression that the piano quartet is simply too aggressive here. It's not especially fast, though there are slower performances; but the attacks are almost angry, and the blasts of violin tone sound almost frantic and certainly irritating (and I think not perfectly on pitch).

This music is not particularly popular. It's from Strauss's Brahmsian period, and he tried to suppress it. Recordings come and go, and I like a few that I think are gone. But in the last five years or so we reviewed two that are better than this one. The Leipzig Quartet on MDG 6431355 (May/June 2006) is probably still available, and we liked the beautiful old world sound and playing. I liked the Alvarez Quartet recording even better—it's also old world but even gentler and sweeter. But that was coupled in a two-disc set with Wilhelm Petersen's Piano Quintet (Hera 2121, March/April 2007). It also had five small pieces for piano quartet by Strauss that you probably can't get anywhere else—and two of them are really nice.

Michal Kanka is an excellent cellist, but often he seems too "busy" to let us enjoy the rich tone of the instrument. He is always rushing on to the next phrase (though the slow movement is quite lovely). Again, this is not a great work, but it can be more appealing than it is here. (The old Audiofon recording by William De Rosa even sounds better—Jan/Feb 1997.)

And the *Capriccio* sextet introduction (about ten minutes) turns up on lots of recordings, so you don't need this for that.

VROON

STRAUSS: *Der Rosenkavalier*

Teresa Zylis-Gara (Octavian), Montserrat Caballé (Marschallin), Edith Mathis (Sophie), Otto Edelmann (Ochs), John Modenos (Faninal); Glyndebourne 1965/ John Pritchard

Glyndebourne 10 [3CD] 188 minutes

This performance of Strauss's most popular opera was recorded from the stage of the Glyndebourne Theater on May 30, 1965 before an enthusiastic audience. Because that theater is relatively small, this performance uses the composer's reduced orchestral score, which undoubtedly made things easier for the excellent cast. But the London Philharmonic, despite its reduced size, plays the music beautifully under John Pritchard's knowing direction, making this one of the better recordings of staged performances of this opera. It has an intimate quality that's often lacking when the original score is used.

As for the cast, Montserrat Caballé, in superb vocal fettle, turns out to be a very good Marschallin. Her pure, gorgeous voice, with its many shadings, allows her to exploit the tonal beauty of the music without scanting the words in a way that few Marschallins can achieve. Her high pianissimos, almost a trademark of her singing, are remarkably effective in the final scene of Act 1, where she uses it to distance herself from Octavian, her erstwhile lover, without losing her dignity. Teresa Zylis-Gara, here Octavian (later in her career, she also sang the Marschallin), also has a smooth and attractive voice, and she acts the teen-age lover with passionate vigor.

Edith Mathis, then still in her 20s, had a beautiful soprano of considerable range; in 1965 she sang both Sophie and Cherubino at Glyndebourne. Her Sophie breaks no new

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 161

ground; indeed it's a bit too bland, perhaps owing to her position on stage. Still, she performs it well. Otto Edelmann's sings Ochs with a pronounced Viennese accent. Since the performance is in German, this may have confused his British audiences; apart from that, it's a standard interpretation, well sung. The rest of the cast is quite competent, though I wonder at the provenance of John Andrew, the Italian Singer; he's no Pavarotti.

Glyndebourne's presentation is, as always, lavish. The book package includes the complete libretto in German and English plus a synopsis of the plot in three languages (including French) as well as photographs of the staging. The sound is the best I've heard in any Glyndebourne release. This set is worth acquiring for several reasons but especially for Caballé's Marschallin.

MOSES

STRAUSS: songs

Ständchen; Leises Lied; Wiegenliedchen; Rote Rosen; De Erwachte Rose; Malven; Schlagende Herzen; Muttertanderlei; Das Bachlein; Amor; Madchenblumen, op 22; 5 Songs, op 48; Ophelia Songs

Gillian Keith, s; Simon Lepper, p
Champ Hill 18—60 minutes

Soprano Gillian Keith, who took a degree in piano performance from McGill University, here proves herself to be a superb interpreter of Richard Strauss's lieder. This is one of the best Strauss recital albums since Soile Isokoski's memorable traversal of the orchestral songs for Ondine (Sept/Oct 2002). She has power a-plenty, but even more impressive are her perfectly gossamer pianissimos.

It is a pity that the engineers have placed pianist Simon Lepper unnaturally far in the background, as it spoils what might have been an unqualified success. No matter—it is at least a qualified success of the best sort.

BOYER

STRAUSS: *songs*

Diana Damrau, s; Munich Philharmonic/ Christian Thielemann
Virgin 28664—71 minutes

The German soprano Diana Damrau has in the last several years become one of the most versatile and busiest lyric sopranos at the Met. She has sung leading roles in operas by Rossini (*The Barber of Seville* and *Le Comte D'Ory*), Richard Strauss (*Der Rosenkavalier*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and *The Egyptian Helen*), Mozart (*The Magic Flute*), and Verdi (*Rigoletto*). On the evidence of this all-Strauss program, she is also a good lieder singer. She has an attractive, secure, and agile voice and a thorough understanding of her repertory. It's not a large voice, but it's pure and even and it has the required vocal range; and her diction, in opera and lieder, is very good, if not quite in the Schwarzkopf class. Her lieder interpretations, while not breaking new ground, are fresh and straightforward, and not encrusted with artificial mannerisms.

This program of 22 lieder includes many of Strauss's most popular songs, such as 'Morgen', 'Allerseelen', 'Das Rosenband', 'Traum durch die Dämmerung', and 'Zueignung'. Yet there are also several that are unfamiliar like 'Lied der Frauen', a seven-minute song that tells of a woman's worries about her absent husband (a miner or a soldier) and her exultation and joy when he comes back to her. The words, by Brentano, seem trite; and that may account for Strauss's lack of inspiration in the musical setting. But many of these songs are among the composer's best.

The orchestral accompaniments are the composer's own, in some cases done long after the piano version had been published. Thielemann is a very careful accompanist, and the excellent Munich Philharmonic sounds wonderfully transparent. It never covers the singer.

Ten of these songs were recorded by Schwarzkopf with the *Four Last Songs*, with George Szell on EMI. That has long been one of my favorite recordings of this repertory. Damrau is not as accomplished a singer now as Schwarzkopf was then in terms of interpretive depth, richness of sound, and tonal beauty; but the better orchestral sound of this release almost evens things up. Texts and translations are included in the booklet.

MOSES

STRAVINSKY: *Rite of Spring;*
BARTOK: *Sonata for 2 Pianos & Percussion*

Duo d'Accord; Eardrum Percussion Duo
Genuin 11195—59 minutes

Pianists Lucia Huang and Sebastian Euler are Duo d'Accord, and this is their fourth superb disc to come my way for review. Impeccable musicianship, precise ensemble, and inquisitive exploration of unusual repertoire are all phrases that describe this young piano duo. Their Messiaen *Visions de l'Amen* (Oehms 704, May/June 2008) made my best of the year list, and I have a strong feeling about this disc repeating that honor this year. This is one of the most brilliant ensemble performances I have ever heard, and Genuin's recorded sound is truly demonstration quality. I have Ohm Walsh 5 speakers with Rotel amplification and will keep this disc at hand to show off my system. If I have one minor caveat, it is that there is so much presence in the percussion instruments that they dominate sometimes when I

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 162

think the pianos should be more front and center. A different reviewer may very well be glad that this is the first recording of the Bartok where the percussion finally has its rightful place in the sonic spectrum. I have been fortunate to see three concert performances of this masterpiece of 20th Century chamber music, and have several recordings (including the excellent Martha Argerich & Stephen Kovacevich reviewed elsewhere in this issue). Duo d'Accord and the Eardrum Percussion Duo (Johannes Fischer and Domenico Melchiorre) are without question at the top of my list. While I expect excellent ensemble, I am grateful for the infectious excitement these four conjure up and the sophistication of their quiet interplay.

While the Bartok is reason enough to get this, the Stravinsky is a world premiere recording of this ensemble's version for two pianos and percussion. It has all of the spectacular performance and sonic qualities of the Bartok, plus we have to give credit to the ensemble for a new version of an established masterpiece that should make its way into the standard repertory. It is of course a perfect pairing with the Bartok. There are few if any works of comparable quality for the same ensemble. Stravinsky himself made an arrangement for two pianists at one or two pianos (a number of compromises must be made if only one piano is used). It is here that this group began. Then they added the percussion parts from the orchestral score and expanded the piano writing. As the booklet notes tell us, there was a long rehearsal process where various ideas were tried and evaluated. The percussion parts were expanded to not only support the pianos, but to take the lead and get the main musical line sometimes. The virtuosity of the mallet instruments will make your jaw drop. The end result works so well that I am astounded.

HARRINGTON

STRAVINSKY: *Violin Pieces*

Isabelle van Keulen, v; Olli Mustonen, p
Newton 8802062 [2CD] 96 minutes

When it comes to Stravinsky, we are not only used to an endless list of masterpieces, but of large works like *The Rite of Spring* and the *Symphony of Psalms*. This is an exceptional collection of the complete works for violin and piano. These pieces, some no more than 3 minutes long, have the same sophistication, brilliance, merit, and inspiration as some of Stravinsky's larger works. Most are arrangements that came from a long friendship with violinist Samuel Duskin.

The high points of this collection are the Divertimento and the glorious and elegant Duo Concertant.

Mustonen and Keulen give a spectacular performance, filled with nuance, color, and intensity. Their passion is intoxicating. Many of these were arranged for specific performances and are meant to have an improvisational flare. In the same spirit, Olli Mustonen made an arrangement of the 'Tango', originally written by Stravinsky for piano.

JACOBSEN

STRAVINSKY: *Duo Concertant; 2-Piano Sonata; Requiem Canticles; Abraham & Isaac; Elegie; Blue Bird*

Jennifer Frautschi, v; Jeremy Denk, p; Philharmonia Orchestra; 20th Century Ensemble/ Robert Craft

Naxos 557532—68 minutes

All of these performances are satisfying. The performance of the Sonata for Two Pianos is very good. The *Requiem Canticles* are also done well, but I am not thrilled with the choir. I expect a more rigid approach with little to no vibrato. The *Duo Concertant* is OK, but I prefer Keulen (above). *Abraham and Isaac* comes to life with baritone David Wilson-Johnson. He has a warm and expansive sound. The high point of this collection is without a doubt the *Elegie* for solo viola. Richard O'Neill gives a stunning performance of one of Stravinsky's most memorable works.

JACOBSEN

STURLA: *Passio Di Venerdi Santo*

Laura Delfino, s; Marina Frandi, a; Emanuela Esposito, cantus firmus; Il Concento Ecclesiastico/ Luca Franco Ferrari

Brilliant 94184—52 minutes

Little is known about Carlo Sturla, active in Genoa in the first part of the 18th Century. This piece is a St John Passion without the full Passion story, as the music manuscript ends at the point where the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothing. The piece is rather interesting, with secular styles (including dramatic opera writing) incorporated into a sacred piece to comply with the Church's music restrictions for Lent. The interpretation is not satisfying: the choral passages (female voices) are often too fast and in a sports-cheering style; the cantus firmus is echoey and sung with a nasal timbre that does not match the choral sound. Rather than providing refreshing contrasts, these differences break the piece into unconnected sections.

Director Luca Franco Ferrari founded Il Concento Ecclesiastico in 1995, and he prepared the performing edition of the Sturla Passion for this 2006 recording. The ensemble specializes in the re-discovery and perfor-

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 163

mance of unknown baroque repertoire. Notes, texts, translations. First recording.

C MOORE

SUK: *Fantasy;*
RESPIGHI: *Autumn Poem;*
CHAUSSON: *Poeme;*
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: *The Lark Ascending*
Julia Fischer, v; Monte Carlo Philharmonic/ Yakov Kreizberg
Decca 15535—70 minutes

The Fantasy in D minor by Josef Suk is a grand and impressive piece written on a huge canvas, and has a powerful orchestration. It calls for a very good violinist; and Fischer has power, precision, and the ability to make every note on the violin sing out in full voice. The recording is made in such a way that the largeness of the orchestration does not detract from the largeness of the violin playing.

The Respighi, another big piece for violin and orchestra, also has a great deal of orchestral color, and it includes a wonderful section of extended violin harmonics.

Fischer's take on the well-known Chausson *Poeme* is rather conventional, and after hearing Ulf Schneider's reading (J/A 2010) on Ars Musici, which draws its inspiration from the Turgenev story 'The Song of Triumphant Love' (the story that inspired Chausson to write the piece), the conventional Ysaye-inspired, somewhat hazy approach to the piece no longer works for me, no matter how beautifully every note is played.

Fischer seems most at home in *The Lark Ascending*, which she plays delicately and effectively. I far prefer the way Fischer plays this music to the way she plays Schubert (J/F 2010).

FINE

SUPPE: *Dalmatia Mass*
Daniel Schreiber, Henning Jensen, t; Philip Niederberger, b; Jens Wollenschlager, org; Lords of the Chords/ Jens Wollenschlager
Carus 83455—49 minutes

Franz von Suppe (1819-1895) was born in Split, Dalmatia (now in Croatia). The original version of this Mass for three male soloists and men's choir was a product of his youth. Later in life he revised it thoroughly before submitting it for publication in 1876. Though not festooned with dazzling counterpoint or ravishing melodies, it is an attractive, mellow, well-crafted traversal of the liturgy that gives a first-rate men's choir many opportunities to shine. And shine these fellows do, whether crooning their way elegantly through the Kyrie and other introspective interludes, or becoming cheerleaders for God when Suppe turns them loose in the Gloria.

His 'Gloria in excelsis', by the way, establishes the key of B-flat major the same way the opening of Monteverdi's *Vespers* puts you in D. (Hope you find the tonic healthful!) Like the choir, the three solo voices are light, bright, and agile, which is precisely what you want in such a work. The Carus engineering is flattering to one and all.

I have to admit, though, that the music had me chuckling more than once. Why? Because the organ can sound a bit like a calliope; and with all the close harmonies being sold to the max by the men, I began picturing them down on one knee, pitching woo to the Lord wearing candy-striped jackets and straw hats! (Adoramus te, my Coney Island baby.) Please don't get me wrong: this is a serious piece full of prayerful intentions. Suppe wasn't fooling around. But I know what I heard, and I'm still giggling as I type this. Anyway, informative notes in a full-service booklet clinch the deal on a handsome release. And who says a proper liturgy can't elicit a smile or two as it unfolds?

GREENFIELD

TAFFANEL: *Wind Quintets;* see DANZI

TANAKA: *Piano Pieces*
Signe Bakke—2L 74—51 minutes

"Crystalline", the title of this enticing program of Karen Tanaka's piano music, is also the name of the works that open and close the program. The first, from 1988, is influenced by Messiaen; the second, a more personal statement from 1995, reflects Tanaka's Japanese heritage. Both are seductive pieces in a non-tonal impressionist idiom. The more recent works, with titles like Water Dance I-III, are more tonal, some might say mushily so. Others, like Techno Etudes I-III, are aggressive molto perpetuo bursts of energy. Still others are charming children's pieces.

Though Tanaka reflects the promiscuously eclectic era we live in, she does explore these varied idioms with imagination and an ear for beautiful piano sound. Signe Bakke, long a Tanaka champion, plays with a stunning color and vividness—qualities matched by the recorded sound.

SULLIVAN

TANEYEV: *Quartets 2 + 3*
Carpe Diem Quartet—Naxos 572421—74 minutes

This is important music to know. Taneyev is certainly known as one of the great composition teachers, teaching Rachmaninoff and Scriabin among others. But his music is not often performed. He is a master of Russian

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 164

chamber music, and this music is improbably brilliant. The A minor Quartet (3) in particular, is one of the best pieces in Russian music. I must get my hands on Carpe Diem's performance of the other quartets.

Carpe Diem is currently the quartet in residence at Ohio Wesleyan University. They are exceptional and deserve praise for an admirable and electrifying go at Taneyev. They have flawless technique and appropriate feeling.

I know getting too "political" in this country is frowned on, especially when talking about education, the last hope we have in this increasingly uncultured and ugly country. But, all I can think of as I listen to Carpe Diem is, how can we support these valuable ensembles that are housed at our universities? Our education system has never supported the arts to the degree that it should. There is culture, brilliance, humanity and inspiring music-making in this country—so let us support and defend it!

JACOBSEN

TANSMAN: *Clarinet Concerto; Concertino; 6 Movements*
Laurent Decker, ob; Jean-Marc Fessard, cl; Silesian Chamber Orchestra/ Miroslaw Blaszczyk
Naxos 572402—62 minutes

Conscious eclecticism did not fully emerge until the mid-20th Century, but musicians who crossed geographical borders rarely resisted the confluence of where they came from and where they were going. One of history's most striking examples is Alexandre Tansman (1897-1986), a Polish-born Jewish virtuoso pianist and composer whose polytonal thinking proved too radical for a country that had not yet heard Debussy. In 1919, after completing law studies at the University of Warsaw, he moved to Paris, where he was encouraged by Ravel and Stravinsky and admired by Les Six. In a modernist answer to Chopin, whom he adored, the young Pole fused the mazurka and the polonaise with French neo-classicism—and in his spare time he wrote jazz under a pseudonym. He also performed often, including with Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony. During World War II, as the Nazis set up a government in France, he fled with his family to Los Angeles, where he became friends with Schoenberg and wrote six film scores, one of which was nominated for an Academy Award.

After the war, Tansman returned to Paris, only to find that the city had moved on without him. While many European capitals sizzled with the sounds of the avant-garde, the aging composer remained true to his philosophy, quietly creating works that, if no longer shocking, were still profoundly individual in their materials and expression.

Here, French soloist and Brussels Royal Conservatory clarinet professor Jean-Marc Fessard and Orchestre National de France oboist Laurent Decker team up with the Silesian Chamber Orchestra of Poland and their conductor for a concert of Tansman's orchestral music from the postwar period.

The Clarinet Concerto (1957) is recorded here for the first time. Tansman wrote it for the famous French clarinetist Louis Cahuzac, who premiered it two years afterward at the age of 79, one year before he died in a motorcycle accident. Inside the standard form and length (three movements, 18 minutes) are elements of Bach, Stravinsky, and folk music, all balanced in a colorful orchestral soup.

The next two pieces look backward and forward even further. The Concertino for oboe, clarinet, and strings (1952) and the Six Movements for Strings (1963) have transparent writing and a wealth of contrapuntal devices that invite comparison to the baroque orchestral suite. Even so, each work is shot through with pungent Gallic dissonance, brooding Slavic passages, jazz references, and romantic cyclicism.

The performances are enthusiastic and sincere, but not always on the same level. Fessard has an excellent soloist personality, competing well against Tansman's large orchestra, and he has the requisite amount of fingers and expressive awareness. But despite his French training, he has poor control over his sound and legato, especially in the high register; and he never achieves the tight articulation, keen intonation, or special resonance that the best players have. Decker, by contrast, boasts a beautifully clear timbre and the first-rate phrasing and technique to go with it. He holds his own with Fessard and his big tone, even if he cannot pull him into his own sculpted soundscape. The Silesian Chamber Orchestra plays with professionalism, authority, and superb musicianship, proving once again that Eastern European ensembles are just as skilled as their more famous Western counterparts.

HANUDEL

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Francesca da Rimini; Serenade for Strings; Marche Slave*
USSR Orchestra/ Gennady Rozhdestvensky
Warner 67547—68 minutes

Lawrence Hansen found Rozhdestvensky's *Francesca da Rimini* the selling point of the original Erato release (Nov/Dec 1992), writing "it takes a while for the coals to heat up, but once they do, things are plenty exciting". I must concur; and while I have no problem with his overall timing of 25:41—my favorite,

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 165

Bernstein with the New York Philharmonic, is 24:36—I must part company with Mr Hansen over his painfully slow treatment of the yearning central episode where Francesca and Paolo recount to Dante their ill-starred love affair. At that Rozhdestvensky manages to convey a perceptibly smoother overall arc than Mikhail Pletnev (with Symphony 5; see review below); but for real smoldering passion neither can top Lenny and the richly blended New York strings. The reprise of Tchaikovsky's eternal hell-fire here strikes me as downright desultory, while Rozhdestvensky trivializes the massive final cataclysmic chords by barreling through them *way* too fast.

Mr Hansen thought the *Marche Slave* "slow"; yet I'd say it actually sets out at quite a jaunty clip. He builds up a sizable head of steam, and you may find it somewhat lightweight next to Reiner, for example. But once the commanding drum beats set up the quickstep conclusion, Rozhdestvensky *really* goes into overdrive, with the big brass standing tall in the Tsarist anthem amid great swaths on the gong. So I liked it better than *Francesca*.

And I steeled myself (pun intended) on reading Mr Hansen's account of "thin, rather pallid string tone" in the *Serenade*; yet I found little reason to complain save for the opening movement. It is far too weighty and heavy of heart for my taste, lumpish and drenched with despair, with the Russian strings laboriously sawing away. Matters improve with the lilting Waltz—one would expect no less from Rozhdestvensky, the consummate master of the ballet—and in the wistful Elegy sentimentality is clearly called for, and he draws some wonderfully expressive phrasing from his players, most notably the solo turn by the concertmaster around five minutes in. The finale is based on a perky Russian dance, and you can really hear the *balalaikas*, while the widespread discourse of high and low strings only adds to the general gaiety. But with the reprise of the opening movement he once again adopts a leaden tread, fortunately soon set aside as the sprightly dance rhythms return.

While Warner has served the curious record buyer poorly by offering no notes whatsoever, this is an interesting and affordable cross-section of Tchaikovsky's music, though you may find more satisfying accounts.

HALLER

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Manfred; Overture in C minor*
Russian Orchestra/ Gennady Rozhdestvensky; Moscow Symphony/ Sergei Skripka
Alto 1139—69 minutes

First, an update. The Melodiya Svetlanov performance of Tchaikovsky's overture to Ostrovsky's drama *The Storm* taped in concert in 1990 that I heralded as "just out" in Part II of my Overview (Mar/Apr 2011)—labeled "Forgotten Pages"—turns out to be *not The Storm* but rather the same Overture in C minor heard here. His earlier studio recording was issued by the Svetlanov Foundation coupled with the *Winter Dreams* Symphony, and you may be fortunate enough to own the Melodiya LPs by Evgeny Akulov and Alexander Lazarev, the latter also released via ABC (67033). The confusion is understandable, as Tchaikovsky re-used both the opening pages and the ensuing lyrical melody (a Russian folk song, 'The Young Maiden') from *The Storm* written a few years earlier. But the assertive passage that follows is entirely different from its jittery counterpart in *The Storm*; and more important, the latter piece is easily recognizable for its inclusion of a melody we now know well from the introduction to the Adagio cantabile of *Winter Dreams*.

As to the performance by Sergei Skripka and the Moscow Symphony offered here, I'd have to put it on a par with Svetlanov, and if you're looking to add a real rarity to your Tchaikovsky shelf this will do very nicely.

But I certainly don't mean to downplay the main course. Gennady Rozhdestvensky recorded Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* in the Large Studio of Moscow Radio in 1989, yet the box says "First issue in West", and I don't ever recall encountering it. As you might expect, both Rozhdestvensky's conception of the score and the recorded sound are not unlike the Svetlanov—unfortunately that also goes for the raw Russian brass (not to mention the often wobbly horns). But Rozhdestvensky clearly has great affection for this grand sprawling narrative and draws the listener in right from the start, aided by the warm and deeply resonant soundstage that still offers a welcome wealth of woodwind detail. He has the Moscow players pouring their very heart and soul into Tchaikovsky's inspired melodies, most notably the haunting strain that tells of Manfred's tormented yearning for the fair Astarte. That builds to an impassioned climax. He imparts an unforced and limpid flow to the centerpiece of the symphony, the pastoral Andante, where even the bucolic Alpine atmosphere cannot relieve Manfred's despair. If the water sprites of the Scherzo seem a bit earthbound for all the nattering of the wind players, the Mendelssohnian imagery is nicely conveyed just the same. But with the stentorian trombones that launch Manfred's bacchanalian revels in the cave of Arimanes, all subtlety is cast aside: Rozhdestvensky slams into it with a manic ferocity, an almost hysterical onslaught with great thwacks on the tambourine and gong, and really all I could do was crank up the

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 166

volume loud enough to wake the dead and just *go* with it—a thrilling, over-the-top spectacle filled out in the closing pages by an absolutely room-shaking organ!

If you prefer your orgies on the genteel side, this is not for you; but even if you buy it for the rare Tchaikovsky overture—as I did—I have a feeling you'll be playing *Manfred* a lot.

HALLER

TCHAIKOVSKY: *The Sleeping Beauty*
Royal Philharmonic/ Barry Wordsworth
RPO 30 [2CD] 1:53

Three strikes and out for the RPO's Tchaikovsky ballet cycle, I'm afraid. David Maninov's *Nutcracker* was bland and colorless and added nothing to the catalog (Nov/Dec 2010); and Nicolae Moldoveanu's *Swan Lake* reflected a considerable improvement in the playing of the RPO while benefitting from considerably more involvement from the podium; yet at the same time he omitted a couple of dances that Previn (EMI) easily found room for (Jan/Feb 2011). But Moldoveanu's *Swan Lake* is a model of completeness next to *this* ill-begotten sham that guts the hell out of the Act III *divertissement*.

You may already wonder what's going on here when you compare the timings of 61:51 and 51:36 to Previn, who breaks Act II across two discs (horrors!) but crams on nearly every note at 77:50 and 78:35. (Even missing a few dances you get more of the ballet from Ansermet than you do here.)

The Prologue manages to come out of it unscathed; but the Maids of Honor and Pages unfortunately don't make it into the Act I 'Pas d'action' (tracks 17-19). Really? You couldn't find room for two more minutes of music on a 61:51 CD? And as if *that* weren't bad enough, Act II is shorn of the 'Dances of the Courtiers' (four in all) along with the bumptious 'Farandole'.

But that's nothing next to the skeletal remains of Act III, where the only characters that remain out of Perrault's vast storybook are Puss-in-Boots and the White Cat, both apparently well into their ninth life—forget Cinderella and Prince Charming, forget Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, forget Hop o' My Thumb and the Blue Bird. I guess their invitations got lost in the mail. *And*—get *this*! *get this!*—the *entire* 'Finale and Apotheosis' is gone—deleted—every note—and in its place we have the 'Polacca' that *should* have ushered the procession of fairy-tale characters onstage. You heard me: the glorious strains of 'Vive Henri Quatre' that I'm sure everyone who loves this ballet looks forward to hearing from full brass and cymbals at the close is simply thrown under the coach. Whose lame-brained idea was this?

Whatever the case, this unforgivably bowdlerized *Sleeping Beauty* is worse than merely a needless waste of time and money; this is an absolute travesty.

HALLER

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Symphony 5; Francesca da Rimini*
Russian National Orchestra/ Mikhail Pletnev
PentaTone 5186 385 [SACD] 72 minutes

This is *not* the same Tchaikovsky Fifth Mikhail Pletnev set down with the Russian National Orchestra for DG several years ago, first released as part of a boxed set (Jan/Feb 1997) and later reissued coupled with *Hamlet* (453 449). I haven't heard that one; but taking Mr Ashby's words at face value, I have to believe this new recording is the polar opposite of that one. He characterized Pletnev's whole cycle as "non-committed", the brass "positively genteel", in fact "nothing whatsoever of tradition, audible Russianness, interpretive conviction, or affection for the music", though he did single out 5 as the best of a none too emotional lot.

Say what you will about some of Pletnev's tempo choices here, "non-committed" he definitely is *not*—nor is there anything the least bit "genteel" about the low brass in the great climax nine minutes into the opening movement and once again at the close—to say nothing of the breathtaking culmination of stark power in the finale where the entire orchestra slams on the brakes, right before what annotator Franz Steiger unbelievably calls a "blaring...noisy and downright garish conclusion". (On the contrary, I rather suspect most readers would join me in finding Tchaikovsky's ringing final statement of the pervasive "Fate" motto a masterpiece of man's triumph over an unfeeling Destiny.)

Tempos in the opening pages seem reasonable—if with some perceptible nips and tucks—and Pletnev is afforded soulful playing from the low woodwinds, who respond with great conviction even though he really draws out the musical line. On reaching the main body of the movement he saunters along in endearingly jaunty fashion, building to a thrilling climax unfortunately largely set in aspic by the resonant Moscow studio—I certainly hope it isn't nearly so congested played as an SACD. But any lingering doubts of Pletnev's "Russianness" were dispelled by his swooning, heart-on-sleeve treatment of the secondary strain, while the development heaves about mightily—whether genuine affection or pure showmanship, who can say?

The Andante cantabile seems all but stagnant at Pletnev's measured tread; that may explain the horn player's sorely prosaic ren-

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 167

dering, merely putting one foot before the other as best he can and still maintain some grasp of the musical line. When the strings take up the theme, you can clearly hear the yearning Tchaikovsky wrote into this music—not apparent from the horn solo. I get what Pletnev is after, but surely you still need *some* semblance of forward motion? The slo-mo clarinet at 6:12 is painful to endure, while the positively fierce onslaught that follows is simply over the top. What a pleasure to lean back and relax once again for the Waltz, in turn contrasting with the fleet trio that the Russian players pull off beautifully.

There's a noble dignity to the motto theme as it sets up the Russian dance central to the finale. It begins in suitably spirited fashion, so you can imagine my amazement when at 4:00 Pletnev all of a sudden sped up *so* fast I thought my CD player had malfunctioned, thereafter barreling through it lickety-split as if some one in the control booth had called down to him that another orchestra needed to use the studio. Had he adopted this same tempo right at the outset, I might have merely mentioned it in passing—he's not that far off from Mravinsky after all—but to suddenly switch gears like this is very odd. (Did he do this on his earlier recording?) So that's where he lost me, and even his jubilant stride at the close could not make amends—nor for that matter his willful caricature of *Francesca da Rimini* with wildly overwrought scenes of hellfire and damnation set on either side of a laborious and finally maudlin eulogy to the unfortunate lovers. Avoid this.

HALLER

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Symphony 6*
Gürzenich Orchestra/ Dmitri Kitaenko
Oehms 666 [SACD] 51 minutes

with **SCHOENBERG:** *Variations for Orchestra*
West-Eastern Divan Orchestra/ Daniel Barenboim—Decca 15607—69 minutes

Barenboim and his ensemble of young players absolutely nail the *Pathetique*—this is one of the finest recordings I've heard in a while, and certainly the single BEST Tchaikovsky performance I've ever heard from this conductor. His earlier account with the Chicago Symphony (July/Aug 1999), while actually a cut above most of his other CSO recordings, was pretty effective but had moments where the dramatic line went slack. Not so here—perhaps inspired by the West-Eastern Divan's mission, Barenboim is all fiery vigor and dramatic tension.

Oh, you haven't heard about the West-Eastern Divan ensemble? It's a youth orchestra formed by Barenboim and Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said in 1999. Its players are drawn from the ranks of young Israeli, Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian, even Iranian and Palestinian musicians. The group actually has its summer academy in Seville, Spain, where it prepares the programs before going on tour. With money coming from the government of Andalucia, some of the personnel are now young Spanish classical musicians. In interviews, Barenboim has insisted that he doesn't expect his project to bring peace to the Middle East, but perhaps it can help musicians see each other in a different light.

I'm normally not a fan of projects to improve "awareness" or make a gesture, and I doubt the W-ED will have much effect on world politics. What I will say is that the orchestra plays spectacularly well under Barenboim—their DVD performance of the Beethoven 9th is one of my three favorite recordings of the work nowadays.

Why does this ensemble play so spectacularly well? I think two reasons: first, the musicians are young—the music is still new to them. It's "wow, we're playing Tchaikovsky under Daniel Barenboim!!!" rather than "oh no, not the *Pathetique* AGAIN!!!" Second, they get plenty of rehearsal time, far more than the average American or European professional orchestra.

Barenboim paces the long, long introduction to the first movement beautifully, blasting off into a furious allegro that builds to a crushing climax before dying away in exhaustion. This is how the movement is supposed to go, even if he sometimes hammers home the bigger rhetorical gesture in the allegro a little too laboriously (hey, he's still Barenboim). He gives II the right nostalgic lilt and pounds out III with plenty of brassy elan and braggadocio before collapsing into the Mahlerian depths of IV. Kitaenko does dig deeper into the finale—he also takes about 2 minutes longer—but Barenboim gives it decent weight.

I have a couple dozen *Pathetiques* on my CD shelves. Even so, I'll reach for this one again.

The Schoenberg Variations are not a favorite piece of mine, but Barenboim and the orchestra play them with alternating verve, delicacy, and nuance. They may seem at first glance an odd choice to accompany the Tchaikovsky, but as the album notes point out, Wilhelm Furtwangler, Barenboim's conducting idol, led the piece's first performance in 1928. Besides, we really don't need another *1812* Overture or *Romeo and Juliet* tacked on as filler.

I can't really give Decca all the credit for the spacious, open, richly detailed sound, since from my reading of the back page of the

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 168

booklet, it looks like Unitel and the Barenboim-Said Foundation deserve the credit for preserving this performance (it may come out on DVD). The sound, recorded at the Salzburg Festival in August 2007, is spectacular.

Oehms gives Kitaenko nice, sumptuous, full, glowing SACD sound, and the Gürzenich Orchestra of Cologne plays with polish and energy if not quite with the end-of-the-world intensity of Barenboim's young ensemble. As I noted above, the Russian conductor takes the finale to deeper depths and draws out the final pages as a long, slow, fade out from life. There's certainly nothing wrong in the first three movements, nor anything exceptionally original or compelling about the interpretation—the approach of an experienced Russian maestro. II is a bit less lyrical and light-footed than Barenboim's, and the march hasn't the vigor and swagger Barenboim and his young players draw from it. But if you want a solid, sturdy, expressive *Pathetique* that doesn't chew up the scenery and has excellent sonics, this'll do, even if 51 minutes of music is a bit short measure. I won't trade in Karajan (EMI), Munch (RCA), Bernstein (DG), Furtwangler (EMI), Ormandy (Sony)—or Barenboim for this.

HANSEN

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Trio;*
KISSINE: *Zerkalo*
Khatia Buniatishvilli, p; Gidon Kremer, v; Gierdre Dirbanauskatie, vc—ECM 15572—72 minutes

According to the essay, this program marks the beginning and the end (for now) of Russian chamber music. The engineering and recording quality are superb.

The Tchaikovsky and the Kissine share philosophical and rhetorical connections. What I find most inspiring is that the pieces come together through a profound sense of Russian community. Kissine draws inspiration from the words of Shostakovich about the Tchaikovsky and the poetry of Anna Akhmatova to conceptualize a truly reflective piece of music. And despite the obvious difference in harmonic language, both pieces share an urgency that can be both disturbing and poetic.

Zerkalo is a very complex work. The title means "the mirror", and the piece is composed in mirror form, shadowing a very formal sonata form. Included with the disc are extraordinary program notes. The amount of time and dedication that EMI puts into these productions is simply remarkable. With *Zerkalo's* complexity comes tremendous difficulty. These players are stunning performers that do not seem to be remotely affected by the demanding challenges.

Despite Tchaikovsky's reluctance to write a trio, and his view that the three instruments just did not work together, he produced one of my favorite piano trios. These players also play it the best I have heard. It is blazing with vigor and tortured with nostalgia. This is a world-class production that I am sure will be acclaimed.

JACOBSEN

TELLEFSEN: *Violin Sonatas 1+2;*
MIKULI: *Duo in A;*
FILTSCH: *Variations*
Voytek Proniewicz, v; Alexander Jakobidze-Gitman, p—Naxos 572560—65 minutes

This is called Music for Violin and Piano by Pupils of Chopin, but the Norwegian composer Thomas Dyke Ackland Tellefsen (1823-74) deserves recognition far beyond his association with Chopin, who was his piano teacher and longtime friend. Tellefsen's two violin sonatas from 1856 and 1867 are wonderful and inventive pieces. The liner notes describe these sonatas as something between Beethoven and Grieg—an observation I can second. Though Tellefsen was a great champion of Chopin, I hear no resemblance to Chopin in either sonata.

Karol Mikuli (1819-97) studied piano with Chopin in Paris in the 1840s, and he toured Europe performing Chopin's music. He was another of Chopin's close friends and also worked as a copyist, which lends an air of authenticity to the editions he published of Chopin's music. His 'Grand Duo' doesn't sound much like Chopin, but it does take inspiration from just about everything else from the 19th Century. The writing is careful and extremely clever.

Carl Filtsch's set of variations, written before he was 14, does sound a lot like Chopin. Filtsch (1830-45) came to Paris as a child star at the age of 11, and Chopin, who normally didn't teach children, gave him three lessons a week and treated him like a son.

Proniewicz is a Polish violinist, and Jakobidze-Gitman is from Russia. They play all of this music beautifully, particularly the two Tellefsen sonatas, which are real gems.

FINE

THALBERG: *Trio;* see SCHUMANN

TOCH: *The Chinese Flute; Egon & Emilie; 5 Pieces; Quartet*
Multar Ensemble—CPO 777092—65 minutes

Ernst Toch, who came from a non-musical family, began composing by secretly buying and copying Mozart string quartets in grade school. A brilliant autodidact who represented no "school", he always said his teachers were

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 169

Mozart and Bach. He eventually became one of Europe's laeding composers, for a while in a league with Hindemith and Stravinsky. That was before the Nazis. Like Kurt Weill and Billy Wilder, he picked up ominous political signs very early and managed to get out of Germany, arriving in Los Angeles via Paris and New York. He wrote for Hollywood while continuing his career as a chamber composer, later branching out into large-scale symphonies (the latter recorded by CPO in this excellent series).

This rewarding album reveals Toch's great range of style and sensibility from various periods in his colorful career. The earliest piece, *The Chinese Flute*, is a setting of Chinese lyrics for soprano and chamber orchestra that exploits "oriental" effects popular in the 20s. Somehow avoiding cliche, it is intoxicating in its rarefied atmosphere and varied colors and effects. The harmonies range from basic diatonicism to elaborate polytonality. Maria Karb sings the challenging vocal part with haunting expressiveness. A student of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, she has a floating, pure sound.

No Family Drama from 1928, is one of a kind, a depiction of a wife haranguing her weary husband as well as a scathing satire of self-regarding opera divas. Britta Stroher sings the demanding soprano coloratura part with virtuosity and self-lacerating wit. The wind ensemble growls, mocks, and whines in a manner both sinister and pungent.

In sharp contrast, the Five Pieces for Wind Instruments, from 1959, are direct and virtuosic, sometimes lyrical, sometimes acerbic. There are moments of startling simplicity and songfulness. (It is not surprising Toch wrote for Hollywood.) Variety is the only constant. The final work, a quartet, is also for winds. Written the last year of Toch's life, it is pastoral and reflective.

This is attractive, unpredictable music, splendidly performed and recorded, and I'll wager you've never heard any of it before.

SULLIVAN

TORROBA: *3 Nocturnos; Castillos de Espana*
Mikko Ikaheimo, Rody van Gemert, g; Aholansaari Sinfonietta/ Jyri Nissila
Pilfink 68—57 minutes

Moreno Torroba has written several works for guitar and orchestra, though none is part of the standard repertory. That's a shame, because the ones I've been able to hear are all worthy, expressive pieces. Back in the LP days, the Romeros performed *Concierto Iberico* for four guitars and orchestra.

The opening pieces here, *Tres Nocturnos*, for two guitars and orchestra, are also worthy. Moreno Torroba is best known in Spain as a composer of *zarzuelas*, the Spanish musical comedy, and his lush, romantic orchestration and beautiful melodic gifts are clearly evident here. The work is in three movements, each with a descriptive title: 'Hoguerras' (Bonfires), 'Sombras' (Shadows), and 'Brujas' (Witches). Despite the titles, the music is mostly quite sunny.

Ikaheimo and Van Gemert perform together as the Helsinki Guitar Duo (see Collections in this issue). Their playing is idiomatic, though ensemble is sometimes not perfect. The concerto was composed in 1969, but not performed until after 2000. I don't see any more recordings coming soon, and this is certainly serviceable. And the Aholansaari Sinfonietta under Nissila sounds lush beyond its chamber proportions.

Ikaheimo performs the *Castillos de Espana*, all 14 movements. These are some of the composer's most popular works, and it's interesting to compare a recent recording of the same music by Ana Vidovic on Naxos (N/D 2007). I much prefer Vidovic's performance, which is more energetic, vivacious, and inventive. Still, Ikaheimo's approach has its merits. He tends to be quieter, emphasizing the lyric and contemplative where he finds it. His rubato is a touch overdone for my tastes, but he doesn't pull the music apart as badly as many do. If you really love the music and don't have a fixed notion exactly how it should be played, you may enjoy both.

But get the disc for the concerto.

KEATON

URSPRUCH: *5 Pieces; Cavatina & Arabesque, 5 Fantasy Pieces*
Ana-Marija Markovina, p
Genuin 11205 [2CD] 92 minutes

Anton Urspruch (1850-1907) was a protege of Joachim Raff. He taught at the Koch Conservatory in Frankfurt, then at the newer Raff Conservatory. His compositions include a symphony, some choral works, and at least two operas, *The Tempest* and *The Most Impossible of All*. The liner notes are not enlightening, but going by opus numbers, the earlier Five Fantasy Pieces show the influence of Schumann, quoting his Symphonies 3 and 4 and referring to his Fantasy in C. Sometimes the reminiscences are so uncomfortably close to their models as to recall Pauline Kael's crack about an homage being plagiarism that wasn't actionable.

The later Cavatina and Morceaux derive from Liszt, after he'd outgrown his glass chandelier period. In general, Urspruch's piano writing is clean and direct, even in some thick chordal agglomerations.

Markovina's playing is crisp and accurately

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 170

voiced, with expressive power and sympathetic interpretations. Some of the Fantasy Pieces are episodic, but her grasp of their overall design helps weld them into a whole. The recording has good sound and resonance. This is Volume 1 of Urpruch's piano output.

O'CONNOR

VAAGE: *Gardens of Hokkaido; Cyclops; Chaconne*
Einar Rottingen, p; Gro Sandvik, fl; Turid Kniejski, hp; Bergen Philharmonic/ Ingar Bergby, Eivind Aadland, Ole Kristian Ruud
Aurora 5072—65 minutes

Norwegian composer Knut Vaage (b 1961) attended the Grieg Academy in Bergen and has lived and worked in that city ever since. Here the Bergen Philharmonic plays three of his works, each with a different conductor, the recording sessions spanning ten years. *Hokkaidos Hagar* (Gardens of Hokkaido), recorded in 2005 under Ingar Bergby, is a 27-minute sound study full of dissonance and unusual effects. Pianist Einar Rottingen is sometimes soloist, sometimes merely part of the action. Much of the work has an ethereal, spooky atmosphere.

In a 2000 reading of *Chaconne,* Ole Kristian Ruud conducts soloists Gro Sandvik (flute) and Turid Kniejski (harp). We are told that "if we open our ears, we will undoubtedly hear a series of variations", but Vaage has done a marvelous job of disguising them. What is the basic material that will be varied? The opening passages are so murky, with flutist Sandvik playing bass flute and harpist Kniejski playing very low notes—that we have no idea where that material ends and variations begin.

Eivind Aadland conducts a 2009 reading of *Kyklop* (Cyclops), a 17-minute work where musicians make distorted sounds, where textures thicken and thin and intensity comes and goes in big waves, and where the persistent sound is dissonant yet not ugly. I felt as if I were looking at a beautiful scene through a damaged lens.

KILPATRICK

VAINBERG: *Symphony 3; Golden Key Suite 4*
Gothenburg Symphony/ Thord Svedlund
Chandos 5089 [SACD] 50 minutes

I liked Vainberg's Chamber Symphony No. 2 a lot (Alto 1037, N/D 2009) and the Symphony No. 1 and Cello Concerto (Northern Flowers 9973, J/A 2010), but these pieces aren't nearly as good. Much of the symphony could have been written by anyone of middling talent; it has little to say, but it makes sure you hear it. It's marred by some shoddy brass playing about four minutes in—and this music is not terribly difficult. The uninspired ballet music just treads water, a step or two down from Shostakovich's more limp efforts. (The label uses the "Weinberg" spelling.)

ESTEP

VAN EYCK: *Engels Liedt*
Gerald Stempfel, rec
Carpe Diem 16284—64 minutes

I think this release will be of interest primarily to recorder specialists, and perhaps especially ones who enjoy the instruments themselves as opposed to music for the recorder. Mr Stempfel makes recorders, and this release was born when Jonas Niederstadt, a producer he was working with on another program, suggested that he make a solo recording using the instruments he had made to "bring forth all facets of the sound of the flute as you imagine it!"

A different recorder is used for almost every piece on this program, and it is indeed a study in sound. But it's not the sort of thing you put on in the background for not-very-attentive listening; try that, and you'll probably find it annoying. The playing and sound are both excellent, but this is a special treat for people who love and are interested in recorders rather than for the average listener.

CRAWFORD

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: *Lark Ascending;*
see SUK

VICTORIA: *Requiem; Lamentations; Responsories*
Tallis Scholars/ Peter Phillips
Gimell 304 [3CD] 177 minutes

In a continuing tradition of repackaging, this collection contains the three early Victoria recordings by The Tallis Scholars (Requiem, Sept/Oct 1988; Lamentations, July/Aug 2010; and Tenebrae, May/June 1991). While Phillips seems to have not been interested in recording Victoria's masses and motets, his interpretation of the Requiem has become something of a classic; and the recordings of the excerpts from the Holy Week services (the Lamentations of Jeremiah and the Tenebrae responsories) were important additions to Victoria's discography. As Mr Gatens noted in his review of the Lamentations, there is a consistency and quality to any performance by The Tallis Scholars, though there are passages where the interpretations can "seem understated and even placid". He expressed a preference for the recording of these works by The Sixteen (July/Aug 2005). My favorite for both the Lamentations and Tenebrae responsories is La Colombina (Nov/Dec 2005), which places Victoria's works for Holy Week in their proper liturgical context, including parts that would

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 171

have been sung in chant (though without the various recited lessons). And I prefer the performance of the Requiem by the Westminster Cathedral Choir (Sept/Oct 1988) to this more sedate interpretation by Phillips.

BREWER

VISEE: *Theorbo & Lute Pieces*
Manuel Stropoli, rec; Masssimo Marchese, theorbo; Cristiano Contadin, gamba
Brilliant 94154—55:22

Robert de Visée was among the foremost lutenists of France at the turn of the 18th Century, and his compositions for both lute or theorbo and guitar have appeared on a number of recordings; I reviewed a very good selection of his theorbo pieces (Mar/Apr 2006). This recording goes beyond Visée the performer to Visée the marketer, since it includes selections from a 1716 publication of his lute and theorbo compositions arranged as chamber suites for a solo instrument and continuo. While a few movements are played by Contadin as viola da gamba solos with continuo, most of this is played by Manuel Stropoli on recorders and baroque flute. He is a very good recorder player, though I find the soprano recorder he uses for one suite rather strident; not as good are the two suites he plays on baroque flute.

The single most important performance decision on this recording was to have Marchese play the continuo on theorbo; as Visée noted in his introduction "I believe that the [theorbo's] gut strings's sound is more suitable to transverse flute than the [harpsichord's] brass strings." Not only does the theorbo supply a suitable accompaniment, but Marchese is a deeply sensitive and proficient performer, and his realizations of the continuo are models that should be emulated by other performers of this repertoire.

While I would like to hear these works played by a flutist with the abilities of Barthold Kuijken, this is still a good recording of very interesting works that demonstrate how deeply the theorbo and its repertoire came to influence the musical styles of the French baroque.

BREWER

VIVALDI: *Concertos for Violin, Recorder, Psaltery;*
FACCO: *Violin Concertos*
Manuel Zogby, v; Daniel Armas, psaltery; Miguel Lawrence; rec; Mexican Baroque Orchestra/ Miguel Lawrence
Divine Art 25091—61 minutes

Both Giacomo Facco (1676-1753) and Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) were violinists and composers based in Venice. Facco's music had been lost in a fire in the Madrid Royal Palace, but a copy of the 12 concertos in his Opus 1 *Pensieri Adriarmonici*, published in Amsterdam in 1716 and 1718 and likely taken to Mexico in 1723, was discovered in a library in Mexico City in 1961. The Mexican Baroque Orchestra was formed in 2009 by director and recorder player Miguel Lawrence in order to play this music.

Although playing on modern instruments, the ensemble uses the same forces that were likely used in Mexico in the 17th and 18th Centuries as well as baroque style and articulation. Starting in the 17th Century, basso continuo in Mexico was played on instruments that today we are most likely to know from mariachi bands, specifically the guitar-shaped vihuela and guittaron. The two instruments are always played together, and the large guittaron (played in the same position as a guitar but with a body wider than a cello) offers the bass notes. The resulting basso continuo group—including cello—works very well with these compositions and doesn't sound "out of place" at all. The guitar timbre is most evident in the slower movements, and the ensemble blends and balances very well, playing with a nice style and spirit.

The violins sound rather thin sometimes, both in the solo and ensemble concertos. As for the other solo instruments in the Vivaldi concertos, it is interesting to hear psaltery used for the mandolin concerto (R 425). Although it does match the thin string sound here, I don't like its metallic timbre (I tend to feel the same way about the mandolin), but it is a valid approach that certainly pays homage to the composer's fondness for writing concertos for unusual instruments. Like their use of vihuela and guittaron, the Mexican Baroque Orchestra's inclusion of psaltery is not anachronistic, since that instrument has been in Mexico for centuries.

The finest playing here is in the two concertos for sopranino recorder (R 443 and R 445). Miguel Lawrence plays with a most natural birdlike quality that is very attractive and musical. Often these pieces, with their extremely high tessitura, are piercing and one-dimensional as the player concentrates on hitting the notes and staying in tune. Here the color is varied and rich, and the virtuoso playing delightful to hear.

C MOORE

VIVALDI: *Sacred Music*
Vocal and Instrumental Ensemble of Lausanne, English Bach Festival, Gulbenkian Choir & Orchestra/ Michel Corboz
Warner 67621 [4CD] 284 minutes

What a great bargain! This set of recordings from Erato in the mid-70s, first released on LP

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 172

and later CD, has not been available for quite some time. For people who like older Vivaldi recordings and who are not particularly interested in having every scrap of sacred choral music that Vivaldi ever wrote, this is just right, and it's available for around $23. You can't beat that.

Both Glorias (R 588 and 589) are in this set, as well as a Kyrie (R 587) and Credo (R 591). Two popular Marian works are included: the Magnificat (R 610) and the Stabat Mater (R 621). The remainder are psalms and motets, some of the latter for solo voice: two different Dixit Dominus (R 594 and 595), Nisi Dominus (R 608), O qui Caeli (R 631), Beatus Vir (R 597), Lauda Jerusalem (R 609) Nulla in Mundo Pax Sincera (R 630), Canta in Prato (R 623), and In Furore (R 626).

These renditions are old-fashioned in terms of current thought on Vivaldi performance practices. They're quite full and lush, tending to be slower than some but not ponderous (though the familiar *Gloria*, which is first on the program, sounds quite up to date with its fast clip). I quite like them, but then I'm tolerant of a fairly wide range of practices: I think the music will bear it.

Don't expect SACD sound. Though the sound isn't bad, neither is it state-of-the-art, and the singing sounds ever so slightly muffled.

There are no notes, either. A small booklet lists the works and their sections by track and indicates which soloists perform in what works. This is probably not a drawback to the serious collector who simply wants to round out his collection with these (by now) historic recordings, but it makes the set less than desirable for introducing someone to Vivaldi's sacred music. I imagine that, although it is less than an ideal solution, a Web search will fairly readily turn up texts and translations for any of these pieces.

CRAWFORD

WAGNER: *Die Meistersinger*

Theo Adam (Sachs), Pilar Lorengar (Eva), James King (Walther), Benno Kusche (Beckmesser), Loren Driscoll (David), Ezio Flagello (Pogner); Metropolitan Opera/ Thomas Schippers

Sony 85304 [3CD] 232 minutes

The second installment in Sony's Met Opera series takes us into Mozart and the German repertory and also begins to sound faint alarm bells. Given the extraordinary wealth of material available in the Met's broadcast archive, why should the early releases in this series flirt with the mediocre? This is not a bad *Meistersinger*—a routine night at the Met can still reach a pretty high standard—but surely there were better performances of the opera available.

Theo Adam was not really an important member of the company. He sang only 17 performances in four seasons, raised to prominence by the chronic shortage of heroic baritones. This 1972 Sachs finds him in typical form: slightly dry and gravelly and fairly monotonous in timbre, but always dignified and eloquent. He had the bearing for Sachs (as he did for Wotan), he was persuasive on stage, he knew his way around the great monologs, but you still wish the timbre had more intrinsic beauty. Kusche, whose only Met role was Beckmesser (he sang it all of seven times), once had a rich, handsome voice—listen to him on Kempe's estimable 1956 EMI recording—but by 1972 the top was gone (along with a few of Beckmesser's high notes) and the rest had really dried up. His verbal skills remained intact, however, and he's lively and alert at every moment, his words always uttered with great relish. The third singer who needs indulgence is tenor Loren Driscoll, singing his last role at the Met. The voice is substantial but peculiar in timbre—husky and clotted much of the time, without the graceful lightness one wants to hear in David.

The rest of the performers are very appealing, down to the fluent Kothner of Donald Graham. Flagello is a sonorous Pogner, and Clifford Harvuot a mellow, resonant Watchman. Among the masters, almost unnoticeable in the tiny role of Schwarz, is James Morris, no less. I remember this run of performances fairly well, and I thought that Lorengar was not entirely suited to Eva. She was always a lovely, vibrant performer, but the role keeps her below the best part of her voice. The broadcast microphones help her out quite a bit. She has presence most of the time, and when she can ascend to her upper range, as in 'O Sachs, mein Freund' and the top line of the Quintet, she's absolutely gorgeous. She's also touching and believable, especially in her scenes with Sachs and Walther in Act 2—you really care about this Elsa. King is a heroic, ringing Walther. He's not subtle, but his stamina is impressive, and he sings with undiminished vigor and gleaming tone from start to finish.

Schippers seems really happy in the busiest parts of the score, particularly the conclusions to Acts 1 and 2. He always keeps the performance moving along, and the many cuts the Met was taking in the 70s make it seem to go even swifter. Among the missing material are a big chunk of David's Act 1 recitation, about half the "Jerum" scene and Beckmesser's serenade from Act 2, the second half of the workshop scene for Sachs and Walther, and part of Sachs's 'Verachtet mir'.

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 173

The sound is of acceptable broadcast quality, a little congested and strident but listenable, even if below 1972 standards. Sometimes Adam and Lorengar seem to wander off mike, the last thing either of them needs. The booklet has a synopsis and track list but no notes or libretto. Adam was Karajan's Sachs in his 1970 EMI *Meistersinger*, but Lorengar and King did not record their roles in the studio, so their admirers will be especially happy to have this.

LUCANO

WAGNER: *Die Walküre*

Jon Vickers (Siegmund), Leonie Rysanek (Sieglinde), Karl Ridderbusch (Hunding), Thomas Stewart (Wotan), Birgit Nilsson (Brünnhilde), Christa Ludwig (Fricka); Metropolitan Opera/ Berislav Klobucar

Sony 83508 [3CD] 217 minutes

In the mid-1960s, after extended negotiations, Herbert von Karajan was persuaded to supervise and conduct a production of Wagner's four *Ring* operas at the Metropolitan in New York. Beginning in 1966 with several performances of *Das Rheingold*, the series was to continue in 1967 with *Die Walkure*, while *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* would follow in the next two seasons. *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walkure* were completed as envisioned, but then serious problems between Karajan and the Met arose, which resulted in the termination of the series in 1968. The two remaining operas were thus never performed.

This was one of the final offerings in the Met series, and it was not conducted by Karajan but by a substitute. It has been suggested that Karajan was present at the performance, but that is not known with certainty. The Met's skimpy notes in this set are a listing of casts, tracks, and timings.

Berislav Klobucar was a Croatian musician, born in Zagreb in 1924. He was active in eastern Europe as a conductor, mostly of opera, for much of his life, but how he ended up at the Met is not easily ascertained. He leads a basically slow performance, at 327 minutes nearly half an hour slower than Karl Böhm, who at 300 minutes defines the faster end of the acceptable spectrum. Does Klobucar merely follow Karajan's course? He's at least 10 minutes too slow, but there's a lot to like with Klobucar. His contribution is generally positive.

The singing cast is a mixed group of generally well-regarded vocalists. The star of the show is of course Nilsson, whose robust and brilliant soprano voice can handle everything Wagner throws at her. Moreover she has a comprehension of the contours and structural constructs that eludes less accomplished singers. Christa Ludwig, as Fricka, is also very impressive dramatically and musically. Leonie Rysanek is the Sieglinde by which others are judged, and she is in top form here. She was also Böhm's Sieglinde.

Jon Vickers is satisfactory as Siegmund, though not quite in top form, while Thomas Stewart is a very fine Wotan overall. Karl Ridderbusch is also a top-notch Hunding. The Valkyries are all right, though not much more than that. They are clearly less impressive than the ones Böhm had at Bayreuth. Despite the fact that Böhm finishes the whole show nearly half an hour quicker than Klobucar, he is noticeably slower in the 'Ride of the Valkyries', a good example of his modus operandi, where he quickly gets through the narratives while markedly slowing for the great dramatic scenes.

The 1969 sound is, though monaural, clear, open, and undistorted. It's a good recording of a good Met performance.

The best performance I've ever heard of the final scene of *Walküre* is sung by Nilsson and Hans Hotter in a 2CD EMI set (9703), accompanied by the Philharmonia splendidly conducted by Leopold Ludwig, and it leaves Furtwängler, Böhm, Karajan, Solti, Haitink and everyone else in its dust. It was part of a scheduled complete EMI Ring that for some reason never saw the light of day.

MCKELVEY

WAGNER: *Wesendonck Songs;* see MAHLER

WARSHAUER: *Symphony 1; Tekeeyah*

Haim Avitsur, shofar, trb; Moravian Philharmonic/ Petr Vronsky

Navona 5842—51 minutes

I admit to expecting something soothing, New-Agey, and maybe sad before listening to South Carolina-based composer Meira Warshauer's four-movement, 27-minute *Living, Breathing Earth* (Symphony 1, 2006). So I was surprised by the agitation and seeming anger in I ('Call of the Cicadas'). Warshauer was inspired by the cicadas' mating calls—"20-30 second waves of overlapping sound energizing the Carolina and Georgia summer". The soothing music I was expecting comes in II ('Tahuayo River at Night'), inspired by the peacefulness of the Peruvian rain forest. III ('Wings in Flight') is about butterflies, birds, and the play of light on water. The finale portrays the 'Living, Breathing Earth' with a five-beat rhythm of slow, steady sonorities underlying gentle surface action. All in all, it is a lovely pieces of music. Ms Warshauer has mastered the art of depicting nature in sound.

Tekeeyah (2008) is scored for shofar, trombone, and orchestra. "In the Jewish tradition", she writes, "the shofar, the horn of a ram or

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 174

other kosher animal, is sounded to wake up the soul. The raw animal sound reaches inside, rousing us from our slumber of complacency and breaking walls of separation. In this concerto, the shofar calls to all of humanity." Various kinds of shofar calls, all with specific function and symbolism in Jewish holidays, are heard in this three-section, 25-minute work. Part I ('A Call') is ethereal, with sustained shofar and string sounds, and with wind sounds apparently made by orchestra members. II ('Breaking Walls') has guttural blasts by trombone and shofar, along with discordant orchestral sounds, leading to an early climax followed by a long period of peace. III ('Dance of Truth') ends the work with energetic, rhythmic passages interspersed with shofar calls.

The disc includes computer-accessible supplemental materials. There are sound clips (including a 10-minute interview with composer Warshauer and shofar-trombone soloist Avitsur), videos of Warshauer discussing her pieces and Avitsur playing shofar, and biographies of both. And you can gaze at and turn the pages of tiny reproductions of the scores.

KILPATRICK

WEBERN: *Quartet;* see BRAHMS

WHITELEY: *Intrada; In Memoriam Duruflé: Scherzo; Toccata di Dissonanze; Aubade; Trilogy on Stanzas of Shakespeare's Sonnets; Scherzetto & Fugue on Francis Jackson; 5 Sisters Windows; Passacaglia*

John Scott Whiteley, org
Regent 353—76 minutes

Whiteley, organist at York Cathedral from 1975 to 2010, is remembered here, aside from his other numerous recordings, for his fine performance of Jongen's complete organ works (Priory 731, M/A 2005).

The instrument is a 4-105 Walker (1904), Harrison & Harrison (1917), Walker (1960), Coffin rebuild (1993). The selections were written from 1998 to 2010. Recorded in 2010, this seems to be a farewell collection of pieces Whiteley wrote in his last decade as Organist at York Cathedral. The liner notes by Whiteley are far too extensive and detailed to interest the casual listener. They look like pages in a biography he may be planning, as they supply what inspired each piece, the registration he used, and an analysis of the principal works. For example, we are told that Variation III in the Passacaglia is linked to the 6th variation of the Passacaglia of Rheinberger's 8th Sonata, or that in the Variation XIV, the light that dances in XXVI is foreshadowed by an *allegresse* of exquisite delicacy.

Intrada lacks the elegance of Elgarian pomp, substituting instead an in-your-face blast from the high pressure reeds. The tribute to Duruflé's Scherzo lacks any resemblance to that piece but still has a charming lightness. Whiteley's Toccata uses melodies from Frescobaldi, and has far less dissonance than the title suggests. *Aubade* is another lighter composition, but not one of great substance. One might well improvise something more atmospheric than this.

Five Sisters Windows will be familiar to anyone who has visited York Cathedral. Positioned in the north transept, the five huge windows were originally completed in 1260. They were done in grisaille with foliage motifs, a technique popular in medieval times, especially with the Cistercians. The outside light is filtered through the grey-green color. Much more recently (1925) the windows came to represent the women killed in WW I. Now it is both world wars. They are each 57 feet tall. They seem appropriately described musically with creative registrations. 'Glints', the first movement, is scored for the 15th, Tierce, Mixtures, and Cymbal to describe the small flashes of light that appear and fade. The opening pitches will test the limits of your hearing: they are stratospheric. The other four pieces are 'Tracery', 'Dichronic Variations', 'Grisaille', and 'Lancets', likewise pictured.

The program closes with Passacaglia (2009) with its 28 variations. Each variation is changed in registration, style, and volume. It's a bit drawn out but an interesting showpiece for the instrument.

METZ

WILLEY: *Quartets 3, 7, 8*

Esterhazy Quartet
Albany 1245—60 minutes

Born in 1939 in Massachusetts, James Willey studied at Eastman with Bernard Rogers and Howard Hanson and later with Gunther Schuller. The sharply conflicting idioms of his teachers are reflected in his string quartets, which merge contemporary-sounding astringency and string effects with distorted references to hymns, folk tunes, country fiddling, and other bits of musical "Americana". I found the resulting mishmash in Quartets 1, 2, and 6 on CRI 816 (Nov/Dec 1999) filled with too many crude stylistic inconsistencies to engender the coherence and integrity required for enjoyable music.

These three quartets also exhibit the deleterious effects of Willey's attention-deficit-disorder approach. Every once in a while an interesting idea emerges—for example the apparent fugue subject at 4:20 in his 16-minute, single-movement Third Quartet from 1981. But the actual fugue is aborted, as the distracted musical narrative is quickly diverted onto

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 175

another path. Quartets 7 and 8 are more recent—from the past decade or so—and show at least in some movements considerable improvement in clear, deliberate formal logic and stylistic constancy. An example is the finale of Quartet 7, a dandy fleet-footed dance-fantasy on irregular rhythmic patterns; it's catchy and exciting—as well as unified—for all of its five minutes. Other movements tend to get derailed onto eccentric byways that puzzle the listener, as when Willey's more-or-less modern idiom veers off into John Adamsy renditions of colonial-era hymns in his Eighth Quartet.

If post-modern jumbles with a strong American flavor are your cup of tea, you may like Willey's perambulations. As far as I'm concerned, Ives did more than enough of this sort of thing nearly a century ago. The Esterhazy Quartet plays with evident passion and devotion, though it sometimes sounds a bit ragged. Albany's sonics are very good.

LEHMAN

WOLF: *Mörike Lieder*

Susan Dunn, s; Thomas Potter, bar; John Wustman, p

MSR 1337 [2CD] 148 minutes

This set contains the 53 lieder composed in 1888 by Wolf to the poems of Eduard Mörike. The singers are Susan Dunn, once a Met soprano with what seemed to be a glorious future in opera, and Thomas Potter, an American baritone with more than 25 years of experience in opera as a Verdi baritone. Dunn's once pure and powerful spinto soprano sang Leonore (*Il Trovatore*) and Lina (*Stiffelio*) to critical acclaim at the Met for several seasons, but then she vanished from the New York opera scene. She is now the head of vocal and opera programs at Duke University. Neither Dunn nor Potter seems to have much experience in the lieder repertory.

In fact, Potter's career, as related in the notes, began at the San Francisco Opera Center and includes many years of singing at the Stadttheater (Municipal Opera House) in St Gallen, Switzerland. He also sang in opera houses in Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and Brazil. He is currently the Voice and Choral Arts Coordinator at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, where he teaches and directs the opera program. John Wustman is the excellent accompanist, well known to collectors of lieder recordings.

From the evidence here, neither Dunn nor Potter are particularly good lieder singers. Dunn can't seem to control her big voice; she overwhelms the music—not to mention the texts—by repeatedly attacking them as if they were Verdi arias. Her diction is poor much of the time, and the quality of her voice has deteriorated. It is often wobbly and edgy when she puts pressure on it, as she does too often in this recital. For example, in 'Er ist's', notes that must be sustained become wobbly and the song ends in a dramatic, operatic climax. Generally, light sopranos like Schwarzkopf or Seefried do much better in this repertory. It needs refinement and smoothness more than dramatic power. 'Schlafendes Jesuskind', as Dunn sings and interprets it, becomes another example of her inability to sustain notes. It's a sweet religious song that ends softly; but by that time it has lost its charm, at least for this listener. Charm and humor are also missing from her rendition of 'Nixe Binsefuss', which, in addition, suffers from poor diction.

Potter's voice sounds rough or raspy much of the time; it lacks tonal purity and isn't in any way alluring. His diction is somewhat better than Dunn's and he generates a bit of excitement in 'Der Feuerreiter', one of Wolf's best and most exciting songs. But that's not enough for me to recommend this rather unfortunate release, which also comes without text or translation. For a recital of Wolf's songs, that's an almost unforgivable omission.

MOSES

WOLPE: *Piano Pieces*

David Holzman

Bridge 9344—73 minutes

Volume 6 in Bridge's Stefan Wolpe series has 10 piano works dating from 1926 to 1959 (Wolpe's dates are 1902-72). The program opens with what should probably be considered the main event, *Four Studies on Basic Rows* (1935-36), a rather clinical-sounding title for these striking, ambitious etudes. As with Debussy's, these concentrate on fundamental musical elements. There are a couple built around single intervals (one in tritones, one in melodically filled-in thirds), one for expanding and contracting intervals (the 'Presto furioso'), and the last of them a stupendous Passacaglia, which runs through all intervals one at a time as its theme. It's a tour de force, compositionally and pianistically. We are reminded of Elliott Carter's crucial contact with Wolpe early on in his career, and it's not hard to hear the effect this music had on the younger composer. Pianist Holzman confronts the studies boldly, though not very cleanly.

Most of the remaining entries are more modest in nature. *Three Pieces for Youngsters* (1950) are reminiscent of Schoenberg's briefer efforts. *Song, Speech, Hymn, Strophe, Tenderest Motion* (1939) is a moody little birthday present for his wife Irma (Schoenberg). The first of the Two Pieces (1941) could almost be Debussy, while the second is a wild *hora*. A

Sig06arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:51 PM Page 176

muddy Toccata in Three Parts (1941) is loosely modeled on Bach, with a cluttered serial fugue as finale following a despairing central Adagio. Two sets of Studies for Piano (1946-48) are very brief exercises on the techniques Wolpe was developing linking him with the Abstract Expressionist painters of the day. The early Two Dances (1926) are an Expressionist blues and tango from the Jazz Age decidedly not reminiscent of Stravinsky. *Palestinian Notebook* (1939) contains four modal studies ending with another *hora*, and Two Vocalises (1959) close with a cakewalk belonging to another time and place.

This is a fascinating collection of little known music by a worthy if challenging composer stubbornly remaining on the fringes of the repertoire. Mr Holzman gets credit for bravery. This is very difficult music, but he is not the most accomplished of pianists technically, and listeners must mentally edit out more than is generally acceptable these days. He supplies detailed and engaging notes.

GIMBEL

WYNER: *Commedia; De Nova; Partita; Dances of Atonement; Cadenza!*
Richard Stoltzman, Michael Norsworthy, cl; Dmitri Pogorelov, v; Rafael Popper-Keiser, vc; Yehudi Wyner, p; Biljana Milovanovic, p, hpsi; Ibis Camerata

Albany 1254—69 minutes

Yehudi Wyner (b 1929) is one of our most imaginative composers. If you are not sure how to take his music, read his liner notes. They introduce you to a world of humor and seriousness intermingled in an unusual but very human way. This is a man of much wisdom, and his music does as much searching and discovering as any I have heard. The combination of his writing and his music here is worth exploring.

Commedia is a 16-minute adventure for clarinet and piano written in 2002 for clarinetist Richard Stoltzman, who performs it here with the composer at the piano. It is an eventful work, not all funny by any means, but with numerous virtuoso passages played with masterly style by both artists. *De Nova,* for cello and chamber group, is an 8-minute piece from 1970 combining a number of different moods with a virtuoso cello part played with polish by Popper-Keiser and members of the Ibis Camerata conducted by the composer.

Now we return in time to 1952 and a piano solo Partita written while Wyner was studying with Walter Piston. The composer tells us an amusing and meaningful tale, as is his wont, of how Piston never had a word of criticism for this piece, though when Wyner went back to studying with Hindemith, there was a different attitude. This work, though a fine one, is a bit farther out than I think Piston ever went. It has Wyner's curious blend of frenetic activity, humor, and dark lyricism and is played with a sense of drama by Milovanovic, who plays keyboard from now on.

In *Dances of Atonement* for violin and piano, the first part is based on a Kol Nidrei chant (not the one we cellists know so well) followed by a kind of answering movement. It is a work from 1976 played with style by Pogorelov and Milovanovic. Finally, we meet the clarinetist from Ibis in *Cadenza!* a four-movement suite of 1969 of varied and strongly portrayed moods, played with sensitivity by Norsworthy with Milovanovic on the harpsichord. This is an attractive program of music by one of our finest composers.

D MOORE

ZAIMONT: *Quartet; Zones; Astral; Serenade*
Harlem Qt; Awadagin Pratt, p
Navona 5846—65 minutes

These four chamber pieces by Judith Lang Zaimont all involve the Harlem Quartet and its members, with guest pianist Awadagin Pratt on board for the two piano trios. The release is titled "Eternal Evolution".

The two-movement String Quartet (2007) has the subtitle *The Figure*, which refers to a rather sullen falling half step motive and to a couple of slightly more elaborate ancillary figures all transformed and put in various contexts in the course of these very freely composed movements. Ms Zaimont's language is firmly neo-tonal, its modest ambiguity culminating in clear triads at the work's close. After the first movement's expository introduction, the music takes on the character of a scherzo, then drifts into a sort of fantasy recitative. The final movement begins with intense drive, then goes through episodes of mystery, interruption, and bits of lyricism until the somewhat cosmic culmination. It is serious but comes across as a bit scattered. It is very well played by this fine group.

Zones (1994) is Ms Zaimont's Second Piano Trio. In three large movements, all about the weather ('Cold', 'Warm', and 'Temperate'), the work begins with a passionate opening movement. II begins as an extremely expressive, broadly romantic slow movement and turns into a seemingly separate, amiably dancing movement in itself. The finale begins actively but is interrupted by a pensive passage that seems to get lost. The piece ends festively. A large, ambitious (perhaps overambitious) work, the music is built in blocks, and makes up in enthusiasm what it may lack in concision or cohesion. I don't dismiss the possibility of a more feminist understanding of Ms Zaimont's

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 177

compositional strategies. Mr Pratt does a creditable job with the big piano part.

Astral (2004, 2009) is an expressive but again thoroughly sectional (in fact, 11-part) solo piece for either solo clarinet or solo viola (here. The clarinet version may be heard on Albany 785 played by John Anderson, M/A 2006). It is extremely well played here by Juan-Miguel Hernandez. I could have done without the humming at the end (and I could do without the extracurricular stompings in the other pieces as well).

Serenade (2006) is a short but lovely piece for piano trio, a lyrical little song without words that lasts five minutes. Because of its modest length, I find it the most effective work here, but it has a rather abrupt ending. It seems to me that from a traditional perspective Ms Zaimont does not handle large forms particularly well, though her take on tonality is musical and welcome. Notes may be found by placing the disc in your computer.

GIMBEL

ZEBELJAN: *Horses of St Mark; Rukoveti; Minstrel's Dance; Seliste; Escenas Picaras*
Aile Asszonyi, s; Zebeljan Ensemble; Janacek Philharmonic/ David Porcelijn
CPO 777670—67 minutes

Isidora Zebeljan, born in Belgrade in 1967, grew up in the countryside between Serbia, Romania, and Hungary—the same area where Bartok and Ligeti were born. She attended the Belgrade Music Academy and has been a composition professor there since 2002. Her opera *Zora D* won international attention in 2003 and earned her more commissions. This album presents works spanning her 20s and 30s, from 1987 (*Seliste*) to 2005 (*Minstrel's Dance*).

Seliste (Deserted Village) is a seven-minute elegy for chamber orchestra that evokes the melancholy image of a place where people no longer live. For a while, quiet, folk-like melodies are heard over gentle, muted string textures. The pace becomes agitated, as if dark secrets are resurfacing, but the work returns to an atmosphere of hushed mystery by the end.

While the harmonic language is quite tonal in *Seliste*, it is strongly dissonant in the 21-minute, three-movement symphony *Escenas Picaras* (Picaresque Scenes, 1992). Here Zebeljan attempts to portray the life of a *picaro*, the fictional rogue (think Till Eulenspiegel) that inspired 16th-Century Spanish writers. In I ('The Circus...and Other Tales'), the action is frenetic, while a languid torpor permeates II ('The Blues, Etc'). III ('Funeral March and Final Development') rehashes earlier material and ends with a dissonant bang.

Rukoveti (2000) is a 15-minute setting of five songs, the texts selected and adapted by the composer from a collection of old Serbian poetry. One cannot help thinking of the horrors of the 1990s wars in Yugoslavia while reading and listening as a young woman turns from loving to bitter. Soprano Aile Asszonyi is the very expressive singer with a voice that ranges from gentle to powerful. The harmonic language is tonal sometimes but more often strongly dissonant.

The most recent works are for chamber orchestra but seem to have little else in common. The 9-minute *Horses of St Mark* (2004) is chaotic, atonal, and often reminds me of parts of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. The three-movement, 15-minute *Minstrel's Dance* (2005) is more Bartokian, with tonal though dissonant harmonies, folk-like melodies, and complex meters. But it is not really Bartokian—it is more complex, spontaneous, multifaceted, polystylistic. Endlessly fascinating.

Remarkable program, excellent readings. *Minstrel's Dance* is played by the 20-person Zebeljan Ensemble, apparently formed for this recording.

KILPATRICK

ZORN: *The Satyr's Play; Visions of Dionysius*
Cyro Baptista, Kenny Wollesen, perc; Peter Evans, tpt; David Taylor, trb; Marcus Rojas, tu
Tzadik 7390—37 minutes

The Satyr's Play, 26 minutes of eight short "odes" for percussion, is either random noises, free solos, or a steady beat for a little bit. The booklet includes "magickal texts" and incantations meant to be read along with the play; I suppose Wiccans or pagans would get into this, if I may presume to speak for them. 'Cerberus', for the three brass instruments, sounds like a transcription of a 1970s-era piece for tape; it's impressive what the instruments can do, and I wonder if there's some electronic manipulation. The sound is excellent, especially in *The Satyr's Play*.

I don't have much use for this kind of thing, but it is very tautly written avant-garde music. And someone had the brilliant idea to include a cellophane inner sleeve for the disc so you don't scratch it when you take it out; industry, please start doing this. Notes are in English.

ESTEP

The cultural role of football in preparing American youth for a lifetime of violence and morally degrading competitiveness should not be overlooked.

—Dennis Rohatyn

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 178

ZUMSTEEG: *The Island of the Spirits*
Falko Hönisch (Prospero), Christiane Karg (Miranda), Benjamin Hulett (Fernando), Andrea Lauren Brown (Ariel); Hofkapelle Stuttgart & Choir/ Frieder Bernius

Carus 83.229 [3CD] 139 minutes

Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg (1760-1802) was a German composer, conductor, and cellist who spent most of his professional life at the Ducal Court in Stuttgart. He composed mainly operas, incidental music, and cantatas for festive occasions in the family of the Duke of Württemberg. As the Ducal Kapellmeister, he produced many of Mozart's neglected operas, as well as *Don Giovanni*, *Cosi Fan Tutte*, and *The Magic Flute*. His greatest success as an opera composer was *Die Geisterinsel*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

This opera was first performed in Stuttgart in 1798; it became so popular that it was kept in the repertory there for more than 20 years. It uses a completely different libretto from Frank Martin's opera that's also based on the Shakespeare play, also reviewed in this issue of ARG. This is its first recording.

Unlike Martin's music, Zumsteeg's is quite conventional for its time; Haydn or Mozart could have composed it—and it would have been better if they had. It's diatonic and mostly in major keys. It's a sequence of arias and recitatives, interrupted by spoken dialog (which has been omitted in this recording, as have several arias and some recitatives). The result is a more or less conventional love story of Miranda and Fernando; Prospero's exile is hardly mentioned, and his magic is incidental to the story. The libretto is by one Friedrich William Cotter; much of it is in rhythmic verse. Unfortunately, only the German text is included in the booklet; but a detailed synopsis of the plot, translated into English and French, has also been supplied.

This cast is not as powerful as the Swiss cast in Martin's opera. As Prospero, Falko Hönisch's baritone lacks power and his voice is not smooth enough or alluring; perhaps this is at least partly owing to the recording venue, a High School of Music in Stuttgart. As the lovers, Christiane King and Benjamin Hulett sing their arias quite well, their voices fresh and attractive. So does Andrea Lauren Brown, as Ariel, though her performance is not the least bit ghostly. Fabio, Fernando's squire, makes a brief appearance here, his role well sung by mezzo soprano Sophie Harmsen. But several of the leading characters in Shakespeare's play have been omitted in this opera, including Alonzo, Antonio (Prospero's wicked brother), and Gonzalo (his friend). So what remains ? A fairly conventional love story set on an island, with music that's generic and not in any way original. Alas, poor Shakespeare!

MOSES

Collections

(Collections are in the usual order: orchestral, chamber ensembles, brass ensembles, bassoon, cello & double bass, clarinet, flute, guitar, harp, harpsichord, miscellaneous, oboe, organ, piano, saxophone, trumpet & brass solos, viola, violin, wind ensembles, early, choral, vocal.)

Israel Philharmonic Orchestra
70th Anniversary

BARTOK: *Concerto for Orchestra;* **BEETHOVEN:** *Fidelio Overture; Piano Concerto 5; Symphony 4; Violin Concerto;* **BEN-HAIM:** *Israeli Capriccio;* **BERLIOZ:** *Harold in Italy;* **BERNSTEIN:** *Chichester Psalms;* **BLOCH:** *Schelomo;* **BRAHMS:** *Piano Concerto 1;* **DVORAK:** *Symphony 7;* **GRIEG:** *Piano Concerto;* **HINDEMITH:** *Symphonic Metamorphosis;* **MAHLER:** *Symphony 4;* **MASSENET:** *4 Pieces from Le Cid;* **MENDELSSOHN:** *Calm Sea & Prosperous Voyage; Hebrides Overture; Symphony 4;* **MOZART:** *Marriage of Figaro Overture; Piano Concerto 27; Sinfonia Concertante; Symphony 41;* **RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF:** *Capriccio Espagnol;* **SAINT-SAENS:** *Introduction & Rondo Capriccioso;* **SCHUBERT:** *Symphonies 5+9;* **SCHUMANN:** *Symphonies 3+4;* **SMETANA:** *Bartered Bride Overture; Moldau;* **STRAVINSKY:** *Firebird Suite;* **TCHAIKOVSKY:** *Nutcracker Suite; Violin Concerto;* **VERDI:** *Traviata Prelude;* **VIVALDI:** *4 Seasons;* **WEBER:** *Oberon Overture*
Shlomo Mintz, Isaac Stern, Pinchas Zukerman, Itzhak Perlman, v; Daniel Benyamini, va; Janos Starker, vc; Julius Katchen, Arthur Rubinstein, Radu Lupu, Pnina Salzman, Daniel Barenboim, p; choruses/ Paul Kletzki, Josef Krips, Georg Solti, Jean Martinon, Istvan Kertesz, Zubin Mehta, Rafael Kubelik, Leonard Bernstein, Daniel Barenboim, Carlo Maria Giulini, Lorin Maazel, Kurt Masur

Helicon 9614 [12CD] 15:15

Bronislaw Huberman, a Polish-born Jew and violinist, persuaded about 75 musicians to immigrate to Palestine, forming the Palestine Orchestra in 1936; Toscanini conducted the first concert in Tel-Aviv on December 26th, a program that included music by Wagner (this was two years before *Kristallnacht*). The

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 179

orchestra also toured Egypt in 1940-43, played for Allied forces in World War II, had its name changed to the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in 1948 and played 'Hatikvah' at the Declaration of Independence ceremony that year, toured the United States in 1950, moved into the new Mann Auditorium in 1957, played Mahler 1 and 'Hatikvah' in Berlin in 1971 (a mere 500 meters from the Reichstag), performed in Poland in 1987, named Bernstein their Conductor Laureate in 1988, and played to a gas mask-wearing audience during the First Gulf War. Its first recordings were made under Paul Kletzki in 1954; this set contains music from only the labels represented in Israel by Helicon: Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, and EMI—so no Sony, Teldec, or RCA. I'm not sure why this is made available this long after the anniversary (2006).

Several of the Decca recordings had never been issued on CD: the Massenet, Dvorak, Bartok, Schubert 9, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Berlioz, and Bloch (the Schubert has recently been issued—more on that later). Archival concert recordings of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 27, the Ben-Haim, the Beethoven Violin Concerto, and Schumann symphonies are appearing for the first time. The booklet has a three-page introduction, a page about each decade, and several color pages of newpaper articles and memorabilia in English and Hebrew. Brian Buerkle will review another Israel Philharmonic box set, entirely conducted by Zubin Mehta.

Kletzki conducted Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* in 1954. It's mono, of course, and balances aren't perfect, but it's not bad to listen to. The opening is elegant! There's a rare serenity to the playing, and the strings phrase their lines ever so delicately. The fast part is full of excitement and sunshine. Krips conducts a passable Mozart Symphony 41—some of it lively, but some of it pedestrian, especially the Minuet. IV sparkles in spite of a few shaky rhythms. Solti's Schubert 5 is stately—there's no out-of-this-world creativity, just good music-making. Its Minuet has a fetching, carefree lilt to the melody, while the accompaniment gives it a danceable firmness. IV is on the fast side, but under control the whole time; I find the quicker tempo charming. The pieces from *Le Cid* come from a Martinon Decca recording that also had *Les Patineurs* by Meyerbeer, arranged by Lambert. The sound is gorgeous; maybe it's nostalgia, but recordings of "light" music from the late 1950s and early 1960s always sound so genuine—there's no irony. Let's hope the rest of that album will be released sometime. Istvan Kertesz gives us a *Bartered Bride Overture* that's a shade fast for the acoustics, but the orchestra sounds ecstatic.

Dvorak's Symphony No. 7, with Mehta, is lugubrious in I, and any Bohemian sparkle has been replaced with a Teutonic grayness in III: the hemiolas sound like Brahms, not Dvorak. IV has some real yearning to it, and crackling percussion work—before long, I found myself waving my paws along with the timpani part. At important structural moments, Mehta pulls the tempo back almost imperceptibly; it's enough to heighten the drama viscerally, perking your interest while not showing all the cards. There's an unfortunate moment at the beginning of Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra, when the high strings come in just before the accelerando, where it sounds like one of the engineers did a panicked dive onto the volume knob. Why isn't there a little crescendo in the accelerando? That should be like the initial drop of a roller coaster. The Dvorak and Bartok were recorded in 1972 and 1976 by Decca, but the sound is stuffy, and the brass and low winds are distant, especially in II of the Bartok—the laughing muted trumpet part sounds like the engineers put them in the back of the hall. The playing is decent.

Kubelik gives the introduction of Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 the perfect amount of space between the chords; the development is thrilling, and the orchestra is at the top of their game. The DG engineers did a superb job on the sound, too (this was recorded in Munich): everything is balanced nicely and perfectly reverberant. II pedals around on the back roads, lost for a bit, but that's more Beethoven's fault. The slower section of III is restful instead of anticipatory; I would prefer anticipatory since there's just been a slow movement, but it doesn't drag. IV is cheerful and crisp.

Mendelssohn's Fourth, with Bernstein, is a concert performance from the Mann Auditorium in 1978, and it is rich, lush, but not saccharine. This group does well with melodies that are bouncy or carefree, giving them lots of vitality.

Mehta's *Nutcracker* starts out bland and gets worse: the horns in the 'March' muscle their way in front of the trumpets, and when the trumpets finally get free of them, you'd think they numbed their tongues with popsicles before playing. The 'Arab Dance' has a sobriety and sadness to it that I've never heard before, but the 'Chinese Dance' (where, oh where, did Tchaikovsky get the idea to end it with that limp chord?) is jittery and poorly balanced. 'Dance of the Reed Flutes' sounds like it's from a different orchestra entirely—everything they did wrong before is suddenly right; the clarinetist uses some intelligent rubato in 'Waltz of the Flowers', and the strings shimmer.

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 180

Mehta's Schubert 9 is another story: I is thick with rhetoric and emotional intelligence, and the surging crescendos are perfectly executed. The Scherzo is played at a slightly relaxed tempo and has some Beethovenian fire to it, which I don't think of when I think of Schubert, but it's convincing. Roger Hecht gave a detailed review of this recording in the last issue, noting that the trombones seemed to have wandered off, perhaps having a beer across the street.

Mahler's Symphony No. 4 is a 1979 recording with Mehta and Barbara Hendricks. This has never been Mahler's most interesting symphony to me: its themes don't have the same mystery and philosophical depth as some of the other symphonies, and it doesn't have the same dramatic arc; even the orchestration isn't as creative. Mehta gets a portentous sound at the opening of II, but Freund Hein's *Totentanz* sounds more like a seaside holiday. III is quite restful. Hendricks sounds pleasant and childlike, but has trouble staying in tune, and the orchestra is suddenly shrill in the loud interludes.

Bernstein delivers a clean, energetic reading of his *Chichester Psalms* with soloists from the Vienna Boys' Choir. I flashes and thrills; the soloist in II is stiff, but the outburst of Psalm 2 is frightening, but still under control. (I accompanied rehearsals of this earlier this year, and was amazed at the simple accompaniment to the boy soprano's part—few composers have had the courage to be that understated.) The sound is a little muffled and fuzzy for Deutsche Grammophon.

After a well-played *Oberon* Overture, Mehta and Mintz bring us Saint-Saens's *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso*, with a searching Introduction and a rather toothless Rondo. The horns in *Capriccio Espagnol* are just enough out of tune to make you flinch, but the rest of it is mostly good except for a few shaggy rhythms.

In the Schubert review I referred to earlier, Mr Hecht noted the Old World sound of the strings, and that's what the *Firebird* makes me think of—they have a charming cushiony quality. Bernstein conducts, and if the interpretation is any indication, he's having the time of his life, wallowing in the elongated phrases, the classy horn solos (except the Finale), and the steamy oboe part in 'The Princess's Round', before startling the living daylights out of every one with the 'Infernal Dance' (this is a concert performance from 1984). Lenny also conducts the Hindemith, another concert recording, this time from 1989; it is rollicking and detailed: he has balanced all the different instruments popping in and out of the texture with their various lines, and gets an amazing, resplendent sound out of the band, even the horns.

Katchen is the soloist and Kertesz the maestro in a 1962 Decca release of the Grieg Concerto. It's aggressive in tempo but tempered in dynamics in I. Katchen's touch is a little heavy in II; still, everyone plays it like a masterpiece instead of a warhorse, which is refreshing. Rubinstein's performance of the Brahms Concerto No. 2 was his last recording with any orchestra, and the only one he made with the Israel Philharmonic; he was 89. The lackluster playing, wrong notes, and diminished expression are apparent; but I suppose I'll be lucky if I can even sneeze when I'm 89. The orchestra plays exceptionally well here, with intensity and tenderness.

Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* was conducted by Mehta in 1982 at the Huberman Festival in the Mann Auditorium; Isaac Stern is the soloist for *Spring*, Pinchas Zukerman for *Summer*, Shlomo Mintz for *Autumn*, and Itzhak Perlman for *Winter*. Stern plays carefully; the tempos are slower than normal. II is stunning, and it sounds like the strings have their mutes on—the quiet is eerie. There's a hilarious grunt from someone, probably Zukerman, during a rest in III of *Summer*; he's a little shrieky in the fast passages. II of *Autumn* is gorgeous, and the lute stop on the harpsichord is unusually mellow. Perlman shines in his part.

Lawrence Hansen reviewed Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante (with Perlman, Zukerman, and Mehta, S/O 2006), noting that none of the performers except Zukerman had a real affinity for Mozart. "But", he said, "the open-mindedness that comes with advancing age has made me somewhat less critical than I was when this first came out. The solo work from both players is brilliant, even if the overall feel of the performance is somewhat heavy-handed." I'm inclined to agree, and I'll add that the horns seem to have been recorded from inside the bathroom.

Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, with Perlman, is from the EMI "Live in Russia" release with Zubin Mehta. It was taped in front of an audience that felt the need to assert its presence regularly. I've always found Perlman's tone to be just a little on the wiry side—not enough to annoy me at any given moment, but enough for the cumulative effect to keep me from listening to him. Taking his vibrato into consideration as well, there are many other violinists I'd rather listen to first. This performance is dogged with shoddy ensemble and some unsteadiness from Perlman in I. II is pleasant. In III's opening cadenza, he makes me think that if he had tried some of these parts this way in the practice room, he would have realized they don't sound that good.

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 181

Beethoven's Violin Concerto is with Zukerman and Mehta in 1989. The introduction is moderately paced, creating a somber effect, but Zukerman's intonation and control are all over the place in the work.

Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 27 has Daniel Barenboim playing and conducting—it's a broadcast from 1972, and sounds like it is monaural. The piano has a few soured notes, but Barenboim's playing is clean, and his touch firm. Radu Lupu and Mehta recorded Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 at Kingsway Hall in London for Decca in 1979. Lupu's interpretation is not particularly revelatory—a solid performance, just rather vanilla. Much of III especially sounds placid. The march in I, though, which is the orchestra's responsibility, has a punchiness to it that I've not heard before. The sound has a little fuzz around the edges, too.

Daniel Benyamini, the IPO's principal for 30 years, is the violist for *Harold in Italy*, a piece I've only known heretofore as the punch line to "What's the world's longest viola joke?" The acoustic is claustrophobic and bassy for Decca from 1975. Benyamini's legato playing is quite impressive: the connections between the notes are smoother than usual. It sounds like a grittier tone would work better for this piece, though—Benyamini's sweet tone doesn't match the orchestra's thunder and lightning (this is one of their best-sounding pieces from this entire set). And I know this isn't really a concerto, but sometimes he does get buried.

This is the first time Bloch's *Schelomo*, from 1968 with Janos Starker and Mehta, has been released on CD. The orchestra, as in the Berlioz, is stunning; Starker is good, but often not audible enough to be completely captivating. Paul Ben-Haim's (Israeli) Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra is the real reason I chose this set to review; his works are rarely seen in the wild, and I love his Mediterranean harmonies and scoring that, though dreamy, are not without their turbulence. This 12-minute piece didn't disappoint me. The sound is archival quality, but the playing (Pnina Salzman and Giulini) is serious and elegant, with a certain restlessness. Oh, for some good label to take up Ben-Haim's cause.

Kurt Masur was the conductor for Schumann's Symphonies 3 and 4; they're from 2003, but the sound is more like 1953, and something kept bumping the microphone stand. They are decent performances: 3:IV is particularly charming. *The Moldau* was recorded under Kertesz in 1962 for Decca. It is lush and moving, though the Achilles' horns are in their usual weak state. And, wow, the marchlike theme is faster than I've ever heard—almost raucous. This was remastered as part of Decca's "Originals" line of reissues in 2007, with the original album cover at a tilt on the front. That sounds clearer than this, which was probably taken from the older Decca reissue without the 24-bit remastering. The newer Decca release, called *Bohemian Rhapsody*, has music from *The Bartered Bride*, a few of Dvorak's *Slavonic Dances*, and his Symphonic Variations.

ESTEP

Barenboim in Chicago

GERSHWIN: *Cuban Overture;* **BERNSTEIN:** *Symphonic Dances;* **RAVEL:** *Daphnis & Chloe Suite 2;* **WAGNER:** *Tristan & Isolde*

Chicago Symphony/ Daniel Barenboim

Warner 69816—67 minutes

This release is a mixture of old and new recordings from Warner, Teldec, and Erato from the later years of Daniel Barenboim's tenure with the Chicago Symphony. I wish I could be more excited about it, but it gets off to a very slow start. Barenboim's reading of Gershwin's rambunctious *Cuban Overture* is immediately plagued by a lackadaisical tempo that never catches fire. The orchestra also lacks the energy level I remember from their 1993 recording with James Levine (DG 431625: Nov/Dec 1993) and doesn't even come close to the 1974 recording of Lorin Maazel and the Cleveland Orchestra (London 460612). The sound of this recording is very close, but also seems slightly engineered. Every once in a while, a phrase you'd expect to hear loudly from one instrument is suddenly missing from the texture while another one pierces through. It's either being adjusted in the booth or there are too many microphones.

The approach to Leonard Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances* is supercharged and fares slightly better than the Gershwin. Barenboim is sentimental in the tender moments of 'Somewhere' and 'Finale' and he ratchets up the energy for the dance music of the 'Mambo' and 'Cool'. One strange cut occurs at the end of track 9 between the 'Fugue' and 'Rumble' that steals away about 30 seconds of Bernstein's timeless score. If I hadn't already played and heard this music a hundred times, it wouldn't sound wrong—but it is. And no matter the fine playing of the Chicago Symphony, it's still no match for Bernstein's own recordings (LAPO—DG 4777101: Mar/Apr 2008, NYPO—Sony 63085: Mar/Apr 1998) or Michael Tilson Thomas's incredible 1996 recording with the London Symphony (DG 439926: Mar/Apr 1997).

After all this jazz-influenced American music, it seems odd to include readings of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe* and Wagner's *Tristan*

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 182

und Isolde—and there doesn't seem to be any remastering of the old recordings to match sound to the current ones. American Record Guide found Barenboim to be a master with Ravel's music—just not in this case with the Chicago Symphony. But this reading is somewhat cold and distant, with not a lot of French atmosphere (Erato 45766: Jan/Feb 1993). The Wagner gets a better treatment with its burnished brass, plaintive winds, and beautiful—but rather thin-sounding—strings. Barenboim is an experienced Wagnerian, and the Chicago Symphony has a rich recorded history in this music. This recording sounds as good now as it did when we first reviewed it (Teldec 99595: May/June 1996).

BUERKLE

Concerto Cologne

DALL'ABACO: *4 Concertos a quattro; 5 Concertos a piu instrumenti;* **LOCATELLI:** *5 Concerti Grossi;* **CANNABICH:** *Symphony in E-flat;* **STAMITZ, C:** *Cello Concerto 4;* **FILS:** *Symphony in G minor;* **STAMITZ, J:** *Symphony in G;* **FRANZL:** *Symphony 5;* **VANHAL:** *Symphonies in D minor, G minor, C, A minor, E minor;* **KOZELUCH:** *Symphonies in C, A, D, B-flat;* **EBERL:** *Symphonies in C, E-Flat, D minor*

Werner Matzke, vc; Concerto Cologne

Warner 69889 [6CD] 7:23

These six discs were originally recorded between 1994 and 2001. The Dall'Abaco and Locatelli are simply boring pieces in the baroque style, which I don't like. The other four discs are very well played and recorded and are interesting. I hope this is at a reduced price so that it will appeal to collectors.

The third disc is titled *Mannheim: The Golden Age* and includes a cross-section of the Mannheim School. In addition to familiar works by the Stamitzes, Cannabich, and Fils, we have the first recording I am aware of of Ignatz Franzl (1736-1811). The Anton Fils (1733-60) Symphony is also new to records, as is Carl Stamitz's Cello Concerto 4. All of these works are outstanding examples of Mannheim craftsmanship. Even Mozart admired Franzl's compositions and learned from him.

Johann Baptist Vanhal (1739-1813) was another Czech composer who was roughly Haydn's contemporary and whose symphonies from the 1760s and 1770s are remarkably like Haydn's. All are familiar from other recordings but none are as fine as these.

Leopold Kozeluch (1747-1818) was one of 16 children of a Czech shoemaker. Fortunately a cousin who was a Prague chapel master saw to it that he got a good musical training that enabled him to move to Vienna and establish himself as a leading musician. He eventually became Imperial *Kammer Capellmeister* and *Hofmusik Compositor*, which carried with them considerable status and responsibility. He left 11 symphonies, and two of these four seem new to records. All are good examples of Mozartean style writing.

Anton Eberl (1765-1807) studied with Mozart, and several of his works were misattributed to Mozart. The second and third symphonies here are mature works. Conservative music lovers at the time of its premiere preferred the second to Beethoven's *Eroica*. These are powerful pieces that are also superbly played.

The set is well played and recorded. Performances that duplicate earlier ones are generally the best available. Good notes.

BAUMAN

Remembering JFK

BERNSTEIN: *Fanfare for the Inauguration of JFK; West Side Story Symphonic Dances;* **LIEBERSON:** *Remembering JFK;* **GERSHWIN:** *Concerto in F; Rhapsody in Blue;* **LA MONTAINE:** *From Sea to Shining Sea;* **THOMPSON:** *Testament of Freedom*

Richard Dreyfuss, narr; Tzimon Barto, Earl Wild, p; Georgetown University Glee Club; National Symphony/ Christoph Eschenbach, Howard Mitchell

Ondine 1190 [2CD] 126 minutes

The Eschenbach-Barto disc is 78 minutes and is from January of this year—a concert commemorating the 50th anniversary of John F Kennedy's inauguration. The other disc is 49 minutes of excerpts from Mutual Broadcasting's radio coverage of the inaugural eve gala Frank Sinatra organized the night before; it began with the National Symphony's concert in Constitution Hall.

Bernstein's Fanfare for brass and percussion is only 40 seconds long and sounds fine. Peter Lieberson's 16-minute piece, subtitled *An American Elegy*, is a poor man's *Lincoln Portrait*. Without Richard Dreyfuss's image on the big screen, this is the first time I realized what a truly ugly, nasal voice he has, as he narrates selections from three of Kennedy's speeches (including his inaugural). He makes the texts all sound the same, though I suspect not even Richard Burton or Anthony Hopkins could make them sound like anything other than moralistic platitudes. I had to struggle to pay attention to the unchallenging and traditional-sounding Americana underneath, especially with Eschenbach's bland, generic conducting. Also, the work has a curiously sudden non-ending, as if the tape suddenly stopped.

Christoph Eschenbach apparently hasn't an ounce of swing in his body. In Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances* rhythms are sluggish and heavy. Even the fugue is cool; he never unleashes the orchestra, even in climaxes. The

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 183

engineers make the muffled violins distant and the orchestra small with a slightly canned ambience. Is it the engineers or the conductor (or both) who make the orchestra sound like four individual choirs rather than an ensemble? Here the NSO seems like a second-rate regional orchestra recorded in a poor hall.

It is more of the same in Gershwin's concerto, where I asked myself, "Is Eschenbach a control freak?" It seems that the rhythmic sluggishness is the result of a conductor who follows the score with mathematical exactitude but misses the style. As for faux-profound Barto, he plays like someone who's been confined to the Balkans all his life (he's an American, born in Florida!). His conception of this work is from another planet; phrases are drawn out with so much incredibly slow rubato that it reminds me of Henry Charles Smith's story of Otto Klemperer telling the Philadelphia Orchestra to play Beethoven's *Eroica Symphony g i o-coooooooooooooooo—soooooo*. The 38:06 timing says it all.

The monaural orchestra sound on the 1961 broadcast is as bad as it comes, but at least Mitchell brings life to John La Montaine's overture, commissioned for the inauguration. Based on the music to the line "from sea to shining sea" from 'America the Beautiful', the music is from the Creston-Piston school harmonically, more motific than melodic, with lots of short phrases for woodwinds, plus a touch of Coplandesque Americana. The Thompson is only the first movement of *The Testament of Freedom*, three minutes of one line of text repeated ad nauseum, set to boring, simple-minded homophonic music. The Georgetown University Glee Club (all men) articulate every syllable clearly. The Howard University Men's Chorus was supposed to join them, but the ferocious snow storm that paralyzed the city prevented them from getting to the hall. Indeed, the NSO's assistant concertmaster and principal trumpet got there only by walking five miles in the storm from Virginia.

Earl Wild (who also walked in the snow) takes almost as many "squeeze box"-type liberties with *Rhapsody in Blue* here as Barto does in the concerto, but at least he has plenty of forward motion and rhythmic wit. Mitchell is having a grand time as well, giving a big audible grunt as he winds up the orchestra leading into the coda. The opening clarinet lick is so wild and entertaining it must have made Sinatra laugh out loud with pleasure.

Ah, and then there's 21 minutes of portentous radio commentary from your host, Tony Marvin (whose name is missing from the liner notes). "We [is he the pope?] must say there has been a slight delay [like two hours] in the start of the concert owing to the very inclement weather that Washington has been the recipient of during the day." Or, "The National Symphony under the distinguished baton of Howard Mitchell is accepting the plaudits of the audience here in Constitution Hall at the termination of La Montaine's *From Sea to Shining Sea*." Wouldn't our editor, Don Vroon, like to take his editing ax to that guy!

In brief, this is a sad tribute to JFK and a sad initial recording for Eschenbach in his first year as music director of the NSO.

FRENCH

To the Point

HIGDON: *To the Point;* **RUDIN:** *Canto di Ritorno;* **SCHULLER:** *Chamber Concerto;* **CASCARINO:** *Blades of Grass;* **REISE:** *The River Within*

Diane Monroe, Maria Bachmann, v; Dorothy Freeman, Eng hn; Orchestra 2001/ James Freeman, Gunther Schuller

Innova 745—74 minutes

Five American orchestral pieces, all but one quite recent, are beautifully played and very well recorded on this program meant to show off the talents of James Freeman and his Orchestra 2001. It begins with a modest ditty for string orchestra by Jennifer Higdon (born 1962), one of our most popular present-day composers (see our cumulative index for reviews). This is a pleasant, folk-tuney 4-minute scherzo on a rudimentary and much-repeated hopping figure; it first appeared as a movement of her string quartet, *Impressions*, recorded on Naxos 559298 (May/June 2007). The string orchestra arrangement adds some welcome heft to this light-weight item.

Andrew Rudin (born 1939) first became known for his electronic music but has long since turned, or returned, to writing more-or-less traditional music. His *Canto di Ritorno* is a 22-minute violin concerto in one movement. The predominant mood is lyrical, established in the work's opening by a wistful melody that engages the listener right away. But that is cut off by vehement, herky-jerky eruptions that break out after a few minutes—an unpleasing and unpersuasive episode, added seemingly only for contrast. Lyricism re-emerges, with intensified emotion, in the long central section, a passacaglia of compelling majesty, followed eventually by a lengthy, songful valediction that returns gradually to the music and the mood of the work's opening. I like and admire *Canto di Ritorno* for its poignant melos, sensuous delicacy, humane thoughtfulness, and deep feeling—all the more powerful for being understated. It would be improved if the composer excised the distracting (if fairly short) sections of spastic racket. Rudin's intention here is clearly to write a music of noble,

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 184

consoling sadness; why tarnish that, even briefly, with unnecessary disruption?

Gunther Schuller (born 1925) is, as everyone knows, one of the grand old men of modern American music—composer, French horn virtuoso, conductor, musicologist, educator, impressario, jazz musician, popularizer of ragtime, even publisher of music scores and recordings. Does anybody know more than a portion of his huge and widely varied productions? The downside of so much enterprise and stylistic range is that Schuller's own compositional voice is rather diffuse: any particular work of his sounds like whatever "self" he happened to be inhabiting when he wrote it. One is likely to hear unusual and inventive timbral combinations and a confident hand shaping the musical discourse, but the individual personality behind all that may be somewhat obscure. Such is the case in his 14-minute *Concerto Da Camera* from 2001, a first slow-and-moody then energetic-and-volatile concatenation of twinklings, twitterings, cooings, shimmerings, slithers, sighings, bloops, bumps, skirlings, twirls, twisters, and flibberflusters. It has far too much verve, impatience, and good humor to sound anything like typical post-Webernian "contemporary" pointillism, and I found it easy to listen to. But don't ask me what I heard after it's over.

Blades of Grass by Romeo Cascarino (1922-2002) was written in 1945. It's a 9-minute essay in American pastoral for English horn, harp, and strings—calm, elegiac, outdoorsy, Coplandesque—sure to appeal to anyone with a drop of romantic in his soul. Readers interested in learning more about this little-known Philadelphia composer might want to read my review of his collected orchestral works (including *Blades of Grass*; Naxos 559266, Jan/Feb 2007).

Orchestra 2001's program is impressively completed by *The River Within*, another violin concerto (with the superb Maria Bachmann as soloist)—a full-scale (26-minute) assault on the genre by Jay Reise (born 1950). Cast in the traditional fast-slow-fast, three-movement pattern, this is a more-or-less traditional, tonally-anchored work that presents no difficulty for anyone happy with, say, the concertos of Walton, Prokofieff, Bartok, or Martin. It doesn't match their indelible melodies—but then, what does? Still it's lively, well-made, and packed with interesting ideas and bravura display. Outer allegros are full of incident and activity, with some brilliant figurations that call to mind, though don't actually mimic, folk dances. The gorgeously-scored central Adagietto Inquieto is animated by a complex spirit—compassionate unease, perhaps, or calm restlessness—that held me rapt with its mysterious, dreamlike beauty.

I intend to look for more by Reise. There are discs of his chamber music on Albany and on Centaur, a program that includes piano pieces played by Marc-Andre Hamelin on Albany 665 (Mar/Apr 2005), and several orchestral works including a cello concerto on CRI.

LEHMAN

Ostravska Band on Tour

Francesconi, Bakla, Zalbuska, Satoh, Cage, Kotik, B Lang

led by Petr Kotik; Joseph Kubera, p; Hana Kotkova, v; Gregory Purnhagen & Thomas Buckner, bar

Mutable 17544 [2CD] 122 minutes

The Czech composer, conductor, and flutist Petr Kotik formed the Ostravska Band in 2005 as the resident chamber orchestra for the festival Ostrava Days. The 24 musicians are all young, committed to new music, and vibrant performers. This release gives a taste of a variety of new music, mostly by established and emerging European composers.

The two outstanding works on the release are Cage's Concert for Piano and Orchestra (1958) and Somei Satoh's *Passion* (2009) in a reduced scoring. Comparing the Cage performance with the one by David Tudor and Ensemble Modern on Mode (May/June 1998), I'm more engaged by the leaner, more intimate reading by Kubera and the Ostravska players. Cage's notation for the orchestral parts, while fairly specific, still admits several possibilities for interpretation; and the musicians (or Kotik) often select some novel and interesting ones. The piano solo, a legendary anthology of outlandish graphic notation, offers considerably more freedom; Kubera seems to select excerpts that allow his part to appear more as an equal to the other instrumental parts. (By contrast, when Tudor played the *Concert*, his presence tended to eclipse everything going on around him.)

Satoh's *Passion* is an extremely restrained setting for two voices, male chorus, and a very transparent instrumental accompaniment. He sets the text (in English) in such a way that each word (and often each syllable) is sustained for long periods, but the words are always perfectly understandable. The setting enhances the ritualism of the passion in general and also underscores its profound sadness. Satoh's setting is very selective: for instance, the first ten minutes of the work (30 minutes total) is devoted to the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. This pacing, too, tends to emphasize the timelessness of the story.

The other works offer an engaging cross-section of trends in 20th Century composition, some familiar, some not. Kotik's own *In Four Parts (3, 6 & 11 for John Cage)* (2009), scored

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 185

for percussion alone, begins with one of the great cliches of 20th Century music: a slowly repeated single note that accelerates to a roll and then slowly decelerates. The gesture appears in overlapping statements for many different instruments and from there explores a wider variety of textures and ideas whose succession is unpredictable. (Like Cage, Kotik makes use of chance techniques.) Luca Francesconi's *Riti Neurali* (1991), scored for a solo violin and seven other instruments (the instrumentation matches the one Schubert used in his Octet), is a tour de force of nervous bundles of energy that gradually increase in tension and finally dissipate.

Petr Bakla's Serenade explores what the liner notes describe as "situations where 'not-quite-yet-music' becomes 'music'"—he deliberately employs ideas that approach banality and gradually transforms them into expressive ones. The idea is provocative and the musical results not nearly as conceptual as one might imagine.

Paulina Zalubska's *Dispersion* (2007) is a lovely essay in timbre informed by her extensive work in electronic composition. Bernhard Lang's *Monadologie IV* (2008), also scored for percussion, comes from a series of works where the material is "built on 'grains' of musical footage...[often] 'sampled' from historic scores". The source materials in this work seem to be popular music, and they are then transformed practically out of all recognition.

The concert performances sound first-rate to me, and the sound sparkles.

HASKINS

Simply Strings

BARTOK: *Divertimento;* **JANACEK:** *Suite;* **SIBELIUS:** *Impromptu;* **BRITTEN:** *Simple Symphony*

Wurttemberg Chamber Orchestra/ Ruben Gazarian

Bayer 100 371 [SACD] 67 minutes

Ruben Gazarian was born and educated first in Soviet Armenia and later in Leipzig. He has built an outstanding reputation for himself on the European continent. He has been principal conductor of the Westphalian Chamber Orchestra Heilbronn since 2002.

These works are all light-textured ones for strings. All are well known, with the possible exception of the early (1894) one by Sibelius—a minor work lasting just under seven minutes. All are very well played. The recording is outstanding. Decent notes.

BAUMAN

American String Project

MENDELSSOHN: *Quartet 4;* **BEETHOVEN:** *Quartet 8;* **VERDI:** *Quartet;* **HAYDN:** *Quartet, op 64:4;* **BRAHMS:** *String Quintet 2;* **PROKOFIEFF:** *Quartet 2;* **SCHUMANN:** *Quartet 3;* **FALLA:** *7 Spanish Folk Songs*

MSR 1386 [2CD] 141 minutes

These are all wonderful pieces by some of the world's greatest composers, but the sound is too bloated to do them justice. The works are all arranged by Barry Lieberman. The performers include nine violins, three violas, two cellos, and one double bass. Perhaps you will like the effect more than I do. In fairness I must say that the performances are well played and recorded, but I won't listen to them again.

The instrumentalists are drawn from the Seattle, Vancouver, Milwaukee, Minnesota, and San Francisco Orchestras as well as from the Indiana University and De Paul University faculties. The group was organized ten years ago.

The brief notes deal mainly with the idea of transcribing music for a different ensemble than what the composer wanted.

BAUMAN

Lightly Classical

Guild 5172—79:34

As you might imagine, I have no taste for this kind of thing. BUT...I had a mother. Yes, my mother delighted in Mantovani, Melachrino, and even Kostelanetz and David Rose, when they didn't get shockingly jazzy. All but Mantovani are here.

All the music here is the real thing, by classical composers, but (mostly) in "popularized" arrangements. I consider that a tribute to the unbeatable melodies of the great composers. The "mostly" is because we have here William Walton conducting the Philharmonia in one of his own pieces—unadulterated.

George Melachrino gives us 'The Last Spring' by Grieg—one of my mother's favorites. I can't hear that he has done anything to it. It's even in stereo (9 of the 23 tracks here are). Music of Kabalevsky, Khachaturian, and Luigini also seems untouched as played here. David Rose has arranged 12 minutes of Stravinsky's *Firebird*; it can be a bit sleazy (Firebird as stripper?). I wonder how much he paid Stravinsky for the chance to do it. That may be the oldest recording here (1942). Most of this is from the 1950s—and that's when I heard most of it and decided I preferred the real thing.

The field is full of pseudonyms. Who was Pierre Challet, who recorded prolifically for Mercury in the late 50s? Who was Philip Green? The arranger "Ralph Sterling" was bet-

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 186

ter known as "David Carroll", but was that also a pseudonym? I like his arrangement of Mendelssohn's 'On Wings of Song'. If you always thought it needed an orchestra, here it is (minus the singer, too—no singers here, but songs for orchestra).

Be warned that some arrangements are a bit "trashy"; you have to accept them as part of the period charm. I recommend this as the best example of a major genre of the 1940s and 50s, when the "general public" still responded to the beauty of wonderful melodies written by real composers.

VROON

Latin-American Quartet

CAMPA: *3 Miniatures;* **CARRASCO:** *Quartet in E minor;* **DE ELIAS:** *Quartet 2;* **LOBATO:** *Quartet in G*

Sono Luminus 92130—80 minutes

The inspired Cuarteto LatinoAmericano brings to life the work of Mexican composers of the mid-20th Century. As the essay notes, most of these works are not products of the Mexican Nationalist movement of the early 20th Century. These are romantic works that use a great deal of chromaticism and, like the earlier works of Ponce, include Mexican folk music in the otherwise European tradition of composition.

The De Elias begins with a large first movement that is incredibly nostalgic. He moves through what seems to be endless keys, as if he is trying to find an appropriate place for the never-ending melody that lingers softly. It sounds to me like an ode to a Mexican landscape or childhood town. II is the most chromatic of all, a bit agonizing to listen to. III is a joyous dance, filled with drama and youth. IV returns to the nostalgic vision of I and ends blazing with hope.

The Carrasco is a excellent. The first movement begins with a passionate line that emerges from warm texture in the cello. It kind of sounds like the melody of the bolero, 'Besame Mucho', oozing with sexuality and romanticism. Carrasco marks it "cumm granus salis", (with a pinch of salt) as if telling the players to not take the music too seriously. Cuarteto LatinoAmericano takes his advice—they never fall into sentimentalism or senseless dramatic playing. The last movement of the work is the most folk-like of all with a wonderful vision of a Mexican plaza on a warm day in Spring, with flowers blossoming and people dancing. Delightful!

Outside of the 'Rondo' movement, I am not as taken by the Lobato. It is nice enough, but it sometimes seems to wander. But the 'Rondo' is spot on, perhaps because he works with a very tuneful melody. His use of chromaticism is significantly less sophisticated than Carrasco and De Elias.

There are also three miniatures by Campa: 'Minuet', 'Gavotte', 'Theme Varie'. These were written much earlier (1889) and are the oldest known works for string quartet in Mexico. They are simple and charming dances—very tender and innocent.

This is a phenomenal production of music that I am thrilled to start to know. The sound of Cuarteto LatinoAmericano is a sound of experience and tremendous maturity; they are not distracted by a thing, and this music is second nature to them. This is wonderful place to start expanding your collection of Latin American classical music.

JACOBSEN

Back to Melody

Kilar, Malecki, Czarnecki

Opium Quartet

Accord 163—57 minutes

The OPiUM quartet is a group of young string players; all four graduated from the Chopin Academy—one in 2003, three in 2005. This debut recording collects four works composed between 1986 and 2007, all influenced to some degree by the so-called "return to melody" or "new romanticism" that commanded the attention of several Polish composers in the mid-1970s. (Gorecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* and Penderecki's first violin concerto are probably the most familiar examples.)

The earliest work, Wojciech Kilar's *Orawa* (1986), begins with minimalist patterns that articulate closely related harmonic changes, then gradually gain momentum to evoke a dance by a highlander band. (Shepherds in Orawa, a region on the Polish-Slovak border, perform such dances after their workday.) Maciej Malecki's *Polish Suite*, written for OPiUM, borrows from four previous works and is unabashedly tuneful, even nostalgic. Slawomir Czarnecki's second string quartet (1997)—the strongest work here—was written during an intense period of documenting folk music from the area of Spis; the music, while in a concert music idiom, retains vestiges of melody and even the playing style of the folk bands in the region. Malecki's daughter Magdalena (the violist for the OPiUM quartet) shines as a soloist in the concluding Andante and Allegro, written by her father expressly for her graduation recital; the quartet is joined here by violist Wojciech Walczak and bassist Radoslaw Nur. While the composition occasionally indulges in more dissonance than the others, it is also thoroughly influenced by folk idioms. The performances are superb, and the engineering is spectacular.

HASKINS

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 187

Polish Quartets

MENDELSON: *Quartet 1;* **PADLEWSKI:** *Quartet 2;* **LAKS:** *Quartet 5*

Silesian Quartet

EDA 34—65 minutes

EDA continues its series devoted to "lost" or neglected music by victims of the Nazis with string quartets by three little-known Polish Jewish composers. Included are the 1925 First Quartet of Joachim Mendelson (1897-1943), the 1942 Second Quartet of Roman Padlewski (1915-44), and the 1963 Fifth Quartet of Simon (or Szymon) Laks (1901-83). Both Mendelson and Padlewski were killed by the Nazis—Padlewski as part of the heroic resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto. Only Laks survived the war and continued to compose until the 1960s, before devoting himself to literary endeavors.

All three quartets are mainly neoclassic in manner and often linear in texture, with much use of fugal and other contrapuntal techniques. But instead of sounding French or German, the inflections here are Slavic, recalling to some extent the quartets of their composers' much-better-known Polish contemporaries, Grazyna Bacewicz and Alexandre Tansman.

Mendelson's quartet is in three fairly compact movements with spirited outer movements and a central Largo. There are light touches of Ravelian impressionism, and the overall mood is optimistic. Padlewski's quartet, drawing on baroque models, is laid out in two large movements: a toccata and a large-scale introduction and fugue. This is a serious, rather austere work of considerable dignity but not much surface allure.

Of greater interest is Laks's four-movement Quartet 5, more chromatic and searching in its language, more varied and imaginative in texture, and more unpredictable and multifarious in its emotions both light and dark. It's also the most expressive of personal feeling of the three here, notably in II's sad (and quite tonal) chorale resonant with memorial significance at once private and universal. Music, as Eduard Hanslick pointed out, is a language that we understand without being able to translate.

The Silesian Quartet plays this music with sensitivity and technical assurance, and EDA's sonics are clear and natural. (But don't be confused by the scrambled sequence of numbers on the booklet's track listings!) I enjoyed the whole program but will return mostly for Laks. Interested collectors will want to know that several more works by Laks have been recorded, most of them also on EDA.

LEHMAN

Tertis Viola Ensemble

Telemann, Weinzierl, Bowen, Bartok, Piazzolla, Norton

Oehms 788—50 minutes

The Tertis Viola Ensemble is named for Lionel Tertis, the British violist who commissioned his compatriots to write difficult (and excellent) solo music for the viola, and is therefore responsible for elevating the viola from its pre-20th Century status as a mostly inner-voice instrument with limited literature to a dignified solo instrument. A viola ensemble like this one, made of members of the viola section of the Munich Philharmonic, is something that would make Tertis proud. Listening to it makes me (even more) proud to be a violist.

Much of the music here has been transcribed from music for multiple violins, but the well-known Fantasy Quartet for Four Violas by York Bowen (1884-1961) and the lesser-known (and gorgeous) *Nachtstück* for Four Violas by Max von Weinzierl (1841-1898) are original.

The Weinzierl was first published in 1910 as a work for four violas or three violins and cello, and was published again in 1988. Weinzierl was mainly a composer of vocal music, and the *Nachtstück* seems to be his only published instrumental composition. The score has a dedication to Dr Wenzel Sedlitzky, a Salzburg druggist who served as the president of the Mozarteum 1888-89.

The two Telemann concertos are direct one-fifth-lower transcriptions of two of his four concertos for four violins (perhaps the other two, which are not well known, will appear on a future recording). The lower pitch, which evokes the sound of a viol consort, allows for a bit more space between the major second intervals that begin the C-major Concerto, and the striking differences between the violas' registers give the piece a great deal of depth.

The space between dissonant intervals brings extra resonance to the the nine Bartok violin duos that are on this recording. The duos were transcribed by Bartok's son Peter. They are, of course, played by only two violists at a time, though the richness of the sound gives the impression of a much larger ensemble.

The Piazzolla 'Four for Tango' is originally for string quartet, and this ensemble does its best to maintain the voicing; but, in spite of the excellent playing, I still prefer the piece in its original form. In Christopher Norton's 'Steering Wheel Blues', the precise way three German violists (and one from Honduras who studied in Freiburg) meet the imprecise but codified American idiom of Blues makes me smile. It brings to mind Die Symphoniker's

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 188

recording of Meredith Wilson's 'Zayr Veyr Pbells'.

FINE

Brassage

HANDEL: *Arrival of the Queen of Sheba;* **CRAUSAZ:** *Brass Quintet Suite 1;* **STEPHENSON:** *Quintet;* **ARUNIUNIAN:** *Armenian Scenes;* **STURZNEGGER:** *Fanfare for GBQ; 4 Fanfares; L'Encyclopedie de l'Opera;* **ROBLEE:** *Early Days;* **LAVALLEE:** *La Rose Nuptiale*

Geneva Brass Quintet
Gallo 1302—55 minutes

I like this group's light articulations and easy way of playing; they don't hammer us the way so many brass ensembles do. But the trumpets and trombone sound more direct and prominent than horn and tuba, which seem distant and tubby. This is a built-in problem for brass quintets, given bell directions and timbres, but it must be solved if a recording is to be pleasant.

The program offers a slew of new works, including an exciting little brass quintet by Etienne Crausaz. A fine and fairly lengthy (4:45) 'Fanfare for GBQ' is contributed by the group's horn player, Christopher Sturznegger. South African composer Allan Stephenson's three-movement quintet is winsome. Richard Roblee's 'Early Days' is an excerpt—first mellow, then rollicking—from *American Images*.

The all-Swiss members of Geneva Brass Quintet are trumpeters Samuel Gaille and Lionel Walter, horn player Sturznegger, trombonist David Rey, and tuba player Eric Rey.

KILPATRICK

Thomas Carroll, cello

BRAHMS: *Sonata 2;* **BEETHOVEN:** *Sonata 3;* **SCHUBERT:** *Arpeggione Sonata*

with Llyr Williams, p
Orchid 16—80 minutes

This is a particularly poetic interpretation of these three cello masterpieces. The players create between them sensitively phrased and beautifully timed performances that hold the attention, seemingly without effort. The tone of the cellist is vocal in its orientation, and the recording is balanced as the musicians intended it, both instruments heard easily, yet with full emotional force. A tour de force.

My only cavil is the articulation of all the downbeats in the first theme of the Beethoven scherzo, which may have been what he intended but doesn't convince this old-fashioned cellist.

The liner notes are written by the cellist and describe Vienna from the point of view of the composers in a touching manner, introducing us to each man through aspects of his life experience. I have seldom read such perceptive and moving descriptions. And that goes for the disc as a whole. Get it!

D MOORE

Casals Encores

Alban Gerhardt; Cecile Licad, p
Hyperion 67831—73 minutes

These 19 numbers were chosen by the cellist as homage to Pablo Casals. All of them were recorded by that master, and five are credited to him as arranger. Gerhardt doesn't play them exactly as Casals recorded them, since some are over the 4:30 length allowed on a 78 rpm side. Also his style, though lovely in tone and temperament, is not reminiscent in any direct way of Casals.

We have everything here from Boccherini through Chopin, Saint-Saens, and Wagner to Falla and Granados with excursions by David Popper and Fritz Kreisler, ending with the folk song 'Song of the Birds'. Of course my response will be to revisit my extensive Casals collection, but I don't think a comparison is in order at this point. If you like the idea of this collection, Gerhardt is a tasteful player beautifully aided and abetted by Licad. Some of their tempos are on the slow side, notably in *The Swan* and in Chopin's Prelude 15, *Raindrop*, but that's a matter of taste, not ability. It is an attractive experience overall.

D MOORE

Autumn

WIKLANDER: *Fantasia;* **SWEENEY:** *Autumn Music;* **BRUCH:** *Kol Nidrei;* **RHEINBERGER:** *Overture, op 150:6;* **BACH:** *3 Chorale Preludes;* **SALTER:** *Vitis Flexuosa;* **LLOYD WEBBER:** *Benedictus;* **GENZMER:** *Cello & Organ Sonata*

Rebecca Hewes; Julian Collings, org
Regent 364—72 minutes

Music for organ and cello is not a common thing in the recording studio, though it happens often in the real world. The blend is a natural, as this program demonstrates. The Svyati Duo has discovered a number of fine compositions otherwise unknown, and a surprising number of them are included here. The program opens with a notably friendly and outgoing Fantasia by Kurt Wiklander (b 1950), a 1987 piece that sounds like something written during WW I, romantic but conscious of the down side of life. Eric Sweeney (b 1948) writes in a similar idiom, but his *Autumn Music* is a much more easygoing piece based on repeated rhythmic figures that bring us out to the woods, fields, and lakes of Ireland.

Then come three transcriptions, first Max Bruch's famous *Kol Nidrei,* then a piece by

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 189

Joseph Rheinberger (1839-1901) culled by the players from his six pieces for violin and organ, and finally three of Bach's organ chorale preludes colorfully scored by Helmut Barnefeld. This is all effectively handled by both players and arrangers.

The most modern music comes last. *Vita Flexuosa* was composed for the duo by Timothy Salter (b 1942). It is nearly eight minutes of excitement and drama, contrasting with lyrical statements in a beautiful way. Another dramatic piece is Harald Genzmer's three-movement sonata, a highly effective work with a fine mood and contrasts enough to excite anyone. Altogether a very listenable program, played with conviction and beauty of tone.

This is the second disc I have heard by this duo. The first was called *Svyati Duo* and contained a similar kind of program including three more transcriptions of Rheinberger's violin pieces, Op. 150, Marcel Dupre's sonata and *In Croce*, a major work by Sofia Gubaidulina, among other fine pieces. If the present program interests you, you might look up Regent 337 as well (May/June 2010, p 174).

D MOORE

Debut

SCHUMANN: *5 Pieces in Folk Style;* **FRANCK:** *Cello Sonata;* **RUZICKA:** *Recitativo;* **SAINT-SAENS:** *Introduction & Rondo Capriccioso*

Valentin Radutiu; Per Rundberg, p
Oehms 759—64 minutes

A young cellist of 25, Radutiu was a student of David Geringas and Claudio Bohorquez in Berlin and shows the sense of musical phrasing one would expect from working with such fine cellists. Both Radutiu and Rundberg show this love of broadly expansive emotional and landscaped gestures, particularly in the gorgeous Franck sonata, originally for violin but transcribed for cello with Franck's permission. There are moments when I miss some melodic clarity in the piano part in the emotional Allegro (II), yet the overall result is positive. Thank goodness Radutiu chooses to leave the last-movement second climax at its original higher pitch, instead of transposing it down an octave as many cellists do. He plays it with flair, too.

Peter Ruzicka's *Recitativo* is a curious piece written in 2009, based on material from his opera *Celan.* It tends to disappear sometimes into the distant heights, to be brought back to earth by the piano—or not, as the case may be. It lasts 11 minutes and is a premiere recording.

The program closes with a transcription by the cellist of the Saint-Saens piece, originally for violin and orchestra. As a listener who tends to prefer a composer's original idea, I wondered what a cellist could possibly do to make this light-hearted virtuoso piece work. Surprise! He sold me. He had been disguising his virtuoso chops, but here he puts them to work to great effect, covering all the showy violin passages with aplomb and accuracy, many of them in the violin register, no less, and playing so well in tune and with such sensitivity to the composer's beauty of phrasing that I really was amazed and moved by his virtuosity and musical ability. And also by the piece itself, always a favorite, but played and arranged here with notable sensitivity to the beauty of the original. Thank you, Valentin!

D MOORE

Jewish Songs

RAVEL:*Chanson Hebraique;* **BLOCH:** *Jewish Life; Nigun; Meditation Hebraique;* **ZYGEL:** *Nigun; Psalmodie; Chemah;* **TRAD:** *Kol Nidre; Question; Psalm; Conversation; Prayer; Chanson; Kaddish; Incertitude; Danse; Hassidic Chant; Elegy*

Sonia Wieder-Atherton, vc; Daria Hovora, p
Naive 5226—77 minutes

Wieder-Atherton has a curious concept of life that she incorporates into her programming in various ways. This one combines fairly recent recordings of Bloch and Ravel with what she calls 14 Stories based on traditional Jewish sources, some arranged by composer Jean-Francois Zygel and all recorded back in 1989. Each of these has a page of explanation in French and another in English, with a separate page for each one's title, printed on thick paper in a booklet adding up to 70-odd pages. This was impossible to remove until I ripped up the case, so watch out! I don't keep my CDs in jewel boxes, so it was no loss, but you may not be ready for my kind of mess yet.

The explanations of the 14 stories are pretty incomprehensible, so let's listen to the music. It begins with a pleasant setting of the Kol Nidrei for two cellos, both played by Sonia. It is followed by cello-piano renditions of a number of Jewish-sounding tunes set in a thoughtful but colorful manner, some by Sonia, some by Zygel. Two of the 14 pieces are for solo cello. It adds up to quite a collection lasting over 50 minutes. If you're looking for settings of Jewish folk or liturgical music for cello and piano, you might find something nice here. The pieces are not particularly complex musically, but some parts are not easy for the cello, though you wouldn't know it from listening to Sonia.

The program ends with Ravel and Bloch, including all of Bloch's Jewish settings, I think. This is a program of some depth emotionally, played to the hilt.

D MOORE

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 190

Solo Clarinet

Berio, Denisov, Jolivet, Reimann, Goehr, Hosokawa, Lehmann, Lourie, Nieder, Pousseur, Widmann

Eduard Brunner—Naxos 572470—71 minutes

Swiss-born clarinetist and former Bavarian Radio Symphony principal Eduard Brunner continues his steady pace of recording with European contributions to the late 20th Century unaccompanied solo clarinet repertoire, some of them not well known in the United States. The program includes the Luciano Berio *Lied* (1983); the Edison Denisov Sonata (1972); the Andre Jolivet *Asceses* (1967); the Aribert Reimann *Solo* (1994); the Alexander Goehr *Paraphrase on a Dramatic Madrigal by Monteverdi* (1969); the recently completed Toshio Hosokawa *EDI* (2009), written specifically for Brunner and still unpublished; the Hans Ulrich Lehmann *Mosaik* (1964); the Arthur Lourie *Mime* (1956); the Fabio Nieder *Terracotta* (1995); the Henri Pousseur *Madrigal I* (1958); and the Jorg Widmann *Fantasie* (1993), written when the composer-clarinetist was only 20 years old. The liner notes are generous with information on each piece and publisher information.

All of the music belongs to the abstract language that developed after World War II—disjunct themes, atonal harmonic content, extended techniques, and Expressionist mannerisms. With the exception of the Berio, most of it runs together in a floating intangible cloud, and one piece could easily be mistaken for another. Nevertheless, Brunner is prepared, and he offers good renditions. He executes the glissandos, flutter-tonguing, and multiphonics very well; he employs the expansive dynamic range essential to each work's otherworldly atmosphere; and he has sufficient fingers and articulation to navigate the seemingly endless thorny passages.

Esoteric proclamations, though, need more than just decent readings. Brunner's tone, tongue, legato, and voicing could all use more refinement, and his interpretations demand more than following the composer's directives. His reed always sounds too soft, giving off a grainy and spread timbre; his tongue could be cleaner and more disciplined; his legato could be creamier and have more line to it; and his frequent crossing of registers is often marred by unnecessary pinching and throat manipulation. Despite his volume capacity, his color spectrum is small, and while he respects the particular soundscape of each piece, he makes little effort to climb inside and offer something personal. The end product may be satisfactory for his students, his peers, and the avant-garde community, but what about everyone else?

HANUDEL

Colors

BARTOK: *For Children, selections;* **MERLIN:** *Suite del Recuerdo;* **OURKOUZOUNOV:** *4 Legends;* **PIAZZOLLA:** *History of the Tango;* **RAVEL:** *Piece en Forme de Habanera;* **VILLA-LOBOS:** *Bachianas Brasileiras 5*

Bas Duo

Sabudo 1001—58 minutes (H&B; CD Baby)

There is so much excellent flute and guitar playing that any new recording must be truly extraordinary to measure up to the likes of Paula Robison and Eliot Fisk, Bonita Boyd and Nicholas Goluses, and Eugenia Moliner and Denis Azabagic. If Elyse Knobloch and Peter Press are not ready to stand in their company, they're only off by a hair.

Press's playing is more natural than his partner's, though her playing is the more expressive. Knobloch's playing sometimes has a nervous quality, and sometimes her sound is rounded to the point of becoming a little tubby. She seems very attentive to playing for a close pickup. The flute sound seems to have more resonance than the guitar, though they are balanced. Press manages to produce a melting, sustained quality in the Ravel and Villa-Lobos that I enjoyed hearing. The music is tonal, direct, and enlivened by occasional sound effects.

GORMAN

East Meets West

FERROUD: *3 Pieces;* **HOSOKAWA:** *Lied;* **LOEB:** *Scenes from the Japanese Countryside;* **OFFERMANS:** *Honami;* **TAKEMITSU:** *Air;* **YUN:** *Garak*

Leonard Garrison, fl, picc; Kay Zavislak, p

Centaur 3099—60 minutes

This program presents works by three of the most famous Asian composers and Asian-influenced compositions from the United States, Holland, and France. These pieces are for solo flute, solo piccolo, and flute and piano.

Yun's *Garak* (1963) is by far the most virtuosic, and handled with aplomb. Time is altered in this sound world, too: the work seems much longer than a mere ten minutes. The Offermans takes its name from the Japanese word used to describe waves created by wind in a rice field. Offermans creates breathy effects that imitate the Japanese flute, shakuhachi, and a central section of the piece beautifully explores tone colors with numerous harmonics and alternate fingerings. It is mesmerizing, and the whistle tone that ends the piece takes phenomenal control.

It is very demanding both to write and to play music for an unaccompanied wind instrument. David Loeb has written 18:30 of short pieces for solo piccolo. Garrison has both the

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 191

feel for atmosphere and command of solo playing.

The piccolo playing is assured. The sweet tone Garrison produces and his control of dynamics at the softer end on both flute and piccolo make this very satisfying. Both the sound of the piano and the playing are crisp.

Readers who like this recording will also want the complete Hosokawa disc on Naxos by Icelandic flutist Kolbeinn Bjarnason (May/June).

GORMAN

Loeki Stardust Collection

Newton 8802044 [4CD] 231:45

The Amsterdam Loeki Stardust Quartet has a considerable following. They first played together in 1978 and first recorded in 1984; 18 additional records have followed. Most of the potential buyers for this collection already have one or more of these. Here is the chance to get four programs together. This content was originally released on Decca, 1987-94.

Baroque Recorder Music (1987) was their second recording. It includes arrangements of Bach, Scheidt, Locke, Sweelinck, Purcell, and a Boismortier sonata. *Italian Recorder Music* (1989, released in 1991) offers adaptations from Renaissance vocal works by Merula, Conforti, Trabaci, Frescobaldi, and Palestrina. *Concerti di Flauti* (1992-94) was a collaboration with The Academy of Ancient Music and presents concertos by Marcello, Heinichen, Schickhardt, Telemann, and Vivaldi (the *in due cori* of R 585). Last, *Extra Time* (1989-90) pulls together an array of classical and pops pieces from JC Bach to Henry Mancini and Charlie Parker. It takes six pages to list everything.

The notes offer no specific background about the music, but three pages of stories by one of the members about how the ensemble began and descriptions of the programs chosen. It is worth observing that the recorder is far less flexible in pitch than many other instruments. The notes tell us that "[we] quickly learned that when a recorder ensemble is anything but perfect in terms of tuning, the result is not just unsatisfactory but disastrous".

It is in this context, then, that the present music can be appreciated: virtuoso playing, tuning, and ensemble. If you've never heard of the Loeki Stardust Quartet before, consider this collection a great place to start.

GORMAN

Cantilena

ALAIN: *3 Movements;* **BACH:** *Sonata in A;* **BONIGHTON:** *Cantilena;* **DUPRE:** *Prelude;* **HILLER:** *Andante Religioso;* **KIRALY:** *3 Miniatures;* **LACHNER:** *Elegy;* **MARTIN:** *Sonata da Chiesa;* **WEAVER:** *Rhapsody*

Marianiello-Reas Duo

MSR 1358—79 minutes

It is rare to hear a program of music for flute and organ. This is the second release by these players; their first, *Dialogues* (MSR 1069, not reviewed) is an American program that came out in 2003. The most likely place for music for flute and organ to be heard is in a church; that necessarily constrains the length and character of these selections.

The *Rhapsody* by NY-based organist John Weaver is a 9-minute piece that makes the strongest impression. At the same time, as a concert piece, it may very well lack exposure because it won't fit into a church service, as much of the rest will. By its title, Frank Martin's *Sonata da Chiesa* (1938, originally written for viola da gamba) straddles both the sacred and secular worlds, and the Bach fits either well. Australian composer Rosalie Bonighton's *Cantilena* is pleasant music based on conventional platitudes of our time. Hans Hiller (1873-1938) had me thinking of Humperdinck, and while the Alain and Dupre might have you thinking organ, they were originally written for piano.

The Alain is one of the two works I have performed. Jean-Pierre Rampal recorded it with the composer's sister, Marie-Claire, but his tone is uncovered and unpretty, affecting the first movement in particular. This sounds better. Marianello and Reas take the final *moto perpetuo* more slowly than Alain and Rampal, who really whip through it. There is enough energy for anyone except real speed demons, and a slower tempo allows all of the notes to be heard clearly. The opening movement of the Bach is likewise sedate, but to different effect; most listeners would probably not identify the tempo indication as 'Vivace' based on this rendition. The Lachner is also too sluggish; this was his last piece, and it sounds like he was half-dead when he wrote it. By their modernism, the Kiraly *Miniatures* stand apart from everything else, and in a positive way.

Linda Marianiello plays well enough without exciting or offending me. The spectrum of interest is as follows: the Bach is just notes and drudgery; the Dupre sounds luscious sometimes, and the Martin has much that works. The writing in most of these pieces is fairly sedate and unchallenging, but there is a high C in the Hiller, an optional high C in the Lachner (not played), and I believe a high C-sharp in the Weaver. Organist Keith Reas has primarily

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 192

the job of not overwhelming the flute and remaining patient. He gets a few big moments in the Weaver and the Lachner, sensitive registration opportunities in the Dupre and Kiraly, and his partnership is excellent. The sound presents their playing clearly, with just a little resonance.

GORMAN

Loro

CORDERO: *2 Afro-Antillean Pieces;* **COREA:** *6 Children's Songs;* **GISMONTI:** *8 Pieces;* **ROTA:** *5 Easy Pieces;* **SATIE:** *2 Pieces;* **STRAVINSKY:** *3 Easy Pieces*

Duo Musica

Scandinavian 220508—65 minutes

This recording gets right everything the Bas Duo (see above) was just short of, despite their accomplished playing. The playing is relaxed; it sizzles and soars. The flute and guitar sound entirely natural together, whereas they sounded slightly unnatural on *Colors*. Bent Larsen and Jan Sommer are accomplished Danish musicians who play a program that is easy to listen to.

One small note: there is a cardboard slipcase that I had to tear off in order to get to the disc, hopelessly destroying a picture of boats in a harbor, the works and their timings on the back. The front and back covers of the CD are the same. The music inside is well worth this sacrifice.

GORMAN

Robert Willoughby, flute

PIERNE: *Sonata da Camera; Canzonetta;* **REGER:** *Serenade in G; Suite in A minor;* **ROUSSEL:** *Trio*

Marilyn McDonald, v; Kathryn Plummer, John Tartaglia, va; Catharina Meints, vc; Wilbur Price, p

Boston 1054—71 minutes

Recordings made in 1982 (Reger) and 1985 (Pierne and Roussel) for Gasparo are remastered here. The sound levels and balance vary. The Reger Serenade for flute, violin, and viola is recorded in a resonant, boxy environment with the flute nestled in the sound of the strings. They are more forward, but not in a bad way. The Suite finds the flute rather lost, placed behind a lovely piano. This is an example of Reger's *gebrauchsmusik*; the Serenade for trio is one of his last compositions. That piece grew on me, whereas the Suite did not.

The Roussel has—from all three players—fire and personality sometimes lacking in the Reger. With the Pierné we are immediately seized by the musical narrative and presented with a natural balance among the players. Catharina Meints has the driest pizzicato I've ever heard, but when bowing she makes an excellent chamber music partner. The recording ends with a delicious bonbon, the Pierné *Canzonetta*.

Robert Willoughby is one of the foremost flute players of a generation that has largely left us. He taught for many years at Oberlin and later at Peabody; he now teaches at Longy. Not mentioned in the notes is that in 1996 he won the National Flute Association's Lifetime Achievement Award. He plays very well here, but I imagine he would sound even better on the instruments commonly available to professionals today. This re-release adds to his legacy of accomplished students who teach at universities and play in orchestras nationwide.

GORMAN

The Infinite Fabric of Dreams

MERTZ: *Hungarian Fantasy; Elegy;* **HAUG:** *Prelude, Tiento, Toccata;* **CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO:** *Sonata;* **BRITTEN:** *Nocturnal*

Colin Davin, g

Davin 0—63 minutes (800-BUYMYCD)

I had my doubts about this one—apparently self-produced, with no company or number and no information about the music or the performer. But I determined it is distributed by several major outlets—and the program is a really serious one.

My doubts were misplaced. Mr Davin is the real thing, a player with a virtuoso's technique, a deeply expressive musicanship, and a probing imagination. The opening Mertz pieces are some of the finest interpretations I've heard. Mertz tends to overwrite—he will often lurch from climax to climax, as if he wants the listener to be perpetually in a state of excitement. That makes his music hard to interpret convincingly, especially in the *Elegie*; but Davin has the measure of this music, and his performances are convincing and moving.

Hans Haug is a Swiss composer, whose association with Segovia led to several work for guitar. His work has never been especially popular among guitarists, probably owing to Segovia's lukewarm advocacy. But his music is pleasant and interesting, free from Hispanic cliches (possibly why Segovia never truly warmed to him). It somewhat resembles Alexander Tansman in style. Davin's performance is warm and lyric, just what the music needs.

Now we come to two of the greatest compositions for guitar from the 20th Century. Davin's performance of the Castelnuovo-Tedesco *Sonata: Homage to Boccherini* is the finest I've ever heard. It's as expressive and more technically sure than Segovia's. His second movement is so achingly beautiful that I had tears when I heard it, and his final movement manages to maintain a solid wall of sound without breaking.

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 193

To follow this with the Britten *Nocturnal* is an incredibly bold choice for a debut recording, but Davin is up to the challenge. His performance won't displace Bream's, but it is a thoughtful, perceptive interpretation, filled with details often missed; and the buildup to the final passacaglia, and its final surrender to the tonal world of Dowland's song, 'Come Heavy Sleep, Come Sweet Death' is almost overwhelming.

Some information about Mr Davin can be found on some reviews of his recording on various internet sites. He is from Cleveland, and his teachers include Jason Vieaux, Bill Kanengiser, and Sharon Isbin. The choice to avoid musical or biographical notes was his own (he wants the music to speak for itself), as was the clear, close, un-reverberant recorded sound. I am not enamored of either choice, but I do admire both his talent and his sense of integrity.

This is no vanity production. Davin has considerable talent and maturity, so seek this one out.

KEATON

Admir Doci

RODRIGO: *3 Canciones Espanolas; Aranjuez, ma Pensee;* **TURINA:** *Sevillana;* **BOCCHERINI:** *Introduction & Fandango;* **ASSAD:** *Valsa de Outono;* **GNATALLI:** *Sonata with Cello;* **REGONDI:** *Introduction & Caprice;* **DERUNGS:** *Elegie;* **WETTSTEIN:** *Skizzen;* **SENFL:** *4 Lieder*

Admir Doci; Leila Pfister, mz; Martin Derungs, hpsi; Mattia Zappa, vc; Matthias Weilenmann, rec

Guild 7347—66 minutes

Albanian guitarist Admir Doci plays solos, songs, and chamber music, so there is a nice variety. I enjoy performances like this, and wish there were more of them. Doci is a fine player, based in Switzerland, and his partners are also fine.

He opens with four songs by Rodrigo and mezzo Leila Pfister. She has a rich, dark sound that's ideal for this music, though she never overpowers the guitar. 'Aranjuez, ma Pensee' is arranged from the concerto by Rodrigo. The text is by Victoria Kahmi, the composer's wife. It's undeniably beautiful, but I can't help feeling that hearing the music out of context is disappointing.

The Boccherini is a Bream arrangement of the last movement of his most popular quintet. It's effective, if a bit anachronistic, and it's played with real joy. Martin Derungs is both harpsichordist here and a composer, and his *Elegie* for guitar solo, is haunting and mysterious.

This is the third performance I've heard of Radames Gnattali's sonata for guitar and cello. I reviewed an all-Gnattali disc (J/F 2011) by Marc Regnier and cellist Natalia Khoma on Dorian. That remains my favorite performance, but this is almost as fine (as is the performance of Goluses and Tayor on viola—see *Night Strings* below). Gnattali is Brazil's most important composer after Villa-Lobos, and it's good to hear more of his music. The sonata is one of his finest works. The first and third movements use unusual groupings of beats (such as 9/8 as 2+2+2+3), and II is deeply expressive. I liken the work to what Prokofieff might have written if he'd been born in Brazil.

Doci is as strong as a soloist as he is in chamber music. The Turina, Assad, Regondi, Derungs. and Wettstein are all excellent performances, and he's mastered the varied idioms convincingly. The closing set is quite unusual—four Lieder by Ludwig Senfl, a Franco-Flemish composer of the Renaissance, Heinrich Isaac's pupil, best known for his secular German songs and for his sacred music. He is a master of his age, and the melodies are ably played on recorder by Matthias Weilenmann. It's a surprising and delightful end to an inventive and enjoyable program.

KEATON

Night Strings

DOBBINS: *Night Suite;* **FALLA:** *Spanish Folksong Suite;* **ADLER:** *Into the Radiant Boundaries of Night;* **GNATALLI:** *Sonata;* **KIMBER:** *Hispanic Fantasy*

Nicholas Goluses, g; George Taylor, va

Albany 1257—59 minutes

When I was in college, my major professor had a duo with the viola prof, and I fell in love with the combination. Viola is the best match for guitar among the bowed strings. Violin is too penetrating, cello too big and rich, and don't even think about double bass. The viola is the Goldilocks instrument; timbre and register are all just right.

There is, however, almost no original repertory for the combination, so one has to rely on transcription or living composers, and that's what Goluses and Taylor, both professors of their instruments at the Eastman School of Music, have done here. The results are delightful. Both players are masters, and both play with a delightful subtlety and finesse. They are comfortable and communicative playing together, spontaneous and responsive—just what fine chamber music should be.

Bill Dobbins is professor of jazz studies at Eastman, and has crafted an ingenious suite of three classic jazz tunes for the duo: Wayne Shorter's 'Night Dreamer', Thelonius Monk's 'Round Midnight', and Dizzy Gillespie's 'Night in Tunisia'. These are composed works. Nei-

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 194

ther Goluses nor Taylor takes the tunes and improvises. This comes off as chamber music, based on borrowed melodies and worked out in their style. Still, who can resist the heart-rending beauty of 'Round Midnight', one my favorite jazz tunes of all time. And sparks do fly in 'Night in Tunisia', an effective close.

I've played Falla's *Suite Popular Espanol* for decades, with singers and with melody instruments. Goluses and Taylor omit one of the songs, the 'Seguidilla Murciana'—it relies on rapid repetitions of text on a single pitch, and doesn't work well in an instrumental transcription. The notes indicate that they are using the Max Eschig edition, but I hear a number of differences, each effective, that the players have made in the transition from voice to viola. I love the subtle use of the mute for the final phrase of the 'Jota'.

Samuel Adler taught composition at Eastman for many years and wrote *Into the Radiant Boundaries of Light* for Goluses and violist John Graham. His goal was to create a work that represented the two instruments equally, allowing each player to demonstrate his musicianship, without making a virtuoso showpiece—think of Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*. The work is a beautiful, rich, neo-romantic treasure.

I reviewed an all-Gnattali recording (J/F 2011), and my favorite performance on that disc was the sonata for cello and guitar. That was the first all-Gnattali disc reviewed for ARG; now, for this issue, I got two more recordings of the work, both worthy (see Admir Doci's above). My favorite performance remains the first one, Marc Regnier on Dorian, but this is almost as fine. I do miss the richness of the cello, but viola balances better with the guitar. Gnattali wrote *Concerto Copacabana* for my major prof, Juan Mercadal, so I've known at least that part of his work for some time.

The least interesting work is the last, Michael Kimber's *Hispanic Famtasy*. It's a slight work, filled with Spanish-sounding cliches. It's too long for an encore, but that's sort of the role it serves here. Still, I'm sure it's popular with audiences.

Performances for this combination are rare, and ones of this caliber are rarer still. Enjoy this one.

KEATON

Everything but the City

HENZE: *Minette; 3 Fairytale Pictures;* **TAKEMITSU:** *A Boy Named Hiroshima; Bad Boy;* **NIEMINEN:** *Night Shadows;* **WOUDENBERG:** *Everything but the City*

Helsinki Guitar Duo—Pilfink 30—56 minutes

Mikko Ikaheimo and Rody van Gemert are the soloists in Moreno Torroba's concerto for two guitars, *Tres Nocturnos*, reviewed in this issue. I found their playing effective and idiomatic, but was a bit disturbed by their less-than-precise ensemble. This recital is even better musically, though they still sometimes have trouble playing exactly together. That's not an easy challenge—listen to some all-pizzicato passages in orchestral works, like the scherzos in the Sibelius second or the Tchaikovsky fourth, and you'll often hear a real mess. Apart from that, the performances are committed and imaginative. They have a nice range of tone and dynamics, and use it effectively.

If you know Hans Werner Henze only through his *Royal Winter Music* for guitar or from some of his thorny, difficult orchestral or stage works, these duos will come as a surprise to you. Indeed, Henze adapted his music to whatever he chose at a given time. His reluctance to let theory dictate kept him at odds with some of the Darmstadt folks, which was a good thing. These works are charming, neoclassical, and quite tonal.

The cycle from Minette is based on arias from his opera *The English Cat*, about a trio of pacifist cats raising a baby mouse. Really. The music is charming, with almost a cabaret-like style, and the arrangement of seven movements for two guitars is effective. The *Fairytale Pictures* is from the opera *Pollicino* (Tom Thumb to English speakers). The opera was written for children to perform and the music is easily accessible. The Helsinki duo's performances of both sets have all the gentle charm the music needs. In March/April 2011 I reviewed another performance of three pieces from that opera, but that was a different three pieces, and for guitar solo, rather than the duo.

Both Takemitsu pieces are from film scores. They are melodic, very pretty, and frankly rather more vanilla than one normally hears from this composer. They are more in the vein of his arrangements of popular music, and I'm sure these pieces will please many listeners.

Kai Nieminen's *Night Shadows* is, like his *Acquarelli della Notte* (see the review of his solo recital in this section), based on the Aurora Borealis. It also is a colorful piece, but meanders along without leaving much of an impression. On the other hand, Rijndert van Woudenberg's *Everything but the City* is fascinating. It was written for these performers and deals with the clash between city life and the natural world. III is especially moving—a beautiful piece written as a Requiem for the composer's father, who died while swimming in the North Sea. And the final movement, based on a seabird's mating dance, builds to a truly raucous climax.

This is an interesting collection of music you're not likely to find performed elsewhere, and played quite well.

KEATON

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 195

Sharon Isbin, guitar

CORIGLIANO: *Troubadours;* **SCHWANTNER:** *From Afar;* **FOSS:** *American Landscapes*

St Paul Chamber Orchestra/ Hugh Wolf
EMI 50999—67 minutes

This is a reissue of a recording that was made for Virgin in 1995 (J/F 1996—Mr Ellis was warm in his praise, though he was as annoyed by the Schwantner as I was charmed). I'm glad to see it continues to circulate.

Sharon Isbin is a national treasure. She is a magnificent musician, and she continues the Segovia tradition of expanding the guitar repertory with commissioned and inspired works. Each of these works is a worthy offering from one of America's leading composers, and each is presented in an excellent performance.

Corigliano's *Troubadours* is typical of that composer in a lyric mood. It is a large set of variations based on a theme inspired by the melodies of the troubadours (in fact, the last third of the theme is a quotation of a song by the trobairitz—a female troubadour—Beatriz, Comtessa di Dia, 'A Chantar'). The music is colorful and rich, yet still simple, in keeping with its origins. It evolves from active to calm, from powerful to meditative. Isbin's performance is superb, and she is well matched by the St Paul players.

Joseph Schwantner's *From Afar...* is the most virtuosic work here. It is swirling and colorful—understandably so, since this is the only work whose composer is actually a guitarist (or was in his early years). It was composed when Schwantner was composer-in-residence for the St Louis Symphony—the first time that a guitar composer was commissioned by a major American orchestra.

Luca Foss's *American Landscapes* is the only work here that is actually based on American folk music. The first movement includes several folk song quotes, including 'Jefferson and Liberty' and the unfortunately named 'Dog's Tic'; the slow movement is a set of variations on 'Wayfaring Stranger', with some witty use of quarter tones (including one point where the guitar detunes one of the bass strings—which Isbin executes with amazing accuracy). The final movement is based on a pair of bluegrass tunes, 'Cotton-eyed Joe' and 'Stay a Little Longer', and ends with an Ives-like quote of 'America the Beautiful' in another key.

In the last 15 years, none of these works have caught on—conductors seem inclined to learn the *Aranjuez* and be done with it if they pay attention to guitar concertos at all. But they are worthy, and Isbin's and Wolff's collaboration means that at least there is a good model.

KEATON

Johannes Moller, guitar

BARRIOS: *El Sueno en la Floresta;* **CRAEYVANGER:** *Der Freischutz Variations;* **VILLA-LOBOS:** *3 Etudes; Cadenza;* **GOUGEON:** *Lamento-Scherzo;* **REGONDI:** *Reverie;* **BROUWER:** *Sonata;* **MOLLER:** *Poem to a Distant Fire*

Naxos 572715—73 minutes

Johannes Moller is the winner of the 2010 Guitar Foundation of America Competition, probably the most important in the Americas. The first prize includes a Naxos recording contract along with several concerts. The contest always attracts the highest levels of talent, and Mr Moller is no exception. It is not enough to have an excellent technique—the winner must also have a distinct musical personality, an interpretive viewpoint. This recording is one of the most musical and expressive programs I've heard.

Yes, Moller has a virtuosic technique, but he's not eager to show it off at any opportunity, especially if there are areas to be explored that need space, quiet, and contemplation. And he has an amazing range of sound expression. Timbre is for him a distinct interpretive tool, so any given passage marked, say, *pizzicato* will not be identical to any other. Each phrase, each piece, creates its own world.

This is even evident in his programming. Who would have thought to play the cadenza from the Villa-Lobos concerto as part of a recital? But it works, and by creating a set of Etudes 7, 9, the cadenza, and Etude 12, he has made the aesthetic equivalent of a four-movement sonata. It was sheer genius to see how naturally the ending of the cadenza led into the wild, swirling portamento chords of the last etude. And it was nice to hear such a loving performance of Etude 9, a beautiful piece I've always adored, but I've never heard it performed outside of a complete set. One could quibble with some of Moller's rhythmic choices in 7 or 9, but he clearly has his own conception, and he presents that convincingly.

The opening Barrios is played with all the mysterious, dream-like mood it should have. The Weber variations by Karel Arnoldus Craeyvanger (who?) is a treat. The music could be by Weber; it inhabits a world a generation after Sor and Giuliani, and the variations avoid the trap of the obvious that older composers so often succumbed to.

The *Lamento-Scherzo* by Denis Gougeon was the required piece for the competition, yet Moller plays it like he's known it for years. It's a challenging work, making demands on both the virtuosic technique and the intellectual and intuitive understanding of the player. Regondi's *Reverie* is an overblown piece, with way too many notes, but Moller makes it all convincing.

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 196

The Brouwer sonata is another modern masterpiece, full of wild contrasts, mystery, and humor (note the quote from Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* at the end of the first movement). Brouwer's scores are notable for the level of detail they include, for timber, dynamics, articulation, and special effects. He loves lots of contrast in his music, and I'm sure he would love Moller's performance, which is one of the finest I've heard.

Moller's bio describes him as "guitarist and composer"—self-taught. As a teacher, I can't approve, but as a musician, I love the final work on the program, his *Poem to a Distant Fire*. It is a beautiful work with ambiguous tonality that reminds me a bit of Scriabin. It is totally without cliches, so easy to fall into on guitar music; the final set of extremely high harmonics brings the program to an end quietly.

This made me sad when it was over. I look forward to more from Mr Moller as his career develops.

KEATON

In the Woods

FALLA: *Homenaje;* **MILHAUD:** *Segoviana;* **ROUSSEL:** *Segovia;* **GOMEZ-CRESPO:** *Nortena;* **TAKEMITSU:** *In the Woods; Piece for the 60th Birthday of Sylvano Bussotti; Equinox;* **TORROBA:** *Suite Castellana; Nocturno; Madronos;* **NIEMINEN:** *Acquarelli della Notte*

Kai Nieminen, g
Pilfink 21—53 minutes

Kai Nieminen is a well-established guitarist and teacher based in Finland, with an active European career. He plays with Duo Upingos, a guitar-oboe ensemble, whose release is also reviewed in this issue. He is also a composer, and one can hear his music on this recording and on one by the Helsinki Guitar Duo, also reviewed here.

Nieminen presents a recital mostly of miniatures from the Segovia repertory. I wish I found his playing more convincing. His sound is bold and varied—perhaps too bold. I wish there were more gentleness in many of the pieces. Gomez-Crespo's *Nortena* simply sounds harsh. And his rubato often breaks the flow rather than enhances it. Rubato needs to do one of two things: either make a passage more beautiful or clarify the phrase structure. Is there a need, for instance, in Torroba's *Madronos*, to stop the piece's magical, gentle flow every few beats? Other choices just seem odd. Torroba's *Nocturno* starts promisingly, but why spoil the mystery in the middle section by playing the chords staccato and the same volume as the melody?

His own piece, *Acquarelli della Notte* is colorful—appropriate for music inspired by the Aurora Borealis—but tends to meander. It's never a good sign when half way through a piece, you start thinking "Isn't this over yet?"

Each of the other pieces has had better performance in other hands. Unless you want this particular set of pieces, you are better off elsewhere.

KEATON

Sans Souci

TORROBA: *Castles of Spain (4);* **BARRIOS:** *3 Waltzes;* **SATIE:** *3 Gnossiennes;* **ASSAD:** *Saudades;* **SPOOR:** *Sans Souci;* **BROUWER:** *Un Dia de Noviembre*

Aaron Spoor, g
ATSTA 0—47 minutes (800-529-1696)

The jacket lists Mr Spoor as producer and recording engineer, and indicates that the project took ten months in 2010. Other than that there is no information about Spoor or the music.

I'm afraid Mr Spoor is simply not ready for prime time. These performances are amateurish. His rubato is both self-indulgent and predictable (it's tricky to be both). Slurs are rushed, tempos uneven, scalar passages sloppy. His tone is not bad, but is often on the twangy side. Beyond his immediate family and friends, I don't know who would be interested in this.

KEATON

Machaca—Mano a Mano

PONCE: *Prelude; Estrellita;* **PIAZZOLLA:** *Bordel 1900; Café 1930; Nightclub 1950;* **LAURO:** *Natalia;* **IANNARELLI:** *Valzer Brilliante;* **BROUWER:** *Danza Caracteristica; Cancion del Cuna;* **BELLINATI:** *Jongo;* **VILLA-LOBOS:** *Bachianas Brasileiras 5: Aria;* **ROTH:** *Quintet*

Morgan Szymanski, g; Jose Menor, hpsi; Ruth Rogers, v; Laura Mitchell, s; Luzmira Zerpa: g, cuatro; O Duo, Oliver Cox, perc; Gemma Rosefield, vc; Phuong Nguyen, acc; Sacconi Quartet
Sarabande 1—68 minutes

Szymanski, born in Mexico and trained at the Royal College of Music in London, has taken some well-known works, many originally solos, and arranged them for chamber ensembles. The results are, for the most part, charming and enjoyable, if not always especially exiting or compelling.

Ponce's 'Preludio' is usually heard as a solo, and it's one of the most joyous, delightful bits of Ponce's neo-classic output. He made an arrangement with harpsichord. The harpsichord part is interesting, but too busy. Piazzolla's *Histoire du Tango* is a four-movement work, originally for guitar and flute (I believe—with Piazzolla it's hard to say). But any melody

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 197

instrument can fill in for the flute. Szymanski plays only three movements, two with violin and guitar, and the slow 'Cafe 1930' with accordion. It works well.

The addition of percussion to Brouwer's 'Danza Caracteristica' is a brilliant touch. Less so the percussion in the lullaby, 'Cancion de Cuna'. Nor am I convinced of the addition of voice and text to the lullaby, even though they have found the text from Ernesto Grenet's original setting. Laura Mitchell has a light, pretty voice—too light for my taste. Text is also added to the Lauro waltz, and she sings the Villa-Lobos *Bachianas Brasileiras 5*. She has considerable competition on that work, and falls short of most of it.

The most interesting work—and by far the best performance—is Alec Roth's Guitar Quintet. It's one of the finest essays for guitar and strings I've ever heard. It has beautiful melodies, interesting harmonies, evocative effects—and, if one can judge by the titles of the movements, considerable extramusical inspiration. That makes the total lack of notes frustrating. What does it mean, when the first movement is supposed to be 'In Memoriam Lobgott Piepsam'? Or the second says 'Papa H Dances'? Papa Haydn? Papa Honegger? Hitler?

The rest of the performances range from charming and delightful to a bit disappointing, but the recording is worth getting for the quintet alone. (This may only be available thru Internet sources.)

KEATON

In South American Twilight

DESPORTES: *Pastorale Melancolique; Pastorale Joyeuse;* **PESSARD:** *Andalouse;* **GOSSEC:** *Tambourin;* **VILLA-LOBOS:** *5 Preludes; Aria from Bachianas Brasileiras 5; Distribuicao de Flores;* **CHAVEZ:** *Upingos; 3 Pieces; SOR: La Romanesca;* **PIAZZOLLA:** *Café 1930*

Duo Upingos (Kai Nieminen, g; Juha Markkanen, ob)

Pilfink 53—60 minutes

I review another of Nieminen's releases in this section, and I wasn't very impressed with it. This is better. In particular, I was happy to hear the combination of guitar and oboe—a lovely sound, and I actually prefer it to the ubiquitous guitar and flute ensemble. Many combinations of guitar and flute can substitute oboe without any changes, as is the case with many of the works here. Markkanen has a beautiful sound, though he's not the most subtle in his phrasing. Nieminen balances well with the oboe, and his tendency to a bold sound actually serve him well in this setting.

The opening four pieces are pleasant, if insubstantial. Pessard's 'Andalouse' is one of those pieces that represent what a Frenchman thinks a Spaniard sounds like, and the Frenchman is wrong. The next ensemble works are the two Villa-Lobos pieces. The Bachianas Brasileiras should have been magical, but is just prosaic. Neither player makes any attempt to come down in sound for the return of the aria melody, when the work calls on the singer to hum (it is marked *boca chiusa*, closed mouth).

Nieminen has several solos here. The five Villa-Lobos preludes are some of the most popular in the guitar repertory, and there is considerable competition. These performances can't be recommended. Most of the technically demanding passages are either sluggish or uneven—and he slows down parts of the arpeggio in the middle section of No. 2.

The three pieces by Mexican composer Carlos Chavez are better, especially the final 'Un Poco Mosso'. Markkanen then plays his own solo, 'Upingos', the source of the duo's name. It's technically fluid, if a bit unimaginative.

Somehow both players really came alive in the last two pieces. Sor's 'La Romanesca' is actually my favorite performance of the lot, and both players are suddenly sensitive and expressive to a degree I hadn't heard. Piazzolla's 'Cafe 1930' is from his set *Histoire du Tango*, and is given a moving, mysterious, and romantic performance.

But why name your disc *In South American Twilight* when only two of the composers are actually from South America?

KEATON

Happy Here

VEDDER: *Rise;* **JEFFES:** *For a Found Harmonium;* **BACH:** *Sheep May Safely Graze;* **BRUCE:** *White Room;* **COUPERIN:** *Mysterious Barricades;* **O'RIADA:** *Women of Ireland;* **COULTER:** *Redwood Waltz;* **VERDERY:** *Happy Here; Tread Lightly;* **TRAD:** *Costa de Galicia; One Night in Bethlehem*

William Coulter, Benjamin Verdery, g

Mushkatweek 400—48 minutes (503-477-7103)

This came with a note from the Editor, "this may not be for ARG". It is, indeed, not the classical repertory, except for the Bach and Couperin. The rest is in various folk traditions. But Ben Verdery is a well-established, well-respected classical guitarist (Bill Coulter is just as renowned and specializes in Celtic music). Music for guitar often has one foot in the cultivated world and another in the vernacular. I've had recent reviews of such music of Columbia, another of Chile—and don't get me, or Mr Vroon, started on Piazzolla. Besides, this is damned fine music-making.

The notes (another nearly illegible mess of

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 198

tiny type superimposed over color shots) tell just a bit about each piece, and most seem to have arisen out of one of the two starting to play something, and the two improvising together. With average musicians, that could be dreadful, but these are not average musicians. They play with taste, affection, and imagination. The results are never disappointing and often delightful and moving. Verdery plays a nylon-stringed instrument, Coulter a steel-stringed acoustic. Some of the cuts seem to be solos, though the notes don't specify. The sources are disparate. Couperin's 'Mysterious Barricades' is well known, and the transcription by Alirio Diaz stays close to the original. Bach's 'Sheep May Safely Graze' is given a looser arrangement, without the pulsing bass that would identify it as baroque, but who can resist this gorgeous music in any guise?

Other sources are more surprising. 'Rise' is by Eddie Vedder of the band Pearl Jam, and 'White Room' is by Jack Bruce of Cream. Yet neither arrangement seems like anything taken from an electronic, highly amplified source, and the performances are moving and wholly natural.

The traditional music from Ireland and Spain has the players in more familiar territory. 'One Night in Bethlehem' is achingly beautiful, and the final work, 'Peggy Gordon' even more delicate and lovely. Both Verdery and Coulter contribute here as composers as well as arrangers. There pieces are in folk style, as would be expected in this project. 'Tread Lightly', written in memory of Verdery's brother Dan, is sweet, gentle, and deeply moving.

I took great pleasure in this recording, and I'll return to it often.

KEATON

More Bizarre or baRock

Elizabeth Anderson, hpsi
Move 3326—64 minutes

Here is a collection of harpsichord favorites, pop-jazz-baroque fusion pieces, and contemporary harpsichord music. Anderson is a dynamic and imaginative player. I enjoy her energetic rendition of Mozart's Rondo alla Turca. She also has a sensitive, introverted side; and several of the pieces she has programmed for this recording, like Herbert Howells's poignant 'Lambert's Fireside', show her in that light. The harpsichord is supported in some pieces by a jazz rhythm section of bass, drums, and vibes, in various combinations. The Australian didjeridu makes an appearance in Ron Nagorcka's 'This Beauteous Wicked Place'.

KATZ

American Music for Percussion 2

CARTER: *Tintinnabulation;* **CHILD:** *Refrain;* **COHEN:** *Acid Rain;* **HARBISON:** *Cortege;* **LERDAHL:** *First Voices*
Yelena Beriyeva, Yelizaveta Beriyeva, p; Kimberly Soby, s; Mary Kate Vom Lehn, mz; Thea Lobo, a; New England Conservatory Percussion Ensemble/ Frank Epstein
Naxos 559684—50 minutes

There's one nice thing about modern percussion music: you don't have to sit there nagging yourself because you can't hear and keep track of the tone rows. And, I've heard some good non-pitched percussion pieces in my time, but these seem simply so much organized striking of clangy objects—or maybe I'm too populist and I need an occasional steady beat to hold onto. John Harbison's *Cortege* is a sometimes angry tribute to his friend Donald Sur, who died in 1999. Alas, maybe because I'm already used to percussion being, well, percussive, the anger doesn't come across. Maybe it's in the playing, but I think it's easier to grasp brutality when it's coming from strings, for example. The ticking clock feeling at the end is effective, though.

The First Voices, by Fred Lerdahl, is a setting from Rousseau's *On the Origin of Language*, about there being no difference between speaking and singing at the beginning of the evolution of language. The singers perform with very little vibrato; the dry harmonies dance to the rhythms, and the sound is similar to Partch's *Delusion of the Fury*. The playing is good, and the sound is deep and very clear.

There's nothing that would draw me to listen to this again. Notes in English, with a translation of the Rousseau. (Also, there's a percussion instrument called a "rape"? That's unfortunate, though it does remind me of a graffito I saw in graduate school: "the lute is often accompanied by the rape and the pillage".)

ESTEP

Czech & Moravian Oboe

Marlen Vavrikova
Centaur 3079—76 minutes

The robust history and culture of the Czech Republic continues to yield new fascinations. These mostly unpublished works are scored for a combination of oboe with strings and piano. For the soloist, Marlen Vavrikova, assistant professor of music at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, they embody perhaps only a sampling of homeland favorites. A few of them belong solidly to the classical tradition, some to folk, and others to a much more modern idiom.

A work by Edvard Schiffauer, born in 1942,

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 199

called *Fantasy about Love* falls neatly into the category of abstract work, whereas the two quartets by Pavel Masek (1761-1826) are undeniably classical, if not quite reminiscent of early Mozart. Others come from the country's rich folk tradition. Ctirad Kohoutek's *Sonatina Semplice*, for example, while a modern work, is the depth of Czech and Moravian tradition and its modern composers' interests in preserving their heritage. And as much repertoire of certain instruments as the oboe have been developed over time by composers writing pieces specifically for competitions and juries at conservatories, Pavel Cotek's *Miniatures* is a collection of nine short works designed to test specific technical abilities using an appealing melodic context.

Overall, Vavrikova doesn't try too hard to sell the unfamiliar repertoire, which can often achieve the opposite result. That is, pushing the performance beyond this level of effort reduces the appeal. Instead, she plays with intuition and subtly uses vibrato to maximum effect. The result is that her performance holds great appeal for the listener, while widening the repertoire available to the instrument.

SCHWARTZ

In Memoriam Nadia Boulanger

BOULANGER,L: *Pie Jesu;* **BOULANGER,N:** *Prelude; Petit Canon; Piece on Flemish Folk Airs; Improvisation;* **FAURE:** *Pie Jesu;* **IBERT:** *Fugue;* **THOMSON:** *Pastorale on a Christmas Plainsong;* **COPLAND:** *Preamble for a Solemn Occasion;* **FRANCAIX:** *Suite Carmelite;* **LEE:** *Mosaiques;* **CONTE:** *Prelude & Fugue*

Carolyn Shuster, org; Magali Leger, s
Ligia 109206—70 minutes

This recording was made 30 years after the death of Nadia Boulanger and it is welcome. The compositions are pieces written by Nadia and her sister Lili, friends of Nadia, and her pupils. Shuster is currently titulaire of the 1867 Cavaille-Coll choir organ at Trinite Church, Paris; Magali Leger is a concert and opera soprano; the organ is the 3-53 Cavaille-Coll (1894) in Saint-Antoine-des- Quinze-Vingts, Paris (12th arrondissement).

It may be redundant to most ARG readers, but Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979) was an internationally known musician who aside from her own talents as a composer, taught and counseled Daniel Barenboim, Elliot Carter, Aaron Copland, and organists Gerre Hancock and Marilyn Mason. It may be that it was Nadia's role in promoting the music by her incredibly talented sister Lili that made her known to many. Her own pieces, while neatly crafted and quite pleasant, lack that special touch, that unexpected turn here and there that would set them apart.

Of the four pieces heard here, the Prelude is most interesting. I came across the music of Lili years ago with a recording of her works done by Markevitch and the Lamoureux Orchestra (originally on Everest, and now on EMI 64281). Her only appearance on this disc is her *Pie Jesu*, a haunting solo for mezzo soprano. Leger's voice is too heavy for this sensitive work. She does a better job with Fauré's selection from his Requiem.

Ibert's delightful 1920 Fugue from *Three Pieces* has a simple subject that may make this an attractive addition to the repertory of organists. *Divinum Mysterium* opens Thomson's piece followed by five variations. The most complex of the settings has the opening tune in the left hand, 'Vom Himmel Hoch' in the right hand, and 'God Rest You' in the Pedal. Copland's entry gets a powerful performance from Fournier as befits the solemnity of the title. Francaix's 1960 work was taken from the *Dialogue of the Carmelites* film. The organ adaptation is dedicated to Pierre Cochereau, who replaced Francaix's father as Director of the Mans Conservatory. The six very brief pieces in this suite (mostly one to two minutes) are dedicated to specific nuns.

Mosaiques by Noel Lee (b.1924) is nine minutes of rhythms and tunes in an atonal framework. Not very pleasant. David Conte (b 1955) teaches composition and leads choirs at San Francisco Conservatory. His prelude slowly broadens after a hushed beginning, concluding powerfully. The four-note subject of the fugue is easy to follow. This also builds to a dramatic conclusion. I find the Fugue more attractive than the Prelude. In sum, a well played tribute to Nadia Boulanger.

METZ

Late Issue?

When ARG is mailed (usually around the 23rd of the month before the cover) it is out of our hands. It may take 3 or 4 weeks to get to you. (It takes longer around the Christmas holidays and may seem to take longer in late February, because that is a short month.) But if it hasn't arrived by then, let us know so we can replace it in the next mailing. We generally cannot afford to mail individual copies, so if you renew late, you will have to wait for the issue you missed. The same if you forgot to tell us a change of address.

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 200

Martha Argerich & Friends, Lugano 2010

SCHUMANN: *Violin Sonata 1; Adagio & Allegro;* **CHOPIN:** *Rondo for 2 Pianos; Piano Concerto 1;* **BRAHMS:** *Schumann Variations;* **LISZT:** *Les Preludes;* **KORNGOLD:** *Piano Quintet;* **BARTOK:** *Sonata for 2 Pianos & Percussion;* **GRANADOS:** *Piano Quintet;* **STRAVINSKY:** *Firebird Suite;* **GRAINGER:** *Fantasy on Porgy & Bess;* **SCHNITTKE:** *Piano Quintet*

Martha Argerich, Nicholas Angelich, Sergei Edelmann, Carlo Maria Griguoli, Alexander Gurning, Stephen Kovacevich, Lily Maisky, Alexander Mogilevsky, Gabriela Montero, Daniel Rivera, Alessandro Stella, Georgia Tomassi, Lilya Zilberstein, p; Renaud Capucon, Lucia Hall, Geza Hosszu-Legocky, Alissa Margulis, Dora Schwarzberg, v; Lida Chen, Nora Romanoff-Schwarzberg, va; Gautier Capucon, Mark Drobinsky, Natalia Margulis, Jorge Bosso, vc; Louis Sauvetre, Danilo Grassi, perc; Italian Swiss Orchestra/ Jacek Kaspszyk

EMI 70836 [3CD] 240 minutes

Since 2005, a 3CD set of concert recordings from the Lugano Festival has been an annual EMI release. Over the years these recordings have garnered many awards and consistently outstanding reviews. For people who have enjoyed them in the past, like me, here is one more superlative release in the series. The tenth annual Martha Argerich Project, promoted by the Lugano Festival, took place June 8 to 30, 2011—around when I was listening to last year's highlights for this review. Each year some 50 artists are brought together around the great pianist, all of whom are either highly regarded musicians or talented young players. A number of people listed above have performed often enough to be considered regulars. Several of the younger pianists have come my way for review, and all have listed playing with Martha Argerich at Lugano prominently in their biographies.

Designed as a showcase for ensemble music, the event is presented as a workshop, with artists in residence invited to play rarely performed compositions alongside masterpieces of the repertoire. We have three almost unknown piano quintets, all given very convincing performances. The two large Schumann works with the Capucon brothers accompanied by Argerich are wonderful. The two-piano works are varied and all at a very high level, whether or not Argerich is one of the participants. I particularly enjoyed the Liszt and the Grainger setting of Gershwin. I have seen a program from the 1800s where Liszt's two-piano version of *Les Preludes* ended a big concert with the composer and Saint-Saens as the pianists. The Bartok as done here by the husband and wife team of Argerich and Kovacevich is easily the best concert performance of the work I have ever heard.

I learned Chopin's Piano Concerto 1 from Argerich's first recording about 40 years ago. She hasn't lost her touch with it, and is strongly supported by Jacek Kaspszyk. About the only work on the three discs that I could do without is the three-piano version of the *Firebird Suite*. It is performed well and I'm sure the pianists had a great time with it, but I am convinced that Stravinsky knew what he was doing when he did his piano arrangements of *Petroushka* and *Sacre du Printemps* (see other reviews in this issue) and did not do a similar arrangement of *Firebird*.

Martha Argerich is the heart and soul of this event. She turned 70 this past June and is universally acknowledged as one of the greatest pianists of her generation. I cannot imagine any ARG reader who would not enjoy just about everything here.

HARRINGTON

Beethoven and His Teachers

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Duet Sonata, op 6; Waldstein Variations; Marches, op 45; Variations on Ich Denke Dein; Grosse Fuge;* **ALBRECHTSBERGER:** *Prelude & Fugue;* **NEEFE:** *6 Easy Pieces from The Magic Flute;* **HAYDN:** *Divertmento*

Cullen Bryant & Dmitry Rachmanov, p; Maria Ferrante, s

Naxos 572519 [2CD] 92 minutes

This is an outstanding release and one that might easily be overlooked. While I am not generally a period instrument person, I do appreciate hearing works performed on an excellent instrument appropriate for the period where they were written. Here we have not one, but two fascinating fortepianos: Caspar Katholnig, Vienna, circa 1805-10 and Johann Tröndlin, Leipzig, 1830. Both have been expertly maintained and preserved by the Frederick Historic Piano Collection in Ashburnham, Massachusetts. All works except the Three Marches and the Great Fugue are performed on the Katholnig, reserving the Tröndlin for the two largest works. The dynamic range coaxed out of both instruments is a testament to the abilities of Bryant and Rachmanov, who should also be commended for their absolute dead-on ensemble. I have sat shoulder-to-shoulder with another pianist at an 1860s square piano (once played by Brahms) and can only imagine the difficulties the earlier, smaller instruments would present. A telling picture in the booklet shows both men off at a slight angle to the center of the keyboard. The sound these instruments produce is different from a modern piano in the

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 201

sonorities for each register (low, middle, and high). The highest notes sound much more akin to a plucked violin or even a marimba or xylophone, while the middle is closest to our modern home spinet pianos. The bass is, as expected, not as full and sonorous as a modern grand, but very clear and never muddy. At the loudest moments in the Marches you hear kind of a raspy twang that reminds you of the percussion that is often associated with marches—a truly unique effect.

It would be easy to label this entire release rarities. Of the five significant compositions by Beethoven, which account for more than half the total time, only one, the *Grosse Fuge*, has come my way for review in the past several years. The Variations on 'Ich denke dein' are listed as a world premiere recording. Beethoven notated the theme for soprano and piano four-hands. The *Magic Flute* pieces are quite enjoyable and the only thing I have ever heard by an early teacher of Beethoven, Christian Gottlob Neefe. Perhaps the most entertaining piece here is the Haydn *Divertmento*. Based on the familiar *Harmonious Blacksmith* theme, this two-movement work is a set of variations and a minuet. The variations, as the subtitle 'Il Maestro e lo Scolare' implies, exploits the master and student relationship. Never was there a master and student who could so accurately imitate each other as the two pianists here.

Whether you are an expert in the field of period instruments or just curious about their sound, you owe it to yourself to make this recording a part of your collection. The repertoire, performers, booklet notes, and recorded sound are all superb; and I plan to keep this one on my active listening stack for the foreseeable future.

HARRINGTON

Hans-Goran Elfving

DEBUSSY: *Ce qu'a Vu le Vent d'Ouest; Poissons d'or; Le Puerta del Vino; Les Collines d'Anacapi;* **SJOGREN:** *Andantino ur Stemningar; Morgonvandring ur Folklivsbilder de;* **FALLA:** *Ritual Fire Dance; Fantasia Baetica;* **THUNAEUS:** *Preludes 1, 11, 12, 14, 19, 20;* **BRITTEN:** *Holiday Diary;* **NILSSON:** *Om en Resa;* **BRAHMS:** *Rhapsody in B minor*

Nosag 187—79 minutes

This gives good value for your money in terms of playing time. There are some drawbacks, however. Hans-Goring Elfving plays with a rather clangorous tone and his touch is somewhat uneven. I can't tell you much about him as the jacket notes are only in Swedish. Two of the three Swedish composers—Ragnar Thunaeus (1898-1972) and Torsten Nilsson (1920-99)—are ones I have never heard of before. Neither one is particularly appealing.

BAUMAN

Tao Lin

CHOPIN: *Piano Sonata 3;* **MOZART:** *Sonata 14;* **SCARLATTI:** *Sonatas*

Artek 55—67 minutes

The actual title of this release is "Tao Lin Live in Concert", but our editor considers the term "live" redundant. Fully agreeing with Mr Vroon, I will admit that the prospect of seeing an artist dead in recital might really be a ghoulish thing, though an experience never to be forgotten.

Now, to the Chinese-American Mr Lin. Admitted to the Shanghai Conservatory of Music at the age of eight, he eventually moved to the United States and became active as a solo performer and chamber music player. His many awards include the William Kapell International Piano Competition. He is currently Professor of Collaborative Piano at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida.

This recording, made at the Gary Soren Smith Center for the Fine and Performing Arts in California, has a mid-auditorium perspective in a rather resonant hall. The two Scarlatti sonatas show Lin's impressive technique, but not always to best advantage as the wash of sound robs the music of some clarity. The Mozart grouping, consisting of the Rondo, K 485, Fantasy, K475, and Sonata 14, are all straightforward and quite pleasant but with little to excite the imagination or to distinguish them from many others.

Chopin's Sonata 3, which has captured the fancy of a legion of today's pianists, is not always an easy work to bring off. While grander in scale than its well-known predecessor, it lacks the fancy and emotional concentration of that work. Lin certainly knows how to handle Chopin properly with playing that is exciting and flows naturally. Once again the recording is muddy, particularly in passagework. With all the currently available recordings this one is not really competitive.

BECKER

Liisa Pohjola, piano

with Olli Pohjola, fl; Jeanne Loriod, ondes martinot; Finnish Radio/ Sakari Oramo

Alba 286 [3CD] 207 minutes

Pohjola studied piano with Timo Mikkila at the Sibelius Academy, with Richard Hauser in Vienna, with Detlev Kraus in Essen, and with Magda Tagliaferro in Paris. She gave her debut recital in 1955 and has mostly been on the European concert scene. As Professor of Piano at the Sibelius Academy from 1976 to 2001 she

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 202

championed the music of her contemporaries and continues to do so as an active teacher.

This very welcome set gathers together a host of recordings of mostly short pieces by Finnish and 20th Century composers. With the exception of a handful of Haydn, Schumann, and Chopin, most of her repertory will be unfamiliar to all but a few of our readers. Recording dates are supplied in the booklet along with thorough notes for this most unusual set.

Stravinsky's *Capriccio* is the only work with orchestra. Its dry wit and capriciousness comes across well, particularly with the Finnish orchestra. As many times as I have listened to this piece over the years, it has never found a warm place in my affections. Pohjola and Oramo manage to capture its desiccated spirit perfectly.

Four of Debussy's Etudes and three of Schumann's Fantasy Pieces display the artist's stirling technical abilities and the remarkable strength of her fingers. This kind of virile playing is not encountered very often.

The Finnish Folk Song Arrangements by Sibelius combine a more quiet, reflective kind of writing, with, in the case 'That Beautiful Girl' an obvious appreciation for the more zaftig aspects of attractiveness. The composer's Nocturne Op.51:3 uses a flute and is drawn from his incidental music to *Belshazzar's Feast*. Two additional pieces from the composer's Op. 24, 'Romanze' and 'Barcarola', are most attractive.

Kocab by the Finnish composer Erkki Salmenhaara (1941-2002) is named after the second brightest star in the constellation Ursa minor. It packs a terrific wallop in its four-minute duration and is quite a discovery. Also a discovery (even with a momentary sound blip) is the Chopin Nocturne Op. 27:1, played with just the right amount of forbidding dark cloud cover and lyrical loveliness.

Prokofieff's Sonata 5 has Pohjola easily holding her own among the competition. The gentle, almost nonchalant writing is played with stunning clarity and forward momentum. With the Andantino we have the sardonic nose-thumbing so typical of his colleague Shostakovich. As with its predecessor, it ends with a whimper before advancing to a last movement similar to the opening. Pohjola rightfully makes no attempt to emulate the pile-driving dynamics of the later sonatas.

Finnish composer Aarre Merikanto (1893-1958) is represented by his Six Pieces, Op. 20. Each of these is an attractive romantic miniature, but with far more impressionist harmonies than one might initially expect. Pohjola is well attuned to the character of each piece and makes of them a joyful discovery for the listener.

Haydn's Sonata 37 in E might seem an unusual choice here, and its early recording date (1971) shows in the sound. Despite the boxiness, it's a sprightly reading perfectly in tune with what we have come to expect from excellent Haydn interpreters—crisp, clean, refined—but not too refined.

Three pieces from Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata* were recorded in 1969 and take a little over seven minutes to perform. While this composer does not immediately come to mind when thinking of accessibility, these three pieces have relatively little of the avant-garde about them. If they finally fail to capture the heart, they are not too indigestible.

Rare pieces by Arensky and Rimsky-Korsakoff are pleasant enough, but Anton Rubinstein's famous 'Romanze' still has the ability to leave a lump in the throat—at least in the right hands and susceptible throats. 'Andante orgoglioso, ma con grazier' by Erik Bergman (1911-2006) is quite an impassioned piece as heard here, and his *Hommage to Christopher Columbus*, while more modern in sound, makes use of some interesting chordal clusters and other sonorities. If Columbus, or his journeys, never once came to mind, its two movements are effective, especially the rhythmic 'Guanahani' (San Salvador).

Andre Jolivet's Three Poems for Ondes Martenot and Piano were written shortly after the years he spent with Edgard Varese. The electronic instrument is similar in sound to the Theremin and has been used like the Theremin to evoke otherworldly sounds in many films. Jolivet's work is definitely weird and otherworldly—perhaps only lacking a monster to pop out at the appropriate time. Crashing piano chords contrast with the wailing sound of the instrument, and long quiet stretches create a feeling of unease. It was a long 16 minutes.

Messiaen's *Catalog of Birds* uses the piano to recreate and elaborate on a series of bird calls. Pohjola plays more than half an hour of them and does what she has to do very well. Stylistically they sound abstract and aleatory. People attuned to this composer may find them more interesting than I did. Even the sounds of the 'Nightingale' sound ugly in this setting.

Usko Merilainen (1930-2004), a student of Merikanto, wrote his Sonata 2 in 1966. It's in three classically styled movements and sounds quite modern. For all its athematic content, it hangs together formally and does not outstay its welcome. Tempos are predominantly slow until the Presto finale, when Pohjola gets to display her skillful handling of rapid repeated notes. I would be curious to hear Merilainen's remaining two sonatas, dedicated to the pianist.

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 203

For readers inclined towards exploration, this set will point them in a few new directions.

BECKER

Russian & Armenian Music for 2 Pianos

KHACHATURIAN: *4 Dances from Spartacus; 6 Dances from Gayne; Suite for 2 Pianos;* **TCHEREPNIN, A:** *Fantasy on Chinese Folk Melodies;* **ARUTIUNIAN-BABADSHANIAN:** *Armenian Rhapsody*

Queen Elisabeth Duo
Telos 14—70 minutes

This is a collection of exciting music, powerfully performed and very well recorded. The notes, at least as translated from the German, are not clear and actually caused me a considerable amount of work to sort out the works presented here. I am still unsure of the origin of the Khachaturian arrangements from his two most famous ballets. I would guess that they were done by the composer himself but cannot confirm that. The Tcherepnin is the composer's arrangement of his Piano Concerto 4, but it is not clear if it is a standard arrangement of the orchestra for one piano and the original solo part for the second, or some more creative combination and rearrangement of the music. There are a number of added percussion effects in this work by unnamed musicians.

The real find here is the Tcherepnin. As the parent of two adopted Asian daughters, my interest in Chinese music has increased significantly in the past dozen years. I have not ever encountered a piece written in the traditional Western style that incorporated Chinese melodies and harmonies so effectively. Most of the time I run into composers imitating Puccini more than real oriental music. Tcherepnin actually lived in China for several years, and his wife was Chinese. He was a true musician of the world and ended up living here in the US.

All together, there is a sameness to the music that only the Tcherepnin interrupts. I would recommend this for the Tcherepnin and also if you want to explore the world of Armenian concert music for two pianos.

HARRINGTON

Mozart to Gershwin

Margery McDuffie Whatley, Steven Hesla, p
ACA 20110—79 minutes

This attractive Georgia-born pianist now resides in Missoula, Montana. For the two-piano version of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* she has linked with Steven Hesla, a faculty member at the University of Montana. This is Whatley's third recording for ACA.

Besides the Gershwin, Beethoven's Sonata 17 is the other main work on this recording. Whatley plays it with little pedal and articulates with great clarity. Although the competition is fierce, she more than manages to hold her own and gives a strong profile to the music. Despite an almost endless list of fine performances, there is always room for yet another if it is of this quality.

Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* is a warhorse that has managed to survive practically every permutation, especially in the hands of pianists with imagination and flair. Whatley has both and manages to swing with the best of them. Hesla is an effective partner, and one rarely misses an orchestra (or jazz band). At around 17 minutes, the music is uncut.

Chopin's Scherzo 1 and Nocturne 8 are models of expressive clarity. There are no blurred passages in the difficult Scherzo, and the Nocturne is lovingly executed. Debussy's 'Reflects dans l'eau' and Griffes' 'White Peacock' are both impressionist pieces and call for a bit more indulgence and pedal than Whatley is willing to give them. All is a little too clear—too direct, when a slower, more introspective approach might work better. Not willing to continue with this nitpicking, I must admit her performances are quite pleasing, and I might eventually be won over by her approach.

Mozart's Variations will always be, a crowd pleaser. 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' sparkles.

BECKER

20th Century Russian Piano

GUBAIDULINA: *Ciaconna;* **PART:** *Partita;* **SHOSTAKOVICH:** *8 Preludes;* **SHCHEDRIN:** *2 Preludes & Fugues;* **KARAYEV:** *10 Preludes*

Vladimir Yurigin-Klevke
Delos 2008—58 minutes

Yurigin-Klevke's tone is very steely, and the piano is bright and poorly regulated—sometimes it sounds thin enough to be an electric piano (or a fortepiano in Shchedrin's Prelude and Fugue 12). The 'Toccatino-Fughetta' movement of Pärt's Partita should sound fleet in the opening; here it's heavy all the way. I much prefer my music, even 20th Century writing, to have more roundness to the tone. The phrasing is too inconsistent in the Shostakovich (Preludes Op. 34: 1, 2, 3, 10, 14, 16, 17, and 24): ponderous one second, hammered the next, then lighter, but nearly always edgy.

Kara Karayev (1918-1982; G's and Q's may be substituted for K's) was an Azerbaijani composer and a student of Shostakovich; these preludes are in between his teacher's and Kabalevsky's in quality—they're not works of genius, but they're not bad at all. Prelude 23 in F has some genuine humor and jazz influence,

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 204

as if Claude Bolling got drunk and wrote a tribute to one of Shostakovich's more baroque preludes. I'd like to hear more of the Karayev (on a better piano). Notes in English.

ESTEP

Mad Dances

Larsen, Diamond, Del Tredici, Albright, Isaacs

Dan Goble, sax; Russell Hirshfield, p

Albany 1251—61 minutes

Here, Western Connecticut State University professors Dan Goble and Russell Hirshfield give a recital of recent American music for saxophone and piano. The liner note explains the theme of the album, but in reality it is a mix of absolute and descriptive elements, and each work is best taken on its own merits. Libby Larsen's *Holy Roller* (1997) supposedly refers to a Pentecostal church meeting; WCSU faculty member Kevin Jay Isaacs contributes *Skookum Suite* (2009), after the Native American name for the Sasquatch creature rumored to inhabit the forests of the American Northwest; the late William Albright and the late David Diamond are each represented with their saxophone sonatas (both 1984); and for a neo-romantic departure we are given David Del Tredici's *Acrostic Song* for flute and piano from his Lewis Carroll stage work *Final Alice* (1976) for soprano and orchestra, adapted for saxophone and piano.

Much of the concert is abstract and difficult to grasp, but Goble and Hirshfield tackle it with enthusiasm. Goble, in particular, always goes for it, calling on the full dynamic resources of his instrument and fearlessly traveling to its extremes. He also renders the extended techniques in the scores, especially multiphonics, with ease and comfort. At the same time, his coarse timbre, undisciplined embouchure, and mechanical vibrato undermine his efforts. His sound can be pleasant at very soft volumes, but his mezzo range is reedy, and his loud playing is honky. Intonation, too, is not always steady, often owing to overt jaw pinching and loosening, and while the recital is well rehearsed, it has a few instances of unsure articulation and fingers. As a result, he never quite transcends the harmonic and rhythmic chaos, and his performance of the beautiful Del Tredici is rough around the edges. Hirshfield is a highly skilled and flexible artist who digs into the thorny passages, yet renders the handful of special moments with wonderful touch and sincerity.

HANUDEL

Jonathan Wintringham, sax

Hindemith, Chambers, Djupstrom, Lynch, Nagao

with Timothy McAllister, sax; Erika Tazawa, Michael Djupstrom, p

Equilibrium 98—70 minutes

In his first release, New Jersey native and University of Arizona graduate Jonathan Wintringham invites his teacher Timothy McAllister, Japanese pianist Erika Tazawa, and Philadelphia-based pianist and composer Michael Djupstrom for a recital of contemporary saxophone music that concludes with Wintringham's arrangement of the Hindemith Viola Sonata, Opus 11:4. The rest of the program consists of Japanese composer June Nagao's *La Lune en Paradis* (1995), written for Nobuya Sagawa; Djupstrom's *Walimai* (2005), based on a short story by the Chilean-American author Isabel Allende; University of Michigan composition professor Evan Chambers's *Deep Flowers* (1992) for solo alto saxophone and *Greensilver* (1990) for two alto saxophones; and British composer Graham Lynch's *Spanish Café* (2004), written for the London group Tango Volcano.

Wintringham has been a major force in the saxophone world for several decades. He has a nice and resonant sound; he boasts an excellent set of fingers and articulation; he phrases with an artistic awareness well beyond his years; and he tackles the postmodernist content of his program with extreme volume shifts, daring color changes, and a deft command of glissandos and slap tongue. Still, he has room to grow. His timbre can be a little reedy; his high register can be a bit thin; his low register could use more clarity; and his intonation sometimes goes awry at the loud end. His vibrato is thoughtfully rendered, always warm and well placed; but even so, it could use more subtlety. Tazawa is a superb collaborator, boldly undertaking the demanding keyboard parts with boundless technique, dynamic range, and expressive understanding.

HANUDEL

Hermann Baumann Collection

Telemann, Haydn, Pokorny, Mozart, Czerny, Beethoven, Rossini, Krufft, Strauss, Gliere, Saint-Saens, Chabrier, Dukas, Weber

Leonard Hokanson, p; Folkwang Horn Ensemble; German Natural Horn Soloists; Academy of St Martin in the Fields/ Iona Brown; St Paul Chamber Orchestra/ Pinchas Zukerman; Gewandhaus Orchestra/ Kurt Masur

Newton 8802035 [7CD] 396 minutes

I don't remember when I first heard of Hermann Baumann (b 1934), but I do remember hearing the Weber Horn Concertino one day in the mid-1980s and wondering, Who is that?! I

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 205

was captured by the sheer artistry: the refined tone with its subtle vibrato, the steely strength of his high notes, the dazzling technical skill, and the cadenza with his startling multiphonics. And so it was a special treat to find that wonderful recording in this boxed set. Each of the seven discs reprises an earlier release. The Weber, for instance, is mere filler between blockbusters—the two Strauss horn concertos—on an amazing 1983 album with Kurt Masur and the Gewandhaus Orchestra. The same team is heard again in a 1985 collection with the Gliere Horn Concerto, Saint-Saens's 'Morceau de Concert', Chabrier's Larghetto, and Dukas's 'Villanelle'. I find that something of a letdown, though, because Baumann's vibrato is a fairly constant quiver—sometimes subtle but too often distracting.

Baumann twice collaborated with Iona Brown and the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields. A 1984 collection deals with music by Telemann, offering vigorous readings of the Horn Concerto, plus four works for two or three horns, strings, and continuo (with horn players Timothy Brown and Nicholas Hill). In a 1988 recording, Baumann and Brown are heard again in Haydn's 2-horn Concerto. But the piece most worth hearing on this album is Haydn's Horn Concerto 1, if only because of Baumann's remarkable technical skills—the fat low notes; the soaring, sustained high notes in II; and what has to be the fastest lip trills ever. Also on this disc is the Haydn-like Horn Concerto by Frantisek Pokorny (1729-94), not heard often but recently given a fine reading by Radek Baborek (Sept/Oct 2010: 265).

The four Mozart horn concertos are from 1984, performed with Pinkhas Zukerman and the St Paul Chamber Orchestra. I appreciate how differently Baumann approaches the Haydn (it's rambunctious) and Mozart (elegant and beautifully shaped). The sonics are excellent—all voices natural, clear, and in balance. I always love to hear the sweet contributions of the clarinets in Concerto 3, for instance, and they are easily heard but not too prominent here. This is my first exposure to Karl Marguerre's completion of the Rondo (II) of Concerto 1. Is it good? Well, sure, but so are the ones by Sussmayr and Humphries and Levin. It's just that none of them really sound like Mozart. We don't know how Mozart would have written it.

Baumann and pianist Leonard Hokanson offer a recital of 19th-Century works in Disc 4 (1986). Carl Czerny's *Andante e Polacca* is given a buoyant reading, the virtuoso piano part handled deftly. The Beethoven Horn Sonata and Nikolaus von Krufft's Horn Sonata, cut from the same cloth, are played aggressively. Rossini's *Prelude, Theme et Variations* is delivered with aplomb, while Strauss's little Andante is given an emotional reading where Baumann's vibrato is all a-quiver.

Over the years, I have reviewed a number of albums by hunting-horn ensembles. This collection includes one of the best (May/June 1992: 165), where the Folkwang Horns and German Natural Horn Soloists team up with Baumann and other horn soloists. It all takes place in a big, resonant church with a wonderful organ. 'Marche d'entrée' is a great example of the strange yet stirring sound of massed hunting horns: throaty tone that is by turns deep and rather fragile, intonation that is by turns beautiful and weird (because of the half-step sharp 11th overtone). And then, after so much magnificent noise, the ending fades away.

Hermann Baumann is one of the great horn soloists of our time—maybe not revered like Dennis Brain, but surely in the same league as Barry Tuckwell. He suffered a serious stroke in 1996, but he has apparently recovered and is playing again. This marvelous collection captures some of his best work.

KILPATRICK

Best of Malte Burba

BACH: *Air;* **BURBA:** *Voyage II;* **NEWMAN:** *Syphilis;* **HESPOS:** *Iosch;* **HEYDUCK:** *Alphorn Solo;* **GOEBBELS:** *Nachtstuck II;* **RIERMEIER:** *Circle III:* **SEIL:** *Super Paradise;* **HOLSZKY:** *WeltenEnden*

Thorofon 2575—63 minutes

It's been a very long time since I laughed at Malte Burba's absurd *Tears of Brass* album (Jan/Feb 1992: 149), a Cagean collection of blips and bloops and long silences. While it might have been amusing to some, it seemed a waste of time and money to me. So, was this a mistaken conclusion based on too little evidence?

Born in Frankfurt in 1957, Herr Burba is a renowned trumpet pedagogue, has collaborated with many composers in the development of new works, and has made many recordings. Seven are excerpted here. Burba's former student Chris Walden is the arranger of Bach's familiar Air, where Burba plays the melody with lovely tone on piccolo trumpet while all manner of wacky sound is synthetically produced by Walden. At first and again later, the accompaniment is Bach's but sounds like something from the old *Switched-On Bach* album from the 1960s. The middle section has a completely free-form harmonization on synthesizer keyboard with a stream of strange sound effects.

Burba says that his own *Voyage II* "combines train sounds with reminiscences of brass music classics to create an irritating collage".

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 206

Well said! It doesn't really sound like that, though—it's more like we're sitting under a waterfall while listening to someone play trumpet snippets. Except for a moment when Burba imitates a beginner, we can tell he is a fine player.

The next work ('Syphilis') begins without pause. Why Chris Newman called it that is not explained, nor can it be discerned by listening, since it is simply a collection of random sounds. The big piece, Hans-Joachim Hespos's *iOSCH* is a montage where seven pieces are superimposed in seemingly abstract fashion. Burba makes all manner of sound on several instruments, standard and non-, including a lovely belch. Nikolaus Heyduck's 'Alphorn Solo' begins with airy sounds, adds ones that might be the plucking of a comb's teeth, and then has Burba making sounds on alphorn. Each of these is electronically looped, and some are quite triadic and lovely.

And so it goes through the remaining works.

KILPATRICK

Horn Constellation

Bujanovsky, Scriabin, Strauss, Barboteu, Fuchs, Arban, Shaw, Marais

Jacek Muzyk; Grace Chu, Caterina Domenici, Casey Robards, p; Angela Baranello, fl; JoAnn Falletta, g; Sebnem Mekinulov, s; Suzanne Thomas, hp; Michal Muzyk, hn

Summit 563—47 minutes

You don't have to be a horn player to fall in love with this recital by Polish-born Jacek Muzyk, who is the principal horn of the Buffalo Philharmonic and recently also assumed the associate principal post with the Houston Symphony.

The recital includes two works by Vitaly Bujanovsky (1928-93), former principal horn of the Leningrad Philharmonic and a leading light in the Russian school of wind playing. His philosophy was that technique is essential, but only as tool to prove that the horn can be as expressive as any other solo instrument. From Muzyk's performances here, it is obvious that he buys into Bujanovsky's credo. His technique is so secure that he makes everything sound easy. Even on repeat hearings I was more impressed by the sinuous fluidity of his lines and his immaculate sense of phrasing.

This is apparent in the opening work, Bujanovsky's 1977 'Espana' for solo horn. It requires stunning virtuosity. But as the piece progresses from its blazingly fanfarish flourishes and whispered responses, one quickly senses that it is not just a showpiece, but is highly expressive musically as well. And Muzyk delivers it to you with a pristine but commanding natural lyricism. It is, quite simply, riveting listening.

Later, Bujanovsky's four-movement sonata for solo horn is a further exposition of the horn as a purveyor of nuanced and deftly phrased lyricism. Although there are many difficulties, they don't stand out vividly but appear as inside stuff, such as tortuous figures played at pianissimo level, triple-tongued phrases, buzzed textures, and even a passage where the player sounds one tone and simultaneously hums another. The lingering memory of Muzyk's performance, however, is primarily of extremely expressive music played as naturally as you and I breathe, and only secondarily as a potential nightmare for the horn player.

Elsewhere the recital offers a number of delightful rarities such as Scriabin's 1890 'Romance' for horn and piano and Richard Strauss's almost unknown 1878 'Alphorn' for soprano, horn and piano, with a poem by Justinus Kerner about magic and mystery of that Alpine instrument's resounding, echoing ambience. The performance is slightly diminished by soprano Mekinulov's wide, excessive vibrato.

In other unusual ensemble works, the horn-flute-harp sonorities in Georges Barboteu's 1940 'Esquisse' cast impressionist images reminiscent of the more intimate works of Pierne or Fauré, while the just as private but more contemporary 'Evensong' by American composer Kenneth Fuchs pair the horn's probing meditations with wandering guitar underpinnings played by noted conductor JoAnn Falletta.

The only work smacking of warhorse literature is Jean-Baptiste Arban's variations on 'Carnival of Venice', transcribed from the original setting for cornet. But even here Muzyk manages to leave behind more memories of the horn's capacity for pliant phrase shaping and clean articulation than for showy display.

Two true miniatures close the recital. Lowell Shaw's 'Bippery No. 1' has Muzyk in a 40-second horn duet with his 11-year old son Michal, and Marin Marais's well known 'Le Basque', a favorite encore piece of Dennis Brain, winds things up with lyrical elegance and a wonderful closing upsweep as an exclamation point.

One might quibble over the 47-minute playing time, but it left me with the feeling that Muzyk had said just enough.

TROTTER

Athletics are a symbol of a society whose values are bankrupt—not only a reinforcement of an unsound value system, but also one of the main ways young people are socialized into that system, coerced into conformity.

—from *American Values*

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 207

Act I

CASTEREDE: *Sonatine;* **PUCCINI:** *Arias;* **DONIZETTI:** *Una Furtiva Lagrima;* **UBER:** *Romance;* **MOLINEUX:** *Manipulations;* **TOMASI:** *Trombone Concerto;* **PRYOR:** *Starlight; Blue Bells of Scotland*

Weston Sprott, trb; Hanako Yamagata, p
WS 1—72 minutes (503-595-3000)

Weston Sprott is a member of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. What a life that trombone section must lead, waiting through interminable rests until called on to play at the big moments. But they get to listen to great singers during those rests, and that would be quite an education. You can hear that influence in Sprott's readings of five arias by Puccini and Donizetti. While I'm never completely happy with instrumental renditions of vocal works—repeated notes can be very boring without text, to name just one reason—it is clear that Sprott knows these inside and out. He feels the emotion of every note and phrase, which is exactly what they need. David Uber's 'Romance' fits well with these beautiful vocal works.

The program opens with Jacques Casterede's Sonatine, a wonderful but vexing work, and one without a recording that seems just right. This might come closest. Everyone does fine with the lovely II, but the lively outer movements demand lightness and the right tempos for the sake of clarity in the fiendish piano accompaniments. In I, Sprott captures the breezy, French folk-song quality perfectly. The tempo is just fast enough to be lively while allowing the excellent pianist Hanako Yamagata to handle the metric and contrapuntal complexity. In II, Sprott takes his time and plays very tenderly; but in III, although clarity is once again superb, the tempo seems just a bit slow. Also from the core repertory, and also played superbly, is Henri Tomasi's Trombone Concerto.

I had to go to the web to learn that Allen Molineux was born in 1950 and teaches at Claflin University in Orangeburg SC. His five-minute 'Manipulations' for solo trombone reminds me of Leslie Bassett's Suite for Unaccompanied Trombone. Molineux has the soloist shift abruptly from contemplation and scampering and back, but he asks for no extended playing techniques.

Sprott and Yamagata end the program with two turn-of-the-20th-Century works by Sousa's trombone virtuoso Arthur Pryor. 'Starlight' is a lively, often sentimental waltz; and 'Blue Bells of Scotland' is a renowned showoff piece. Sprott gives it plenty of stylistic variety, adds his own touches to the cadenzas, handles the considerable technical demands with ease, and maintains excellent intonation and beautiful tone at all times. It is an exemplary ending to an outstanding recording.

KILPATRICK

After a Dream

Carsten Svanberg, trb; Birgit Marcussen, org
Danacord 710—54 minutes

A lovely-melodies recording with the beautiful tone qualities of trombonist Carsten Svanberg and Birgit Marcussen on the 1993 Gunnar Husted organ in Denmark's Egebjerg Church. Some of the melodies are quite familiar: Purcell's 'Trumpet Tune', Parry's 'Jerusalem', Grieg's 'Song of Solveig', Schumann's 'Traumerei', Brahms's 'Lullaby', Rossini's 'Cujus Animam', and 'Ravel's 'Apres un Reve'. Others are probably known by Scandinavians. Several works for organ solo are also heard, including one of my all-time favorites, Oskar Lindberg's beautiful and melancholy 'Gammal Faboldpsalm'.

KILPATRICK

Best of Guy Touvron

Trumpet concertos by **HAYDN, L MOZART, HUMMEL; BELLINI:** *Oboe Concerto;* **ARBAN:** *Carnival of Venice; Cavatine et Variation; Traviata Fantasia;* **BACH:** *Suite 3;* **SCHUBERT:** *Ave Maria;* **SCHUMANN:** *Reverie;* **MOZART:** *Queen of the Night Aria;* **MASSENET:** *Meditation;* **RACHMANINOFF:** *Vocalise;* **GAUBERT:** *Cantabile et Scherzetto;* **RAVEL:** *Pavane*

Nelly Cottin, p; Olivier Vernet, org; I Soloist Veneti/ Claudio Scimone; Prague Chamber Orchestra—Ligia 105220 [2CD] 139 minutes

French trumpeter Guy Touvron turned 60 last year, so Ligia has released this collection compiled from seven 1990s albums. The selections I enjoy most are three sets of variations by 19th-Century cornet virtuoso Jean-Baptiste Arban. Two are on themes from the Verdi operas *Nabucco* and *La Traviata* (Jan/Feb 1997: 59), but best of all is the famous 'Carnival of Venice'—not the standard one with boring piano accompaniment, but Gilles Herbillon's imaginative, quirky one with orchestra. Then there are the trumpet concertos. I was moderately enthusiastic when I heard Touvron play the Haydn and Hummel almost two decades ago (May/June 1992: 169), but now they strike me as uninteresting—nothing more than tone, elegance, and technical skill. It's pretty, but the phrases lack shape and emotion.

Arrangements of Bellini's Oboe Concerto and familiar works by Schumann, Mozart, Schubert, Massenet, Rachmaninoff, and Ravel are lovely vehicles for Touvron's beautiful tone, expressiveness, and singing style.

KILPATRICK

Sig07arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 208

French Horn Colours

STRAUSS: *Andante;* **SCHUMANN:** *3 Romances; Adagio & Allegro;* **ROSSINI:** *Prelude, Theme & Variations;* **FRANCAIX:** *Divertimento;* **POULENC:** *Elegie;* **KIRCHNER:** *3 Poems*

Szabolcs Zempleni; Peter Nagy, p
Oehms 789—65 minutes

Hungarian horn player Szabolcs Zempleni (b 1981) won a number of international competitions about ten years ago, and this outstanding recording shows why. He has a full, potent tone quality and the personality needed for the full range of expression. In Strauss's little Andante, Schumann's Adagio & Allegro, and Poulenc's Elegie, we hear everything from warm and melting to searing and heroic. Rossini's Prelude, Theme & Variations is tuneful and lively, Jean Francaix's Divertimento playful.

The most unusual works are Schumann's Romances, originally for oboe (or violin) but sounding excellent on horn; and Volker David Kirchner's *Tre Poemi* (1986-9), heard only once before in an excellent reading by Spanish horn player Javier Bonet (March/April 2002: 203). Among the dramatic work's many arresting sound effects are ones involving piano strings: sympathetic vibration (horn pitches directed toward resonating strings); rumbling bass glissandos (fingers on the strings); and slow, eerie bass sounds as hammers slowly contact the vibrating strings. These are only a few of the fascinating elements in a mesmerizing piece.

Truly outstanding recording. Excellent piano work by Peter Nagy.

KILPATRICK

Viola Reflections

SCHUMANN: *Marchenbilder;* **HINDEMITH:** *Sonata, op 11:4;* **BRITTEN:** *Lachrymae;* **WAELBROECK:** *Sonata 2*

Dominica Eyckmans, va; Frederik Croene, p
Pavane 7531—66 minutes

Dominica Eyckmans just isn't good enough to be a soloist. She seems to be just making it through these readings, and she doesn't have the technique to project much of a personality. The Schumann, Hindemith, and Britten are famous works in the viola repertoire and there are several recordings of each that are much finer than Eyckmans's.

The one thing that makes this release worth acquiring is the sonata by the Flemish composer Jean-Pierre Waelbroeck. The work recalls neoclassical modernist music from the mid-20th Century. It is in four movements of traditional form: a fast sonata form movement, a scherzo, a slow movement, and a moderate finale. While I wouldn't count it a masterpiece, it is engaging and I think could make a fine effect in the hands of a more accomplished player.

MAGIL

Songs for a Lonely Heart

Emanuel Borok, v, Cullan Bryant, p
Eroica 3448—61 minutes

This recording includes the usual array of love-themed, expressive violin encores by Kreisler, Massenet, Rachmaninoff, Elgar, Sarasate, Brahms, Paganini, and Tchaikovsky that young violinists study, perform, and record; but there is a great deal of difference between the way young musicians play this music and the way a truly seasoned musician like Emanuel Borok plays it. His experience is reflected in every note and every phrase, and his musical sincerity makes even the most over-played and over-recorded pieces sound fresh and compelling. Borok has the rare ability to play with his heart on his sleeve without ever sounding inappropriately sentimental. This might be due, in part, to his impressive sense of the long phrase—something that makes me want to listen to Elgar's 'Salut d'Amour' over and over again.

Emanuel Borok recently retired from his position as the concertmaster of the Dallas Symphony (1985-2010), and before that he spent 11 years as the assistant concertmaster of the Boston Symphony. Borok and his superb accompanist, Cullan Bryant, also include music by a handful of less-likely suspects on this recording, including Robert Schumann's 'Romance' from the F.A.E. Sonata, Josef Suk's 'Love Song', Carlos Gardel's 'Por Una Cabeza', and the vocalise from the end of Richard Strauss's *Daphne* that the title character sings after she is transformed into a tree. What a fitting way to end a superb recording of violin music.

FINE

Mosaic

Lavry, Bloch, Perlman, Chajes, Goldfaden, Bonime, Saminsky, Dobrowen, Ravel, Warshawsky

Orsolya Korcsolan, v; Judit Kertesz, p
Solo Musica 150—58 minutes

This is music of Jewish character by mostly Jewish composers. Most of the works collected here are quite short, and the longest is Ernest Bloch's *Baal Shem* Suite from 1923. The Three Jewish Dances of 1951 by Marc Lavry (1903-67) are very energetic, appealing pieces. Another work of Bloch's here is the *Abodah*, a Yom Kippur melody he wrote for Yehudi Menuhin in 1929. 'Dance of the Rebbitzen' by George Perlman (1897-2000) is a movement from his *Suite Hebraique. The Chassid* of 1939 by Jacques

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 209

Chajes (1910-85) is a soulful prayer. 'Raisins and Almonds', a lullaby, is the best-known song by Abraham Goldfaden (1840-1908), the father of Yiddish drama, and is taken from *Shulamith*, his most famous work for the stage.

Danse Hebraique by Josef Bonime (1891-1959), the pioneering music supervisor of CBS radio, is one of his few works that draw on his Jewish heritage. The *Hebrew Rhapsody* by the Ukrainian Lazare Saminsky (1882-1959) was written for the American violinist Helen Teschner Tas shortly after he arrived in the USA. 'Melodie Hebraique' was written by Issay Alexandrovitch Dobrowen (1891-1953), who made a career as a conductor first in the Soviet Union, then in Germany, and finally in Scandinavia. 'At the Fireplace' by Mark Warshawsky (1840-1907) is believed by many Jews to be an actual folk song. The only work here by a non-Jewish composer is the arrangement of the *Kaddish* by Maurice Ravel. Ravel and Bloch are by far the two most accomplished composers represented here.

Mostly, this is a collection of rather homely pieces, all quite good, some very folk-like. Orsolya Korcsolan is an excellent violinist who is based in Vienna and studied under Dorothy Delay and Itzhak Perlman, and these performances are very polished. She plays a violin made in 2004 by the Viennese maker Johannes Rombach.

MAGIL

Brahms & Friends 6

BRAHMS: *Sonata 2;* **REINECKE:** *3 Fantasy Pieces;* **JENNER:** *Sonata 2*

with Rainer Schmidt, v: Saiko Sasaki-Schmidt, p

Divox 29604—54 minutes

Rainer Schmidt and Saiko Sasaki-Schmidt made this excellent recording in 1996. It's the sixth volume of a series called "Brahms and Friends". I love their reading of the Brahms A-major Sonata, and its proximity to the sonata by Brahms's faithful student Gustav Uwe Jenner (1865-1920) shows the influence it had on his Second Sonata. These performers take the Jenner for the fine student imitation of Brahms that it is. Perhaps these musicians, who play the piece with a great deal of attention to detail, feel protective of Jenner, in much the way Brahms might have.

Carl Reinecke was a decade older than Brahms, and he wrote his Fantasy Pieces quite early in his career. He also wrote them for the viola. The piano part remains in the original octave in this transcription, and everything remains in the original keys. I is a particularly beautiful take on the 'Hymn of Thanksgiving' that Robert Schumann used in his Second Violin Sonata, and it sounds lovely on the violin (it is rare that a violinist would make a transcription from the violists' far-smaller literature). II is also filled with the spirit of Robert Schumann, and, with the incorporation of the lower-register viola pitches into the piano part, requires very little in the way of octave changes. III sounds much more humoresque-like on the violin than it does on the viola, because of the violin's comparatively quick response.

FINE

4 Strings Only

BLOCH: *Solo Violin Suites;* **BACH:** *Sonata 2;* **BEN-HAIM:** *Sonata in G;* **BERIO:** *Sequenza 8*

Herwig Zack, v

Avie 2189—77 minutes

This is a program that fits together remarkably well. Between all of the modern works' relationships to Big Daddy Bach and the Jewish origin of both Bloch and Ben-Haim there is a lot to listen for. Another plus for this listener is that both of the Bloch suites are included.

The suites by Ernest Bloch (1880-1959) are some of his last works, written in 1958. They are quite Bachian in sound as his late pieces tend to be, less outwardly Jewish than his earlier compositions. They surround the Bach sonata happily and are none the worse for the association. Paul Ben-Haim (1897-1984) is more overtly ethnic in style, full of energy and imaginative ideas with a touch of klezmer about some of them. Luciano Berio's *Sequenza* is modeled on the great Bach Chaconne in many ways and is by no means the dissonant piece that one might expect it to be. It is a work of depth, and it dies out under the influence of a practice mute that is called for in the music.

Of course, all of this is secondary to the quality of Zack's playing. That is another plus: he is a remarkably smooth technician and full of feeling and evident love for the music he plays. The recording itself has a remarkably clean and natural sound, making it a pleasure to hear and to recommend to you.

D MOORE

Manto & Madrigals

Thomas Zehetmair, v; Ruth Killius, va

ECM 15573—49 minutes

You are what you eat, musically speaking, and Zehetmar and Killius are very much at home with the technical demands of later 20th Century music (microtones, complex rhythms, odd timbres, and extended techniques). It seems that the more conventional music on this recording, like the Martinu *Madrigals,* lacks the kind of warmth that I normally associate with it, but their reading of the *Madrigals* is precise, and it fits together vertically like the gears in a Swiss watch.

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 210

I am not able to judge the accuracy of the microtones in some of this music (anything smaller than a half step is a quarter tone to me), but from the accuracy of the conventionally-pitched music I can assume that the microtones are played as they should be.

I really like Rainer Killius's setting of an ancient Icelandic folk song, 'O min flaskan frido' (love song to a bottle), but it's difficult for me to grasp Giacinto Scelsi's 'Manto', a piece for solo viola where the violist (who needs to be a woman or a man with a high voice) sings. In addition to microtonal intervals, Scelsi calls for an unconventional tuning, which is further disorienting. I imagine that the point of the piece is to be disorienting.

Heinz Holliger wrote his *Drei Skizzen* in 2006 for use as an encore following a performance of the Mozart Sinfonia Concertante. Killus and Zehetmair wanted an encore that would not require retuning the viola after the Mozart (a piece in the key of E-flat that violists find preferable to play with the viola tuned half a step higher, so that it feels like playing in D major). The resulting sound quality of two instruments resonating in two different sound spectrums is truly unusual.

There's some Bartok here, but it doesn't sound at all like normal Bartok. It's a piece he wrote in 1902 as an imitation of Mozart's 'Table Music for Two' (the music is placed on a table, and the violinists read the music from either side—one plays it upside-down and backwards, while the other plays it rightside-up and forwards). Peter Maxwell Davies's 'Midhouse Air' (1996) sounds more like Bartok than the Bartok, though the folk inspiration is, as to be expected, from Orkney.

Nikos Skalkottas's 1938 Duo is a real virtuoso work for both instruments, and grows in excitement as the piece progresses; and Johannes Nied's 'Zugabe' is kind of serial hocket that uses only a few pitches and divides them between the two instruments, requiring precise divisions of beats. It resembles the sound of a pitched game of ping pong, but without the predictability.

FINE

Arctic Hysteria

Almila, Nordgren, Kokkonen
Arktinen Hysteria Wind Quintet
Alba 307—57 minutes

"Despite its name, the Quintet's attitude to music-making...is anything but hysterical." So say the notes, and it's good to know, but then the Arktinen Hysteria Wind Quintet says about itself that it "sings, growls, echoes, screams, muses, crows, and warbles like virtuosos...with oodles of vim and vigour and jolly harmony". They seem to be a fun-loving group of young woodwind players. Are they any good?

Yes, very. These Finnish players have been together for more than a decade, and in this album they offer serious music by three composers. *Arctic Hysteria* (Woodwind Quintet 2, 2006) by Atso Almila (b 1953) deals with the disadvantages of living where darkness and winter last so long. In six movements, the 20-minute work is by turns somber and lively; the harmonic language, while dissonant, is by no means atonal. The formidable technical challenges are handled with seeming ease by all, and there are some astonishing sounds—especially when both horn and bassoon are playing very low notes.

Pehr Nordgren (1944-2008) contributes two works. In *The Good Samaritan* (2007) he tries to depict the story's events in the music: opening quietly, becoming first violent (when the traveler is beaten) and then somber (when passersby avoid him), then turning optimistic (when the Samaritan does his good deed). The work is marked by poignant sonorities, and the playing is sensitive and secure. Nordgren wrote his three-movement, 16-minute Quintet 2 in 1975 after living in Japan for three years. Opening with an interesting horn sound effect, I then becomes insistent. II is quite dissonant and includes shakuhachi-like pitch-bending by all of the instruments. III begins with alto flute (again evoking traditional Japanese music), then gives solos to each instrument. The work ends pensively.

Joonas Kokkonen's four-movement Quintet (1973) packs much meaning and challenge into its mere 11 minutes. I is a pensive, anxiety-ridden Andante; II a spritely Allegro Vivace where fleet lines are passed around the group. III is breezy with moments of repose, and IV scampers brightly.

Excellent ensemble, program, and recorded sound.

KILPATRICK

Petite Patisserie

Trio d'Anches Cologne—Telos 162—63 minutes

This program of French Wind Trios shows how expansive repertoire for the woodwind trio has become. Though its title is silly and the program notes mere afterthoughts, the assembly of music from early classical to contemporary is satisfying. They weave Bozza with Bach, Piazzolla with Haydn and Leopold Mozart, and a couple short ragtime works by Ingo Luis with Errol Garner's 'Misty'.

In the first half of the program, while most of the pieces reveal a strong and disciplined blend, there was a weakness that caught my ear too often. The Haydn London Trio reveals their delightful tone and their sense of proportion, but it was a bit disappointing that Bozza's little trio didn't have the same sense of propor-

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 211

tion. Instead, it lacked dynamic contrast. And while their performance of the Bach inventions was technically impeccable, it also lacked contrast. A common trap when playing Bach's music is relying too heavily on its gracious harmonic structure to communicate shape to the listener rather than crafting it.

The second half falls into a different category. Though they sound sometimes like fish out of water bending pitches and relaxing rhythms, they do eventually warm up to the idea of having a good time. In Piazzolla's *Four Seasons*, for example, they finally achieve that dynamic contrast missing from the first half; and the clarinetist actually lets a bit of vibrato creep in during the unaccompanied 'Misty'.

Overall, it's clear that they're top quality musicians who enjoy what they're doing, and so it doesn't really matter that there may be performers who can bend pitches with greater ease or let their hair down more.

SCHWARTZ

Woodwind Quintets

Pirmin Grehl, fl; Florian Grube, ob; Johannes Zurl, cl; Dmitry Babanov, hn; Bence Boganyi, bn
Profil 8063—63 minutes

Each musician of the Quintet Chantily holds a position in an orchestra in Munich or Berlin. A few years ago the ensemble released a recording on the same label with a Beethoven quintet and a few works by Mozart (9002). While that recording did not promote works outside the standard repertoire, this release has three of the finest examples from the woodwind quintet's 19th and 20th Century literature: Paul Taffanel's quintet, Samuel Barber's *Summer Music*, and Carl Nielsen's quintet. Many quintets have recorded *Summer Music*, and even more have recorded Carl Nielsen's beloved quintet. But fewer ensembles have recorded the Taffanel.

Their performance of the Taffanel is well proportioned. The first movement ebbs and flows gently, executed with a good sense of balance between effect, articulation, dynamics, and color. The horn solo that makes up the substance of II is very well done and with a sturdy tone. While I first thought the tempo of I was too slow, the brisk *vivace* of III gives the whole piece better balance that way. In this issue (under DANZI) we review a Crystal Records re-release of the Soni Ventorum quintet's 1978 performance. Since then, not many other recordings have emerged.

Samuel Barber's *Summer Music* has only been in the quintet repertoire for a little over 50 years, yet it has endeared itself to performers and audiences. The ensemble very effectively manages the transition points between its 11 sections. Their grasp of the music is very intuitive, and their style and phrasing is natural.

Best on their program is the Nielsen, with its great solos and ingenious textures and combinations. This performance gets a lot of things right. They give it a genuine grandeur without pomposity and an innocence that is honest and respectable.

SCHWARTZ

Fanfare, Capriccio & Rhapsody

NELSON: *Kennedy Center Fanfare; Medieval Suite;* **TULL:** *Tudor Psalm Sketches; Rhapsody;* **BARKER:** *Capriccio;* **BOYSEN:** *Wind & Percussion Symphony 1*
Vince DiMartino, tpt; Chicago Saxophone Quartet; Indiana State University Faculty Winds & Wind Orchestra; Kent State University Wind Ensemble/ John Boyd—Naxos 572528—72 mins

A compilation of old recordings by three concert bands, John Boyd conducting. The Indiana State Faculty Winds gave a good account in 1999 of Ron Nelson's 'Kennedy Center Fanfare'. The Kent State Wind Ensemble is heard in 1984 readings of Fisher Tull's 'Sketches on a Tudor Psalm', 'Rhapsody for Trumpet', and in Nelson's *Medieval Suite*. These recordings have been re-released before—I could not help but comment on the terrible recorded sound then (Jan/Feb 2000: 221). Trumpeter Vince DiMartino delivers an impassioned reading of 'Rhapsody', but tinny recorded sound again undermines the effort.

Two works by Warren Barker sound better, though still not great. The Capriccio for saxophone quartet and band is heard in a fine 1994 reading by the Chicago Saxophone Quartet with the Indiana State University Wind Orchestra, and that band sounds very good in the Symphony 1 for Winds and Percussion.

KILPATRICK

Marquee Mojo

NELSON: *Hour of Sunrise Fanfare;* **BERNSTEIN:** *On the Waterfront Suite;* **LABOUNTY:** *How Deep the Father's Love for Us;* **GOLDSMITH:** *The Wind and the Lion;* **SULLIVAN:** *Mikado Suite;* **MOZART:** *Magic Flute Overture;* **BROUGHTON:** *Silverado Overture;* **KING:** *Barnum & Bailey's Favorite March*
UNLV Wind Orchestra/ Thomas Leslie
Klavier 11185—60 minutes

Thomas Leslie makes consistently good recordings with his University of Nevada at Las Vegas Wind Orchestra—this is at least the seventh such to pass my way, and his band sounds terrific. The program is something of a hodgepodge, but film music seems to be the main theme.

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 212

The Suite from Bernstein's *On the Waterfront* (arranged by Guy Duker) is the big piece, and Frederic Stone's excellent horn solo sets the tone for a reading marked by dramatic moments, secure solos, fine intonation, and ensemble precision. Jerry Goldsmith's music from the historical drama *Wind and the Lion* (arranged by Michael Davis, 1975) has power and sweep, intimate moments, and virtuoso lines that are handled very impressively by clarinets, trumpets, and saxophones.

The very familiar music from Arthur Sullivan's *Mikado*—four movements arranged for the UNLV band by David Irish—is given a wonderful, technically precise reading. Bruce Broughton's Overture from *Silverado*, arranged by J Morsch, sounds suitably spectacular. And while it is not from a film, the Overture to Mozart's *Magic Flute* (arranged for band by Teresa Stewart) sounds great, with beautifully blended chords and lively playing.

In a different vein is Anthony LaBounty's setting of the hymn 'How Deep the Father's Love for Us'. LaBounty, UNLV's assistant director of bands, composed the work in memory of his colleague Leslie's father. The program opens with a Ron Nelson barnburner, 'Fanfare for the Hour of Sunrise', and ends with Karl King's wild 'Barnum & Bailey's Favorite March'.

Recent recordings make the case that the quality of many American university wind ensembles is improving by leaps and bounds. I am hearing, in recordings like this one, sounds and skills that were once the sole province of the best conservatories.

KILPATRICK

Psallat Ecclesia—Medieval Norway

Schola Solensis/ Halvor J Osttveit
2L 70 [SACD] 47 minutes

Liturgical sequences were sung between the Alleluia and the Gospel in the Catholic mass. They probably originated in the practice of fitting words to the lengthy melismas of the Alleluia chants, but eventually they took on a life of their own. In the Middle Ages the repertory of sequences reached the thousands. The Council of Trent purged all but four of them from the Roman liturgy.

The present recording presents 11 of the 111 sequences preserved in the archives of the Norwegian archbishopric of Nidaros. They include sequences for various feasts of the church year as well as for the feasts of saints who were patrons of important Norwegian cathedrals. In some instances related chants are given along with the sequences: for example, the Introit and Alleluia for the feast of St Agatha (February 5). Included in the program is one of the sequences retained by the Council of Trent: 'Victimae Paschali Laudes' for Easter Day.

Schola Solensis, an ensemble of women's voices, was founded in 1995 by Halvor J Osttveit in connection with the consecration of Sola Ruin Church, built on the site of a 12th-Century foundation. That church is their home base. The booklet lists nine singers besides a soloist. The singing is at once flowing and restful with a unanimity of movement and phrasing that can only come when an ensemble sings this repertory together for a considerable time and the singers learn to merge their individual voices self-effacingly into the unison choral tone. The recorded sound is warm but clear.

GATENS

Mors et Resurrectio

Requiem Mass; Easter Sunday Mass
Ronald Greene, cantor; Ensemble Torculus/ Haig Mardirosian—Centaur 3028—52 minutes

The program includes complete recordings of both the Proper and Ordinary chants for the Requiem and Easter Masses, plus the 'Asperges' chant 'Vidi Aquam' sung in Eastertide. The singers prefer the traditional method of singing chant over the more highly nuanced style now in vogue. That is, they like the unwavering tone and smooth cadence of melody one associates with "the sound of Gregorian (i.e. Roman) chant", and not the sliding and ornamental practice that sounds like middle-eastern chant. They show sensitivity to text phrasing, and use dynamics to illustrate the strong and weak cadences. They are also sensitive to the medieval practices of alternation in antiphonal and responsorial chants. We hear Ronald Greene's clear tenor voice in the intonations and psalms of the responsorial chants; but the antiphonal chants are left to the entire chapter of singers. The recording comes without notes. Texts are in English.

LOEWEN

L'Orient des Troubadours

Ensemble Beatus—Ad Vitam 110115—57:27

Ensemble Beatus on this recording includes only two performers. Jean-Paul Rigaud, who sings and plays hurdy-gurdy, has been a member of a number of other medieval ensembles (such as Diabolus in Musica and Ensemble Organum) for more than 20 years. Jasser Haj Youssef, a much younger performer in styles as varied as traditional music from the Maghreb, medieval music, later classical music, and jazz, plays viola d'amore.

This anthology of troubadour song ranges from a reconstruction by Rigaud of the melody

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 213

for 'Farai un vers' by Guillaume IX (1071-1126), who was at the very beginning of the traditions of secular song in Occitan, to Jaufre Rudel's 'Lanquan li jorn', Peire Vidal's 'Pois tornatz', and Gaucelm Faidit's 'Lo gent cors onratz', which have all been recorded before. I know of no earlier recordings of the songs by Rigaud de Barbezieux ('Atressi cum Persavaus') and Uc de Saint Circ ('Tres enemics'). In between the songs, Youssef offers instrumental interludes, some based on traditional melodies from North Africa and some his own improvisations.

The use of a viola d'amore is rather unusual since most medieval groups use modern reconstructions of medieval-style vielles; but the tonal color of this baroque musical instrument is not that different, especially when played in a more folk-like manner by Youssef. While most other recordings I know that combine a singer with a single instrument in this repertoire have rather restrained accompaniments (I am thinking of Brice Duisit, Mar/Apr 2006, and the Duo Trobairitz, Nov/Dec 2007:246), the support Youssef offers is rather more prominent. In a few places I found this distracting when it felt as if the song was accompanied by a medieval version of a Bach unaccompanied sonata or in songs where the hurdy-gurdy offers a simple drone and Youssef sounds like Ravi Shankar playing sitar. In other songs the accompaniments are subdued and subtle. While I find this variety of accompaniment styles distracting, it does make for a more interesting recording. The deciding factors are the sensitive performances by Rigaud and the repertoire.

BREWER

The Sacred Bridge

Boston Camerata/ Joel Cohen
Warner 69895—65:24

This recording, first released in 1990 (Erato 45513), remains a fascinating attempt to document in sound the complex and controversial theories of how Jewish music and musical traditions influenced the Christian traditions both in antiquity and the Middle Ages. The title of this collection is taken from Eric Werner's 1959 book that examined some of the documentation and conjectures. In the decades that followed its publication, scholarship continued to examine, expand, and refine some of his conclusions. Joel Cohen and The Boston Camerata had already released in 1979 a significant collection of Jewish baroque music by Salamone Rossi, Louis Saladin, and Carlo Grossi (Harmonia Mundi 1901021, which also deserves to be reissued) and this later recording opened a sonic window into the even more complex musical and cultural interrelationships in the Middle Ages.

The repertoire is derived from many sources. Most prominent is music from oral traditions, including the cantillation of biblical texts and the folksong tradition of the Sephardic Jews who had been expelled from Spain in 1492. Those selections are often paired with similar music from the Christian traditions. Cohen has also recorded secular songs by Jewish musicians that were destined for the entertainments at court, including a song by the trouvere Matthieu le Juif and a German song by Suesskint von Trimberg (though in this case Cohen had to borrow a melody from another Minnesinger, Der wilde Alexander).

The two high points of the recording are both sung by John Fleagle: Psalm 137 from the Sephardic tradition of Jerusalem and a reconstruction of a 12th Century eulogy to Moses by Obadiah the Proselyte, a Norman convert to Judaism.

The performers often add instrumental drones and improvised interludes to the original melodies, but even after two decades they seem restrained and tasteful. The disc includes only minimal information. Texts, translations, and essential historical commentary scanned from the original booklet are available online. This is an essential recording both in terms of the significant repertoire and effective performances.

BREWER

Sancte Deus: Renaissance Sacred Polyphony

New College Choir/ Edward Higginbottom
Warner 67541—71 minutes

This is a re-release of recordings of Renaissance polyphony made by the Choir of New College, Oxford in 2000. The program draws on nearly every region of Europe: Tallis and Byrd from England; Lassus from Germany; Ugolini and Palestrina from Italy; Victoria, Guerrero, Lobo, and Cardoso from Spain; Gombert from Austria; and Josquin from the Netherlands. It is an impressive cast of some of the greatest masters of the era. There are neither notes nor texts.

LOEWEN

A Meeting Place

Munir Nurettin Beken, ud; August Denhard, lute
Sono Luminus 92133—50 minutes

Most people probably know that an ud (perhaps more often spelled oud) is a Middle Eastern stringed instrument; what they may not know is how much it sounds like a lute or that the two instruments most likely started out from a common ancestor and then developed differently in the East than in the West. In this

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 214

magnificent program, the musicians play each piece together, and it is difficult to distinguish one instrument from the other.

The mix of songs is quite unusual, and I was unfamiliar with many of the pieces. The program starts out with 'Greensleeves', but then I recognized only one other tune. Much of the music is quite lively, and all is expertly played. Especially delightful are two pieces by composer Joanambrosio Dalza, an Italian lutenist and composer who is known to have been alive in 1508. The final piece does not belong to either time represented here but is rather a 20th Century work by Mutlu Torun that is based on a medieval Turkish instrumental form that is similar to a rondo.

The sound is excellent, the playing superb. This program is a cut above an ordinary lute program in both quality and interest.

CRAWFORD

The Renaissance Album

Lute Songs from the English Renaissance
Robin Tritschler, t; Janne Malinen, g
Pilfink 70—66 minutes

This release from Finland presents some of the most familiar songs from renaissance composers, including Philip Rosseter, John Dowland, Robert Johnson, Robert Jones, and Francis Pilkington. About half of the songs are from Dowland. The notes present only information about the composers, in English and Finnish. Texts for the songs are in English only.

Janne Malinen is a talented young Finnish guitarist who, having graduated from the Sibelius Academy with a master's degree in music, now teaches there. Robin Tritschler, another young musician, graduated from the Royal Irish Academy of Music and the Royal Academy of Music in London. He has established an international singing career, performing in every venue from recitals to operas.

The performances here are very warm and nuanced. This duo works together extremely well and has produced one of the finest programs of renaissance songs I've heard recently. Since some of the most familiar songs are included here, this would be a good introduction for a newcomer.

CRAWFORD

Venezia

String Sonatas by Rosenmuller, Legrenzi, Stradella
Rare Fruits Council/ Manfredo Kraemer
Ambronay 28—82 minutes

Originally from Germany, Bergamo, and Tuscany, Johann Rosenmuller (c 1619-84), Giovanni Legrenzi (1626-90), and Alessandro Stradella (1644-82) were all active in Venice around 1677. Their writing for strings drew on different traditions, advanced the evolution of string chamber music, and further cemented the violin's ascendant position as a solo and ensemble instrument.

This is excellent in all ways. The seven players in The Rare Fruits Council (founded in 1997 by director and violinist Manfredo Kraemer) are very adept and imaginative. The ensemble is tight and agile, with rapid changes of direction spot on. In Legrenzi's Sonata 3 for two violins and viola da brazzo the lines are nicely shaped, with a sweet languor in the slower passages. The contrapuntal character of Rosenmuller's pieces allows the players to draw out the taste-filled sourness of chromatic lines (as in Sonata 11) and to balance dramatic contrasts and meter changes. The three sinfonias here by Stradella—a generation younger—give even more complex music to the solo players. In Sinfonia 11 the many soft and delicate violin passages are played with effortless grace, and the very active bass line is poised and precise.

Even in extremely fast passages, the music is never graceless, never at all in the "speeding bullet" school of Ardella Crawford's taxonomy of interpretive approaches to Vivaldi (J/A 2011, p 213), and the well-sequenced program is endlessly refreshing to hear. One of the many ways The Rare Fruits Council builds its color palette is to use organ both as part of the continuo and also as a "flute" in the melodic texture (as in Rosenmuller's Sonata 2 for two violins and Legrenzi's Sonata 6).

John Barker (Biber sonatas, Astree 8630, S/O 1999) and Ardella Crawford (Naive 8840, J/F 2004, p 229) have high praise for this ensemble. All three composers have small discographies, especially for their instrumental works. After you have bought this, Peter Loewen's top rating for Rosenmuller's psalm concertos (Christophorus 77333, J/A 2011) will spur you beyond the instrumental music into the polychoral Venetian style.

C MOORE

Dancing in the Isles

Musica Pacifica Baroque Ensemble
Solimar 101—75 minutes
(CD Baby: 800-BUYMYCD)

This rather unusual collection of music is assembled to demonstrate the wide variety of musical styles in the British Isles in the 17th and 18th centuries and also to show the influence of folk tunes on classical music in that period. The program begins with a set of dances from John Playford's *English Dancing Master* and then presents parts from an English court masque. Sonatas by James Oswald and Matthew Locke demonstrate the influence of English folk tunes. A short medley of traditional Scottish tunes follows, along with some

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 215

airs by Nicola Matteis. The program concludes with another medley, this time of Irish tunes, part of a sonata by Veracini that is a set of variations on a Border ballad called 'Tweed Side', and a short work by Henry Purcell.

This is a lively program, played with plenty of joy and verve. It's easy enough to find complete programs of either folk tunes or classical music from this time period, but not so easy to find a combination of the two, skillfully intertwined. The notes are quite thorough and the sound excellent.

CRAWFORD

Treasury of German Baroque

Bach, Buxtehude, Fasch, Lubeck, Pachelbel, Quantz, Telemann
Hanoverian Ensemble—MSR 1380—64 minutes

Trio sonatas and a flute duet are interspersed with short organ pieces, all by major composers of the day. The trio sonatas use flute and recorder with cello and harpsichord; this is a period instrument performance. Tempos are sprightly and playing is spirited.

The first organ selection is a brawny and impressive Buxtehude Prelude in C; I just had to hear it again before going on. This performance has lots of pomp, and I say this having recently attended a Cameron Carpenter concert. The last chord of the Buxtehude alone is worth mention: a particularly bold statement. The power of this organ music certainly contrasts with the flute and recorder selections. The sound is clear and direct, and everything in the manuals and pedals comes across, including the flourishes. The Pachelbel that concludes the program offers a tour of the organ's stops.

The Hanoverian Ensemble is a group of accomplished New York players that has six other recordings on MSR: two of Telemann (1309, Sept/Oct 2009; 1113, Jan/Feb 2006), one of Michel de La Barre (1191, not reviewed), and three collections (two reviewed: 1087, Sept/Oct 2003: 218; 1099, Sept/Oct 2005: 181).

There are 3-1/2 pages of notes in English, plus biographies of the players and two photos of the baroque organ (by Fritts, at Vassar College). Flutists might enjoy this release more for the organ pieces and vice versa.

GORMAN

Kingdoms of Castille

Spanish, Italian, Latin American Baroque
Castellanos, Falconieri, Handel, Zipoli
El Mundo/ Richard Savino
Sono Luminus 92131—74 minutes

Spain's baroque Empire spread Spanish culture to many parts of the world, and this program brings together music from Italy and Latin American, two places where the artistic links are the strongest. There are 11 composers: two Spaniards active in the Hapsburg court (Marin and Hidalgo); five—Spanish and Italian—from Rome and Naples (Domenico Scarlatti, Falconieri, Mazzocchi, Manelli, Aranes); one each from Germany (Handel in Naples), Peru (Aparicio), and Guatemala (Castellanos); and Domenico Zipoli, an Italian by birth who joined the Jesuits in Spain (1716) then went with the Order to Paraguay, spending most of the rest of his life in Argentina.

The El Mundo ensemble demonstrates an engaging assertiveness (for example, the full sound and nice swagger in Falconieri's 'Ciaconna'), and solo violin and baroque guitar shine in the intricate figuration of the anonymous instrumental 'Folia'. Accompanying forces vary in color and size and support the singers very well, with guitar, tambourine, and castanets used effectively. There is some raggedness in ensemble and tuning in the excerpt from the opening of Zipoli's opera *San Ignacio*, which may be caused by performing forces too small to fit the music.

Soprano Nell Snaidas sings with vivid color and abandon in the Castellanos homage to Mary ('Oygan Una Xacarilla') and animates Hidalgo's stophic song 'Esperar Sentir Morir' with suave and passionate seduction. Soprano Jennifer Ellis-Kampani sings the Handel cantata expressively; it is one of the few pieces in Spanish by Handel, and the only one specifying guitar accompaniment. In the bass solos (such as Marin's 'Coracon Que En Prision') Paul Shipper—who also plays guitar and percussion—sounds rather dry in the higher and lower registers; but his voice is better suited to the Aranes 'Parten Las Galeras', a solemn reflection on departure, pain, pleasure, and sadness.

Compositions fit the theme well, and very fine booklet notes by director and guitarist Richard Savino explain the context and stylistic connections. The program has fine variety and contrasts, but not all performances are on a high level. Fewer performers and composers might be better: for example, more of Handel's Spanish-language pieces, music for sopranos, and no Zipoli.

John Barker liked two discs by El Mundo (of music by Duron, Dorian 92107, S/O 2010 and by various composers, Koch 7654, M/A 2006, p 227). There are now many recordings of Latin American baroque music. Mr Barker and Ardella Crawford have very high praise for the series by Ex Cathedra conducted by Jeffrey Skidmore on Hyperion (67600, J/A 2008, p 243 & 67524, J/F 2006, p 264) and I am among several ARG reviewers who applaud many releases on the K617 label, which led the way in recording this repertory. William Gatens covered three fine ones (S/O 2002, p 218, K617

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 216

120, 121, 123) and Charles Brewer another (139, M/J 2003, p 187). Mr Barker liked two Jesuit "operas" by Kapsberger and Zipoli conducted by James David Christie (Dorian 93243, S/O 2003), and I liked Zipoli's San Ignacio Vespers conducted by Gabriel Garrido (K617 027, S/O 1993) but *not* the Zipoli cantatas by the same performers (K617 037, S/O 1994). As you collect discs of colonial Spanish music, note that there is almost no repertoire duplication among them. Notes, bios, texts, translations.

C MOORE

Come to the River

An Early American Gathering
Apollo's Fire/ Jeanette Sorrell
Avie 2205—65 minutes

Apollo's Fire, the period performance ensemble based in Cleveland, has taken a break from the baroque and classical eras. Director Jeanette Sorrell and her harpsichord are joined by flutist Kathie Stewart, sopranos Sandra Simon and Abigail Lennox, Tina Bergmann on the hammered dulcimer, and other players to investigate our country's 19th Century folk traditions. The result of their collaboration is a vibrant American sampler that is one of the most joyous releases to have crossed the ARG choral desk in some time.

The program is divided into thirds: *Appalachian Wagon Train*, *Love and Death*, and *Revival Meeting*. The classification scheme had me scratching my head once or twice (Irish dances at a prayer meeting?); but there's no arguing that this is a well-chosen, well-paced anthology that holds the interest.

Special touches abound as these artists evoke the spirit of a rural American gone by. In selections like 'Swinging on a Gate', 'Ways of the World', and 'Glory in the Meetinghouse', Tina Bergmann's hammered dulcimer conveys the gratitude of people intoxicated by the sheer joy of being alive. (She plays the thing, by the way, like Horowitz played the piano.) Matters of the spirit are raised with affecting tenderness in soprano Abigail Lennox's 'Wayfaring Stranger' and in a moving choral arrangement of 'Down In the River to Pray'. Vivid story-telling in such varied offerings as 'Oh When Shall I See Jesus?', 'The Fox Went Out on a Chilly Night' and 'The Three Ravens' turns the program into musical time travel. Sorrell's accompaniments from the harpsichord and her sensitive handling of a set of dances from the Old World and the New aren't run of the mill either. Brilliant engineering clinches the deal. Maybe if we could tap into the communal wisdom of our musical past, our national values would be better.

GREENFIELD

Il Giardino Armonico

Warner 63264 [11CD] 11:18

When I first opened this boxed set, compiled from the Teldec recordings of Il Giardino Armonico, my first thought was that I was again meeting a number of good old friends, some of whom I had not encountered for some time. Along with these old friends, I also noticed some new "faces" that I had not seen before. Among the old friends were two recordings of Vivaldi (double and triple concertos, Nov/Dec 1995 and chamber concertos, Sept/Oct 1993), and the new faces included Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and his concertos for lute and mandolin. Also among the old friends were Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* (Mar/Apr 1998) and an unusual recording pairing Biber's *Battalia* with Matthew Locke's incidental music for *The Tempest* (July/Aug 1999). Also new to me (but not ARG) were three collections: Christmas concertos (Nov/Dec 1992: 266), Baroque "chestnuts" (Pachelbel's *Canon* et al., Mar/Apr 2002: 214), and Neapolitan Chamber Music (Sept/Oct 1994: 255). A completely new "face" to me (and ARG) was a very good collection of Italian instrumental music from the early 17th Century (including compositions by Tarquinio Merula, Dario Castello, Giovanni Battista Riccio, Salomone Rossi, and Marco Uccellini). A number of these recordings have held up well over the years. The four original recordings of the Vivaldi chamber concertos (represented in this collection by a single disc) are still among the best interpretations of these works; and while there are some idiosyncratic performance decisions in Biber's *Battalia*, it is still an enjoyable interpretation, and if you wish, the *Sonata Representativa* has its captions read by the lutenist. Other discs (including the *Brandenburg Concertos* and the various baroque anthologies) contain good interpretations, if not necessarily first choices.

My sole surprising disappointment was that the interpretation of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* is rather bland, especially compared with the inventiveness the performers demonstrated on their other Vivaldi recordings. While in some cases (the Vivaldi chamber concertos) I wished for more, this is a suitable selection from some of the best recordings made by this ensemble in their formative period.

BREWER

Rose of Sharon

100 Years of American Music (1770-1870)
Linda Brotherton, s; Deborah Rentz-Moore, mz; Timothy Leigh Evans, t, perc; Joel Frederiksen, b, g; Ensemble Phoenix Munich/ Joel Frederiksen
Harmonia Mundi 902085—72 minutes

In the *Early American Gathering* hosted by Apollo's Fire (above) you can easily lose the

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 217

historical impetus and just surrender to the Appalachian folk idiom in all its glory. Here, the music is on historical display and you never quite forget it. The songs are keyed to the American Revolution, "Singing Schools" where itinerant Christian singers traversed the fledgling nation teaching the faithful to read music, Shakerism, and the Civil War. There's also a set of three songs by William Billings, America's first composer of note. But while everything pretty much remains in "museum mode" as the eras roll by, it's an attractive exhibit and quite an interactive one at that.

It seems odd to be taught American history by an ensemble based in Munich; but one gathers from the heading that the main singers aren't German—certainly not director Joel Frederiksen, who trained in New York and Michigan and was a member of the Waverly Consort and the Boston Camerata before founding his ensemble. He has a flair for music history, and there are all sorts of interesting things here that will be new to most of us.

'The Death of General Wolfe' is a sad tribute to the English commander who perished on the Plains of Abraham in the French and Indian War. (The Brits, you'll recall, were on our side in that one.) In Singing School, the public learned that military men could be a philandering lot ('The Gentlemen Soldiers'); that evil must surely be punished ('Captain Kidd'), and that the Savior's love is a liberating force easily celebrated while dancing a jig ('Leander'). This anthology also offers a welcome introduction to William Billings's 'God Is the King', which is complex enough to approach mini-cantata form and is accompanied by instruments to boot. (Why did I think all of his choral stuff was a cappella?) The female singers are more engaging than the men, who are a mite stuffy from time to time. I also can't shake the feeling that Frederiksen's *basso* is maybe a bit too *profundo* for this music, especially in the SATB selections, where his pungent timbre is tough for the others to match. He's more affecting as a guitarist, conductor, and as the historical mind who put the whole thing together.

I can't remember a Harmonia Mundi release that didn't sound terrific, and this one is no exception. What I don't like is the annotation design, where full notes, bios, and translations are spread across two booklets in multiple languages. Matching the correct track with its translation and commentary amid all the checking and cross-checking you have to do could turn you into a bit of a historian yourself.

GREENFIELD

Cantus Sollemnis

Divina Musica/ Juha Pesonen
Pilfink 51—38 minutes

Divina Musica is a Finnish ensemble consisting of four female singers—Heidi Monanen, soprano; Jaana Ravattinen, alto; and Kirsi Hirvonen and Susanna Karjalainen, mezzosopranos. Their program offers considerable variety: chant, sacred polyphony from the Renaissance and romantic periods; and contemporary sacred and secular songs from Finland and Georgia. The artistic purpose behind the program strikes me as more about the "sound" of the music than the substance—no texts and translations for any of the works.

I like the sound of the ensemble, though it is enhanced by reverb. I'm a little more concerned about the undifferentiated style of the singing. They appear to like warm, rich chords. Why not? It sounds terrific. But it all sounds the same, whether they're singing Hildegard, modern Finnish or Georgian songs, or Victoria. The notes tell us that the purpose of the release is to "compose the listener to prayer". The secular songs are meant to sound "soothing". Indeed, the music does sound soothing; but I would like to know what they are singing about. Brief notes are in English.

LOEWEN

Choral Anthology

HASSLER: *Deus Noster Refugium; Verbum Caro Factum Est; O Admirabile Commercium; Cantate Domino; Jubilate Deo; O Domine Jesu Christe; O Sacrum Convivium;* **CORNELIUS:** *Liebe, Dir Ergeb' Ich Mich; Ich Will Dich Lieben, Meine Krone; Thron der Liebe, Stern der Gute;* **BRUCKNER:** *Tantum Ergo;* **LISZT:** *O Salutaris Hostia*

Exon Singers/ Christopher Tolley
Priory 5042—53 minutes

Joy is the operative word here—joy in the music and joy in the bright, fresh singing of the 28 English men and women entrusted with the task of bringing that music to life. The Renaissance motets of Augsburg's Hans Leo Hassler (1562-1612) couldn't be lovelier or livelier. Peter Cornelius (1824-74), the notes tell us, was a friend and disciple of Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner whose most famous work is an opera called *The Barber of Baghdad*. All I know about him first-hand is that he wrote these three handsome, deeply-felt songs, which are sung with palpable affection by the female sopranos and male everything elses of this choir from Britain's southwest.

Poised, devout Bruckner and Liszt make up the remainder of the program. I love everything about this: the music, the singing, the engineering (clear, warm sound), and the

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 218

cover art. The latter is a lovely photo of the grand interior of Peterborough Cathedral, one of my favorite haunts in England. We lived 30 miles south of Peterborough during our Fulbright year in Britain, and the city's train station was our jumping-on point for several trips north. We strolled the cathedral every chance we got. Walk a bit down that left aisle you see pictured and you can step—reverently, one would hope—on the grave of Catherine of Aragon. What an amazing place, and what an uplifting program!

GREENFIELD

O Vos Omnes

Ganymede/ Yvan Sabourin
ATMA 2631—56 minutes

Ganymede is a Montreal-area male choir that grew out of the local gay community. Here they offer us a pleasant assortment of 17 arrangements and original works for men's voices; most selections are from the Renaissance era and modern times, with a light sprinkling from in between. Of the modern composers, Canadians are favored—most of whom you're not likely to know.

It soon becomes apparent to the fussy listener that this is a choir of average amateur voices. Bless them, for just such voices are the backbone of everyday choral singing worldwide. But director Sabourin has made a fairly competent ensemble of them. Everything here is a cappella, and the singers generally stay on pitch well; their collective diction is excellent, whether in French, German, or English. I particularly enjoyed their lovely renditions of Schubert's 'Die Nacht' and Morten Lauridsen's ubiquitous 'O Magnum Mysterium'.

But their lack of professional refinement is heard in some minor technical flaws: I noted occasional ragged entrances and cutoffs, plus slightly awkward vocal execution in some of the trickier passages. Sabourin seems to cultivate a smoothly subdued, even bloodless interpretive approach, unlike the overtly macho swagger you hear from most male ensembles. For example, their rendition of Pablo Casals's famous 'O Vos Omnes' (the title piece)—a work of agonized sacred passion and power—sounded sweetly insipid to me. Their rather amorphous, bottom-heavy sonic textures didn't help, either (they could use a few more tenors); I was often hard-pressed to distinguish between the various sections. While I enjoyed many of their individual numbers, listening to the entire album at one sitting left an overall impression of blandness. Recording quality is quite good, and the booklet is complete.

KOOB

Strid

Oslo Chamber Choir/ Hakon Daniel Nystedt
2L 73 [SACD] 57 minutes

The title *Strid* (Norwegian for "struggle") sums up the spirit and (partial) intent of this very unusual and oddly fascinating effort from the excellent Oslo Chamber Choir. Over the past 25 years, the ensemble has made a specialty of Norwegian folk music.

But don't let the choir's folk specialty mislead you. This is a first-rate group, capable of singing just about anything well. And they prove it in four pieces that superimpose traditional Norwegian sacred folk songs over unaltered classical choral movements and motets by Rachmaninoff, Grieg, Bruckner, and Tchaikovsky. At first, these numbers tend to strike the ear as musically incongruous—such classical treasures heard mostly as background beneath the plain-voiced folk soloists as they intone their much simpler hymns, complete with the unique vocal swoops and inflections that are the hallmark of the traditional Norwegian style of singing.

And it is in the listener's sometimes vain attempts to reconcile such stylistic conflicts that the "struggle" suggested by the title is found. But, on repeated listening, a certain sweet confluence became apparent to my ears—at least in most of these "odd-couple" pairings—mainly owing to the apparent care that was taken in matching the moods and sacred sentiments of the otherwise disparate musical elements. After a while, my ear began to adjust to the coolly melancholy, spiritually sincere Scandinavian voices washing over familiar choral masterpieces. I was particularly taken by 'O, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus', drifting atop the exquisite Bruckner motet, 'Locus Iste'. And 'My Heart Always Dwells', underscored by the 'Cherubic Hymn' from Tchaikovsky's *Liturgy*, turned out to be a rare treat.

The album's eight remaining selections are devoted exclusively to traditional folk material. Some of the pieces—probably intended for congregational singing in rural churches—sound like Norway's equivalent to America's Sacred Harp or Shape-note traditions, with the entire choir singing in simple folk style. In others, the original solo (or unison choral) melodies are delivered over more sophisticated background arrangements. One of the more complex and effective examples is 'Hallelujah, our Struggle Ends'. I took particular delight in 'The Lost Sheep': a touching sacred song—arranged by conductor Nystedt—that begins with a protracted episode of raucous, cunningly overlapped herding calls from three different Norwegian regions.

But perhaps the greatest pleasure offered

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 219

by this recording is the sheer sonic alchemy of its engineering. I've had the pleasure of covering several of 2L's previous SA hybrid releases (also playable in standard stereo), and they all make for unforgettable listening. Here the evenly-spaced choir is recorded in the round in a church, as if surrounding the congregation; the incredibly rich and detailed sound comes at you from every angle—and the effect is truly magical. The booklet will tell you everything you need to know.

Not everybody will go for this music. But choral fans blessed with adventurous ears and broad musical minds should enjoy it immensely—particularly the SACD sound.

KOOB

Otto Voci: Bleu de Lune

HOSTTETTLER: *Le Rouge-Gorge; Songe d'une Nuit d'Ete; Sable; Le Coquelicot; La Rose;* **GAUDIBERT:** *Intermezzo;* **FALQUET:** *Hirondelles; D'une Tourterelle; L'oiseau-Prophete;* **RICOSSA:** *3 Madrigali Crepuscolari;* **KODALY:** *3 Madrigali Italiani;* **PART:** *2 Beter; Peace Upon You, Jerusalem*

Gallo 1313—57 minutes

Otto Voci is eight voices, all women. They hail from Switzerland and this is their first CD. It's an impressive debut; the voices are youthful and attractive, and technical matters are attended to with commendable skill. Not only do the voices blend nicely, but there's a flair for communication in evidence through a variety of musical styles. The freshness of Michael Hostettler's quartet of 4-part songs reminds me of Hindemith's *Six Chansons*. The Voci attend to their shifting moods with breezy assurance. Best of all are Kodaly's madrigals, which are lush, rich, and full of fun. Expressive story-telling is on display in Part's 'Peace Upon You, Jerusalem', which is as feisty as it is holy. Alas, 'Zwei Beter', Part's evocation of the Book of Luke 18, is interval spinning and not much more. The dissonances that pile up in some of the other works grow wearisome as well.

In the future the group needs to work on the production values of their releases. Luca Ricossa's madrigal set is marred by some audible clicking in the background—an electronic goof that should not have been allowed on an internationally distributed release. The program notes are vague, pretentious blather that is of no help to the listener. And while the annotation is printed in German, French, and English, the texts are given in their original languages only. Only Part's 'Jerusalem' and one stanza from Gaudibert's 'Intermezzo' are in English.

GREENFIELD

Our Lady

LANGLAIS: *Mass, Salve Regina; Ave Maria; Ave Maris Stella;* **DURUFLE:***Tota Pulchra es, Maria;* **HADLEY:** *I Sing of a Maiden;* **GORECKI:** *Totus Tuus;* **BINGHAM:** *Ancient Sunlight;* **BIEBL:** *Ave Maria;* **BRITTEN:** *Hymn to the Virgin;* **PEETERS:** *Toccata, Fugue & Hymn on Ave Maris Stella*

Ruaraidh Sutherland, Thomas Corns, org; Fine Arts Brass, St Mary's Collegiate Church Choir, Warwick/ Thomas Corns

Regent 345—66 minutes

This recording is a musical tribute to Mary, adoration for whom was renewed in the 19th Century; selections come from the 20th Century. It was made in St Mary's Collegiate Church, Warwick; the choir of 18 boys, 22 girls, and 15 men is supported by two organs: a 3-59 Nicholson & Co. (1980) at the west end and a 2-33 Davies (1969), Nicholson (1979) in the transept. The Fine Arts Brass (3 tpt, 5 trb) plays only in the Langlais mass. The combined choirs are heard only in the Gorecki. The largest single piece—Langlais's Mass, premiered at Notre-Dame in 1954—is performed well musically but without the pomp and grandeur one really wants. The tempos are close to the ones from the Westminster Cathedral Choir (MHS 515525, M/A 2000), and both are noticeably faster than the original (and best) recording from Notre-Dame (Haydn Society 9008 or MHS 3745). It was written for a television audience on Christmas Eve, 1954. Langlais calls for congregation, two choirs, two organs, three trumpets, and five trombones. At the rehearsal before the service there were 600 early participants in the congregation. Get the original if you can.

The organ solos are excellent, especially the Peeters setting. I find the girl's choir best overall, with fine balance and blend in the Duruflé and Hadley, though the enunciation should be clearer in the Hadley. The men's choir is not uniformly balanced between parts. The tenors often stand out, and the soloist who opens the Gloria in the Langlais Mass and Biebl's 'Ave Maria' has a tremolo that makes it sound as though he were new to the group and very nervous.

The strangest selection is *Ancient Sunlight* by Judith Bingham. It is in three parts, and we are told that it calls to mind Giotto's frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel, Padua. Hogwash. It seems to go nowhere and includes occasional low Pedal dissonances. I fail to understand why this piece was included in an otherwise quite respectable recording.

METZ

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 220

Pater Noster

Cherubini, Gounod, Verdi, Nicolai, Liszt, Meyerbeer, Tchaikovsky, Janacek
Philharmonia Choir of Stuttgart/ Helmut Wolf
Profil 11003—66 minutes

This is a set of "Our Fathers", ending with Mendelssohn's organ variations on Martin Luther's hymn 'Vater Unser in Himmelreich'. It was recorded in 1988 for Calig (Sept/Oct 1989: 136).

There's wonderful music from start to finish, and most of it is not well known. The two stunners are a gorgeously uplifting 8-part setting from Otto Nicolai and Janacek's 16-minute affair set for solo tenor, harp, organ, and choir. Janacek's undertaking (sung here in German) was inspired by a set of paintings depicting laborers in worship, a jailed penitent, a family in mourning, a bountiful harvest, and the Lord's protection of people at rest. It's a terrific piece that turns the prayer into a discursive mini-oratorio given shape and direction by colorful writing for the soloist. His joyful eruption at "Dein Reich" is the most exciting moment here.

Cherubini, Gounod, and Liszt (an excerpt from his oratorio *Christus*) are the other notables. The choir is very good, but not of the highest caliber. They don't quite get the intense louds and softs required to bring off the Verdi, and there are entrances the soprano section could have used another crack at. The choir could have done a lovely job with Stravinsky's 'Pater Noster'. I wonder why it wasn't included, along with one of the towering readings of the 'Otce Nas' from the Eastern church. (Maybe Rachmaninoff's from his *Liturgy*?) Tchaikovsky's 2-minute work is sung in German and sounds more western than eastern.

Well, enough quibbling about what *isn't* here. This is definitely worth acquiring for what is. Brief English notes are included, along with the text of the prayer in Latin, German, and Italian.

GREENFIELD

The Winchester Tradition

WESLEY: *Ascribe unto the Lord; Thou Wilt Keep him in Perfect Peace;* **WEELKES:** *Hosanna to the Son of David;* **DYSON:** *Morning Service in D; Lauds; Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis in C minor;* **ARCHER:** *Mass, Omnes Sancti; Domum, Dulce Domum;* **CLARKE:***O Jesu, King Most Wonderful;* **HUMPHREY:** *I Sing of a Maiden;* **PROVOST:** *Jubilate Deo;* **COLE:** *A Heart Alone*
Paul Provost, org; Winchester College Choir/ Malcolm Archer—Regent 331—71 minutes

Here's a collection of music written by composers associated with Winchester College from the late 16th Century to the late 20th. The college itself was founded in 1382. Extensive, mostly biographical liner notes for each composer are included along with the texts for every piece. The 41-voice male choir (14-7-9-11) includes one Miss Coralie Ovenden (alto). Winchester has a remarkable history as an ecclesiastical center since the seventh Century A.D. The quality of composers who worked or composed for the choirs may be judged from the names above.

The quieter pieces—Wesley's 'Thou Wilt Keep him', Dyson's Nunc Dimittis, and the Agnus Dei from Archer's *Missa Omnes*—are especially well done and sound most like the traditional English choir. The other selections tend to be sung forcefully. The choir is the loudest I have heard, and whether the reason is dry acoustics or too close miking, I wish they had toned down their enthusiasm.

This disc includes the first recordings of Provost's own *Jubilate Deo* and arrangement of Clarke's *O Jesu*, pieces by Humphrey and Cole, and Archer's *Domum*.

METZ

Shakespeare Inspired

Elgar, Gurney, Parry, Quilter
Michelle Breedt, mz; Nina Schumann, p
Two Pianists 1039077—67 minutes

Here are 28 songs about Shakespeare or settings of his texts from 18 composers, most of them well-known 20th Century British composers. Only a few of the songs are really great ('Sleep' by Ivor Gurney, 'Silent Noon' by Vaughan Williams, 'The Poor Sat Sighing' by Stuart Findlay) but all of them are good to hear and many are seldom heard (e.g. 'Who is Sylvia' by Eric Coates, 'I Know a Bank' by Julius Harrison, and 'Homing' by Teresa del Riego). Several strikingly different paired settings of texts make for engaging listening ('Under the Greenwood Tree' by Walton and Mervyn Horder and 'Take, O Take Those Lips Away' by Parry and Rubbra).

Breedt is a South African singer with good technique that relies heavily on letting phrases trail off, a touch that most of the time works in the service of the song. She has excellent vocal agility, shimmering soft singing, and a wonderful ability to float high notes. Her diction is clear, though some of her "sh" pronunciation sounds like she studied elocution with Sean Connery. Schumann's accompaniment is excellent, and the recorded sound is very present but not too immediate. Here is a chance to discover rare repertoire that will be familiar in style; it's a well-planned program performed with great elegance.

Notes by Breedt and texts included.

R MOORE

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 221

Gre Brouwenstijn

BEETHOVEN: *Ah, Perfido; Arias* from *Freischutz, Tannhauser, Lohengrin, Dutchman, Don Carlo, Trovatore, Forza*

Newton 8802061—70 minutes

The Dutch soprano Gre Brouwenstein (1915-99) was one of those singers whom audiences and record collectors truly seemed to love. I hope Newton's reissue of an old Philips recital will win her some new fans. She seemed personally involved in everything she did, even Beethoven's strange excursion into Italian opera aria—this anonymous protagonist might well be a character one can sympathize with. She was perhaps best known for her lyric Wagner roles (though she recorded only Sieglinde). The arias here allow her to return repeatedly to the warmest, loveliest part of her voice, and the *Tannhauser* and *Lohengrin* excerpts are about as beautiful as you'll ever hear.

The Verdi arias are also stunning, despite some weakness on the bottom. She never had a Tebaldi-like lower range, but her top is secure and radiant, and she knows exactly how to phrase the music. The original recordings were made in the 1950s, with conductors Van Otterloo and Moralt, and still sound fine; and there's more where this came from, so perhaps we can look forward to future reissues. Brouwenstijn seldom visited the recording studio—we know her primarily from a slew of bootleg performances—and what she did should be preserved. Newton supplies notes but no texts.

LUCANO

The Very Best of Placido Domingo

Mozart, Handel, Meyerbeer, Gounod, Massenet, Tchaikovsky, Puccini, Boito, Mascagni, Wagner, Verdi, Strauss Jr, Zeller, Lehar, Guerrero, Sorozabal, Alonso, Rodrigo, J Gade

EMI 48676 [2CD] 149 minutes

Considering the staggering number of Domingo recordings, the very best must surely include far more than what is on these discs! Domingo is quite a versatile artist. Everything here is handsomely sung, and the best tracks demonstrate what all the fuss has been about. 1971-2002 are the years covered.

The first six tracks are Mozart and Handel, composers Domingo doesn't sound quite comfortable with. But if you like Domingo the "baritone", the 'La ci darem' duet with Susan Graham will please you. (Domingo can sing baritone roles without key changes, but he doesn't sound like the real McCoy.) The French selections fare better, and Lensky's aria in passable Russian is lovely. The Puccini and Verdi arias are for the most part beautifully done.

The zarzuela arias and Spanish songs are splendid. Domingo began his performing career in zarzuela; he really has it in his blood. I enjoyed the Viennese excerpts purely as singing, yet Domingo lacks a natural feel for this repertory. In a clever piece of tape editing, the tenor conducts himself in the *Night in Venice* aria that ends the collection.

There's plenty Grade A Domingo here—enough to indicate what makes him so special. Domingo buffs will want this even if they own most of the recordings the tracks are taken from. No texts or translations.

MARK

Jardin Nocturne

Songs by Poulenc, Halphen, Massenet, Chausson, Fauré, Hahn

Isabelle Druet, s; Johanne Ralambondrainy, p

Aparte 13—68 minutes

The relative newcomer Isabelle Druet is no slouch, given her credentials and the awards she has racked up. So why does she sound like such a slouch in this interesting program of French songs?

Part of it is her approach. She sings Poulenc as if he were Palestrina. Her voice comes off as far too thin, far too "white", for the music at hand. Sometimes she really comes through, but it doesn't happen enough.

Part of it, too, is the uncomplimentary recording venue, which colors everything with a brassy, metallic tinge. No one could sound her best under such conditions, though her accompanist, Johanne Ralmbondrainy, comes off splendidly, her piano sounding rich and full.

There must be more to Ms Druet than meets the ear on this album. Let's hope we hear it on her next one.

BOYER

The Ballad Singer

Beethoven, Loewe, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wolf, Mahler

Gerald Finley, bar; Julius Drake, p

Hyperion 67830—71 minutes

Here are 14 songs, nine by the leading 19th Century German masters and five less-often heard (aside from Sullivan's 'Lost Chord'). Defining what exactly constitutes a "ballad" is not easy, but Richard Wigmore in his excellent notes points out that the genre originated in the Middle Ages as a dance-song sung by street musicians that dealt with sensational, ghoulish, and supernatural themes and evolved into how it is generally understood today: "simply a popular song in (usually) a slow tempo. Sentiment still rules."

There are so many extraordinarily fine baritones singing today that it is impossible to

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 222

name one as "best", but clearly Finley is in the handful of the elite—and one of the three or four baritones most desirable for this literature. He delivers a highly dramatic reading of Loewe's 'Edward' that surpasses the settings of either Schubert or Brahms. He captures both the energy and the mystery of the text in Wolf's 'Der Feuerreiter', and Drake brings great fire and drama to the song. In Schubert's 'Erlkonig' he does not offer very subtle distinction between voices, though it is still a fine performance. The emotional investment in these songs is very convincing without going over the top, whether it is in the humor of Beethoven's song of the flea ('Aus Goethe's Faust'), Cole Porter's sardonic 'The Tale of the Oyster', Mahler's haunting setting of a girl's encounter with the specter of her soldier sweetheart ('Wo die Schonen Trompeten Blasen') or Stanford's setting of 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' of Keats. The oddest item here is Cyril Scott's arrangement of 'Lord Randall' that sets an altered version of the text leading to some odd pronunciation, with "my" sometimes pronounced "mah".

The team of Finley and Drake continues to produce some of the finest recordings of songs. Both artists are at the top of their game. Hyperion's characteristically fine sound and intelligent program notes add to the picture. Texts and translations.

R MOORE

Mirella Freni

Adriana, Boheme, Tosca, Turandot, Carmen, Manon, Aida, Figaro, Onegin
Munich Radio Orchestra/ Kurt Eichhorn, Vladimir Ghiaurov
BR 900303—60 minutes

Nicolai Ghiaurov

Faust, Jolie Fille de Perth, Sadko, Life for the Tsar, Aleko, Boris, Boccanegra, Don Carlo, Barber, Much Ado About Nothing
Munich Radio Orchestra/ Georges Pretre, Alfredo Antonini
BR 900304—56 minutes

The Munich Radio Orchestra began its series of Sunday concerts in 1952, and at first they played mostly "light classics". With the coming of conductor Kurt Eichhorn, the emphasis shifted more toward opera, and in the past six decades there was no shortage of great singers willing to perform in Munich. The Freni collection comes from three concerts, given in 1971, 1983, and 1987. The program begins and ends with Adriana's 'Io Son l'Umile Ancella', first from 1971 and then from 1987, and it's a marvel that the voice remained so consistent over the years. The earlier performances are of more lyrical material: Puccini, and arias for Micaela and Manon. In later years, Freni tackled heavier roles, like Aida, and she also (with the encouragement of Ghiaurov, her second husband) turned to the Russian repertory. Tatiana's 14-minute letter scene must have been the centerpiece of the 1987 broadcast. Fans of Freni will already be familiar with her recordings of this and the other items here, so there's really nothing new, but it's still a pleasure to hear her, even in such familiar fare.

Ghiaurov's programs (1966, 1969) were a little more adventurous. In 1966 he sang the full Coronation Scene from *Boris*, with chorus; and in 1969, arias from *Sadko, A Life for the Tsar,* and *Aleko*, sung in Russian to an audience that most likely had been unfamiliar with the music. The Sunday concerts had clearly come a long way. Ghiaurov leavened his programs with more popular arias from *Faust* (a very extroverted Mephistopheles), *Boccanegra*, and *Don Carlo*, and a really hammy 'La Calunnia' from *Barber*—he seemed to enjoy playing to the Munich audience. A real rarity is an aria by the Russian composer Tichon Khrennikov (1913-2007), a drinking song from the opera *Much Ado About Nothing*. It was apparently an encore, and the audience loved it. Ghiaurov was at his best in the 60s, though he sometimes seemed to be all voice and no heart. Audiences would bring out the best in him, and he really does seem involved in the *Faust* arias and the *Aleko* monolog, though the heartbreak of the great arias for Fiesco and King Philip is rather muted and impersonal. Still, what a voice this was, and what a pleasure to hear it in its prime!

The sound is of excellent broadcast quality for both programs, and the audiences are remarkably quiet. Applause intrudes only once or twice.

LUCANO

Fete Galante

Fauré, Ravel, Debussy, Poulenc, Honegger, Vuillermoz
Karina Gauvin, s, Marc-Andre Hamelin, p
ATMA 2642—66 minutes

One of Canada's most accomplished sopranos is joined by one of that country's most remarkable pianists in this lovely collection of French song. One could have wished for a slightly more prominent role for Mr Hamelin, considering the importance of the piano parts and his talents, but the balances are more than acceptable. There can be no question of Ms Gauvin's stunning singing, which, from the most powerful fortissimo to the most delicately spun pianissimo, is all that anyone could hope or wish for. In a crowded field of French songs albums, this one stands out.

BOYER

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 223

Long Island Songs

CIPULLO: *Long Island Songs;* **BRUNNER:** *3 Japanese Songs;* **PHILLIPS:** *4 Broadway songs;* **MCLEER:** *3 Light Pieces; Longing Eternal Bliss*

Monica Harte, s; Tom Cipullo, Noby Ishida, Anne Dinsmore Phillips, Christian McLeer, p

MSR 1310—48 minutes

Halte's voice seems disconnected from its core—sometimes it sounds as if she's trying to force it to make up for its light weight; her diction is mushy in the classical pieces and her phrasing square, though in Tom Cipullo's 'Invocation' the dynamics are well done. She's often flat. Cipullo's *Long Island Songs* are pretty good, and George Brunner's settings are exquisite and sad, though the sparse textures in Western settings of Asian poetry is becoming a predictable gimmick.

Anne Dinsmore Phillips's four songs are musically shallow (I suppose some would call them simple and melodic, but I've heard more intricate Southern Gospel songs); there's much better Broadway stuff out there—Jason Robert Brown's *Last Five Years*, for instance. In the first of Christian McLeer's *Three Light Pieces*, there is a narrated part about someone's brother's butt catching on fire on a camping trip—the dad trying to put it out with his beer and the sibling comparing it to a firefly are hilarious, especially the childish whispering of the word "butt"—but even here, her diction is too vague. Notes and texts are in English; passable sound.

ESTEP

Come Away, Death

Korngold, Plagge, Sibelius, Ratkje, Finzi, Moussorgsky

Marianne Beata Kielland, mz; Sergei Osadchuk, p

2L 64 [SACD] 64 minutes

Here is a recording that really reaches out and grabs you. With state-of-the-art sound and challenging programming, this is a deeply satisfying album. The title comes from Shakespeare's 'Come Away, Death' sung by the clown in *Twelfth Night*, and it includes three very different settings of the text (Korngold, Sibelius, Finzi). Wolfgang Plagge's riveting *Sodergrang Songs* (1960) makes demands on the artists as well as the listeners. The most unusual and thorny work is *HVIL* (Rest) composed in 2008 by Maja Solveig Kjelstrup Ratkje and Aasne Linnesta, an avant-garde plea from the earth to humanity to slow down and care for this fragile planet. The text, untranslatable into English, is a guttural cry of anguish and despair that speaks to the soul at a level deeper than its curious words (e.g. "Cu cu mu lus humilis cumulus hum… Solkasterbranner ...Hvil. Alt. Er"). It is as though the whole earth speaks with one voice that draws syllables from various tongues. This work makes extreme demands on the singer and pianist. The program concludes with Moussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death*.

Kielland sang the premiere of *HVIL* at the Nordlande Musikkfestuke, Bodo in 2008 and gives a bravura performance here of this challenging 20-minute work. Her voice has enough of a Slavic timbre to sound right for the Moussorgsky songs, and she sings them with considerable authority. She is a strong interpreter of 18th Century music (e.g. her Naxos 557621 recording of Bach cantatas), and she made me wonder the first time I heard her recording of *Wiederstehe doch der Sunde* if I was listening to a countertenor. Her voice is very distinctive, exceptionally clear, and highly expressive.

With superb sound and outstanding performances this most imaginative program is a remarkable tour-de-force and deserves a wide audience. Notes in English, texts in Norwegian, English, and transliterated Russian.

R MOORE

Paul Martyn-West

Warlock, Moeran, Stern

Nigel Foster, p

Diversions 24152—69 minutes

Here are 37 songs by three 20th Century British composers—13 by Ernest John Moeran, 16 by Warlock, and seven by Geoffrey Stern (1935-2005). Warlock's songs are the best of the lot.

The program begins with Moeran's arrangements of *Six Folksongs from Norfolk* (1923) and continues with *Seven Poems of James Joyce* (1929) including 'Strings in the Earth and Air', the title used to market this program. Warlock's *Candlelight—A Cycle of Nursery Jingles* (1923) is a collection of 12 little gems, most of them less than a minute long. His Three Songs (1916-17) and 'The Fox' (1930) are particularly delicious. Stern was a friend of Martyn-West, and the style of the songs heard here (*Three Wordsworth Songs* of 1953 and *Four Songs of James Joyce* of 2001-5) is very much in the tradition of Moeran and Warlock.

Martyn-West's voice is a classic—almost generic—English choir tenor, closer to the sound of Gilchrist and Kennedy than Padmore; it's a sweet, gentle voice without much variety of color or dynamics from song to song—other than mimicking the voice of an old woman in Warlock's 'There Was an Old Woman" and he never really sings louder than (*mf*). It is, nevertheless, a truly lovely voice that is well suited to these songs. Foster is an able and responsive collaborator.

Notes and texts included.

R MOORE

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 224

Aga Mikolaj

Cosi, Figaro, Don Giovanni, Capriccio, Ariadne; 4 Last Songs

Cologne Radio/ Karl Sollak
CPO 777 641—67 minutes

This appears to be a transcription of a radio broadcast by Radio Cologne. Aga Mikolaj is a native of Poland and a new name to me. After initial studies in Posen, she was accepted in the master classes of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf in Austria. But, unlike her mentor's many recordings, her diction here is poor. In the *Four Last Songs* she sings the notes well but lacks expression and color. These wonderful songs have been, I dare say, over-recorded, with the result that a young singer like Mikolaj has very little to say about them that Schwarzkopf, Della Casa, Fleming, Te Kanawa, and others haven't already said, with deeper insights and greater expressivity as well as more beautiful voices.

This also applies to the four Mozart arias; these are some of the best known of that composer's prodigious output. Mikolaj sings them well; but, again, her performances don't stand out in a crowded field. The least known selection here is the final scene from Strauss's *Capriccio*—also a Schwarzkopf specialty. Mikolaj is evidently familiar with her recording, and she does fairly well in her own way; but Schwarzkopf, Te Kanawa, and others have colored the words better, with more insight and deeper emotional involvement.

The WDR Orchestra, directed by Karl Sollak (also a new name to me) supports the soloist well. Texts and translations.

MOSES

Camilla Nylund

Lohengrin, Tannhäuser, Walküre, Tristan, Arabella, Daphne, Ariadne, Salome

Tampere Philharmonic/ Hannu Lintu
Ondine 1168—73 minutes

Camilla Nylund is a Finnish soprano now active primarily in European opera houses who is scheduled to sing the role of Elsa in next season's *Lohengrin* in San Francisco. As it happens, 'Elsa's Dream' is the first selection here. Her voice seems ample but it's quite wobbly; and while she has good diction, there's not much expression. That is true in many of the selections. Also, her voice, while strong and in some respects appealing, lacks warmth and tonal beauty. Her lack of control and steadiness appear also in Elisabeth's two arias from *Tannhäuser*, at the climax of Sieglinde's narrative 'Der Männer Sippe' (Act 1 of *Die Walküre*) and even at the beginning of Isolde's Liebestod. Clearly, Nylund has little control over this flaw in her singing.

The longest excerpt here is the final scene from *Salome*, starting with 'Es ist kein Laut zu vernehmen'. Nylund has the vocal strength for the music but she still struggles in a few spots.

The Tampere Philharmonic sounds impressive, and Lintu's conducting is quite competent. Texts and translations.

MOSES

Apres un Reve

Strauss, Fauré, Mendelssohn, Chausson, Bouchot, Poulenc, Britten

Sandrine Piau, s; Susan Manoff, p
Naive 5250—59 minutes

This enchanting program presents 25 songs related to the night and dreams. Notes by Agnes Terrier offer general information about the composers. An introductory comment by Piau and Manoff suggests what they have in mind: "In the beginning is the night, the cradle of our childhood terrors, peopled with creatures as fearsome as they are fascinating...in that magical region where everything is possible."

Having established herself with great distinction in early music, Piau has been expanding her repertoire—and doing so very well. The program begins with sublime readings of three Strauss songs. It is refreshing to hear them sung with such tenderness by a sylphlike voice. Spectacular technique, stunning phrasing, and spot-on tonal accuracy are evident at every turn. She captures equally well the dreaminess of Poulenc's 'C' and the manic nimbleness of 'Fetes Galantes'.

The most unusual and welcome inclusion here is Vincent Bouchot's setting of Morgenstern's demented *Galgenlieder* (Gallows Songs) with its surreal images (e.g. "The Man and Woman in the Moon lie howling on their knees, howling to show their teeth to the sulphurous hyena"). The program concludes with three Britten songs, where her English, with its slighting of consonant sounds, is almost understandable without following the texts. Her singing of 'The Salley Gardens' is wonderful, but the album ends enigmatically with the nearly unaccompanied 'I Wonder as I Wander'.

The one low point of the program is her singing of the title song 'Apres un Reve', Fauré's magical setting of an anonymous poem translated by Romain Bussine about a dream of meeting a dead lover in heaven and wishing to return to this dream state after waking. At 2:07—possibly the fastest reading on record—it feels rushed and misses the magic.

Nearly everything here is first rate. Manoff is Piau's frequent accompanist and is also excellent. The recorded sound is outstanding, with just the right resonance. This is one of the most engaging vocal releases of recent years. I can hardly wait for her recital in Boston this season that will include much of this music.

Texts and translations.

R MOORE

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 225

Mostly Americana

Jennifer Poffenberger, s; Lori Piitz, p
Enharmonic 12—66 minutes

What a pity that this album, which can boast Ms Poffenberger's clear, lyric soprano and an attractive program of American music that includes several lovely songs by *American Record Guide's* own Mark Lehman, is so badly let down by the engineering. The sound is distant, tubby, hiss-filled, and marred by different perspectives from the various recording sessions. Even the finest voice singing the greatest music could not overcome sound this bad.

BOYER

Hermann Prey

Cornelius, Pfitzner, Fortner, Brahms, Strauss
Günther Weissenborn, p
Hänssler 93713—54 minutes

This documents Prey's recital at the Schwetzingen Festival on May 15, 1963. The program is an interesting one: four songs from Cornelius's *Lord's Prayer* cycle; four Eichendorff settings by Pfitzner; four Hölderin songs by Wolfgang Fortner; and finally three of Brahms and two of Strauss. The last five are well known; the others are not. But the rarities make a fine impression. The Cornelius pieces are warmly romantic, while Pfitzner's are often dark and expressive, in style more like Wolf than Pfitzner's 20th Century contemporaries. The Hölderin songs are early works of Fortner (1907-87); they were composed in 1933-34, before he was drawn into the Nazi movement. After the war he was associated with the Darmstadt group and taught at Detmold and Freiburg. His style in these songs is post-tonal, but supple and singable; they too are very effective.

Prey was in excellent voice back in 1963. I've always felt his voice sounded a bit congested and cottony; but he sang with great authority, and his top notes could be thrilling, e.g. in Strauss's 'Befreit'. I've also felt (does anyone agree with me on this?) that almost all of his singing seemed to be on the underside of the pitch—not really flat, but placed a hair too low. In any case this malady is minimal here. I don't think I've heard him sound better. I do remember Prey as something of a rival to Fischer-Dieskau, who was born in 1925, four years before Prey. I had lost track, though, and did not realize Prey died in 1998.

Expert accompaniments from Weissenborn (though he commits a blunder in Brahms's 'Wie Melodien'). The 1963 sonics are excellent for the period. Texts in German and English.

ALTHOUSE

Timothy Richards

Traviata, Rigoletto, Ballo, Macbeth, Tabarro, Boheme, Turandot, Forza, Tosca
Minsk Orchestra/ Wilhelm Keitel
MDG 909 1664—[SACD] 51 minutes

Welsh tenor Timothy Richards's performances of well-known arias face loads of stiff CD competition. He has a noticeable baritonal timbre, especially in mid-range. The voice is certainly attractive, but there's not much variety of expression to his singing. Each of the tracks is pretty much like the others, and the sluggish conducting is no doubt partly responsible. Keitel's takes on the *Traviata* and *Macbeth* preludes and the *Forza* overture are more of the same. No texts or translations.

MARK

Storyteller

Mary Elizabeth Southworth, s; Philip Amalong, p
Southworth 0—58 minutes
(CD Baby, 800-BUYMYCD)

People who attend faculty concerts in the regions outside our largest cities know there are many accomplished musicians (and actors, for that matter) who have never, and will never, become famous. There are many reasons for that, though it probably comes down to the limited number of reasonable, full-time positions compared to the remarkable pool of available talent.

The citizens of Cincinnati are probably familiar with one such case, soprano Mary Elizabeth Southworth, heard here in a self-produced concept album that is neatly described by its creator thus: "I have always been drawn to music with evocative images, emotions, and stories. [...] Ordering the selections into an unusual sequence [permitted]...characters [that] could be more readily defined, circumstances more expressly detailed, and closure created for pieces that lacked tidy endings."

It's an interesting idea, and while Ms Southworth discusses the individual selections in her notes to the album, in the end it is difficult to say what it is that binds these songs together. In a personal communication to the author, she expressed her regret that not every number from this program, which she has performed many times in concert, could be included because of roadblocks thrown up by some copyright holders. Perhaps these missing elements would have made things clearer, but it remains at the very least a varied and attractive program. We hear songs and arias from such disparate sources as Poulenc, Menotti, and Walton; works from the stage that approach the operatic like Sondheim's 'Greenfinch and Linnet Bird'; and even spoken readings from *The Great Gatsby* and Paul Lawrence

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 226

Dunbar's 'Sympathy' ("I know why the caged bird sings").

Ms Southworth's resume is a key to what one can expect to hear from her. She has sung Gretel in Humperdinck's opera, as well as the solo in Mahler's Fourth Symphony. Indeed, were I the conductor of an orchestra looking for a soprano who could convey the child-like sweetness needed for that work but who had the vocal heft to compete with Mahler's orchestra, Ms Southworth would be near the top of my list. Hers is a sweet, pure, lyric voice that reminds one in many ways of Heidi Grant Murphy. Heard in the more popular numbers like the Sondheim, it is a young Joan Morris who comes to mind. Indeed, she tosses off the Sondheim and Jules Styne's 'I Said No' so ably that it is she, rather than Ms Morris, the author would rather hear. Still, though she is perfectly at ease in the popular idiom, it is the field of art song and opera where one hopes future encounters with her will be made.

The production is greatly aided by pianist Philip Amalong's contributions, and by the excellent engineering that allows both to be heard to full advantage in a spacious, natural perspective.

Let us not close without a few quibbles. There are no texts. Since everything is sung in clear English, that is no great loss, but they would still have been handy. Ms Southworth also announces the title of each spoken reading, which detracts from the natural flow of one number to the next. It makes the spoken readings sound slightly out of place, though they are well rendered.

Finally, our soprano adopts the current trend of including extended acknowledgements. There is no harm in this, but she uses up two pages of space that might have been devoted to more extensive notes. Further, they start to get a bit personal, ending with a gush of affection for her husband and children that would inspire in any boy of seven years a distinct feeling of yuckiness—and inspires in a certain boy of 47 years just a twinge of jealousy. Ms Southworth, you see, is an *exceedingly* lovely woman, something made clear by the numerous photographs by Ethan Hahn that grace the booklet.

BOYER

WORD POLICE: Notoriety

People confuse this word with "fame". In a magazine article about writers, it said, "They write because they enjoy it and because it gives them notoriety within the industry, which certainly helps with career advancement." Notoriety would not help their careers! It is a bad reputation--unfavorable fame. ("Within" is also wrong in that sentence.)

Frederica Von Stade

Duets
Judith Blegen, s; Charles Wadsworth, p
Sony 78514—42 minutes

Song Recital
Martin Katz, p—Sony 78516—54 minutes

Italian Opera Arias
National Arts Center Orchestra/ Mario Bernardi
Sony 78518—51 minutes

MAHLER: *orchestral songs*
London Philharmonic/ Andrew Davis
Sony 78517—41 minutes

FAURE: *songs*
Jean-Philippe Collard, p—EMI 94425

Sony continues to reissue old titles from their RCA and Columbia stock at their original LP length, using the notes and album art that first accompanied them. In our last issue we discussed several 1960s era recordings of Shirley Verrett. This time we have four 1970s albums of Frederica von Stade, plus one unrelated rerelease from EMI. No texts are included for any of these releases.

From 1975 we have an album of duets with soprano Judith Blegen, accompanied by Charles Wadsworth. In some ways having Ms Blegen along is to Ms Von Stade's detriment, because she grabs our attention. Our mezzo certainly does nothing less than good, but Ms Blegen has the more lovely voice and, perhaps more important, a certain "way with a song" that her colleague lacks. Mr Wadsworth's contributions are slightly recessed, though not uncomfortably so, and the whole effort is blessed by satisfactory sound.

Two albums from 1978 follow. First is a song recital covering everything from John Dowland to Carol Hall (b 1939). The balance between the soprano and the accompanist, in this case Martin Katz, is somewhat more realistic; though the sound, which is perfectly clear for the mezzo, is for the piano rather gritty. Ms Von Stade sings beautifully, but one wishes for a bit more involvement, a bit more characterization. Of note are the editions used for Dowland's 'Come Again' and Liszt's 'Oh! Quand je Dors'. The latter has a short introduction unfamiliar to me, while the former sounds more like an 18th Century arrangement than a genuine 16th Century lute song.

The second entry from 1978 is an album of Italian opera arias that avoids the "best of" and "world's favorite" cliches, instead offering lesser known fare by Rossini and Leoncavallo, as well as selections by Giovanni Paisiello (1740-1816) and Riccardo Broschi (1698-1756). Ms Von Stade is again her professional but detached self, while Mario Bernardi and the

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 227

National Arts Center Orchestra supply vigorous support.

Last of the Sony recordings is a 1979 album of Mahler's orchestral lieder in stunning analog sound. The clarity and depth is remarkable, and the engineers are to be commended for making Mahler the real star of the show rather than our singer, who comes off, to her credit, as just one more instrument at the composer's disposal. In a note accompanying this album, our editor complained of the singer's thin, insipid sound, though he found the five *Ruckert Lieder* that close the recording better. I must confess that too often Ms Von Stade does sound dull and even boring, but the *Ruckert Lieder* indeed come off splendidly.

Finally, we have a 1982 recording of Fauré songs, accompanied by Jean-Philippe Collard. The sound is excellent, the balances realistic, and the singer seems to have matured a bit, for she sings with more conviction. Either that, or French song suits her better. Perhaps it's a bit of both.

BOYER

Till Solveig...

Grieg, Rangstrom, Sibelius, Debussy
Karen Vourc'h, s; Susan Manoff, p
Aparte 2—55 minutes

Karen Vourc'h has one those biographies that makes one do a double take. Does it really say she graduated from the Ecole Normale Superieure with a degree in *physics*? This is the most arresting fact about a young singer since we read that Isabel Bayrakdarian took an honors degree in biomedical engineering from the University of Toronto.

In any case, Ms Vourc'h is a formidable young talent. There are performers who have such an ability to convey the best in music that they allow us to enjoy composers to whom we otherwise have little affinity. Grieg's songs, I must confess, have always left me a bit cold, but Ms Vourc'h makes them come alive in a way that no other singer does. She makes the Nordic idiom of Grieg, Rangstrom, and Sibelius entirely her own, making one wish she had found another ten or 20 minutes of like music (which, after all, we know is there) to fill out the running time of the album.

Even the five songs by Debussy that close the album, seemingly at odds with the 15 Nordic songs the precede them, are sung in such a way as to make their inclusion perfectly natural.

Ms Vourc'h is ably accompanied by Susan Manoff, whose contributions are captured in vivid, detailed sound.

BOYER

The Newest Music

DENNEHY: *Gra Agus Bas; That the Night Come*
Iarla O Lionaird, vocals; Dawn Upshaw, s; Crash Ensemble/ Alan Pierson
Nonesuch 527063—59 minutes

ROBERTS: *The Avocatus Suite Part I*
Elisabeth Toye, s; Michael L Roberts, p
Nota Bene 25—42 minutes

Terminal Velocity

GORDON: *Yo Shakespeare;* **ANDRIESSEN arr. POKE:** *De Snelheid;* **BRYARS:** *The Archangel Trip;* **LE GASSICK:** *Evol;* **LANG:** *Slow Movement*
Icebreaker
Cantaloupe 21031—75 minutes

LA BERGE: *Drive; Brokenheart; ur_DU; Away; 800 Speakers*
Anne La Berge, voice, fl, electronics; Misha Myers, Josh Geffin, Amy Walker, Stephie Buttrich, Patrick Ozzard-Low, voice; Cor Fuhler, p
New World 80717—76 minutes

BAIN: *Music of the Primes; Butterfly Effect; Chaos Game (For Nancarrow); God Does Not Play Dice!; When Inspiration Came; Language of the Angels; Strange Attractors & Logarithmic Spirals; Pi Day*
Centaur 3089—53 minutes

GABER: *In Memoriam 2010*
Innova 243—64 minutes

Quartet for the End of Space

NORT: *Outer; Inner;* **BRAASCH:** *Web Doppelganger; Snow Drifts;* **LOPEZ:** *Untitled 270, 273;* **OLIVEROS:** *Mercury Retrograde; Cyber Talk*
Pogus 21059—70 minutes
(50 Ayr Rd, Chester NY 10918)

LIGETI, L: *Without Prior Warning; On Patterned Time; Timelessnesses; From the Ground Up; Translucent Dusk; A Hook in the Sky; Tunnels Alight*
Benoit Delbecq, p; Gianni Gebbia, sax; Aly Keita, balafon; Michael Manring, electric bass; Lukas LIgeti, perc, toy balafon
Innova 732—56 minutes

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 228

AKIHO: *Hadairo-Beige; Kiiro-Yellow; Murasaki-Purple; Aka-Red; Karakurenai-Crimson; Daidai Iro-Orange; To Walk or Run in West Harlem; The Ray's End; No One to Know One; 21*

Andy Akiho, steel drums
Innova 801—62 minutes

Marimba Commissions 1

WUORINEN: *Marimba Variations;* **BURHANS:** *Lullaby for Madeline;* **SAPERSTEIN:** *Marimba Solo I-III*

Payton MacDonald
Equilibrium 104—31 minutes

BARBER, S: *Chanson Rond Point; Conversatio Morum I+II; Marbles; Elvis & Annabelle I-III; Multiple Points of View of a Fanfare I+II; Quartet I; Les Mots; The Killing*

Lucy Schaufer, s; Stephen Barber, p; Darren Dyke, steel drums; Tosca Strings; The Boiler Makers; Meridian Arts Ensemble; American Repertory Ensemble

Navona 5850—51 minutes

BECK: *In Flight Until Mysterious Night; Sonata 2; In February; Gemini; Slow Motion; Third Delphic Hymn; September Music*

IonSound
Innova 797—69 minutes

GALBRAITH: *Other Sun; Traverso Mistico; Island Echoes; Night Train*

Stephen Schultz, electric fl; Barney Culver, Simon Cummings, Ben Munoz, Tate Olsen, Nicole Myers, electric vc; William Yanesh, p, hpsi; Brandon Schantz, Marcus Kim, Brandan Kelly, Zachary Larimer, Andrew Wright, perc; Carnegie Mellon Contemporary Ensemble/ Walter Morales

Centaur 3106—54 minutes

Awake

GREENSTEIN: *Change;* **FRIAR:** *Velvet Hammer;* **MAZZOLI:** *Magic with Everyday Objects;* **DANCIGERS:** *Burst;* **CROWELL:** *Waiting in the Rain for Snow;* **BURKE:** *Awake*

NOW Ensemble
New Amsterdam 29—52 minutes

Pianos in The Kitchen

GLASS: *Third Series Part 4 (Mad Rush);* **MONK:** *Travelling; Paris;* **PALESTINE:** *Evolution of a Sonority in Strumming & Arpeggio Style (exc);* **DAVIS:** *A Walk Through the Shadow;* **JARRETT:** *Ritual for Piano (exc);* **BUDD:** *Preludes for Solo Piano (exc)*

Orange Mountain 70—57 minutes

Donnacha Dennehy's opening to *Gra Agus Bas* is warm and annoying at the same time. Iarla O Lionaird's vocals are strong and clear, singing in the sean-nos tradition of Ireland, while pure and tempered scales interact around him. The Crash Ensemble busily plays around the singer, weaving motives derived from the sung parts in with new material. Because of the dual tunings, strange clashes occur in the background, but I found them enjoyable. There are great moments where the ensemble bolsters the vocals and the melody lines soar gracefully over a tonally supportive accompaniment. The last several minutes there is a rush to a cacophonous climax with whirling winds, percussive brass, and straining strings. Dennehy's settings of Yeats poems in the 6 movements of *That the Night Come* range from the lush and pastoral tones of 'He Wishes his Beloved Were Dead' to the eclectic, quirky language in 'These are the Clouds'. 'White Birds' begins with devilish mystery but unveils its beauty in the second half as soprano Dawn Upshaw sings over several different, repeated motives. Each piece is reverent in its treatment of Yeats while exploring rhythmic punctuations and, most often, layered, repeated patterns.

In 2003, Michael Roberts survived a prolonged and life-threatening illness. His distress was compounded by the passing of two dear friends as well. *The Avocatus Suite Part I*, his response to the events in his life, is lyrically and musically somber. The moods are dark, but more transient and humbled before the fragility of the human condition than wallowing. Roberts uses a chromatic language with jazz inflections and improvisation. The block chords in 'The Last Corridor' intermingle with brief moments of repose and a stunning, simple vocal line at the end. Elisabeth Toye's soprano is gentle, clear, and mournful. High voice sections as in 'The Deserted Star' have light accompaniment, and she is never piercing. 'Arrogance, Be My Friend' has a distinctly different mood, its driving bass giving way to triplets. It would be the best track on the album were it not for the confused ending. 'Avocatus', instead, is given the title for its return to the simplicity begun in the program's opener. The harmonic language is softer, but still emotionally burdened.

Icebreaker's performances are heavy and energetic. Even Gavin Bryars's slow-moving, tonal *Archangel Trip* has zest. The punch and snap of the percussion beneath the soprano saxophone in *Archangel Trip* are nothing compared to the romping, overblown runs in Damian Le Gassick's *Evol*. Intensely syncopated and displaced lines disrupt the sense of time, and the themes are quickly passed to and between instruments. Icebreaker's take on Michael Gordon's *Yo Shakespeare* falls victim to its recording environment. The piece is too loud, and instruments and articulations are lost. The electric guitar wails but is entirely apart from the ensemble and dynamics reach a plateau too early. The glacial, droning *Slow Movement* by David Lang is the program closer and high point. The mass of sound, the jumble

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 229

of colors, and the concentration on electronic instrumentation makes for a splendid prolongation.

Anne La Berge's electronic compositions are more like stories with improvisations. *Drive* includes a lengthy narrative from a woman with a southern accent with rapid-fire electronic pulses in the background. *Brokenheart* also includes a narrative but then dives into wild oscillations and high pitches over pulsating hums. A 19-tone octave is the basis for *Away*, and specific instructions guide the performer in *ur_DU*. These facts are secondary to the actual experience of listening to the program, which was far from enjoyable for me.

Reginald Bain's program, like La Berge's, contains many pieces using Max/MSP for its programming language. Prime numbers, the Fibonacci sequence, chaos theory, and fractals are all inspirations for him. *The Music of the Primes* sounds like a straightforward electronic beat with emerging pedal tones under it. *Butterfly Effect* has a performer interact with the equation for the Doppler effect to create changing glissando textures while soft tones ebb and flow in the background. The program finally comes alive with the third work, *Chaos Game (For Nancarrow)*. Two musical lines weave around and through each other while undergoing constant phasing. The harmonic language shifts as well, while the rampant percussion, especially the triangle, ground the listener. Dripping faucets and the logistic equation are the basis for *When Inspiration Came*. It begins with promise, creating melodies from the naturally occurring sounds of faucet drips, but the faucet is given no help from other sounds except the same sort of wind-swept, washed out pedals Bain uses in every piece.

Harley Gaber's 64-minute *In Memoriam 2010*, like Bain's program, lacks a variety of sounds. The first 25 minutes are filled with bubbling, garbled pulses and filtered feedback that rises and falls in pitch. There isn't enough sound for it to be a noise piece, and there is too much motion for it to fit as a drone, leaving the hour-long work an ethereal ambience where the listener follows the airy, hollow electronics through lengthy sections and a gradual, steady decrescendo.

The *Quartet for the End of Space* comprises extensive evolutions of the four composers playing together on several different occasions both at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and the Deep Listening Institute. Doug Van Nort's *Outer* and *Inner* are slow to emerge and reveal themselves. *Inner* seems to be manipulations of mostly vocal sounds, but the effects make it hard to pinpoint the source. *Outer* floats in a sonic bog before turning up the volume and throwing in heavy clip distortion and bit crushing. The two untitled tracks by Francisco Lopez offer more activity to the listener's ears while retaining the same detached, underwater sound Nort uses. Electrical hisses punctuate before becoming pedals, and soft squeaks play detached themes. *Mercury Retrograde* by Pauline Oliveros moves much closer to traditional music because it includes many instruments and she wants the listener to be able to recognize them. This is in direct contrast to the busy, shuffling *Cyber Talk*. With pitch shifts, cuts, crinkles, and lots of Doppler effect, *Cyber Talk* is extremely busy and contains many layers.

Lukas Ligeti continues to write hip percussion based music oozing with style and new sounds. The entire album explores polymetrics and, sometimes, layers of different time signatures as well. Apparently, Ligeti keeps track of where he is in extended beats and what signature he is in not by counting bars but with the choreography of his limbs. *On Patterned Time* is quirky, jerky, and immersive. The seemingly unconnected parts are glued together so tangentially that it can be difficult to hear the piece as one ensemble playing cohesively. All the puzzle pieces do, of course, fit somehow; and the results of this feat entranced me. The balafon and saxophone give range and color to the experimental ensemble. The thorough exploration of polymetrics and the Afro-jazz nature of the tracks means there are few straight-ahead sections to enjoy where cohesion and ensemble playing is simple. On the other hand, with the variety of rhythms, patterns, and downbeats, there is always something new to discover.

I find it very difficult to listen to an hour of steel drum music. The obtrusive timbre is jarring in any ensemble, and I can rarely divorce the instrument's sound from island images in my mind. Andy Akiho's program is centered around it. Whole tone scales, jazzy interludes, prepared steel drums, and full ensemble accompaniment are all used in the mostly diatonic program. *To Walk or Run In West Harlem* is highly chromatic, with rough cello bowing, but the piece uses prepared vibraphone rather than steel drum for its mallet percussion. The compositions certainly have merit, with the trumpet, violin, steel drum trio in *The Ray's End* standing out as particularly memorable with its subtle dynamic changes, ostinato, and the weaving of motives among the instruments.

Super Marimba II, by Payton MacDonald, is still one of my favorite albums that I have reviewed. His latest effort, a collection of solo marimba commissions, removes the technological effects and concentrates on exploring the instrument's wooden sounds. His performance is strong and he displays a large range of dynamics and impeccable rhythmic preci-

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 230

sion. *Lullaby for Madeline*, by Caleb Burhans, is filled with gently rolled chords and expressive arpeggios that push and pull the tempo. Rolls dominate I of David Saperstien's *Marimba Solo*, becoming points of return after rising lines as well as slow, separated pieces of a melody. The finale's quickness points out MacDonald's dexterity with some extremely fast runs that he absolutely nails. Wuorinen's *Marimba Variations* is the low point of the record. It, like *Finnegans Wake*, starts and ends mid-sentence. The numerous tempo changes supply a disjointed listening experience that estranged me.

A highly eclectic composer, Stephen Barber; gives us serialism and frozen register, chromatic language, Renaissance flair, standard chord progressions, and sweeping, romantic melodies. The confusion in *Multiple Points of View of a Fanfare* is brimming with robust energy and round, tight articulations from the brass. *Elvis and Annabelle II* is touching and lush. The mix of muted brass, dark strings, and the saxophone creates a thick, warm sound. The short string quartet spreads chromatic themes across the ensemble and uses small motives as building blocks for its angular lines. *Conversatio Morum I* has the energy of a rousing Copland with the sound of a flowing, but unrelenting, piece for Asian ballet. Like any Navona release, all sorts of extras are packed on this varied but solid disc.

Jeremy Beck's program, performed by IonSound, is filled with light-hearted, tonal chamber works. *In Flight Until Mysterious Night* has warmth and spunk. The clarinet floats through and with the cello while a surprising marimba lends it a soft timbre. The quick, syncopated melody is pop-like. *In February*, a quartet for soprano, violin, clarinet, and piano, expresses complex emotions lyrically, but stagnates in a musical mood of pastoral, flowery longing. *Slow Motion* is actually rather quick, but the interplay between the vibraphone and piano is best in calm passages. Beck seems more adept at writing the slower sections.

Continuing with programs with new chamber ensemble configurations, Nancy Galbraith's *Other Sun* combines an electric baroque flute with electric cellos, percussion, and a harpsichord. The opening, 'Journey', won me over with its minimalist tilt and pop-like chord progression. The piece's contented mood continues in the lyrical 'Between Stars'. The light percussion refuses to mesh with the ensemble, and the metallic hits seem like cameos. *Island Echoes* is a percussion ensemble piece for three players. It is a nice break from the flute, and the light timbres of the keyboard percussion are refreshing, but some of the playing isn't clean. *Night Train* has more confident, brash passages than any of the other pieces. The amplification of the flute in some sections takes it into dangerous territory where it loses its charm. Galbraith's compositions are tonal, but the harmonic language she uses combined with the timbre of the electric flute leads the listener specifically toward Native American dances.

NOW Ensemble's new album begins with the fantastic *Change* by Judd Greenstrein. The minimalist opening is filled with excited energy as it builds. Forward motion undergoes its own development section as the electric guitar enters, completely altering the sonic landscape. In a couple of minutes, however, a rousing, charged piece gounded by piano and pushed by the flute and clarinet erupts. Mark Danciger's *Burst* employs circular rhythms and pentatonic melodies with classical sensibilities. The pedals affecting the guitar make it sound like incidental background music from an 80s movie, but it meshes much better in the return of the introductory figures when the flute and clarinet become much more active. The lengthy figures in David Crowell's *Waiting in the Rain for Snow* are dark and motive. Just as rain under certain conditions can transform into white flakes, the material undergoes shifts and changes. Pedal tone shifts usher in minor mode treatments of motives while other major, pop chord progressions float above. The coexisting harmonics add great depth to the quick, syncopated piece.

Volume 5 of "From the Kitchen Archives" celebrates piano performances from 1976 through 1983. Philip Glass's haunting, sonorous *Third Series IV (Mad Rush)* opens the program with its steady pulse and repeated patterns. Anthony Davis's *Walk Through The Shadow* is a darker piece, with temporally disjointed motives, some loud trills, and ascending figures. Meredith Monk's *Travelling* is the sole performance with more than piano. Her voice chants more than sings, and there are no lyrics. She shrieks and wails above a simple accompaniment while humming little ditties and sounding off as if she were a pioneer about to tackle the Oregon Train. The excerpt from Keith Jarrett's *Ritual for Piano* is tonally based, with a gospel chord progression. The melody is tender, with simple motion at mid-tempo. Unexpected notes and short passages that sound like errors crop up, but they fold seamlessly back into cadential material.

LAMPER

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 231

Newest Music 2

MCLEAN: *Caverns of Darkness, Rings of Light; Desert Voices; Cries and Echoes; Xakaalawe*
James Gourlay, tuba; Jonathan Aceto, midi violin; Ronald Feldman, vc; Charlie Tokarz, woodwinds; Priscilla McLean, voice
MLC 0—74 minutes
(55 Coon Brook Rd, Petersburgh NY 12138)

MUHLY: *Seeing Is Believing; Motion; By All Means; Step Team;*
BYRD: *Miserere Mei; Bow Thine Ear, O Lord;*
GIBBONS: *This Is the Record of John*
Thomas Gould, elec v; Aurora Orchestra/ Thomas Gould
Decca 4782731—72 minutes

On the Nature of...

ICHIYANAGI: *Portrait of Forest;* **NORGARD:** *I Ching;* **DRUCKMAN:** *Reflections on the Nature of Water;* **DI SANZA:** *Concerto for Darabukka & Percussion*
Anthony Di Sanza, darabukka; Jason Richins, Tim Russell, Jamie V Ryan, Cindy Terhune, perc
Equilibrium 99—66 minutes

Songs & Cycles

DIEMER: *Strings in the Earth & Air; The Caller; One Perfect Rose; Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?;* **RAHN:** *Vicarious; Shore Grass;* **FREIBERGER:** *The Coffee-Pot Songs; Winter Apples;* **LARSEN:** *Songs from Letters; Calamity Jane to her Daughter Janey;* **AUSTIN:** *Sonnets from the Portuguese*
Linda McNeil, Kathy McNeil, s; Stephanie Shapiro, ob; Carolyn True, p
Leonarda 357—76 minutes
(808 West End Ave Suite 508, NY 10025-5305)

RICHTER: *Riders to the Sea; Kyrie*
Melissa Maravell, a; Susan Holsonbake, Julie Nord, s; Anna Tonna, mz; Aram Tchobanian, William George, t; Judith Mendenhall, Jill Sokol, fl; Ingrid Gordon, perc; Susan Jolles, hp; William Schimmel, acc; Tali Kravitz, Aleeza Wadler, Kelly Hall-Tompkins, v; Anoush Simonian, va; Ellen Rose Silver, Rubin Kodheli, Maxine Neuman, vc; Pawel Knapik, db/ Daijiro Ukon
Leonarda 358—67 minutes

ASENJO: *The Batrachomyomachia; Palm-of-the-Hand Tales; Basile's Pentameron*
Slovak Symphony/ Kirk Trevor
Albany 1259—59 minutes

NIEMINEN: *Il Viaggio del Cavaliere... (Inesistente); In Mirrors of Time...; La Serenissima*
Erkko Palola, v, va; Anni Kuusimaki, hp; Pori Sinfonietta/ Jukka Iisakkila
Pilfink 79—71 minutes

TICHELI: *An American Dream;* **MCLOSKEY:** *Prex Penitentialis*
Leilah Dione Ezra, Andrea Fullington, s; Frost Symphony/ Zoe Zeniodi; HGNM Chamber Orchestra/ Brad Lubman—Albany 1258—64 mins

SHAPEY: *Violin Sonatas; Solo Violin Sonata 1; Adagio & Allegro; 4 Etudes*
Miranda Cuckson; Blair McMillen, p
Centaur 3103—60 minutes

ARAUCO: *Envoi; Ritorno; Fantasy-Quartet; Cello Sonata; Piano Quartet; Meditation*
Hirono Oka, v; Burchard Tang, va; John Koen, vc; Paul Demers, cl; Matthew Bengtson, Charles Abramovic, p—Albany 1249—54 minutes

CHILD: *Songs of Bidpai; Pantomime; Promenade; Viola Sonata; Rilke Songs*
Olivia Robinson, s; Rebecca Lodge, mz, Lontano/ Odaline de la Martinez—Lontano 131—66 mins

American Percussion 1

TOWER: *DNA;* **SANDLER:** *Pulling Radishes;* **HIGDON:** *Splendid Wood;* **RODRIGUEZ:** *El Dia de los Muertos;* **SCHULLER:** *Concerto for Percussion and Keyboards*
New England Conservatory Percussion Ensemble/ Frank Epstein, Gunther Schuller
Naxos 559683—67 minutes

LIANG: *Ascencion; Winged Creatures; Journey into Desire; Yuan; Lake; Harp Concerto; Milou*
Meridian Arts Ensemble; Takae Ohnishi, hpsi; Kate Hatmaker, Jeff Zehngut, v; Chia-Ling Chien, vc; Pablo Gomez, g; Radnofsky Quartet; John Fonville, Jane Rigler, fl; June Han, hp; Manhattan Sinfonietta/ Jeffrey Milarsky; New England Conservatory Chamber Singers/ Tamara Brooks; Lenny Breton, Eric Hewitt, Conrad Kline, Shyen Lee, Samuel Lorber, Greg Ridlington, sax; Christopher DeChiara, Jeremy Friedman, Phillip Kiamie, Matthew Masie, Eric Millstein, Mei-Ying Ng, Gary Wallen, perc; Van Weng, elec g; Jon Sakata, p; Lei Liang, hpsi—New World 80715—69 minutes

Commissions & Concertos

ENGEBRETSON: *Wind Symphony;* **SAPIEYEVSKI:** *Trumpet Concerto;* **HIDAS:** *Rhapsody;* **MAYAZUMI:** *Percussion Concerto;* **BOELTER:** *Mountains & Mesas*
SUNY Fredonia Wind Ensemble/ Paula Holcomb
Albany 1252—62 minutes

Light & Shadow

WORTHINGTON: *Tracing a Dream;* **OSWALD:** *Finding the Murray River; Sleep, Child;* **ALBERT:** *Boundaries; Interiors;* **RUSSO:** *Family Voices;* **LOMBARDI:** *Tonisadie;* **PERTTU:** *Light & Shadow in the Yosemite Valley*
Russian Philharmonic/ Marinescu; Moravian Philharmonic, Pilsen Philharmonic/ Vit Micka; Ohio State University Symphony/ Marshall Haddock
Navona 5847—52 minutes

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 232

Priscilla McLean has long been a part of the new music scene, in association with her husband Barton McLean. This DVD shows off her video artistry as well as four pieces of music composed by her. The music is full of extended techniques and often uses electronic manipulation, and it is obvious she knows very well how to make interesting and beautiful sounds from a number of instruments. *Caverns of Darkness, Rings of Light* is for tuba, *Desert Voices* for midi violin, and *Cries and Echoes* is for cello. These are all recorded in concert, but the fourth piece is a studio work, *Xakaalawe (Flowing)* for woodwinds and voice, with McLean herself performing the vocals. They are all very interesting musical explorations and performed very well.

The video art that accompanies each work is not as good. From a slow slide-show of landscape photos to meagerly manipulated low-quality video of the instruments in close-up (and the performers' hands), these visuals all share one thing in common—they just aren't very interesting. They are sometimes blatantly bad. This very interesting music—and these very good performances of it—would have been better served by an audio release.

Seeing Is Believing, the title track on the recording of works by Nico Muhly, is a piece for six-string electric violin and orchestra. Muhly gets some attractive sounds from the orchestra, and the whole has some moments of beauty—but these alternate with longer sections of less interest. The work seems longer than its 25 minutes. In Muhly's other works recorded here, his interest in English vocal music is very evident, which is driven home by the interspersal of three English works in arrangement—two by Byrd and one by Gibbons. *Step Team* is in many ways the most interesting, with precise rhythmic articulation and occasional brief moments of hesitation. The Aurora Orchestra here performs exceptionally well.

On the Nature of... is a collection of percussion pieces performed by Anthony Di Sanza and others. The short work by Ichiyanagi is aimless and derivative, but there are two excellent works on the program—the astoundingly difficult (and seminal) *I Ching* of Norgard, which charted his exploration of the infinity row in a non-pitched context, and the beautiful *Reflections on the Nature of Water* by Druckman—both performed very well by Di Sanza. The last work on the program is by Di Sanza himself, a Concerto for Darabukka and Percussion Quartet. The Darabukka is a middle-eastern goblet-shaped drum. With it (and his quartet) he creates a fascinating work of many facets, influenced by middle-eastern music (of course) and Japanese drumming.

A compilation of songs (mainly with piano) by "contemporary American women composers", *Songs and Cycles* is marred by harsh vocals with nearly epileptic vibrato. With the best recording imaginable these performances would be severely compromised, but on top of this the mix is *heavily* in favor of the voice. Most of the songs are mediocre at best in any case.

With a libretto taken from John M Synge's play of the same name, *Riders to the Sea* by Marga Richter is about loss and the cruelty of the sea, and about life in rural Ireland. The music fits the text well—sometimes heavy, sometimes somewhat folksy, often tender and melancholic. The vocal performances are somewhat lackluster, but there are some interesting moments musically. Also, there is a short *Kyrie* for string quartet and double bass that is very accessible and songful. Lyrical melodic passages lie on low drones in the bass and create a lush, beautiful effect.

Asenjo's *Batrachomyomachia* is a work for orchestra based on the ancient Greek work of the same name, a parody of the *Iliad*. Lyrical sections are often interrupted by short declamations and chords, and it has an interesting mix of colors. *Palm-of-the-Hand-Tales* is a collection of 10 pieces—incidental music to ten of the *Palm-of-the-Hand-Stories* by Yasunari Kawabata. They are less interesting than the first piece—an amalgam of cliched phrases without much aim, often sounding saccharine. *Basile's Pentameron* is again based on literature, this time on (you guessed it) the *Pentameron* by Giambattista Basile. The *Pentameron* is a source for some of the stories later found in the tales of the Grimm brothers and Perrault—and the stories themselves are more interesting than these musical episodes.

Il Viaggio del Cavaliere...(Inesistente) is a concerto for violin and orchestra based on Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. It is quite colorful, and the solo writing is sometimes very beautiful. The first movement is especially attractive—a quicksilver shifting of moods and colors. *In Mirrors of Time... (through Colours of Autumn)* is a piece for orchestra dedicated to the memory of Nieminen's colleague Lasse Eerola. It is appropriately meditative, and he makes good use of the orchestra—even if he is slightly too obvious with the harp sometimes. His viola concerto, *La Serenissima*, is an evocation of the mystique of Venice. The viola part is very interesting and performed very well. [More of Nieminen's music and playing are reviewed from Pilfink releases in Collections.]

Frank Ticheli's *American Dream* is a "symphony of songs for soprano and orchestra" with texts by Philip Littell. His aim with this work was to express the anxiety felt in America at the close of the previous century. The songs are expertly constructed, sometimes (appropriately and subtly) disturbing, and the texts are rich and evocative. The third song, 'Out-

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 233

side in the night, a woman cried out' is especially good. Leilah Dione Ezra sings with style and character. Lansing McLoskey's *Pres Penitentialis* is a work for soprano and orchestra with text excerpted from two works of Petrarch—*Canzoniere* and *Pres Penitentialis*. A more introverted work, it has a soaring vocal line accompanied with restraint by the orchestra. It is an ethereal and beautiful piece, performed very well here by Andrea Fullington.

Ralph Shapey is called a "radical traditionalist". His grounding in the western classical tradition was firm, and this recording shows his music at its most characteristic—tightly constructed, rich with ideas, modernist but expressive. It also shows another aspect of his music: it is difficult to listen to very much of it at once. There is an ineffable monochromatic element that makes an entire program of his music something of a trial, no matter how fantastic the performers. And these performers show a technical mastery and musical sensibility of the highest class. Still, the three sonatas are very well constructed pieces, and anyone interested in high modernism would do well to listen.

With a harmonic language heavily influenced by the Second Viennese School, the works by Ingrid Arauco are both atonal and harmonically complex. The influence doesn't end there, however—the way her ideas and motives evolve reminds one of Schoenberg and, especially, Berg. These are attractive works and well performed, but finally sound derivative. The *Fantasy-Quartet* is an exciting demonstration of writing for dissimilar instruments and one of the most effective pieces on the program. The cello sonata, more tonal than the other works, borders on trite in the first movement—but II is a lyrical slow movement. The Piano Quartet has five short movements, each very different from the other. It is an effervescent romp—light and airy.

The texts of Peter Child's *Songs of Bidpai* are from Libyan poet Muhammad al-Faituri and are something of hybrid of western modernism and an Islamic aesthetic. This is in a way appropriate; these songs were written with the attacks on the World Trade Center in mind. They are extroverted and rhythmically very inventive, and performed expertly by Olivia Robinson. *Pantomime: Seven Lyric Scenes for Oboe Quartet* is a playful work, exciting and exuberant. The Viola Sonata is a well-written dialog between the viola and the piano, changeable in mood and rich in ideas. In almost direct opposition to the opening song cycle, the program closes with Child's *Rilke Songs*—a set of seven introverted and beautiful songs for mezzo-soprano and ensemble on short poems by Rilke. Rebecca Lodge has some pitch problems, but the songs are satisfying.

This recording of *American Music for Percussion* collects works by five composers. Joan Tower's *DNA* is a listenable representation of the physical structure of DNA. Felicia Sandler's *Pulling Radishes*—the title comes from a short Japanese poem, translated in the booklet as "The man pulling radishes pointed the way with a radish" comprises small rhythmic motives and interesting color changes, and is one of the most effective works on the record. *Splendid Wood*, by Jennifer Higdon, is called by the composer "a celebration of the splendor of the marimba". And that it is—the beautiful sound of the instruments (three marimbas) takes center stage, though the piece is well written and Higdon knows how to exploit the instruments' idiosyncrasies. Robert Xavier Rodriguez's *El Dia de los Muertos* is inspired by the Mexican "day of the dead". It is a work for eight percussionists that evokes a somber mood. Gunther Schuller's Grand Concerto for Percussion and Keyboards is the least interesting piece presented. It is a long work (almost 26 minutes) for huge forces (over 100 percussion instruments, plus piano, harp, and celeste) and quite sparse.

Milou, a varied program of music by Lei Liang, opens with *Ascension* for brass quintet and percussion. It combines glissandos and deep rumblings—among other things—into a rather conversational whole. *Winged Creatures—A Cadenza for Harpsichord* is an especially beautiful and delicate work for harpsichord and strings, where the harpsichord improvises on the shape of the Chinese character for "flight". In this performance Takae Ohnishi uses the inside of the harpsichord as much as the keyboard—rubbing the strings with her palm, plucking them with her fingernails, etc. All of this is accompanied beautifully by the strings and makes for a lovely piece. *A Journey into Desire* for guitar, based on *the Dream of the Red Chamber* (one of the "Four Great Classical Novels" of China), is an interesting work that gets distinctly Asian sounds from the guitar using accents and pitch bends. *Lake* is a piece for two flutes, delicate and beautiful. The title piece is for chorus, percussionists, saxophonists, electric guitar, piano, and harpsichord. It opens with an imitation of Beijing opera recitation by a saxophonist vocalizing through a mouthpiece and contains many interesting sounds and colors—but it suffers from a lack of direction, and many of the vocalizations end up sounding contrived and empty of meaning.

Commissions and Concertos is a compilation of wind ensemble music performed by the SUNY Fredonia Wind Ensemble. They range from Mark Engebretson's Symphony for Winds, a four-movement work for large ensemble, to the short *Mountains and Mesas*

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 234

by Karl Boelter. Little stands out as exceptional, except perhaps the excellent performance, by Randall Hawes, of Frigyes Hidas's Rhapsody for Bass Trombone and Wind Band. The works in general sound rather pedestrian, but they are performed well.

The high point of the Navona Records release *Light and Shadow* would have to be Adrienne Albert's *Boundaries*, a consciously repetitive and well-performed short orchestral work. The Russian Philharmonic under Ovidiu Marinescu performs Rain Worthington's *Tracing a Dream* with a beautiful, lush sound, but most of the rest of the recording leaves much to be desired.

BYELICK

Classical Broadway

Having seen the Collegiate Chorale's revival of the Kurt Weill-Maxwell Anderson musical *Knickerbocker Holiday* this past January, I was happy to hear it was recorded, as this would give me a chance to appreciate the score more fully. (Ghostlight 84450). The Anderson book remains ponderous and political, and the lyrics are not easy to assimilate, But at least half of the score (the first act) is truly admirable. The huge chorus and the excellent orchestra conducted by James Bagwell are marvelous, and the recording offers many chances to appreciate Weill's gorgeous orchestration.

The style is operetta-ish, a combination of something like *Der Kuhhandel* and a touch of Gilbert & Sullivan; but the book, instead of being primarily comic, is so concerned with proto-facism and Rooseveltism that is sinks under its own weight in Act II. But the numbers in Act I are sensational, especially on a recording, where you aren't bothered with most of the dull dialog. 'There's Nowhere to Go but Up' has delightful twists and turns, ending rapturously. 'It Never Was You' is wonderfully sung by Ben Davis and Kelli O'Hara, and what an enchanting melody it is. The tune to 'How Can You Tell an American?' is memorable, and the lyrics are appropriately pithy.

Then comes the entrance of the Governor Pieter Stuyvesant, and his songs, first 'One Touch of Alchemy', then 'All Hail the Political Honeymoon" with its fascist 'Strength Through Joy' refrain. Then the charmingly pattery 'One Indespensable Man' and finally the famous 'September Song'. Victor Garber may have had his nose in the script during the performances, but on the disc he gets away with most of these numbers nicely—and with a certain gusto—not quite with the raffish, scowling style of the original Stuyvesant, Walter Huston, with his patented, devilish charm, but with his own Garberish charm. (I wasn't too impressed with 'The Scars'—that came off less well.)

There are other pleasant diversions, like the waltz chorus 'Young People Think about Love', the lesser love duets like 'Will You Remember Me?', quite Germanic, and the Latin-sounding 'We Are Cut in Twain'. Finally we have a complete recording of this 1938 score, and it is to be cherished. It doesn't yet have the more fully Broadway style of later works like *Lady in the Dark* or *One Touch of Venus*, but there lies its fascination. It is Kurt Weill slowly leaving Europe for the USA.

The revival of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* is doing excellent business on Broadway, mainly, one would suppose, because of *Harry Potter* star Daniel Radcliffe playing the role originated in 1961 by Robert Morse. The last Broadway revival, with Matthew Broderick, was a sorry affair that added no luster to this fabled show.

The current production (Decca Broadway 15645) uses an orchestra of about 14, probably half the original, and has been reorchestrated, as usual these days, this time by Doug Besterman. There's a conscious effort to approximate the lounge-y style of the the 1960s, to go with the look and feel of *Mad Men*, the hit TV series. That's fine, but I do prefer the original glorious orchestrations by Robert Ginzler, which were supremely theatrical.

In the recording, Mr Radcliffe sounds earnest and agreeable, with an approximation of an American accent. No problem there. But I miss some of the original supporting cast. (I haven't seen this production yet.) The most missed is Charles Nelson Reilly, as Bud Frump; the new actor, Christopher J Hanke, has no discernable comedic sound. John Larroquette sounds OK as the magnate, and the girls all sound agreeable.

The nice thing about this recording is that you get expanded versions of many of the songs, with reprises, and things that went unrecorded in 1961, in the dear old days of the LP. Examples include the narrator's spiel at the beginning done by Anderson Cooper, items like 'Martini Time', the Act I finaletto, the music accompanying the bows at the end of the show, and even the orchestral exit music. Plus an extended version of the Pirate Dance, part of a TV quiz show sequence.

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 235

But the great ensembles still retain their mythic glory: 'The Company Way', 'Been a Long Day', 'Paris Original', and the executive washroom scene, with the singing businessmen and 'I Believe in You'. 'Coffee Break' falls flat here, but the secretarial 'Cinderella Darling' sounds just spiffy, with its typing or tapdancing, or both. 1The Brotherhood of Man' looked rather busy on the Tony Awards TV broadcast.

The London Palladium, which started as a vaudeville house, is now in the business of mounting spectacular musicals. A new version of *The Wizard of Oz*, based on the 1939 Hollywood film classic, is the current occupant (Decca 15692). I remember seeing another stage mounting of this by the Royal Shakespeare Company earlier—it was not memorable.

The production, from the booklet photos, looks cheesily-spectacular British, though I have no doubt there are spectacular effects, this being the Palladium.

This version adds unnecessary songs by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice to the classics by Harold Arlen and EY Harburg. They are completely out of character with the charm of the old ones, and are sung in a modern, drawly, power-ballad style that has nothing to do with the originals. The problem is compounded with a synthesizer-ish band that wreaks havoc with the original, glorious MGM orchestrations.

The songwriters dare to add a new introduction to 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow': anathema! The attempt to musicalize scenes in the film that were perfectly good with dialog is another miscalculation. One, for the nominal star Michael Crawford, as Professor Marvel, is a model of syrupy world-gazing.

The wit of Harburg's brilliant rhymes endure, and although the arrangements have accretions by David Cullen, the songs left (relatively) alone come off best. The new 'Red Shoes Blues' has clever lyrics, if not much of a tune, and there's a new sentimental anthem to take Dorothy back to her Kansas farm. But the film is so perfect, that the only reason I can see redoing this for the London stage is to bring in new generations of children.

TRAUBNER

Archives

BACH: *Partita 1; Italian Concerto; English Suite 2; Chromatic Fantasy & Fugue*
Wanda Landowska, hpsi
Paradizo 9—74 minutes (with DVD)

Concert performances from 1935-36, recorded at her own concert hall in Saint-Leu-la-Foret and remastered in 2010. The interpretations, as always, are stunning; I'm amazed in particular at the variety of touch in the third movement of the Italian Concerto and her grand sense of expressive planning in the Sarabande from the Partita. It's easy, indeed, to see why Landowska made and continues to make such an impression on enthusiasts of early music; her approach, strange to say, remains highly relevant today.

The release includes a DVD-ROM that contains almost 200 photographs of Landowska, her teaching, letters, and other important documents. These materials have largely been available only by permission of the owners in whose archives they are stored. No Landowska devotee will want to be without this release, and most lovers of early music performance in general will be very pleased to own it as well.

HASKINS

BARTOK: *Violin Concerto; 2 Portraits; Cantata Profana; Music for Strings, Percussion, & Celeste; Dance Suite; Divertimento for Strings; Rhapsody; Piano Concertos 1+2*
Tibor Varga, v; Geza Anda, Louis Kentner, Andor Foldes, p; Helmut Krebs, t, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, bar, RIAS Symphony/ Ferenc Fricsay
Audite 21407 [3CD] 3:04

The 1950s was the great decade for Bartok performances—would that the composer had been still alive! It was a remarkable recovery considering the comparative obscurity of his last years. But the 1950s were also a dicey decade for the interpretation of 20th Century works, because success came at the cost of homogenizing performance practices that deracinated some of the more exciting elements in modern music. Ferenc Fricsay, much admired then and since, was both a champion of Bartok and of the mode of conducting then displacing the more spontaneous mode associated that earlier Hungarian conductor, Artur Nikisch. These museum-friendly performances, made in 1950-53, lack the warmth and rubato one might expect in "authentic" Bartok. Fritz Reiner is much racier in the Concerto for Orchestra.

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 236

The RIAS Symphony doesn't help: they are competent in what must have been unfamiliar repertoire, but they certainly come across as Berliners: their sound is smooth and attractive but lacking in earth tones. That said, Fricsay's soloists, Hungarian compatriots all, supply the necessary ingredients to make Bartok sing.

The concertos are all wonderful, particularly Tibor Varga in the violin concerto and Geza Anda in the Third Piano Concerto. Conceding that Bartok performances can work even in the mode of high-modernist abstraction, I much prefer the color and inflection that typified central European music-making in the composer's lifetime. Since Bartok concertos are not heard so often now as in the 1950s, and since this collection has been admirably produced from original sources (studio and broadcast) it is well worth seeking out.

RADCLIFFE

BEETHOVEN: *Missa Solemnis;* **VERDI:** *Simon Boccanegra, Act I, Scene 1*
Elisabeth Rethberg, Marion Telva, Giovanni Martinelli, Ezio Pinza; Schola Cantorum; NY Philharmonic/ Arturo Toscanini; Metropolitan Opera/ Ettore Panizza
Immortal Performances 1011 [2CD] 125 minutes

Here is a brief overview of Toscanini and *Missa Solemnis*. Working backward, we have 1953 with the NBC Symphony with Marshall, Merriman, Conley, and Hines as soloists. This is the performance most of us know—fast, incisive, and in pretty good sound. In 1940 we have the same orchestra, but with generally superior soloists: Milanov, Castagna, Bjoerling, and Kipnis. A year earlier Toscanini conducted the work in Queen's Hall, London with the BBC Orchestra and Milanov, Thorborg, Von Pataky, and Moscona. And finally we have the present recording from 1935. This was made from AM radio and was released by Eddie Smith in 1957 and has been around in various forms, always with very poor sound and lots of pitch problems. Now Richard Caniell has undertaken the task of setting things right: patching together various sources, re-equalizing phrase by phrase, removing ticks and pops, and using gentle noise suppression to make this performance more listenable.

And the performance is worth it. It is the slowest of the four recordings—monumental, powerful, and deeply expressive. The sound is still not very good. The level and type of noise vary often, and you have to screen out the haze to get to the music. But if you already know the piece fairly well, you can zero in on a fantastic performance of Beethoven's masterpiece. If you're not deeply into the Toscanini "thing", you may prefer one of the later performances in better sound (the BBC one recently appeared in the BBC legends series). The 1935, then, will be of particular interest to followers of the soloists.

The second disc is filled out with half an hour of *Simon Boccanegra* with three of the Mass soloists plus Lawrence Tibbett. This comes from the Met broadcast of February 16, 1935, only two months before the Mass performance. It gives the opportunity, then, to hear these legendary soloists in repertory they were generally associated with. The performance itself is wonderful, and the sound, aided by four splices from the 1939 broadcast with the same performers, is quite listenable. In addition we have two interviews—three minutes with Rethberg, seven with Martinelli—that include reminiscences of Toscanini.

So, many thanks to Immortal Performances for preserving such a wonderful part of our heritage.

ALTHOUSE

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Concerto 5; Sonata 28*
Robert Casadesus, Concertgebouw Orchestra/ Hans Rosbaud
Newton 8802050—56 minutes

The *Emperor* was recorded in 1961 and released in the US on the budget label Odyssey. It reappeared on a Philips CD, and later as part of box sets dedicated to Casadesus (Sony France) and Rosbaud (DG). It's not a revelatory reading—the outer movements are played well enough, and II flows along at a dispassionate pace that's brisker than the norm. Casadesus is sensitive and poetic, but some degree of brio and bravado would help. The Concertgebouw doesn't sound like its usual self—the strings are shrill, the ensemble doesn't blend properly, and the acoustics are flat and dry. The sonata, recorded in concert (1978), is not stereo but it's better on all counts except for the inevitable audience noises.

KOLDYS

HAYDN: *Il Mondo della Luna*
Cesare Curzi (Ecclitico); Ernst Gutstein (Ernesto); Oskar Czerwenka (Buonafede); Anneliese Rothenberger (Flaminia); Vienna Philharmonic/ Bernhard Conz—Melodram 50076 [2CD]

This recording has been around about forever. It was a Melodram LP set long ago and is now reissued in adequate monaural sound. The performance comes from the 1959 Salzburg Festival and is a good middle-European cast performing a good Haydn opera. There have been more recent recordings in infinitely better sound by Dorati and Harnoncourt, but this has its charms.

Haydn's opera is about a scheming astronomer who wants to trick credulous peo-

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 237

ple into believing that they have been transported to the moon. The credulous person in our story is an old man with two daughters whom he wants to marry off to rich suitors. The daughters have other ideas. The fool is led to believe that he has been transported to the moon and winds up tricked into consenting to (and funding) the marriages of his daughters to men they really care for. It's slight stuff, and Haydn's music is lovely, but not terribly specific. It's hard to imagine that he believed the piece would be performed twice.

The singers are all fine. The conducting is OK; and the VPO, in its guise as the pit orchestra at Salzburg, makes it clear that it has some experience playing Haydn. There is no special reason to buy this instead of one of the more recent ones.

CHAKWIN

MENOTTI: *The Saint of Bleecker Street; The Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore*
Gabrielle Ruggiero (Annina), David Poleri (Michele), Gloria Lane (Desideria), Maria Di Gerlando (Carmela), Leon Lishner (Don Marco); Chorus & Orchestra/ Thomas Schippers
Naxos 111360 [2CD] 156 minutes

It is said that the *Saint* was Menotti's favorite of all his operas. Certainly it reflects his personal life, his inmost feelings. As a little boy growing up in Italy Menotti was a sincere believer in the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. When he moved to Milan to study, that simple faith was shaken by the complications of modern life. In 1928 he moved to Philadelphia for further study at the Curtis Institute, and there his faith was even more shaken.

Menotti was a success. His first operas were well received. Yet at the same time the young composer was consumed by feelings of guilt and sin a growing disbelief in sanctity. In 1951 he paid a visit to a real-life saint, Padre Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo. Padre Pio was blessed (suffered) from the stigmata, bleeding from both his hands. But the priest drove Menotti away, claiming that the composer was driven by nothing more than curiosity. It sounds like the Tannhäuser story in modern times. Menotti was severely shaken, and out of his confusion and pain grew his opera *The Saint of Bleecker Street*.

The opera combines the two themes that so haunted him: the feeling of exclusion and of religious fervor. This is a potent combination and made for a dramatic opera. It is set in New York's Little Italy. First generation Americans, Annina and her brother Michele, must deal with the daily events of urban alienation and traditional religion. Annina is believed by the locals to truly be a saint. Her skeptical brother rejects any religious belief. His sister is ill, but not a saint. The fanatical neighbors believe implicitly in Annina's sanctity. The two ideas collide in a dramatic scene in Act I, where, on Good Friday, she re-enacts the crucifixion of Jesus and is given the stigmata. The neighbors are driven out of the house by Michele. To add more complications, Michele is in love with the prostitute Desideria. She is jealous of Michele's love for Annina and accuses him of loving Annina—implying incest. Michele stabs her and she dies in the arms of Annina, who tries to sooth Desideria's fears and teaches her to pray. Although she is seriously ill, Annina is accepted as a nun. The opera ends in one of the most harrowing scenes in all opera, the religious rite as Annina is made a nun. She dies just before the ring is slipped on to her finger.

The opera has been condemned by some as too melodramatic, too emotional. But isn't that what opera is all about? Each act ends with dramatic intensity. Few operas have such an emotional shattering as the Saint's Act I Festival of San Gennaro. It is celebrated with a procession carrying a statute of the saint. Michele is brutally beaten and chained to a fence as Annina is forcefully carried away to join the procession as a living saint.

This recording was originally made by RCA Victor in February and March 1955 with the original cast in the opera's run on Broadway. Schippers was an advocate of Menotti's music and a sincere interpreter as well. The dramatic tension is stunning. The unidentified chorus and orchestra are presumably from the Broadway production.

There is no doubting the sincerity of the singers. While not the greatest singers in the world, they more than fulfill their assignments. There is much beauty in Ruggiero's singing, a rich, fruity voice and a heartfelt portrayal. Poleri's unique voice borders on the ugly; but the ferocity, the power of his singing is overwhelming. Michele's savage aria 'I know that you all hate me' is raw drama. Lane's sumptuous Desideria and Lishner's solemn priest are the best singing.

There is another recording. (Chandos, Nov/Dec 2002). Richard Hickox leads a powerful performance actually superior to the Naxos recording in every way except one: the Annina is totally inadequate. That disqualifies the Chandos.

Filling out the recording is Menotti's rarely performed madrigal fable *The Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore*. It is part masque, part ballet, and part chamber music. It is three stages in the life of an eccentric poet, symbolized by the allegorical animals of the title. Its tender beauty is well realized by Schippers. There is no libretto for the opera, but the text of the madrigal fable is included.

PARSONS

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 238

MOZART: *The Marriage of Figaro*
Cesare Siepi (Figaro), Roberta Peters (Susanna), Ezio Flagello (Bartolo), Regina Resnik (Marcellina), Mildred Miller (Cherubino), Kim Borg (C1ount), Lucine Amara (Countess), Gabor Carelli (Basilio); Metropolitan Opera/ Erich Leinsdorf
Sony 85310 [3CD] 155 minutes

This was recorded January 28, 1961 from the stage of the Met, probably as a Saturday afternoon broadcast. As the notes put it: "the original monaural recording has been digitally remastered from original source material". But the sound is quite poor; it's noticeably deficient in high-frequency content and it strongly favors the singers. The orchestra sounds dull and sometimes inaudible; in the tuttis it lacks body and transparency.

This is one of the fastest *Figaros* on records. Most performances take from 170 to 190 minutes, depending on what has been cut. In this performance, the Act 4 arias for Marcellina and Basilio were omitted, as was usual at the Met.

The cast is representative of what the Met offered at the time. There are several very good performances. Siepi's Figaro is the best I can remember, and the Susanna of Roberta Peters is perky. But Lucine Amara is, at best, an indifferent Countess. Her voice isn't steady enough for her arias; and her last lines, where she forgives her errant husband, lack poise and emotion. Kim Borg's singing, as the Count, lacks elegance and smoothness—he sounds like a country bumpkin. But Regina Resnik's Marcellina and Ezio Flagello's Bartolo are very well sung and characterized, and Mildred Miller sings her two arias with pure and beautiful tine. The rest of the cast is competent enough but not always comfortable with Leinsdorf's fast tempos. So this adds up to a fairly routine performance; it doesn't show the Met at its best. After Levine took over this repertory, performances of the Mozart operas, in particular, became much better.

No texts; only an English synopsis.

MOSES

PONCHIELLI: *La Gioconda*
Zinka Milanov (Gioconda), Giovanni Martinelli (Enzo), Carlo Morelli (Alvise), Anna Kaskas (La Cieca), Bruna Castagna (Laura), Nicolo Moscona (Alvise); Metropolitan Opera/ Panizza
Immortal Performances 1012 [3CD] 204 minutes

This truly immortal performance, from 30th December 1939, has been available for many years—originally surfacing on one of the infamous EJS LPs. To my knowledge, its last appearance was in much improved sound as a two-CD set on the Symposium label, prompting the question as to whether we really need yet another issue. After hearing this new set, brilliantly re-mastered by Richard Caniell, the answer is decidedly in the affirmative.

In order to fit the work onto two discs, Symposium made a number of cuts, which are now all restored. Apart from Laura's 'Stella del marinar', omitted that afternoon, almost the entire score is now here. Pitching has also been carefully checked. Even more praiseworthy is the new sound quality—almost as great an improvement over Symposium's as that transfer was over the LPs. Bonuses include an interview with Milanov, a talk by Martinelli, and the splendid finale of Ponchielli's *I Lituani* with Ottavio Garaventa, Yasuko Hayashi, and Carlo de Bortoli, conducted by Gavazzeni.

This performance saw the debut of Milanov in a role that had been almost exclusively the property of Ponselle. Although often compared with her famous predecessor, in truth Milanov had more in common with Caballe. This was her debut at the Met, and she is in fine voice, though it is generally conceded that her 1946 performance was a more definitive assumption of the role.

For many tenor enthusiasts it will be a joy to encounter Martinelli in a complete performance. After a slightly disappointing opening 'Assassini'—Ponchielli's equivalent of Otello's 'Esultate'—the tenor speedily gets into his stride and sings with a welcome range of dynamics and nuance—more than can be gleaned from many of his studio recordings. Of the entire cast, it is his voice that seems to have benefited most from this new transfer. If not the possessor of an intrinsically beautiful sound, he sings with such integrity as to disarm criticism.

Carlo Morelli's warm, vibrant tones, while perhaps too generous for the arch villain Barnaba, fall gratefully on the ears, as do Kaskas's as La Chieca. Castagna's refulgent voice is somewhat heavy for Laura, but it would nevertheless have been interesting to have heard her tackle Laura's only solo—the sole omission from this performance.

The late, greatly-missed, John Steane's detailed and erudite notes further embellish this most worthwhile issue. It deserves a place in every collection.

LIFF

PUCCINI: *Tosca*
Renata Tebaldi (Tosca), Ferruccio Tagliavini (Cavaradossi), Tito Gobbi (Scarpia); Covent Garden/ Francesco Molinari-Pradelli
ICA 5022 [2CD] 110 minutes

When the Covent Garden company was re-established in 1946 after the War, its new beginnings were almost provincial: opera in English, with predominantly English singers. As time passed, it became more international, so that when Renata Tebaldi made her 1955

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 239

debut as Tosca, all the principals were Italian and only the supporting singers were British. Gobbi would sing Scarpia many times in London, and in 1955, he's close to his best, the voice strong and menacing, the words sharply pointed. Tagliavini also knows how to use words and how to shape his lines, though he's a lightweight Cavaradossi; and on this occasion his voice wasn't flowing as freely as it usually did.

Tebaldi, on the other hand, is in full flood, the voice just pouring out easily, the words crystal-clear. She's not the most fiery Tosca, but her sincerity is palpable; and she sings so beautifully (aside from a couple of flat high notes), and with such power and richness (not least in her chest register), that it must have been thrilling to hear her.

Molinari-Pradelli is a capable, well-seasoned conductor. The sound is fairly good in that the voices come through clearly, with some presence; the orchestra fares less well. So this is a *Tosca* for people who can't get enough Tebaldi or Gobbi. Notes but no libretto.

LUCANO

VERDI: *Il Trovatore*
Bianca Scacciati (Leonora), Francesco Merli (Manrico), Enrico Molinari (Count), Giuseppina Zinetti (Azucena), Corrado Zambelli (Ferrando); La Scala/ Lorenzo Molajoli
Preiser 20059 [2CD] 116 minutes

It was not long after the invention of recording that attempts were made to record complete operas. These were issued as bulky collections of shellac discs, which presumably enjoyed reasonable sales since all the major record companies offered examples, with varying degrees of sophistication as the technical side of the industry progressed. But it was not until the advent of electrical recording in the 1920s that these issues really took off. Two major firms in this field were HMV and Columbia. Both tended to concentrate on the standard operatic repertoire, and there was great rivalry between them. No sooner had HMV's *Il Trovatore*, with its stellar cast of Pertile, Minghini-Cattaneo, and Granforte appeared on the top-price red label than Columbia offered its cheaper, black label release, the subject of this review.

All the artists here enjoyed considerable success in the international field and sang at most of the world's leading opera houses. The men are all easier on the ear than the ladies. Scacciati's searing top is certainly not for all tastes, but she was an interesting artist who, several, long-departed friends affirmed, could be thrilling in the opera house. Azucena, the mad gypsy, is the one role Zinetti's plangent tones sound eminently suitable for. Merli (a De Lucia pupil, believe it or not) is a fine if unsubtle Manrico—surely one of the most stupid of all Verdi's heroes? Molinari sings Di Luna with warm tone and a good line, and Zambelli's Ferrando is another positive boon. Indeed, although hardly the most refined reading available, the whole performance carries great conviction and is ably conducted by the ever reliable Molajoli. It has been excellently transferred. Hearing it again after a break of about 50 years is a potent proof of what has been lost in the operatic world.

LIFF

VIVALDI: *Gloria; 4 Seasons*
Vienna Opera Orchestra/ Hermann Scherchen
Tahra 697—77:30

No. Some people liked Scherchen; I never understood that. In the *Seasons* the 1958 sound is tinny and plunky—irritating and just plain ugly. And that would seem to be partly the conductor's fault. Some like it stark. The 1960 *Gloria* is dull and muffled.

VROON

WAGNER: *Götterdämmerung*
Lauritz Melchior (Siegfried), Helen Traubel (Brünnhilde), Herbert Janssen (Gunther), Regina Resnik (Gutrune), Deszö Ernster (Hagen), Gerhart Pechner (Alberich), Margaret Harshaw (Waltraute); Metropolitan Opera/ Fritz Stiedry
Immortal Performances 1010 [4CD] 228 minutes

Well, here's the Ring of the Month Club's current entry, this time (at last) a really phenomenal and truly historic performance from December 1948. It was Melchior's last Siegfried at the Met. It is of special interest to me, since I heard the music for the first time at a Met performance precisely like it—the same cast, orchestra and conductor, in the same locale—two years earlier. I was 19 years old, just beginning to form what was to be a lifetime commitment to Wagner, but also *hearing a complete opera for the first time*—not *Carmen* or *Rigoletto,* but *Götterdämmerung*, a drink from the fire hose if there ever was one!

I expected a frayed, noisy, and distorted sound—after all, this was recorded before tape technology was available in the US. But I was surprised to hear the opening chords of the Norns scene bright, sharp, clear, and undistorted. Further investigation revealed that the original source must have been acetate FM broadcast masters—16-inch plastic discs that could accommodate 25 minutes per side, clear, distortion-free, and with a full frequency spectrum. Columbia's first LPs were also recorded that way.

The performance would have been recorded at the old Met at Broadway and 39th Street, a hall with good acoustics but a smallish orchestra pit. So the orchestra is somewhat

Sig08arg.QXD 7/22/2011 4:52 PM Page 240

lean and spare. But it is adequate to convey the musical thrust of the score, particularly as conducted by Stiedry.

Fritz Stiedry (1883-1965) was younger than Muck and Weingartner, and older than Böhm and Krauss—roughly contemporary with Klemperer and Furtwängler. Like Karl Böhm, he began by studying law, and like Böhm, he earned a doctoral degree in that field before becoming a musician. His musical career began in 1907 as assistant to Mahler at the Vienna Opera. He later conducted opera in Kassel and Berlin until (being Jewish) he was forced in 1934 to leave Germany. His next post was conductor of the Leningrad Philharmonic from 1934 until 1937, when he left for America. He settled in New York. His work in this recording leaves no room to question his skill as a Wagner conductor. His tendency was to keep the narratives moving along smartly while slowing down for the orchestral music and the great dramatic scenes. That technique results in a performance sculpted along the lines of the great Böhm Bayreuth performance recorded 20 years later. Actually, in the presentation of Act III, he manages in some instances to beat Böhm at his own game! Indeed, his timing for the entire opera is a little faster. The 228-minute time given in the heading reflects commentaries, applause, and an eight-minute interview with Melchior. Böhm's time is 230:33.

There is no question that Melchior was the greatest Wagnerian tenor of the 20th Century. His voice was baritonal in timbre, very loud, its carrying power unsurpassed. His pitch is accurate, and he can go up to the top with ease. He is not the subtlest artist, but all things considered, he's at the top of the lists. In this performance he is singing his last *Götterdämmerung* at the Met, though this isn't his last performance there. I heard his *Tristan* at the met three years later.

Helen Traubel was the Wagnerian soprano of choice at this time, since Kirsten Flagstad was not to return to the US until much later. Traubel was a big woman with a big wide-ranging soprano voice with lots of carrying power. She was American-born, from a St Louis German-American family. Her voice was smooth and powerful, more colorful than Melchior's if not as loud. Anyway, she was the US Brünnhilde of choice at the time, and this recording preserves that.

Herbert Janssen was at the time the US Wotan of choice, his smooth, dark, low-pitched baritone perfect for the role, as fine as the European competition of the era, with the possible exception of Hans Hotter, who actually peaked a bit later. He also appeared as Wotan in a complete *Walküre* Act III alongside Traubel and the NY Philharmonic under Rodzinsky for Columbia (in 1948). The others are also quite fine, Ernster a threatening black-voiced Hagen, while as his dad Alberich we have one Gerhard Pechner, as nasty as can be. At the other end of the spectrum. there's Regina Resnik as Gutrune, and Margaret Harshaw as Waltraute, both as good as they come. As a whole, a finer cast could hardly have been assembled, then or now, anywhere.

I shall treasure this in the time available to me on the planet, which is not infinite. It's an experience I shall never forget, from a golden era at the Met.

MCKELVEY

WALTON: *Violin Concerto;* **SAINT-SAENS:** *Havanaise;* **SINDING:** *Suite;* **CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO:** *Concerto 2*
Jascha Heifetz, Philarmonia Orchestra, RCA Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic/ William Walton, William Steinberg, Alfred Wallenstein
Naxos 111367—77 minutes

This is a thoroughly happy collection: the compositions sort well together, and Jascha Heifetz commissioned the Walton concerto (heard in the 1950 recording). The Saint-Saens *Havanaise* is a work particularly associated with the great violinist, and the less familiar works by Sinding and Castelnuovo-Tedesco glow in his hands. The 1950s recorded sound is splendid, and the liner note is by Tully Potter.

RADCLIFFE

Celibidache

GERSHWIN: *Rhapsody in Blue;* **RAVEL:** *Rapsodie Espagnole;* **BUSONI:** *Violin Concerto;* **CHERUBINI:** *Anacreon Overture:* **HINDEMITH:** *Piano Concerto;* **GENZMER:** *Flute Concerto;* **COPLAND:** *Appalachian Spring;* **TIESSEN:** *Hamlet Suite; Salambo Suite; Symphony 2;* **SCHWARZ-SCHILLING:** *Introduction & Fugue for Strings*
Gerhard Puchelt, p; Siegfried Borries, v; Gustav Scheck, fl; Berlin Philharmonic, RIAS Symphony/ Sergiu Celibidache
Audite 21406 [3CD] 3:35

Celibidache, famously, was the conductor who didn't make recordings; he was long a cult figure, though since he died in 1996 he has been, if anything, overexposed through reissued broadcasts. This collection has particular interest, both historical and musical. Celibidache conducted the Berlin Philharmonic from 1945, when Furtwangler was banished, to the beginning of Karajan's tenure in 1952. It was still very much Furtwangler's orchestra, though some things had changed, as a glance at the contents indicates: this is music banned by the Nazis and so new to Berlin audiences in 1948-50. (The three pieces by Heinz Tiessen, Celibidache's teacher, were recorded for the RIAS in 1957).

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 241

Celibidache was, like Furtwangler, a fundamentally subjective artist. In these early performances, the personal seems less significant than the social as the orchestra rejoices in the new liberal era. The Rhapsody in Blue is performed in the best sleazy-jazz Berlin manner reminiscent of Klemperer's *Three-penny Opera* suite of an earlier day. By contrast the Hindemith seems mere cacophony as the spirit of the composer proves more elusive. The Tiessen works are middle-brow Teutonism that leaves one wondering what he could have done to run afoul of the Nazis. Reinhard Schwarz-Schilling's piece is a pleasing homage to Bach; the Busoni concerto can be heard to much better advantage elsewhere. Harald Genzmer's Flute Concerto is a neoclassical gem of the first water: I would very much like to hear more from this composer.

The outstanding performance is Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. Here one relishes the meditative qualities that made Celibidache a cult figure and an elfin grace and lightness that quite lift the spirit out of the body. Presumably this has more to do with the conductor's relish for Buddhism than any feeling for Americana, but whatever the source, his gift for simplicity proves abundant.

Anyone with a serious interest in Celibidache should seek this out. Audite's production is first-rate, a far cry from the dismal pirated LPs where we first encountered Celibidache in the West. The orchestra is splendid. The conductor, the repertoire, and the epoch make this a historical reissue worthy of particular notice.

RADCLIFFE

Johanna Martzy

BACH: *Solo Violin Sonatas & Partitas*
Testament 1467 [2CD] 139 minutes

SCHUBERT: *Violin Pieces*
with Jean Antonietti, p
Testament 1468 [2CD] 124 minutes

Johanna Martzy (1924-79) was one of the last students of the prolific Hungarian virtuoso and pedagogue Jeno Hubay (1858-1937). Her style and tone production were more modern than Hubay's students Franz von Vecsey and Joseph Szigeti, whose bowing was of the old German School. Martzy's recordings with EMI have long been deleted and have fetched high prices from collectors. They have attained a legendary status.

While her recordings of Bach must have sounded stylistically very modern and technically accomplished for their time, they have not aged well. Style has changed dramatically since the mid-1950s. Dynamics are not so terraced now, and rhythms are more pointed. Frankly, I find the recordings by Henryk Szeryng for Odeon and Nathan Milstein for EMI at the same time as these more satisfying, even though they also show some age stylistically and sonically. Szerying is more lyrical and noble, while Milstein is more energetic and playful, especially in the dance movements. Martzy is too stiff, and she doesn't have the engaging personality of a world-class soloist.

She is a bit more satisfactory in the Schubert, especially in the early sonatas. Perhaps the presence of a partner relaxes her. Still, these readings do not move to the top of the list. Schubert is a difficult composer to interpret. I write this from embarrassing experience as a quartet member. I have never heard completely satisfying recordings of Schubert's music for violin. His demands are, of course, rarely technical, except insofar as technique is brought into the service of interpretation, which is the highest level of technique. The interpreter must first have the imagination to understand the significance of each note, and then must know how to make each phrase tell its story. In the more mature works, many sustained notes must go through a range of emotions and tone colors that the average violinist (and probably the average violin) is barely capable of mustering.

These recordings were made in 1954 and 1955, and the sound is very early hi-fi. Martzy plays the 1733 "Tarisio" Carlo Bergonzi violin, which is widely regarded as his masterpiece. Booklet notes are by that walking encyclopedia, Tully Potter.

MAGIL

Isaac Stern

BEETHOVEN: *Sonata 10;* **BRAHMS:** *Sonata 2;* **FERGUSON:** *Sonata 2;* **SCHUBERT:** *Sonata 1*
with Dame Myra Hess, p
Testament 1458—79 minutes

Stern and Hess began playing together in 1952, but they did not make any commercial recordings together. This is a BBC recording of a superb concert at Usher Hall in Edinburgh on August 28, 1960. It was their last concert together, and, owing to a heart attack that Hess had shortly after the concert, it was one of her last performances.

I think Stern was at his very best in the company of Hess, and it is to everyone's great fortune that we have this recording. The interpretations are personal and very spontaneous. The reading of Howard Ferguson's 1948 Sonata (new music in 1960) is particularly personal because of Hess's friendship with the composer.

This is a recording not to miss and one to return to often.

FINE

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 242

Irma Gonzalez, 1945-65

Butterfly, Boheme, Manon Lescaut, Tosca, Turandot, Amico Fritz, Pagliacci, Andrea Chenier, Mefistofele, Norma, Manon, Herodiade, Carmen, Jeanne d'Arc; Traviata, Aida, Requiem, Otello, Forza

Urtext 189 [2CD] 142 minutes

After nearly three quarters of a century spent listening to voices, I was more than mildly astonished to come across a soprano I had never heard of. And it was one who seemingly enjoyed a major career—but almost entirely in the country of her birth (Mexico). Judging from many photos and these mainly air-check examples, the lady had almost every attribute required for an international career. A pleasing appearance, a fine voice of individual quality, a smooth legato line, instrumental-like phrasing, and splendid dynamic variety, all combine to make her a most exciting discovery. Virtually no appearances outside of Mexico and less than a handful of commercial recordings, may explain to some extent her relative obscurity.

This handsomely produced double-fold tribute includes a slim booklet—unfortunately entirely in Spanish. It appears to omit any reference to her birth year (1916) but does include 2008 as the year of her death. She appears to have been most active in the middle years of the last century, from when all these recordings date. While the best of them are perfectly tolerable, none are exactly easy on the ear. But if prepared to cope with less than first rate sound, you will be rewarded by some truly magnificent singing.

Two excerpts from *Butterfly* are moving and meaningfully sung, but Mimi's two arias are even better. Musetta's air, which follows, is a highly individual interpretation. The first total revelation is a genuinely affecting 'Vissi d'arte' noteworthy for being sung as scored—the final phrases taken in one breath. Also from *Tosca* is the final act, commencing at Tosca's entrance. Her Cavaradossi is the ever-reliable Domingo. Despite a sound glitch near its conclusion, she triumphantly surmounts the hidden pitfalls of Nedda's 'Bird song' and with Di Stefano in good voice, is thrilling in the *Andrea Chenier* finale. The trill may not be quite up to Alda standard in the first of the two arias from *Mefistofele*; but it is highly respectable, and she competes with Olivero in the second. 'Mira, O Norma' with Dominguez is good enough but not perhaps as noteworthy as hoped. Manon's farewell to her table goes convincingly, and her seduction scene at St Sulpice is irresistible but somewhat bizarrely continues into the concluding duet, sung here as a solo! Pitching problems emerge in the *Herodiade* and *Jean d'Arc* arias, which sound as if transferred about a half to a full tone sharp. The orchestra in Micaela's air (down a quarter tone at least) sounds almost unbelievably poor. The Nile aria is predictably fine, as are the *Otello* excerpts. She is joined in the love duet by Vickers—a highly idiosyncratic Moor. A splendid 'Pace, pace' from *La Forza del Destino* and a singularly smooth Recordare (down a half tone) with the unknown Aurora Woodrow further confirm her to have been a Verdi singer of note. A bonus track offers snippets from a session where Gonzalez sings Garland's numbers from *Meet me in St Louis*, for its Mexican release!

As a memorial to an important, unfairly neglected artist, this issue warrants the highest praise and deserves support. Whether to purchase it will probably depend on your tolerance of the somewhat indifferent sound, balanced against such superb singing and artistry. Singing of this calibre must surely entitle this soprano a place among the truly great singers of the past century.

LIFF

Gustav Neidlinger

Preiser 93475—79 minutes

This German bass (1910-91) was one of the superb, black-voiced basses of the 1950s and 60s. Thanks to his performance in the Solti *Ring* cycle (Decca) Neidlinger became identified with the wicked dwarf Alberich. There are examples of his Alberich here: the *Rheingold* Curse, The Alberich-Wotan-Fafner encounter in Act II of *Siegfried*, and the Alberich-Hagen Scene from *Gotterdammerung*, all from a 1953 Bayreuth performance with Erich Witte, Hans Hotter, and Josef Greind.

But Neidlinger's art was far more extensive than Alberich. Here is a chance to hear him as Wotan ('Wotan's Farewell', a 1958 Electrola recording). The other Wagner selection is Pogner in *Meistersinger*.

But who would have guessed his delight in comic roles? Here is Baron Ochs (*Rosenkavalier*, two arias from Mozart's *Garden of Love* (sung in German of course), a rollicking scene for Fra Melitone (*Forza*), and Masetto's 'Ho capito, Signor, si'. There is great joy in Neidlinger's singing, and a great, huge, cavernous, black voice to back it up.

No texts.

PARSONS

Kurt Baum

Preiser 89741—71 minutes

As the brief biography from Preiser points out "Few tenors have polarized opera fans more than Kurt Baum'. Although he was born in Czechoslovakia and studied voice in Germany, his principal repertoire was Italian—the "big

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 243

voice" repertoire. His principal opera house was the Metropolitan in New York, where he remained for 26 years. Some considered him a vocal bull in the china shop, with poor musicianship, an ugly voice, wooden acting, and only the incredible strength and reliability of his high notes to base a career on. The tremendous power of his high C riveted audiences and even impressed the critics. To his credit, Baum always sang at the original pitch, never needing to transpose.

In the 1950s I saw Baum numerous times at the Cincinnati Zoo Opera. As a youth I was indeed impressed by his loudness and high notes, but terribly unimpressed by everything else about him. But on hearing this disc I began to mistrust my memory. Baum was bad, but not this bad! The 18 selections taken from an Allegro Royale LP and a Remington LP are studio recorded and are worse than anything I remembered. All singing is forte, fortissimo, and FORTISSIMO. The conductor, Wilhelm Loibner, Baum regards as an impediment. It's all Baum's way, or nobody's. Aria after aria—Pollione, Faust, Manrico, Don Alvaro, Radames, Don Jose, Canio, Andrea Chenier, Rodolfo, Cavaradossi, Calaf, Enzo—even the Italian Tenor in *Rosenkavalier*—all sound the same. It's take no prisoners, and it's painful.

Still, I don't remember Baum being this bad. So, I dug out a complete *Pagliacci* (Walhall 286) from Boston, the Met on tour, April 13, 1957, with Fausto Cleva leading Lucine Amara, Robert Merrill (Tonio), and Frank Guarrera (Silvio). What a wonderful surprise! Baum is more than a decent tenor; he really delivers a powerful, dramatic performance. Even the voice is prettier—brighter, still strong as iron, horrifically exciting, quite enjoyable. Perhaps it was the on stage performance or Cleva's iron baton that kept Baum in order. He still isn't the tenor of one's dreams.

PARSONS

Albert Da Costa

Preiser 89740—71 minutes

After Kurt Baum I turned to this American tenor (1927-67). There are several similarities to Baum: big voice, iron strength, not the most beautiful voice to belt from the stage. But there are major differences, too. Da Costa has a cleaner sound, good musicianship, and a generally good grasp of the dramatics. Of the 21 selections here, only seven duplicate Baum. All of Da Costa's selections were recorded in the studio and published on Allegro Royale and Concord LPs.

Several repertory items here are from operas Baum never attempted: *Puritani*, *Le Prophete*, *Otello*, and especially some Wagner (*Lohengrin, Meistersinger, Walkure, Siegfried*). It is in this repertoire that Da Costa excels. The voice is robust, fresh, full of confidence, with strength to spare.

No texts.

PARSONS

Videos

BEETHOVEN: *Symphony 5;* **STRAUSS:** *Don Juan;* **WAGNER:** *Flying Dutchman Overture*
Covent Garden Orchestra; BBC Symphony/ Georg Solti

ICA 5024—96 minutes

Georg Solti had been Music Director of the Royal Opera House of Covent Garden for two years when he taped this Wagner performance in 1963. At the time, he was still controversial at the Opera because of his loud dynamics, fast tempos, nervous beat, and lack of lyricism. Still, his ground-breaking Decca *Ring Cycle* was well under way, so there was good reason for critics to be patient, and Solti went on to enjoy a good relationship with the Opera until leaving in 1971. The setting for this recorded-for-television *Flying Dutchman Overture* is visually striking. The orchestra is in full formal dress and arrayed on step-by-step risers—every row back goes one step up—with Solti standing before it like a raving sorcerer. The dark, shadowy photography is like something out of Orson Welles. As annotator David Patmore notes, the performance is stormy, with tight, fast tempos and a wide range of dynamics.

The risers are gone for the 1967 *Don Juan,* and everyone is dressed casually. For this work, we get rehearsal excerpts as well as the performance—and what a rehearsal! It is easy to see why Solti was known as the "screaming skull" at Covent Garden. It is also easy to understand how the orchestra improved so much under his leadership. The man is everywhere on that podium, lunging from one side to the other, forward, back, up and down, involved and earthy. He waves his hands up and down like a mad condor, emphasizing upbeats, while still giving cues. Rather than stop often to make his verbal points, he shouts them over the music, along with descriptions of what is going on in the music's program.

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 244

When he does stop, he speaks quickly and nervously, teeming with energy and enthusiasm. Anyone wondering where Solti's nervous performances came from need only watch this one. It is thrilling, raging, sweeping, and passionate (literally), but still tender when needed, a real *tour de force*. Along with the rehearsal excerpts, there is a long conversation between Solti and record producer John Culshaw about Strauss and *Don Juan*. Solti conversed just like he conducted—-all over the couch, always smiling, talking fast.

In 1985, Solti was 73, 16 years into his Chicago Symphony directorship, when he conducted the Beethoven. Culshaw never thought much of Solti as a Beethoven conductor, and the conductor's set of Beethoven symphonies with the powerhouse Chicago Symphony proved that point. The BBC Symphony adds some solidity and dignity to the cause, but this is still a Solti performance with strong accents, powerful punctuating chords, fast tempos, and an exultant finale. It's not bad, and it is certainly entertaining. This is the only segment in color (somewhat faded), and it was made in concert in Royal Albert Hall.

The sound is decent but not outstanding monaural. Patmore's notes are brief but useful. The reasons to get this DVD are the Wagner and especially the Strauss.

HECHT

BELLINI: *Norma*
June Anderson (Norma), Daniela Barcellona (Adalgisa), Shin Young Hoon (Pollione), Ildar Abdrazakov (Oroveso); Teatro Regio, Parma: Orchestra Europa Galante/ Fabio Biondi
Arthaus 107 235 [2DVD] 163 minutes

A too gosh darn dark but otherwise OK traditional production of *Norma*, with hardly a cut that allows the opera to unfold in a straightforward way without contempt. It was given in 2001 with June Anderson in the autumn of her career. She was a major player in the bel canto world. (I have fond memories of her *Puritani* Elvira and Semiramide at New York's two major opera houses.) She understands Norma thoroughly, and if time has robbed the voice of some luster and added a touch of dryness, there is still much expert singing. She has a great understanding of Norma's emotions and brings them out very well. 'Casta Diva' and her duets with Adalgisa are high points. Bel canto style and drama. I wish Barcellona were a better partner. She's done Adalgisa often, but here she sounds clumsy. Anderson seems to be working for two in their scenes together. The voice is attractive; was this an off night?

Hoon is a lyric Pollione, not heroic in style but sturdy enough. Abdrazakov early in his career is an authoritative Oroveso—attractive singing in an ungrateful role. Orchestra Europa Galante is a period orchestra, and sometimes I longed for the richer sounds of a modern ensemble. But it isn't unduly unattractive; the sound is fuller than some period orchestras I can think of. Biondi generally paces the show with an understanding of bel canto style and how to support his singers. Yet sometimes he does peculiar things. For example, the beginning of the overture slows down and almost runs out of steam and then suddenly picks up—full speed ahead. The chorus is a good group, though a mite unpolished. DG has a DVD with Gruberova that's good competition. (I have heard the Caballé video only on CD.). This is mainly for Anderson fans—and I am one.

MARK

HAYDN: *The Creation*
Arleen Auger, Gabriela Sima, Peter Schreier, Walter Berry, Roland Herrman; Collegium Aureum, Schoenberg Choir/ Gustav Kuhn
Arthaus 107225—114 minutes

This is a performance from 1982.
The singers are distinguished ones with (except for Auger) mostly middle European careers. Kuhn (who was in his 30s when this concert was given) studied conducting under Maderna and Karajan.

The Collegium Aureum was a German early instrument group with a relatively modern (and pleasant) sound. The strings have at least a hint of vibrato, and the brass and wind seem to be close to modern instruments.

The chorus is a little light in weight.

The soloists are all lovely in voice. It's nice to be back in a time when Schreier and Berry had young, juicy voices and Auger was alive.

Kuhn's reading is a little light and sometimes slow, approaching slack, in ways that neither Karajan nor Maderna would have put up with for a moment.

I wouldn't choose this over Hogwood on video and would want to look at the Fischer DVD before I settled on this one.

If I were going beyond DVDs, I would choose either Karajan, Solti, or Harnoncourt over this one.

Still, this performance is perfectly pleasant, never goes seriously off the rails, and offers fine vocal work, especially when Auger is singing. I don't mind having spent time with it and will go back.

CHAKWIN

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 245

MOUSSORGSKY: *Pictures at an Exhibition*
Eyran Katsenelenbogen & Andrei Ivanovitch, p
Eyran 9009—48 minutes (www.eyran.com or 617-267-1648)

This concert was recorded on May 24, 2009 in Jordan Hall at the New England Conservatory in Boston. It is the American premiere of an arrangement that these two pianists first performed in 2006 in Germany. The original piano solo version of this great work is alternated with jazz interpretations or reflections on each movement. Sometimes, especially in 'The Great Gate of Kiev', Katsenelenbogen (the jazz pianist) joins Ivanovitch in the original, adding an additional sound layer that seems perfectly appropriate. Audience response here and critical responses have been quite favorable.

I have many different versions of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, from the piano original to Ravel's (and other's) orchestrations, to a synthesized version, pipe organ, and even the 1960s rock version by Emerson, Lake & Palmer. I have also performed most of the movements on and off since first learning them in the early 1970s. This *Classical Meets Jazz* version is a completely new and original approach, very well executed, thought provoking, and always interesting.

My main reservation is how well the original works back-to-back with the jazz versions. As creative as they may be, it almost seems like a straight jazz version by itself might work better, much like the orchestrations or even the rock version. Imagine a pianist playing the opening Promenade on a concert grand piano, directly followed by a trio of Hammond Organ, Electric Bass, and Drums doing the same thing, slightly embellished. But my reservations are minimal. There is no booklet with notes.

HARRINGTON

MOZART: *The Magic Flute (for Children)*
Ileana Cotrubas (Pamina), Peter Schreier (Tamino), Christian Boesch (Papageno), Kurt Rydl (Sarastro), Zdzislawa Donat (Queen of the Night); Vienna Opera/ James Levine
Arthaus 107201—106 minutes

This is an adaptation of *The Magic Flute* for children given in the Felsenreitschule as part of the 1982 Salzburg Festival. It uses the same scenery and costumes as the complete opera (Jan/Feb 2006) and has mostly the same cast. (The Zurich performance of this same opera for children had a different cast—July/Aug 2010.) The audience is almost entirely children; adults were admitted only if they came accompanied by at least two children. Many of the children are pre-schoolers, and they were entranced by what they saw and heard.

Christian Boesch, who is credited with the idea, acts as narrator (he also sings Papageno's arias); he is charming as he explains what the children are about to see and hear, the music as well as the story. Unfortunately, he talks too much; less than half of the time is taken up with the music. The opera is reduced to 12 musical selections. The musical numbers are sung very well.

Children ho may well enjoy this, especially if they understand German. While subtitles are supplied, they do not keep up with all of Boesch's jokes and explanations, and they go by so fast that I doubt that many children can keep up with them.

Several years ago, Levine conducted a streamlined version of Julie Taymor's production of *Magic Flute* at the Met, also meant for children. It dispensed with the talk and charmed the listeners with its more imaginative use of costumes and innovative stage business. It was very effective; if there is a Met video of it, it ought to be released. It was a much more magical production of Mozart's opera.

MOSES

OFFENBACH: *La Belle Helene*
Felicity Lott (Helene), Yann Beuron (Paris), Michel Senechal (Menelaus), Laurent Naouri (Agamemnon), François Le Roux (Calchas); Musiciens du Louvre/ Mark Minkowski
ArtHaus 107403—127 minutes

This famous production of *La Belle Helene* originated at the Ch*f*telet in Paris in 2000, and then played internationally, from London to Santa Fe. It was originally released on the Kultur label, then on TDK. The terrific conductor is Mark Minkowski, the fabulous director Laurent Pelly.

The production takes all kinds of postmodern liberties with the original Trojan-War timeframe and gets away with most of them, from the overture, with a bored, modern Helen (Felicity Lott) going into her bathroom, to a Nauplia (Act III) with modern guys and gals cavorting by the seaside. It adds an appreciable amount of sex and skin to a ribald work that for many years had been enbalmed in fussy costuming. One startling example for your delectation is having its Paris take a shower on stage.

The Parisian critics raved about this show, and the Châtelet had a huge hit on its hands. The following Pelly-Minkowski Offenbach offering was a less-effective *Grande-Duchesse de Gerolstein*, also with Madame Lott. There have also been productions elsewhere with the same director or conductor of *Orphée aux Enfers* and *La Vie Parisienne*, but not with quite the same eclat. Of course, M. Pelly has

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 246

gone on to furnish the Metropolitan Opera with more challenging vocal works like *La Fille du Regiment*.

But do not disparage the vocal and acting talents required to pull off an Offenbach opera-bouffe. Fortunately, a superlative cast here has the goods required. Yann Beuron is a very sexy Paris, and François Le Roux is a very amusing Calchas, the soothsayer. The Kings of Greece are enacted wonderfully by Michel Senechal, Laurent Naouri, Erich Huchet, and others. Marie-Ange Torodovitch is the sparkling Orestes, a breeches part; and Stephanie d'Oustrac, who just wowed me considerably in the Champs-Elysées-Arts Florissants Armide (by Lully), appears as one of the courtesans.

Felicity Lott was possibly a little too old to play the most beautiful woman in the (ancient) world and the "face that launched a thousand ships", but her wry comedic ways and good singing and excellent French help her to get away with it.

Belle Helene is a landmark Offenbach, and not to be missed. The DVD has English (and other) subtitles, and includes an interesting documentary at the end. The score follows the critical edition, but there has been some tampering with the original Meilhac-Halevy text by Agathe Melinand, as you might expect.

TRAUBNER

PUCCINI: *Tosca*
Emily Magee (Tosca), Jonas Kaufmann (Cavaradossi), Thomas Hampson (Scarpia); Zurich Opera/ Paolo Carignani
Decca 15483—125 minutes

VERDI: *Macbeth*
Thomas Hampson (Macbeth), Paoletta Marrocu (Lady Macbeth), Roberto Scandiuzzi (Banquo), Luis Lima (Macduff); Zurich Opera/ Franz Welser-Most
Arthaus 101563—141 minutes

Both of these productions are from the Zurich Opera, but only one is worth bothering with. We've all seen a lot of Eurotrash and a lot of preposterous opera stagings, but David Pountney's 2001 *Macbeth* sets a new low standard. Almost nothing you see has any relationship whatsoever to the story or the words. The props are arbitrary and irrelevant: typewriter, hula hoop, boom-box, newspapers. The costumes suggest no time or place at all, and the variety of styles would take too much space to describe. Macbeth's is vaguely military; Lady Macbeth is almost topless, save for a few strips of cloth. Some characters are wearing newspapers. There's no furniture on stage to speak of. The producer might have gone to a local charity shop, emptied it out, threw everything on and around the players, and called it *Macbeth*. Yes, there's a dagger, and a lot of children wave branches about when Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane, but nothing illuminates the drama at all. It's rare—fortunately—to see such a complete mess on an opera stage.

The actual performance is decent, no more. Though on the light side, Hampson is a good actor, and his strong top voice gets him through a role he's not naturally suited for. Paoletta Marrocu has a strong, cutting voice and the right sort of dominant personality for Lady Macbeth. She's no pleasure to hear, but she's flexible enough for her arias, and she goes easily up to the top D-flat of the Sleepwalking Scene (where, for the first time, she's modestly clothed). Scandiuzzi is an eloquent Banquo, and veteran tenor Luis Lima still has enough voice for Macduff. Welser-Most likes broad tempos, often to the detriment of the drama, but he holds it all together.

The 2009 *Tosca* also has some silly moments, but next to *Macbeth* it's a model of lucidity. The characters are in modern dress (you wonder why they're so upset about the news of the battle of Marengo); the stage settings are drab but functional. The church might be a church (with a very oddly dressed congregation for the Te Deum and a theater curtain in the background), and Scarpia's apartment at least looks like a habitable room. Act 3 is vague: nothing to suggest the Castel Sant'Angelo or Rome in the background, and no parapet for Tosca to leap from—she just raises her arms and walks into the darkness.

Hampson, again in a role just a size too big, is a riveting Scarpia, handsome and unctuous and very much in command. His best vocal moments are at the top of his voice. Kaufmann looks perfect as Cavaradossi, very much the romantic hero. His voice has a baritonal cast on bottom but grows more ringing and thrilling as it rises, though it never sounds Italian. He sings so softly sometimes you wonder if he would be audible even in the small Zurich house. He and Emily Magee have good chemistry—they play off each other and really seem to be in love. She has a fresh, rather plain-vanilla voice that, like Kaufmann's, is stronger on top than on bottom, and her words are not really filled with the sort of emotion Italian sopranos put into them. But she's tireless, and she keeps on rising to shining heights from beginning to end. I'm not entirely sold by her girl-next-door Tosca, but she's honest and touching. Conductor Carignani sets even slower tempos than Welser-Most—*Tosca* doesn't need this much deliberation—but the orchestra plays well for him.

Sound and picture is fine for both performances. The *Tosca* is worth seeing but skip the *Macbeth*.

LUCANO

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 247

RAUTAVAARA: *Aleksis Kivi*
Jorma Hynninen (Aleksis), Janne Reinikainen (August Ahlqvist), Riikka Rantanen (Charlotta), Pauliina Linnosaari (Hilda), Ville Rusanen (Young Aleksis); Finnish Opera/ Mikko Franck
Ondine 4009—1:47

Aleksis Kivi is regarded as Finland's "national author", creator of "the first major novels, plays and poems in the Finnish language", according to the composer's notes. He died of a combination of alcoholism, madness (said to be schizophrenia), and depression in 1872 at the age of 38.

A genuinely tragic figure, Kivi's downfall offers juicy material for 20th Century operatic treatment and is a good role for a strong dramatic baritone. Jorma Hynninen, for whom the role was written, fits the bill perfectly. A long-time operatic collaborator with Rautavaara, Hynninen is a master of the composer's lyrical idiom and a fine actor.

Rautavaara's 1996 three act opera opens with a brief prologue, set near the conclusion of the protagonist's demise. Act I proper begins as a flashback to the young Kivi (well sung by Ville Rusanen) feeling his oats and declaring his commitment to depicting the Finnish People warts and all, their crude language, heavy drinking, and gruff character naked and unexpurgated. He is surrounded by his two women, his considerably older patroness Charlotta (Riikka Rantanen) and her pretty, if air-headed, blonde pupil Hilda (Pauliina Linnosaari). All is not merry, though, since Aleksis has a jealous alter ego in the Professor August Ahlqvist, intentionally given a speaking role owing to what the composer regards as his inherent lack of musicality (played to the hilt by actor Jenne Reminkainen). Ahlqvist will have none of Kivi's realist aesthetic, insisting instead on the duty of art to teach man "what should be", rather than "what is". His disgust at the rabble's abuse of the Finnish language might sound familiar to readers of these pages. The act closes with Charlotta thinking better of her budding lust for artist Aleksis, and she leaves him after advising her pupil to leave him as well.

Act II opens with the older Kivi asking the powerful Ahlqvist for aid in getting his works published. Not a chance! He tears up the manuscripts and throws Aleksis a penny to go drinking with. Act III finds the destitute Aleksis alone, drunk and delusional, tortured by the specter of Ahlqvist, assorted characters of his own invention, and apparitions of his past. An Epilogue finds Aleksis at death's door in a mental institution, begging for peace. He sees himself revisiting his youth and sings a duet with it (a neat touch). The moving, almost Wagnerian finale is set to words that were also set by Sibelius.

Rautavaara based his libretto on texts by Kivi himself, as well as by merciless critic Ahlqvist. They are set in a basically tonal, lyrical style, suitably dramatic sometimes, and are constructed with what amounts to set pieces in the traditional operatic sense. The production is austere, since this is essentially a chamber opera. Groups and spare characters are wheeled around on dollies by "the eighth brother" (an extra "Young Finn": see below), a "dancing role" (Timo Saari) symbolizing, I suppose, Kivi's active subconscious, or, more likely, his psychosis. It prances around like an irritating troll, which I suppose could be an apt portrayal of a mental illness. It is not an effective device theatrically after a while. Kivi's male entourage, known as the "Young Finns" (there are seven of them), are always rather awkwardly hanging around, providing ensemble when needed. Least effective are the first act episodes involving the women, particularly the irritating Hilda. Her mooning all over Aleksis as he sings one of his poems is cloying and downright embarrassing.

Pekka Milonoff's direction is more clever than consistently effective. I found much of the staging distracting. Singing is generally excellent (though I'm not wild about Ms Linosaari's contribution). The piece is worth seeing, though as a whole consider my response "mixed". Included as bonus is 'The Making of 'Aleksis Kivi'', which contains interviews with Rautavaara, Hynninen, and conductor Franck. The booklet includes an introduction by the composer, essays on the opera and Kivi, and a synopsis. Subtitling is clear; sound is excellent.

GIMBEL

SAINT-SAENS: *Samson et Dalila*
Torsten Kerl (Samson), Marianna Tarasova (Dalila), Nikola Mijailovic (High Priest); Flemish Opera/ Tomas Netopil
EuroArts 2058628—136 minutes

Co-directors Omri Nitzan, an Israeli, and Amir Nizar Zuabi, a Palestinian, must have thought they had an absolutely brilliant idea when they updated *Samson* to the present. Israelis vs Palestinians in Gaza. Great idea, right? Wrong! The directors chose to make a political statement, biased, I think, toward the Philistines—oops, Palestinians. I thought the Philistines were the bad guys. And besides, the Philistines and their god Dagon aren't around anymore in the era of three great monotheistic religions. Cultural Philistines don't count.

Leaving out the politics, this is still an icky production. There is dancing in the choral scenes that suggests slow dances and other stuff one might see on one of those TV reality dance shows. Pretty tame for a bacchanal or

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 248

lamenting Hebrews. And some of the choreography for that bacchanal seems like a futuristic Rockettes number. Yikes! Samson's blinding is tame stuff. In Act 2 Delilah puts a handgun to Samson's head; sometimes she seems to be using it as a sex toy. The High Priest and Philistine crowd are about as menacing as students in a high school pageant. Modern dress and a refusal to face the fact that *Samson* is set in a fixed time and place—those demerits alone would be enough to irritate me. The bonus interview with the directors attempting to justify themselves is pure gobbledygook.

The musical side of the show is notable mainly for Torsten Kerl's sensitive singing—heroic sounds from a voice not really heroic. He tries hard to create a sympathetic figure, but the production does him in. I tried sometimes to close my eyes during his big moments and felt I was hearing a real effort to make the best of a bad concept. Tarasova's cloudy, mature sounds and what I consider to be unsteadiness with a vibrato not in proper working condition don't make for a believable seductress. The High Priest and supporting singers are no great shakes, but the chorus is fine. Conductor and orchestra are OK but not particularly stimulating. Who can blame them? If I want a good *Samson,* I'll stick with CDs: Vickers-Gorr or Bouvier-Luccioni on EMI, to name just two of the best.

MARK

SCARLATTI: *A Daring Game*
Francesco Leprino
Concerto 2021—98 minutes

This DVD will be of great interest to lovers of Scarlatti's music. All we can hope to learn about the composer's inner life must be gleaned from his music. The interviews documented by this film help paint a picture of who Scarlatti was. Harpsichordists Enrico Baiano, Emilia Fadini, and Gustav Leonhardt bring early music performance practice and scholarship to the table. Composer Salvatore Sciarrino and writer Jose Saramago discuss Scarlatti's influence on their own work. The film maker has interlaced video footage of performances of Scarlatti's music, from harpsichord solos to fado arrangements.

KATZ

SCHOENBERG: *Gurrelieder*
Deborah Voigt, Stig Andersson, Mihoko Fujimara, Herwig Pecoraro, Michael Volle; Bavarian Radio/ Mariss Jansons
BR 900110—124 minutes

Gurrelieder is a great work. It gathers the darkness and the soaring aspirations of the Romantic Era, from Beethoven through Mahler and Strauss, wraps them into one huge work of art and then sends them off with a blazing C-major sunrise, like some ancient warrior sent off to a sea burial on a blazing boat.

This is only my second encounter with it on video. The first was a private recording of a BBC performance under Andrew Davis from some time ago. I don't know why we don't have more video recordings of it, since the recordings of it that exist almost all seem to come from concerts. The sheer spectacle of these massed forces is not easily forgotten; and, when you actually see things like what the double bass players have to go through in the Wild Hunt or the Wagner Tubas with their mutes opening Part III with unearthly sounds, you have a much better idea of how strange and ambitious this music is than most people's unaided ears can offer.

All of that said, I have some reservations about this performance. Jansons is a technically superb, superbly trained, and deeply sensitive musician. Many of his performances are ones that I treasure. But lately, perhaps for health reasons, perhaps because that's just where he is in his development as an artist, some of his performances have become so understated that they seem short of energy.

Parts of this performance are like that. The magical opening of the piece, so gorgeous in color, so full of light and shadow, in for example, the Inbal performance, is very muted here, almost conversational. The emotion in the big duets doesn't soar. Over and over again, the camera pans to Jansons, who is physically very involved in the music, but what you see is not what you hear. I don't know why this is.

Voigt is in fine voice, and Andersson has a clean, slightly dry voice that's a little small for the part but sounds good all the way through. They are both lovely to listen to but don't have performing charisma. In most Gurrelieders, Tove and Waldemar grab your attention and don't let it go. Not here.

Who does grab your attention is Fujimara, the Wood Dove. Her voice is a good instrument, though there have been some fabulous singers in this part over the years. What makes the difference is that she has the charisma that nobody else does. She is absolutely riveting. Every note matters. Jansons isn't there for her. He could have built the insanity in the orchestral response to what she was singing at the end, but no. He's not intense.

The chorus and orchestra and minor parts are all first-rate. The video editing (Brian Large) is sensitive and smart.

Among the audio-only performances, Inbal is the best conducted that I know of. He revels in the colors of the score and handles the ebb and flow really well. Chailly, who is not on Inbal's level as a conductor, has a great

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 249

team of singers, and they are all great communicators.

This performance is full of virtues but doesn't add up to what I hoped for. But I would not want to give up the chance to hear Fujimara.

CHAKWIN

SOMERS: *Louis Riel*
Canadian Opera/ Victor Feldbrill
Centrediscs 16711—126 minutes

Louis Riel (1844-85) was an important and controversial figure in Canadian history. A leader of the Metis (descendants of French settlers who paired with people already present), he led uprisings when the young Canadian government extended its reach westward in the mid-to-late 19th Century. For his deeds (or misdeeds, depending on your point of view), he was arrested, convicted of treason, and hung. Today he is hero to some, traitor to others—as he was a century ago.

Composer Harry Somers (1925-99) and librettist James Mavor Moore were commissioned to write this two-hour, three-act opera in commemoration of Canada's centennial in 1967. The first runs were in Toronto and Montreal, and it has been revived several times since—including at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC during the US bicentennial in 1976. The present recording is of a 1969 television adaptation and offers almost the entire original cast. The cast is large: 37 characters are listed.

Introductory material, spoken and with archival news photos, lets us know that Louis Riel's story has parallels in current events—that struggles between minorities and majorities still take place and still vex people in power. As stated in the notes, "the geographic, linguistic, and cultural fault lines emphasized in Somers's opera have long haunted Canada's past since Riel's death and continue to persist in the present".

The opera is excellent, the performances are moving, and the overall production is marvelous. It appears that no expense was spared on sets and costumes. The atonal music fits the tense scenes quite well, and the gritty libretto packs punches. Texts are in English, French, Cree, and Latin. Conductor Victor Feldbrill coaxes fine playing from the orchestra, and the engineers make sure the cast can be heard clearly. The cast is very strong, musically and dramatically. Scenes are expertly crafted to portray the important events and the underlying conflicts.

Principal characters are played by Bernard Turgeon (Riel), Patricia Rideout (Riel's mother), Mary Morrison (his sister), Roxolana Roslak (his wife), Donald Rutherford (Prime Minister John Macdonald), Joseph Rouleau (Bishop Tache), and Thomas Park (Thomas Scott). The DVD includes a 10-minute interview with composer Somers and librettist Moore.

KILPATRICK

STURMINGER: *The Giacomo Variations*
John Malkovich (Casanova), Ingeborga Dapkunaite (Elisa+), Florian Boesch (Count Almaviva+), Sophie Klussmann (Despina+); Vienna Akademie/ Martin Haselböck
Arthaus 101570—139 minutes

The Giacomo of the title is Giacomo Casanova (1725-98), the notorious rake and, perhaps, the model for Mozart's Don Giovanni. He is the hero of this weird and rather silly Chamber Opera Play, allegedly based on Casanova's memoirs and spiced with arias from Mozart's Da Ponte operas. It's more of a play than an opera, and it can also be described as a fantasy. Casanova is portrayed by the actor John Malkovich (not known as an opera singer); he is supported by the three singers listed above who are trained in opera. They sing the Mozart arias beautifully, and they try to persuade us that the goings-on in Casanova's memoirs can be characterized by Mozart's arias. (I am not that easily persuaded, but I love the music.) This idea and its realization is the work of Michael Sturminger, who also directs it. The spoken dialog (and there's lots of it) is in English, but the arias are sung in the original Italian.

Unfortunately, the libretto for this "play with music" is not supplied, though a terse commentary by the author is printed on the DVD box. "The 18th Century is nearly over. Mozart died seven years ago and the first bars of his *Prague* Symphony still resound a certain vicinity of death, when the Venetian adventurer Giacomo Casanova contemplates putting an end to his deplorable existence. Stranded as Count Waldstein's librarian at the remote castle of Dux and lacking any eligible occupation for 15 years now, Giacomo has been doing nothing but writing his memoirs. Considering himself to be forgotten by the world, he is surprised to see the German poet Eliza van der Recke paying him a visit and showing serious interest in the 4000 pages of his 'Histoire de ma vie'. Attracted by this fascinating woman, old Giacomo for one last time wages the struggle to capture a female heart, ready to show her "how young I can be". Reciting Da Ponte's lyrics to her, he recalls his first love and above all his falling in love with love."

Elisa then sings 'Non so piu', Cherubino's Act 1 aria from *The Marriage of Figaro*. Is it relevant? Inspired by Elisa's amazement, Giacomo cannot refrain from opening other chap-

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 250

ters of his life, even granting Elisa a brief look into his "catalog of affairs", such as Leporello's "in Espagna son gia mille e tre"...And so on and on, for more than two hours.

The staging, by the author, is primitive but emphasizes Casanova's interest in sex. There's much groping, undressing, and coupling on stage. The scenery is minimal but there are almost always beds. The costumes evoke what the upper class was wearing in the last decades of the 18th Century. Malkovich gives a fine performance; I just wish he wouldn't try to sing; his vocal range, I'd guess, is at most one octave. The other soloists have smooth and alluring voices; they sing with a good understanding of Mozart style and they act with confidence. But some of the excerpts are used in situations quite different from Mozart's intentions. For example, the trio 'Suave sia el vento' (*Cosi Fan Tutte*) is here sung as a duet after a duel between the two male soloists. After Giacomo is shot, that melody accompanies Elisa's attempt to soothe her lover. Susanna's 'Deh vieni non tardar' (from *The Marriage of Figaro*) is sung by Elisa just before she and Casanova make love together at a picnic.

The accompaniments are well played on period instruments by the Vienna Academy Chamber Orchestra, which Haselböck conducts with vigor and authority. I'd be more inclined to recommend this release if a libretto were included. As it is, it can't be taken seriously, and its humor is often strained.

MOSES

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Nutcracker Act II;* **GLINKA:** *Ruslan & Ludmilla Overture; Life for the Czar Dances*
BBC Symphony/ Gennady Rozhdestvensky
ICA 5027—65 minutes

WAGNER: *Meistersinger Excerpts;* **FRANCK:** *Symphony;* **FAURE:** *Pelleas & Melisande Suite*
Boston Symphony/ Charles Munch
ICA 5015—71 minutes

STRAUSS: *Ein Heldenleben;* **DVORAK:** *Symphony 9*
Royal Philharmonic, BBC Symphony/ Rudolf Kempe
ICA 5009—89 minutes

ELGAR: *Symphony 2; Enigma Variations*
London Philharmonic/ Georg Solti
ICA 5011—84 minutes

Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* music has to be as close to perfection as any human creation has come. And if I had to choose its most nearly perfect interpreter, it would have to be Artur Rodzinski. But Gennady Rozhdestvensky and Eugene Ormandy (though he never recorded the complete ballet) would be extremely close second choices.

Rozhdestvensky seemed to have a particular fondness for the score: it was one of the first pieces he led as a 20-year-old conductor at the Bolshoi Theater in the 1950s, his Melodiya recording of the whole score (Sept/Oct 1997) is something of a classic, he leads the Royal Opera House orchestra in the Covent Garden production widely circulated on VHS and DVD (a staple of my family's Christmas celebrations)—and he seemed to like to lead the second act in concert. I remember being bowled over by his account with the Chicago Symphony in the early 1990s at the Ravinia Festival, after a blistering, life-altering performance of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto with Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg. This performance was videotaped at Royal Albert Hall on 27 July 1981 at the Proms, and it brings back memories of that one. It's a spectacular traversal that anybody who loves this score really must hear and see.

Rozhdestvensky was director of the BBC Symphony for only a brief period, from 1978 to 1981, before the unrelated political fall out from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (I guess we should call it the First Afghanistan War now) and the last-gasp tightening foreign travel restrictions of the Communist Old Guard in the 1980s forced him to give up the position. By all accounts, he enjoyed the relative freedom and working conditions with the ensemble and regretted giving it up. Judging from what we see here, he seems to have a genial and mutually supportive relationship with the orchestra.

It is definitely not the CSO—there are moments when Rozhdestvensky seems to have to hold back the tempo because the players are having trouble staying together. And sure, the trumpet soloist makes a few goofs in the intro to the 'Spanish Dance'. But when everything is running well he knows that the orchestra doesn't have to be manhandled into delivering the performance. He doesn't over-conduct, and sometimes he doesn't conduct at all, as when he steps back in the 'Waltz of the Flowers' and barely moves his arms. In the grand Finale, he actually steps back and crosses his arms at one point, an expression of pure satisfaction with the orchestra's playing on his face! When he wants a certain kind of expression, he shapes it with his extremely long baton, which he sometimes sets down to guide the players with his hands. The beautifully lithe, sinuous rendering of the 'Arabian Dance' is reflected in his remarkably graceful, almost perfectly choreographed movements.

So is Rozhdestvensky just showing off to the audience with a flashy conducting style? I don't think so. His unforced, lively interpreta-

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 251

tion is beautifully expressive, with careful yet fuss-free attention to the wealth of detail in Tchaikovsky's score. Turn off the picture and it sounds gorgeous; turn the TV back on and Rozhdestvensky's gestures translate directly into what we hear.

The program leads off with a lively, vibrant *Ruslan and Ludmilla* Overture. Rozhdestvensky doesn't treat it like a 50-yard dash, so it has energy without feeling rushed. There's enough time for him and the orchestra to savor some of the delicious details in the inner voices that usually get lost when the piece is treated like a slam-bang curtain raiser or encore. The Waltz, Mazurka, and Krakowiak from *A Life for the Czar* are slighter, less inventive works, but you would never know it from the concentration and savoring of detail by conductor and orchestra. The Glinka items were recorded at the Proms about two weeks after the Tchaikovsky.

Rozhdestvensky had probably led the *Nutcracker* hundreds of times before this concert, yet he still has the score in front of him and follows it all through the performance.

The video and audio production is quite good for 1970s television material. Despite the age of the videotape, the color is quite vibrant, and the camera work is straightforward and businesslike. They'll get you a shot of wherever the action is—often it's on the podium—but it's usually the same angle each time. Don't expect the kind of close-ups and swooping around you see from modern, lightweight, remote-controlled camera equipment.

The recorded sound is OK. *Ruslan and Ludmilla* sounds distinctly monophonic, but the rest of the program seems to be stereo—perhaps only the quality of an FM broadcast, but more than serviceable.

Today, the Boston Symphony doesn't quite have the profile it had in the 1930s through the 1960s, its status harmed by the long, dull tenure of a music director who stayed too long (Ozawa), followed more recently by a director who had vision but not the physical health to execute it (Levine). In the 1950s, though, it was a spectacular ensemble of virtuosos, led by Charles Munch, and fully deserving of its place in the Big Five. Looking much like a trimmer, rather more stylish Carl Sandburg, "Le beau Charles" was BSO music director from 1950 to 1963. Like Rozhdestvensky, he had a huge baton, which he used boldly, decisively, and assertively, though it could also express serenity and stillness. All those characteristics are on display in this program.

The material comes from three different concerts at Harvard's Sanders Theater in three consecutive years: 1959 (Fauré), 1960 (Wagner), and 1961 (Franck). The picture is, of course, black and white; and the two later performances seem to come from early video tapes, while the Fauré is obviously a Kinescope (a movie film of a TV monitor). Oddly enough, in portions of the Franck and Wagner, the corners of the picture are sometimes cut off, as if viewed through a telescope. It reminds me of watching TV on the small black and white set we had in the basement when I was a kid. Just be prepared that this is archival material; once you adjust back to the way TV viewing was 50 years ago, it's highly rewarding.

Munch was from Alsace-Lorraine, the province on the border of France and Germany that is attached to whichever of the two countries won the last war. When Munch was born it was part of Germany, and his musical upbringing was essentially German (eventually leading to becoming concertmaster of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra), but he eventually turned to conducting, leading his first concert in Paris.

Munch conducted and recorded a good deal of Wagner, and the three *Meistersinger* excerpts presented here figured regularly on his Boston programs. He combines serenity (Act III prelude) with Mozartean geniality in the 'Apprentices' Dance' and grandeur in the 'Entrance of the Mastersingers'—Furtwangler meets Toscanini, with balance and proportion in a sound that can only be Munch. The BSO plays brilliantly, but the sound isn't hard or aggressive.

Along with Pierre Monteux, Munch pretty much "owned" the Franck Symphony; it's hard to think of a later interpreter who approached their mastery, let along topped it. The performance Munch leads here makes the piece sound like something Beethoven might have produced if he'd had a "French Period". From the ominous introduction to the first movement, to the blistering allegro, to the movement's wild final pages, Munch leaves no doubt that this work, for him at least, is one of the great masterpieces. II has repose and scherzo-like interruptions—not a dull moment. And of course the finale is brash and vigorous and full of life—not bombastic in the slightest. The BSO plays with a rich, dark-hued, organ-like tone with burnish brass, fruity woodwinds, and lustrous strings.

Charmingly called a "bonus" in the booklet, the suite of four movements from Fauré's *Pelleas* incidental music puts the spotlight on the first-chair woodwinds of the BSO, a roster that reads like a Who's Who of famous players. It's a piece not often played today, maybe because few conductors can give it the charm, color, and life that Munch did.

Although the picture is imperfect, the sound is solid monaural with adequate bass and a decently tamed treble that keeps the top of the violins' range from sounding screechy.

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 252

Balances seem quite good, much like what we know from Munch's commercial recordings.

Rudolf Kempe was not a particularly flashy podium figure, though he could get plenty animated, as he does several times here. Both interpretations have the depth, musical integrity, and cohesion that made him a beloved figure for a lot of record buyers and concert audiences. Back in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, he was just one among many excellent conductors plying his art on the international circuit. Now, the Chicago and Boston Symphonies or the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonics would be vying for his services.

Kempe succeeded Beecham as conductor of the Royal Philharmonic and had a long and fruitful relationship with the ensemble. The Strauss, a Kempe specialty, is from his last concert with them, at the Proms in 1974. The Dvorak comes from almost exactly one year later, 29 August 1975, early in his tenure with the BBC Symphony. (He died a few months after this concert.)

Kempe's commercial recordings of Strauss are justly regarded as some of the best ever made. This is a superb opportunity to see him making the music with the orchestra he worked with for so many years. You won't really hear anything much different from what we know in the studio recordings, but the visual element adds something for us who are too young to have seen Kempe in person.

The Dvorak gets a big, bold, yet carefully balanced and paced interpretation. Kempe's account is plenty animated, but he refrains from stirring up frenzy just to add excitement. The full melodic richness of the score is never short-changed, and as the album notes point out, he maintains a particularly wide dynamic range, fortunately captured in the full, vibrant stereo sound. Given the limitations of sound reproduction on the TV sets of the period, one has to assume that the BBC was also recording the audio for FM transmission.

The video production is very fine, with exceptionally vivid color—better than many video tapes of the period, even the BBC's.

One has to be impressed by the quality of the old material ICA has trawled up from the depths of the BBC archives. The Solti Elgar program is a particular find. Despite the conductor's long tenure with the Chicago Symphony, in a city with one of the largest PBS stations in the US, very little of his work there was captured on video. What we have was mostly taped during foreign tours and has already been issued on DVD. Solti "discovered" Elgar's music (or perhaps finally realized its worth) shortly after becoming a British subject a few years before this Symphony 2 was taped. The album notes make a rather sizeable point out of his referring to Elgar's own recording of the work when he was learning the score. Elgar's performances of his own works are incisive, unsentimental, and often fiery.

Does he pour the "Solti Hot Sauce" on Elgar? I'm probably not the best judge since, as a teenager, I was glued to the radio every Sunday afternoon to hear the Chicago Symphony broadcast. Certainly, his account of the massive Second Symphony has the sometimes abrupt, angular, Soltian phrasing in the vigorous passages. The first movement is one of the most intractable of Elgar's large-scale works; I always get a bit fidgety during it. Solti moves it along but doesn't convince me that he's getting the most out of the music (but who does?). He makes up for it by plumbing the expressive depths of the slow movement—makes sense, given the conductor's affinity for Mahler—and he builds from the end of II through the lighter Rondo of III and to a an earth-shattering finale.

In some ways, Solti's take on the more popular *Enigma Variations* is less convincing. As in his earlier CSO recording (made in 1976; this concert dates from 1979), he seems to miss the charm of the score, its melodic richness, and the composer's genuine affection for the friends it depicts. Solti knows how to hammer through the vigorous variations, and 'Nimrod' is suitably expansive; but at this stage in his career he didn't quite have the grasp of nuance in phrasing that he did in his last decade. He makes it into a series of episodes not closely related to each other. An exciting performance—and good to see the conductor in any video program I hadn't encountered before—but probably not indispensable to the Elgar discography.

As in the other two BBC programs, the picture quality is vivid and clean. I viewed all of these on my Sharp Aquous LCD, letting the TV upscale the feed from a Sony NS3100ES DVD player (also my playback machine for audio SACDs, by the way). It wasn't Blu Ray quality, but it was quite impressive for 35-year-old broadcast TV material.

HANSEN

WAGNER: *Parsifal*

Poul Elming (Parsifal), Linda Watson (Kundry), Hans Sotin (Gurnemanz), Falk Struckmann (Amfortas), Ekkehard Wlaschiha (Klingsor); Bayreuth Festival 1998/ Giuseppe Sinopoli

Unitel 705908 [2DVD] 278 minutes

This was recorded at the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth in July 1998. The production is credited to Wolfgang Wagner, grandson of the composer, at that time the sole director of the Festival. It dates from 1989, when James Levine conducted it with a different cast; his performance was recorded on Philips CDs.

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 253

Sinopoli took it over in 1994 and conducted it every year until 1999 (when I happened to see it). It's one of the slowest and most boring performances of this work I have ever heard. Sinopoli establishes a slow tempo in the Prelude and rigidly holds on to it all through the opera. The performance is slack, it lacks tension and is full of *luftpausen.* I discussed it briefly in a review of several Bayreuth performances (N/D 1999). This cast is the same except that Linda Watson, the Kundry in 1998, was replaced by Violetta Urmana in 1999.

Wolfgang's staging breaks no new ground; it's a mixture of the traditional and the modern. The stage is uncluttered, the dominant colors are green (Acts 1 and 2) and bluish pink. The forest in the opening scene is represented by huge idealized green trees, and the only props in the Grail scenes are the shrine for the Grail and Amfortas's chair. Klingsor's castle is notable by its absence. In the first scene of Act 3, the Holy Spring whose water refreshes and is used to anoint Parsifal is a huge semi-sphere surrounded by a small moat; it also gushes water in the Act 3 Prelude. I don't know why. Gurnemanz and his retinue in Act 1 wear green robes, Parsifal wears a green hunter's suit, Amfortas is clad in black, and Klingsor and Kundry's robes are violet with red stripes. For Act 3, Kundry has changed to a more neutral light-green robe. In this production, as I wrote in my 1999 review, Kundry does not die at the end; she officiates at the Grail's unveiling with Parsifal, contrary to the composer's stage directions. Perhaps she'll become the first female Knight of the Grail.

The best and obviously the most experienced singer in this cast is Hans Sotin. He has been singing Gurnemanz for a very long time, yet his noble and mellifluous voice is in good shape here and his diction and phrasing are superb. His bearing is dignified and his use of vocal colors unmatched. In the title role, the Danish tenor Poul Elming is most appealing and sometimes thrilling in his high register, notably in his last lines as he uncovers the Grail. Elsewhere and especially in his low register, his voice loses its tonal purity. He is also a stiff, unconvincing actor; he often looks bored. The American soprano Linda Watson was new to this production (and Bayreuth) in 1998, and perhaps she as yet hadn't taken the measure of the place (and this production). Her voice is ample and smooth; but her acting, vocal and physical, is primitive and unconvincing. In Act 2 she stands on the stage and keeps on waving her arms; it becomes a distracting and annoying habit that means nothing. She also moves awkwardly (when she moves) and she is surely no seductress.

Falk Struckmann's Amfortas doesn't move the viewer as it should in the Grail scenes; perhaps the fault lies with Sinopoli's rigidly-held and slack tempos that don't give the singers many opportunities for expressive interpretations. The Bayreuth Chorus is, as usual, outstanding; but the orchestral sound is sometimes rhythmically slack, thick, and unbalanced.

This performance is as long as Levine's (Philips) but Levine at least varies the tempo freely and has a better feel for the drama and the orchestral score. The slowest *Parsifal* on records is still Goodall's, but only by less than 10 minutes. By contrast, the much-praised Knappertsbusch *Parsifal* from 1964 clocks in almost a half hour faster, yet many fans thought he was too slow! For a really "fast" performance, try Pierre Boulez's—one hour faster than Goodall's. (These are all on CD.)

Subtitles are available, and the overall sound is not bad; but the Bayreuth Orchestra has sounded much better with Levine, Knappertsbusch, and even Barenboim at the helm.

MOSES

If I Were A Rich Man

The Life of Jan Peerce
EuroArts 2058328 [DVD] 59 minutes

This is greatly entertaining. Peerce (1904-84), Toscanini's favorite tenor, is a wonderful storyteller. Through black-and-white photos and film and through intelligent, entertaining questions and comments by Isaac Stern, viewers get a look at Peerce's humble beginnings as a synagogue choir boy, his deeply-rooted faith and cantorial background, life as a bandleader and Radio City performer, the Toscanini years, and Peerce's family life, though mention of family members other than his devoted wife Alice is scarce. Viewers will get nothing whatsoever about Peerce's long-lasting feud with brother-in-law Richard Tucker. But Peerce doesn't come across as an unkind man. It is a joy to listen to the *joie de vivre* when he talks about his faith, career, and marriage. He has great timing, and even the serious moments are fascinating. The film and photos vividly convey bygone times, especially of New York City's lower east side Jewish community. I remember Peerce's appearances in the 1960s with Johnny Carson. The guy could have become an entertainer in the tradition of Myron Cohen and Alan King. This documentary was co-produced by Peerce's son Larry. He did his father proud.

MARK

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 254

Books

James Levine: 40 Years at the Metropolitan Opera

Elena Park, ed.
Amadeus Press, 230 pages, $35

A bounty of CD and DVD performances has already been released to celebrate James Levine's 40 years at the Met, and there has also been a PBS special, which will probably be issued on DVD as well. Now comes this hefty, richly illustrated book that neatly chronicles his Met career. Its basic format is a timeline that takes us through four decades. At the bottom of the pages, important premieres, new productions, and other milestones are listed by date. Levine himself comments on most of them (he should really get author credit), and sometimes there are additional remarks by singers, orchestra members, and stage producers.

For instance, 1991 brought us Levine's first *Magic Flute*, a new production of *Parsifal*, Mirella Freni's 25th anniversary gala, the first tour of the Met orchestra, and the premiere of *The Ghosts of Versailles*. Aside from Levine, we hear from Marilyn Horne and John Corigliano, and there are copious photographs. To take another example, 1974 was the year of Levine's first *Don Giovanni* and *Wozzeck*, the first Met performances of *Vespri Siciliani*, and Kiri Te Kanawa's "eleventh-hour" debut in *Otello*. Again, Levine's comments are illuminating, and Te Kanawa herself has words of praise for the supportive conductor. ("He didn't just plow on but helped me all the way through.")

The weight and size of the book (9 1/2 by 11 inches) make it a bit unwieldy, but once you prop it up, it makes addictive reading—or just browsing. And for us who remember Levine's 40 years, it's a wonderful, nostalgic history, filled with good anecdotes and useful information. The book has some appendixes: tallies of all Levine's Met performances, telecasts, premieres, opening nights, and orchestral concerts, as well as a discography of his Met recordings.

LUCANO

Sibelius: A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland

Glenda Dawn Goss
University of Chicago Press, 549 pages, $55

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) is one of our most enigmatic composers and a nest of contradictions. A national symbol of Finland, he was nurtured in the German tradition. His surname was Latinized to Sibelius by his grandfather, and the composer himself Gallicized Janne to Jean. He was of working class origin, but his first language was that of the Finnish elite—Swedish. His music owes much to Finland's history and folklore, yet most of his songs have Swedish texts.

Sibelius is a natural for a biography, but there are few good ones in English. Enter Glenda Dawn Goss, an American who teaches at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki and was an editor of the *Sibelius Edition*. Goss writes like a good novelist and balances objectivity and observation, often humorously and sometimes bluntly. Convinced that to know Sibelius one must understand the Finland he lived in, she supplies more information on the country than any other Sibelius biographer I know.

Finland was ruled by Sweden from 1155 to 1809 (hence the two major languages, Finnish and Swedish) and as a Russian duchy from 1809 to 1917 (though Russian never took root). Goss discusses the Russian czars who ruled Finland, but also tells about Nikolai Bobrikov, the ruthless, doomed-to-be assassinated Russian administrator of the duchy. She is excellent on the linguistic divide and life under foreign rule. She describes in detail how Finland was devoutly Lutheran and steeped in ancient folklore and how its social divisions were tempered by the Russians but exploded in a bloody civil war after independence. The book teems with information about everyday life, history, politics, and the arts, including the painter Axel Gallen, the poet Johan Runeberg, Finnish Symbolists, and musicians like Robert Kajanus. She even has a heart for the Finnish celebrations and political lotteries, which she covers down to the costumes.

The problem is that Jean Sibelius often gets lost in this broad tapestry, coming and going as national events dictate. Much of what Goss tells about him is interesting, perceptive—and sometimes novel—but there is a hit-and-miss quality to her coverage. She is very good on capturing Sibelius, the superannuated man. Her explanation for his withdrawal from composition is probably closer to the truth than most. (Along with other points she raises, is the new-to-me theory that shaking hands made the revisions the composer insisted on doing himself difficult.) On the other hand, I could not find what Sibelius's original family name was. (I believe it was Sibbe.)

Goss writes more about *Kullervo* than most writers, but I don't recall her mentioning that Sibelius pulled the piece from circulation. She

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 255

tells us he turned down the directorship of the Eastman School of Music but not that the job went to Howard Hanson. She does not deny Sibelius's drinking binges and marital problems, but neither does she bring them to life. And it would have been nice to read about Eugene Ormandy's visit with Sibelius at home in the 1950s.

Coverage of the music is variable, brief, and strictly speaking, not musicological, though she includes some generous samples. There is a lot about the Violin Concerto (mostly background) and *Kullervo's* folkloric aspects and social effects. There is less about other major works, but quite a bit on some minor pieces. The criterion for inclusion seems to be a piece's relationship to Finnish culture rather than musical interest.

I must point out that the title is misleading. Readers who care nothing for Sibelius but are interested in Finland may never give this volume a thought—and they should—while people looking for a biography of Sibelius may skim it in frustration. The latter should start with *Jean Sibelius* by Guy Rickards or the biographical section of Robert Layton's *Sibelius,* which has a lot of musical analysis. (Andrew Barnett's *Sibelius* reads more like an annotated catalog of works than a biography.) The most comprehensive biography, *Sibelius* by the composer's friend, Erik Tawaststjerna, is in three volumes, from the 1970s and 80s, and out of print, but well worth finding. Read one of those first. Then, by all means, take on Goss.

The book is beautifully put together, with excellent pictures, endnotes, and bibliography, but no list of works.

HECHT

Mailings outside USA

In 2007 the US Postal Service stopped accepting periodicals for outside the USA. We are forced to use private mailers. The mailer requires a minimum of $200 per mailing. Therefore we can only mail something every two months, with the new issue. If you order back issues, the postage will be $4 each if you mark your order "NO HURRY" and we send it with the next issue.

If you want immediate shipment, we can mail an issue as a small packet, but it costs more than $10 postage for one, $17 for two (Canada $5 and $9). Priority Mail flat rate envelopes are $11.95 Canada and $13.95 foreign--and it's stretching it to get two in an envelope. Priority Mail boxes holding 8 or 10 issues are $27.95 Canada and $45.50.

If you live outside the USA we want to serve you, but please take account of how limited our options are.

Index to Overviews

Sig09arg.qxd 7/22/2011 4:53 PM Page 256

Record Guide Publications

American Record Guide
4412 Braddock St
Cincinnati OH 45204

subs@americanrecordguide.com
phone: 513-941-1116
toll-free: 888-658-1907
www.americanrecordguide.com

Record Guide Publications—Back Issue Order Form

Before 1994: ask for list			May/June—$3 ❑		July/Aug—$3 ❑		Sept/Oct—$3 ❑		Nov/Dec—$3 ❑		
1994	May/June—$3 ❑		July/Aug—$3 ❑		Sept/Oct—$3 ❑		Nov/Dec—$3 ❑				
	July/Aug—$3 ❑		Sept/Oct—$3 ❑		Nov/Dec—$3 ❑						
	Sept/Oct—$3 ❑		Nov/Dec—$3 ❑	2000	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑	2004	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑	2008	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑		
1995	Jan/Feb—$3 ❑	2000	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑		Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		
	May/June—$3 ❑		Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		
	July/Aug—$3 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		
	Sept/Oct—$3 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑		
1996	Mar/Apr—$3 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑		Nov/Dec—$4 ❑		Nov/Dec—$4 ❑		Nov/Dec—$4 ❑		
	May/June—$3 ❑		Nov/Dec—$4 ❑	2001	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑	2005	Mar/Apr—$4 ❑	2009	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑		
	July/Aug—$3 ❑	2001	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑		Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		
	Sept/Oct—$3 ❑		Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		
	Nov/Dec—$3 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		
1997	Sept/Oct—$3 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑		Nov/Dec—$4 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑		
	Nov/Dec—$3 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑		Nov/Dec—$4 ❑	2006	Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		Nov/Dec—$4 ❑		
1998	Jan/Feb—$3 ❑		Nov/Dec—$4 ❑	2002	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑	2010	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑		
	Mar/Apr—$3 ❑	2002	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑		Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		
	May/June—$3 ❑		Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		
	July/Aug—$3 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		Nov/Dec—$4 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑		
	Sept/Oct—$3 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑	2007	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑	2011	Jan/Feb—$5 ❑		
	Nov/Dec—$3 ❑		Sept/Oct—$4 ❑		Nov/Dec—$4 ❑		Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		Mar/Apr—$5 ❑		
1999	Jan/Feb—$3 ❑		Nov/Dec—$4 ❑	2003	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑		May/June—$4 ❑		May/June—$5 ❑		
	Mar/Apr—$3 ❑	2003	Jan/Feb—$4 ❑		Mar/Apr—$4 ❑		July/Aug—$4 ❑		July/Aug—$5 ❑		

USA: If you are ordering only one or two, specify "NO HURRY" and we will mail them with the next mailing for $1 each. We pay postage for $30 worth or more in the USA. If you want your order immediatley, it is wise to pay with a credit card, so we can charge the actual postage.
OUTSIDE USA: We can ship one or two with our bimonthly mailing for $4.00 each, air-speeded. Immediate airmail costs $13.95 each, $11.95 Canada. A package with up to 10 or 11 copies is $45.50 postage, $27.95 for Canada.
ELECTRONIC ORDERS: If you order anything from us by e-mail or website, please be sure we can reply. Sometimes we find that your e-mail is blocked to us—not very smart if you have just ordered something. If you want us to fill your order, you have to be reachable.
23 year cumulative index ❑ $23 postpaid ❑ Upgrade $5 The index is a text document listing all the reviews published in ARG in the last 23 years. Each CD has a PC, Mac, and PDF version.

Subscriptions: ❑ One year: $43.00 ❑ Two years: $80.00
Outside USA: Canada, Mexico: ❑ One year $63.00 (US) ❑ Two years $120.00 (US)
Western Europe: ❑ One year $65.00 (US) Air Speeded Other countries: ❑ One year $70.00 (US)

If you do not specify we will begin with the next issue after this one (dated below).

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Gift Subscription from: _____

Please make check payable to *American Record Guide* or

Credit Card No: _____ Exp: _____