American Record Guide

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Here & There

Appointments, Awards, & News

Vasily Petrenko, 44, principal guest conductor of the State Academic Symphony of Russia "Evgeny Svetlanov" since 2016, will become the orchestra's artistic director in September, when he will also become music director of London's Royal Philharmonic. At the end of the current season he will step down as chief conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic after 15 years.

Venezuelan **Rafael Payare**, 41, signed a five-year contract to become music director of the Montreal Symphony in 2022, succeeding Kent Nagano. Since 2019, he has held the same position with the San Diego Symphony, where his contract runs through 2026. Before that, he was music director of Northern Ireland's Ulster Orchestra from 2014 to 2019. He will spend 10 weeks in San Diego and 14 to 16 weeks a year in Montreal. His wife is cellist Alisa Weilerstein.

Simon Rattle, music director of the London Symphony since 2015, announced in January the extension of his contract an additional three years, after which he will become chief conductor of Munich's Bavarian Radio Orchestra. He will then become conductor-emeritus of the LSO for life. In Munich he succeeds Maris Jansons, who died in 2019. Rattle said the change is an effort to better balance his life; he lives primarily in Berlin with his wife, mezzo Magdalena Kozena, and their three children.

Fabio Luisi, 61, who began as music director of the Dallas Symphony last September, has extended his contract another five years to 2029.

Conductor **James Conlon**, who turns 71 on March 18, signed a three-year contract to become music advisor to the Baltimore Symphony, following the departure of Music Director Marin Alsop after 14 years. Conlon will be involved in personnel and program decisions, and will conduct three concerts per year, as will Alsop. Conlon continues as music director of the Los Angeles Opera, where he began in 2006.

French conductor and contralto **Nathalie Stutzmann**, 55, signed a three-year contract to become principal guest conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra starting next season. She has been guest-conducting the orchestra since 2016. She held the same position with the RTE Orchestra in Ireland from 2017 to 2020, is in her third season as chief conductor of the Kristiansand Symphony in Norway, and is also an opera conductor.

Helgi Tomasson, 78, artistic director and principal choreographer of San Francisco Ballet since 1985, will leave in June 2022. He is well known for his artistic innovation and the quality of his dancers' technical level.

British conductor **Daniel Harding**, 45, signed a two-year contract to become conductor-in-residence of Geneva's Orchestre de la Suisse Romande starting this autumn, working on special projects and recordings. (Jonathan Nott remains music director.) After leaving as music director of the Orchestra of Paris in 2019, he had planned to become an Air France commercial pilot in 2020, but COVID-19 cancelled those plans. Since 2007 he has been music director of the Swedish Radio Symphony, where his contract runs through 2023.

Conductor **Jun Märkl**, 62, became the new music director of Malaysian Philharmonic in Kuala Lumpur in January. This follows his recent appointment as artistic advisor to the Taiwan Philharmonic starting next August (see "Here & There" Jan/Feb 2021 for further background).

Conductor and harpsichordist **Laurence Cummings**, 52, will succeed Richard Egarr as music director of the Academy of Ancient Music next season (a period-instrument orchestra based in Cambridge, England). Cummings is artistic director of the Handel Festival in Göttingen, Germany, and has been music director of the London Handel Festival since 1999. Egarr will succeed Nicholas McGegan as music director of San Francisco's Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale next season.

Israeli conductor **Omer Meir Wellber** signed a five-year contract to become music director of the Vienna Volksoper in 2022, his fourth current position. He has been chief conductor of the BBC Philharmonic since 2019, music director of the Teatro Massimo Palermo since January 2020, and principal guest of the Semperoper Dresden since 2018.

Perryn Leech becomes general director of the Canadian Opera Company on March 1, succeeding Alexander Neef, 47, who is now general director of the Paris Opera. Leech, whose 28-year career began in his native England, joined the Houston Grand Opera as technical and production director in 2006, becoming its chief operating officer in 2010 and managing director in 2011.

As of January 1, **Deborah Borda**, president of the New York Philharmonic, assigned most of her internal duties to two others, allowing her to devote her time to fundraising (made more dire by the pandemic) and planning the renovation of Geffen Hall, the orchestra's home. CCO Adam Cox is now the Philharmonic's executive director, handling all business functions. And Isaac Thompson, VP of artistic planning, now also manages artistic, concert, and production functions.

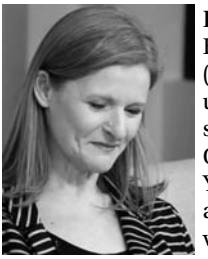
Angelo Xiang Yu, 32, is the new second violinist of the Shanghai Quartet, succeeding Yi-Wen Jiang, who was fired last March after the Chinese government objected to some of his social media postings. Yu won first prize at the 2010 Yehudi Menuhin Violin Competition and an Avery Fisher Career Grant and a Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award in 2019. Jiang is currently suing the quartet and Montclair State University, where the group is in residence; it is also in residence at the Tianjin (China) Juilliard School, the Shanghai Symphony, and major conservatories in Shanghai and Beijing.

In December the **New York Philharmonic** ratified a new contract that runs from September 2020 to September 2024. Musicians will continue to be paid 75% of current minimal scale ($2,952 per week or $153,504 per year) through 2023, 80% for the next six months, and 90% for the contract's final six months. If the orchestra's finances exceed pandemic projections, significant bonuses will be paid starting in 2022.

Gillian Friedman Fox became executive director of the Newport Music Festival on January 4 after two years as the Dallas Symphony's director of contemporary programming initiatives. She succeeds interim director Suzanna Laramee, who replaced Mark Malkovich IV who left in 2017. He succeeded his father, Mark Malkovich III, whose legendary leadership from 1975 to 2010 ended when he died while driving in rural Minnesota.

Todd Schultz, 54, signed a three-year contract to become CEO of La Jolla Music Society effective this past January. He was VP of development for the McCallum Theater in Palm Desert CA. Before that he was a VP for the San Diego Symphony and marketing and PR director for the San Diego Opera. He's the fourth CEO in two years. Kristin Lancino left abruptly in 2018, and her appointed successor, Susan Danis, withdrew two months before taking the job. In 2019 the Society moved to the new Conrad Prebys PAC in La Jolla.

Terrence Dwyer, 64, became CEO of the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts in West Palm Beach FL on January 11. He succeeded Judy Mitchell, who was Kravis's first CEO and retired after 28 years. Dwyer was president of California's Segerstrom Center in Costa Mesa CA from 2006 to 2019.



Katy Clark, president of the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) since 2015, left in January. Before joining BAM, she was president of the Orchestra of St Luke's in New York. Before her career in arts management, she was a violinist with the BBC Symphony from 1994 to 1999.

Soprano **Suzie LeBlanc**, 59, one of Canada's renowned early music vocalists, became artistic and executive director on January 4 of Early Music Vancouver, which turns 50 this season. She succeeds Matthew White, who held the position for seven seasons and is now CEO of the Victoria Symphony. LeBlanc, a founder of Montreal's Opera Nouvel, was its artistic director from 2005 to 2019. In 2018 she also became director of Cappella Antica at McGill University.

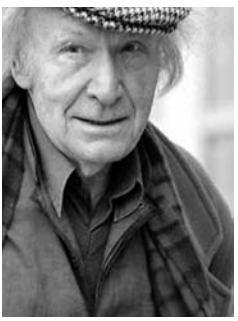
Canadian **Michael Cavanagh** signed a five-year contract to become artistic director of the Royal Swedish Opera this summer, succeeding Birgitta Svenden. Alan Gilbert is the company's music director. As part of Cavanagh's career of 20+ years, he was formerly artistic director of Edmonton Opera.

Ott Maaten, 53, is the new director of the Estonian National Opera in Tallinn. He succeeds Aivar Mäe, who resigned in August following allegations of sexual harassment. Maaten's background as a professional musician, financial and administrative director of the Estonian Academy of Music and Theater, and manager of several complex construction and reconstruction projects made him attractive to a company eager to move out of the 100-year-old National Opera with its poor acoustics and stage.

The **Nashville Symphony** has reached an agreement with its musicians to provide a monthly stipend of $500 per week that began January 3 and extends through July 31. They have been furloughed since last July 1. The situation had become untenable for some musicians, who had no choice but to leave the area.

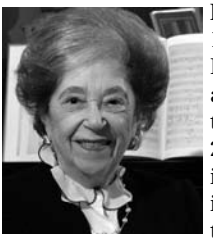
Obituaries

Italian soprano **Rosanna Carteri**, 89, died on October 25 in Monte Carlo. No cause was given. After her Scala debut at age 20, she sang leading parts at the Salzburg Festival and in Paris and London; in the US she sang at the San Francisco Opera and the Lyric Opera of Chicago. In addition to famed lyric roles by Verdi, Puccini, and Gounod, she also gave initial performances of works by Prokofieff, Poulenc, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, and Pizzetti, among others. She retired in 1966 at the age of 35 at the height of her powers to devote herself to her family.



Israeli violinist **Ivry Gitlis**, 98, died on December 24 in a Paris nursing home. He was an uncompromising artist. His reviews in the US in the 1950s were so scathing that he didn't return again until 1980. He was known in this country mainly through a few recordings on the Vox label. One of his last performances was in Tel Aviv in 2018 with pianist Martha Argerich.

Chinese pianist **Fou Ts'ong**, 86, died in London on December 28 from COVID-19. He was the first Chinese pianist to win international attention. He finished third in the 1955 Chopin Competition in Warsaw and became best known for playing Chopin, Mozart, and Debussy. Starting in the late 1950s, he made London his home. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, he returned to China frequently and became a professor at the Beijing Central Conservatory in 1982.



Dame Fanny Waterman, 100, co-founder of the Leeds Piano Competition and its chairman and artistic director from 1963 to 2015, died on December 20 in a residential care home in Yorkshire UK. Winners of the triennial competition include Murray Perahia, Jon Kimura Parker, Ian Hobson, and Alessio Bax; runners-up include Mitsuko Uchida, Andras Schiff, Lars Vogt, and Louis Lortie. Waterman was not above manipulating the results, changing the rules mid-competition in 1972 to include Radu Lupu as a finalist—and he went on to win.

Composer and jazz pianist **Claude Bolling**, 90, died on December 29 in the Paris suburb of Garches. No cause was given. His Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano, a cross of baroque, classical, and jazz styles, was written for Jean Pierre Rampal in 1973. Recorded in 1975 with Bolling as pianist, with string bass and drums, it remained on the Billboard charts by 1982 for 343 weeks, coming in at No. 5. It has been on the playlists of classical radio stations ever since. Still, Bolling's main fame as a composer was in the world of jazz, movies, and TV.

Critical Convictions

Composing and Inspiration

A fairly common complaint I get from our reviewers is that they are tired of note-perfect performances that are expressionless, and they are tired of most recent music, which is either ugly or predictable and boring.

A contemporary composer is almost always unable to write a real melody. They commonly excuse that by saying that they are interested in rhythms or textures or colors—but one good melody is worth all the rest put together. Music without melody is utterly uninspiring.

The music is not inspiring because it is not inspired. The composers don't believe in inspiration. They learn a craft—that's all there is. That gets them their music degree and supposedly qualifies them to be considered a "composer". But they don't believe in inspiration or transcendence, so their music has no power to move us.

Their training is increasingly technical in orientation—even their training on an instrument. They are taught complexity, and they cannot win academic approval thru simplicity. Complexity quickly displaces anything like joy or beauty. I was thinking the other day about fugues. They can be quite complex, I suppose, but not many composers since Bach could write a fugue that was beautiful as well as complex.

There is a general fear of emotion in music, a lingering anti-romanticism. Beauty is no longer an important goal; joy and elation are not desired responses. Instead, so much music is angry, depressed, and full of grief. In a way, that is heavily emotional; it's just the opposite from romantic emotion. Life is not so hellish these days, so one wonders about all the negativity. Read the novels of the romantic period: death was everywhere. That has not been the case since World War II, but most of the music that emerged in that period has been bristling with negativity, even shock. (I have not heard any music written during the Covid epidemic.) What draws attention is angry noise. It is extremely common for a "contemporary" composer to resort to shocking his audience—often in the first few seconds of a composition. (Epater le bourgeoisie.)

Noise is not music, but a great deal that now calls itself "music" is nothing but noise. One writer suggested the term "sound art", and it is true that a lot of what passes for music today is nothing but the manipulation of sounds and is obviously uninspired.

They learn these days to give their works socially relevant titles. In fact, the titles seem more inspired than the works—as is often true of visual artists, too. A new work is more likely to be performed if it has such a title—and even more so if a "minority" person wrote it.

Classical music is becoming a political matter like everything else. Musical values are becoming secondary to political ones like "diversity". There is no reason on earth that black people should be represented in anything at all according to their population share. They are free to ignore classical music and leave it to white and Asian people. They are free to let Indians and Chinese become physicists. If physics doesn't interest them they don't have to be represented on physics faculties. The same applies to music. People should follow their interests and inclinations. Classical music doesn't seem to interest many black people. The few who are interested suddenly have hundreds of new opportunities! The classical music world is under the illusion that they desperately need to hire more black men and women. There is absolutely no basis for that except political "correctness" and the ridiculous idea that if black people are underrepresented in any field the reason must be prejudice and injustice.

This is so ridiculous that I am amazed anyone would voice it. But the point is, if musical decisions are based on political reasoning the future of our field is pretty bad.

There are many other decisions and policies in our field that are also pretty indefensible. There is, of course, the perennial problem that in this country it is all business. Decisions must be made on the basis of income and raising support. That is much less the case in Europe, where the orchestras and opera companies are considered a necessary part of the culture and supported by the people as a whole thru taxes.

One example of this kind of thing here is

that it is easy to raise money for performances and recordings of "new music". An orchestra that hasn't played more than 2 of the 9 Dvorak symphonies will program instead a piece of bombastic noise by a living "composer". This is often financially shrewd, but it also gains prestige in the industry—another unworthy motive that adds to the mess our musical world is in.

Americans are massive conformists, and once these ideas take hold in a few places they spread fast to other orchestras and opera companies. No one dares to ask about quality or excellence—yet that's what our music is actually all about. It has "classical" status because it is excellent, better than other music, the best there is. Therefore it demands the best musicians, the best-sounding halls, the best recordings. All other considerations are secondary and may not violate these.

Music that lasts transcends its time because it is in touch with the transcendent. Is anyone today writing that kind of music?

Relevance seems to be replacing transcendence. I have sat thru whole operas that were blatantly relevant but utterly lacking in melody. Besides, what is most relevant now will be forgotten tomorrow. Immediate appeal is not often compatible with lasting value.

One writer about religion correctly chastised "seeker-friendly" churches. They gear their music to uninformed tastes; they design their worship to appeal to people who don't know what worship is. That author said that churches would be better off if they became "finder-friendly"—that is, if their worship and music had some substance that was worth going out of our way to hear.

Classical music is finder-friendly. It's not obvious; it doesn't reach out to you. But once you seek it out it offers tremendous rewards.

The composer and the musicians are there to enrich their audience, not to shock them or make them social justice warriors.

Most of the great composers freely admitted inspiration from a transcendent source. Most commonly they attribute it to God or Nature. A few, naturally, attribute it to themselves, because they don't believe in God and are not inspired by Nature. But the verb (inspire) does imply something external to the self working upon the self. It can be a person or thing, but it is usually something in nature or creation, if not in the spiritual realm.

Almost everything I believe about music was perfectly stated by Bruno Walter in his 1957 book, *Of Music and Music-Making*. Here is an example from that book about "the distressing contemporary scene":

Though the muses seem exhausted today; though a cold autumn of the soul has called a temporary halt to flowering and fruit-bearing; though the talents and efforts of the present generation are essentially directed to the material and technical; though the spiritual climate of our epoch has perilously changed just as the terrestrial has... the genius of mankind shall survive this period of illness once it has remobilized the spiritual and moral powers that are nourished by those lofty springs.

He had no illusions about the decay of the arts; it was obvious even in 1955, when he wrote that. 65 years later, I'm afraid I don't share his optimism about the future. It has only gotten worse—much worse.

Coming at it from another angle: Americans are the world's great extroverts. We are not exactly known for introspection, meditation, self-questioning, or spiritual seeking. We write music the way we do everything else: make a big noise and draw attention to yourself. True, we are not as angst-ridden as the Europeans (in general), so our music is never quite as depressing. But it is often shallow, empty, and meaningless.

We claim to be a Christian country, but there is far less spiritual depth and seeking than in Europe. Our religion is also extroverted, and our God is very friendly and doesn't come with much mystery. In the "spiritual" realm we act as if we know it all—which is a guarantee that what little knowledge we have is pretty shallow.

Music arose and triumphed in Europe partly because there was simply greater spiritual and intellectual *depth*. The latter there still is, but it is hard to hear anything spiritual in most new European music (outside of the Slavic countries). Since World War II it has been mostly alienated and angst-ridden.

Great music rises above circumstances and has very little "relevance" to political matters and everyday life. The "rising above" is a large part of what makes it great. Another word for that is "transcendence". It reaches a realm where all those "relevant" things are rendered irrelevant, because beauty is its own reward. Beauty feeds the soul.

Do people still believe in beauty? I read last night a statement by an Eastern Orthodox

theologian that God is—above all—beautiful, and that rejoicing in God is rejoicing in the beautiful. For a serious Christian or Jew (at least) worshipping God is a response to his beauty as well as his love and mercy. For most of western music, composers felt as if creating something beautiful was serving God—or was at least an end in itself. Great music must be beautiful. If it is not beautiful it cannot be great. "Pretty" is the shallow form of "beautiful". It is not to be scoffed at: the ability to write a pretty melody or song is a great gift. But add depth and spiritual sensitivity, and then—and only then, you have great music.

Negativity

One of the drippiest criticisms I am subjected to is that I am too "negative". I must respond, first of all, that "the power of positive thinking" gave us a president who could not for a moment entertain the thought that he could fail in his goals and be a "loser". But he was a loser, and his "positive thinking" was delusional—probably even mental illness. Most positive thinking is delusion.

This is a magazine of criticism, and I was trained in critical thinking all my life—not "positive thinking". I can tell you what is wrong with anything, and I think that's my job as a music critic. The more I love the music, the more critical I can be, because I can't bear a recording that fails the music. I believe that is my job, and that if I were "positive" all the time I would be failing our readers.

I also deeply admire the prophetic tradition in Judaism and Christianity. The prophets were often accused of negativity, too; but they were essential to a people who were never satisfied with the way things were, because they had a vision of something better.

Responses

It has been a long time since we have published reader letters. That is partly because we don't want to become a "democratic" document. That is, people love to insult each other, not just disagree. Think of Facebook or Slipped Disc. Open the gates and we will have pages of invective. But also, readers seldom send us any comments except encouragement. We are apparently doing what we are supposed to do. When our own writers disagree with each other (which certainly must happen) we usually don't let them argue on our pages. Again, that kind of thing could take over the magazine and decrease its usefulness. The above comments on "Negativity" are an answer to a few readers who have accused me of that. In fact, come to think of it, airing every little disagreement adds a lot of unnecessary "negativity". Americans are so polarized and angry. I really do not want to add to that, and I am convinced that my position on most matters is pretty moderate (people on both extremes lose patience with me).

I am also convinced that the mass media in this country are destroying us all by setting us against each other. I truly do not want to encourage that. The "news" exaggerates and sensationalizes everything—and the result is fear and anger. If some wonderful magnetic force suddenly eliminated television, we would all be better off. It is a great unmitigated evil.

Postal Service in December was the worst we have ever seen since we took over ARG in 1987. We mailed ARG on December 8, and many readers had not got their magazine as of January 15, and some of our writers only got their copies around January 20.

We mailed our reviewers discs on December 1, and some didn't get them before the end of December. A few of them therefore could not contribute to this latest ARG, and some wrote less than usual. (That was Priority Mail, supposed to take 2 days.) Magazines we subscribed to were 3 or 4 weeks late in arriving.

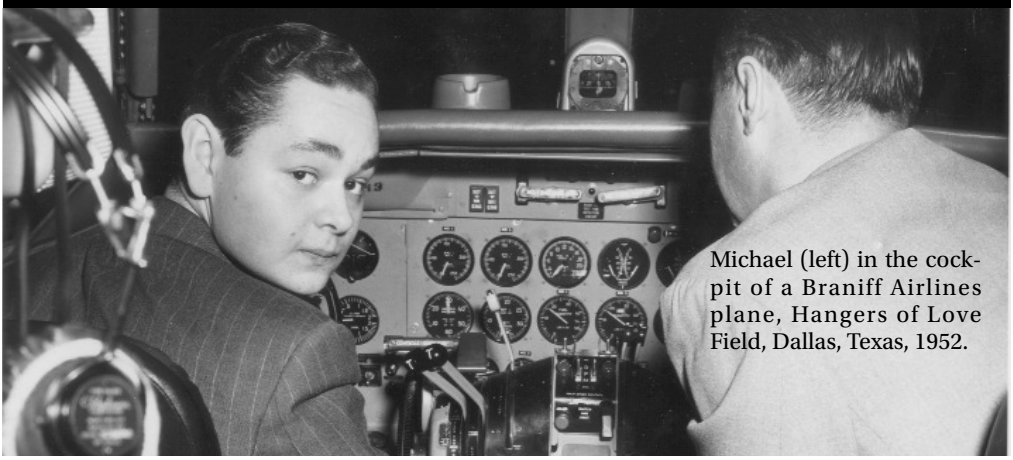
We think the outgoing president sabotaged the mail so he could delay and question mailed ballots, and the damage continued into January.

It has been almost impossible for the last year to get any CDs for review from Warner. A spokesman said recently to us, "I'm afraid we are going to have to wait until the world returns to normal again."

Word Police: dis

This word is pure slang from the late 1980s. It was apparently a short form of "disrespect". In a recent Science News the editor of that journal says that some scientists "dis" a hypothesis. There the word must mean to "dismiss" or "dispute" or "discount". Even "question" might work. Whatever it stands for, no editor should allow "dis", let alone use it.

Michael Rabin and His Magic Bow



Michael (left) in the cockpit of a Braniff Airlines plane, Hangers of Love Field, Dallas, Texas, 1952.

The Triumphs and Troubles of His Recorded Legacy

Michael Rabin (1936-72) was one of America's most talented violinists; his renowned teacher, Ivan Galamian, said he had "no weaknesses, never." He is one of the very few musicians who can keep my attention with compositional cream puffs and showy romantic-era concertos, repeatedly leaving me agog at his mellifluous tone, invention, and technical prowess. He maintained an exhausting pace from childhood, with daily 8-hour practice marathons, a well-meaning but domineering mother, world tours starting in his teens, triumphs in concert halls and studios, debilitating fears about falling off stage, and struggles with prescription drugs. In his 20s he made some progress through therapy, got off the pills, and rebuilt his performing career. The pills later reappeared, though, and likely contributed to his tragic, early death when he slipped and fell in his kitchen. His sole biography is Anthony Feinstein's book, *Michael Rabin: America's Virtuoso Violinist*, written with the co-operation of Rabin's sister, Bertine; make sure to get the improved second edition.

His tragic early death kept him from a career that likely would have rivaled most others, and because his major-label contract lapsed sometime after his final Capitol sessions in 1961, his discography is uneven in quality. Most of what we have from the last decade of his life are broadcasts, some of which surely would not have met with his approval; the sound is often archival, to put it politely. Since Rabin's luminous tone was one of his greatest glories, it's cruelty to have to hack through lousy sonics to hear it. This is not a complete discography, chaff and all, but rather recommendations of what is readily available, affordable, and listenable. Original LPs are collectors' items and not consistently available, so I am not covering those, and most of EMI's CD reissues are deleted and frightfully expensive.

Rabin recorded nine LPs for EMI, and the UK label Testament remastered all of them for their 2011 "Studio Recordings" box set. The sound is warmer and less "digital" than EMI's "Michael Rabin: 1936-1972" and "Young Genius on the Violin" reissues, which are deleted anyway. For the best sound, presence, and vitality, Testament's reissues cannot be topped, especially for the price.

"The Magic Bow", the cream of Rabin's studio work and an audiophile classic, is a delightful collection of lighter fare made with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra under Felix Slatkin. Everyone should own a copy. Whether it's the 'Meditation' from *Thais*, the 'Hora Staccato', or the Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso of Saint-Saens, every note is played with elan and glowing affection. Testament's version in "The Studio Recordings" loses a little shimmer in the violin tone, and the playback speed was apparently slowed so the orchestra would match A=440. I have five Capitol LPs that indicate that the Hollywood Bowl actually tuned a little sharper. It's no deal-breaker, but it does result in slightly slower tempos. (I have

to thank my American Record Guide colleague, Joseph Magil, for pointing me in the right direction regarding the tuning.) Testament's splendid LP preserves both the scrumptious sonics and the correct playback speed. The best version on a single CD is the 1994 Royal Classics "Strings by Starlight", which intermingles selections from another Hollywood Bowl recording of that name. Avoid the SACD from Blue Moon Records: it sounds mediocre, and the audio files used were CD-quality, not high-resolution.


From left to right: Michael Rabin, Morey Amsterdam, Jack Benny, Henny Youngman as the Waukegan String Quartet.

"Mosaics", from 1959, has Leon Pommers accompanying Rabin in several short, virtuosic pieces. With Sarasate's 'Zapateado', I listened to a handful of other violinists (Perlman, Szeryng, Shaham, Midori, Heifetz, Sarasate himself); only Midori came close to Rabin's elegance and ease, and only Heifetz, Rabin's hero, appeared to enjoy it more. With pianist Brooks Smith there was a follow-up to "Mosaics" in 1961, but Capitol inexplicably shelved it. Only Testament has released it, first in their "Unpublished Recordings" set and then as the "Mosaics 2" LP. The phrases in Dvorak's Slavonic Dance in E minor have a connecting arc that defies all the rubato. In Debussy's 'Girl with the Flaxen Hair', Rabin is a wizard with the bow—in the brief stillness of the opening note, and in the unison double stop from which descending notes on the lower string magically appear. His only studio recording of a favorite showpiece, William Kroll's 'Banjo and Fiddle', positively sparkles. It's too bad the Capitol engineers left the piano so far in the background.

Close miking and an antiseptic studio mean that the complete Paganini caprices soon become wearying. In 2003, Simon Gibson at Abbey Road added tasteful reverberation for the "Great Recordings of the Century" remastering (EMI 67986), and it lies easiest on the ears. Mr Rabin had already recorded 11 caprices for his Columbia debut at age 14, and they sound fresher and even more playful. Sony's "Early Years" reissue includes them along with the contents of two 10-inch records, one with pianist Artur Balsam and the other with an orchestra.

The concerto recordings for EMI were mostly monaural. The Mendelssohn is earthbound. The Tchaikovsky is generally sunny and upbeat, though I feels rushed. Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy* is a heartbreaker, and Glazounov's Concerto is noble and ardent, with all the nuance the Tchaikovsky should have had. The first concertos of Paganini and Wieniawski reveal how much depth he could bring to so-called showpieces. 1960 brought a remade Paganini 1 in terrific stereo sound with Wieniawski 2 on the flip side.

Doremi has issued three volumes in their "Michael Rabin Collection". Volume 2 is a mixed bag but the most valuable of the three.

A Ravinia Festival performance of the Brahms Concerto with the Chicago Symphony and Rafael Kubelik is beautifully paced and has decent sound. His intonation was running on 87 octane rather than his usual high-test, but his interpretation reveals both ardor and musical maturity. Orchestra and conductor are with him all the way. His Guarneri violin, by the way, once belonged to Kubelik's father, Jan. One of Rabin's few forays into 20th-Century music was the 1945 concerto of German-American composer Richard Mohaupt. It is ruddy-cheeked but angular, a bit like rustic Hindemith. Rabin makes the themes sing like Heifetz tunes, and if they weren't so academic, the piece could have been fairly popular. The first movement of Bach's Double Concerto is the only aural document of Rabin performing with his dear friend Zino Francescatti. The Bell Telephone Hour orchestra is shaggy, but the stars, ages 16 and 50, are clearly having a blast. The Brahms-Heifetz 'Contemplation' is gorgeous; six solid Paganini caprices and short pieces by Milhaud, Szymanowski, and fellow violinist Albert Spalding come from Berlin broadcasts.

Michael's sister Bertine contributed family tapes and lacquers to Testament's "Unpublished Recordings" (3CD). A recital from December 1947 included most of Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole*, four Paganini caprices, and a few other beefy selections. Rabin played on a borrowed Amati, and the concert was held at Temple Beth-El in Providence, Rhode Island, where he had made his public debut earlier that year. His mother, Jeanne, was his accompanist. Expression would develop later, but his technique and tone are mind-boggling, especially considering that he had only rosined a bow four years earlier. Some 78s from 1949 include three movements of Bach's Partita in D minor—but not the Chaconne, alas. John Alden Carpenter's underrated, sensual sonata was recorded for Golden Crest in 1964 but never released; it is monaural, and the tape has suffered some deterioration, but it is still well worth hearing. A Bruch *Scottish Fantasy* from a 1971 stereo broadcast is a keeper. There is also the aforementioned "Mosaics 2".

In 2009 Audite gave us Bruch's First Concerto with Thomas Schippers and the Berlin Radio Symphony, sonically superior to one on Doremi 2 (both were recorded the same week in June 1969). The pacing, the fire, the grandeur, the swells, and the details from all the instruments are breathtaking. The disc also has the most caffeinated rendition of Kroll's 'Banjo and Fiddle' as well as some Sarasate rarities.

Profil's four-disc "Genius on the Violin" is a fine, budget-priced introduction to Rabin. It has almost all the monaural concertos in sound that holds its own against EMI and Testament. Beethoven and Faure sonatas from 1960s Berlin broadcasts are rather slapdash and prosaic, and Mozart's Fourth Concerto has coarse orchestral playing, but selections from "The Magic Bow" and "Mosaics" and Bach's Third Sonata help make up for them. Engineer Torben Widdermann managed to make the premiere of Paul Creston's Second Violin Concerto listenable. The concerto has strong strains of both impressionism and neoclassicism, and the rhythms are vigorous and sophisticated. The slow movement is steamy, and the finale is a flirtatious, carefree tarantella that reflects Creston's Sicilian heritage. Rabin plays it to the hilt.

A few television appearances are now on DVD: "Great Violinists of the Bell Telephone Hour" (VAI) has three. A turn on "The Milton Berle Show" with Danny Thomas as the main guest can be had on Mill Creek's ridiculously inexpensive "Essential Family Television" set. Rabin and Claudio Arrau performed on the soundtrack for the 1954 film "Rhapsody", starring Elizabeth Taylor and two fellows constructed mostly of Brylcreem. I don't believe the soundtrack was issued on its own. Feinstein mentions in his book that Brahms's Third Sonata can be heard, but it eluded me when I watched the movie. I would commit dastardly deeds to see the 1967 "Fiddler on the Loose" episode of the "Kraft Music Hall" program, where Rabin and comedians Morey Amsterdam, Jack Benny, and Henny Youngman, billed as the Waukegan String Quartet, perform and presumably ham it up. My biggest dream, though, is to see proper high-resolution reissues of the EMI studio recordings as good as the original LPs, preferably on SACD.

STEVEN ESTEP

A version of this article was published in *The Absolute Sound*, and it appears here with their kind permission. Pictures are courtesy of Anthony Feinstein and Bertine Rabin Lafayette.

Guide to Records

ADES: *In 7 Days; Paraphrase on Powder Her Face; Berceuse; Mazurkas*
Kyril Gerstein, p; Tanglewood Orchestra/ Thomas Ades—Myrios 27—59 minutes

Here are piano works by Thomas Ades, an acclaimed if slightly overrated British composer. This is some of Ades's most attractive music. Kirill Gerstein's long relationship with Ades insures that the performances are strong and authoritative, and the Tanglewood orchestra sounds splendid in *Seven Days,* a combination of tone poem and piano concerto. According to Gerstein, Ades sticks to traditional structures even though has a "very individual style and take". The music often has classical titles and is full of fugues, three-part structures, mini-cadenzas, and variations.

Seven Days opens with a strutting neoclassical introduction played by the terrific Tanglewood strings and concludes with a simple statement of the main tune, which undergoes an elaborate series of variations before slimming down to basics and abruptly shutting off. The work depicts the Biblical story of creation with a great deal of opulence and color. We get eloquent brass and mysterious gongs in 'Chaos-Light-Dark', growling lower sonorities beneath high piano figures in 'Separation of Waters into Sea and Sky', layered chorales gradually building with leaping brass in 'Land-Grass-Trees'. The more celestial sections sound a bit like Messiaen with a touch of John Williams. The moon is evoked in a brief cadenza, full of light and magic; the fugue in 'Creatures of the Sea and Sky' returns to the polyphony of the opening, but the mood is more ecstatic.

The more lyrical sections are similar to the Berceuse (from *The Exterminating Angel*) for solo piano, which has a mesmeric, chiming melody under shimmering chords. (The resonant recording was made in Symphony Hall in Boston.)

Powder her Face for two pianos (Ades with Gerstein) refers to a different, later tradition: this is a gaudy Lisztian concert paraphrase of Ades's opera, full of show-offy effects and contrasts between harsh dissonance and seductive consonance.

The Mazurkas, written for the Chopin bicentenary for Emanuel Ax, are icy mood pieces, with little of Chopin's charm or rhythmic lift.

The most compelling piece is the concerto, which is also the longest and most ambitious. It is reason alone for trying this disc even if you don't normally care for Ades's music. For his admirers, this is essential.

SULLIVAN

AGRICOLA: *Cantatas;* see HOMILIUS
ALYABIEV: *Trio;* see Collections

AMMANN: *Piano Concerto;*
RAVEL: *Left-Hand Concerto;*
BARTOK: *Concerto 3*
Andreas Haefliger, Helsinki Philharmonic/ Susanna Mälkki—BIS 2310 [SACD] 76 minutes

This is the world-premiere recording of Swiss composer Dieter Ammann's Piano Concerto, subtitled 'Gran Toccata' (2019). It captured my attention immediately because I felt grounded by its clear rhythms, basic tonality, incredible breadth of orchestral colors, and its coherence, aided by the full-throated, vivid playing of both soloist and orchestra, and full-frequency, balanced, transparent sound that extends from deep, resonant bass notes to brilliant mid-range and treble ones. Ammann taps into a wide array of stylistic influences. Also, he uses plenty of percussion, but not the gratuitous copy-cat kind heard in most new 10- or 12-minute orchestral pieces; here it is fresh, creative, and integral to all the other sounds going on. And I mean *all*. As Ammann says in his liner notes, "The high level of density both in the solo part and in the orchestra, and also the close interlocking of the two, demands great virtuosity from all the players." In brief, this concerto is a tour de force.

The 31-minute work is in one movement but with three sections, each helpfully given its own track. The composer explains the subtitle: "The interlocking [see above] increases the coloristic palette of the piano exponentially, for example, when merging the piano with the marimba and the vibraphone to create a kind of 'super-instrument'. The propulsive character of the piano writing sometimes makes it sound like some type of percussion instrument, using percussive figures to display its potential in rhythmic terms (hence the subtitle)." This is one occasion where the liner notes ring

absolutely true with what I just finished hearing.

In the second section the pace slows but the textures thicken. What an ear Ammann has for orchestral sounds; he widely expands beyond traditional possibilities without forcing instruments to do dumb things—he's not into mere effects here. It's amazing how he enhances the piano with barely noticeable bell-like sounds from the percussion in the cadenza. The third section begins upbeat with action, rhythm, and a clear beat. But it's here that Ammann loses me: fast, then slow, then fast again, before a long, slow, unexpected ending with a very long waxing-and-waning section, only to resolve sparsely on an unresolved chord. But that alone can't negate the work's brilliance and creativity.

The Ammann was recorded in concert in November 2019. Eight months earlier Ravel's Left-Hand Concerto was recorded in the same location but without an audience. The opening measures are like the perfect extension from the Ammann, but the sound here isn't nearly as radiant or transparent. As a result, the low growlings of the introduction are poorly defined or projected; nor is the piano sound rich enough in the lower register—a problem I attribute to the engineers rather than the performers. The same thing happens in the final cadenza that builds toward the grand finale. The performance itself is very fine, but neither pianist nor conductor create the kind of liquid flow that erases all the seams. For that turn to Leon Fleisher, Seiji Ozawa, and the Boston Symphony on Sony, who grasp this masterpiece as one overarching sweep, with the sound projecting every rich detail from the gurgling contrabassoon to the raspy descending trombones in the second-last measure (which are barely audible with Mälkki).

Three months later, the sound for Bartok's Concerto 3 is much better balanced, transparent, and resonant. Why this pairing with the Ammann and Ravel? The rhythms! Bartok's folk-inspired 3/8 melodies alternate measures of an eighth-note followed by a quarter-note, with measures of just the opposite; also, in measures with three beats he has the bass plucking away in duple meter. The concerto's Hungarian imprint is as distinctive as Ravel's is jazzy and Ammann's is polyglot.

Haefliger and Mälkki turn the Bartok into an alert, transparent, brightly paced, perfectly matched dialog between piano and orchestra that projects its tight rhythms and details. Just a few times Haefliger tends to rush rather than articulate rapid 16th notes amidst slews of rapid eighth notes. In I rhythms are alive but not punchy. Both pianist and conductor search the quiet depths of II, which is gently paced with a lovely twittering mid-section. III is sharp, alert, spot-on. It generates excitement, notably toward the end. Bartok died before he could finish his sketches for the orchestration of the last few bars. So Mälkki adds to the final chord a hit on the resonant bass drum that isn't in the standard printed score—why not!

FRENCH

ARNOLD: *The Dancing Master*
Eleanor Dennis (Miranda), Catherine Carby (Prue), Fiona Kimm (Mrs. Caution), Ed Lyon (Gerard), Mark Wilde (Monsieur), Graeme Broadbent (Diego); BBC Concert Orchestra/ John Andrews—Resonus 10269—76 minutes

This one-act comic opera is an almost forgotten work. It was completed in 1952 in a very busy period for composer Malcolm Arnold. He was working on several films: *Brittania Mews*, *No Highway in the Sky*, *The Holly and the Ivy*, and *Breaking the Sound Barrier*—all in 1952. At the same time he was writing his *English Dances* and completing his First Symphony. Constant rejections by the BBC owing to the opera's mildly racy content prevented a radio production, but Arnold had little time to adapt the score to meet the BBC's requirements. The opera was never produced and was almost forgotten until an amateur performance in 1962. The first studio recording (which I haven't heard) was made shortly before Arnold's death. This is the second studio recording (early 2020) with full orchestra.

The opera is based on an adaptation by Joe Mendoza of William Wycherly's 1671 play *The Gentleman Dancing Master*. The Restoration period comedy included some language and bawdy plot points (no worse than the *Carry-On* British films a few years later). The plot involves familiar tropes for a Restoration Comedy. Miranda is kept virginally pure by her companion, Ms Prue. They are both under the watchful eye of the appropriately named Ms Caution. Miranda is set to have an arranged marriage to Monsieur, a French Dandy; though everyone knows that he's after her dowry. Gerard appears at Miranda's window where they have a "cute" introduction, and she invites him in. Within a few moments (including a lovely duet) they fall in love. Don Diego, Miranda's father, finds the two in her room and

thinks the worst, tries to break up the couple, and insists that Miranda marry Monsieur as soon as possible. To smooth things over, Gerard is introduced as a dancing master, giving dancing lessons to Miranda for her wedding. Other complications ensue, with Gerard admitting that Miranda is really his wife, Monsieur will marry Ms Prue, and Don Diego counts his money. It's all light-hearted and enjoyable.

There are some problems with the opera and the recording. The plot and text are complicated, and character motivations are not fully explained. Text and songs are often sung very fast, and there are many ensembles where each singer sings a different text. Even with the included libretto I found it difficult to follow. Although the sound is very good, the recording favors the orchestra, making the singers even more difficult to understand.

What stands out is the witty and enjoyable score. You can hear the influence of the *English Dances*, and there are astringent sections that sound like his First Symphony. The singers are all very good; Ben Lyon's Gerard, and Eleanor Dennis's Miranda are stand-outs. Graeme Broadbent's Don Diego is properly pompous and buffoonish. The BBC orchestra plays well, and conductor Andrews keeps everything light.

FISCH

ARRIGONI: *Arias, Cantatas, Sonatas*
Marta Fumagalli, s; Davide Ferella, mandolin; Accademia degli Erranti—Dynamic 7878—59:46

This collection of music by Carlo Arrigoni (1697-1744) is titled "Tiranni affetti" (tyrannical feelings), a phrase adapted from one of his arias about unrequited love. Arrigoni was born in Florence, and there his first oratorios were performed. He was later appointed by Francesco Geminiani as director of the weekly Thursday concerts at Hickford's Room in London along with Giuseppe Sammartini, and his opera *Fernando* was performed by the anti-Handel Opera of the Nobility. Arrigoni returned to Florence as a musician and composer to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, a position that also allowed him the opportunity to work for the Hapsburgs in Vienna.

Arrigoni's ability to convey different affects is evident in the two cantatas (*Cerbetta Amorosa* and *Perdona Cara Amorosetta Fille*) and the four separate arias for voice, violin, and continuo, all of them probably composed in Vienna. The timbre of Marta Fumagalli's voice is perhaps a little heavy for Arrigoni's intricate melodies, but her interpretations bring out Arrigoni's dramatic sensibilities. Texts are in the booklet, but the translations are a bit loose.

Arrigoni was reported to have played lute or theorbo in his own operas but must have been just as adept at playing the North Italian mandolin (tuned differently than the more familiar Neapolitan type). The two sonatas for solo mandolin and continuo and a trio for mandolin, violin, and continuo are skillfully performed by Davide Ferella and are fascinating examples of soloistic writing for the mandolin and a useful contrast to the more famous but less virtuosic concertos by Vivaldi. The extended variations that form the final movement of Arrigoni's solo Sonata in E minor are an excellent and memorable example.

Ferella's research was the stimulus for creating this recording. The Accademia degli Erranti (Barbara Altobello, violin; Claudia Poz, cello; Diego Cantalupi, archlute; Gabriele Levi, organ and harpsichord) supply sensitive accompaniments.

BREWER

AVNI: *Piano Concerto; In Spite of All That; Autumn Interludes; On the Verge of Time; From There and Then; Andante Meditativo*
Heidrun Hoffmann; Saarbrucken Radio/ Jamie Phillips—Hanssler 20040—73 minutes

Tzvi Avni (b. 1927) emigrated from Saarbrucken to Palestine as part of the Jewish diaspora in the wake of the Third Reich, studied in Israel and New York, and now teaches in Israel. The piano concerto, completed in 2010, varies stylistically from the extreme dissonance and pompous violence of the first movement to a more spare and rhapsodic slow movement (including much dialog among piano, winds, and strings) to the lighter finale, which seems to project a kind of off-kilter humor.

The remainder is given over to solo piano works. *In Spite of All That* (2014), subtitled 'Sonata Brevis', is a beautiful work: colored by the onset of another war between Israel and the Gaza Strip, it begins with elegiac chords in the lower register of the piano but gives way to freer, more active passages punctuated by clusters and other dissonant sonorities. A more meditative closing follows, still disturbed from time to time by the earlier outbursts of the central section. Several allusions to Jewish song and liturgical music and figure prominently in *From There and Then* (1998), a

loosely styled Baroque prelude followed by a brooding passacaglia.

Ms Hoffmann commissioned *In Spite of All That* and has performed it many times. She seems to be an ideal interpreter of this music, which, all in all, seems to progress the way dreams do—not quite deliberately but not quite aimlessly either. This is music worth knowing better.

HASKINS

AVONDANO: *Il Mondo della Luna*
Susana Gaspar (Clarice), Carla Caramujo (Flaminia), Carla Simoes (Lisetta), Fernando Guilmaraes (Ecclitico), Joao Pedro Cabral (Ernesto), Joao Fernandes (Cecco), Luis Rodrigues (Buona Fede); Musicos do Tejo/ Marcos Magalhaes—Naxos 660487 [2CD] 137 minutes

A new name to add to ARG's index! Pedro Antonio Avondano (1714-82) was an Italian composer working for the court in Portugal. This is the world-premiere recording of his setting of a well-known libretto by the renowned Carlo Goldoni: *The World of the Moon*. Since late 1986 we have reviewed operas by Galuppi, Haydn, and Paisiello that use some version of this libretto. The rich cultural associations of the text, and thus of the various settings, are authoritatively revealed in an important book by Pierpaolo Polzonetti: *Italian Opera in the Age of the American Revolution*.

Avondano's opera was performed in carnival season of 1765 in the Royal Theater of Salvaterra rather than in the "luxurious Casa da Opera, also known as the Opera do Tejo, which was completely destroyed by the Lisbon earthquake of November 1755, just seven months after its inauguration". (So says the helpful booklet-essay by Jorge Matta, who also prepared the edition of the score used here.)

Avondano was one of seven musicians by that name—including his father, son, and four other male relatives—who were active in Portugal in the 1700s and early 1800s. Pedro Antonio played violin in the royal chapel and composed ballet music for operas as well as music for balls at his home. Three volumes of "Lisbon Minuets" by him (for two melody instruments and continuo) were published in England at the time. Symphonies and violin concertos by him survive in manuscript, as do some sacred operas and oratorios.

Only one (non-sacred) opera survives, and here it is, in a significantly abbreviated edition commissioned in 1994 by the Teatro Nacional (Sao Carlos) in Lisbon. "Some scenes, arias and recitatives are omitted", though the omitted material is not indicated in the libretto. The most significant omissions are a chorus and six arias.

The result would, I think, make for an entertaining evening in the theater, especially given the comical shenanigans in the plot. Various characters persuade a pretentious guy that he has flown to the moon while asleep. When they reveal the charade, he is at first angry. But he then realizes that he should be less strict, and, in the end, allows his two daughters and his maid to marry the men they love.

The recording is self-recommending for people with a special interest in 18th Century comic opera; it's a skillful rendition of a forgotten version of a particularly fascinating and culturally resonant libretto. The mid to late 18th Century was, of course, the age of political revolutions and challenges to settled social arrangements (such as the often abusive control of a household and its inhabitants by the master of the house), as we know from plays by Beaumarchais and operas based on them by people like paisiello and Mozart.

For the general opera-lover, the pickings are slimmer. The numerous musical numbers are mostly short and generic, with little of the inventiveness and imagination of contemporary composers such as Galuppi (Jan/Feb 2021), Paisiello (Sept/Oct 2017), and Cimarosa (his oft-recorded *Il Matrimonio Segreto*)—not to speak of Haydn and Mozart or French operas from the same period.

The musical numbers come across well here, with all the vocalists singing nicely on pitch—a quality that should not be taken for granted!

But listening to the whole recording was a trial for me because of the recitatives. Not that they are any longer or less well crafted than in many other operas of the period. The problem is an experiment by the conductor that, to read his description in the booklet, sounds interesting and plausible: the singers have been instructed to learn their many recitatives as spoken dialog, and then, in rehearsals, have gradually worked half-singing into it from the chords that they hear coming from the harpsichord.

So much for theory. In practice, the result is that a character may, say, cadence on a pitch that is a whole-step or a tritone away from the root of whatever chord is played at a given moment, or may pronounce the syllable in an entirely unpitched manner. The effect, to my

ear, is that the harpsichordist is often trying to correct a willful or negligent vocalist. (Something similar happened in Boulez's recording of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*.)

The libretto (online) does not include a translation. The synopsis is helpfully detailed but should have included track numbers.

The performing group heard here is new to me. Its name means "The Musicians of the Tagus". (The Tejo—or Tajo, to use its Spanish name—is the long river that flows from Spain through Portugal to the Atlantic.) Musicos was founded in 2005 by two harpsichordists, Marcos Magalhaes and Marta Arauo. The former plays for the recitatives and presumably did much of the vocal coaching. If so, he deserves praise for getting the all-Portuguese cast to deliver the Italian words so well.

The instrumental ensemble is smallish (fewer than two dozen musicians in the photo), but they play with grace and subtlety. The lovely overture (in four short movements) sometimes sounds like elegant chamber music. I look forward to hearing this group in purely instrumental repertory.

This is a minor but fascinating opera.

LOCKE

BABADJANIAN, CHEBOTARYAN: *Trios;*
PIAZZOLLA: *4 Seasons*
Trio de l'Ile—Divine Art 25211—55 minutes

This is the fourth time that the trio by Arno Babadjanian, a 20th Century Armenian composer, has come my way. It is a brooding, romantic work, with a strong Rachmaninoff influence coloring the Armenian melodies, and I'm always happy to see a new recording. The Trio Aeternus's coarse reading (Toccata 6, Nov/Dec 2020, p 117) is out of the running. I still have the other two I've reviewed (Trio Solis: MSR 1418, Sept/Oct 2012, p. 207, and Potch Trio: Delos 3420, Mar/Apr 2015), so I put them all in the CD changer and had a good old-fashioned shootout.

The MSR sonics are dark, accenting the brooding; the violinist has recurring intonation problems—really the only flaw. The Potch Trio has a brighter sound, sometimes with a glare from the violin; the piano isn't the most resonant. Their performance is good, but it now sounds careful.

The Trio de l'Ile has more fluid phrasing and the most drama though not the most mystery. The violinist struggles a little with intonation, too, but is much better than the Trio Solis's violinist. There is a part in I that must be wicked, as it tends to snare everyone to some extent. The sonics are clear; I would prefer more plush acoustics for this ardent, glowing piece, but its other good qualities elevate it over Potch and Solis. The finale is particularly vigorous. Our Editor praised the Gelius Trio (Thorofon 2650, Sept/Oct 2018, see ARENSKY) for its sweet sound; it is mellower than the recording at hand, but the excessive reverberation puts too much oil on the stormy waters.

The short, one-movement trio by Gayane Chebotaryan (1945) is closer to Khachaturian and has an even stronger folk influence. The pizzicato accompaniment to the piano melody at the opening is clever, and the diminuendo from the slow central section to the dancing coda is magical. If you're a sucker for Armenian tunes (as I am) you'll enjoy this charming, beautiful piece. At the risk of beating a dead horse, I will point out that the miking at this session captured a lot more reverberation, almost making the cello indistinct. Also, the Chebotaryan is on track 4, not track 1 as the artwork indicates.

Piazzolla's *Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas* were scored for violin, piano, electric guitar, double bass, and bandoneon; Jose Bragato, a member of Piazzolla's Octeto Buenos Aires, made this effective arrangement. At first it seemed a strange disc-mate, but the slow, sentimental part of 'Primavera Porteña' reveals that it has more in common than expected with the Armenian pieces. The musicians play it with plenty of affection and expressive beauty.

ESTEP

BACH, CPE: *Trios, all*
Linos Piano Trio
Avi 8553480 [2CD] 133 minutes

As I listened to this very satisfying recording of CPE's piano trios—all of them published in 1776—I was reminded very strongly that the music was probably not intended to be heard as a group. Without a deep knowledge of his music, it's quite difficult to distinguish one of these works from another (this from a person who adores CPE). They are accompanied sonatas, meaning that the piano part could stand on its own; but they sound great with the additional instruments and sometimes motivic interplay.

They are all three-movement pieces with one exception, the one-movement arioso of W 91:4. Musically they are quite reminiscent of the first collection of the Kenner und Lieb-

haber solo keyboard sonatas. Here and there one hears sometimes shocking musical surprises. One of the best comes in W 91:3: the first movement begins with a solo piano hymn-like phrase and then a tutti blast of sound in another key and with a much more fiery mood. If you know the slow movement of Mozart's Piano Concerto 17 in G, you'll be reminded of it when you hear this piece. Indeed, the hymn-like tune is eerily similar. One wonders if Mozart knew this work when he wrote the concerto, intending it as a gloss on or tribute to CPE's manner.

The modern players are thoroughly versed in performance-practice techniques, but they still have abundant fun with the music and are completely at home with it. This release, in short, is an excellent reference recording made by great musicians who are never merely dutiful.

HASKINS

BACH: *The Art of Fugue*
Accademia Strumentale Italiana/ Alberto Rasi
Challenge 72842—68 minutes

This performance follows the text of Bach's earlier manuscript of *The Art of Fugue* (P 200), though it somewhat inexplicably includes the unfinished 'Fuga a tre soggetti' from the later, printed edition. Rasi assembles a group of violin and violone along with treble, tenor, and tenor viols. Sometimes the organ doubles the strings, which makes for a nicer tone color and a little more definition to the lines; sometimes strings or organ play alone.

Overall, the performance is pretty and appealing but finally not especially compelling. The fugue in French style is well done, with the organ supplying an effective continuo and the strings indulging in lovely French-style trills. It could have more self-importance, however. Other movements are less satisfying. What is best known as Contrapunctus 9, for instance, chugs along speedily but with hardly any drama. (I do appreciate the doubling of the bass part at the lower octave by violone at the end, though.) Some scoring decisions are quite wrong-headed: the canon at the octave is played by the organ alone; fair enough, but the cutesy 4-foot stop is rather dumb and predictable. In what is best known as Contrapunctus 11, the most dramatic one of all, the organ takes the first fugal exposition on its own, followed by strings alone, and finally the two together without the benefit of 16-foot violone tone—sounds good on paper, but antiseptic in reality.

There are so many other performances to choose from, whether they be on period instruments or modern ones. Three that I would prefer are Joan Lippincott on Gothic (July/Aug 2012), Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra under Munchinger on Decca (Jan/Feb 2001), and Musica Antiqua Koln under Goebbels.

HASKINS

BACH: *Cantata Excerpts*
Anna Prohaska, s; Lautten Compagney/ Wolfgang Katschner—Alpha 658—80 minutes

During the shutdown of public performances as the coronavirus became widespread, Anna Prohaska, Wolfgang Katschner, and about 20 members of the Lautten Compagney gathered to make music. They asked themselves: "Can music give us consolation in times of sickness and crisis; can it open up emotional and contemplative spaces for us; is it redemptive for us as musicians to be the 'instruments' in engendering music and therefore spirituality?"

They found that performing together in this time supplied a kind of redemption (or consolation) for them as artists, which led to the development of a program they called "Redemption". Beyond the redemption or consolation it gave them as performers, the album is a testimony about redemption of the human condition with a carefully chosen selection of movements from Bach cantatas that build a smart sequence from wrestling with sin and guilt toward acceptance of death with peaceful confidence. As Prohaska mentioned in an interview, "We wanted to send out a signal of hope: that even during a pandemic Bach's music is like a consoling hand."

With accompaniment by distinguished early music performers Prohaska sings 10 arias and is joined in 4 choruses by 3 other singers: Suzanne Langner (alto), Christian Pohlers (tenor), and Karsten Müller (bass). A few vocal movements are performed in instrumental arrangements: four cantata chorales and a soprano aria from a secular work, the *Hunt Cantata* (a birthday cantata for Prince Christian von Sachsen-Weissenfels that contains 'Sheep May Safely Graze'). The instrumentalists are exceptionally good and the performances are recorded in immaculate but warm sound. They do a skillful job of depicting the death bells or ticking of a clock in 'Die Seele Ruht in Jesu Händen' from Cantata 127 *Herr Jesus Christ*.

Sequences are created out of cherry-picked movements from separate cantatas. Three movements of Cantata 150, *Nach dir, Herr, Verlanget Mich* (Lord, I long for you), are placed at different points in the program. Prohaska begins with the somber aria 'Bete aber Auch Dabei Mitten in dem Wachen!' (Pray nevertheless also during your vigil!) from Cantata 115, *Mache Dich, Mein Geist, Bereit* (Make yourself ready, my spirit), imploring purification from sin. That flows without pause into the opening chorus of Cantata 25, *Es ist Nichts Gesundes an Meinem Leibe*, a confession of deep sinfulness. It is followed by a plea for forgiveness in the closing chorale from Cantata 135, *Ach Herr, Mich Armen Sünder*. That chorale, 'Ehr' sei in's Himmels Throne', in praise of the eternal blessedness of the Trinity, is one of Bach's more elaborate final chorales, but unhappily it is played in a simplified arrangement for instruments. The chorale tune, 'Herzlich Tut Mich Verlangen' (I do desire dearly a blessed end) by Hans Leo Hassler, is better known as the Passion Chorale and was used in various harmonizations by Bach many times—five times in the *St Matthew Passion* alone. The notes tell none of this, and no text of the chorale (or any of the others) is included, but just recognizing the tune carries a further message of redemption to listeners.

Two movements of Cantata 105, *Herr, Gehe Nicht ins Gericht*, are included, but at separate points. Prohaska takes the aria 'Wie Zittern und Wanken der Sünden Gedanken' at an urgent tempo, and her biting articulation of the words vividly depicts a sinner's "anguished conscience torn apart by its own torment". The message is further emphasized by trembling and wavering in the strings while the sublime melodic line with oboe obbligato suggests perhaps a divine presence in the midst of distress. This has been one of my favorite Bach arias simply for its loveliness since I first heard it 50 years ago, but this performance gave me a much deeper appreciation for what it imparts spiritually. For me it conveyed the very heart of the program: in the midst of our deepest distress, there is grace.

As the arc of the program bends toward the title theme of redemption, we hear a wonderfully joyful performance of 'Weichet Nur, Betrübte Schatten', the opening aria of Cantata 202 (the Wedding Cantata).

There is a lot to like here. The recorded sound is excellent, with a wonderful intimacy that puts you right in the midst of the performers. It's like a home performance. The instrumentalists are terrific and their performance is unhindered by excessive vibrato.

Prohaska's light lyric voice is agile, penetrating, and bell-like. She sings with minimal vibrato, and her articulation of the text is pristine. Her singing is more quirky than you usually hear in music of this period—lunging at notes and then falling off. It called too much attention to her technique, and it can sound too fussy. A little more sustained lyricism would help.

The practice of singing Bach cantatas with one voice per part in choruses is justified, especially in this time of pandemic when social distancing is necessary. It allows each line to be heard clearly, and the quartet sings well, but in the end I found it mostly unsatisfying. The final chorus of Cantata 150, *Nach Dir, Herr, Verlanget Mich* (Lord, I long for you), considered Bach's earliest extant cantata, is a perfect way to end the program in confidant assurance. This time it works well with a solo quartet as the text alternates between solo lines and quartet. What is especially significant is the way Bach builds it so skillfully as a chaconne. It is beautifully performed.

I thought the program had come to an end at this point, but it continued with an unlisted encore: a jazzy scat arrangement of the aria that began the program, 'Bete Aber auch Dabei'. It's an odd thing to do, so you might want to stop before you come to it and listen to it some other time if you are curious.

Alpha recorded and released this very quickly. It is a comforting program for this time of pandemic when a shut-down of what we have considered normal is difficult but necessary. Each track is lovely (even the encore) and it all is well performed, but I will happily return to hearing Bach's cantatas performed in their entirety.

Notes, texts, translations.

R MOORE

BACH: *Cello Suites 3+4;*
KURTAG: *Signs, Games & Messages*
Tabea Zimmermann, va
Myrios 36—53 minutes

Tabea Zimmermann's Bach is light, sprightly, lyrical, and mellifluous. She does not attempt to makes grand statements in these suites. That is sensible considering the light tone of her instrument. It is a choice that works beautifully thanks to her taste and intelligence. She tells us, "We truly need Bach's music, regard-

less of the instrument it is performed on. But for me the most important thing is to achieve a coherent approach that makes a connection between the instrument you have chosen and the way you play it." These are the most satisfying readings of these suites that I have heard on the viola.

There are six pieces from Gyorgy Kurtag's *Signs, Games and Messages*. These are expressionist, dissonant, avant-garde pieces that are largely gestural and timbral. The fifth piece, 'A Flower for Tabea', was written for her as a memorial to her deceased husband.

Zimmermann's viola was made by Etienne Vatelot in Paris in 1980.

MAGIL

BACH: *Cello Suites*
Eleonor Bindman, p
Grand Piano 847 [2CD] 119 minutes

Why should a pianist be interested in going into the relative depths of her instrument to transcribe and perform these lovely lyrical works? Does it work?

Well, yes and maybe. Bach's music is great no matter who plays it on what. Bindman takes him quite literally, transcribing in the register he wrote in, mostly, and clearly with enjoyment. Her tempos are sometimes faster than a cellist's fingers might find practical, but her musical sense is excellent. She observes most of the written repeats. Her six pages of English liner notes are followed by seven in German. They tell us of her purposes in doing this deed. I'm sure that pianists will find it more thoroughly engaging than cellists, but that is not meant to depreciate it. Enjoy it if you can!

D MOORE

BACH: *Goldberg Variations*
Pavel Kolesnikov, p
Hyperion 68338—80 minutes

Bach's lengthy full title of this work is "Aria with divers variations for the harpsichord with two manuals. Composed for people who love the mind by Johann Sebastian Bach". The Aria is one of the most beautiful 32 bars ever composed. Divided into two 16-bar sections, each repeated, it is the basis for the following 30 variations. It concludes with the Aria repeated and unchanged from the opening after over an hour of music. That makes 32 separate pieces based on a 32-bar Sarabande (as the Aria is called in Anna Magdalena's Notebook). Richard Wigmore's booklet essay here is, like most of Hyperion's booklets, a model of scholarship and quite informative.

Pavel Kolesnikov (b. 1989) will turn 32 as this goes to press. Born in Serbia, his early training was at the Moscow Conservatory. He is now London-based after completing his studies at the Royal College of Music. He was the winner of the 2012 Honens Competition and was inspired to learn the *Goldberg Variations* to accompany a ballet with choreography by Anna Teresa De Keersmaeker. The pianist says that his approach to the work was developed through this fascinating, laborious, and enthralling collaboration. I found his interpretation rewarding musically and impressive in an unusually subdued way.

Kolesnikov is capable of more tone colors and gradations of volume at a low dynamic level than any pianist I have heard. My notes use the word "detached" a few times and also mention light, crisp articulation. He does use a bit of pedal here and there, and there are some louder moments, but those are few and far between. His legato playing, especially Variations 9, 21, 25 and 26, is superb and a welcome break from the more harpsichord-like other variations. Still, he makes incredible use of dynamic shading; and his ability to play the technically difficult late variations like 20, 23, 26 at a very quiet level is amazing, especially when on a repeat he plays even quieter. All repeats are taken, and tasteful ornamentation is added on the repeats.

I have enjoyed this several times; its low-key approach makes it unique among my favorites.

HARRINGTON

BACH: *Musical Offering; 14 Canons; Vom Himmel Hoch*
Calefax—Pentatone 5186840—68 minutes

Calefax is a Dutch quintet of reed players who have been working together for more than 25 years with no change of personnel. A few of their earlier recordings were reviewed here, but none more recently than 15 years ago. Beyond some Rameau, Debussy, and Ravel (which I've bought) the ensemble has recorded two Shostakovich CDs, some Duke Ellington, a "Roaring 20s" album, and much more. Here they give us most of the rest of Bach's canons, after their earlier sets of the *Art of Fugue* (Mar/Apr 2001) and the *Goldberg Variations* (2012, not reviewed).

The arranger (Raaf Hekkema, their saxophonist) arranges the movements to make a

plausible concert sequence, interspersing the assorted canons among the movements of the trio sonata. He joins some of the canons to one another, flowing from one technique to the next.

The six-part ricercar obviously needs six players some of the time, but Calefax has only five. They hired Arthur Klaassens, a player of English horn and lupophone (a rare instrument resembling a bass oboe). Hekkema gave him plenty to do in the other movements, too. It freed up the bassoonist and bass clarinetist to do other than merely handling the bass lines. The two ricercars are solo keyboard pieces, but this deployment of well-matched timbres helps the contrapuntal lines stand out more clearly than they do on keyboards. The stereo image helps here as well.

Because there is no keyboard player improvising from figured bass in the trio sonata, Hekkema consulted a harpsichordist and composed suitable filler for the midrange instruments. Part of the fun in listening is guessing which instruments might come in next.

The program includes the 14 short riddle canons, S 1087, based on the bass line of the *Goldberg Variations*. They are usually arranged for two or more harpsichords. Klaassens plays here again to make the ensemble a sextet. This little set is shorter than five minutes.

The variations on *Vom Himmel Hoch* go far beyond the expected instrumentation and transposition of the organ piece, S 769, extending it to last more than 22 minutes. We get excerpts from the *Christmas Oratorio* and Magnificat, plus some of the other organ settings, transposed into E-flat and mixed between the canonic variations. Again, the carefully balanced tone colors and the dynamics in the phrases give these pieces layers of fresh beauty beyond the keyboard originals.

Someone playfully whistles the chorale after the end of these variations. Maybe that was supposed to represent a house manager happily locking up after the great show?

LEHMAN

BACH: *Little Books*

Francesco Corti, hpsi
Arcana 480—79 minutes

Corti made a phenomenally good recording of Bach harpsichord concertos last year (July/Aug 2020) and attractive Haydn sonatas (July/Aug 2017) before that. He played with superb imagination and humor. His smooth control of accelerations and ritardandos is another prominent strength.

Here he offers a program loosely organized around the several books for Bach's wife and children. About half of these pieces are by other composers: Kuhnau, Hasse, Bohm, Couperin, and Telemann. Almost everything is in flat keys, giving the program an amiable warmth.

The three most substantial of Bach's own pieces are the Capriccio in B-flat, S 992, French Suite 4, and the *Praeludium, Fugue, and Allegro*, S 998. This last piece is only loosely connected to the rest of the program. It is a much later piece (1739), but may have been used to teach musical style to some of Bach's youngest children. I don't care that this contrived connection is an anomaly, because the performance, intonation, and tone are all so good. I'd want this recording of it, no matter what the rest of the program is.

Corti includes a partly improvised prelude (S 815a) for the French Suite 4. He plays an earlier manuscript version of the suite, and he elaborates it freely in the repeats. It sounds like spontaneous music flowing out of him.

Kuhnau's piece is the Biblical Sonata about King Hezekiah. Telemann's is a keyboard arrangement of one of his orchestral suites (ouvertures). Three of the 12 movements are omitted. Corti did record the whole suite, but the resulting program ended up too long to fit onto a single CD. Purchasers of a download version can get all of it, as the missing movements (a total of five minutes) are edited into the tracks at the ends of other movements. That odd compromise is the only mark against this fabulous program.

LEHMAN

BACH: *Anna Magdalena Notebooks*

Jan Depreter, g—Brilliant 95533—79 minutes

This is a selection of little pieces from the several books Bach and his family compiled for home use. Some of them are by contemporary composers, or anonymous, or by young Carl Philipp Emanuel. It seems to be an album for people who aren't going to listen to the music as anything but a mellifluous background sound.

Guitarist Jan Depreter gives most of the pieces a placid sameness in his too-smooth interpretations. It is hard to imagine the Bach children stomping around the room to this dance music, if it had been played this slowly

and unobtrusively. The chorales and popular songs are likewise dull.

Tracks 1 ('Wachet auf') and 17 ('Bist du bei mir') are disasters, as if no one in the production team ever listened to these pieces with scores. Depreter somehow mis-learned parts of 'Bist du bei Mir' in a minor key instead of major and repeats some sections willy-nilly. 'Wachet auf' doesn't even belong to these books. He plays only the first half of it (maybe to keep the program's time under 80 minutes?). He omits all of the middle-voice melody (the chorale!), as if he didn't ever notice it ought to be there. The treble and bass lines have perplexing wrong notes that don't even make sense with the harmony in the ways he has changed it. The meter skips a beat at one point—bad editing?

The C-major Prelude from WTC I is a mess, too—he changes the chords substantially for half a dozen bars, in ways beyond simple adjustments by octaves. The long aria 'Schlummert ein' from Cantata 82 goes about as well as it can without a singer, but it's boring. A singer could have shown him how to take the piece fast enough that each phrase could be done in one breath.

The last 30 minutes of the program were recorded 20 years ago, when Depreter was only 24. He repeats one of those CPE Bach marches in his new middle-age part of the program, trying it differently.

To hear some of these pieces played much better, try to find the 1985 EMI album "Christopher Parkening Plays Bach". Parkening varied his tone colors, applied tasteful vibrato, and had plenty of spirit and personality on top of all the right notes. Next to that, Depreter has little to say as he ambles through his clumsy arrangements.

LEHMAN

BACH: *Partitas*

Colin Tilney, hpsi

Music & Arts 1301 [3CD] 157 minutes

The recorded sound and intonation are first rate, but those virtues don't rescue these performances from a general lack of energy and involvement. The music's brilliance and humor are drained away through this matter-of-fact reading of the notes.

Although Tilney cuts some repeats from the longest movements, his performance takes a long time (and three discs) because most of his tempos are exceedingly slow. Slow Gigues and Courantes have plenty of historical precedent in the harpsichord literature, but it is odd to hear Bach's examples taken to such extremes. There is an insufficient sense of dance remaining in such a calm and serene delivery.

Tilney has an uncommon way of turning the fastest notes into triplets in many of the movements, disagreeing with the notation. He chooses to render the meter of Partita 6's Gigue as triplets, too. These interpretive eccentricities are both interesting and frustrating. He explains his choices in the booklet's long essay. It can be a good thing to challenge us in music we know, but I'd usually rather just enjoy it.

Beyond those details, the accuracy is good, except for a wrong bass note that happens twice in the first part of Partita 2's Allemande. That Partita's Sarabande also hits an editing glitch at one of the repeat bars.

For slow-tempo performances with much more dance and imagination, plus 16-foot bass from a pedalboard(!), plus all the repeats, get Peter Watchorn's set (Jan/Feb 2014).

LEHMAN

BACH: *St John Passion*

James Gilchrist, Evangelist; Christian Immler, Jesus; Hana Blazikova, Damien Guillon, Zachary Wilder, Christian Immler; Bach Collegium Japan/ Masaaki Suzuki

BIS 2551 [2SACD] 105 minutes

This recording owes its existence to the COVID-19 pandemic. In March of 2020 the singers and players of Bach Collegium Japan were embarked on a European tour of 11 concerts in six countries to celebrate their 30th anniversary. Arriving in Cologne after 3 concerts, they were informed that the remaining 8 had been cancelled owing to the coronavirus. The intendant of the Cologne Philharmonie made an offer for them to give a live-streamed performance of the *St John Passion* at the time the concert had been scheduled, but the cancellation of the other concerts left the artists with time on their hands. At this point, Masaaki Suzuki's wife Tamaki, who sings in the choir, suggested that they make a recording. BIS records gave the go-ahead, and there was considerable scrambling to assemble a producer, crew, and recording equipment. The intendant offered the use of the main hall of the Philharmonie free of charge, and for four days the recording sessions proceeded. As they were approaching the end of the project, the police arrived with orders that the building be vacat-

ed immediately and closed. As it happened, one of the policemen had heard the live-streamed performance and allowed the musicians and crew an hour to complete their work. The result is the present recording.

Bach Collegium Japan recorded the *St John Passion* in 1998 (BIS 921; S/O 1999). My review of that recording could almost be a review of this one. There are some differences apart from the names of the solo singers, but not enough to constitute a substantial rethinking of Bach's masterwork. There is considerable drama built into the work, especially the arrest scene in Part I and the interrogations under Pontius Pilate in Part II; but Suzuki's interpretation is at its strongest where the music calls for lyrical reflection. Nowhere is this more the case than in the alto aria 'Es Ist Vollbracht', performed here at a slow and ruminative tempo and heartbreakingly sung by countertenor Damien Guillon. His aria in Part I—'Von den Stricken'—does not come off nearly as well. The tempo seems prodded and Guillon's tone less substantial.

The opening chorus is one of the places where the two recordings differ considerably. Here the orchestral prelude sets off with a bang, and the choral entrance evokes palpable anguish. The tempo was a touch slower and the treatment gentler in 1998. Another magical moment in the present recording is the penultimate chorus, 'Ruht Wohl', where Suzuki captures the perfect feel of a solemn triple-meter *tombeau*.

I am not convinced by Suzuki's treatment of the chorales. In an essay published in the booklet with this recording, Bach scholar Robin Leaver likens the chorales to "the pillars of a gothic church building" that hold up the arches and vaults of the narration, dialogs, and devotional arias and ariosos. I believe that this function demands that the chorales be treated with a deliberate and solemn formality. If the tempo is too brisk and the treatment too subjective this function is defeated, or at least badly compromised, as is sometimes the case here. Another element of this recording that I find annoying is the harpsichord continuo. It seems too obtrusive and busy when it should be supportive and even self-effacing. I made a similar complaint about the 1998 recording.

Tenor James Gilchrist is an expressive but not excessively histrionic Evangelist. In the more agitated portions of the narrative, Suzuki makes rapid and breathless joins between dialog, crowd choruses, and narrative. The result is vehement and driving but not always effectively dramatic. Vehemence is cheap; drama can be elusive.

Bach never left a fully definitive score of the *St John Passion* as he did with the *St Matthew*. There are four discernible versions, beginning in 1724. In 1725 Bach produced three replacement arias and choruses that would eventually become part of the *St Matthew Passion* and Cantata 23. The third version omits these additions as well as a passage of narration taken from St Matthew's Gospel. A tenor aria and instrumental sinfonia written for this version are now lost. In 1739 Bach began to write what might have been the definitive score of the *St John Passion*, but he broke off midway through the 10th movement. The fourth version of 1749 returns to the formal conception of the first version, but with some modifications of the text and revisions of instrumentation. This recording gives the 1739 version as far as it goes, and then 1749.

There will probably never be a perfect recording of so complex a work. Elements that please one listener may displease another. Suzuki and Bach Collegium Japan invariably present performances of the highest technical caliber by some of the finest exponents of this repertory. Readers looking for a first recording of this masterpiece could do far worse than this one.

GATENS

BACH: *Solo Sonatas & Partitas*
Atilla Aldemir, va
Cybele 25 [2SACD] 141 minutes

Bach's Six Solo Sonatas and Partitas are monuments of the violin repertoire. The range of moods and technical demands are not merely unprecedented, but they seem to come out of nowhere, with nothing leading up to them in music history. They are occasionally performed on the viola, which is quite a feat considering how hard they are to play on the violin. The present set is very impressive for that reason.

Turkish violist Atila Aldemir is an excellent musician, and he handles the musical and technical demands with intelligence and ease—a remarkable achievement considering his unusually large viola. This is an excellent set for people who want to hear this music on the viola, though I feel that the instrument's dense, somber sound doesn't allow the music's full range of moods to shine through.

Aldemir plays one of the world's oldest violas. It was made by Pellegrino di Micheli of Brescia around 1560.

MAGIL

BACH: *Well-Tempered Clavier I*
Marcel Worms, p—Zefir 9674 [2CD] 109 minutes

Most of this is lovely. Marcel Worms has credentials as both a classical and blues pianist. He plays simply here, making gentle and clear tones. The music flows easily with only subtle emphasis. Tempos are moderate.

It's not perfect: there are some faked notes in the trickiest sections of the A minor fugue, the E minor prelude, and insecure fingering in the fastest parts of the D major, G major, and A major pieces. A note of the subject is missing from the treble voice about halfway through the F minor fugue. Editing problems mar the sustained tone of several notes in the E-flat minor prelude and its D-sharp minor fugue. It takes close attention to notice any of those problems, though. The overall mood is relaxed and easy to enjoy.

Overall, this is recommendable to anyone wanting to hear this genteel manner on piano. Vladimir Ashkenazy's set (Sept/Oct 2006) has some similar virtues without the mishaps. Worms keeps the character more consistently understated, not going as fast or loud as Ashkenazy at his most animated moments.

An even better delivery of this type of interpretation was by Edward Aldwell in 1992 (Book I not reviewed). It is long deleted, but get it if you can find it. That is late-night Bach pianism at its best.

Worms's control of quiet serenity has led me to his recordings of blues-inspired piano pieces and Federico Mompou. Those interpretations are more vivid than his Bach. Dissonances urge him to play more forcefully.

LEHMAN

BARRY: *Viola Concerto;* see BEETHOVEN

BARSANTI: *Concerti Grossi, op 3; Old Scots Tunes;* **HANDEL:** *Atalante Overture*
Ensemble Marsyas/ Peter Whelan
Linn 626—51:51

This is the second collection titled "Edinburgh 1742" by Ensemble Marsyas and contains the five concertos for solo trumpet, timpani, oboes, and strings published in that year and place by Francesco Barsanti. Mr Barker's comments on the earlier recording of Concertos 1-5 (with two horns and timpani rather than a single trumpet and timpani) are still apt (Jan/Feb 2018). He wrote that Barsanti's music "may not be up to the highest standards of imagination...but it is certainly enjoyable".

Barsanti's trumpet parts are rather rudimentary, especially in contrast to the difficult solo trumpet in Handel's overture to the opera *Atalanta* (adapted from Telemann's *Tafelmusik* from 1733), also included on the recording. More effective is Barsanti's writing for strings, as in the Adagio in siciliano rhythm from Concerto 9. The playing by the 12 string players does not have a strong presence on this recording, also noted in the earlier review, and the performances of the concertos overall are very workmanlike and not very subtle. As in the earlier release, this recording also includes four of Barsanti's settings of Scottish folk tunes for violin and continuo, effectively interpreted by Colin Scobie (violin) and Elizabeth Kenny (guitar). All of these works must have been useful and pleasant entertainments for the Edinburgh Musical Society (1728-97) and remain so today.

BREWER

BARTOK: *Quartets 1, 3, 5*
Jerusalem Quartet
Harmonia Mundi 902240—77 minutes

I have lamented that so many ensembles put all of Bartok's quartets on two CDs. They do fit, of course, but should they? When encountered that way, they wear out their welcome. Some wiser artists release them on three discs, which enables the listener to digest them in smaller increments. This release by the Jerusalem Quartet contains the odd numbered ones, four years after their disc of 2, 4, and 6. It is surprising that this ensemble of committed modernists who have been playing together for 27 years didn't get around to any of these pieces sooner than 2016. They play them quite well.

Quartet 1 is skillfully managed, with the opening Lento a miniature masterpiece. Cellist Kyril Zlotnikov is not always heard as clearly as might be hoped, but in the few moments when he is, it is a thrilling sound.

The miniature Quartet 2 is joyous, particularly in IV, and it's hard to imagine it played with more precision and depth of understanding. The album could have ended after this and would have only been better for it.

Although I have not a single complaint about this performance of Quartet 5, I must stress again that it is *de trop*. This piece is rich,

complex, but also abrasive; by the third movement I am worn out. Like such later purveyors of modernism as Ligeti and Penderecki, Bartok had a rather confrontational style that does not fit every mood or occasion.

Remember when Harmonia Mundi releases were so beautifully packaged that you could spot them from 50 feet away? No more. The cover shows the musicians in drab attire, standing at a distance in tall grass as they half-heartedly ham it up in front of a towering wall. Content is what matters most, but honestly, a well chosen painting from Bartok's era might have given this recording an edge over its many competitors. I won't be ditching my set by the Emerson Quartet, but there is room for this one on the same shelf.

DUTTERER

BARTOK: *Piano Concerto 3;* see AMMANN

BEACH: *Trio;* **IVES:** *Trio;* **CLARKE:** *Trio*
Gould Piano Trio
Resonus 10264—61 minutes

A year ago (Neave Trio, "Her Voice", M/A 2020) I reviewed a disc containing two of these three works and remarked that, to my knowledge, no two of them had ever appeared together before. Now that is no longer true. What makes it odder is that the grouping principle is entirely different. The Neave Trio put Amy Beach's and Rebecca Clarke's trios together because they were both by women; the Gould Trio now puts them together, less plausibly, because they are both American. (Clarke, as it happens, was *newly* American, having had her entire upbringing, education, and compositional training in England.) The disjunction extends to their discmates: for the Neave Trio, it's the much-earlier and very fine E-flat Trio by Louise Farrenc; for the Gould Trio, it's the masterpiece by the irascibly, exuberantly American Charles Ives.

In comparisons the two ensembles are close, though I favor the Gould for their superior way of holding the music together; there is no suggestion, as there sometimes is with the Neave, that the Beach was assembled (as it was) from a number of older works and sketches. In the Clarke the honors are even. Both trios make the most of the work's dazzling textures, shot through with harmonics and pizzicatos.

As for the Ives, I am at something of a disadvantage, since despite knowing *of* it as a vital work more than half my life, despite having absorbed the idea of "TSIAJ"—"This scherzo is a joke"—and all it implies about what music was to Ives, I have never actually heard it before. I can only say that this performance seems to me insolent, cocky, zippy, and at the same time wholly sincere and stern and profound. Which, I suspect, makes it exactly right.

THOMSON

BEETHOVEN: *2 Cello Sonatas; Handel Variations*
Peter Bruns; Annegret Kuttner, p
Klanglogo 1535—73 minutes

This program is portrayed as "Beethoven-most complete! 2". Clearly it is set up to confuse us into buying it. Well, shall we?

These are good players who work together well. Bruns was born in Berlin and studied the cello there with Peter Vogler. He is also a conductor and has appeared all over the world in both roles. Kuttner comes from Zittau and studied with Peter Rosel and Ludger Remy and has also played up a storm. I enjoyed their program of Widor and Vierne (Hanssler 98.294; Sept/Oct 2008).

The usual Complete Beethoven Cello Collection takes up two CDs. What makes the present one take up more space is the addition of Opus 64. That is a transcription of Beethoven's String Trio, Op. 3, a huge 6-movement work, here lasting over 36 minutes. The repeats in the Andante are omitted. This was published in 1807. It is unclear whether Beethoven made the arrangement himself, but since it has an opus number it seems likely. It makes very pleasant listening, though I prefer its original scoring. Here it is well played and recorded.

D MOORE

BEETHOVEN: *Cello Sonata 3; Violin Sonata 9*
Luka Coetzee; Miclen LaiPang, v; LGT Young Soloists/ Alexander Gilman
Naxos 579081—61 minutes

"Beethoven Recomposed" is the title of this program, for a good reason. These two great sonatas are played not with piano accompaniment, but with a string orchestra scored by Paul Struck, a Russian-born arranger who also contributes to the liner notes, as do conductor Gilman, Keith Anderson, and Dorie Ellmere.

Does it work? Yes, to fine effect! Struck scores with sensitivity, sometimes setting the lines with solo strings instead of a full section. Coetzee observes all of the written repeats in

the Cello Sonata. LaiPang omits some in the even longer *Kreutzer Sonata*. I wish he hadn't; I would have loved to hear more from him. The evident care for balance between soloists and the orchestra gives us a new sense of the way all of the parts relate. The result is a new concept of this music and one that I think the composer would have appreciated. There are moments when I feel the music says more this way than it did in its original scoring. This is further confirmed by the fine cellist Coetzee and violinist LaiPang, and by the polished and sensitive playing of the string orchestra.

I'm sure you have heard these famous works in their original scoring, but even if you haven't, don't let that stop you from getting these. The recorded sound is excellent.

D MOORE

BEETHOVEN: *Christ on the Mount of Olives*

Elsa Dreisig, s; Pavol Breslik, t; David Soar, b; London Symphony/ Simon Rattle

LSO 862 [SACD] 45 minutes

As I've noted before, this, Beethoven's only oratorio, is quite a fine work; but it depends heavily on two soloists, and the choral contribution is fairly small. Nonetheless, the drama moves convincingly from beginning to end, and it closes with one of Beethoven's best-known choruses, his 'Hallelujah.' This recording was made in concerts at the Barbicon in January and February 2020.

The two soloists—Elsa Dreisig as the Seraph and Pavol Breslik as Jesus—are quite fine. Neither has a particularly large voice, but it's hard to complain when their high notes are so clear and ringing. Dreisig's role also has some passages of difficult coloratura, which she handles beautifully. David Soar's role (Peter) is limited, but he is excellent as well.

Much of the credit, though, belongs to Rattle, who takes the work quite briskly and keeps the dramatic tension high. A few tempos feel a bit too fast, but on the whole Rattle keeps it exciting, and the whole production is moving and enjoyable.

There is some choice in this piece, particularly about soloists. Nagano had a dramatic Orgonasova and Domingo, and Spruit had Wunderlich (but little else). Even recordings without "names" can be satisfying, e.g. the Segerstam (N/D 2020). I would avoid Rilling (too slow) and Vad (too slow and provincial).

ALTHOUSE

BEETHOVEN: *Clarinet Trios*

Asko Heiskanen, cl; Jussi Seppanen, vc; Jerry Jantunen, p—Brilliant 96215—60 minutes

In 2004 three students at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki gave a performance of Beethoven's Trio in B-flat (Gassenhauer) for clarinet, cello, and piano. Since then Trio Origo has been devoted to the classical and romantic repertory on period instruments. In this August 2019 recording, they pair the *Gassenhauer* with Beethoven's popular arrangement of his septet for clarinet, cello, and piano. The clarinet is an H. Grenser model from 1800; the cello is an anonymous 18th Century product; and the fortepiano is a copy of a 1784 J.A. Stein.

Trio Origo offers vigorous readings alongside admirable command and control of the historical accessories. The group takes risks in almost every facet of the music—time, tempo, texture, dynamics, volume, and phrasing—and yet the musicians achieve an outstanding level of teamwork and communication. Still, the instruments have limits: the fortepiano tinkles, the clarinet and cello tones are too covered, and tuning is sometimes weird. Facility also varies: Heiskanen sometimes struggles to maintain a nice legato; yet Jantunen flies across the keyboard with breathtaking speed and accuracy.

Readers interested in how Beethoven heard his early chamber music will be pleased. Others may wonder how these engaging renditions would sound on modern equipment.

HANUDEL

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Concerto 1; Variations on an Original Theme*

Rudolf Buchbinder; Berlin Philharmonic/ Christian Thielemann—DG 4847733—49 minutes

My first thought was that this will have to be awfully good to justify the chintzy playing time. On learning that the recording was made at a 2016 concert, I had to see if it was offered at a special price. It is reduced slightly. Both the performance and recording are excellent, without audience noise and without any uncomfortable imbalance between piano and orchestra.

Thielemann is an excellent accompanist. The Berlin Philharmonic is forthright, but never tries to seize the spotlight. The piano (unidentified, but probably a Steinway D) sounds clear, clean, and definitely not too timid. By any standard this is just the way one would want Beethoven to sound.

Buchbinder presents a traditional approach, without any distortions and minus the little "strokes of genius" some attempt to inflict on the music. The Largo is very expressive, with exquisite Berlin woodwinds; and the final Rondo is a joyful conclusion to a performance worth preserving. If you are a collector of first rate Beethoven piano concertos you may well wish to add this to your collection.

The Variations only total some 15 minutes, but the listening time has been well spent on what can easily be described as one of the finest performances among the many available. Jed Distler's notes are good, and the sound satisfying.

BECKER

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Concertos 1+2*
Olivier Cavé; Potsdam Chamber Academy/ Patrick Hahn—Alpha 649—63 minutes

These performances are just average perusals, using the modern instruments of a chamber orchestra. Swiss pianist Olivier Cavé, 43, has a light pastel touch that leaves no memorable imprint. He uses his own cadenza in I but Beethoven's in III. Austrian conductor Patrick Hahn, 25, projects only the obvious—melody line and chords that indicate harmonic movement. Downbeats are not incisive, and inner details and lower strings are not drawn out. The orchestra sounds soggy.

In 1 I recommend the superb Stewart Goodyear with Andrew Constantine conducting (Orchid; July/Aug 2020). Richter, Munch, and the Boston Symphony on RCA have their moments too. In 2 Robert Levin, John Eliot Gardiner, and the Revolutionary and Romantic Orchestra on DG Archiv are excellent. Ashkenazy with Solti and the Chicago Symphony on Decca are too.

FRENCH

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Concerto 4; Coriolan & Creatures of Prometheus overtures*
Kristian Bezuidenhout, fp; Freiburg Baroque Orchestra/ Pablo Haras-Casado
Harmonia Mundi 902413—46 minutes

One of my favorite performances I attended in my days as an Eastman doctoral student was Kristian Bezuidenhout's of Beethoven's Fifth Concerto with an orchestra conducted by Brad Lubman. His control of piano sonority was masterly, and his musical instincts far more seasoned than a number of other concert pianists I could have named at that time. Naturally, anything he does demands my attention, and so it is here in this recording of the beautiful Fourth. His tone is again magnificent, the clarity of articulation beyond reproach, and the musical decisions are sound even when they depart from what I'm used to in the work.

With smaller numbers in the orchestra, the overall sonic impression of the piece is of a piano concerto rather than an orchestral piece with a very important piano obbligato. This pays huge dividends, especially in passages like the development of the first movement, where the orchestra has considerable musical interest. The orchestra is very fine, though I sometimes think Maestro Haras-Casado is afraid to let the music breathe when the orchestra is on its own.

HASKINS

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Sonatas, all; Diabelli Variations*
with 1958-59 recordings (8, 14, 21, 23, 29, 32)
Daniel Barenboim—DG 483 9320 [13CD] 14:40

Barenboim, who is now 78, has taken up the Beethoven sonatas several times. there was a set for EMI (1966-69), followed by one for DG (1981-84) and a DVD set from 2005, also issued on 10 CDs by Decca. When I saw this box, I assumed it was some sort of reissue, but no, these are new. Back last summer, when you and I were binge-watching some dumb television series or using up time re-reading all the Agatha Christies, Barenboim (who also was stripped of his usual conducting activities) went back to the piano and made these recordings in Berlin from April to June. The box has two "bonus" discs that are reissues: Barenboim's Westminster recordings of six sonatas, done in 1958-59, when the pianist was still a teenager.

This survey of the sonatas is a worthy addition to Barenboim's legacy in Beethoven, and while it might not be first choice among his recordings, it is a formidable achievement with few drawbacks. Common to his approach is a tendency to take slow movements deliberately, emphasizing their depth and meaning, and to take fast movements quickly, pressing the edges of virtuosity. One nice aspect of DG's packaging is their placement of the sonatas in numerical order, instead of mixing them up to better dit on the discs. One is easily able to listen from beginning to end, preserving the chronology.

Barenboim's manner comes through at the very start. As early as the Op. 2 pieces I was struck by how carefully and beautifully he

brings out small details like a striking chord change, which he accompanies by the tiniest extra space between beats. He is not a Mozart pianist looking ahead to play Beethoven in crisp, classical outlines; he is more of a Schumann pianist looking back with subtleties of light and shade along with a romantic touch. Barenboim argues in the liner notes that he is not an "interpreter" of Beethoven, who, he says, needs no "interpretation". I would argue otherwise. Barenboim brings inventiveness and personal characterization to all of his playing; he has a point of view, which I regard generally as a good thing.

Working my way through the early sonatas, I found the slow movements the most memorable. And, of course, as we move into the later sonatas, the slow movements become more and more profound. Here the wisdom of more than 60 years pays fascinating dividends. In quicker movements, where Beethoven's writing often becomes very challenging, Barenboim's playing is sometimes less smooth and clear than he gave us in years past, but seldom did I feel that the music was beyond him. Perhaps the best gauge is to compare these 2020 recordings with the ones he made for Westminster. Almost every movement in the earlier recordings is faster, more impetuous and youthful, much as you would expect. One excellent example is the *Appassionata*, which in 2020 has (in the opening movement) the light and shade of a great tragedy. In 1958 it was breathless and manic, unrelenting and forced. Before listening I had checked the timings (11:04 in 2020, 8:30 in 1958) and assumed he simply skipped the repeat in the earlier recording. But no, it is really that much faster. (A little ha-ha note: How many of you caught me on this one? There is *no* exposition repeat in the *Appassionata*!) The finale is also quicker, particularly the Presto at the very end, which is astonishingly fast! That 16-year-old kid could really play! I am fairly sure that Barenboim couldn't play that fast today even if he wanted to, but his later conception, more controlled and mature, is probably your better choice.

Two of the late sonatas—28 (*Hammerklavier*) and 32—are duplicated by Westminster recordings; both make valuable contributions to our understanding of Barenboim's Beethoven. The 2020 performance of the *Hammerklavier* is slower in every movement; in all it lasts 9 minutes longer, a considerable span. The slow movement here is a marvel of concentration. Time seems to stand still, and yet at the same time it moves inexorably forward. A wonderful performance, then, preferable to Westminster and able to stand with the very best. In the outer movements, however, the dexterity and sheer strength of the younger Barenboim put 2020 in the shade. It is not so much a matter of speedy digits. Barenboim shows in the presto finale of Sonata 6 (and many other places) that he has "fingers". It sounds in the *Hammerklavier* more like a lack of stamina and power. Besides, what does one do with the *Hammerklavier's* fugal finale, a movement with no discernible lyrical moments? I think you have to just fight it and wrestle it to the ground, which is what Barenboim does in the Westminster performance.

The last three sonatas are all wonderful in the later recordings, particularly 30, where Barenboim wrenches every anguished beauty from the score; it's a terrific performance in every way. In 32, though, we have an earlier Westminster recording for comparison. That is (of course) faster; and in the opening movement, the faster sections have more excitement and drama than in 2020. In the Arietta, the later Barenboim is far preferable. He takes us into regions of darkness and despair, making us deeply aware that this is Beethoven's last sonata. The jazzy variation (the third) often presents a problem for me, but here it is subdued enough to feel part of the movement. (Often it just sticks out and doesn't fit into the spirit of the movement; and in the Westminster recording it is way too fast!) Later in the movement Barenboim handles the (very awkward!) trills quite well, and the ending is sublime.

The final disc in the box is the *Diabelli Variations*, a work Barenboim has recorded several times. Again, his concentration, particularly in slow variations like the Largo near the end, is memorable; and, as in the sonatas, the playing maintains a sense of freedom and spontaneity.

Heartiest congratulations, then, to Barenboim for a splendid job. All in all, the old EMI set may be a safer choice, but after all these decades Barenboim brings a wisdom that comes from long acquaintance and study. Do not, then, be discouraged from these recordings, particularly with the Westminster performances for comparison. DG includes essays by Anne-Sophie Mutter and Julia Spinola that mainly talk about Barenboim—there is no detailed discussion of the music.

So, let me issue a challenge. If, when you read this, you're still boarded up at home, get

out a recording of the Beethoven sonatas—this one or whatever you have—and go through them, perhaps two a day, with a score. I can think of other musical journeys you could take (Bach's *WTC* or the whole *Ring*), but I doubt any would be more rewarding than this one! (Well, maybe the Beethoven quartets!)

ALTHOUSE

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Sonatas 28, 30, 32*
Nikolai Lugansky
Harmonia Mundi 902441—69 minutes

This release is part of a Beethoven series planned to run until 2027, the 200th anniversary of the composer's death. It is evident from the booklet that many of these future recordings will be heavily influenced by the HIP agenda, but some will use traditional approaches and instruments, and this is one of them.

Nikolai Lugansky (b 1972) is perhaps the most prominent Russian pianist of the middle generation, though I do not know him as well as I should. He is a serious, unflashy artist with a sterling technique; his recordings have been praised in these pages (our Editor considers him one of his favorite pianists—J/A 2014), though a previous release of Beethoven sonatas did not convince Alan Becker (M/J 2006) who found the interpretations indulgent and over-romanticized. That was some years ago and Lugansky probably has matured since, for the present performances of three late sonatas are both technically and musically close to perfection. By this I mean to say that they could hardly be played any better, though they could certainly be played differently, perhaps with greater individuality and perhaps even more movingly. Still, model performances like Lugansky's deserve admiration and can serve as benchmarks.

As is my practice, I listened to each sonata immediately after listening to a recording from my collection. For No. 28 I chose a 1965 concert performance of Sviatoslav Richter, who plays I beautifully but races through II and IV with ferocious intensity and rigid timing (Brilliant 92229). While I am a great admirer of Richter, I prefer Lugansky's moderation in this instance. For No. 30 I selected Myra Hess (Philips 456832), recorded in 1953, whose touch, sound, and general approach are altogether mellower than Lugansky's, who seemed a bit hard-hitting and loud when heard right afterwards. But this may in part have been owing to the different recording technologies, and comparisons across so many decades are perhaps not quite fair.

The fairest comparison was the one for No. 32, where my benchmark was an excellent recording by Vladimir Feltsman (MHS 513654), a prominent fellow Russian who was 40 years old at the time (1992). His interpretation is quite similar to Lugansky's, but there are subtle touches in it that make me prefer it by a hair's breadth. To describe those touches would require detailed analysis. For the purpose of this review and faced with two such excellent performances, I am happy to attribute their differences simply to the ineffability of musical expression. In any case, the present disc should please anyone who loves late Beethoven.

REPP

BEETHOVEN: *Quartets 14+16;*
FERRE: *Muss Es Sein? Es Muss Sein!;*
SOLLIMA: *Note Sconte*
Kremerata Baltica/ Gidon Kremer, Mario Brunello—Alpha 660—79 minutes

These are arrangements of Beethoven's string quartets for string orchestra, recorded eight years apart (2011 and 2019) with completely different players. The performances have their advantages and disadvantages. In 14 Gidon Kremer (conductor-concertmaster) uses alert articulations to make leading voices and inner harmonies clear and effective. Accents, crescendos, and sudden pianissimos drive the music forward. Only the Andante theme and variations, while decently played, feels a bit plodding. But the Allegro finale captures the sheer contrapuntal virtuosity Beethoven wrote. In general, this quartet leans more to the treble register; transcriptions for string orchestra work better when the lower strings are more engaged.

That would be true in Quartet 16, except that Kremer's friend, cellist Mario Brunello (winner of the 1986 Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow), is the conductor. The only advantage here is that this orchestral arrangement forces me to listen more clearly to each of the four lines of music. The disadvantages are numerous. I feels plodding rather than *allegretto* because of Brunello's upright 1-2-3-4 conducting; it lacks the playfulness and flexibility of a quartet played by old musical friends. II is played *vivace* as marked, but the additional strings make it feel heavier and thicker. Beethoven asks that III be played "very slowly and tranquilly". Here it is so slow it

sounds like a movement from a Mahler symphony—very beautiful and deeply moving—but, I wondered, can Brunello hold that tempo without speeding up? Yes, he does, very poignantly. He also judges the tempo changes in the midsection and recap beautifully, though I wish he had emphasized more the harmonic effects of the second violins.

The final "Must it be? It *must* be!" here lacks the buoyancy of just four players—not owing to tempo but orchestral texture. But the advantage is the emphases that come from the weight of the orchestra (7-6-5-4-2) that make me *feel* the struggles and jostlings of the joyous, complicated, fugue-like music. The very weight conveys Beethoven's awful acceptance of deafness, sickness, and death, not like a dog accepting the discipline of its master, but a full termination of past regret and a plunging ahead with the powers one has. On the whole, though, the minuses outweigh the pluses in this performance.

The title of this album is "Searching for Ludwig". *Muss Es Sein? Es Muss Sein!* by Leo Ferré (1916-1993) opens the album with lovely music for cello, strings, and light percussion before the composer's hysterical shouts and screams in Italian bury the orchestra—even the percussion! The text is given in English. It's 6 minutes long. And you think Donald Trump is filled with puffery!

In *Note Sconte* (Hidden Notes) Giovanni Sollima (b 1962) takes bits from a thematic catalog of Beethoven's works that includes unpublished pieces and sketches, and turns them into a 7-minute tonal fantasy that at first feels like excerpts, followed by a two-minute slow section, and concludes with a sort of Irish jig. Conductor Brunello gives this bon-bon a richly recorded, full-throated performance.

FRENCH

BEETHOVEN: *Quartet 14;*
LIGETI: *Quartet 1*
Jupiter Quartet— Marquis 81499—61 minutes

Despite the plaudits that are heaped on Beethoven's Quartet 14, I think of it as mostly erratic and too long. There's nothing specifically wrong about how the Jupiter Quartet approaches it, but it would be hard to say that anything has been added to our understanding of it. Only in IV does the group begin to dig in and enjoy this material fully. Towards the end of this movement, though, the musicians start to sound a bit disorderly. From there, it's practically a sprint to the end of this epic. It is in the home stretch that these artists salvage the whole. They have performed all of Beethoven's quartets in concert, but they also have a penchant for Bartok, Ligeti, and various contemporary composers, and some of that filters into this occasionally raucous recording.

In fact, to hear Ligeti's first quartet (*Metamorphoses Nocturnes*) it would be easy to assume that it was the real reason for this album. Some ensembles revel in the "noise" factor of such composers, but the Jupiter Quartet emphasizes this piece's rhythmic qualities, its occasional subtlety, and its dry, almost imperceptible humor. Sure, there's the Arditti Quartet, the Casals Quartet, and many others; this piece is closer to mandatory repertoire than it may appear. But here there is enthusiasm, understanding, and terrific sound quality.

Beethoven pays the bills, but we can hope these musicians will continue to forge a separate identity as interpreters of 20th Century music.

DUTTERER

BEETHOVEN: *String Trios*
Brunsvik String Trio
Zefir 9675 [2CD] 145 minutes

There have been many string quartets that were once string trios. The English Quartet (once the Cummings Trio) and the Carmina Quartet (once the Carmina Trio) are only the first two that come to mind. What is rarer is to find a string trio that's the product of three disaggregated string quartets, which is what we have here. The Brunsvik Trio—named after the woman, Josephine von Brunsvik, now first in the running for the title of Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved" (whatever happened to Antonie Brentano?)—is made up of a violinist formerly of the Rubens Quartet, a violist formerly of the Chilingirian Quartet, and a cellist formerly of the Brindisi Quartet. Together they put together an ensemble that has much experience interacting with others, but different others. Interesting.

There is nothing peculiar or even unusual about the ensemble as it stands. Quirine Scheffers, late of the Rubens, is a fine violinist with a determined and direct turn of mind; she leads with conviction and not a little heft. Asdis Vladimirsdottir (only in Iceland!), late of the Chilingirian, is likewise very much her own woman, and there are faint traces of friendly competition between the two. Michael Stirling, late of the Brindisi, anchors the whole

trio with some uncommonly solid and emphatic cello playing.

In the Beethoven they are a more than usually solid entry in a more than usually crowded field, owing to the Beethoven anniversary festivities. I could go for more sheer playfulness in the two "not-trio" trios, the Divertimento Op. 3 and the Serenade Op. 8. The latter, especially, could do with more plain fun. The Andante (IV) is almost slapstick and ought to be played as such; Stirling is all too shy in his off-beat cello "whomps" in the fast bits. And the Alla Polacca just hasn't the ditziness—I won't say, of the best performances, but of the worst. Any bunch of gigging quartet players, asked to play a trio movement while a violinist popped out for a pee, would have more fun with it, though obviously with a lot less refinement. Could we not maybe have both?

The "real" trios, Op. 9, reveal a first-rate ensemble that is even more revealing of its members' separate inclinations than an ordinary quartet would be; everyone seems intent on differences and distinctions. This is terrific, and the best I could hope for in a new ensemble. They are still, as it were, discovering each other.

THOMSON

BEETHOVEN: *Symphony 2*
with *Piano Concerto 1*
Hanna Shybayeva, Animato Quartet; Bas Vliegenthart, db—Naxos 551431—70 minutes

with *Trio in E-flat*
Swiss Piano Trio—Audite 97.771—65 minutes

These are all arrangements. The arrangement of the Second Symphony was perhaps by Beethoven himself (but perhaps, as the Audite liner notes point out, by Ferdinand Ries). The Trio in E-flat was arranged from the String Quintet, Op. 4 and published as Op. 63. The piano concerto was arranged for piano and string quintet well after Beethoven's time by Vincenz Lachner and published in 1881. Both of these releases are parts of larger series. The Shybayeva is the second of three that will include all five concertos in Lachner's versions with string quintet (the symphony is a filler), and the Swiss disc is the seventh and last in their survey of the Beethoven trios. In fact I reviewed the first volume from the Swiss Trio (J/A 2015).

Back in 2015 I was particularly impressed with the pianism of Martin Lucas Staub; he was assertive and articulate, but never heavy. That judgement seems just as valid today as then, and with his partners violinist Angela Golubeva and cellist Joel Marosi (who has replaced Sebastian Singer) they play wonderful chamber music. I make this rather banal point because in the other recording I get a sense of a free-for-all, rather than a group of good friends getting together to make music. Hanna Shybayeva is a wonderful pianist, but she tears at the Second Symphony, trying, it would seem, to make the chamber version superior to the original. Strings from the Animato Quartet—violinist Floor Le Coultre and cellist Pieter de Koe—are fully on board with this all-out approach. Tempos are all faster than with the Swiss, and the music is undeniably exciting. Only in the slow movement did I feel the need for more repose.

The other pieces are fine as well. The Trio in E-flat is a nice, interesting piece, and somehow just as enjoyable as the original version (an early work for string quintet). On the other disc Shybayeva plays Beethoven's First Concerto, and again it is quick and exciting, with a long challenging cadenza in I. The accompaniment from the Animato Quartet plus bass is satisfactory if your attention is mainly on the pianist, but sometimes the addition of bass made the music bottom-heavy.

So we have two discs, both looking at Beethoven through the medium of arrangement. I endorse both, but you will have to judge whether you want these scaled-down versions rather than the real thing.

ALTHOUSE

BEETHOVEN: *Symphonies 4-6;*
BARRY: *Viola Concerto; Conquest of Ireland*
Lawrence Power, va; Joshua Bloom, b; Britten Sinfonia/ Thomas Ades
Signum 639 [2CD] 140 minutes

What a puzzling album! No rationale is given for these pairings other than that the Britten Sinfonia's projects are "characterized by their rich diversity of influences and artistic collaborators". (Fine for concerts, but not a way to sell albums.)

Ah! Thomas Ades, a frequent conductor with the Boston Symphony—how promising. Not! He makes the strings of the modern-instrument Britten Sinfonia (10-8-6-5-4) sound like a tired romantic choir with long, poorly articulated phrases, the opposite of the best period style. Even worse is the sound quality. Why would a label choose to record in one of the worst halls in the world, London's

Barbican? Each of the orchestra's choirs has a different acoustic, and each sounds as if it's at a different distance. The hall gives a slightly hollow, faintly echo-like tinge that lacks warmth and swallows overtones, making the timpani and woodwinds sound flat sometimes. Inner details seem to have a layer of gauze draped over them.

All of this characterizes Symphony 4. 5 is even more offensive. Ades fails to articulate the three eighth notes that define the opening da-da-da-dumm—they're just smudges. And do the trumpets BLARE!—so much so that the sound at the opening of IV is distorted. The album gives no indication of having been recorded in concert, so I wonder why producers didn't fix a French horn error about 45 seconds into the finale. Performances and sound are not refined.

Symphony 6 with its simpler rhythms and textures serves as the clearest example of Ades's conducting inadequacies. Yes, he uses Beethoven's marked tempos. But in I, by failing to draw out the lower strings' triplet rhythms against the violins' duple melody line, he misses the playfulness of "the awakening of happy feelings". II is a nice long stroll here and all the parts are present, but they're not woven together. So much is missed in III, 'Peasant's Merrymaking'. The opening fast quarter-note melody ends with two 16ths plus a quarter; Ades slurs what should be a rhythmic kick, stomp, jiggle, whatever. The melody's cadence has pairs of ascending quarter-notes against descending eight-notes—another rhythmic wiggle that's barely noticeable. And the peasant dance itself, alternating quarter- with paired eighth-notes—here, mere slurs. All opportunities missed. IV, 'The Storm'? Raw, blaring, no character or definition or balances. And V, the long 'Shepherd's Song, Joyous Thanksgiving' is one legato line in old-fashioned romantic style that ignores all the marked phrases that should let it "breathe" after the storm.

Symphonies 4 and 5 are paired with Irishman Gerald Barry's 15-minute Viola Concerto (2019) with superb British violist Lawrence Power, 43. Barry serves him a solo line where a briskly bowed viola introduces (I hesitate to call it) a melody line with a brief echo of a short motif from the finale of Beethoven's Fifth and a tune that seems partly inspired by 'Yankee Doodle'. It becomes a succession of endless etude-like eighth notes, initially with a lion roar and gong-and-cymbal smashes, taken over in succession by string basses, tuba, violin, and ending with interminable trombones, sloppily played initially. After 13-1/2 minutes, the viola (playing harmonics) plays a forgettable tune with two bassoons, followed by someone (the composer?) whistling it (are those attempts at grace notes or just a lousy pair of lips?) until it terminates in medias res. Why would anyone have the conceit to write something like this? As the composer himself says in the liner notes, "Exercises have always been pure things for me, clean, unburdened by meaning. Because I know their routine, I can think about other things while playing." All I could think of was, "Enough of this meaningless torture!"

Even more incongruous is pairing the *Pastoral Symphony* with Barry's *Conquest of Ireland* (1996). The 12th-Century text (translated into English) is by a Welsh member of an army that invaded Ireland. It's a narrative description of five of the soldiers followed by two Irishmen—the first "misshapen" and the second who "considered lawful any act which others wished to perform on him or he wished to perform on others involving lust in all its forms".

What Barry then does to this ripe potential is a sort of *sprechstimme* where Joshua Bloom must alternate (without any logic) between bass and ultra-high falsetto, often at such a "frenetic" pace (Barry's direction) that it's impossible to understand the text without following the printed libretto. The instrumentalists ("orchestra" would be a misnomer here) seem to be utterly alert (this, not Beethoven, appears to be Ades's fach). Their lines are so darty, disconnected, and ostinato-ized that I can only conclude that Barry has seriously scrambled brains. Like the Viola Concerto, it suddenly ends after 20 minutes in medias res. Some pieces can be tedious as recordings but huge fun in concert. This one would require an on-stage performance to even begin to be alluring.

FRENCH

BEETHOVEN: *Variations: C minor; F; Eroica*
Angela Hewitt, p—Hyperion 68346—80 minutes

Ms Hewitt's entertaining liner notes begin with a story of Beethoven hearing a friend perform the C-minor Variations and saying, "That piece of folly mine? Oh, Beethoven, what an ass you were in those days!" Sometimes I think he had a point: it is a favorite student piece, and students—even some of the best ones—often

hack their way thru it. (And not a few concert pianists, too.) I'm delighted, then, to say that this performance has completely rehabilitated the piece in my mind. She begins more moderately than many, revealing the Baroque character of the theme and the opening variations. When Beethovenian fury kicks in, she communicates it perfectly. She makes all the important musical points through subtle rubato or placing key arrivals, including some unexpected but welcome.

The F-major Variations, Op. 34, are an important milestone leading to the *Eroica* Symphony. Each one is in a different key, which allows the listener to imagine the piece as having a much more dramatic trajectory than traditional sets of variations (and naturally helped lead to the variation-finale of the symphony, where the theme and its variations also include free developmental material that gives the form a much more symphonic conception). Hewitt's approach emphasizes these very qualities. And I also love her romp through the *Eroica Variations,* which abound in good humor and that most elusive quality, understated virtuosity—virtuosity, that is, in the service of music.

Four far more lightweight variation sets complete the program. The sound is particularly fine, as it always is for Hyperion—the piano is captured with clarity, but the characteristic bloom of the instrument (as happens in a concert hall) appears too.

HASKINS

BEETHOVEN: *Violin Concerto; Romances*
Midori; Lucerne Festival Strings/ Daniel Dodds
Warner 517920—56 minutes

Beethoven's Violin Concerto opens with the longest of his instrumental movements, about the same length as the finale of Symphony 9. By the last half of the 20th Century ultra-romantic interpretations often turned I into a warhorse with ponderous Klempererequ coddling that made me dread hearing it. Then in 2012 I heard Thomas Zehetmair as soloist and conductor of the Chamber Orchestra of Paris turn it into "Oh! *That's* what it's all about!" As I said in my review (Jan/Feb 2013, p 21), "The key was an aesthetic where soloist and orchestra were in constant contrast yet intimately bound to one another. This Beethoven is *not* about pretty melodies but simultaneous contrasts, performed with seamless continuity across three movements." That's the prejudice with which I approached Midori's new recording.

Midori, who at 49 is in her 38th year of performing, is a person of huge integrity and presence. She holds one's attention by just standing still. Her extensive liner notes convey both her intellectual depth and her awareness of current events. And her violin playing here retains its sweet tone, perfect pitch, superb technique (despite one or two near misses), and beautiful phrasing and lyricism. What it lacks is a breadth of style. It's like being served sweets as the main course. Drama, continuity of line, and assertiveness are missing.

I's 24 minutes here seem even longer; both Midori and conductor Dodds lack a steady pulse, despite Beethoven's writing a persistent, almost militaristic timpani beat in the orchestra. Fluctuating tempos, too many small retards, and sudden bursts of energy followed by coddled sweetness cut the movement into segments. Theirs is a purple-patch rather than flow-through performance. It takes 17 minutes to get to the cadence that signals the cadenza and coda—and there are still 7 minutes to go! Midori plays Fritz Kreisler's cadenzas in both I and III. Again she wallows, serving it up in chunks without shape or form. When the orchestra enters, the coda drags until the final four measures.

Midori's tone and style fits better with the Larghetto's alert kind of ease. It's in ABA form. I was surprised by the brisk clip she took in the second theme with pizzicato accompaniment; it didn't flow naturally from or into the A theme.

The flow in III is more integral. Even the cadenza moves along; Midori makes it one-of-a-piece with the rest of the movement, as if she's finally leaving her mark on the concerto. What is deadening is Daniel Dodds, the Lucerne Festival Strings's concertmaster, here as conductor. From start to finish the orchestra lacks transparency; it's all violin melody with the rest of the instruments reduced to a homogenized mass of sound. Harmonies between instruments are not delineated, and Beethoven's instrumental colors are so buried that I forgot there are trumpets in the orchestra until I listened to the superior performance with Christian Tetzlaff, Robin Ticciati, and the German Symphony Berlin on Ondine (Jan/Feb 2020—they're just as good in the companion piece, Sibelius's concerto).

Violinist Lorenzo Gatto with Benjamin Levy and the Pelleas Chamber Orchestra on Zig Zag have the same pairing as on the Warn-

er album. They're almost as good as Tetzlaff and Ticciati in the Concerto. In the Romances their performances are better than Midori's. In No. 1 Gatto's expressive range and sustained tension contrast with her unchanging tone colors. At first her pulse seems business-like, but in the second theme she veritably prances. In No. 2 Midori achieves a pleasant pulse and gait, but Dodds's orchestra has no shape, color, or character—it's just a pastel presence—whereas Levy's orchestra has so much presence that it seems to speak, energizing Gatto's phrases with more expressive depth and color than Midori's.

FRENCH

BEETHOVEN: *Violin Sonatas 1, 2, 4, 5*
Michael Foyle; Maksim Stsura, p
Challenge 72860—72 minutes

Sonatas 1, 2, 3, 5
Andrew Wan; Charles Richard-Hamelin, p
Analekta 8795

This is the second set of Beethoven violin sonatas that I have had to review from Andrew Wan, concertmaster of the Montreal Symphony. The middle sonatas appeared in 2018 (March/April 2019). Like those, these are good performances, but they are too civil and fail to catch fire. I like Beethoven wild and explosive, and Augustin Dumay and Maria Joao Pires (May/June 2003) and Gidon Kremer and Martha Argerich (Jan/Feb 1998) are more to my taste.

Scottish violinist Michael Foyle was recently the youngest-ever violinist to be appointed professor at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He is a bit more outgoing than Wan, as is obvious from comparing their openings to Sonata 1. He isn't capable of Wan's refined nuances, though, so his performances become a bit tiresome after a while.

Foyle plays a Januarius Gagliano violin built in Naples in 1750. Wan plays a Michelangelo Bergonzi violin made in Cremona, Italy, in 1744, using a Dominique Peccatte bow from 1860.

MAGIL

BEETHOVEN: *Violin Sonatas 8+9*
Ragnhild Hemsing; Tor Espen Aspaas, p
2L 160 [SACD] 59 minutes

These two violin sonatas were written within a year of each other but come from different worlds. Sonata 8 in G (1802) comes from the tail end of Beethoven's first period. It is a simple work of unclouded skies. The famous *Kreutzer* Sonata is explosive and wildly willful. Together they show Beethoven's sudden rapid growth as an artist.

Ragnhild Hemsing's playing in both works shows a real sense of occasion. She underlines notes and phrases with all manner of nuance. This is exciting playing. After listening for I while, though, I began to feel fatigue. She is doing all of the work, but Tor Espen Aspaas offers undistinguished support, so the feeling is like listening in on a conversation but only hearing one side of it. Beethoven's violin sonatas are not for violin with piano accompaniment; they are for equal partners. For a recent recording that shows the violin and piano striking sparks off each other, try Lara St John and Matt Herskowitz's take on Sonata 9 (July/Aug 2020). It makes a world of difference.

Hemsing's violin was made by the Cremonese master Francesco Ruggieri in 1694.

MAGIL

BELEVI: *Guitar Duos*
Duo Tandem—Naxos 574081—63 minutes

Chicago-based guitarist Mark Anderson and Necati Emirzade, who was born in North Cyprus and now teaches in London, met at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and became a duo in 2012, blending their very different ethnic backgrounds into a unified sound to be enjoyed in the music of Cypriot-British guitarist and composer Kemal Belevi, who arranged the entire program for the duo. Belevi has also composed guitar concertos.

The recording intelligently alternates multimovement works with individual pieces, including 4 engaging Cyprian Rhapsodies and 2 lovely waltzes. This enjoyably tonal music radiates fluid lyrical lines and coordinated, conservative phrasing with tasteful rubato and dynamics.

Belevi's 'Elegie' movement from *Suite Chypre* was written for the composer's mother, who died at an early age; this performance could have benefitted from more rubato. The 'Ciftetelli' that follows is played with a strict tempo, appropriate for the dance that it is.

Belevi's *Turkish Suite* includes three short movements with an eloquent II that is my favorite track on the album.

Three Fragments comes the closest to contemporary musical dialects and reminds this reviewer of the music of Pierre Petit, with motivic development and unusual harmonic progressions that are challenging to compre-

hend on first hearing, but always giving the listener enough to hold onto so as not to feel completely disoriented.

This is an excellent recording of music you've likely not heard before, performed by two artists who have invested their efforts well to create something worth hearing.

MCCUTCHEON

BELLINI: *Norma*

Elena Souliotis (Norma), Fiorenza Cossotto (Adalgisa), Mario Del Monaco (Pollione), Carlo Cava (Oroveso); Santa Cecilia/ Silvio Varviso

Urania 121.390 [2CD] 126 minutes

This abridged recording of Norma has been much maligned over the years. It's time for a reassessment. Elena Souliotis was all of 24 when she recorded this, and though her voice and interpretation are already impressive one wishes that Decca had waited a few more years before committing her portrayal to records. Her voice sounds healthy (if unsupported sometimes) and she has no trouble with the coloratura. She has no trill. Her range extends to the top D she interpolates at the end of Act I, and she conveys a majestic presence that serves her well through most of the opera. What she hasn't mastered consistently is the refinement the role needs. In the studio she doesn't have a problem with stamina, something that would plague her in staged performances of this role. Her singing as such is pleasant to hear, but is not yet memorable.

Maria Callas began singing Norma when she was 25, but didn't record it until she was past 30 and had had a number of stage appearances in the role. I mention Callas because that is the singer to whom Souliotis was often compared. She was expected to be an answer to Callas, but was pushed too early out of the chrysalis.

Fiorenza Cossotto sang Adalgisa to Souliotis's Norma many times and partners her like a champion in the duets. Their voices blend beautifully, and they sound like they are really listening to each other. The Italian mezzo ducks no high notes: her top Cs are just as strong as her prima donna's. Temperamentally she is a much better fit with Souliotis than she was with Joan Sutherland. In her second studio recording with Caballé 'Mira, O Norma' was sung up a tone in F. In this recording the ladies content themselves with singing the duet in the more genial and traditional E-flat.

Mario Del Monaco still makes an impressive sound and offers an appropriately brash, arrogant characterization. Even in the studio he ducks the written top C in his aria. Oroveso suffers the most from the abridgement used in this recording (Decca didn't want to spend money on another complete recording—they had just spent a lot of money on a recording with Sutherland and Bonynge). His Act I entrance aria is truncated, and his big Act II aria is not here; but with what he is given Carlo Cava sings more than competently.

Silvio Varviso's conducting is more propulsive and better paced than Bonynge's, but then he had had more experience. The sound is not Decca's best; it's rather boomy and constricted. Urania often transfers from LPs, but I hear no surface noise here. Eloquence issued this performance a couple of years ago; if you can't find that one this will do (see also N/D 2008, Archives).

Souliotis is a flawed Norma, but no Norma is flawless; and the Greek soprano's portrayal is worth hearing. One can sense her intentions in the role even if they're not fully realized. Each act is on one disc; there are too few cue-points—and no texts or translations.

REYNOLDS

BEN-HAIM: *Pan; Pastorale Variations; Symphony 1*

Claudia Barainsky, s; John Bradbury, cl; BBC Philharmonic/ Omer Meir Wellber

Chandos 20169—61 minutes

Paul Ben-Haim (1897-1984) born Paul Frankenburger in Munich, left Germany in 1933 for what was then Palestine. He eventually became a father figure for Israel's serious musical culture. The music here is a bridging of the cultural divide in his art.

Pan (1931), though billed as a symphonic poem is also an extended concert song with orchestra. The text is from a Heinrich Lautensaack poem. A woman, speaking through a man's dream, anticipates and eventually meets the great god Pan. Its musical language will appeal to anyone who enjoys the work of Schreker or Zemlinsky. The vocal line often soars into the higher regions, with an orchestral accompaniment both colorful and supporting. A memorable opening motif on the flute—Pan's instrument—recurs in the music to give it some backbone.

The 1948 Pastorale Variations, for solo clarinet, harp, and strings, is an expansion of an earlier clarinet quintet. The theme itself, introduced by the soloist, is a reflective one. Ben-Haim's variations cover a range of moods

from thoughtful beauty to extroverted liveliness via dance rhythms. The last variation initially seems like a tranquil epilogue, but frenetic reminiscences of the dance episodes interrupt. The overall effect is of a wealth of color and expression, despite "limited" forces.

Symphony 1 (1940) opens with a sharply defined figure. By contrast, there ensues a more flowing melody. The general vigor of the movement recalls Hindemith's better work, though the development also includes passages of romantic emotion. The music has vehement drive and convincing purpose. II, the slow movement, begins with a sustained string melody influenced by Jewish prayer melismas. The music sustains its development to an eloquent climax. The conclusion is one of transparent beauty, effected with delicacy of taste and touch. Its emotional sincerity reminded me of the great American symphonists of the 1940s. The movement achieved an independent life under the title *Psalms*. A relentless moto perpetuo over a timpani pulse gets III off to a running start. Eventually it's underlain by a brass chorale as a cantus firmus. Dance episodes follow, some of their sounds approaching klezmer usage. Dr Michael Wolpe's excellent notes suggest that the composer uses these elements to symbolize the cultural traditions of his old and new countries. After a gradual decrescendo where the music seems nearly to evaporate, the work finishes with the moto perpetuo figures. The mood is spirited, but not triumphant.

The whole disc struck me as the work of an utter professional—exactly the caliber of person needed to establish a vital musical tradition of both craft and inspiration. Performances are excellent. Ms Barainsky's singing has firm tone quality, steady pitch and, when the vocal line descends into the staff, good diction. John Bradbury—the first clarinet of the orchestra—plays his demanding role with skill and grace. The orchestra plays with good ensemble, refinement of tone and especially rhythmic flexibility—a must here. Wellber's conducting makes an excellent case for the music and furnishes well-balanced support for the soloists. The notes include musical examples. You'll need a magnifying glass to read them, but they're worth the effort.

O'CONNOR

BERKELEY: *Piano Pieces*
Douglas Stevens—Hoxa 1806 [2CD] 113 minutes

Mark Lehman described Lennox Berkeley as "closer to Jean Françaix: a likable composer who nevertheless seldom achieves melodic distinction or that indefinable but crucial individuality that makes us instantly recognize his voice". I might add that the music is surely well made but lacks depth; and while I suppose there's a lot of music like this that many people enjoy, it always leaves me feeling a little short-changed. (Nor is this a classical-music snobbery: John Williams, Ennio Morricone, and The Cure can have genuine depth—but don't ask me about Justin Bieber.)

Mr Lehman singled out the Six Pieces (1945) and Sonata (1945) as stand-out compositions. I agree with him and would also add, inter alia, the second of the 1927 piano pieces, the third and fourth of the Four Concert Studies (1940), and each of the Four Piano Studies (1972). Berkeley seems to revel in writing virtuosic music; and often, when he does, the music also excels as music.

Mr Stevens, who completed a PhD about Berkeley supervised by Stephen Banfield, has done a great service by recording his music, which is somewhat diminished by the strange, boxy acoustic.

HASKINS

BERLIOZ: *Te Deum;* see Collections
BERNSTEIN: *Serenade;* see GINASTERA

BERTOLDO & BORGO: *Organ Pieces*
Manuel Tomadin—Brilliant 95874—79 minutes

Sperindio Bertoldo (c1530-1570), a native of Modena, was appointed organist of Padua Cathedral in 1552. He was offered a ten-year contract with an increase in salary in 1557, and in 1567 a 16-year contract, but in that year he was dismissed for insubordination. None of the details are known, but soon afterward he was reinstated. After he died the cathedral continued to pay his salary to his widow and children.

Four books of his compositions survive. There are two volumes of madrigals published in Venice in 1561 and 1562. They are designated "Part 2" and "Part 3", but there is no trace of a Part 1. The other two books contain organ music published posthumously in 1591 under the supervision of Giacomo Vincenti. The organ works are in genres common at the time: toccata, ricercar, and canzona. Four of the five canzonas are elaborated intabulations of vocal works by Crecquillon, Janequin, and Clemens non Papa. As Manuel Tomadin points out in his notes, Bertoldo's toccatas are

mainly chordal in contrast with the contrapuntal writing of the Venetian school as represented by Andrea Gabrieli and Claudio Merulo. For Bertoldo the ricercar was the genre for imitative counterpoint.

Cesare Borgo (c1560-1623), born in Milan, was a friar. He was appointed organist at San Pietro in Gessate near Milan in 1584. In 1590 he was appointed second organist of Milan Cathedral and in 1592 principal organist there, where he remained for the rest of his life. His surviving organ music consists of 12 canzonas that were published in his lifetime. Various liturgical vocal works survive in manuscript.

The pieces by Bertoldo and Borgo are attractive and well crafted, but I cannot say that I find them endlessly fascinating. They will not make us forget the works of Frescobaldi or Byrd. Bertoldo comes off better than Borgo here, as the contrasting musical genres offer variety and lend themselves to varied organ registrations. The same cannot be said of Borgo's 12 canzonas, though Tomadin does what he can. Fine as they are individually, I suspect they were never meant to be heard at one sitting.

Tomadin is a noted specialist in early keyboard music. He brings to this repertory a formidable scholarly and practical expertise. He plays with an insider's understanding of what makes this music tick.

The organ on this recording was built by Vincenzo Colombi in 1532 for the Church of the Most Holy Body of Christ in Valvasone. It is claimed as the only surviving 16th-Century organ of the Venetian school. Typical of instruments of its time and place, the specification is essentially a principal chorus whose components can be drawn separately. There is also a flute stop and a tremulant. The instrument has one manual and a pedalboard of 20 notes permanently coupled to the manual. It may be a modest instrument by most standards, but it is well suited to the Italian organ music of its period. The tone is attractively clear and warm, and Tomadin puts the instrument through its paces in the pieces on this program. The lavishly gilded and painted organ case is an impressive work of visual art produced by noted craftsmen and painters of the day. The most recent restoration took place in 1999. This recording is an impressive aural document of an important historic instrument.

GATENS

BIZET: *Te Deum;* see Collections

BLISS: *Colour Symphony; Violin Concerto; Introduction & Allegro; Things to Come Suite; Baraza; Theme & Cadenza; Welcome the Queen; Quartet 2*

Eileen Joyce, p; Alfredo Campoli, v; Griller Quartet; London Symphony, London Philharmonic, National Symphony/ Arthur Bliss, Muir Mathieson

Decca Eloquence 4840215 [2CD] 147 minutes

I have been hard on the programming of some Eloquence releases for combining interesting recordings with ones less worthwhile. This one is a good introduction to the music of a fine British composer.

Arthur Bliss (1891-1975) attended Cambridge, studied with Charles Wood and Edward Dent, and moved on to the Royal College of Music. He fought in the Great War, which had a profound effect on him, and composed prolifically after discharge. (One of his finest works, *Morning Heroes* (1930), was a tribute to his brother, who was killed in that war.) In 1923 he spent two years in the United States helping his American-born father, who had been living in Britain, resettle back home. In those two years he met his wife and heard several American orchestras, including the Philadelphia Orchestra under Stokowski and the Boston Symphony, which played his *Colour Symphony* under Pierre Monteux. About those occasions he wrote, "I thought I had never heard such perfectly disciplined playing, such orchestral virtuosity...It startled me into a new conception of what orchestral tone could be."

After returning to Britain in 1925 he went on to become one of the major British composers of his century. Early in his career, Bliss was considered a modernist but later proved to be on common ground with most of the English neoclassicists and neoromantics of his time. He served as Director of Music at the BBC during the Second World War, became Sir Arthur Bliss in 1950, and replaced Arnold Bax as Master of the Queen's Musick in 1953.

The major work in this collection is *Colour Symphony* (1922, rev. 1932), a piece essentially commissioned by Edward Elgar, who was disappointed by the final product and not entirely without good reason: "I hoped you were going to give us something very great in modern music, the progress of which is very dear to me; and then you seemed to become a mere 'paragraphist.'" Ouch. A strain of popular music and slickness does run through it, along with a touch of glibness. Even so, it is an entertaining,

well drawn-out piece that works with a variety of approaches, as demonstrated by the number of good but different recordings. Bliss's aggressive interpretation with some healthy speeds makes for a performance that might be a prime choice if it were in stereo, good as the monaural recording is. (The rich, broad Hickox is my favorite, but most of the others have considerable merit.)

Another major recording is of the Violin Concerto (1955), with violinist Alfredo Campoli and Bliss conducting. Not only was the work composed for Campoli, but Bliss wrote it with the violinist's active participation, to the point where, in my review of the Lydia Mordkovitch performance (M/A 2007), I called it too much of a showpiece, and at 40 minutes, too long. Adding to my frustration was the fine orchestra writing, leading to the old saw that it would make a good symphony were it not for the violin. Bliss also thought it was too long. Before the premiere he made a cut that he restored at Campoli's insistence for this performance. Mark Lehman loved the work when he reviewed the Campoli recording (J/A 1995), and I never understood why. Now that I have heard the Campoli, I do, though I am not as excited by the work as Mr Lehman was. If you want the best performance regardless of sound—and the monaural recording is very good, if a little too close to the soloist for us to hear all the splendor of the orchestra—the Campoli is the best one I know of. Despite his obviously soloistic temperament, he plays without excessive emoting, and he has a nice sound. Mordkovitch is too indulgent and adds enough subtle slides and upward swoops to become annoying. The concerto is followed on the same disc by the less interesting, aptly titled Theme and Cadenza for Violin and Orchestra (1946), again with Campoli and Bliss.

Bliss wrote Introduction and Allegro (1926, rev. 1937) after returning to Britain from the US. He dedicated it to Stokowski, who led the Philadelphia Orchestra in the premiere. The composer led the British premiere in 1926. The work marks his transition from a young to a mature composer. According to Bliss scholar Andrew Burn, the work is based on "a succession of minor-scale notes heard at the opening of the processional introduction on basses and harp, then horn, and lastly trombone, a series of melodic phrases played over them. The resulting figure opened the Allegro." That opening is a rolling, very British sort of melody that becomes nervous and even militant. The virtuostic Allegro varies in mercurial fashion in moods, from pastorale to a driving scherzo.

After succeeding Bax as Master of the Queen's Musik, one of Bliss's first assignments was to write *Welcome the Queen* (1953) to herald her return from the Commonwealth Nations in 1954. It opens with an often dotted rhythm-fanfarish passage and mixes that material with spirited, good natured British march episodes plus a slower more Elgarian one.

The Bliss-conducted suite from his music for the film *Things to Come* (1935) is a classic. Some recordings deliver more of the music, but this one is beautifully played and conducted, and the stereo sound is wonderful. *Baraza* is taken from the film *Men of Two Worlds* (1946) about an African composer and pianist who studied in Europe and returned to his home village to become a teacher, only to stumble into a sleeping sickness epidemic. The title reflects the conflict between his African homeland and his European training. Much of that score was lost. Surviving were the piano and orchestra piece that opened the film and *Baraza.* The latter incorporates African song, is a little jazzy, and, as suggested in Peter Quantrill's interesting notes, hints of the *Warsaw Concerto.*

String Quartet No. 2 (1950) was written for the Griller Quartet, who play it here. Bliss wrote it after his opera *The Olympians.* The opera was not well received (unfairly), and he wanted to retreat "into the intimate and private world of chamber music". The quartet is Bliss at his most Neoclassical. The music is spirited and seems based on upward, dotted-rhythm figures. It is not typical Bliss and seems more well crafted than inspired.

Most of the sound on this collection—both monaural and stereo—is quite good.

HECHT

BOISMORTIER: *2-Flute Sonatas*

Fabiano Martignago & Luca Ventimiglia
Brilliant 96121—48 minutes

Boismortier may never attain the familiarity and renown of Vivaldi, but given the number of recordings lately seems well on his way. The only thing lacking may be the presence our beloved Venetian has established in popular culture: even people who couldn't name Vivaldi encounter him in television commercials, movie soundtracks, mobile phone ring tones, and so on. These unaccompanied duets come from Opuses 1, 6, 8, and 40, with the last set

indicated for two bassoons, cellos, or violas rather than a treble instrument. 4 or 5 movements consist of brief dances such as gavottes and rounds, or have standard indications such as Lentement or Allegro. Two sonatas in B minor are placed back-to-back, but this presents no problems. All movements are given a track, making 26 for the album.

Recorded in an Italian modern art gallery, our two young artists are enjoying themselves and these scores as they present renditions with clear sounds, good pacing, and excellent balance. Finger vibrato is used on sustained notes. In general the breathing is very unobtrusive and hardly noticeable. If you appreciate interplay typical of 18th Century writing executed with perfect coordination, you ought to find this hour of listening enjoyable. A 12-page booklet has background and biographies and photographs. The cover image showing the sinuous yet woody stem of an orange trumpet vine against a faded amber wall appears under the disc with our two performers in it.

GORMAN

BOWEN: *Fragments from Hans Anderson; Piano Studies*
Nicolas Namoradze
Hyperion 68303—67 minutes

Edwin York Bowen (1884-1961) was an English composer and pianist of considerable note during his lifetime, and a student of Frederick Corder and Tobias Matthay at the Royal Academy of Music. Those of us who have made his acquaintance by means of recordings in the past few decades were especially thrilled by his wonderful piano concertos. Despite his extraordinary craftsmanship, he still awaits discovery by a world that doesn't always appreciate the efforts of its best creators.

This recording adds considerably to our Bowen discography by presenting several of his solo piano compositions—some of which may well be first recordings. The *Fragments* date from 1920-21 and are essentially character sketches drawn from Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tales. with such titles as 'Thumbelina', 'Metal Pig', and 'Marsh King's Daughter'. They are all imaginative, creative, and embrace Bowen's romanticism with zest and warmth. Can there ever have been such an attractive pig? All ten are well described in Francis Pott's notes—and they are definitely not for beginning fingers.

The 12 Studies Op. 46 and additional two Concert Studies Op. 9:2 and Op. 32 exploit the technical possibilities of the keyboard while retaining some musical value. One thinks of Liszt, because their difficulty is much to the fore. Namoradze, student of Emanuel Ax, Zoltan Kocsis, and others, is an impressive advocate for this music. Hyperion is to be praised for bringing it to us. Unlike Chopin's two great sets of Etudes with their variety, these are best heard only a few at a time owing to their persistent intensity and wildly virtuosic flights. Totally exhausting but worth the effort.

BECKER

BRAHMS: *Clarinet Quintet; Quartet 1*
Thorsten Johanns; Aris Quartet
Genuin 20704—71 minutes

As Brahms matured from youth to middle age, he struggled over the span of two decades with both the string quartet and the symphony. In the 1870s he produced his first efforts, each in the key of C minor. Nearly two decades later, after hearing clarinetist Richard Muhlfeld, Brahms forsook his retirement plans and wrote four clarinet chamber works in three years. They all remain masterpieces.

Founded 2009 in Frankfurt, the Aris Quartet is among the new generation of chamber ensembles in Europe. Here, in the group's fifth release, the Brahms of summer meets the Brahms of autumn: the String Quartet No. 1 in C minor and the Clarinet Quintet in B minor. Thorsten Johanns, professor of clarinet at the Franz Liszt University of Music in Weimar, joins as the guest artist.

The concert is beautifully played but rather conservative. Aris and Johanns offer exquisite clarity, resonance, balance, and blend; and every phrase is finely honed and shaped. Their range of dynamics, though, rarely moves beyond forte; and only in a few passages do they give the listener the full romantic heat of the music. As a result, the coda of each work feels empty. This is too bad because the craft is so good and Brahms has so much to say.

HANUDEL

BRAHMS: *Horn Trio; Cello Sonata 1; Scherzo*
Alec Frank-Gemmill, hn; Daniel Grimwood, p; Benjamin Gilmore, v—BIS 2478—60 minutes

Two of this English horn player's albums made my Critic's Choice list for 2018: *A Noble and Melancholy Instrument* (Jan/Feb 2018: 208) and *Before Mozart* (Sept/Oct 2018: 208). So it

is not surprising that this new one is very good, too.

The program opens with arrangements. The Scherzo in C minor is Brahms's contribution to the *F-A-E Sonata* that he, Albert Dietrich, and Robert Schumann composed as a gift for violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim. As mentioned in the notes, the Scherzo bears a striking resemblance to the finale of the Horn Trio, so it sounds good as a horn piece—especially with soloist Alec Frank-Gemmill's very high notes on his triple horn. So does the wonderful Cello Sonata 1, which pianist Daniel Grimwood transposed up a minor third (to G minor) to avoid low notes that sound murky on the horn. Another result is, of course, that the highest notes are even higher. But Frank-Gemmill's stratospheric notes sound strong.

For the Horn Trio, Frank-Gemmill plays a French instrument from 1870, borrowed from the Dennis Brain family. It was originally a natural horn, but a valve block was added later. In the notes he defends his use of a valved horn, given Brahms's insistence that the work be played on natural horn. He postulates (on the basis of a Brahms quote) that what the composer wanted was not the various tone qualities of the natural horn, but rather its quiet dynamic level. He believes that the instrument used in this reading is "light in sound, and...very close to the natural horn". I'm happy with his choice—I enjoy natural-horn recordings, but not of this marvelous work. To me, hand-horn technique distracts from the drama, the beauty of the melodies, and the interaction between members of the trio. Those elements are wonderful here.

KILPATRICK

BRAHMS: *Piano Pieces, opp 117, 118, 119*
Victor Rosenbaum—Bridge 9545—65 minutes

Brahms's late piano pieces have been recorded quite often lately, and this is very fine. This was my first encounter with Victor Rosenbaum (b 1941), a distinguished American pianist and teacher who plays these great works very well and lovingly. I especially admire his many gradations of dynamics—an expressive dimension often neglected by less experienced artists. Alan Becker (M/J 2005) praised his recording of Beethoven's last three sonatas (Bridge 9159) and named it as one of his Critic's Choices for that year. (Mr Rosenbaum's web site amplifies this to "it was named by the American Record Guide as one of the top 10 classical recordings of 2005", which is not accurate.) Several Schubert recordings, spaced out over many years, got mixed reviews.

I do have two small reservations about these interpretations. One is that the tempos are much slower than usual. Jorge Federico Osorio (Cedille 171, S/O 2017), whose tempos I consider ideal, takes 53:21 for all pieces combined; Julius Katchen (Decca) is a little faster at 52:19, Boris Berman (Palais 18, M/J 2020) a little slower at 56:43. Rosenbaum takes 65:10, which is extreme. Perhaps he is one of those artists, like the conductors Giulini and Rozhdestvensky, who slow down in old age. His playing is so sensitive and well judged that his tempos remained in my comfort zone, but I don't think he quite achieved the *un poco agitato* in Op. 119:2 or the *giocoso* in Op. 119:3, for example.

The other thing is that he has a tendency to lead the right hand with the left. It is not very pronounced but sufficiently frequent to be considered a technical habit (I hesitate to call it a mannerism in his case) rather than a strategically employed expressive maneuver that can be effective. It is most noticeable in slow pieces such as Op. 117:1 and 3 and Op. 119:1. I cannot say that it harmed the interpretations, but it did not benefit them either, and just knowing that it occurred bothered me a little.

Rosenbaum also wrote the liner notes, where he analyzes each piece and describes its emotional content. He quotes Brahms to justify an extremely slow tempo for Op. 119:1, but why then do so many great pianists play it faster than he? There is slow, and then there is too slow. Still, this recording gave me much pleasure.

REPP

BRAHMS: *Requiem*
Christina Gansch, s; Matthias Winckhler, bar; Mainz Bach Choir/ German Radio Philharmonic/ Ralf Otto—Naxos 574273—76 minutes

As I listened to this light, delicate, hopelessly wimpy Brahms, I passed the time writing down the recorded versions of the *Deutsches Requiem* I wished I'd been listening to instead. Levine, Harding, Abbado, Jansons, Rattle, Masur, Karajan (pick a number from 1 to 4), Blomstedt, Solti, Shaw, Barenboim, Gardiner, Giulini, Alsop, Sinopoli, Vriend, Sawallisch, and—of course—Klemperer were the ones I thought of. All are infinitely more satisfying.

The Mainz Bach Choir looks to be an ensemble of about 35. No doubt they make

pretty sounds, but the singing (from the soloists as well) is just way too precious and wispy for Brahms. JE Gardiner's Monteverdians sound like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir next to this lot. Even Naxos's piano 4 hands version sung in English has more guts (J/F 2020).

GREENFIELD

BRAHMS: *Viola Sonatas;*
DOHNANYI: *Violin Sonata*
Jenna Sherry, v; Daniel Lowenberg, p
BMC 295—60 minutes

The meat and potatoes of this recital are the two sonatas by Brahms. These are the two works that were originally written for clarinet and then transcribed for strings. They are best known now in their arrangements for viola. I first encountered these violin arrangements in 2019 and 2020 when I reviewed recordings by Ulf Wallin and Roland Pontinen (Nov/Dec 2019, May/June 2020). I decided that the dark, stormy Sonata 1 in F minor was wrong for the violin and that the violin part had too many changes of register from the viola part to sound natural. Sonata 2 in E-flat is a sunnier piece, and the switch to the tonally lighter violin works very well.

If you are interested in hearing this arrangement, I strongly recommend Wallin and Pontinen's excellent recording. Jenna Sherry is a good violinist, but her pallid tone and lack of dynamic contrast and articulation show that she is not cut out to be a soloist.

The Violin Sonata by Ernst Dohnanyi is forgettable—which may be why hardly anyone has recorded it. The first two movements don't appeal to me, and though the finale is soft and lovely, the moment it ends it fades from memory.

MAGIL

BRAHMS: *Symphony 4;* see STRAUSS
BRAUNFELS: *Te Deum;* see Collections

BREINER: *Slovak Dances*
Slovak Philharmonic/ Breiner
Naxos 574184 [2CD] 99 minutes

Composer and conductor Peter Breiner has recorded several discs for Naxos, and is called on this cover "one of the world's most performed composer-arrangers". That is news to me. Here he conducts his own compositions—under the rubric "Naughty and Sad". In the notes Breiner admits that these are neither Slovak nor dances. I agree. What you hear are 16 colorfully orchestrated "fantasias" that have fanciful titles essentially unrelated to what you hear. What you hear is also rather fanciful and hard to describe. The music sounds like a combination of Respighi, Grofé, and Kodaly in a pseudo-panoramic style. There is some variety to the music, but the composer rarely repeats a theme that has been introduced, nothing is developed, and there don't seem to be any codas. The music gets loud and quiet and sometimes has some Slavic sounds, but it doesn't seem to go anywhere. I found it tedious. The orchestrations are colorful, with many unusual instruments—whistles, bells, Fujara, and Jew's Harp—and Breiner knows how to take advantage of the full orchestra. The orchestra plays well and the sound is very good.

FISCH

BREINER: *Caressing Your Soul*
Peter Breiner, p—Naxos 574256—74 minutes

The apt subtitle is "Calm Romantic Piano Music". The effect I felt from listening to it was, in order: Simple, Calming, Sleeping. Mr Breiner's music is so simple it sounds like the Schirmer Book 1 for Beginning Piano Students. The basic melodies are pleasant, reminiscent of the Beatles sound from the 1970s, but they all sound pretty much the same. If you want to relax after a rough day this and a glass of wine should calm you down. If you can't fall asleep, the music is a good alternative to sleeping pills. Don't listen to this while driving. Mr Breiner's goal of recording calming music was achieved.

FISCH

BROSSARD: *Salve Rex Christi;*
see CHARPENTIER

BRUCH: *2-Piano Concerto; Russian Suite*
Mona & Rica Bard; Staatskapelle Halle/ Ariane Matiakh—Capriccio 5420—48 minutes

Max Bruch (1838-1920) was a German late-romantic composer strongly in line with Brahms. His most famous work is the Violin Concerto 1 (1886), part of the standard repertoire. His *Scottish Fantasy* for violin and orchestra and the *Kol Nidre* for cello and orchestra are also heard on a regular basis. Otherwise, his music does not get played much despite a catalog of over 200 works.

Late in Bruch's life, it was a performance in 1911 of his early Fantasy for 2 pianos by Rose and Ottilie Sutro that inspired him to write his

Concerto for 2 Pianos and dedicate it to that American piano duo. They were given the score and granted exclusive performing rights in America by Bruch. They altered both the piano parts and orchestration before the world premiere in 1916 with Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra. They performed it once more in 1917, and it was not heard again. They made more alterations over the years, but held onto the score. After Ottilie's death in 1970 (Rose died in 1957), at the estate sale, Bruch's original score came to public light for the first time. An excellent recording by Genova & Dimitrov came my way a couple of years ago (CPO 555090, Sept/Oct 2018).

The *Suite on Russian Themes* (1903) is the first of three orchestral suites that Bruch composed. It is derived from the *Songs and Dances* for violin and piano and includes some wonderful orchestration. The English horn and harp, along with clarinet and viola parts playing clearly Russian tunes brought Tchaikovsky to mind.

I first encountered the Bard sisters playing French repertoire (Audite 92.672, May/June 2013) and was very impressed with that recording. Our editor talked about elegant and refined playing from the same pianists and conductor, again in French repertoire (Capriccio 5237, July/Aug 2013). Here in heavier late romantic repertoire they excel with the Staatskapelle Halle. I can't say that the Bruch 2-Piano Concerto is a great work. Even with as good a performance as we have here, this may sound like Brahms, but it isn't. The *Russian Suite* was a brand new work for me and I found it much more interesting. This is an excellent concert recording with superb booklet notes.

HARRINGTON

BRUCKNER: *Motets*
Latvian Radio Choir/ Sigvards Klava
Ondine 1362—59 minutes

This is a wonderful recording of 18 motets that will include most of your favorites: 'Os Justi', 'Christus Factus Est', 'Locus Iste', 'Ave Maria' (7-voice), 'Virga Jesse', and so forth. Some of the other pieces—four 'Tantum Ergos', the *Kronstorfer Mass* (which lacks a Gloria and Credo), etc.—are early Bruckner, excessively homophonic, and not very interesting. Everything here, though, is exceptionally well done by these Latvian singers.

The choir numbers, if I count correctly, 21, which is not large for Bruckner, but they are full-throated professional singers, and they are splendid. Most impressive is their intonation, which, as anyone who has stepped in the waters of Bruckner's a cappella music will tell you, can be a land mine (or should I say depth charge!). Their blend and rich tone are as fine as you will ever hear, and the dynamic control elicited by conductor Klava, is wonderful; the conclusions to works like 'Os Justi' and 'Christus Factus Est' are beautifully drawn out with perfectly gauged diminuendos.

This would make a great introduction to this music. The early works, written in the 1840s when Bruckner was in his early 20s, don't have the strength of his later pieces; but they make an important contribution to our knowledge of Bruckner, his music, and his deep faith. The later works need no apology at all! Texts and translations.

ALTHOUSE

BRUCKNER: *Te Deum;* see Collections

CACIOPPO: *Songs & Piano Pieces*
Kristina Bachrach, s; William Sharp, bar; Evan Ocheret, ob; Curt Cacioppo, Debra Lew Harder, Wan-Chi Su, p—MSR 1777—54 minutes

After a career of performing as a pianist and teaching for 41 years at Harvard University and Haverford College, Curt Cacioppo (b. 1941) retired from academia in mid-2020. He has won numerous awards over the years and made more than a dozen recordings. We have reviewed a few of them—most recently "Ritornello". George Adams described his music as neo-classical and wrote that "his melodies and gestures are easily understood and accessible" (S/O 2016).

This program has two major works: an "operistica" *Luce e Donna*, a setting of a poem by the distinguished Italian poet Luigi Cerentola, and his setting of Walt Whitman's 'I, madly struggling, cry'. It also includes settings of three other Cerentola poems and two solo piano works.

His compositions have been influenced by a broad variety of sources including the medieval poetry of Dante, aspects of Native American culture, and the music he grew up with. His style is a mixture of discordant and tonal elements and improvisatory jazz. You can hear quotations here and there from Mozart, Puccini, and Chopin. He describes his piano piece 'Notturno Elidiano' as "an Elysian tribute to a musical hero: Frederic Chopin". One of the Cerentola settings with piano and

oboe accompaniment is quite lushly romantic. The other piano piece, 'Paean', performed by the composer, recalls the duet in praise of conjugal love from Beethoven's *Fidelio*.

The closing work is a majestic setting of Whitman's poem in praise of the broad heterogeneity and equanimity of the United States of America. It begins with the words: "Restriction of immigration?" and is an amplification of the famous quotation from Emma Lazarus on the Statue of Liberty welcoming people "yearning to breathe free". (Cacioppo took the liberty of adding the words "as our forbears were welcomed" to the text.) Written in 2018, it makes a clear and needed statement addressing current US government immigration policy.

The performances are gripping and compelling. Kristina Bachrach uses a variety of vocal techniques and hits stratospheric heights thrillingly. William Sharp serves as both narrator and singer for the Whitman piece. His warm and vibrant voice brings out the grandeur of the text. All three pianists and oboist are first rate.

The composer wrote the notes, except that literature professor Brian Yothers wrote about the Whitman setting.

Text and translations.

R MOORE

CANNABICH: *Electra*
Isabelle Redfern (Electra), Bernd Schmitt (Orestes), Sigrun Bornträger (Soldier), Isolde Assenheimer (Chiron); Hofkapelle Stuttgart/ Frieder Bernius—Hänssler 20062—53 minutes

While opera continued to develop and flourish in the 18th Century in Italy and France, other parts of the world struggled a bit. The British had not yet improved on the 17th Century "Dramatick Operas", spoken plays with extensive musical interludes; Purcell's *King Arthur* is a prime example, as a recent video shows (S/O 2020). Another hybrid form emerged in Germany. In 1778 Mozart wrote to his father about the Melodrama, a theatrical presentation where the text is not sung but declaimed, and the music "is like an obbligato recitative" He had "imagined it would have no effect", and was surprised to find that the amalgam of speech and music "created the most splendid impression". Beethoven's *Fidelio* incorporates elements of the genre, and Richard Strauss gave it fresh life in the late 19th Century with his riveting piano accompaniment to the Tennyson poem *Enoch Arden*. The attraction of Melodrama is evident in Christian Cannabich's *Electra* (1781), with a text by Wolfgang Herbert von Dalberg based on Greek mythology.

Von Dalberg's telling of the legend begins with Electra's monolog as her mother weds Aegisthus. Her feelings of torment and rejection ("Oh evil day that I should live to see such abominations") are in sharp contrast to the restrained yet jubilant wedding music. This device is even more chilling later on. She hears the "hollow, terrible" sound of Clytemnestra's bridal march and predicts (correctly) it will be her mother's funeral dirge. Elsewhere, there is beautiful tone painting, as in the more earnest and lyrical phrases that accompany Electra's happy childhood memories of her father. Typical for its era, powerful emotions are expressed with classical understatement, and the scoring often brings to mind Mozart's *Magic Flute*.

Unlike the Elektra of Hofmannsthal and Strauss, Cannabich's heroine does not celebrate after Orestes takes vengeance on their mother. Rather, she suffers deep remorse; and the work concludes with a prayer to the gods to grant mercy on her and her brother. In the title role, the incandescent German actress Isabelle Redfern benefits from her musical background as a choral singer to convey the full force of the text setting. Bernd Schmitt, an opera stage director with a history of musical studies, is the dramaturge for this performance, and also a strong presence in the brief but pivotal role of Orestes. Frieder Bernius leads the forces of the Hofkapelle Stuttgart in a definitive document of a work worthy of attention.

ALTMAN

CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO: *Cello Sonata; Clarinet Sonata; Trio 2; Pastorale & Rondo*
Ensemble Italiano—Brilliant 96007—78 minutes

These are fine pieces, and Castelnuovo-Tedesco is almost always enjoyable. The performances keep this album out of the running, though: the violin tone is nasal and the clarinet tone unappealing, especially in the lower register—and all the instrumentalists show technical weaknesses fairly often. Nothing is bad, but it is not difficult to hear something every dozen bars that could be better, whether a sloppy scale from the piano, an awkward break as the clarinet moves from one note to another, or a grating leap from one of the strings. After a while, the cumulative effect proved to be too much.

ESTEP

CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO: *Guitar Quintet;* see HAUG

CHARPENTIER: *Mass for 4 Choirs; Sub Tuum Praesidium; Domine Salvum Fac Regem*
with pieces by Cazzati, Cavalli, Merula, Beretta, Giamberti, Benevoli
Ensemble Correspondances/ Sebastien Daucé
HM 902640—80 minutes

It is well known that Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704) spent about three years in the late 1660s studying in Rome, where his principal teacher was Giacomo Carissimi (1605-74). He became an exponent and champion of the Italian style, though one might say that he spoke the Italian musical language with a French accent. As Graham Sadler points out in his notes to this recording, there was considerable antipathy in France toward Italian music. For many, the reserved and graceful style of French music was considered preferable to what some listeners considered the excesses of Italian music. Such views did not always work to Charpentier's advantage. None of the music he wrote before his Italian studies has survived, but Sadler points to his setting of the antiphon 'Sub Tuum Praesidium' (H 28) for three unaccompanied voices as typical of mid-17th-Century French music. Its economy and reserve make a strong contrast with the principal work on this program, the Mass for Four Choirs (H 4), probably dating from 1671. It is the fruit of Charpentier's first-hand experience of Roman polychoral church music, and is the only surviving polychoral work by a French composer of that period.

Charpentier would have become familiar with the music of Rome during his time there, but the program of this recording, subtitled *An Italian Travel Diary*, assumes that he would have visited the principal musical centers of northern Italy on his way from Paris to Rome. The other works here are ones that Charpentier may have heard on his journey.

Maurizio Cazzati (1616-78) was Maestro di Cappella at the church of San Petronio in Bologna. His double-choir motet 'Salve Caput Sacrosanctum' is in honor of the city's patron saint.

The Venetian polychoral tradition is justly celebrated in the works of the Gabrielis and Monteverdi. Francesco Cavalli (1602-76), better known today for his operas than his church music, was music director at St Mark's in Charpentier's day. His Magnificat for three choirs is a highly impressive work, almost upstaging the Charpentier Mass. Two of the three choirs combine voices and instruments, while the third choir is purely instrumental. Passages for groups of accompanied solo voices alternate to great effect with imposing statements by the full forces. One suspects that Cavalli was drawing on his flair for theatrical composition in this liturgical piece. It is easy to imagine the overwhelming impression this music must have made in the majestic space of St Mark's.

Tarquinio Merula (1594-1665) was in charge of music at Cremona Cathedral until 1655. He is noted for his ground bass compositions. The Vesper psalm 'Credidi Propter Quod' is an example. It is for a solo bass with two violins and continuo. The vocal part demands considerable virtuosity with its two-octave range, wide leaps, and daunting roulades.

The Roman polychoral tradition was as spectacular as the Venetian, if not more so. There is documentation of Masses written for as many as 12 choirs. The tradition is represented here by movements from the *Mirabiles Elationes Maris Mass* by Francesco Beretta (c1640-94) and the Crucifixus from the *Si Deus pro Nobis Mass* by Orazio Benevoli (1605-72). The only surviving source for Beretta's 16-part Mass is a manuscript compiled by Charpentier from the now lost part books.

The performances are by a choir of 18 voices and a small orchestra of period instruments. They are beautifully stylish and technically unimpeachable. Balances may not always be ideal, but that is a minor quibble. Readers looking for a first-rate recording of the Charpentier Mass will not go wrong. The other works on the program will give great delight and an historical context for Charpentier's artistry.

GATENS

CHARPENTIER: *Meditations for Lent (10);*
BROSSARD: *Salve Rex Christe; O Plenus Irarum Dies*
Les Surprises/ Louis-Noel Bestion de Camboulas
Ambronay 56—60 minutes

In his booklet notes this conductor says that "the program of this recording has been built around the personality of Sebastian de Brossard (1655-1730)." He was a priest, composer, lexicographer, and music theorist. In 1687 he was appointed vicar at Strasbourg Cathedral, and soon afterward *maitre de chapelle*. In addition to his cathedral duties, he founded a musical academy in the city and directed secular concerts, opera, and ballet.

He was also an indefatigable collector of music, including original manuscripts, manuscript copies, and printed editions amounting to nearly 1,000 items. As he had no heirs, he bequeathed his collection to King Louis XV, and it now forms an important part of the music department of the Bibliotheque Nationale.

Brossard's collection is often the only source for the pieces it contains. That is the case for the 10 *Meditations for Lent* (H 380-389) by Marc-Antoine Charpentier on this recording. Charpentier left some 28 manuscript volumes of his works, but these brief motets are not among them. The musical forces are modest: three male voices (alto, tenor, and bass) and continuo. The motets are primarily a series of meditations on the Passion of Christ, and Bestion likens them to the Stations of the Cross. The first two are songs of desolation with no direct reference to the Passion. Two other motets take their texts from Holy Week Tenebrae Responsories. Others have texts adapted from scripture, including dialogs that Charpentier sets dramatically. The concluding motet is on the theme of the sacrifice of Isaac, understood as prefiguring the Passion of Christ. It seems significant that the motet text does not include Isaac's rescue, and so strengthens the association with the Passion.

Charpentier spent a substantial part of his career providing music for the Jesuit church in Paris. He had been a student of Giacomo Carissimi, and his Italian predilections are well known. Brossard was also an admirer of Italian music. It is entirely possible that the *Meditations for Lent* were intended for an extraliturgical devotion at the Jesuit church, and the dialogs show an affinity with Italian oratorios of that period.

Two motets by Brossard are included here. The text of 'Salve Rex Christe' is adapted from the Marian antiphon Salve Regina. 'O Plenus Irarum Dies' sets a text by Jean de Santeul, a canon of the Abbey of St Victor in Paris. The subject is the Last Judgement, and the poem is similar to the Dies Irae sequence. As a composer, Brossard is a consummate professional, but as I have observed in other reviews, he does not have quite the spark of imagination that we find in Charpentier or Couperin. The program is filled out with two somber instrumental pieces: a *Tombeau* for theorbo by Robert de Visée (c1655-c1723) and a Prelude in D from the first book of Pieces for Viola da Gamba by Marin Marais (1656-1728).

Described as a "flexibly sized baroque ensemble", Les Surprises was founded in 2010 by Bestion and gambist Juliette Guignard. The name is taken from the opera-ballet *Les Surprises de l'Amour* by Jean-Philippe Rameau, and French baroque rarities for the stage have been an important part of their repertory. Their performances here display great technical aplomb and keen expressiveness.

Some years ago I reviewed a recording of the *Meditations for Lent* by Ensemble Pierre Robert under Frederic Desenclos (Alpha 91; M/A 2007). The performances on both recordings are very fine. The earlier one has a greater sense of space, and I find that attractive, though the balance between voices and instruments is not always ideal. The present recording sounds closer and more intense.

GATENS

CHEBOTARYAN: *Trio;* see BABADJANIAN

CHERUBINI: *Mass*

Ruth Ziesak, Iris-Anna Deckert, Christa Mayer, Christoph Genz, Robert Buckland, Thomas E Bauer; Stuttgart Chamber Choir & Philharmonic/ Frieder Bernius—Carus 83512—76 minutes

If you are acquainted with the masses of Luigi Cherubini, including this traversal of the liturgy crafted in 1811, chances are you know them from the performances Riccardo Muti recorded for EMI back in the 80s. (If you scratch around the internet, you can find some of those, especially the C-minor Requiem acknowledged to be Cherubini's *magnum opus*.) EMI has incorporated Cherubini's five surviving masses, plus his 2 Requiems, assorted overtures and motets, and horn sonata into a 7-disc set (J/F 2011—Barry Tuckwell played that sonata, and Neville Marriner handled the small-scale stuff). Though Mr Althouse didn't single out this D minor Mass in that review, he included it among the works benefitting from the "spirited, inspired leadership of Muti". Few rivals, he concluded, have challenged Muti, though he did lavish praise on the expert choral conducting of Helmuth Rilling in the German maestro's account of the same Mass (Hanssler 98325; M/A 2000).

This newcomer to the field isn't really a newcomer at all. It was recorded in concert at the Schleswig-Holstein Festival in 2001. The singing is delightful on all counts. The orchestra is top-notch; and the engineers created a bright, clear soundstage utterly bereft of audience noise. But if you know Herr Bernius, you

know he brings period sensibilities to his interpretations, favoring quick tempos and transparent textures that allow fugal counterpoint to ring out with the utmost clarity. What can be missing from such streamlining is the kind of depth and weight that might compel us to take more notice of the music. Cherubini, let's face it, wasn't one of our greatest tunesmiths or orchestral colorists; so when he aspires to grandeur and solemnity his music can benefit from the kind of power that's missing here. For Cherubini with an 18th Century feel, this will do nicely. For a performance that makes him sound more like a contemporary of Beethoven, I would choose Muti or Rilling.

GREENFIELD

CHOPIN: *Piano Pieces 6*
Louis Lortie—Chandos 20117—84 minutes

This is Volume 6 of Lortie's Chopin series on Chandos, and it includes the early Variations on Mozart's 'La ci darem la mano', the Fantasy in F minor, two Polonaises (Op. 40), and four sets of Mazurkas (Opp. 6, 24, 41, and 67), arranged in an order that would make a good recital program.

We have reviewed all five previous volumes, and the mixed comments foreshadow my own impressions. Alan Becker, who reviewed Volumes 1 (S/O 2010), 4 (S/O 2015), and 5 (M/A 2018), was generally very positive but had some reservations. About Volume 5, which like the present installment contained some Mazurkas and Polonaises, he wrote that the Mazurkas seemed "unevenly phrased and lacking the natural flow of a Rubinstein" and that Lortie " falls short of what we call a natural Chopin pianist". John Moore, writing about Volume 3 (J/A 2012), found the playing "tame and on the conventional side". About Volume 4 our Editor wrote with characteristic bluntness that Lortie was "boring" and "had nothing to say".

With some 45 Chandos recordings under his belt, Lortie is unquestionably a highly competent and experienced artist, but probably not one in the first rank. My feeling, too, was that he is not a natural for Chopin. His interpretations tend to be gentle; they lack tension and drama when required, as in the Fantasy and especially in the Polonaises, which are unimpressive here. The Mazurkas come off better. One problem besetting all pieces in various degrees is a somewhat affected individual rubato that seems added on to the kind of rubato that Chopin requires and which Lortie seems to understand quite well. These mannerisms take the form of elongated single notes (something I like to call "sticky keys") or sometimes shortened notes, but with the common result that the rhythm is distorted. Moreover, if a passage is repeated these distortions recur with machine-like precision. For example, in the Mazurka, Op. 67:3, the short notes following a dotted note are consistently lengthened, and in the Polonaise, Op. 40:2, the timing at about 5:25 is so strange that I thought it was an editing error, but then I heard it again around 5:54 and 6:52. Of course, Lortie also does many nice things, and this recording can certainly be enjoyed for the magnificent music, played quite well. But it is not competitive with the best Chopin players.

The cover image is one of the least inviting I have seen. Not only has Lortie forgotten to shave but also his disgruntled expression, with his chin resting on his hand, suggests he has given up the idea of pleasing his audience or even himself. On the covers of successive volumes, which are reproduced in the booklet for advertising purposes, a progression can be seen from (1) smiling to (2) handsome and charming to (3) serious to (4) doubtful to (5) unshaven and withdrawn though still not unpleasant, and (6) the present disagreeable pose. Is there a point to all that?

REPP

CHOPIN: *Piano Sonata 2; Scherzos; Polonaise 6*
Sophia Agranovich—Centaur 3805—71 minutes

This recording continues my encounter with the artist's pianism. I wish I could say it was a rewarding encounter, but the sonata sounds choppy in I, with the rhythmic trust of the left hand almost vanishing. The Scherzo fares a bit better, and one certainly cannot accuse her of being too subtle with the dynamics. With the Marche Funebre we are on firmer ground as the music moves forward with grim determination until the lovely central section. The ghostly Finale is quite a thrilling ride, worthy of anyone's attention.

The Scherzos are played with sparse pedal and an impressive display of technical prowess. If they are not like any other performances I have heard, that isn't necessarily a bad thing. On the contrary, they have an edge-of-your-seat energy and nervous jitter to them that is alluringly different and sometimes shakes the listener up. If I might not want this as my only performance, I find it compelling

enough to want to repeat it when it suits my mood. There is much pent-up energy at the point of explosion that fits the Scherzos especially well.

I do like the way she plays around with the last (and greatest) Scherzo. It is not a relaxing performance, but it is a great traversal with an almost acidic humor that should be heard. Her feeling for the composer is well displayed in the slow lyrical section.

How she fares with the famous *Heroic* Polonaise is a little more traditional, pushing forward with energy and determination. Once again, Agranovich writes her own excellent notes and the Steinway D sounds forth with energy to complement this often fabulous recital.

BECKER

CLARKE: *Trio;* see BEACH

CLYNE: *Mythlogies*

Jennifer Hoh, v; Irene Buckley, voice; BBC Symphony/ Marin Alsop, Saraki Oramo, Andre de Ridder, Andrew Litton—Avie 2434—67 minutes

Anne Clyne (b. 1980) writes in a tonal style with folk-like touches and spectacular orchestration aided by lush electronic manipulation. With all that, the composer's language is along the lines of an aggressive postmodern Vaughan Williams. There is a cinematic feel to it.

There are five pieces on the program. *Masquerade*(2013) is a colorful and blazing opening. As an overture, it will stun most listener's sensibilities.

This Midnight Hour (2015) is inspired by texts by Juan Ramon Jimenez and Baudelaire (both translated by Robert Bly), but they are not included in the booklet. The piece is dreamy and includes variation on a British early music quotation (unidentified) with a hallucinatory waltz in between.

The Seamstress(2014) is a violin concerto-tone poem, with panting and weeping along with Yeats recited in whispers. An ethereal 12-tone row drifts in amidst the Anglophile pastoralism.

Night Ferry(2012) inspired by a poem by Robert Lowell, is a harrowing seascape ending with broken nature fragments. It is an explosive 21st Century *La Mer*.

Finally, *Rewind* (2005) is intense, describing a videotape run backwards. The orchestra is completely in charge here and puts out a pulsating tour de force.

This is an impressive introduction to a formidable composer. The conductors in charge are at their predictable best.

The notes, not by the composer, are helpful but filled with deep purple prose.

GIMBEL

COATES: *Orchestral Pieces 2*

BBC Philharmonic/ John Wilson
Chandos 20148—57 minutes

Volume 2 of Chandos's series of Eric Coates's music continues with some well-known and some unusual selections. As I mentioned in my review of Volume 1 (M/A 2020) much of his "light music" sounds like Leroy Anderson but with a British sensibility—marches, luxurious waltzes, and dreamy ballads. I have recordings of a lot of Coates's music, some conducted by the composer. It is not always memorable, but it is always enjoyable.

Volume 2 includes one of his most famous pieces, 'London Bridge' from 1934. It's a jaunty march and you may want to get up and march along. 'Wood Nymphs' from 1917 is one of his earliest "light" pieces, written while he was still a viola player in Sir Henry Wood's Queens Hall Orchestra. Wood was so offended by its success that he soon after fired Coates from the orchestra. No matter; Coates went on to more recognition and greater success, including the idyllic and lively *Summer Days* suite (1919).

Coates usually included a dance as the basis of each work, and of the longer selections on this disc *Summer Days* includes a section titled 'At the Dance'. Other longer pieces include the nine-minute fantasy *The Selfish Giant* (1925) based on the children's story, and the 18-minute ballet *The Enchanted Garden* (1938) both with delightful melodies. They are alternately lively and introspective.

I thoroughly enjoyed these excellent performances. Included is an informative booklet. Among the many recordings of this light music, this stands out for the longer, less recorded selections. If you want to watch Coates conducting he can be seen in the 1944 film *Two Girls and a Sailor*, leading comedian Gracie Allen at the piano in the *Concerto for the Index Finger*. It's quite a show.

FISCH

CORDERO: *Piano Pieces*

Tuyen Tonnu—Albany 1833 [2CD] 100 minutes

I have only one childhood memory of Roque Cordero (1917-2008): seeing a compilation recording at the library that included one of

his works and thinking, "*That's* an interesting name." I see that we have not reviewed many of his recordings over the years. One would think that, since he is a Panamanian composer of considerable skill and imagination, people agitating for more people of color to be represented in today's music scene might champion his work. (My guess is that most of them, who self-style themselves as "curators" [sic] of new music, have never heard of him.) At least Tuyen Tonnu, an associate professor at Illinois State University, believes in the music and has the skill necessary to realize it effectively and inspirationally.

Cordero was largely self-taught until 1944, when he studied with Ernst Krenek. He asked to learn about 12-tone technique, which he would use (as the liner notes state) "with some liberty—and found a way to impart Panamanian flavor through rhythm, texture, tempo, and melodic contour". This release collects all of his piano music from early works in 1941 to his final composition, *Three Poetic Meditations* of 1995. If I understand the notes right, only two of these pieces, the *Sonatina Ritmica* and *Sonata Breve*, have been published.

Cordero's earliest compositions are tuneful, simple in form and gracious in style. With the *Sonatina Ritmica* his harmonic style begins to move toward more neoclassical-sounding quartal writing, and the *Sonata Breve* is angular and spikily dissonant. A clear sense of line and form continues through these later works, which may account for their relative neglect over the years—not gimmicky enough. (It also probably didn't help that Cordero's career after 1972 was in the Midwest, at Illinois State.) There's also a tendency toward abrupt shifts between slow, almost static textures and almost violent outbursts of nervous passagework. The best of the later pieces is the compact but wide-ranging Sonata of 1985.

Professor Tonnu, whose contemporary repertoire reads like a who's who of new music (Hans Otte, Libby Larsen, Tristan Murail, and Ligeti among them), performs Cordero with considerable authority and verve. I will include his work the next time I teach my new music course.

HASKINS

A dead thing goes with the stream, but only a living thing goes against it.

—CHESTERTON

CORELLI: *Concerti Grossi, op 6*
Cremona Baroque Orchestra
Urania 14061—76 minutes

Back in 2004 CPO gave us the *Four Seasons* with winds in a version from Dresden (Sept/Oct 2004 & Nov/Dec 2012). Here we have a new recording of another standard based on the discovery "that in the Corellian orchestras there was a significant presence of wind instruments". The program consists of concertos 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, and 10. Since the first eight are church concertos with emphasis on counterpoint and the last four are chamber concertos with preludes and dances, we get to hear some of each done Giovanni Battista Columbro's way—he plays flute 1. In his arrangement, we are presented with transverse flutes in the concertino group and bassoon in the ripieno or grosso—6 in one and 7 in the other. In each case, the winds are paired with and do not replace strings: two flutes with two violins and bassoon with double bass. We also have harpsichord, harp, and theorbo as foundational instruments. Original keys are kept, unlike some adaptations of these pieces. Having the flutes placed in one group and the bassoon in another doesn't keep us from hearing just the three now and then. If you're open to a different approach to scoring that involves period instruments, try it. Having flutes and bassoon does create a sound palette that is gentler and more pastoral than all strings.

The evidence that seems to have been hiding from almost everyone else over the past hundred years comes especially from two sources. Scottish-Savoyan organist, composer, and lawyer George Muffat (1653-1704) wrote in his treatises about the varied instrumentation used to render Corelli's concertos, "performed with the greatest exactness by a large number of instrumentalists". Italian critic and poet Giovanni Crescimbeni (1663-1728) wrote for a volume published in 1720, "There were more than a hundred instruments...in that huge and varied number, mainly both winds and strings." From his account it sounds as though a full-size modern orchestra of 50 to 100 players would make an apt ensemble for performing these old and venerable concertos, yet here in the 19-page booklet we have no justification for one of 13 (inexplicably, 11 in the picture).

You can hear three (1, 4, and 7) done with trumpets and trombone by Harmonie Universelle on Accent (Jan/Feb 2014) and all

strings but with 18 players including two harpsichords and two lutes on Zig Zag (Mar/Apr 2014), which John Barker made his primary recommendation. Not long ago on Tactus (Sept/Oct 2014), the eminent Federico Maria Sardelli added pairs of recorders, oboes, or trumpets with bassoon, but John Barker was not entirely convinced by those renditions. Here there is no vibrato in the strings—the overall approach is scrappy and scrapey—but countering the degree any timbres might be objectionable is the considerable range of sounds from treble to bass and their combination. The point here is not blend but contrast; at moments your ears will be directed one way or another and the unexpected changes can be a delight. As long as this is not your only encounter with Corelli's Opus 6, consider it among your possibilities.

GORMAN

DEBUSSY: *La Mer; Afternoon of a Faun;*
RAVEL: *Rapsodie Espagnole*
London Symphony/ Francois-Xavier Roth
LSO 821 [SACD] 49 minutes

The performances are competent, comfortable, understated, well played, and fine for a concert, but with no special inspiration or qualities that make a recording to be listened to more than once. Nor do they sound particularly French, or in the case of the Ravel, Spanish. As if to add insult to injury, the timing is short, and it is hardly a bargain. The booklet notes are well written and interesting, particularly on Debussy, but hardly a reason for purchase. All is well recorded.

HECHT

DEHLINGER: *Songs*
Danielle Talamantes, s; Kerry Wilkerson, bar; Henry Dehlinger, p—Avie 2424—63 minutes

San Francisco pianist and singer Henry Dehlinger (b.1966) turned to full-time composition in 2015. He wrote the songs of this program for the husband-and-wife team Danielle Talamantes and Kerry Wilkerson, his frequent collaborators.

The album's title, "At That Hour", comes from the first of 10 poems of James Joyce that begin the program followed by settings of texts by Dante, Edgar Allen Poe, Mark Riddles, Oscar Wilde, and the Bible. The biblical text is from Chapter 2 of the Song of Songs and is set is a scena for the two singers.

The program closes with his setting of Wilde's 'Requiescat' in a clever jazzy style.

Dehlinger's style makes much use of simple repetitive piano patterns, often sounding influenced by minimalism. His melodies are attractive but predictable. Much of it has the feel of theater music. After a while the sameness of the music became tedious to me.

The performances are first-rate, but I found the outcome unsatisfying. Notes, texts, translations.

R MOORE

DEVIENNE: *Bassoon Sonatas*
Mauro Monguzzi; Giovanni Brollo, p
Bongiovanni 5212—60 minutes

Known as the "French Mozart", Francois Devienne (1759-1803) earned widespread admiration as a flutist, bassoonist, composer, military musician, and Paris Conservatory professor and administrator. He spent the prime of his career during the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon; and his surprising death at age 43 is likely owing to physical exhaustion from overwork. He left behind over 300 compositions; and while his music lacks the genius of the First Viennese School, his devotion to wind chamber music influenced his compatriots for decades to come.

In this Italian production, recorded in July 2019, bassoonist Mauro Monguzzi and pianist Giovanni Brollo present the six bassoon sonatas of the composer's Opus 24. In true classical style, each sonata divides into three movements, beginning with an Allegro, following with an Adagio or Largo, and then concluding with a Rondo or Minuet.

Monguzzi executes each piece with a smooth covered tone and excellent technique; yet his overall sound is dry, his color palette is limited, and his phrasing is standard. Brollo is solid at the keyboard, rendering Monguzzi's basso continuo realizations with nice touch and balance.

HANUDEL

DOHNANYI: *Violin Sonata;* see BRAHMS

DONIZETTI: *Il Paria*
Albina Shagimuratova (Neala), Rene Barbera (Idamore), Misha Kiria (Zarete), Marko Mimica (Akabare); Opera Rara Chorus, Britten Sinfonia/ Mark Elder—Opera Rara 60 [2CD] 111 minutes

In an interview promoting this new Opera Rara release, Sir Mark Elder says no one has ever heard of this opera or heard the music. Well, there was a mediocre Bongiovanni recording a while back, though I doubt it

reflects the scholarship that is behind this release. At any rate, this new recording of Donizetti's first tragic opera (1829) is terrific, and any one who loves Donizetti or operas from the Bel Canto period must hear it. It is a youthful work so it doesn't have the finesse and sheer stage craft of some of his later works, but it is highly original in ways that may have contributed to its lukewarm reception at the time of its premiere. As was the custom in those days, the lead roles were written for the leading singers. Adelaide Tosi created the prima donna role of Neala, Giovanni Battista Rubini the tenor role of Idamore, and Luigi Lablache created Zarete, the eponymous hero and father of Idamore. Since this was a Rubini role, Idamore's music is written very high with a cabaletta in the first act that is liberally sprinkled with high C-sharps followed by a chain of descending trills. Few tenors now (or then) could sing it. Donizetti's use of the chorus is much more prominent than in his earlier operas, and the orchestral introductions to scenes and arias are exquisitely written. The opera ends with a dramatic quartet rather than a final ensemble despite the fact that the chorus is still on stage.

The plot is a Romeo and Juliet tale set in India (unusual for that time), telling of two lovers separated by their positions or lack thereof in society, and plagued with annoying, vengeful fathers. The libretto by Domenico Gilardoni is unusually forward-looking, dealing with religious tolerance and intolerance. In the final scene Zarete, father of Idamore, makes a speech similar to Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, pleading for compassion and humanity. It doesn't end up well for any of them: Zarete and Idamore are led to execution, Neala promises to join Idamore in death, and her vindictive father, Akabare, gloats over his hollow victory.

Donizetti's music matches the situations beautifully. The arias and ensembles are bathed in the melodic fecundity Donizetti was becoming known for. Moreover, the story doesn't overstay its welcome. The entire piece with repeats in the cabalettas is finished in less than two hours. Nevertheless the premiere audiences were not satisfied and *Il Paria* faded into operatic obscurity. Some of the music was refashioned into later works (some melodies were used in *Anna Bolena*).

The singers in this recording are all first-rate. Albina Shagimuratova starred in Opera Rara's excellent recording of *Semiramide* several years ago. She doesn't have as flashy a role here, but she sings her opening aria with a masterly handling of legato and an instinctive knowledge of how to fashion the ornaments into an expressive musical whole. Rene Barbera was called in at almost the last minute to replace another singer. That would be impressive enough, yet Barbera makes the music his own. He manages the top Cs and C-sharps of his first aria with enviable ease and caps it all with an interpolated high E (this is a Rubini role after all). He also has a genuinely attractive voice—not always the case in music of this difficulty. Misha Kiria brings a flood of warm, beautiful tone to Zarete's pronouncements. This is a very different role from Don Pasquale, a role Lablache created in 1843. Kiria meets the challenge of Zarete's big Act II scene head on, singing with imagination and color. The villain of the piece, Akabare, never gets his own aria, but Marko Mimica makes as much as he can of this rather cardboard character.

The chorus and Britten Sinfonia supply dramatic accompaniment. Elder's ability as an opera conductor is second to none. He (or his assistants) makes sure the cabaletta repeats are ornamented properly (as they would have been in Donizetti's time). Shagimuratova is supplied with an especially lovely flourish in one of her final solo phrases.

The sound is warm and natural with sufficient space around the solo voices as well as the chorus. Roger Parker's notes are detailed and informative (Opera Rara always offers superb background information), the booklet is lavishly illustrated, and text and translation are included. These Opera Rara sets are more expensive than the usual CD sets, but are absolutely worth the money.

REYNOLDS

DOPPLERS: *Flute Pieces 11+12*

Claude Arimany; 11 others; Arts Quartet
Capriccio 5421—78 minutes
5422—77 minutes

Brothers Albert Franz (1821-83) and Karl (1825-1900) Doppler were born in Lemberg, a major city of the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria when it was part of the Austrian Empire. They became two of the most significant performers, conductors, and composers of their time, working in Budapest, Vienna, and Stuttgart, writing operas and ballets, helping found the Budapest Philharmonic and giving concerts on tour. Franz played in the Vienna Philharmonic from 1858 to 78 and Karl

directed the orchestra of the House of Wurttemberg's Royal Chapel from 1865 to 98.

The admirable playing and extensive documentation continue in these installments of a series that belongs in any collection dedicated to woodwind literature, Hungarian culture, or romanticism. For example, Volume 11 has over 30 minutes of Hungarian folk songs arranged for flute and piano by Karl decades before the pioneering work of Bela Bartok, Zoltan Kodaly, and Laszlo Lajtha. 2021 is the 200th anniversary of the older brother's birth, and with Volume 12 the set concludes. *Doppler Discoveries* from Farao is worth having too, and the review (July/Aug 2019) explains a bit more about the decades of dedication some musicians have devoted to resurrect their creations.

GORMAN

DOWLAND: *Guitar Pieces*
Michael Butten—First Hand 84—57 minutes

From the opening prelude one knows this will bring calm and beauty in a world that needs more of both.

With a rich tone and a light touch, adding delicate divisions to the melody lines, English guitarist Michael Butten invites us to the world of John Dowland's lute music, juxtaposing a variety of the composer's works, long and short, lively and melancholy, well-known and less-well-known,

Dowland's emblematic 'Lachrimae Pavan' has a decidedly somber interpretation. This was also produced by Dowland as a song, 'Flow My Tears,' with phrases that singers often deliver with a heightened energy; here they are kept in check, with Butten consistently delivering them in a slow, deliberate manner employing tasteful ornamentation. Also notable is Dowland's Fantasy in E, with a spritely flowing triple meter section at the end—Butten rises to these challenges with an effortless feel.

Overall, this is an excellent portrayal of Dowland's music. The performer once won the Julian Bream Prize, adjudicated by Bream, who was a major interpreter of Dowland's music. With music ranging from elegant fantasies to spirited marches, Butten makes this one-composer concert constantly interesting.

MCCUTCHEON

A primary function of art and thought is to liberate the individual from the tyranny of his culture.

—LIONEL TRILLING

DRUZHININ: *Viola Sonata;*
VAINBERG: *Sonata 3;*
VIEUXTEMPS: *Capriccio in C minor;*
BACEWICZ: *Polish Capriccio*
Krzysztof Komendarek-Tymendorf
Naxos 551432—51 minutes

This debut disc by a young Polish violist contains two major works, one Russian, one Russo-Polish. Fyodor Druzhinin is probably best known as successor to Vadim Borisovsky in the Beethoven Quartet (the dedicatees of most of the late Shostakovich quartets, including Quartet 13, written for Borisovsky specifically), but he is a composer in his own right and, on the evidence of this work, a very good one. The piece, in four movements, doesn't aim for grandeur like Shostakovich's own sonata a couple of decades later. Still, its four compact movements convey a lot of different impressions in a small space, encompassing effort and quiet and even the odd bit of humor.

Moisei Vainberg actually fled *to* the Soviet Union and made it through the war. But he had the misfortune to marry the daughter of Solomon Mikhoels; Mikhoels was executed with many other high-level Soviet officials in 1948, and Vainberg himself got caught up in the "Doctors' Plot" of 1953. Only Stalin's own death saved him from what seems to have been a pretty common fate at that time and place. (You can gauge the severity of his plight by the fact that Shostakovich seems to have intervened with Beria on his behalf.)

This is the third of his four solo viola sonatas (the first, the notes point out, was dedicated to Fyodor Druzhinin), and dates from 1982. It was dedicated to another Borisovsky student, Mikhail Nikolaiyevich Tolpyga. It's a big piece, in five movements, and there is much play with harmonics and other delicate devices of stringed instruments, but the general affect is more brutal than otherwise. The notes of tenderness are there, but sparely deployed.

The other two works on the program are much shorter and appear almost as afterthoughts. Henri Vieuxtemps's brief Capriccio is an homage to Paganini, a tiny cantabile with very little of the flashy virtuoso about it. Grazyna Bacewicz's, on the other hand, has *a great deal* of the flashy virtuoso about it, having been written as a display piece for violin and later transcribed for viola by Jerzy Kosmala. It's a fine conclusion here.

Performances are not absolutely note-perfect, but fine, and the sound is excellent. I look

forward to hearing more from Mr Komendarek-Tymendorf.

THOMSON

DVORAK: *Poetic Tone Pictures*
Elena Bashkirova, p
Avi 8553113—61 minutes

This Moscow-born pianist is a graduate of the Tchaikovsky Conservatory, and a student of her father Dmitri Bashkirov. In 1998, having migrated to Israel, she founded the Jerusalem International Chamber Music Festival and has become its artistic director. Most musicians will know her as the wife of Daniel Barenboim and the former wife of Gidon Kremer. She has recorded in ensembles, but rarely as soloist.

On the basis of these Dvorak interpretations, she is a sensitive pianist, has a supple technique, and makes a substantial contribution to a segment of the repertory that few have paid any attention to.

The *Poetic Tone Pictures* are sometimes called *Poetic Tone Poems* or *Poetic Moods* (the recording by Radoslav Kvapil). Kvapil manages to squeeze the *Humoresques* onto his disc, adding 23 minutes.

Bashkirova caresses an added seven minutes from these lovingly melodic inspirations. Her touch is lighter, though Kvapil certainly cannot be accused of less than full commitment to the interpretive tasks. If, in the end, I make room on my shelf for both, I regret that this newcomer could not be more competitive. Kvapil is a little more dynamic, Bashkirova more poetic.

BECKER

DVORAK: *Symphony 9;* see IFUKUBE
Te Deum; see Collections

DYSON: *Concerto Leggiero; The Open Window; Primrose Mount; Bach's Birthday; Untitled Piano Piece; 6 Lyrics; My Birthday; 12 Easy Pieces; Prelude & Ballet; Epigrams; 3 Wartime Epigrams; 4 Twilight Preludes*
Simon Callahan, Cliodna Shanahan, p
Somm 622 [2CD] 102 minutes

The set includes all of George Dyson's keyboard music. Most are premiere recordings. Many are what Prokofieff would have called "for domestic consumption". They're generally brief; several are for beginning students, with pleasant melodies, well harmonized and gratefully laid out for the keyboard. They cover about a 60-year span of Dyson's life, but since many date from the 1920s, you can hear the influence of Cyril Scott.

There are exceptions. *Bach's Birthday* (1929), written to honor the 50th anniversary of Bach specialist Harold Samuel, is a suite of four three-part fugues. Their subjects are nearly atonal in their free chromaticism. In *Epigrams*, 'Sonore' has whole-tone phrases and 'Con Fuoco' is definitely adult in both its content and technical demands. The *Four Twilight Preludes* are Ravelian in their grace and controlled whimsy.

The one lengthy piece, *Concerto Leggiero* (1949), is Dyson's two-piano arrangement of his piano concerto. I is a sectional affair, forming piquant vignettes. II has a continuous, elegant melody, its development skilled and logical. III is more athletic; its harmonies move the piece along to a convincing wrap-up. If conservative for its time, the music has beauties aplenty.

The playing in everything is clean, with coherent phrasing and especially firm rhythmic articulation. With the exception of the concerto, these works are best heard in small groups; charm needn't be laid on too thickly.

O'CONNOR

ELMAS: *Piano Concertos 1+2*
Tasmanian Symphony/ Howard Shelley
Hyperion 68319—74 minutes

Stephan Elmas (1862-1937) was born in Smyrna (Izmir), Turkey, of Armenian descent. He became a concert pianist in addition to writing several keyboard works and four piano concertos. In 1912 he moved to Geneva, Switzerland, where he fell in love with the armless painter Aimee Rapin. (She could wield the brush with her foot, and very ably too.) She tended to him through bouts of depression and loss of his hearing. They're now buried together in Geneva.

The two concertos here (1882, 1887) share common formal structures and influences—Chopin and Anton Rubinstein, with a dash of Grieg. In each, the first movement is extended, with elaborate—some will feel over-elaborate—passage work for the soloist. The orchestral support is routinely laid out and scored; the pianist has all the lines. The center movements are tender and intimate, in the Chopin tradition. The movement in Concerto 2 has an interlude suggesting a funeral march. The final movements are animated and inventive, in each case the keyboard writing having nice

touches of fancy. The music is listenable, but not especially urgent in inspiration.

Shelley interprets these works with assurance and sensitivity. His fingerwork is well articulated, with the dynamics consistently shaded so as to enhance the music. The Tasmanians play competently, though truth to tell, Elmas gives them little to do other than punctuation. The album is Volume 82 in Hyperion's extensive canvassing of the romantic piano concerto. It'll no doubt appeal to that large public with a boundless appetite for keyboard gymnastics of minimal expression.

O'CONNOR

FEINBERG: *Violin Sonata 1; Fantasia 1; Suite 1;*
WINTERBERG: *Sonata 1; Suite 1945*
Nina Pissareva Zymbalist, v; Christophe Sirodeau, p—Melisma 11—58 minutes

It is difficult to write about music so very nearly lost. The pianist has painstakingly tracked down the manuscripts and, in some cases, reconstructed them. What we hear is music that, one way or another, missed destruction almost purely by happenstance.

Samuil Feinberg first. His name at least will be familiar to many listeners, as a fine Soviet-era pianist, notable above all for his Bach; not one in a hundred (certainly not I) would have guessed that he was also a composer, or what sort of music he'd have written if he were one. The music here, all of it essentially pre-Soviet, is Bach-like only in its almost fanatical care for voice-leading; in everything else it is hyper-late-romantic, with an emphasis on late Wagner, Scriabin, and the lower end of the keyboard. The violin sonata, whose history Sirodeau lays out in loving detail, is the easiest piece here to get to know, not least because of the presence of the entrancing Nina Pissareva Zymbalist as violinist. It begins almost negligently, but before the first minute is over one is inveigled in a great tangle of harmonic and melodic skeins, from which it's difficult to get out again. The other movements (particularly the Largo (III), which—as Sirodeau takes repeated pains to remind us—really is magically beautiful) are all uncanny in their different ways. Even the finale, which purportedly wraps things up by repeating the Largo theme in a faster tempo, makes everything all the more confusing for this listener.

The Op. 5 Fantasia may take its bearings from *Das Rheingold,* as Sirodeau says, but it stays with them only briefly; it's a dark, unsettled piece without even later hints of Wagner to break us out. The Suite, Op. 11, meanwhile, is four tiny etudes dedicated to the great piano pedagogue Alexander Goldenweiser (really tiny; the longest is just over two minutes). The last is all of 12 bars long, but bars so embellished and filigreed that they last a lot longer than their 1:24 suggests. There is, in fact, more music by Feinberg, and Sirodeau seems to have mostly cornered the market on it for the moment; he co-recorded the complete piano sonatas with Nikolaos Samaltanos in 2003, though Marc-Andre Hamelin jumping in with the first six must have made things murkier for the buyer, and recorded the piano concerto with Leif Segerstam and the Helsinki Philharmonic in 1998. Interesting stuff for people of a late-romantic/mystico-Russian cast of mind.

Hans Winterberg is a much more obscure name; he had no fame as an executant and precious little as a composer. For me, after hearing this, he will be remembered as the first composer I have heard of who was actually in Theresienstadt (Terezin) when the camp was liberated. Every one I have heard of before this merely started at Theresienstadt and then got moved on to Auschwitz, where they were all murdered. But necessarily the camp was never "evacuated" wholesale, and therefore a few survived to the end of the war. Winterburg was one, and his Suite 1945, written over the course of four months in the camp, is the last, perhaps the only, relic of that time.

Like many of the pieces from Theresienstadt, it has a light, almost gay quality in its outer movements, but the central Intermezzo (which is in fact the bulk of the piece) is darker and more meaningful. The sonata is much earlier, from 1936, and doesn't seem to know quite how dark things were about to get.

Winterberg's story is that of innumerable Jews in Central Europe in the 40s. Protected for a time by marriage to a Catholic wife, he at length divorced her so that she wouldn't share his fate. On being liberated, he never sought to return to Prague, where he had lived pre-war, possibly because he feared the Soviets nearly as much as he had the Nazis—or possibly because he merely wanted to stay in Germany so as to recover the manuscripts his wife had promised to secure for him. He made his way to Munich and died in 1991, utterly unknown as a composer.

Many thanks to Christophe Sirodeau for bringing us this music, and documenting so meticulously the circumstances of its recovery.

THOMSON

FORSTER: *Cantata, Sonata, Concertos*
Cologne Concert Royal/ Karla Schröter
Musicaphon 56982—72 minutes

The purpose of the recording, according to Klara Schröter, is to present an overview of Georg Förster's orchestral music. Including works for oboe gives Schroter the opportunity to play the solo parts. The program opens with a festive concerto in D, which calls for oboes, strings, three trumpets, and timpani. There follow concertos in D and B-flat and a sonata in C minor for oboe, and an Organ Concerto in G. The central work is *Jauchzt, Ihr Frohen Christenscharen* for Michaelmas, and the program closes with a Concerto in D for horns, flutes, oboes, bassoons, and strings.

Förster (1693-1745) was known in his time as a melodist. This mostly comes out in the middle movements of his concertos and in the cantata. Fast movements seem repetitive and predictable but often include exciting passages for instruments. In the opening concerto, for example, scales and triads make up most of the melodic motion between tonic and dominant harmonies. The middle movement, though, has some lovely writing for solo violin and trumpet. The parts for horn in the cantata and final concerto are rather high and demanding. The playing is always excellent, particularly Schröter's. Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

FRANCAIX: *Trio; Duos;*
POULENC: *Cello Sonata; Flute Sonata*
Sarah Rumer, fl; Joel Marosi, vc; Ulrich Koella, p
Prospero 6—74 minutes

This co-production with the French-speaking cultural station (Space 2) of Swiss Radio in Lausanne is entirely first class, including the robust tri-fold case and 24-page booklet printed on thick paper with text by musicologist Yael Heche. It's a pity that such treatment is given to composers and music already well known.

The works by Jean Françaix are the 1951 *Nocturne* and 1953 *Lullaby* for cello and piano, his 1953 *Diversion* for flute and piano, and 1995 Trio. Poulenc's Cello Sonata was completed in 1948, and the Flute Sonata is from 1957. Françaix's Trio is bubbly, tonal, for the most part energetic, and calls for a switch to piccolo at the end. The slow movement opens with a duet between the flute and cello, the piano only entering after more than a minute of intimate interplay. Others have recorded it on Thorofon (May/June 2002: 186) and Camerata (not reviewed). There are other recordings of the *Diversion* for flute and piano on Hungaroton (Nov/Dec 2005: 243), with string sextet (ARS, not reviewed), and with string orchestra (Nimbus, Nov/Dec 2016, under Damase). The cello pieces are arranged from orchestral works also available on Orfeo (not reviewed) and Hyperion (July/Aug 2005).

There are so many recordings of the Poulenc sonatas it is enough to add that here are two more excellent renditions. Françaix might have had more talent and technique, but Poulenc undoubtedly wrote music that was more moving and memorable. The playing, packaging, and production are consistently satisfying; enough to overcome and dismiss any concerns one might have had.

Since 2004 Sarah Rumer has been a principal flutist of the Swiss Romande in Geneva and since 2014 a Sankyo flutes artist. Joel Marosi has been principal cellist of the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra since 2005, was a founding member of the Zurich Piano Trio, and joined the Swiss Piano Trio in 2018. Ulrich Koella is a professor of piano chamber music and collaborative piano at the Zurich University of the Arts.

GORMAN

FURSTENTHAL: *Horn, Cello, Oboe, & Viola Sonatas; Quartet*
Rossetti Ensemble—Toccata 577—76 minutes

Robert Fürstenthal (1920-2016) once said, "When I compose, I am back in Vienna", his birthplace. Self-taught by listening to his favorite composers (his favorite was Hugo Wolf), it was with his wife's encouragement that he seriously returned to composing about 1975. The gait, tonality, chordal progressions, long-lined lyricism, and use of parallel sixths and hemiolas are reminiscent of Brahms. The difference is that Fürstenthal's music lacks contrapuntal depth. His lyrical lines are absolutely lovely, but they're accompanied mostly by chords that are extended horizontally. The lines never wrap around one another. This is most evident in his String Quartet in B minor where he uses one and occasionally two lines of melody, but the rest is basically chordal. Since I had just reviewed two Beethoven quartets for this issue, Fürstenthal sounded mighty thin.

The album opens with his Horn Sonata in D minor, a 13-minute work in the traditional

four movements that went down pleasantly as my introduction to the composer. It is gloriously played by Nicholas Korth, co-principal horn of the BBC Symphony since 2000. So smooth and lyrical is he that I almost heard the portamento he would have used if the instrument were capable of it. Pity that John Lenehan's piano isn't recorded as richly as the horn; instead, it sounds thin and a step removed.

In the four-movement 18-minute Cello Sonata in C-sharp minor soloist Timothy Lowe plays with the same kind of gorgeous tone and line as horn player Korth. The work has the same immediate loveliness as the Horn Sonata, except I began to notice the emptiness of Fürstenthal's writing for the piano's left hand—basically just chordal movement. This was recorded in a different place, and Lenehan's piano sounds a bit fuller.

In the 15-minute Oboe Sonata in E-flat minor Malcolm Messiter plays with a very piercing nasal sound with minimal expression. Here and in the 13-minute Viola Sonata in F-sharp minor (two movements) with soloist Sarah-June Bradley, I wondered if both these instruments were recorded too close-up, making even soft passages sound too forward. This is especially true of the viola, which is played mostly in its higher register; it sounds more like a forced violin. In both sonatas Lenehan's piano is recorded with fuller sound.

This is Volume 3 (all world-premiere recordings) of Toccata's survey of Fürstenthal. Earlier volumes contain eight more sonatas and a couple of trios, also played by members of the London-based Rossetti Ensemble, a collection of long-standing musical friends formed in 2018. I hope this is the last Furstenthal album I have to review; I think I've already heard all that he has to offer.

FRENCH

GHEDINI: *Viola Concerto;* see Collections

GINASTERA: *Violin Concerto;*
BERNSTEIN: *Serenade;*
MOUSSA: *Concerto*
Andrew Wan; Montreal Symphony/ Kent Nagano
Analekta 8920—78 minutes

Andrew Wan has been concertmaster of the Montreal Symphony since 2008, hired by Kent Nagano, who became music director in 2006. (He resigned effective 2020, but his final concert for last June was "postponed" because of the pandemic.) I usually find that even the most renowned concertmasters are not best as soloists, but Wan is a clear exception, based on the performances here.

The score for Ginastera's Violin Concerto (written for the opening of Lincoln Center in 1963 but premiered a few weeks late on October 3 because the composer didn't finish it on time) comes with a veritable instruction book: a dry analysis of its three movements. I is divided into variations for chords, thirds, other intervals, arpeggios, harmonics, and quartertones; II is an Adagio for 22 soloists; and III is a perpetual-motion scherzo "played at a flying pace, with mysterious, scarcely audible whisper" and microstructures. There follow 12 directions discussing a microtonal scale, unusual notations, tone clusters, and the battery of instruments assigned to five percussionists. Sounds forbidding for the first-time hearer? As critic Susan Brodie told me long ago about such challenges, "Just listen, and write about what you hear."

What I heard is highly fascinating. The concerto indeed does open, as promised, with a cadenza, "cast in a rhapsodic virtuosic style, that serves to introduce the basic musical materials for the entire concerto". I listened to it twice before continuing; Analekta is very helpful by adding tracks for each of the variations (called studies), even though they're played without breaks. The basic musical materials easily became familiar. The Adagio for 22 instruments (orchestra soloists) is melancholy and delicate, with textures similar to Alban Berg's Violin Concerto. The engineering of both soloist and orchestra is so exquisitely balanced and full-ranged that I felt like I was hearing everything without ever reaching for the remote's volume control (that's what happens when engineers "set it and forget it", leaving all in the hands of the soloist and conductor). The percussion in III is truly "whisper soft", like tropical forest whispers; add a *ppp* flute, other woodwinds, and gradually the rest of the orchestra leading to a piercing cadenza. The results: Ginastera's notes prepare the listener for a head trip, but the music itself became very emotional for me. As Virgil Thomson once said, "You either respond to music emotionally, or you don't respond at all." This 31-minute performance is 3 minutes slower than the estimated timing marked in the score.

Leonard Bernstein's Serenade for solo violin, strings, harp, and percussion is the one familiar work here. Right from the start, Wan's solo tone is sweet, mellow, and nuanced with lovely rubato; he conveys a confidence I quick-

ly took for granted. Nagano's strings are the perfect match for Wan's style, including the waltz gait that develops in I. In II Wan and Nagano again are hand-in-glove with an almost muted gorgeous tone and seamless flow. IV is tenderest of all, fitting for the movement Bernstein says was inspired by "statements in praise of love". In V Nagano lyrically sustains the long phrases. I leave III (Presto) till last; the artists play it rhythmically and fleetingly but not with the bat-out-of-hell uproar of some others. III most clearly defines the artists' approach to this work, one that subjects all the stylistic cues to a warm lyricism. For a more rambunctious performance that grows with excitement, I recommend Hilary Hahn, David Zinman, and the Baltimore Symphony on Sony. Both performances take 31 minutes, so the difference is not speed but style.

Wan and Nagano played the world premiere of Samy Moussa's Violin Concerto on November 28, 2019, in Montreal (where the composer was born in 1984). He subtitles his Violin Concerto *Adrano*, the fire god who lives under Mt Etna. Why? The three sections of its first 13 minutes are played without a break, which makes sense, since, like the Ginastera, all the materials are taken from the opening ascending "scale". (Unlike the Ginastera, it is a tonal work.) Wan again exhibits total security and confidence as he ascends without a quaver to the highest B-flat (the highest note?) attainable on a violin. Modulations, evolving from the scale in both ascending and descending direction, develop in intensity while remaining at the slow tempo. The midsection is a cadenza played at a whisper, joined initially by a stratospheric *ppp* flute. After about 6 minutes the cadenza begins to feel like mere noodling before the third section inserts new energy and full voice with a chugging rhythm in the orchestra, leading to an even bigger cadenza. Both soloist and orchestra are absolutely elegant, but in the end I was left wondering what it was all about—seemed like too much music for such minimal content.

But wait! Moussa's Concerto isn't over. After the work's only full cadential stop, there is a two-minute 'Epilogue,' which I listened to twice and still can't figure out what it has to do with the rest of the work.

FRENCH

Education must free the student from the tyranny of the present.

—CICERO

GLAGOLEV: *Lay Aside All Earthly Cares: 32 Choral Works*
Cappella Romana/ Vladimir Morosa
Cappella Romana 401—75 minutes

The movement to adopt the English language for the Russian Orthodox Church in America goes back to the 1950s. An important figure in this change, particularly involving music, was Father Sergei Glagolev, who began an Orthodox mission in Southern California that used English for worship. In addition to his training for the priesthood Fr Sergei also studied music, completing a BS in Music Education. So, when something was needed to be sung in English, he found it easier to compose or arrange a piece than to hunt elsewhere, since very little was available. The compositions here are from his Selected Orthodox Sacred Choral Works, Volume I, published in 2002. These recordings were made in 2004.

The music itself is lovely, even mesmerizing. Most of it is SATB, and there is no polyphony. Very few sections feel metrical, which is to say the rhythm is the rhythm of the text, and it is almost entirely modal. (I did hear a couple of V-I relationships, but they were rare!). In simpler pieces the music seems unrelentingly triadic, but in larger works seventh chords are quite prominent—even dominant sevenths, but they don't resolve to a tonic!

The Cappella Romana is a small professional group (3, 3, 3, 4) with fine tone, blend, and intonation. This music isn't hard notewise, but the shading and dynamic control—so important to making this music effective—show the qualities of this group and also the skill of conductor Vladimir Morosa.

A fine job, then, warmly recommended to anyone interested in Orthodox music in English. Texts are included, along with lots and lots of notes!

ALTHOUSE

GLASS: *Opening; Metamorphosis; Modern Love Waltz; Mad Rush; Distant Figure—Passacaglia*
Jenny Lin—Steinway 30127—62 minutes

I know and love Philip Glass's music—met him in 1984, wrote a thesis on *Einstein on the Beach* in 1993, and have been impressed that he always remembers who I am when I've seen him over the years. I've always felt that his music is extremely expressive, even when it is at its most severely minimal: that it can't sim-

ply be rendered by playing the notes, but by adding one's own feeling and personality.

That's what pianist Jenny Lin does here. *Opening* has a sense of yearning that I've never heard before. The reading of *Modern Love Waltz* is a little less free but does manage to give the impression of a certain sly sense of humor. She also gives us the first (I believe) recorded performance of the recent *Distant Figure—Passacaglia*, pairing it with the well-known *Mad Rush*. The two share a number of affinities, but the later work reminds me of recent Glass works in its nostalgic tone (for instance, *The Hours*). In both these works (as well as *Metamorphosis*, also included here), Lin shows a deep understanding and love for Glass's music as well as the willingness to do new things with it.

HASKINS

GLASS: *Etudes;* see SCHUBERT

GLUCK: *Opera Gala*

Jessye Norman, Pilar Lorengar, Elisabeth Söderström, Ileana Cotrubas, s; Nicolai Gedda, t; Franco Bonisolli, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, b/ Serge Baudo, Lamberto Gardelli, Ferdinand Leitner

Orfeo 2001 [2CD] 149 minutes

Orfeo has assembled an entertaining compilation of scenes from the operas of Gluck, all drawn from complete sets, recorded between 1964 and 1990. Not all the performances are in strict accordance with the latest scholarship on classical style. But what may be lacking in "authenticity" is more than compensated by the presence of major vocal personalities—an asset Gluck himself would have prized.

In scenes from *Alceste*, Jessye Norman is predictably forceful in 'Divinités du Styx,' but also dazzling in the ineffably beautiful simplicity of the passage 'O Dieux! Soutenez mon courage!'; it's part of an ensemble where she is joined by the princely elegance of tenor Nicolai Gedda. The versatile Pilar Lorengar shines in excerpts from *Iphigenie en Tauride*, where her colleagues are Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Franco Bonisolli. Bonisolli is not a singer one would associate with Gluck, but he delivers a persuasive if no-nonsense reading of the familiar 'O del mio dolce ardor' from *Paride ed Elena* and is joined in other excerpts by the shimmering soprano of Ileana Cotrubas as Elena. Fischer-Dieskau brings his smooth tone and interpretive depth to the title role of *Orfeo ed Euridice*. For some reason, though, either singer or conductor (Ferdinand Leitner) decided to pitch his music a half tone lower than the standard published keys. So in the centerpiece aria 'Che faro senza Euridice' and elsewhere he seems a bit muted. His Euridice in the 1964 recording is Elisabeth Söderström, who sings an impassioned 'Che fiero momento.'

Among the more unusual selections is the scintillating Overture to *Les Pelerins de la Mecque* (Pilgrims to Mecca), a comic opera that had a direct influence on Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*. There are also two numbers from *Le Cinesi*, including Thomas Moser's engaging rendition of the lengthy tenor aria 'Son lungi e non mi brami.'

The logistics of the packaging are excellent. Though no texts are included, there are detailed track listings and a concise but informative essay by Gerhard Persché about the six operas.

ALTMAN

GOMPPER: *Cello Concerto; Double Bass Concerto; Moonburst*

Timothy Gill, vc; Volkan Orbon, db; Royal Philharmonic/ Emmanuel Siffert

Naxos 559855—60 minutes

David Gompper (b. 1954) has been professor of composition at the University of Iowa since 1991. He is also a pianist and has played on and composed for several Albany releases, as well as conducting. In other words, he is an expert in musical expression and demonstrates it here without personally raising a finger or a baton. His music is delicate and demanding by turns, not particularly tonal but not painful to hear.

Both concertos are substantial. The Cello Concerto is scored for strings and percussion, giving it an easy-listening glow; and the Double-bass Concerto employs a fuller orchestra but is still light in texture, giving the soloist a chance to be happy on his own. The program ends in an 11-minute *Moonburst* for orchestra alone, a follow-up to an unrecorded *Sunburst.*

Cellist Gill tells us he has led the cello sections in all the London orchestras. He currently teaches at the Guildhall School and has played two albums for the Guild label. Bassist Orbon has won a number of prizes, in the Concert Artists Guild competition here in New York, co-first place winner of the International Society of Bassists Competition, and a Grand Prize at the American String Teachers Association Solo Competition. Whew!

The soloists are excellently balanced with

the orchestra, which is itself beautiful and polished in sound, as one might expect from this well-known group, here conducted with care and clarity by Siffert, who is principal conductor of the San Juan Symphony in Argentina. This is a recording to be seriously considered.

D MOORE

GRAUN: *Cantatas; Viola da Gamba Concerto*
Amanda Forsythe, s; Opera Prima Orchestra/ Cristiano Contadin—CPO 555284—78 minutes

As the recordings of Johann Gottlieb Graun's music have accrued, slowly but surely listeners have become aware of this great composer's genius. Graun (1702-71) was a prolific composer, having written music in nearly every conceivable genre. His career at the court of Frederick the Great meant his music would have had more exposure than JS Bach's.

The program includes two Italian cantatas and a concerto for viola da gamba. *O Dio, Fileno*, and *Gia la Sera* are settings of texts by Metastasio. They both consist of an alternation of recitative and da capo arias. The arias have a ritornello form, which brings the voice and gamba into competition with one another. Amanda Forsythe has a gorgeous voice, which breathes life into Metastasio's words with Graun's music, filled with dramatic leaps and florid melismas. The final aria of *O Dio, Fileno* is particularly striking for its rapid scales and aggressive rhythms.

The virtuosic gamba parts and concerto might have been inspired by Graun's colleague Ludwig Christian Hesse. His writing requires Contadin to execute wild scale-like passages and technically demanding harmonies and double trills. It is an excellent recording. Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

GRAUPNER: *Passion Cantata 4; chorales*
Ex Tempore; Mannheim Court Orchestra/ Florian Heyerick—CPO 555 348—57 minutes

The best-known fact about Christoph Graupner (1683-1760) is that he was the second choice after Telemann to succeed Johann Kuhnau in 1723 as Thomaskantor in Leipzig. In the end, the Leipzig fathers had to settle for their third choice, JS Bach. Graupner was a strong candidate with Leipzig connections: he was an alumnus of the St Thomas School, where he had studied music under Kuhnau. He began the study of law at Leipzig University, but that was cut short by a Swedish military invasion in 1706. He migrated to Hamburg to take a position as harpsichordist with the Hamburg Opera. It was there that he was spotted by Landgrave Ernst Ludwig of Hesse-Darmstadt who hired him in 1709 as Vice-Kapellmeister for his court. On the death of Kapellmeister WC Briegel in 1712, Graupner was promoted to the position he would occupy for the remainder of his life. His early years at Darmstadt were occupied primarily with the court opera, but financial reversals led to the dissolution of the company in 1719. By 1723 the post of Thomaskantor in Leipzig was looking very attractive, but Ernst Ludwig refused to accept Graupner's resignation and offered him a hefty pay raise to remain in Darmstadt. The greater part of Graupner's time there was devoted to instrumental music (including 113 symphonies) and music for the court chapel. We may be in awe of JS Bach's 200-plus church cantatas, but Graupner wrote some 1,418, mostly to librettos by his brother-in-law Johann Conrad Lichtenberg (1689-1751), the highest-ranking cleric in Hesse. He produced 25 volumes of cantata texts containing 1,659 librettos.

It was the custom in Darmstadt to present a cycle of cantatas for the Sundays and holy days in Lent. The cantata here is the fifth of a cycle of ten written in 1741. This is the fourth and final volume of a recording of the complete cycle. Each cantata contemplates a different aspect of the Passion of Christ. This one considers the irony of the innocent and righteous Jesus subjected to the judgement of the deceitful and wicked. The cantata opens with a choral setting of a passage from the prophet Micah. There are two duets—one for tenor and bass, one for soprano and alto—flanked by accompanied recitatives. A figural chorale setting concludes the cantata. This is a typical format for Lichtenberg.

Graupner was a consummate professional, but his musical personality was quite different from Bach's. His church cantatas may be in the traditional form, but they incline to the galant style in contrast with Bach's contrapuntal intensity and ingenuity. In one of the booklet essays, Ursula Kramer points out that Graupner's cantatas are notable for imaginative effects of instrumentation and instrumental technique. Music for Lent will not have flashy instrumental colors, but even here Graupner can arrest our attention. A notable example is the first of the two duets where a solo violin and oboe d'amore are accompanied by pizzicato strings. The rest of the recording consists of 13 selected figural chorales from Passion

cantatas written from 1713 to 1751. They display the rich variety of Graupner's treatment.

Florian Heyerick is active mainly in Flanders, where he lectures at the conservatory in Ghent. He founded the vocal ensemble Ex Tempore in 1989. For this recording they consist of a double quartet of four soloists and four ripienists. He is also artistic director of the Mannheim Court Orchestra, a period instrument ensemble founded in 2007 to mark the 400th anniversary of the city of Mannheim, home of the orchestra's historic namesake. There is one player to a part on this recording. The character of these performances is intimate and refined, perhaps as appropriate for the Darmstadt court chapel, which was considerably smaller than the city churches of Leipzig.

The ARG index lists 29 other recordings of music by Graupner, more of them instrumental than vocal. This is a respectable number for a lesser-known composer, but nothing compared with the extent of his output. Over the years I have reviewed four other recordings of his church music: two of Advent and Christmas cantatas directed by Genevieve Soly (Analekta 9115; N/D 2005) and Hermann Max (CPO 777 572; N/D 2011), one of Lent and Passion cantatas under Hans Michael Beuerle (Carus 83.457; J/A 2012), and the cycle of cantatas based on the Seven Last Words directed by Soly (Analekta 9122; S/O 2012).

GATENS

GREGSON: *Piano Pieces*

Murray McLachlan, Edward Gregson

Naxos 574222—72 minutes

Edward Gregson studied with Alan Bush at the Royal Academy of Music. We've only reviewed recordings of orchestral music; in a review of a Chandos release (Jan/Feb 2015), Mr Estep remarks that "this music tends to be weighty and the influences of Berg, Shostakovich, Hindemith, and Mahler are apparent". That does not really apply to these piano works, which suggest for the most part a supple and elegant Neoclassical outlook. There are exceptions, of course—the more dissonant *Six Little Pieces* (1982) make a very different impression from most of the works here, but I would not describe them as Bergian; *Friday a.m.* (1981) clearly refers to the Adagietto from Mahler's Fifth Symphony.

Like Vincent Persichetti, another excellent Neoclassical composer for piano, Gregson has composed for both virtuosos and students. The opening work, *An Album for my Friends* (2011), is a charming suite of miniatures with titles coming from the Bach English and French Suites. 'Adam's Allemande' is typical, beginning with the characteristic upbeat of the dance and then repeating the gesture with humorous obsession, closing finally on a bit combining scales from two different keys. The first of the three etudes (2020) and the outstanding Piano Sonata in One Movement (1983) require a pianist of virtuoso caliber. Gregson himself performs the expressive and beautiful 'Song for Sue' (1966), a miniature composed for his wife.

HASKINS

GUARNIERI: *Choros for Flute; for Bassoon; for Violin; Seresta*

Olga Kopylova, p; Alexandre Silverio, bn; Claudia Nascimento, fl; Davi Graton, v; Sao Paulo Symphony/ Isaac Karabtchevsky

Naxos 574197—58 minutes

This is the beginning of a series devoted to a significant modern composer who gets little play in the US. As both a teacher and composer, Camargo Guarnieri is important for Brazilian culture; though not as well known as Villa-Lobos, his effect as a teacher is singular. His collaboration with the poet and musicologist Mario de Andrade, his mentor in the 1920s, gave rise to a Brazilian Nationalist School and the use of Brazilian folklore in classical music—not unlike Bartok's slightly earlier and far better known contribution to Hungarian music. For Guarnieri (unlike the more renowned Villa-Lobos), "Choro" was a replacement for "Concerto". The three Choros and the Seresta for Piano and Orchestra reveal his unique approach to the concerto form.

All of these pieces have an understated emotionality that is characteristic of much Brazilian music. The orchestrations are lucid, compact, and crystalline. The excellent soloists are constantly "on" and very busy, as in a neo-baroque concerto, but are given few cadenzas or other opportunities for display.

The *Seresta* from 1965 behaves exactly the same way as the Choros works, with straightahead musicality and little time for showy effects; it has tart, rhythmically charged first and last movements and a slow movement full of melancholy lines and a beautiful fadeout for the violin. The piano zips and weaves like an obligatto or a soloist in a classical concerto.

The austere Choro for bassoon and chamber orchestra, has a harpsichord part that gives

the piece a neo-baroque feeling. The 1972 flute Choro in one movement is perhaps the most virtuosic, with all manner of leaping, swaying flute lines, played with freedom and panache by Claudia Nascimento. Guarnieri's use of percussion is typically wispy and underplayed, just enough to give a semblance of vernacular sound.

The earliest piece is the Choro for Violin and Orchestra. It has the most generous sense of melody and also the most soulful folklore feel, especially in the scampering finale. For the most part, Davi Graton's violin playing is exquisitely tender, especially in the whispered 'Calmo' slow movement. In the finale he lets loose and sounds more like a fiddler than a violinist, which is perfect for this infectious Brazilian romp. Here the terrific Sao Paulo Symphony under Isaac Karabtchevsky (who has recorded all the Villa-Lobos symphonies) gets to show its full colors, though again the composer pulls back on emotion as much as he projects it—a characteristic of Brazilian jazz as much as classical. This well-wrought music, a balance between the heart and the head, is well worth investigating. I look forward to the next volume.

SULLIVAN

HANDEL: *Apollo & Dafne*
Boyd Neel & St Cecilia Orchestras/ Thurston Dart, Geraint Jones—Cameo 9127—69:28

This release contains recordings of BBC broadcasts made at his home by the audiophile Richard Itter and now preserved in the Itter Broadcast Collection. Unfortunately, the audio quality of these recordings from the late 1950s is not as good as studio recordings of the same period. This includes two selections from a 1957 broadcast: Osian Ellis's sensitive performance of Handel's Harp Concerto (especially his cadenza to the first movement) and the Concerto in B-flat, Op.3:1, both with Thurston Dart's imaginative continuo accompaniments. Dart's studio recording with Ellis of his edition of the Harp Concerto with an added lute part for Desmond Dupré has better audio quality (Decca 4824749, July/Aug 2018).

The same audio problems plague the interpretation of Handel's *Apollo e Dafne*. Thomas Hemsley (baritone) and Arda Mandkian (soprano) are effective soloists, though their voices are heavier than the ones on most recent recordings of this work (see ARG index). Especially troubling is the poor balance between the singers and the instrumentalists, notably in Apollo's aria, 'Come rosa in su la spina,' with solo cello. The same can be said of the excerpt from Handel's *Sosarme* from 1955 with Margaret Ritchie (soprano) and Alfred Deller (countertenor), but Dart's improvisations are again interesting.

BREWER

HANDEL: *Arias*
Sophie Junker, s; Concert de L'Hostel Dieu/ Franck-Emmanuel Comte—Aparte 233—67:44

The title of this release, "La Francesina" (the little French woman), is the nickname for Elisabeth Duparc (d.1778), a singer of French origin, trained in Italy, who was brought to England to sing in the "Opera of the Nobility", formed by Handel's rivals. When that group folded, she performed in operas and oratorios by Handel from 1739 until 1749, when a new young soprano, Giulia Frasi, came to the composer's attention. This judicious selection from Handel's lyrical and dramatic works supplies examples of the range of Duparc's repertoire, from Michel in *Saul* to the title character in *Semele*.

Sophie Junker studied in her native Belgium and at the Guildhall in London. Most of her earlier recordings have been smaller dramatic roles or soloist in larger choral works (Bach cantatas, Jan/Feb 2013; oratorios by Charpentier, Jan/Feb 2015). This is her first solo recording. The collection includes soprano arias from both Italian operas (*Faramondo*, *Serse*, both 1738, and *Deidamia*, 1741) and oratorios (*Saul*, 1739; *Ode to St Cecilia's Day*, 1739; *Semele* and *Joseph and his Brethren*, both 1744; and *Hercules*, 1745).

Junker responds most affectively and effectively to the dramatic and musical demands of Handel's lyrical writing, from the poignant invocation to music with solo cello from the *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*, 'What passion cannot music raise and quell', to the passionate outbursts of 'Va, perfido!' from *Deidamia*. Particularity impressive and imaginative are her cadenzas. She is sensitively supported by the musicians of Le Concert de L'Hostel Dieu, who also supply three short orchestral interludes. Complete texts and translations.

BREWER

HANDEL: *Choruses (24)*
The Sixteen/ Harry Christophers
Coro 16180—81 minutes

Over the years, Harry Christophers and The Sixteen have recorded nearly all of Handel's

major English vocal works. The present recording is a compilation of 24 choruses from eight recordings dating from 1990 to 2018. They include six oratorios, the ode *Alexander's Feast*, and the dramatic serenata *Acis and Galatea*.

Handel was an undisputed master of choral writing, but it is for individual listeners to decide whether they find this sort of compilation attractive. I am more inclined to favor recordings of complete works. Handel's choruses are often the culmination of a dramatic or rhetorical scene built up over the course of the preceding solo movements. When wrenched from their context, the choruses lose that significance, and a recording that contains only choruses will lack the variety of musical texture intended by the composer.

An inexplicable instance of programming here is the separation of the final choruses from *Messiah*. 'Worthy Is the Lamb' ends on a dominant chord that is resolved by the D-major fugue subject of the concluding 'Amen.' Clearly they ought to be performed in succession, but here they are tracks 6 and 24. There are a couple of instances here of choruses that are not stand-alone movements, but call for a tonal and harmonic continuation.

As we expect from Christophers and The Sixteen, the performances are magnificent and remarkably consistent over a span of 28 years.

GATENS

HANDEL: *Messiah*

Julia Doyle, Tim Mead, Thomas Hobbs, Roderick Williams; RIAS Chamber Choir; Berlin Academy for Early Music/ Justin Doyle

Pentatone 5186 853 [2CD] 135 minutes

There is no such thing as a perfect recording of *Messiah*. I doubt that any two critics could agree on what that would be like. Most period-instrument recordings simply annoy me. One of the few that does not is the 1988 recording by Trevor Pinnock and the English Concert (DG). I like his dignified pacing and the refinement of the playing and singing. Even so, there are things that could have been better, and I have spoken with colleagues who don't much care for that recording. The trouble is that so many conductors, when faced with such a familiar and often-recorded work, seem to feel obliged to leave their individual mark so as to stand out from the crowd. This may be unfair to many interpreters, but I do not think it my imagination that many eccentricities are foisted on this masterwork that would not be if it were less well-known. Here again, I like Pinnock because he plays it down the middle.

The purpose of this preamble is to give some context to my judgement that the present recording contains much to recommend it. The singers and players are first rate. Justin Doyle presides over some remarkably crisp and clean playing and singing. He favors brisk tempos, sometimes faster than I would like, but rarely to the point of eccentricity. Of course, his singers and players are undaunted by such tempos. 'For Unto Us a Child Is Born,' for example, is taken very quickly, but it comes across as buoyant and jovial, not driven.

The four solo singers leave nothing to be desired in terms of vocal technique and poise. I was quite taken with the mysterious quality bass Roderick Williams imparts to 'For Behold.' Without wishing to slight the others, I was especially impressed with countertenor Tim Mead. The male alto voice is an acquired taste, but Mead's tone is solid and commanding and unlikely to sound exotic to listeners more accustomed to contraltos. All four soloists freely ornament their lines, especially on repeats. Not all of the ornamentation is equally effective or convincing. Sometimes I think they just enjoy singing notes that are not on the page. For me the worst instance is the *da capo* of 'The Trumpet Shall Sound,' where Williams's elaborations sound contrived and too busy.

The recorded sound is remarkably clear. In my reviews I often complain that the solo voices are overbalanced. Here the opposite is the case; the soloists sound artificially prominent. There has to be a happy medium. The choir of 34 voices has good presence but sounds distant compared with the soloists and wrapped in an acoustical cloud.

Instead of conventional program notes, the booklet contains a highly amusing imaginary conversation between Handel and his librettist Charles Jennens written by Roman Hinke. He exhibits the cantankerous personalities of both gentlemen, and manages to get in a good deal of historical information along the way. Deliberately anachronistic turns of phrase liven the prose, and the subject matter is not limited to the lifetimes of the two speakers. For example, Handel is permitted to deplore the gigantism of the Victorian Handel Festivals at the Crystal Palace, where *Messiah* would be presented by thousands of singers and players.

This may not be the *Messiah* recording all the world has been waiting for, but one could do a whole lot worse.

GATENS

HANDEL: *Semele*

Louise Alder (Semele), Hugo Hymas (Jupiter), Lucile Richardot (Juno & Ino), Carlo Vistoli (Athamas), Emily Owen (Iris), Gianlucca Buratto (Cadmus & Somnus); Monteverdi Choir, English Baroque Soloists/ John Eliot Gardiner

SDG 733 [3CD] 156 minutes

This is Gardiner's second recording of *Semele*. The first was in 1981 and was reviewed by John Barker with John Nelson's DG recording in November/December 1993. The earlier Gardiner recording had an all-English cast; this one has two Italians in the cast, and one (the bass) is impossible to understand. He sounds nasal and muffled. Sam Ramey (Nelson) is way ahead of him in voice and characterization. The countertenor here also doesn't quite measure up; at least twice he is out of his range and sounds it. The person who sings Juno and Ino is French, and I can't understand what she is singing without looking at the texts. She does roll her Rs and sound plenty angry sometimes—makes Juno a bit of a wicked witch.

It doesn't help that in all these instances the tempos seem too fast. True, that is not literally so. John Nelson's tempos are often just as fast. But Nelson is *expressive*, and Gardiner is not. Nelson's English Chamber Orchestra sounds very beautiful compared to these period instruments—and a large part of it is expressive dynamics. The sound of Gardiner's period strings can be tinny (I cringe in the final sinfonia), but usually it isn't objectionable. They just don't seem expressive. Sorry to keep coming back to one word, but I think "not expressive enough" sums up what I thought about this recording (and a friend who listened with me—who really loves *Semele*). Nelson's chorus also sounds better. The chorus plays a huge part in this. It was called, after all, an oratorio rather than an opera—though it has been staged.

I have heard two actual performances of *Semele*: Nelson at Carnegie Hall (same basic cast as his recording) and Harry Bicket and his English Concert in Ann Arbor in the spring of 2019. Add in the recordings, and I think I know the piece quite well and like it almost as much as John Barker did. By the way, Gardiner still does not give us as much as Nelson did. Act I is about 39 minutes here; Nelson is 62—and actual times in each piece are similar. The cut music in Act I includes the essential 'Morning Lark' aria where we get to know Semele. 'Endless Pleasure, Endless Love' is not sung by Semele, as it usually is. The plot summary here assigns it to Semele, but the notes say that the original Congreve libretto did not. But Handel did, so why doesn't Gardiner? It fits Semele's character to gloat like that.

Louise Alder is a wonderful Semele—that is, the voice is beautiful, the singing high-class. Kathleen Battle was more "into" the character in the Nelson recording—again, more expression. Maybe this singer just doesn't have the ego and vanity to sound totally convincing in 'Myself I do Adore'. The countertenor (Athemas) is generally OK; he essentially disappears after Act 1, but he sings a lot there.

I really like the voice and expression of the Jupiter here; but he has trouble with the word "into", which occurs often in his famous aria, 'Where'ere You Walk'. It's as if to pronounce the vowel he has to twist his mouth, which distorts the sound. He does finally get it right the last time he sings it. In general he sounds very warm for a tenor; he reminds me of Martyn Hill.

By the way, we are told on the sleeve that this was "recorded in front of a live audience". Well, I don't have any recordings made in front of a dead audience. And the occasional titters from the London audience are not edifying. We are also told that this group performed it in "iconic venues" all over Europe. The Semele singer is called a "passionate recitalist". How hard it is today for writers to avoid dumb clichés!

VROON

HARBISON: *Viola Concerto; Double Concerto; Bass Concerto*

Edwin Barker, cb; Julie Ruskin, v; Marcus Thompson, va; Emily Ruskin, vc; Boston Modern Orchestra Project/ Gil Rose

BMOP 1074—64 minutes

The Viola Concerto (1988) with its writing in fifths and neoclassical structures is indebted to Hindemith. The Double Concerto (2009), for violin and cello, owes more to Mahler's 7th in outline and niceties of orchestration. The Bass Concerto (2005) uses "a Leipzig Bach tuning in fifths, rather than fourths" producing unique sonorities and performing techniques. There is some jazz, and a neobaroque passacaglia ends in a hoedown. The result is a valuable contribution to the instrument's repertoire and is an entertaining diversion.

Notes are unusually flowery for this label. Performances are expert.

GIMBEL

HAUG: *Guitar Concertino;*
CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO: *Guitar Quintet*
Marisa Minder, g—Naxos 551426—51 minutes

Swiss guitarist Marisa Minder, who has spent much of her career bringing lesser-known music for classical guitar to the concert stage, does much the same thing here. She includes compositions of her fellow countryman, Hans Haug (1900-67). Haug composed operas, oratorios, symphonic works, concertos, and music for film as well as string quartets, chamber works, and vocal music. His interest in composing for the guitar led him to study it, because to write competently for it one really must have some experience playing it.

Haug's Concertino is reminiscent of the neo-romantic concertos of Ponce and Castelnuovo-Tedesco. It won a composition prize in Siena when it was composed in 1950, and as part of the prize it was to have been performed soon thereafter by Andres Segovia and then published by Schott, a leading publisher of guitar music at the time. This would have definitely elevated it to the status of the other well-known concertos of the period, because it is that good, with lush melodies, creative harmonies and a strong understanding of the guitar as a solo instrument. Unfortunately, Segovia did not perform it—even though, in this reviewer's opinion, he would have liked this music! He was probably just too busy at the time; and the work was not premiered until 1970, 3 years after Haug passed away, by the eminent French guitarist Alexandre Lagoya.

The much more familiar Guitar Quintet by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco is delivered with coordinated energy and spritely charm in a rousingly spirited performance.

A short woodwind quintet of Haug's is included and is played quite competently by the Basel Philharmonic Quintet. The only work on the program without a guitar, it seems a bit out of place; but I'm happy to have heard this delightful work.

Minder enlivens this music with an assured technique, rich tone, and a clear connection to the music and its many moods. The recording quality is excellent, with the guitar realistically balanced with the other instruments. Definitely worth hearing!

MCCUTCHEON

HAYDN: *Piano Sonatas 23, 33, 41, 42, 44, 46*
Leon McCawley—Somm 624—78 minutes

This is Volume 3 of the British pianist's traversal of Haydn's sonatas. Having reviewed the first two volumes (M/J 2017, J/F 2020) I knew what to expect, and McCawley delivered it. His performances are crisp and tasteful, with a sufficient amount of feeling and ornaments added here and there. They are not unlike Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's (S/O 2017), which also have been received very positively by reviewers—but neither would be my first choice. In my 2020 review I mentioned several artists whose Haydn I prefer (Brendel, Derzhavina, McDermott) and now I must add Gilbert Kalish, whom we neglected to mention in our Haydn overviews (M/A 2002, M/A 2019). This distinguished American pianist (still alive and well at 85) recorded a substantial selection of sonatas for the Nonesuch label in the 1970s that do not seem to have been re-issued on CD but can be found as used vinyl or online via streaming services. His interpretations are deeply felt, played with a gentle touch, and recorded with warm, intimate sound—quite possibly the finest of all.

REPP

HAYDN: *7 Last Words of Christ*
David Jalbert, p—ATMA 2796—62 minutes

This is perhaps the most unusual keyboard work by Haydn that I have encountered. It began life as a commission for an orchestral work to by played in the Good Friday service at the Oratorio de la Santa Cueva in Cadiz. It was first performed in 1787; and, encouraged by its success, Haydn arranged it for string quartet and authorized this anonymous transcription for keyboard that he found "very well made, and with particular care". Later Haydn expended the work into a full oratorio with soloists, choir, and orchestra. He considered *The Seven Last Words* his best work.

It is in nine sections beginning with a slow processional introduction. There follows seven 100-bar slow sonata movements, each a meditation on the last words of Jesus on the cross. These run 6 to 9 minutes each. At the end is a brief Presto movement called 'The Earthquake'. While I was not able to find the score for the original keyboard transcription played so well here by Jalbert, I did find a version by Czerny that allowed me to follow along. Jalbert discreetly ornaments the recapitulations, perfectly keeping in Haydn's style. His sensitive

and nuanced touch helps to maintain musical interest over seven slow movements. I was very impressed by his French (ATMA 2683, Mar/Apr 2016) and Russian (ATMA 2684, May/June 2018) programs. This shows another, also good side of his abilities. The recorded sound and booklet essay are top notch.

HARRINGTON

HAYDN,M: *Mass, St Nicolas Tolentini; Vespers for St Innocent; Anima Nostra*
Jenna Harper, s; Emily Owen, s; Helen Charlston, mz; Marko Sever, org; St Albans Cathedral Girls Choir; Lawes Baroque Players/ Tom Winpenny
Naxos 574163—79 minutes

We know Michael Haydn as Josef's younger brother (by five years) and also as an inspiration for Mozart's style, since he was in Salzburg when the young Mozart (19 years younger) was getting his start. Mozart's early music, particularly his sacred music written in Salzburg, is quite similar to Haydn's in its melodiousness and rhythmic energy. The music here is exclusively for upper voices. It includes a Mass (1768), written for two soloists and unison treble choir, accompanied by strings and a single trumpet. The Vespers movements were written at different times (mostly 1780-81) and later compiled by Nikolaus Lang, a cleric at Salzburg Cathedral. These movements were written for performance on the Feast of the Holy Innocents (December 28), when only upper voices sang at the cathedral. 'Anima Nostra' is an Offertory text, again written (in 1787) for Holy Innocents' Day.

Haydn's music is inventive and idiomatic, well crafted and finished. Indeed, you could convince yourself that this was early Mozart. (The difference, of course, is that Mozart grew beyond this style even while a teenager.) The performances here are all very fine. The girls of the St Albans Choir sing with good ensemble and intonation. They are matched by three soloists who are barely out of school, so the youthful sound is maintained. The Lawes Baroque Players, a period group, was founded in 2004 mainly to accompany choirs in St Albans and Harpenden. Under conductor Tom Winpenny this gives a sense of what a performance might have sounded like in an outpost like Salzburg (so long as you can imagine the girls being boys!).

I won't push this in preference to the sacred music of Mozart or J Haydn, but if you're curious, Winpenny and his forces do a fine job! Texts, translations, bios, and good notes.

ALTHOUSE

HERTZBERG: *The Rose Elf*
Samantha Hankey (Elf), Sydney Mancasola (Girl/Luna), Kirk Dougherty (Beloved/Horus), Andrew Bogard (Brother); Orchestra/ Robert Kahn—Meyer 20044—55 minutes

As librettist for his own operatic treatment of Hans Christian Andersen's *Rose Elf*, David Hertzberg's elevated poetry is dense and evocative, and he shows great skill in adapting the tale into a well-structured one-act "shadow play", as he calls it. The lion's share of the music is given to the Elf—a plumb mezzo-soprano role—who acts as narrator both omniscient and innocent.

A tiny elf lives in the petals of a rose bush. One evening, he stays out too late and returns to find all the petals closed for the night. Looking for a place to rest, he turns to a bower where a Girl (the clear-voiced soprano Sydney Mancasola) bids a sad farewell to her Beloved (the appealing tenor Kirk Dougherty), whom her brother (the appropriately menacing bass Andrew Bogard) is sending off on an errand. As the Girl offers a rose for him to keep as a memento of her love, her tears open the leaves and the Elf settles into his new home. From this vantage point, he becomes the sole witness to the Brother's cruel murder of the Betrothed along the road. The Elf manages to communicate the gory details to the Girl, who recovers her beloved's severed head and plants it in a pot. A jasmine bush, watered by the Girl's weeping, grows and blooms from the head, while the Girl withers and dies. In Andersen's original the Brother then acquires the bush, and the elves who live in its flowers take revenge on him. Hertzberg softens the ending. The Elf extols the beauty of the jasmine flowers. "How sweet and delicious is your fragrance!", he marvels, concluding poignantly, "I suppose you have no other way to cry over the dead."

Samantha Hankey is affecting in the title role, but I found it hard to grasp the musical style, which is perhaps too intellectual for my taste. For example, the brutal nature of the Girl's brother is apparently illustrated by the six-and-a-half minutes it takes him to declaim 10 brief lines of text, sung to a bare, minimalist accompaniment. Maybe seeing the opera would add to my understanding. But I confess to an inability to appreciate certain contempo-

rary works, such as George Benjamin's *Lessons in Love and Violence* (J/A 2019). Like the Benjamin opera, Hertzberg's work has garnered high praise. A publication called *Classical Voice North America* declared this music "at least the equal of Puccini". And Joel Rozen, writing for the online site *Parterre Box*, was sure he was "hearing something straight out of the late romantic period, though Strauss's *Daphne*, an obvious inspiration, frankly isn't as good." Oh, really?

ALTMAN

HODGKIN: *Guitar Preludes*

Mark Hodgkin—MH 1—49 minutes

Mark Hodgkin is an excellent composer-guitarist; this release includes ten preludes for solo guitar, each 3 to 6 minutes long. They are miniatures that really match well with some of the great solo guitar repertoire, for instance Tarrega: really, they're that good. Great melody and rhythm abound, as well as luscious harmony and very clear-cut form: if you want your ears assaulted by unrepentant modernists or epigones of hip hop and pop music vainly struggling for social relevance (which seems to be the basic dispensation these days), you will be disappointed. Still, I think our readers will find much to savor in this pleasant but memorable music, which is beautifully performed and recorded.

HASKINS

HOMILIUS & AGRICOLA: *Cantatas*

Hannah Morrison, Rahel Maas, Bethany Seymour, s; Elisabeth Popien, a; Georg Poplutz, t; André Morsch, b; Kolner Akademie/ Michael Alexander Willens—CPO 555332—77 minutes

Here is another outstanding recording of music by Gottfried August Homilius (1715-85), together with two Easter Cantatas by Johann Friedrich Agricola (1720-74). Homilius's music was very popular in his time; and I agree that he is a very fine composer. Twice I have listed recordings of his vocal music among my Critics' Choices: *the* St Mark Passion (Carus 83.260; Sept/Oct 2013) by the Madrigalisten and L'Arpa Festante and recently "Advent & Christmas Cantatas" (CPO 555278; Nov/Dec 2020) by the Cologne Academy.

Both Homilius and Agricola spent their formative years in Leipzig under the guidance of JS Bach. Then Agricola found employment at the court of Frederick the Great in Berlin, while Homilius returned to Saxony and a career in Dresden. Homilius's oratorio *Frohlocket Und Preiset Den Göttlichen Held* (1768) appears to follow Mark's account of the resurrection, judging from the characters. The opening chorus with its trumpets, timpani, and dotted rhythms anticipates the victory of the resurrection. But the recitatives and arias that follow return listeners to the doleful spirit of the three Maries approaching the tomb. The trio 'Betrübter Fall, so Hemmt die Liebe' for sopranos (Rahel Maas and Bethany Seymour) and alto (Elisabeth Popien) is particularly lovely—a lament with a light accompaniment of strings. The stirring ornamentation in the middle of the texture seems to affect their feelings of trepidation. The bass aria (André Morsch) 'Entsetzt Euch Nicht, Getreue Herzen', representing the Angel, returns the oratorio to a spirit of triumph and resolve. He assuages their fear and pain with news of Christ's resurrection accompanied by exuberant fioritura with trumpets.

Agricola's cantatas *Der Gottmensch Jauchzt* and *Die Auferstehung des Erlösers* are as enchanting as Homilius's oratorio. Like other cantatas of the period, they are meditative rather than dramas involving individual characters. The first of these was certainly composed at least 10 years before Homilius's oratorio, and yet it sounds more classical in style. This is clear from the outset of both works through the addition of a pair of horns in the orchestration. Gorgeous fioritura in the tenor aria 'Umkränzt Maria' (Georg Poplutz) in the second of these cantatas creates excitement; the agitation of syncopated rhythms also signals the influence of the so-called *empfindsamer stil*, which is another classicizing element. I hear glimpses of Hasse's style here. As with the oratorio, I am drawn to the lyrical writing in the ensemble numbers. The duet 'Held, der den Fels vom Grabe Rückte' for alto and bass in the second cantata is wonderful for its tuneful quality. Good notes and texts are in English.

LOEWEN

HOWELLS: *Piano Pieces 1*

Matthew Shellhorn—Naxos 571382—66 minutes

According to Mr Shellhorn's brief note accompanying, news that he was undertaking this project led to a number of people sharing with him little-known Howells manuscripts. There's much to look forward to. Howells studied with Stanford at the Royal College of Music and taught there himself from 1920 to the late 1970s. A wistful, airy manner characteristic of all early 20th Century English composers pre-

vails, along with an economical and gracious approach. Some works, like the early Phantasy (1917), exude the most refined whiff of French musical air (Jonathan Cline's observant notes remark on its similarities to Ravel's *Jeux d'Eau*). Other works enact a brilliant dialog with Renaissance keyboard music; sometimes the effect is one of almost-near resemblance, as in 'My Lord Harewood's Galliard', and sometimes the symbiosis is more elusive, as in the mysterious and dark 'Finzi: His Rest' and the Pavane from 1964.

Matthew Shellhorn is an excellent and intelligent pianist. These performances will serve as an excellent reference but also as creative stimulus to other pianists who want to explore this repertoire.

HASKINS

HUMPERDINCK: *Die Heirat Wieder Willen Prelude Act II; Merchant of Venice; The Miracle; Pilgrimage to Kevlaar, Ballade; Lysistrata*
Andrea Chudak, s; Ruxandra Voda van der Plas, a; Harrie van der Plas, t; Robert Bennesh, org; Malmo Opera/ Dario Salvi
Naxos 574 177—74 minutes

Here we get an excellent cross-section of Humperdinck's less-known theatrical music, and many are first recordings. The brief prelude to *Die Heirat Wieder Willen* (The Unwanted Marriage) begins with stern opening chords, followed by a treading theme. After a more lyric section, the darker opening returns. The *Merchant of Venice* music has typical Humperdinck fingerprints—good tunes, efficient scoring, and attractive vocal writing.

The Miracle was a wordless play by Karl Vollmoeller, also set as a movie. Impresario Max Reinhardt brought the play to the US in 1923, where Norman Bel Geddes designed its spectacular sets. It was a sensation, establishing Bel Geddes as one of the great theatrical designers of all time. Here we have a five-movement suite arranged by Adolf Lotter. The Prelude, for organ only, has the flavor of a Bach chorale meditation. II, 'Procession and Children's Dance', is melodious, with folkish horn writing a la Mahler, as is much of the third segment, 'Banquet and Nuns' Dance'. IV, 'March and Death Motiv', has a sprightly tune for piccolo, flute, and snare drum that gradually becomes more sinister. The last movement, 'Christmas Scene and Finale', begins with the carol 'Christ Was Born on Christmas Day', the scoring including some ingenious woodwind bell effects played over it. The suite ends with a splendid orchestration of a hymn tune combining the Doxology and 'Holy God We Praise Thy Name'.

The Pilgrimage to Kevlaar sets Heine's ballad as a condensed cantata. Heine's poem comments on the power of the Virgin Mary to heal the sick. It ends ambiguously with a child's death and its mother's resignation to fate. The vocal writing is excellent, with every melodic and harmonic strain cleanly voiced. Though Humperdinck evades Heine's irony, his music still has some shadowy undertones.

The music to Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* (1908) picks up some of the humor of the play. The women of Athens stage a sex strike against war (a piece for peace?). Humperdinck's music uses the folk vein he and Mahler were so skilled at. In a couple of passages, the woodwind and horn writing sounds borrowed from the first Nachtmusik in Mahler's Symphony 7.

The performances are uniformly skilled and spirited. The singing from both the soloists and the chorus is excellent—lively in expression and accurate in pitch and phrasing. The orchestra plays with rich tone, constantly producing sweet, mellow sounds. Salvi conducts with a flexibility most effective for theater music. Texts are available online. They're worth getting, but the singers also deliver their parts with good diction.

O'CONNOR

IFUKUBE: *Sinfonia Tapkaara; Godzilla movement;*
DVORAK: *Symphony 9*
Tokyo Philharmonic/ Andrea Battistoni
MDG 6502176—76 minutes

In the opening moments of Akira Ifukube's (1914-2006) *Sinfonia Tapkaara*, I thought to myself, "movie music". It was only a few minutes after this that I learned Ifukube actually *was* the composer of many of the film scores in the Godzilla series; the 7th movement of his Godzilla Symphonic Fantasy will be familiar to anyone who's seen the movies. As for the symphony, the composer sought to incorporate something of the indigenous music in Hokkaido, the island in northern Japan where he lived. This gives the music a clear rustic flavor—lots of folk-like melodies, driving rhythms and ostinatos, occasional touches of orchestration that seem to suggest traditional instruments. The orchestration overall is sumptuous and rich, as one would expect of a composer who wrote a lot of film music. Mr Hecht was pretty dismissive of the work in his review of a

performance by the Russian Philharmonic on Naxos (Mar/Apr 2006), calling it "classical primitivism". But I can admire what it sets out to achieve. The Tokyo Philharmonic performance is energetic and thrilling.

The release opens with a fine performance of Dvorak's *New World*, notably augmented by the rich, warm sound. It's a colorful, lovely, and well-shaped performance, but I can't say it would supersede any of the others our reviewers have recommended over the years (Dvorak Overview, Sept/Oct 1998).

HASKINS

IVES: *Trio;* see BEACH

JACKSON: *The Archbishop's Fanfare; Sonatas 5+6; Scherzetto Pastorale; Intrada; Impromtu; Diversion for Mixtures; Fantasy on Sine Nomine; Prelude on East Acklam*
Mark Swinton, org—Willowhayne 55—67 min

Francis Jackson, still going strong at 103, was a chorister at York Minster and, at the same time, an articled pupil of the then Organist and Master of the Music, Edward Bairstow. Following Bairstow's death in 1947 he assumed the post of Organist and Master of the Music until he retired in 1982. He was an active organ recitalist, making numerous recordings and performing in Britain, Europe, Canada, Australia, and the United States.

As a composer he is primarily known for his choral and organ music, but he also wrote chamber music, a symphony, and several art songs. His style is a mixture of opulent post-romanticism, neo-classicism, deft counterpoint, and carefully-wrought structures, with the spirits of Vaughan Williams and Herbert Howells hovering nearby. I found the shorter pieces the most effective and useful to organists, but the sonatas didn't sustain my interest.

Swinton gives fine, committed performances of these demanding pieces on the 3-manual, 43-stop 1980 Nicholson organ in the Church of St Mary in Warwick, England. Why not on the recently refurbished Minster organ? Excellent notes on the composer and music by the performer.

DELCAMP

JANACEK: *The Cunning Little Vixen*
Lucy Crowe (Vixen), Gerald Finley (Forester), Sophia Burgos (Fox), Peter Hoare (Schoolmaster, Cock, Mosquito); London Symphony/ Simon Rattle—LSO 850 [2CD] 119 minutes

Sir Simon Rattle has the gift of inhabiting a piece of music, rather than standing apart from it. This is particularly true of Janacek's *Cunning Little Vixen*, a work he has cherished since his student days at the Royal Academy of Music. Assigned to play celeste and conduct the off-stage chorus in a performance led by Steuart Bedford, he says "it changed my life. It's the piece that made me want to become an opera conductor." Whether in the gorgeous crescendo of nature sounds in the interlude before the final scene of Act 1, or the sudden burst of energy as the little foxes (the offspring of Vixen and the Fox, voiced by children) appear on the scene in Act 3, bar lines disappear and the joyous music-making is full of spontaneity. And thanks to canny microphone placement and the "high-density stereo" recording process known as SACD, we get the best of both worlds: the vibrancy of a stage performance (semi-staged, to be precise) and the rich, clear sound of a studio recording.

Lucy Crowe's beautiful and soaring soprano is a perfect fit for the frisky title character, and she finds richer, more mature tones to represent the Vixen's transition to motherhood in Act 3. When Fox asks when they will have more children, her voice takes on a bittersweet glow as she answers "Wait! We'll see next May" (in the original Czech, of course). Sophia Burgos's Fox is also sung and inflected with refinement, and both singers make good use of expressive staccato articulation. The marvelous Canadian baritone Gerald Finley uses his warm, clear tone to portray a sympathetic Forester.

The set is rounded out with an absorbing performance of Janacek's 1926 *Sinfonietta*. The Maestro's handling of III, with its mercurial shits from gently swaying melodies in the strings to a boisterous brass section and thrilling exclamatory passages in the flutes and piccolos, is alone worth the price of this treasurable recording.

ALTMAN

JANSON, J-B: *Cello Sonatas*
Claudio Ronco, Emanuela Vozza
Urania 14062 [2CD] 155 minutes

Jean-Baptiste-Aime-Joseph Janson (1742-1803) was a cello virtuoso from Valenciennes, a town to the north of Paris. His younger brother also played the cello, and these sonatas were apparently written for them to play together. That is how they are presented here by two cellists who work together with aplomb, feeling no need to add a keyboard.

There seems no need for more since both parts are full of harmonies and virtuosity enough to fill our ears and minds with luscious music. All are three-movement works, though the formal structures vary rather remarkably.

These works are here recorded apparently for the first time. Janos Starker recorded a cello concerto by Janson back in 1996 that I have, but otherwise he is new to the recorded world, it seems. This may be partly because of the confusion as to who actually wrote them, as explained by Ronco in his liner notes in English, French, and Italian. They are worth our ear-time and are here played to a turn and recorded clearly. Enjoy!

D MOORE

JOSQUIN: *Masses*
Tallis Scholars/ Peter Phillips
Gimell 51—72 minutes

And so we come to the final release in The Tallis Scholars' vaunted Josquin Mass cycle. The project, which began more than 30 years ago in 1987, now accrues to 9 volumes and includes some 18 Masses. Their release of Josquin's *De Beata Virgine* and *Ave Maris Stella* masses won a Diapason d'Or de l'Année in 2012. The three masses here are as remarkable as the rest, and with distinguishing characteristics that mark their place in Josquin's career.

While it is uncertain exactly when he composed the *Hercules Dux Ferrarie Mass*, its subject is anchored to Josquin's short career (1503-4) as *maestro* at the court of Ercole d'Este in Ferrara. In 1502 Girolamo Sestola, a musician employed at Ercole's court, weighed in on the prospect of acquiring Josquin from the Chapel of King Louis XII: "My Lord, I believe that there is neither lord nor king who will now have a better chapel than yours if Your Lordship sends for Josquin and by having Josquin in our chapel I want to place a crown on this chapel of ours" (August 14, 1502).

The Mass, composed in the duke's honor, inscribes his name musically using a technique called "soggetto cavato dalle vocali di queste parole", which in this case means the subject is "carved out" of the duke's name using the syllables from Guido's hexachord to replace the vowels. Hercules Dux Ferrariae yields the subject re-ut-re-ut-re-fa-mi-re. Josquin uses these 8 notes in his tenor voice as he did other cantus firmuses to unify the movements of his mass, sometime altering it through transposition and augmentation. According to Phillips, the short tune is sung 47 times; yet the work never lags into mere repetition because Josquin weaves around it a sinuous web of counterpoint that seems to continuously renew the composition. With pure intonation, brisk tempos, and careful phrasing, the work continues to excite the ears till the end of the final Agnus, where the texture opens up to a grand finale of 6 voices and canons. Incidentally, this is precisely how Josquin closes his *Homme Armé Mass*.

The *D'ung Aultre Amer Mass* is outstanding for its chordal textures and explicit reference to the rondeau 'D'ung Aultre Amer' by Josquin's mentor Johannes Ockeghem. In another departure from the norm, Josquin adapts not one but both the cantus and tenor parts from Ockeghem's rondeau so that every movement of the mass begins with the same sequence of pitches—enough to remind one of Ockeghem's song. The most striking moment comes where one would expect the Benedictus. Josquin replaces it with the motet 'Tu Solus Qui Facis Mirabilia', composed in a strictly chordal style reminiscent of the Italian Lauda to which Josquin was first exposed while employed as a singer at the court of Milan. To ensure the listener has made the connection here to Ockeghem's rondeau, he quotes not only the music but also the French text.

The *Faysant Regretz Mass* is thought to have been composed around the turn of the 16th Century. And here, too, Josquin makes use of cantus firmus, here from a rondeau composed either by Gilles Binchois or Walter Frye—just a short, four-note fragment, which, by Phillips's reckoning, he bounces around the texture more than 200 times. Again, the genius of Josquin's counterpoint is on full display with echoing and overlapping parts to create the impression of a continuously evolving texture.

What's left to say? There's no more glorious music than this, and in the hands of the Tallis Scholars and the Gimell engineers, we hear all of the delicate interplay between the voices, rich chords perfectly balanced, in tune, and finely phrased. Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

KENINS: *Concerto di Camera 1; Piano Concerto; Symphony 1*
Tommaso Pratolo, fl; Martins Circenis, cl; Edgars Saxons, perc; Agnese Eglina, p: Latvian Symphony/ Guntis Kuzma, Andris Poga
Ondine 1350—58 minutes

Latvian and Canadian resident Talisvaldis

Kenins (1919-2008) wrote in a style built with Latvian modality gravitating toward tonally stable conclusions. Bartok seems to be a primary influence. Like Bartok, the piano writing is grateful and secure, with plenty of scintillating virtuosity.

Chamber Concerto 1 for piano, flute, clarinet and strings (1981) is slinky and without bombast. It's elegant and attractive.

The Piano Concerto with Strings and Percussion (1990) is more aggressive. Powerful and muscular, it offers a considerable workout for the soloist.

Symphony 1 (1959) is closer to Shostakovich. with bold gestures and fertile counterpoint (the final movement ends with a fugato).

Kennis is a well-known force in Canada. He taught for many years at the University of Toronto and deserves to be better known down here. This is a worthwhile release of interest to all sympathetic listeners. All performers are excellent.

GIMBEL

KORNGOLD: *Suite; Piano Quintet*
Spectrum Concerts Berlin
Naxos 574019—65 minutes

These two compositions are from Korngold's middle period; the 1930 suite and the 1921 piano quintet. Korngold wrote the suite for piano (left hand), two violins, and cello. The piano part was written for pianist Paul Wittgenstein, who had already commissioned several composers including Ravel, The suite is in five sections based on Korngold's impressions of musical history, including a powerful 'Prelude' and 'Fugue' with a vigorous piano solo incorporating abstract but tonal sound. The second section is a waltz with hints of Richard and Johann Strauss, Brahms, and Schoenberg and Korngold's later music for *The Sea Hawk*. The third section is titled 'Grotesque'; it has both riotous and melancholy themes, is rhythmically interesting with faster outer sections and a beautiful middle section. 'Lied' (IV) is a beautiful love theme; and V, the Finale, blends all the suite's forms, including classical, modern, and some occasional astringent passages. It all excellent and something to savor repeatedly.

The Piano Quintet has varying musical ideas from the loud, energetic, and dramatic opening section to more melodic portions, returning to an aggressive final portion. On whole it is more melodic than the suite. The middle Adagio movement has several beautiful slow themes including the melancholy song 'Oh moon, is this how you rise again?.' It's exquisite. The Finale is an allegretto movement that includes fast and complex first and second movement themes mixed with some of Korngold's colorful and modernistic touches. It's thrilling and exceptional.

Spectrum Concerts Berlin performs the music flawlessly and with spirit. The sound is excellent. Neither piece has had many recordings. The suite has been reviewed 3 times by ARG, the last in May/June 2013. The only recording I have heard is an older Sony one (originally Columbia) with Leon Fleisher (N/D 1998). This new recording is better. The Piano Quintet has been reviewed by this magazine four times (the latest J/A 2012). I am unfamiliar with those recordings.

FISCH

KORNGOLD: *Piano Trio; String Sextet*
Spectrum Concerts Berlin
Naxos 574008—65 minutes

Korngold was just 12 years old when he composed the trio. It's hard to believe a 12-year-old could write this very difficult, demanding, and complex score. It's no wonder that the piece was a success with audiences. The piece is lyrical, melodic, and tonal—somewhat similar to Richard Strauss's music of the same period. It is Opus 1 but not the first Korngold composition performed for the public. His enterprising father Julius, a leading Vienna music critic, saw to it that his son's music was catalogued. Julius was also influential in having the Berlin and Vienna premieres played by none other than Bruno Walter. The Trio gives ample weight to all the instruments, and in this recording the piano is subdued. The playing and teamwork are exemplary.

The String Sextet was written over a two-year period and premiered in 1916 when Korngold was 17. It is another example of Korngold's remarkable talent. There are fast and slow romantic sections with short repeated themes that are alternately heard in the foreground and background. The third of the four movements uses a waltz theme that is ingeniously threaded into the scoring. The shifts between major and minor keys became a Korngold signature. The sextet is also very entertaining. Again, the playing by the orchestra is excellent. The English booklet has an interesting discussion of the music and its history.

Both pieces have been recorded many

times and are usually paired with other Korngold pieces. In the Sextet Mr French was impressed with Camerata Freden on Tacet (J/F 2013). The latest review of the trio was the Naxos (572758; J/A 2014), which I have not heard. This new pairing is highly recommended.

FISCH

KRENEK: *Piano Pieces 2*
Stanislav Khristenko—Toccata 399—82 minutes

Mr Khristenko's survey continues with six substantial works: a Toccata and Chaconne on the [fictitious] chorale 'Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ' (1922); three suites (1922 and 1924), the first of which is essentially a series of variations on the chorale; his fifth piano sonata (1955); and finally *Six Measurements* (1955). The works thus show the Weimar Republic Krenek in all his bad boy glory counterpoised with the later, more sober academic whose approach to serialism influenced Stravinsky.

This is, in the main, not easy music to listen to: one exception is the suite on the chorale tune, which deftly imitates a number of characteristic suite movements: Allemande, Sarabande, Gavotte, Waltz; the remaining two are a fugue and a foxtrot. The music is almost tonal—lighthearted, not sarcastic. The pair of suites from 1924 is more dissonant but just as varied: one does get more than a hint of Weimar Era sarcasm in the final movement of the second.

I find myself much more interested in—and eager to hear—the later serial works: I have been ever since I heard Glenn Gould's performance of the third sonata. The fifth is, for all its thorniness, a remarkably lucid work abounding in beautiful (but atonal) melodies. His piano writing recalls Schoenberg but without the contrapuntal density and sometimes unfathomable difficulties of his piano music. The liner notes report that Krenek's music was "less welcome" at the avant-garde hotbed of the time, Darmstadt—no doubt because pieces like the sonata are fairly traditional in form.

Krenek's *Measurements* are short, inscrutable pieces that organize various aspects of the music including pitch, rhythm, and pitch density. The resulting rhythmic difficulties cannot be perfectly realized: this far more cerebral piece sounds more like a wasteland than the other more traditional works.

As in the first volume of the series, all the performances have the utmost clarity and integrity. He seems deeply engaged with the music—so important for music that remains little known.

HASKINS

KRENEK: *Static and Ecstatic;* see SCHUBERT
KURTAG: *Signs, Games, Messages;* see BACH

KVANDAL: *Vocal Pieces*
Lina Johnson, s; Arnfinn Tobiassen, org
LAWO 1203—57 minutes

Johan Kvandal (1919-99) was a Norwegian organist, music critic, and composer. This program, "A Quiet Beauty", presents 22 religious songs and organ compositions, most of them composed from 1946 to 1977. I found the vocal pieces unremarkable but the organ works more imaginative. His musical style reminds me of Hindemith—somewhat austere and without memorable or ingratiating melody and with a cold starkness that seems to reflect one aspect of the Nordic spirit. The most interesting works here are a six-movement organ partita on a Norwegian folk tune of 1977 and a Fantasia written toward the end of his life.

The performances are fine. Lina Johnson has established a highly regarded reputation in opera and recital and sings very well here. Arnfinn Tobiassen is Music Director of St Olav's Church, Avaldsnes, and a leading Norwegian organist. The notes give no information about the organ of Our Savior's Church, Haugesund, where this was recorded. There's nothing bad about this recording, but it's just hard to get very excited about it.

Scant notes with texts in Norwegian and English. but they are not side-by-side.

R MOORE

LESHNOFF: *Piano Concerto; Symphony 3*
Stephen Powell, bar; Joyce Yang, p; Kansas City Symphony/ Michael Stern
Reference 739 [SACD) 60 minutes

I have reviewed quartets by Jonathan Leshnoff (N/D 2019) and also his Symphony 4 (S/O 2019). I found them derivative and hopelessly conservative. His Symphony 3 is another story, based on letters found by a young man's mother in the midst of World War I (they are housed in Kansas City's World War I Museum). Since the work was commissioned for acknowledgment of the city's contributions to important cultural events, the locale is appropriate. The letters are heartbreaking. The last one is moving and unforgettable. They are sung with excellent diction and expression by Mr Powell.

The Piano Concerto returns to Mr Leshnoff's conservative style. It is often joyous and filled with glittering passagework. The composer's devotion to Jewish liturgy is always present. Ms Yang's technique is assured. This is enjoyable but does not threaten any of the great concerto repertoire.

Notes by the composer, mostly of the promotional variety. Texts are included.

GIMBEL

LIEBERSON: *Songs of Love & Sorrow; The 6 Realms*

Gerald Finley, bar; Anssi Karttunen, vc; Finnish Radio Symphony/ Hannu Lintu

Ondine 1356—49 minutes

The dual career of Peter Lieberson (1946-2011) is reflected in this program of two very different yet related works. As a composer Lieberson was steeped in the New York arts world. His father, Goddard Lieberson, was president of Columbia Records. His mother was ballerina and choreographer Vera Zorina. In preparation for a career as a composer he studied with Charles Wuorinen, Milton Babbitt, Donald Martino, and Martin Boykan and completed his studies at Columbia University in 1976.

A second career began when he left New York to study in Boulder, Colorado with a Tibetan Buddhist master, Chögyam Trungpa. There he met and married a fellow student, Ellen Kearney. At Trungpa's request, the Liebersons moved to Boston to co-direct Shambhala Training, a Tibetan Buddhist meditation and cultural program. During his time in the Boston area Lieberson earned a PhD from Brandeis and taught at Harvard. He later moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia and became international director of the Shambhala Centre there.

A new chapter of his life began in 1994 when Lieberson devoted himself exclusively to composition.

When Yo-Yo Ma requested a piece that reflected his long-standing practice of Tibetan Buddhism Lieberson composed *The Six Realms* (1999-2000), a concerto of six continuous movements for amplified cello and orchestra. As Lieberson writes in his liner notes, the six realms in Buddhism are "a highly detailed portrait of our human consciousness". Each realm is associated with a particular emotion including anger, neediness, jealousy, and ignorance.

The work begins somberly with an introductory lament, 'The Sorrow of the World', which reminded me of Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*. 'The Hell Realm' sounds raucous and angry until it yields to 'The Hungry Ghost Realm,' imbued with a plaintive sense of one who is unfulfilled and always wants more.

'The Animal Realm' is a scherzo that begins with a tuba solo and continues with what the composer aptly calls "a plodding quality" until it turns quietly into a movement for solo cello, 'The Human Realm.' With solo cello and minimal string accompaniment it conveys a sense of loneliness and separation from others.

The final movement, 'The God Realm and The Jealous God Realm' presents the two realms simultaneously: the gods who are wrapped up in their own smug self-satisfaction and the jealous gods who want what the others have. A quietly sustained bass line seems to represent the gods, and a frenzy of instruments led by the cello seems to represent the jealous gods. The orchestra erupts in fury before the solo cello brings the work back full circle to the opening lament.

I did not respond well to this work on first hearing, but with repeated hearing I found more and more to like about it: its wonderful lyricism, its evocation of many moods, its richness of orchestral color. No explanation is given for why the cello is amplified. It does not sound unnatural, though it is hard to know how it would sound in a concert hall. Even if (like me) you don't know much about Tibetan Buddhism, you don't need to hear this as program music and can glory in the rich palette of colors and moods the piece conjures.

Finnish cellist Anssi Karttunen had worked with Lieberson in the formation of this concerto but did not get to play it until after the composer died. He handles the demands of the score deftly. The orchestra plays with both rigor and finesse.

Another important turning point in Lieberson's life came in the 1997 Santa Fe Opera production of his opera *Ashoka's Dream*, when he met Lorraine Hunt, a singer of exceptional gifts. The two married in 1999 after he divorced his first wife. He wrote two song cycles for Lorraine: *Rilke Songs* and *Neruda Songs*. Both are recorded and were reviewed glowingly by Allen Gimbel (S/O 2006, M/A 2007, S/O 2010).

His settings of five love poems by Pablo Neruda were co-commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony. Lorraine Hunt Lieberson sang the premiere May 20, 2005 with the Los Angeles Phil-

harmonic and Esa-Pekka Salonen and in November that year with the Boston Symphony under James Levine. In July 2006 she died at age 52 after a battle with cancer.

Neruda Songs was received with such great acclaim that the BSO commissioned him to compose another cycle of Neruda songs as a companion piece. Shortly after her death, Lieberson himself was diagnosed with advanced lymphoma and had given up composing. While undergoing grueling chemotherapy and grieving his wife's death, he turned to Neruda's Love Sonnets. And then something else happened; while he was recovering "all of a sudden I fell in love again". He married Rinchen Lhamoa, a former Buddhist nun, and he says his capacity to love again gave him the strength to write his new song cycle, *Songs of Love and Sorrow*, this time for a baritone.

The recording engineers fortunately left nearly a 30 second break between the two works. That is very important, because *The Six Realms* ends with a solo cello and *Songs of Love and Sorrow* begins with a cello solo. The notes do not indicate it, but I suspect Karttunen is again the cellist—this time (I assume) not "amplified". I would recommend listening to these separately. There is a common Buddhist emphasis on relinquishment in both, but the styles are so different as to sound like they are written by different people. In some ways they are.

As with *Neruda Songs* Lieberson's style here is much more sedate and warmly lyrical. His choice of sonnets creates an arc of life from youthful infatuation to passionate physical love to renewal of life to its ending. The final word of the cycle, "Adios", is repeated over and over in a way reminiscent of Mahler's "Ewig" at the end of *Das Lied von der Erde*. As Lieberson said an interview with NPR about this work, "We're always saying adios every time we close the door. We say goodbye to our lover, adios. We say goodbye to our parents, adios. And one of my teachers said, 'Always smile when you say goodbye, because you never know if it's the last time.'"

Gerald Finley sang the premiere in March 2010 with the Boston Symphony. In that same NPR interview, Finley said he was humbled when Lieberson first showed him the love sonnets he had chosen for the new piece and said, "I suddenly thought this is Peter's voice through me, now." Lieberson died in April 2011.

The composer's voice is well served with this superb performance, but I do not think Finley sings in Spanish very often. His diction is perfectly clear, but his pronunciation isn't great. That doesn't matter. His feeling for the songs is exquisite and his performance is spellbinding.

The notes indicate that both works were recorded in Helsinki Music Center but specifies that only *Songs of Love and Sorrow* was recorded in concert and is a world premiere recording. The Finnish Radio Orchestra under Hannu Lintu gives excellent performances that are superbly recorded.

Notes by the composer, texts and translations.

R MOORE

LIGETI: *Etudes I;*
LISZT: *Paganini Etudes;*
LUTOSLAWSKI: *2 Etudes*
Jacki Jaekyung Yoo, p
Genuin 20720—50 minutes

Etudes: A New Perspective is the name of the program, and it lives up to its title. Gyorgy Ligeti's three books of etudes are a high-water mark of 20th Century piano music, combining the expected virtuosity with approachable humor and free dissonance with tonality. There are tributes to works of Chopin, Liszt, and Debussy; but Ligeti also portrayed aspects of quantum physics in some of the etudes.

Yoo brings more order to "Disorder" than I've heard from Aimard, Biret, Denk, or Ullen, fine as each of them is. Yoo is more playful and fluid, with a looseness that evokes swing even though the rhythms stay unchanged. She brings to light a French impressionist influence that I hadn't picked up on before. There are so many different ways to interpret these etudes that another superb recording is a boon. I only wish she had recorded more, especially considering the short playing time. Lutoslawski's Two Etudes are perfect companions, bracing yet joyous in Yoo's hands.

Liszt's *Grandes Etudes de Paganini* are the more manageable 1851 revision of his *Etudes d'Execution Transcendante d'apres Paganini* from 1838. I have less enthusiasm for Liszt, which may color my view, but it seems that Yoo didn't apply as much imagination to these etudes; they are enjoyable, just not as scintillating. There is still much to admire here, and I hope more of her recordings come my way.

ESTEP

LIGETI: *Quartet 1;* see BEETHOVEN

LISZT: *Annees de Pelerinage*
Michele Campanella, p
Odradek 391 [3CD] 155 minutes

It is good to have this recording by a Liszt specialist who, up to now, was only known to me through his excellent recording of the Hungarian Rhapsodies (still available). Several other recordings exist of his Liszt, but this is his first of the *Years of Pilgrimage*.

Why we have had to wait so long for more from this pianist escapes me, though I have to admit that I have not been following his career very closely. Now in his 70s, he deserves the right to be left alone, and to take whatever paths he so chooses.

There is much to admire in this complete set containing many of the composer's most popular pieces. To begin with, his technique is still grand enough to cope with the difficulties of 'Orage' and the *Dante Sonata*. You certainly can't become a Liszt specialist without coming to terms with what a mere two hands are called on to accomplish.

The Swiss first year in Campanella's hands is more mellow than in other hands. One is rarely aware of any conscious effort to impress by sheer virtuosity. The Steinway D sounds wonderful, but never unduly asserts itself to a point where one becomes aware of and uncomfortable with the sound of the instrument. In this way it is quite different from other performances.

Year 2 finds us in Italy with the famous *Petrarch Sonnets* and *Dante Sonata*. The supplements and Year 3 continue the Italian journey but regale us with sites further afield and considerably more difficult to execute.

Campanella has prepared his own revealing program notes that delve into the psychological and philosophical implications of Liszt's creative explorations. They are more revelatory than usual. Many music lovers place Liszt in a category of composers to be snubbed: too much empty rhetoric. Here Campanella decries such thoughts. Nothing really screams out for attention, yet all remains exquisitely beautiful, with depth and meaning. Even the terrors of the *Dante Sonata* reveal themselves with thrust and energy, rather than tasteless display.

Despite the sufferings and pain of the composer's coming to terms with his God, the average listener need not concern himself with music that shows too much in the way of morose self-pity. On the contrary, Liszt's later journeys in life can be absorbed, if not easily, then without much pain. Repeated listening has won me over to what may well be my favorite of the many available recordings. Campanella has made the journey a most pleasant one.

BECKER

LISZT: *Piano Concerto 1; Sonata; Totentanz*
Benedek Horvath; Basel Symphony/ Hans Drewanz—Prospero 7—68 minutes

Liszt's piano music, intended for the hands of the composer and fiendishly difficult, is often seen merely a vehicle for virtuosos. For a young pianist—Horvath was still in his 20s when he recorded these pieces—our natural assumption is we have a young gun with chops, prepared to play fast and little else. Well, in this case, that would be totally wrong. Horvath has all the technique he needs, but more than that, he plays with great poetry and, sometimes, restraint. I've never enjoyed Liszt's slippery changes of key in the concerto so much, and it's wonderful to hear those changes acknowledged so beautifully by piano and orchestra. The usual adjectival descriptions of this piece—dazzling, thrilling, exciting—don't really apply here. The mood is almost melancholy, and the effect is beautiful. Not too many recordings bring a tear to this crusty old reviewer, but the concerto did just that!

The sonata is perhaps an even better vehicle for virtuosity, but again Horvath does not press tempos, and the effect is beautiful and musical. *Totentanz* (a fantasy on 'Dies Irae') is much the same—a virtuosic piece that can be used to show off—but Horvath manages to find some depth in it.

This is worth picking up even if you have other favorite Liszt pianists (e.g. Richter in both the concerto and the sonata). Horvath seems like a major talent, and I expect to hear from him in the future. Just one question: Can this guy play Schubert?

ALTHOUSE

LISZT: *Piano Pieces*
Jerry Wong—MSR 1751—75 minutes

It is becoming increasingly common to give titles to recordings, even though they are rarely necessary and often not quite appropriate. This release is called "Of Love and Longing", which pertains (at least indirectly) to some pieces on the program but not to others. The

former include Liszt's transcription of *Isolde's Liebestod* and five selections from *Années de Pelerinage* (Chapelle de Guillaume Tell, Au lac de Wallenstadt, Les Cloches de Geneve, Sposalizio, and Vallée d'Obermann), which Liszt composed when he was in love with Marie d'Agoult, though they are really more about nature than about love and longing. The remaining five pieces, along with *Liebestod*, are more about death. They are *Funerailles*, a transcription of *Lohengrin's Admonition*, and three depressing pieces from Liszt's late years: 'Nuages Gris' (here consistently misspelled as "nauges"), 'La Lugubre Gondola', and 'Unstern.' "Of Love and Death" would have been a more appropriate title for this collection.

Jerry Wong is an American pianist, probably in his 40s, with a doctorate from the Manhattan School and currently teaching at the Melbourne Conservatory in Australia. James Harrington had good things to say about a previous recording of Prokofieff pieces (MSR 1357, J/F 2011) and was quite enthusiastic about a more recent Debussy release titled "Of Motion and Dance" (MSR 1678, M/J 2019). This Liszt recital is also very fine. Wong is a thoughtful artist who plays clearly and expressively, without mannerisms or showiness (for which the selected pieces give little opportunity). He often shapes the music in unexpected ways, but I usually found him convincing. His build-up of dynamics in the beginning of *Funerailles* is not steady, and his chords in the octave passages are a bit weak. In *Chapelle* and *Cloches* his rubato sometimes disturbs the meter. There are other such minor details I could mention, and I would not place him on the same pedestal with Lazar Berman, Alfred Brendel, or Julius Katchen, some of whose performances I chose for comparison, but his artistry commands respect. He also wrote the succinct liner notes.

REPP

LISZT: *Schwanengesang; Valses Oubliées*
Can Cakmur, p—BIS 2530—80 minutes

I had encountered transcriptions of Schubert songs, including some from *Schwanengesang*, in recitals and on recordings but did not know Liszt had transcribed all 14 songs of that collection and heard them here for the first time. Two previous recordings, by Frederic Chiu (Harmonia Mundi, J/F 1999) and Joel Schoenhals (Fleur de Son, S/O 2005) have been praised highly in these pages.

The transcriptions range from relatively straightforward adaptations (such as 'Liebesbotschaft') to virtuosic paraphrases ('Kriegers Ahnung') that add considerable ballast to the simple texture of Schubert's songs. I approached the recording with some trepidation, thinking that I would rather hear the original songs and wondering whether I would be able to stomach Liszt's frills. Thanks in part to the marvelous execution, I came away with considerable admiration for Liszt's inventiveness and his respect for the character of the songs. While his treatments affect that character in some cases, they generally amplify rather than distort it, and although there is undoubtedly an element of showiness in them, they do not sound like empty add-ons thanks to the profundity of Schubert's melodies.

The young Turkish pianist Can Cakmur (b 1997), winner of the 2018 Hamamatsu Competition, is clearly a major talent. His debut recording of a varied program elicited high praise from Sang Woo Kang (BIS 2430; N/D 2019). His rendition of the Liszt transcriptions, in an order chosen by him, is sensitive and technically accomplished, and he also wrote the eloquent liner notes. He plays some songs slower than they are usually sung, most notably the light-hearted 'Abschied' and 'Taubenpost', but this can be attributed to his desire to retain clarity in the virtuosic flourishes added by Liszt, which are particularly challenging in those pieces. But was there a bar missing at about 2:27 in 'Abschied'?

I am not as enthusiastic about the other pieces on this generously filled disc. The four *Valses Oubliées* are from Liszt's late period, and except for the first one they are rarely played or recorded. While it is good to have them all together, I find it difficult to warm up to them, and Cakmur plays them stiffly and cautiously. Vladimir Horowitz (old RCA) is far more enticing in the first waltz, and John Ogdon (old Melodiya) is more brilliant in the second, shaving off almost two minutes of its duration. Get this for *Schwanengesang*.

REPP

LULLY: *George Dandin; Grotte de Versailles*
Marguerite Louise/ Gaetan Jarry
Versailles 27—78:43

Between 1664 and 1666, Louis XIV had an artificial cave built at his country chateau, Versailles, but demolished it in 1684 to allow construction of the north wing. Soon after its completion, this grotto became the setting for Jean-Baptiste Lully's first collaboration with

the poet Philippe Quinault, *Le Grotte de Versailles*. This "eglogue en musique" was first performed at Versailles in 1667 or 1668 and was still being performed (with some alterations) as late as 1728 at the *Concerts Spirituels*. As a typical divertissement, it begins with a French overture, followed by songs and dances. The center point of the eclogue is the entry of Daphnis and the Nymphs, who were joined in the dance by Louis himself, and it concludes with an extended "echo" chorus and dance.

This is the second complete recording I know; the earlier was by Hugo Reyne with La Simphonie du Marais (Accord 461811, 2001). Both reflect a sensitivity to the nuances of the French style, though the soloist for Iris in 2001 seems more comfortable with the intricate ornamentation written in the manuscript for the second verse of her lament. Unfortunately, the musettes mentioned in an original libretto are missing in both recordings, both of which attempt to recreate the original performance.

Molière's "comedie en musique", *George Dandin*, was first performed at Versailles on 18 July 1668 with Lully's incidental music. This divertissement was just one part of an extensive evening's festivity, incorporating appetizers, wandering through the gardens, the play in a specially constructed outdoor theater, a large dinner followed by dancing and fireworks. The plot follows the plight of the rich peasant, George Dandin, and his unfaithful wife, and the libretto was conceived "in the manner of an improvisation" with inserted interludes that form a miniature pastoral. These are now missing from most modern editions of Molière's play, but this recording includes both the music that preceded the play, the two interludes between the three acts, and the final divertissement with its concluding double-chorus dialog between the followers of Bacchus and Love. The booklet offers complete texts and translations for these musical additions and short summaries of how the music fits into the text of the play.

The interpretation by Jarry and his musicians is fully in the French style, though his number of musicians does not match the 1668 description of the outdoor performance of *Georges Dandin* by André Felibien: "after beginning with one voice, it terminates with a concert of more than 100 people who can all be seen at the same time on the same stage joining together their instruments, their voices, and their dance-steps." This recording does incorporate some adaptations from the original manuscript, including the subtle rewriting of a continuo part for a bass recorder that could not play all the original pitches.

Around these two works Jarry has added at the beginning a shorten timpani solo by Claude Babelon followed by a prelude from the last act of Lully's *Psyche*; and between the two major works he inserts two further excerpts from the same act of *Psyche*, all with trumpets, timpani, oboes and bassoon, and strings. It appears that the three trumpets only play in unison with timpani, since only one part in the original scores is written, with the restrictive pitches available in the 17th Century. I believe that this was only a short-hand notation, since some of the manuscripts used by the Louis XIV's wind players indicate that with timpani, the trumpets would play different parts in consort. The missing parts could easily have been reconstructed for this recording. It also should be noted that the intonation of the "natural trumpets" is good, but do not expect them to be "in tune", following a modern "historically informed" practice. All through the performance the continuo harpsichord is too busy and distracts from the voices.

These are just minor caveats. This is a significant release and presented with a great deal of care. It also fills in an important gap in the sonic documentation of Lully's creative work with Molière and would be an important addition to any baroque collection.

BREWER

MACHAUT: *Lion of Nobility*

Orlando Consort—Hyperion 68318—61 minutes

This is the eighth release in the continuing project by the Orlando Consort to record Machaut's complete lyrics with music along with a slowly published complete works edition (see ARG index for the previous seven recordings). As in all the previous recordings, the Orlando Consort has adopted what John Barker aptly termed the "Page Principle", which require all parts of a work to be sung, but if there were no words in the manuscripts, the singers would just vocalize on a neutral vowel. This can sometimes make it difficult to differentiate between the parts, but this new release has resolved some of the balance questions. It also means that in most of the songs either Matthew Venner (countertenor, singing the "triplum" on two chansons) or Mark Dobell (tenor, singing the "cantus" on four chansons) has the task of communicating Machaut's subtle lyrics.

There is an exception. On the Orlando Consort's earlier recording of the rondeau, 'Ma fin est mon commencement' (May/June 1999), following the "Page Principle" only the middle voice is sung, based on how the piece was published in the scholarly editions available. But in the process of reediting the music, it was noted that in the manuscripts the upper voice part, which was composed to be sung forwards and backwards at the same time ("My end is my beginning"), actually only has the refrain text written upside down and backwards from the end ("fin") to the beginning ("Ma") under the music. Following the notation, the complete lyric is written separately after the music. So on this new release, which has more presence than the earlier recording, you hear the text simultaneously sung forwards and backwards, which actually helps to clarify both the music and Machaut's musical and lyrical game.

In addition to the single rondeau, there is a varied selection of virelais (3), ballades (5), motets (2), and a single 18-minute lai. 'En demantant et lamentant' (With troubled mind and lamentation) is an elaborate plaint for "The Lion of Nobility", thought to be King John II of France. It was copied only in a late manuscript of Machaut's works for Jean, Duke of Berry. Written as monophony, it was only realized in 1970 that it was actually also polyphonic. Each three verses of the lai, with different texts, can be sung simultaneously in counterpoint. This interpretation repeats each group of three verses three times with the text sung only by one part with the remaining two using the "Page Principle". On a basic sound system, the more active vocalise parts tend to distract from the one sung part, but using earphones, the spatial separation is more evident and it becomes easier to distinguish the three interlocking parts.

'Ne pensez pas' (Ballade 10) appears also to be a first recording. There still are 16 lais waiting to be added to this series, 11 of which will be first recordings.

BREWER

MAHLER: *Symphony 9*
Dusseldorf Symphony/ Adam Fischer
Avi 8553478 [SACD] 79 minutes

This is the third entry from Adam Fischer's Mahler symphony series that I have reviewed, following the Seventh and Fifth. My review of the Fifth quoted Fischer's philosophy in conducting Mahler: "Mahler's music stems from the same world as Haydn and Mozart. He expresses the same emotions as Haydn—only he had another kind of orchestra at his disposal. When I conduct Haydn, I want to bring out the Mahler in Haydn, and when I conduct Mahler, the Haydn in Mahler." That led to a discussion of Fischer's Neoclassical treatment of Mahler, which worked very well in the Seventh and Fifth.

This is similar in style to the other two, but the Ninth is a very different symphony. The outer movements, especially I, are heavier and deeper in tone than in 5 and 7. After all, the work, in Fischer's words, is a musical preparation for death, and that requires a different orchestral approach and a weightier sound. Fischer and the Dusseldorf did not or could not make those adjustments, so this Ninth works well enough in the inner movements, but not so well in the finale, and not at all in I.

The Ninth is a difficult symphony to play, especially the first movement. It is full of short motifs and ideas of all kinds that are passed back and forth, sometimes quickly, sometimes even awkwardly, and they may sound awkward if a certain kind of precision and overview is lacking. Despite the varying nature of these elements and all the contrasts, some of them startling, the whole thing should be seamless unless the conductor has a creative idea to make it work some other way. That is especially true in a movement that needs weight and depth as well as precision and dexterity, and it is that weight and depth that is lacking here. The opening is on the fast side, a little nervous and a bit awkward, even pensive in the back-and-forth as the orchestra finds its way to the first climax. Things build up again, but the result should be bigger, more powerful, and more "together". Some sections seem hurried and unsure where they are going. Missing also is intensity in quiet parts, which seem to wander a bit. Strings should be darker and more commanding, and a broader-toned solo horn would help. The ending is quite good.

The middle movements are better suited to Fischer's approach, but II is still not up to what I heard in the earlier two symphonies. Quiet passages are good, but the orchestra feels too small. The result is ordinary, perhaps hurried—even this movement could use a larger-toned orchestra. The trio is quite good, but it sounds too light-hearted and happy, and the impression remains that Fischer's interpretation is held back and over-intellectualized.

For some reason, III has more body to it, and the orchestra seems more committed and

on top of things. It is fairly fast, the fugue is well done, and the lyrical music is good, with a warm singing tone, even if it is not quite warm enough. The impression, correct or not, is that this is a young orchestra, not entirely comfortable or familiar with what this symphony is expressing.

As in I, the finale seems too light and lean in sound and lacks warmth and heft. The pacing is static, maybe a little slow, and again it would be nice to have a more commanding and broader horn sound. The ending is lean enough to be austere, and it works well enough. Still, what this all comes down to is a performance that seems remote and lacking in "pull" into its world.

The qualities that made Fischer's recordings of 5 and 7 memorable are certainly in play here, but they do not work in this very different music. The sound is not outstanding, either, and that might be part of the problem. The booklet notes supply an interesting essay by Fischer on the notion of the Ninth describing the anticipation of death and an interesting analysis of the work by Jens Schubbe.

HECHT

MAIER: *Quartet;*
SMYTH: *Quartet 4*
Maier Quartet—DB 197

It will come as no great surprise that these are both world premiere recordings—works by two "women composers" who struggled to be appreciated in their own time. Probably Amanda Maier (1853-94) would have become better known as a recitalist and composer of works primarily for violin, but she died after a seven-year struggle with tuberculosis. Her husband, Julius Rontgen, outlived her by four decades and achieved significant renown, at least in his lifetime.

A portion of Maier's Quartet in A, written under the influence of Beethoven, was played at an 1877 musical evening at the Rontgens' house. After that, the composition fell off the map. Researcher B. Tommy Anderson reconstructed the outer movements from Maier's notes.

This is quintessential 19th Century music, not especially novel but satisfying in the same way as a chamber work by Dvorak, Brahms, or Tchaikovsky. The Allegro is standard yet lovely, and the Andante is ethereal and (dare I say?) feminine. Although the six-minute Allegro non troppo goes nowhere, the ten-minute Finale is extravagant and reveals Maier's appreciation for the *Grosse Fuge*. Regarding the unexpected shift to a minor key for the final movement, the liner notes make the startling admission that IV might belong to a different quartet than the opening movement!

Ethel Smyth adored Maier, who was five years older, and likewise studied with Carl Reinecke. After writing the 1881 Quartet in C minor, the 23-year-old returned to England and gave little thought to it, except to borrow the scherzo for an orchestra work. After a likeable but not especially memorable opening, the Adagio also seems a bit elusive, but halfway through it becomes noticeably modern, which by the standard of the time meant Wagner. The momentum shifts, occasionally becoming lazily pastoral, only to swell as if a crescendo could happen but doesn't. It's a wonderful effect. The Scherzo is boisterous, in the best Rossini sense, and IV is dramatic and emotionally ambiguous. Altogether it is an accomplished work for such a young composer.

Again, they are both recorded here for the first time, but it's hard to imagine anyone giving the Maier Quartet serious competition.

DUTTERER

MANCINI: *12 Sonatas*
Armonia Delle Sfere
Tactus 671390 [2CD] 116 minutes

Neapolitan composer Francesco Mancini (1672-1737) was known mainly for operas, cantatas, and sacred music. His largest non-vocal work appears to have been the collection presented here and published in London without a date (believed to have been 1724) as *12 Solos* for a violin or flute. It was dedicated to John Fleetwood, an accomplished recorder player who had met the composer earlier in Naples while serving as the highest-ranking Englishman at the British consulate there.

The group calling itself Harmony of the Spheres—a reference to the ancient metaphysical theory of Pythagoras—was founded in 2009 by recorder player and flutist Daniele Salvatore and keyboardist Silvia Rambaldi, who are colleagues at the Martini Conservatory of Bologna. Here those two are joined by Perikli Pite playing viola da gamba and cello and Pedro Alcacer Doria playing theorbo and baroque guitar. The program offers a varied instrumentation across the set, with two of the sonatas played as harpsichord solos, an option presented by the first edition. The 10-page booklet has text by the flutist and keyboard

player plus a list of the instruments with details on their provenance. Four types of recorder plus transverse flute are used, offering considerable variety to the timbres available, and the recorder has vibrato on many of the notes that are long enough for it. Delicate ears might sometimes dislike chromatic pitches that occur in the writing, but such is the nature of the instrument.

Whatever the reason, the sonatas on disc 1 run in the order 1-2-3-5-4-6. Each 4-movement sonata is given a track which runs about 9 or 10 minutes. Preludes open some and ornaments abound. Two toccatas for keyboard from anonymous contemporary Neapolitan sources are inserted fifth on each half for variety. The sound has a realistic room ambiance but is far less flattering than, for example, the Boismortier duets from Brilliant in this issue. The performances themselves are buoyant, stylish, and spirited, notable for freedom. Relish the first Toccata in A minor, then hear the second if you like. The Largo that opens Sonata 6 could have been a model for the Largo movement of Bach's Flute Sonata in A.

I thoroughly enjoyed the members of the Philadelphia Baroque Orchestra I heard playing some of these on Chandos (Sept/Oct 2014). Two other single-disc programs have come out recently: Ricardo Kanji on Globe and Yi-Chang Liang on Claves, evidently not reviewed here. This album is your only way to hear them all.

GORMAN

MASCAGNI: *Cavalleria Rusticana*
Alessandra Di Giorgio (Santuzza), Piero Giuliacci (Turiddu), Domenico Balzani (Alfio); Cilea Chorus, Berlin Symphony/ Filippo Arlia
Brilliant 96179—79 minutes

I have no idea for whom this performance was recorded. *Cavalleria Rusticana* is Mascagni's most famous opera and has been recorded by some inspired singers and conductors. None of the singers here are memorable except for their confounded mediocrity. Alessandra Di Giorgio has a muddy, unsteady mezzo with a good top. She knows what she is supposed to be doing, but does so with an alarming lack of specificity. Piero Giuliacci sounds like he might have been a good Turiddu 20 years ago. His voice is raw, his characterization superficial. Domenico Balzani sings well, but again the stakes are far too low. Mamma Lucia and Lola have wobbly, unremarkable voices (though this is the only Cav I've heard where Lola joins Turiddu on the final high B at the end of the Brindisi). Have none of these singers heard the famous recordings of the past? They all sound so casual. The stakes for these characters—all of them—are very high, yet none of that is conveyed here.

They're not helped by Filippo Arlia's slow, uneventful conducting. Every scene plods. This performance runs nearly 80 minutes; that tells you all you need to know about the pacing. The chorus sings well, but sound like they are providing musical back-up for a spaghetti commercial. At least a competent woman (unidentified) was hired to deliver the final "Hanno ammazzato compare Turiddu!" with chilling tones. It's the only time the performance comes to life.

The sound is as bland and unatmospheric as everything else. Notes about the singers and conductor; no text or translation

REYNOLDS

MASSENET: *Brumaire Overture; Visions; Espada Suite; Les Erinnyes Incidental Music; Phedre Overture*
Scottish National Orchestra/ Jean-Luc Tingaud
Naxos 574 178—76 minutes

Jules Massenet has something in common with two other good operatic composers, Britten and Menotti. All three also wrote worthy symphonic music that tends to get skimped. These selections will prove this. None are well known; all are entertaining pieces, without the sickly chromaticism that vitiates some of Massenet's work.

The *Brumaire* Overture (1900) commemorates Napoleon's 1799 coup against the Directorate. After its brash opening comes a minor mode theme, well developed. A snare drum and trumpet fanfares interrupt, followed by a quote from the *Marseillaise*. The music also has an appealing hymn-like episode with harp and chimes.

Visions (1891) is a symphonic poem Massenet wrote for a new publisher, though the online score is still in manuscript. In addition to a standard orchestra, it also uses an isolated group with a soprano, violin, harp, harmonium, and "electrophone". I've no clear idea what the last is; the part is blue-penciled into the score and consists of some pedal notes on three pitches. This ensemble apparently is the visions of a better life. The introduction blends its opening fragments into a full-fledged theme, establishing a pastoral mood. A harp glissando introduces the isolated ensemble

that includes a violin solo near to Thais's Meditation in quality and charm. Massenet works up an affecting duet between these two instruments. Agitated music recalling Franck's *Accursed Huntsman* gallops figuratively to a climax ending on a gong smash. After some more beatific stuff, the soprano enters singing a vocalise, the work ending on a quiet pizzicato. *Visions* is a sport in Massenet's output, but a most likeable one.

The *Espada* suite, from his ballet is colorful Franco-Spanish music in the best Bizet tradition. The *Erinnyes* (Furies) incidental music was written for Leconte de Lisle's 1872 play. Its plot is like much of Strauss's *Elektra*. Massenet's music is mostly dignified and refined. The Prelude is of near-Brahmsian severity. II, 'Religious Scene', has a beautiful cello solo that accompanies Electra's obsequies at the body of Agamemnon. The music also has other suave string melodies and imaginative woodwind writing. The final segment begins in agitation. After a calm episode for flute and harp, the agitated passages return, the music rushing to an end on an unexpected major triad.

Like *Brumaire*, the *Phedre* prelude would make a fine concert offering. Its melancholy opening bass theme audibly descends from Liszt's symphonic poem *Tasso*, as does the ensuing clarinet motif. Their skilled development recalls some of the better passages in Mendelssohn. The initially boisterous ending yields to a return of the Tasso theme to close the music in a tragic vein. All these works are well played, and in *Visions* well sung. The Royal Scotsmen handle their duties with vigor or sensitivity as needed, and Tingaud's conducting is fine.

O'CONNOR

MATTHESON: *The Melodious Talking Fingers*
Colin Booth, hpsi—Soundboard 220—70 minutes

Johann Mattheson (1681-1764) dedicated this 1735 book to Handel, who had been one of his friends many years earlier. They had had their disagreements, one of which even led to a duel, and they eventually lost touch with each other. Mattheson kept trying to preserve a connection, but apparently Handel let the relationship fall away.

The book is a few years ahead of Bach's *Art of Fugue* and may have helped to inspire it. There are 12 fugues and 7 other interspersed movements. The latter are lighter in character, welcome playful diversions. The fugues sound mostly old-fashioned to me, rather like Pachelbel's. Several of them have two or three subjects. When the counterpoint gets around to strettos and inversions, the harmonic progressions sometimes get briefly odd, as a by-product of this type of exercise. Fugue 10, the most complicated piece, eventually acquires funny figures that might be illustrating a giggle fit at the end.

As I mentioned when reviewing two other harpsichordists' sets of Mattheson's suites (Sept/Oct 2017 & Nov/Dec 2018), Colin Booth has a strong affinity for this composer. The new release is a companion to his set of those suites, the best I have heard.

He plays the same harpsichord that he built and used for his recent set of Bach's WTC (Mar/Apr 2019 & May/June 2020). He demonstrates some uncommon registrations that he did not use for Bach. One of those is in the movement named 'Burla' (joke), coupling two eight-foot registers but having the buff stop's mutes applied on one of them. I don't recall ever hearing that sound before in anyone's recording of anything.

Booth offers his customary clarity and thoughtfulness here, both in the performance and in his thorough notes about the piece. He played from a facsimile of the 1749 edition, but also consulted all the other editions. He then made his own edition that was published in December 2020 as a companion to this recording. Both of these items (recording and score) are available for purchase through his Soundboard label's web site, and the recording alone through Raven (804-355-6386; 3217 Brook Rd, Richmond VA 23227).

LEHMAN

MENDELSSOHN: *Cello Sonatas; Trio 1*
Viola de Hoag, vc; Mikayel Balyan, p; Marten Root, fl—Vivat 120—77 minutes

Felix Mendelssohn's two cello sonatas date from 1839 and 1843. They are both lively and lovely works. The four-movement Sonata 2 is better known than the three-movement Sonata 1, which is probably why it is played first here. In between the sonatas we have his first trio, written in 1840, here played in his arrangement of it with a flute replacing the original violin. That significantly changes the sound of this fine work, though the structure is unchanged. The frequent alterations in register and lack of double-stops gives us a rather new experience.

Viola de Hoog plays her cello well and phrases thoughtfully. She likes to slide a lot between notes. Balyan is a virtuosic pianist who likes to move fast. They get along well together, and Root makes a fine flute friend. Unfortunately, the recorded balance and sonic thinness keep me from feeling totally happy with this. The cello seems at a greater distance than my ears like. We also tend to lose the flute sometimes in the background. This will stay on my shelves because of the composer's unusual re-scoring of the Trio, but I wish the sound were better.

D MOORE

MERCADANTE: *Flute Chamber Pieces*
Gian-Luca Petrucci; 8 others
Brilliant 96152—63 minutes

Several of the selections are short pieces for flute or flute d'amore and piano. One is a duet, the last from a set of 6 Duetti Concertanti co-edited by our performer for publication by Guglielmo Zanibon in 1985 in Padua. The longest works are the Variations on 'There, I'll give you my hand' based on a duet for baritone and soprano from Act 1 of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* for flute and string trio and a 4-movement Trio in F for flute, flute d'amore, and cello.

One curiosity is 'The Dream' to a text by poet Maria Giuseppa Guacci Nobile (1807-48) that is not supplied; I found it online without trouble in the LiederNet Archive. The original setting for baritone, piano, and obligatory cello was published in 1842; here it is soprano, flute, and piano. A recording of the other form on Opera Rara's album *The Power of Love* lasts 2 minutes longer (Mar/Apr 2000: 264), and Ettore Bastianini also takes significantly longer on Myto (July/Aug 1998, Archives).

Despite their variety, all these pieces are typical of his output; his writing is largely conventional yet practical and sounds very much from its time and place—Italy in the decades before unification.

These recordings were made in performances from 1992 to 2014 in Rome, Verona, and Stuttgart, all on modern instruments. The quartets for flute and strings came out on Bongiovanni in 2000 (5093, July/Aug 2000: 226) and those have considerably more resonance. The flute sounds distant on the lone vocal track, but not detrimentally so. Another contribution from this performer to the discography, perhaps unexpected, is the flute quartets of Donizetti with the Kodaly Quartet on Tudor (Mar/Apr 1998).

Flutist Gian-Luca Petrucci is one of the foremost Italian woodwind players and music editors, especially since Severino Gazzelloni died in 1992. He has performed on five continents and played principal flute in theater orchestras of Parma and Milan and in the Italian Radio Orchestra in Rome. His daughter Ginevra is an accomplished professional as well, reviewed favorably in these pages many times. Hearing his brilliant, silvery sound is a delight. Fine finish and tasteful interpretations serve the writing, which in an Adagio grandioso contains an unexpected heft for a short piece for flute and piano. All the collaborators come across as superb professionals. A 12-page booklet offers notes on the program and brief biographies of everyone, but no particulars about the selections, alas.

GORMAN

MEYERBEER: *Romilda & Costanza*
Luiza Fatyol (Costanza), Chiara Brunello (Romilda), Patrick Kabongo (Teobaldo), Emmanuel Franco (Albertone), Javier Povedano (Retello), Giulio Mastrototaro (Pierotto); Gorecki Chamber Choir, Passionart Orchestra/ Luciano Acocella
Naxos 660495 [3CD] 174 minutes

Meyerbeer, born and trained in Germany, got his start as an opera composer in Italy. In this he was following a path forged by German-speaking composers over the preceding century or more. Handel, Hasse, JC Bach, Mozart, and Johann Simon Mayr had made the same pilgrimage, sometimes to gain further training, sometimes to compose directly for a particular theater, court, or church.

In Italy Meyerbeer gained success with a half-dozen operas, beginning with the one that here gets its world-premiere recording (1817) and continuing with such notable examples as *Margherita d'Anjou* (1820) and *Il Crociato in Egitto* (1824). *Il Crociato* was produced not only in Italian theaters but in Paris and London, and its success in Paris led to Meyerbeer moving to that city. There he made history with a series of grand operas—including *Les Huguenots* (1835)—that became standard items in the international repertory for close to a century.

Romilda e Costanza is a "melodramma semiserio", which means that it includes some comic characters (e.g. Pierrotto—recognizable in part by the diminutive version of his name, indicating lower social class) and that it ends

up happily for all. Rossini's *Matilde di Shabran* (review in this issue) is another instance of this interesting and today sometimes-puzzling genre—as is Bellini's *Sonnambula*.

The plot is a fascinating variant of the "rescue opera" type that opera aficionados know about from such instances as Gretry's *Raoul Barbe-Bleue* and Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Here the unjustly imprisoned person is male (Teobaldo, tenor), and not one woman but two seek to release him: his current sweetheart, Romilda, and his former but still faithful one, aptly named Costanza.

The artful libretto by Gaetano Rossi (librettist also for Rossini and, later, Donizetti) makes the most of the complications here, which involve Costanza and Romilda having to overcome their competitiveness for the affections of Teobaldo. There is some interesting confusion along the way. Romilda first shows up in disguise as a young page (male), which Meyerbeer made plausible by setting the role for alto. (The faithful Costanza is a soprano.) What at first seems to be Romilda's entrance aria (disc 1 track 14) quickly gets joined by Costanza and Teobaldo in a gorgeous trio of emotional complexity ('Che barbaro tormento'). It became the best-known number in the opera.

The superb booklet essay, by musicologist Sieghart Döhring, helpfully explains some of the ways this first of Meyerbeer's six Italian operas already goes beyond the Rossini operas that it strongly resembles. I think I noticed, though, one borrowing from Rossini that is a bit too close: a march motive that runs through disc 2 track 9 ('Ma, cos'è questo?') seems to have been lifted directly from the opening of the Act 1 finale of *The Barber of Seville* (which had been a big hit a year earlier), matching it even in the way it modulates. I couldn't help hearing a supposedly drunken soldier (Count Almaviva in disguise) throwing the door open and crying "Hé!"

Particularly notable is the orchestration, which has more variety—quicker shifts and contrasts—than in Rossini's operas of the same period. This is a testament no doubt to the symphonic achievements of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, which Meyerbeer had studied in his years of training in Germany. A rising series of parallel chords in the strings near the end of the overture seems to predict a moment in Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, though I doubt that Berlioz knew this particular opera of Meyerbeer's.

The singers—from widely varied countries including Mexico, France, Italy, and Romania—are all capable or much more than that. The weakest in the main roles is Giulio Mastrototaro, who is apparently older than the rest, having sung in the festival's recordings in 2006-8. His unsteady delivery and approximate pitch are no more welcome here than in Rossini's *Matilde*. But his humorous (manipulative, etc.) delivery is clearly apt and, in front of an audience, must have helped enliven several important scenes, including an extended duet with Romilda in Act 1.

The hero Tebaldo is coloratura tenor Patrick Kabongo. He comes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, studied in Brussels, and has made his career with major opera houses in Paris, Rouen, and Strasbourg. I already had the pleasure of encountering him in secondary roles in two Rossini recordings from this same festival (*Maometto II*, March/Apr 2019; *Moïse et Pharaon*, Jan/Feb 2021). Here he rises to the challenges of a leading role, and the audience is clearly thrilled. I look forward to hearing the confident tones of this dramatically alert singer in future productions. His coloratura is elegant and faultless.

The title roles are taken effectively by soprano Luiza Fatyol (as the rejected Costanza) and alto Chiara Brunello (as Romilda). Distinctly different ranges helps us distinguish them. Brunello has a darker tone than Fatyol, even when the two sing in roughly the same range. Each is quite accomplished in coloratura and becomes, if anything, even more impressive as the opera goes along. (A singer's voice often becomes more flexible as it warms up.) Their duet in Act 2 (end of disc 2) would be a great way to sample this opera. It can be heard for free on YouTube.

Comparing that trio for Tebaldo and the two women ('Che barbaro tormento') to a previous recording of that marvelous movement with Chris Merritt and two little-known but fine singers, Bronwen Mills and Anne Mason (Opera Rara, unreviewed), the orchestra is just a bit more polished and more vividly present in the older recording, and the coloratura singing is a touch cleaner there (often true in studio recordings). But here one gets a stronger sense of dramatic interaction among the characters: the tempo adjustments and the women's energetic performance of the scalar swoops near the end prevent the number from feeling like a highly refined vocal concert, as in the Opera Rara recording.

I was also pleased to encounter again here the baritone Emmanuel Franco (who so impressed me in Rossini's *Matilde*).

You can download the libretto and booklet from Naxos.com.

The Passionart Orchestra, a group from Cracow (Poland), became the resident ensemble at the Rossini in Wildbad festival in 2019. It plays just as well as the Moravian orchestra that held the same contract for years. The winds are perhaps better tuned, though the solo violin in one aria here is insecure, not remotely up to the level of the rest of the group (disc 1, track 6—Couldn't this have been re-recorded?). The Gorecki Chamber Choir sings with superb tone and balance, though they sound uninvolved in the proceedings. I hear no stage noises; nor do the soloists seem to move around.

The conductor keeps up a smart pace, yet adapts tempos appropriately. Fortepianist Andres Jesus Gallucci makes the secco recitatives specific to the situation and, with his occasional semi-improvised right-hand commentaries, musically engaging.

Döhring's wonderful booklet-essay is printed in type too tiny for aging eyes. The synopsis is detailed and includes track numbers (hurrah!). The Italian-only libretto carefully indicates in paler print any lines of recitative that have been omitted in performance. But I wish that Wildbad and Naxos would also translate the libretto, especially when an opera is unknown.

This much-needed release will give opera lovers and music historians lots to think about and lots to enjoy.

LOCKE

MIASKOVSKY: *Symphony 21;*
see PROKOFIEFF

MONTEVERDI: *Madrigals 3*

Concerto Italiano/ Rinaldo Alessandrini
Naive 30580—65 minutes

When Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) wrote about performing madrigals he stressed the importance of text expression, and this ensemble takes that to heart. Illuminating each of Monteverdi's expressive gestures is not easy to do in Book 3 (published 1592) where the composer has packed gestures together, piling them on top of each other. In some madrigals, such as 'Rimanti In Pace' there's a certain Gesualdo quality in the dense texture.

Director and ensemble founder Rinaldo Alessandrini describes his interpretive approach: "Monteverdi urges us to let the text live almost word by word, demanding a microscopic identification with what the text itself allows us to glimpse behind it. And this is not merely and exclusively a question of correct pronunciation, but the ability to 'simulate' in theatrical terms a truth that exists in the abundant, proliferative stage of the human soul."

As a listener, it's important here to take the time to savor and repeat. I found it rewarding to listen alternately with and without the words in front of me.

Book 3 is generally regarded as the collection where Monteverdi increasingly used the dramatic techniques—such as *declamato* and *concitato*—that he developed through the later books. For example, in 'Vattene Pur, Crudel' (text by Tasso) we get a taste of the composer's skills in depicting a battlefield's desolate landscape, peopled by combatants faint with war and abandoned. The drama, suspense, and vivid evocation of place found in this madrigal are used in expanded form in Monteverdi's great battle narrative 'Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda' (Book 8, also Tasso).

Concerto Italiano's mastery of the style is complete: ensemble blend, ebb and flow of phrasing and tempo, vocal gesture, and color are used in countless ways. For instance, in 'Stracciami Pur Il Core' sharp edges on the vocal attack for the opening declaration "Rend my heart asunder, then!" are fittingly serrated, and a subtle open-throated warble in 'O Rossignuol, Ch'in Queste Verdi Fronde' evokes the titular nightingale.

These are very fine interpretations. Keeping up momentum while conveying the meaning of each word is hard to do, and sometimes (such as in 'Rimanti In Pace') it feels as though the overabundance of puzzle pieces or textured threads in a wall hanging—some bulky, some slender—drape rather heavily on the singers. Even a small amount of leavening would generate more forward movement and animate the flow.

John Barker praised this ensemble's reissued 1992 recording of Book 6 (Arcana 425, M/J 2017) and also their more recent "wonderful array of 'great Monteverdi moments'" in a program of madrigals and sinfonias called *Night* (Naive 30566, N/D 2017). Notes, texts, translations.

C MOORE

Word Police Redundancy Division

On a plane, from a crew member, in February: "You may now use your mobile phones at this time."

MORKOV: *The Czar's Guitars*
John Schneiderman, Oleg Timofeyev
Hanssler 20018 [2CD] 98 minutes

This is a unique recording, with a variety of arrangements and compositions by one of the guitar's most ardent Russian proponents, Vladimir Morkov, who, like many musicians of his generation in Europe, earned his living outside of music but still found time for a substantial amount of composing and other artistic pursuits.

The recording shows the true tone of these instruments. They are closely related to the modern classical guitar, but have their own special timbres. The music is well chosen and performed with sensitivity and care, though the more challenging technical passages show the performers' limitations. Less technically-demanding works, such as Rubenstein's 'Andante' from his Trio in F, come off as more solid. The two-guitar arrangement of Glinka's song, 'Tell Me Maiden', and Morkov's 'Variations on Carnival of Venice' are my favorites on the first disc.

The second disc begins with a collection of 16 solos with Schneiderman and Timofeyev alternating. The mix is sonically consistent and allows the individuality of each artist's playing to come through. A particularly sweet solo piece is 'Marie', performed by Schneiderman on a Russian guitar. Five movements from Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* are my favorite tracks on this recording. The 10 preludes that follow are very pleasant chorale-like pieces that may have been harmonic outlines meant for improvisation. Playing the Russian guitar and the higher-pitched Russian quart guitar, Timofeyev and Schneiderman achieve a nice blend in these fairly easy pieces.

Despite some typos, the liner notes are quite informative and add to the bigger picture this set is trying to portray.

MCCUTCHEON

MORPURGO: *Grandpa Christmas;*
see SAINT-SAENS

MOSOLOV: *Symphony 5; Harp Concerto*
Taylor Ann Fleshman, hp; Moscow Symphony/ Arthur Arnold—Naxos 574102—69 minutes

Alexander Mosolov's (1900-73) career was in many ways representative of the lives that fellow composers in the Soviet Union endured in the age of Stalin. He was born in Kiev, but his family moved to Moscow three years later. After his father died, his mother, a singer who gave him his first music lessons, married a famous painter, placing him in an artistic environment that was on top of the latest artistic trends. Even so, young Alexander's work as Lenin's mail carrier rendered him sympathetic enough to the Revolution to join the Red Army, where he won a battle commendation before leaving with a medical discharge (probably PTSD) in 1921. Next came Moscow Conservatory, where he studied composition with Reinhold Gliere and Nikolai Miaskovsky, though his Russian futurist inclinations caused him problems with other faculty. He became a major figure in the Soviet *avant-garde* and wrote enough futuristic music in the 1920s to be one of four composers invited by the Bolshoi Theater to write a ballet known as *Four Moscows* that staged the capital at four periods in the future. Mosolov's entry, *Stel* (Steel), was to be the final act, set in 2117, but the ballet was never staged. A suite from it was well received, but only the score to its first movement survived. Suitably titled *The Iron Foundry: Music of Machines,* the loud, brash piece is the kind of machine-inspired work that typified the Russian futurist movement (Jan/Feb 1995). In the late 1920s, many of Mosolov's scores disappeared. Film maker Matthew Mishory, who made a 2019 documentary about that mystery called *Mosolov's Suitcase,* believes that "some of Mosolov's music survives [perhaps in a suitcase] because he was able to smuggle it to the West".

In 1927 Mosolov came under pressure from the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians because of his modernism. He tried to relieve that pressure by going to central Russia to resume his earlier studies of folk music in Turkmenistan and other regions. Several folk-influenced works followed, such as *Turkmenian Overture* and *Turkmenian Nights,* but they did not appease the authorities. In 1932, he wrote a letter to Stalin pleading for relief—to no avail. When the government forbade futurism outright, the composer did not take it well. He was a bit of a *bon vivant,* drunk, and ruffian to begin with, and his carousing and picking fights intensified. One of those incidents, exacerbated by the criticism of composer and regime toady Tikhon Khrennikov, led to his expulsion from the Composers Union in 1936. In 1938 he was arrested and sent to a labor camp as a counter-revolutionary, only to be released eight months later when an appeal by Gliere and Miaskovsky earned a reduction in charges from a political crime to hooligan-

ism. The catch was that he was temporarily forbidden from Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev. He responded by writing only works that could survive charges of "formalism", many based on the folk music he had been collecting, but things never quite worked out. Even Shostakovich criticized him. In many ways, he was broken. Writing in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* about Mosolov's attempts to conform, musicologist Marina Frolova-Walker observed that, "It becomes impossible to discern the former avant-gardist in the works written from the late 30s on: his style had been irreversibly 'corrected' by his experiences in a labour camp."

The 1939 Harp Concerto, possibly a tribute to Gliere, who also wrote a harp concerto, represented Mosolov's surrender. The score disappeared after the 1939 premiere at the Moscow Conservatory, but it was recently recovered and restored by Dutch conductor and Moscow Symphony Music Director, Arthur Arnold. Mosolov managed the difficulty of scoring a harp concerto by giving the instrument plenty of solo moments in front of a quiet orchestra limited mostly to solos and smallish instrumental groups. Harmonies are often modal, sometimes impressionist, with occasional subtle balalaika effects. The tunes are good ones, the invention is beguiling, folklike, and sometimes eerie; and some parts are sprightly and light-hearted. The result is clever, well integrated, atmospheric, and remarkably upbeat.

Symphony 5 (1965) begins with a chant in the trombones that the rest of the orchestra picks up for development. The first section is expansive and Russian in color, interrupted by brief heavy chords, suggesting gazing at expansive scenery during a work break, only to be reminded of the factory behind you. The chant becomes more powerful as the orchestra builds in intensity and color to a triumphant climax. At the last minute, quiet strings look back on the chant, mellow brass follow, and the ending is powerful. The Adagio is spooky at first, as the chant returns in the winds over a slow mysterious tread. A warm string melody takes over, and an earlier quiet figure in the bass is now a heavy march. Woodwind solos give way to a string melody before the middle of the orchestra takes the line from that early heavy bass. More eeriness returns, interrupted by lyrical woodwind solos and ensembles. After an episode in the full orchestra, the bass figure reappears and looks back to Moussorgsky. Eerieness returns, and the movement ends in uncertainty. Solo winds open III in an Andante Recitativo that continues what was going on earlier plus a little modernism. The strings enter with a simple hymnlike tune that comes from nowhere, as the piece takes on a hopeful aspect with odd stirring underneath. After an Allegro bursts forth in excitement, the symphony proceeds to a triumphant close. It is interesting that some of its composer's early modernism does peek through.

The long-suffering Alexander Mosolov deserves rehabilitation, and these fine performances and sound make a good case. If you like this symphony, by all means try the (unnumbered) Symphony in E (1944), a darker work, more Russian and more romantic (Northern Flowers, not reviewed).

Performances and sound are first rate. Anthony Short's essay on Mosolov's life and career is comprehensive and detailed but includes almost nothing about the music. Finally, many thanks to Lawrence Millman, author and expert on Soviet music, for his help with the research for this review.

HECHT

MOUSSA: *Violin Concerto;* see GINASTERA

MOZART: *Gran Partita*

Concertgebouw Orchestra/ Alexei Ogrintchouk
BIS 2463—58 minutes

Mark Simpson, Fraser Langton, Oliver Pashley, Ausias Garrigos Morant, cl; Nicholas Daniel, Emma Feilding, ob; Amy Harman, Dom Tyler, bn; Ben Goldscheider, Angela Barnes, James Pillai, Fabian van de Geest, hn; David Stark, db
Orchid 100150—58 minutes

On 23 March 1784 at the Imperial Court Theater in Vienna, the young celebrated clarinetist Anton Stadler led a benefit concert that included four movements of a new and sprawling wind serenade by his friend Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The composer could not attend; but one concertgoer showered the serenade with praise, calling it "glorious and sublime". No other performances in Mozart's lifetime are known; and 19th Century printings relied on corrupted parts from the premiere.

After the composer's premature death in 1791, his widow Constanze sold the autograph manuscript of the serenade to the German publisher Johann Anton Andre. Since the corrupted parts were already available for sale, Andre bound the autograph in a hard cover, scribbled on it the title "Gran Partita", and gave it to Archduke Ludwig I in exchange for a royal

favor. In 1912 the autograph surfaced, and in 1942 the Library of Congress purchased it. In the early 1970s, the California-based mathematician and clarinetist Daniel Leeson, using the manuscript at the Library of Congress, prepared an authoritative version that cemented the work as a cornerstone of the wind repertory.

Here two wind ensembles add to a long list of interpretations. Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Principal Oboe Alexei Ogrintchouk leads his colleagues in a 2019 recording; and rising clarinetist-composer Mark Simpson (b. 1988) enlists his British compatriots in a July 2020 recording. Ogrintchouk finishes his program with Beethoven's Eight Variations on 'La ci darem la mano' from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* for two oboes and English horn. Simpson begins his program with the world premiere of his own 'Geysir', an eight-minute tone poem in the same instrumentation as the Mozart.

The Concertgebouw is thoroughly professional and persuasive, rendering all solo utterances, bass lines, and inner counterpoint with stunning beauty, clarity, and technique. The presentation strikes an uncommon balance between 18th and 19th Century viewpoints, interlacing abundant dynamics with elegant style and punctuating fiery proclamations with graceful cadences.

The Simpson ensemble is also very good, even if the timbres are a bit more raw and edgy. Group fortissimo moments sound like a reed organ; and the slow movements are arrestingly thoughtful and heartfelt. The reading can be uneven; although the musicians seem to favor a fully romantic approach, they sometimes follow assertive statements with puzzling retreats. Yet if the Concertgebouw has a more unified vision, the Simpson ensemble offers a more riveting Rondo finale that pushes the envelope on tempo and sound.

Companion pieces are important considerations; here the Concertgebouw makes the best choice. The Beethoven keeps the listener in Mozart's world; and Ogrintchouk and his oboe section give an exquisite reading with gorgeous sonics, lovely cantabile phrasing, and nimble and effortless fingers and articulation. Simpson's 'Geysir' is confident and well scored; but its restless and unnerving contemporary soundscape is too alien next to the congenial Mozart. Some listeners may applaud this kind of unconvential pairing; but many others will prefer to extend their idyll in Imperial Vienna.

HANUDEL

MOZART: *Piano Concerto 20; Fantasies;*
SILVESTROV: *Messenger; 2 Dialogues*
Helene Grimaud; Camerata Salzburg
DG 4837853—79 minutes

Mozart's Fantasy in D minor, K 397, and Fantasy in C minor, K 475, flank the concerto. There's a plot twist in the segue from the first fantasy to the concerto that I won't spoil, but which I thought was quite ingenious. The concerto is one of Mozart's more dramatic, and the Camerata Salzburg, an orchestra with around 40 members, plays with vigor and without vibrato. The excitement helps mitigate the somewhat wiry sound, but I still miss a richer tone. Grimaud plays cleanly and is also engaged, muscular but not revelatory. She uses Beethoven's cadenzas. The piano produces some harsh sounds.

Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov tends to write syrupy, derivative fare; even Caspar Milquetoast himself might be left pining for something more adventurous. *The Messenger*, for string orchestra and synthesizer or piano, subjects Mozart melodies to the worst sort of New Age music production values. The version for piano solo is even less relevant; without the strings and synthesizer offering some contrast, it is simply ripped-off Mozart played in an airplane hangar at plodding tempos. Calm, ethereal music can be intelligent and well done—see Gavin Bryars—but this is unbearably silly. The *Two Dialogues with Postscript* have the courtesy not to drag Mozart down with them, but Silvestrov's themes are still bland and his chord progressions astoundingly simplistic. It's like listening to a bottle of cheap perfume.

There is a high-falutin' essay about time, Mozart, and Silvestrov in the booklet, and I feel moved by the spirit to take exception to one quote from Grimaud, namely, "The pandemic we are experiencing is unprecedented." Why do people keep saying this is unprecedented? The CDC's website notes that the Spanish Flu killed at least 50 million people worldwide and about 675,000 in the United States, which had about 100 million people in 1918. US deaths are just over half that with 331 million people, and deaths worldwide are at 1.83 million as I write. All those deaths are certainly grievous, but things could be far, far worse than they are.

ESTEP

MOZART: *Piano Concertos 21+22*
Idil Biret, Bursa Symphony/ Ender Sakpinar
IBA 571408—72 minutes

Idil Biret is Turkish, and Bursa is south of Istanbul in that country. There's no sense comparing this orchestra to, say, the Cleveland in the Casadesus recordings. And Biret is not Ingrid Haebler, whose recording will always be hard to beat—even in sound.

I listened to all of this in one sitting, and I found nothing to object to. Still, I was left with the feeling that this is not one of the very best recordings. Her touch is heavier than suits Mozart; that very factor makes some of her other recordings competitive. (In fact, her touch works better in 22 than in 21—since 22 is almost Beethoven.) Some of the instruments in the orchestra sound weak. It becomes a matter of good versus the best, and this is not the best. But if you can't find Haebler or Kovacevich or Casadesus, this is worth considering.

VROON

MOZART: *Vespers of the Confessor; Requiem*
Bavarian Radio Choir, Berlin Academy for Ancient Music/ Howard Arman
BR 900926 [2CD] 134 minutes

The strings positively *squeak*—a tiny "period" group playing with no vibrato. The choir is excellent, but I can't stand to listen to this, because squeaky violins sound like amateurs practicing.

Two discs, because there's a whole disc of rehearsal for the Requiem (73 minutes), and also because of a 7-minute 'Libera Me' by Neukomm, which comes after the Requiem on the first disc.

VROON

MOZART: *Violin Sonatas, K 376, 379, 526*
Vineta Sareika; Amandine Savary, p
Muso 41—65 minutes

The K 376 and 379 sonatas were written in 1781 when Mozart was 25 years old. They belong to the set of sonatas published that year and dedicated to the composer's prize student Josepha Auernhammer. I've always regarded these as Mozart's first fully mature violin sonatas. K 526 dates from 1787 and is the composer's last real violin sonata. It is his masterpiece in the form.

Vineta Sareika and Amandine Savary play these works with obvious relish. They are very intelligent musicians, and there is plenty of wit in these performances. These are among the finest performances of these sonatas that I've heard. By the way, there is nothing of period performance practice in their playing: Sareika uses a continuous vibrato, and Savary is obviously playing on a modern grand piano.

Sareika plays a Stradivarius built in 1683.

MAGIL

MUSGRAVE: *Voices of Our Ancestors; Missa Brevis; Rorate Coeli*
New York Virtuoso Singers/ Harold Rosenbaum; American Brass Quintet
Lyrita 387—63 minutes

I associate Thea Musgrave with avant-garde musical adventures, but this choral program reveals a startling range of style and sensibility, from the daring to the disarmingly conservative. The performances are by turns sweetly lyrical and intensely aggressive, as the music requires. Musgrave's breadth should not be surprising, as she is now 92 and has written for numerous occasions and varied genres, including opera, ballet, choral, and orchestral. She doesn't like being pinned down, and that includes being regarded as a female composer (even though she studied with Nadia Boulanger and was acutely aware of her status as a female composer.) "When I'm composing", she says, "I'm a human being. It's not a question of sexuality."

Perhaps her most consistent attribute is a sense of drama, a willingness to try anything. When she turned 90 Harold Rosenbaum, the authoritative and sympathetic conductor here, used a sports metaphor: "It's like she has a baseball team with 9 people on the field, but 80 people in the bullpen, and she starts throwing them on the field in different arrangements. She has so many tricks up her sleeve, but all for the good of the music. Nothing is silly or just thrown in for the sake of doing it. It all makes sense."

The earliest work, the 1977 *Rorate Coeli* for a cappela choir, has the most tricks and might appear to make the least sense, though it has its own idiosyncratic sense of structure and unity. It is certainly the most overtly modernist work here, partly sung, partly chanted or spoken, sometimes whispered or shrieked, full of dizzying aleatory passages, a work that helped cement Musgrave's reputation in the avant-garde. It is packed with imagination and color, with contrast between soaring solos, dense

chords, chittery chance-music effects, and unpredictable polyphony. The choral glissandos in the upper registers are spine-tingling.

In the ambitious, large-scaled *Voices of Our Ancestors*, from 2014, Musgrave immerses herself in different cultures and ancient texts (Persian Greek, Chinese, and others, all translated into English.) The choral writing is colored by delicate, sometimes sinister brass, performed here with spiky eloquence by the American Brass Quintet. The harmonic idiom is again modernist, but not harshly so; indeed, some of the bitonalities are strikingly gentle.

After these complex, layered pieces, so full of effects, the most recent work, Missa Brevis, from 2018, comes as a relief, a point of relaxation. It's like a master painter showing she can do a simple sketch. It is homophonic, diatonic, and heartfelt. The Sanctus has a sweet innocence, the Agnus Dei a ghostlike stillness; the soloists have an angelic purity.

Rounding out this welcome release are the excellent notes by Peter Conway. The recordings, from St Mary's and Advent Lutheran in New York, are clear enough, with just the right amount of churchy echo and ambiance.

SULLIVAN

NIELSEN: *Violin Pieces*
Hasse Borup; Andrew Staupe, p
Naxos 573870—88 minutes

The total time listed above is not a typographical error. Naxos has (heaven knows how) managed to put 88 minutes of music onto one CD. What should matter to us is what the contents are; in this case, they are worthy of our attention no matter what the circumstances.

Nielsen's relationship with the violin is complex, and you can see that immediately from this program, which contains all of his music for the instrument apart from the concerto. We have, at the beginning, two violin sonatas, including the "numbered" No. 1 and one earlier than that, from the 19th Century, along with a handful of yet earlier pieces with and without piano. Then there's a large gap, and the Second (numbered) Sonata of 1912/1919, plus the two big solo violin works: the *Prelude, Theme and Variations* of 1922-23 and the *Preludio e Presto* of 1927-8.

The distance between the earliest works here and the last is profound. I can't fathom why the solo works are not better known, because they are strong and obviously bright, as the edge of a blade is bright; that they are brilliant ought to be apparent to everyone. At the same time, the early stuff is juvenilia of the sort that doesn't even foreshadow greatness, just presages some further progress in music.

Hasse Borup takes on the most difficult of these works with apparent ease, and Staupe gives his best, which in the Second Sonata is a lot.

THOMSON

NONO: *Lontananza Nostalgica Utopica Futura*
Marco Fusi, v; Pierluigi Billone, elec
Kairos 15086—61 minutes

La Lontanzan Nostalica Utopica Futura (1989) is barely translatable, but it means something like *The Distant Nostalgia of the Utopian Future*. It is an extended work for solo violin and electronics in six movements. It is a collaborative effort. The violinist has Nono's score, which mostly consists of gestures barely heard by the violinist himself, including a disembodied arpeggio, a melodic fragment, and a harmonic or two; Mr Billone (a composer himself) created the tapes that are streamed through 6 speakers put together with barely audible scrapes, a door closing, a voice, and transformations of the above: he offers exhaustive notes and diagrams.

There are no notes by the composer, but enthusiastic apologias from Billone and violinist Fusi. This will appeal to fans of the extremist avant-garde of the last few years of the century. The collaboration involved of score and performers reflects Nono's wish for a utopian future. Gidon Kremer has this on DG as well.

GIMBEL

NOVAK: *South Bohemian Suite; Toman and the Wood Nymph*
Moravian Philharmonic/ Marek Stilec
Naxos 574 226—57 minutes

The South Bohemian Suite is close to a symphony, it's so elaborate, even if its processes differ. I 'Pastoral; Horizons' opens with high strings creating an atmosphere of spaciousness. One of the main themes is an oboe tune with Czech folk overtones. The material develops with ever richer textural interest. The movement closes on reminiscences of its earlier mood with an imaginative use of attenuated sounds. II, 'Reverie; Forest and Pond' borders on impressionism with the effect, if not the precise sound of Delius. The music accumulates in detail and volume before ending in tranquility. Grumbling inchoate bass sounds start III, 'Once Upon a Time; March of the

Hussites'. A heroic theme gradually forms from the martial pulse in a steady crescendo of implacable power. A carefully controlled fade-out ends the movement. IV, 'My Homeland', is a brief epilogue, where a calm hymn-like tune works up to climax. In 1941, during the Nazi occupation, Novak would use some of the sounds from III in his *De Profundis*, one of the greatest musical products from WW II and, along with Suk's *Ripening* the greatest of Czech tone poems.

Toman and the Wood Nymph (1907) comes from a poem by Frantisek Celansky. Toman, feeling restless, seeks his lover on Midsummer Eve, only to discover she's found someone else. He goes into the forest, seeking oblivion in the arms of a wood-nymph. As happens with interspecies romance, things go awry. The music quotes a Czech folk tune 'Guelder Rose, Why Are You Growing in the Ditch?' Novak was drawn to the music of Richard Strauss, the writing of Strindberg and the erotic Symbolist art of Felicien Rops. The work premiered along with Novak's tone poem *Of the Eternal Longing* (Naxos 573 683); he thought of them as complementary. The opening pages use augmented harmonies with themelets trailing off in little tendrils reminiscent of Bax. Some sinister passages occur, with ample employment for the trombones and Hittites before the harmonies of the early pages reappear, with colorful bird-chirps and other forest sounds. You could describe this section as one of massive delicacy, so thoroughly does Novak flesh it out. The music rises to a pitch of Dionysiac abandon with sustained writing worthy of Richard Strauss. The work seems as if it'll end on a long decrescendo with a solo bass clarinet when it abruptly closes in a violent brace of *ff* minor triads.

Performances of both works are full-blooded, totally sympathetic to Novak's style. Stilec's conducting shows a firm grasp of the beauties of this still underrated master.

O'CONNOR

OCKEGHEM: *Chansons*
Cut Circle/ Jesse Rodin
Musique en Wallonie 1995 [2CD] 134 minutes

It takes a little getting used to, but the more I listen the more I love it. It seems to me that ensembles recording the music of the 15th Century usually aim for the same thing—to make the music sound "beautiful". One might think the notion of beauty would vary depending on the text, but not so. Most ensembles aim for warm timbres, light textures, carefully crafted phrasing, and precise intonation as a base line, regardless of the text. Yet Rodin asks, what would this music have sounded like in a banquet hall, a bedroom, or outdoors? And when eye witnesses describe audiences openly weeping at the sound of a song, did it have to do with a vocal technique that sounded different from one that would have, say, made them laugh? Questions such as these led Rodin to consider a strategy for singing Ockeghem's chansons in a way that would preserve a strong sense of ensemble and pitch, but use a "flexible, full-blooded vocal technique" that could evoke a broad range of emotions. The intimacy of the music also inspired Rodin to bring the microphones close to the singers so that the listener might feel the effect of sitting next to them in an intimate setting. All of the voices sing the texts all of the time—a controversial decision, but he makes sound arguments for it.

Every song has its unique sound depending on the requirements of the text. As Rodin says, they try to get to the emotional heart of a song with a vocal technique that evokes those feelings. Accordingly, when considering the text of the rondeau 'L'aultre d'antan', which begins, "Someone from yesteryear passed by the other day and in passing pierced me with a glance forged in Milan", voices yelp and scoop their parts with a piercing timbre to evoke the passion of a piercing glance. Later, after the singer reconsiders his mistreatment, he mourns his loss of love, which requires a softer vocal timbre. By contrast the virelai 'Ma Bouche Rit', where the singer reflects on the conflict between inner feelings and outward expression, calls for a flexible technique and lighter tone color with more chest voice.

The notes are very helpful and lavishly printed. Rodin explains his reasoning and also the technical inner workings of each song. Full-color reproductions of folia from the chansonniers place Ockeghem's songs in a context that helps one imagining audiences' appreciation of his music as works of art. Texts and notes are English.

LOEWEN

PAGANINI: *Centone di Sonate*
Gianfranco Iannetta, v; Walter Zanetti, g
Tactus 781606—75 minutes

There was a recording of one of these sonatas by Perlman and John Williams. When you've heard that, these fellows seem a bit crude. The

Dynamic label had a set of these (with Luigi Bianchi, a violinist with real personality) and so did Naxos; both were reviewed by us back in the 1990s. If you are looking for violin-and-guitar sonatas by Paganini, I would look there rather than here.

VROON

PAGANINI: *43 Ghiribizzi*
Marcello Fantoni, g
Stradivarius 37149—64 minutes

It is universally known that Niccolo Paganini was an inspiring violin virtuoso and showman in the first half of the 19th Century. What is not as familiar is that he was also a pretty adept guitarist and wrote a number of solo pieces for it as well as violin-guitar duets and a number of chamber works that included guitar.

"Ghiribizzi" translates to "whims" and "caprices", and was written in Naples around 1820. Having supposedly been written for "a little girl from Naples", the music on this recording is rather rudimentary in concept, with simple harmonic structures and tuneful melodies, many taken from popular operas of composers including Rossini and Mozart, as was the rage of guitar composers from this period such as Fernando Sor and Mauro Giuliani.

Guitarist Marcello Fantoni takes this somewhat simplistic music and endows it with an always-spirited delivery. It's as if we are listening to passionate performances by the energetic composer-performer himself, endowing this uncomplicated music with the romantic, exuberant flair of a captivating recitalist. He approaches each piece individually, giving the flow of the program variety that maintains the listener's interest. Occasional minor technical flaws occur in rapid passages; these would bother only the most critical listeners and do not detract from the musicality and high energy generated by Fantoni's brisk tempos.

Notable tracks include 15 and 20, where the guitar, playing portamento, brings to mind techniques used when playing the violin. No. 22 is played with a markedly slow, tender feel.

Recorded sound is pleasant, but a bit on the thin side, even though this is played on a modern instrument. Perhaps the thinness was intended to imitate the tone of the guitars in Paganini's time.

Liner notes by Danilo Prefumo are excellent and give a fine condensed picture of the role of the guitar in the musical life and work of this famous violinist.

MCCUTCHEON

PARK: *Choral Pieces*
Owain Park, p; Epiphoni Consort/ Tim Reader
Delphian 34239—77 minutes

Owain Park (b.1993) is one of Britain's most abundantly gifted young musicians. In my visits to the UK I met him first as an organ scholar at Wells Cathedral and later as organ scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge where it was clear that he was headed for greatness. He has achieved much success as a composer, conductor, organist, and singer. He organized an award-winning singing ensemble, Gesualdo Six, which has toured extensively and released three recordings to critical acclaim.

His 2018 recording of choral works for Hyperion performed by the Trinity College Choir under Stephen Layton also met with high praise (N/D 2018).

The present recording brings out his romantic strain. It is a paean in various ways to the British music he has grown up with. Some of these compositions follow in the tradition of Stanford and Vaughan Williams, but with Park's own daring harmonic stamp on them. All these pieces are recorded here for the first time.

The program opens with a luxurious and rapturous setting of Wordsworth's 'Louisa' for alternating solo soprano, chorus, and solo tenor. It takes us into the poet's inner world and captures the depth of spirit of one who is truly enamored of nature itself and this "nymph-like maid".

Particularly striking is his setting of 'Holy is the True Light', which begins with words from the Latin Requiem Mass ("Lux aeterna luceat eis"). The piece is six minutes long, and about half way through Park quotes "Nimrod" from Elgar's *Enigma Variations* and adapts it for the choir and a soloist who repeatedly intone the final words "Alleluia. Amen." It is lushly romantic.

The longest composition here at nearly 20 minutes is *Sing to Me, Windchimes*, a tender 9-movement work with 7 settings of poems and 2 solo piano interludes using lines from other poems as titles. His piano writing effectively suggests the sound of windchimes. With its themes of love and loss, affirmation and renewal, it is both an elegy for a loved one and an ode to her spirituality and love of nature. Park accompanies here on piano.

'Antiphon for Angels', composed for choir with violin accompaniment, was commissioned by the vocal ensemble Voces8 and vio-

linist Rachael Podger. It begins as the choir alone enters with hushed tones in what sounds like the first phrase of the chorale 'Ermuntre Dich' (Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light) and continues with Park's own gentle completion of the chorale. It creates an ingenious pairing with text by St Ambrose: "Behold the radiant sun departs in glory from our sight, but, O our God, possess our hearts with Thy celestial Light". At first it sounds like an homage to Bach (and perhaps Podger, who specializes in Bach) but with the solo violin writing it turns into what sounds like an homage to *The Lark Ascending* (Vaughan Williams). It is rich and gorgeous.

Two engaging and winsome groups of Shakespeare settings complete the program. For the four *Shakespeare Love Songs* Park has chosen words from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the sonnet 'Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds' to create, as Michael Emery writes in his liner notes, "a narrative arc describing the lovers' journey from yearning and flirtation to sweet contentment". The texts for the 6 *Shakespeare Songs of Night Time* come from 8 plays, and all but one of them concludes with these lines from *Romeo and Juliet*: "Come, gentle night, come, loving black-brow'd night". Each set ends with a sumptuously lovely setting.

The Epiphoni Consort (8-6-6-8) sings exceedingly well, including proficient solo voices. Balance, clarity, and tonal warmth are complemented by lucent diction. Aside from *Sing to Me, Windchimes* and 'Antiphon for the Angels' the works are sung a cappella.

I've been watching with great delight as his career has developed, and this recording confirms what a gift he is to music in our day. All are first recordings.

Notes, texts, translations.

R MOORE

PART: *Lamentate+*
Onute Grazinyte, p; Edward King, vc; Lithuanian Symphony/ Modestas Pitrenas
Accentus 30512—70 minutes

Allen Gimbel reviewed the premiere recording of Part's *Lamentate: Homage to Anish Kapoor and his Sculpture Marsya*. I can do no better than quote him: "I don't feel it has enough musical substance to sustain repeated hearings. . . . this is not the best music I've heard from this composer". The work contains some wild dissonance that occasionally leavens the by-now stale holy minimalism the composer is best known for.

The rest of the album is filled by smaller works like the watershed *For Alina* and *Fratres* (cello and piano). These earlier works have lost nothing of their mystery and power. Later works like two short pieces *For Anna Maria* (2006) bring kitsch to a new level; here he seems to be interested in capturing something of Silvestrov's haunting near-imitations of 19th Century music, but without any of the probing mind of the Russian. I'm really no longer sure why he enjoys such continuing interest: my guess is that too many performers and presenters simply don't know a lot of new music.

HASKINS

PENDERECKI: *Horn Concerto; Adagio for Strings; Violin Concerto 1; Threnody*
Radovan Vlatakovic, hn; Barnabas Kelemen, v; London Philharmonic/ Krzysztof Penderecki, Michal Dworzynski—LPO 116—79 minutes

The Horn Concerto (*Winterreise*, 2008) has no relation to the Schubert other than weather and landscape. This is in Penderecki's late neoromantic style (which after his avant-garde period became his norm). The piece is in 2 movements: a distant passacaglia and a more vigorous rondo. There are 4 recordings with Penderecki conducting. The DG has the same soloist as this one and the same conductor (Penderecki), but a different orchestra—Cracow. Mr Vlatakovic, the works' dedicatee, is a superb player, and the DG is authoritative. The other recordings (Dux and Naxos) both have Polish orchestras, but the LPO seems more cautious. Stick with the DG.

The *Adagio for Strings* (1995) is III of his Symphony 3, so don't confuse this with the Barber. This is simply an arrangement. You're better off just getting the whole symphony (there's an excellent Naxos with Wit).

The Violin Concerto 1 (1976) is Penderecki's first major neoromantic work, and was first performed by Isaac Stern, who made a memorable recording with Moshe Atzmon and the Basel Symphony. I heard this for the first time when I was a student, and it made a tremendous impression. The Stern recording is still available, but it does show its age. There are 3 now with Penderecki conducting. Violinists are fine in all of them. The LPO is not competitive. I'd skip the Naxos and go with any of the Pendereckis.

Finally, the famous *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960). It was not expressly

written about the bombing, but Penderecki considered it apt. I also remember hearing it for the first time on the old RCA Victrola New Music LP with the Rome Symphony. That was much scarier than this one. The piece should curl your hair, though again the Londoners are too polite when they should be excruciating.

I can't recommend this.

GIMBEL

PETRALI: *Mass in F; Pastorale; Sonata in A; Andante; March; 71 Studies*
Pablo Bottini, org
Brilliant 95613 [2CD] 131 minutes

Vincenzo Antonio Petrali (1830-89) had an extraordinary career as an organist, improviser, conductor, composer, pianist, violinist, double-bass player, and teacher. A famous critic was moved to describe his remarkable gifts as an improviser: "I'm almost at a loss to say something that gets anywhere near the truth, that can convey an idea of his extraordinary talent as an improviser and organist, which I can only call genius. I've listened to a number of organists, including Saint-Saens, Lemmens, Guilmant, Lefebvre, and Widor; he has something special of his own that makes him stand out from all the others."

As in an earlier recording (M/J 2016), this program presents two facets of his taste as a composer for the organ: the orchestral-operatic style of church music prevalent in mid-19th Century France, and a later, more serious approach influenced by the *Cecilian Movement* which called for a reform of Catholic church music.

The Mass consists of short, "serious", often dull, versets to be played in the Kyrie, Gloria, Epistle, Offertory, Elevation, and Communion, ending with a jaunty Postlude sending the congregation home toe-tapping. Bottini presents 34 of the 71 studies, which are short (under three minutes), charming character pieces, perhaps meant to be studies in interpretation rather than technical exercises. I wouldn't want to hear all of them in one sitting, but a carefully chosen group of them would be delightful on a recital. The other pieces are in his earlier style, with the March providing another rousing finale to Sunday Mass.

Bottini plays with energy, wit, and charm on three marvelous Lingiardi organs: the 1866/2003 in the Parish Church of Trecate; the 1876/1973 in the Parish Church of Palazzolo; and the 1873/2010 in the Parish Church of Verolanuova. It is not clear which organs are used for which pieces. Notes on the composer, organ specifications, but nothing on the music.

DELCAMP

PIAZZOLLA: *4 Seasons;* see BABADJANIAN
PISTON: *Symphony 5;* see Collections
POULENC: *Cello Sonata; Flute Sonata;* see FRANCAIX

PROKOFIEFF: *Piano Concerto 2; Sonata 8; Sarcasms; Gavotte;*
STRAVINSKY: *Serenade in A; 3 Movements from Petrouchka and Firebird;*
SCRIABIN: *Piano Concerto*
Daniil Trifonov, Mariinsky Orchestra/ Valery Gergiev—DG 483 5331 [2CD] 145 minutes

Like most of Trifonov's recent recordings, this is one I have been waiting for since I first knew it was coming. I was not disappointed. It is one of the finest programs ever to come my way. Trifonov, about to turn 30, ranks among the best pianists in the world, with an ever-expanding repertoire and a series of musical collaborations. He has established a residence in New York, and in pre-pandemic times I have heard him as concerto soloist, in solo piano recitals, and as a collaborator with vocalists and chamber groups. His own piano concerto and piano quintet show a compositional ability in line with his illustrious Russian predecessors. His association with Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra has many years of history. Here they have given us the best Prokofieff and Scriabin piano concertos available.

Much of this program owes its origins to Diaghilev's Historical Russian Concerts project in Paris in the early years of the 20th Century. Scriabin's music was introduced to the French public. Joseph Hoffman premiered Scriabin's concerto and Rachmaninoff's Concerto 2 in May of 1907 at these concerts. Prokofieff and Stravinsky, almost exact contemporaries, became recognized as the leading composers of ballet music through Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. World War I and the Russian Revolution effectively ended the Silver Age of Russian music. Several of the later works in this program by Prokofieff and Stravinsky do find their origins in music composed in the Silver Age.

Trifonov has both the technical mastery and musical intellect to bring off this monstrously difficult program with ease. The clarity of his playing is without peer, and I always find new musical moments in his performances. It is rare to get a recording where all of the pieces

move into the top or next-to-top positions on my all time favorites list. One of my favorite recordings last year was Beatrice Rana's superb performances of the two Stravinsky ballet suites (Warner 541109, Mar/Apr 2020). Trifonov has a little more subtlety and less muscular drive. I would not want to be without either. Before that, my favorite Prokofieff 2 and Scriabin concertos were Ashkenazy's (with Previn, Decca 452 588; and Maazel, Decca 417 252). There are still wonderful moments in those, but Trifonov nudges them out of first place.

Prokofieff's Sonata 8 is the last of the three War Sonatas and the longest of all 9. When Trifonov was playing this in his recitals, Yuja Wang was also, in the same season. She played it with all possible excitement and brought a sold out Carnegie Hall to its feet. Trifonov probed the music deeper, and his clarion bells at the end also brought the audience to its feet. Both are on CD now, and I prefer Trifonov.

Trifonov's comment is worth quoting: "The Silver Age period of art in Russian history is not a single aesthetic, but describes an increasingly fractured social, political, and intellectual environment—a cocktail of different expressions, in agitated interaction." Musically, you can't get a better exposure to the Russian Silver Age and a bit beyond than here.

HARRINGTON

PROKOFIEFF: *Symphonies 1-3*
Bergen Philharmonic/ Andrew Litton
BIS 2174 [SACD] 87 minutes

This completes a set of Prokofieff symphonies from these performers. Mr Vroon reviewed Symphonies 4+7 (J/F (2017) and 5 (N/D 2015) affably but not enthusiastically. We did not review 6. My response this time around ranges from a strong endorsement to disappointment.

The endorsement goes to Symphony 2, Prokofieff's modernistic "iron and steel" symphony, as he called it, and one of the most difficult of his works to like. "Iron and steel" aptly describes a piece that, as annotator Andrew Huth put it, was not "expected by the *avant-garde* circles who looked to the ascetic Neoclassical Stravinsky as their arbiter of taste". The Soviet authorities were not pleased, either. Upbeat social realism the Second was not. Even Prokofieff was unsure of what he had wrought. Much later he included revising the work among his future plans, but he died before he could carry it out. I have never liked the piece, but this recording has changed my mind. It is interesting, compelling, and riveting. Litton takes a straightforward approach to most works, and he does so here with shocking intensity. The result is powerful, direct, and sometimes frightening, especially in a few low brass moments, one in the final section aided by massive percussion. The quiet string passages are more atmospheric than I am used to. Those moments, especially in the Theme and Variations movement (II), look ahead to the Third Symphony, something I had not noticed before. The sound picture produced is a cleanly etched, solid block of aural "iron and steel" that glistens and commands attention. The brass are clean and powerful, the winds are expressive, and the percussion has an occasional field day. The Bergen string section is not lush, but its clean, sleek sound is effective here, especially in the quiet, airy sections. I have always found the Second oppressive, repetitive, and rather ugly. I still find it repetitive toward the end, but this recording makes the best case for it that I have heard.

The Third goes down a similar path with mixed results that are better than that suggests. The best performances are as powerful as this one but with more flexibility, atmosphere, and subtlety, especially in the quieter sections. After listening to the Second, the start of the Third sounds like the earlier work's continuation before it quickly calms down to become reflective, subdued, or even sleepy until the quick second idea picks things up with increased energy. The love theme in the strings is slow, with strong counterpoint in the brass. Things take off later and intensify, turning eerie as the love theme contends with woodwind triplets. II is slow, airy, and delicate. In some ways III can make or break a performance of this symphony. Here it tends to break, mainly because those wonderful string glissandos need to be sleeker and more prominent. The finale opens powerfully, though textures could be more filled out. The loud chime is commanding, and the final passages symbolize power. My main complaint is that the string textures could be fuller. This is a very good, but not great Prokofieff Third.

The reading of Symphony 1 displays many of the characteristics that created a great Second and good Third but are inappropriate in the more delicate *Classical.* The reading is generally tight, metric, and square, with accents sometimes overdone. II is more affectionate and sweeter in string tone, with some nice phrasing, but III returns to the problems

of I and is too march-like. The finale is a little better, but it is still too tense, urgent, and martial. The whole thing needs to be lighter, warmer, and more flexible—more classical in tone. Some listeners might find this an interesting, sterner take on the work, but to me it is misconceived.

BIS's outstanding sound is a major reason the Second Symphony sounds so impressive. The Bergen Philharmonic does its best work in that piece and is very good in the Third, but it seems out of place in the First. The booklet notes are not exactly comprehensive, but they get the job done.

HECHT

PROKOFIEFF: *Symphony 5;*
MIASKOVSKY: *Symphony 21*
Oslo Philharmonic/ Vasily Petrenko
LAWO 1207—62 minutes

By the time this was recorded (2018) we had reached a stage in the mainstream classical orchestra world where you could count on it being very good. There were at least 30 or 40 orchestras in the world that could do this and do it well. We are past the point where 5 or 6 recordings competed for excellence in playing and sound. We are living (or were, before the Virus) in a world where orchestras are really brilliant—but, alas, the age of great conductors is past.

The Prokofieff 5th was recorded by Koussevitzky (1940), Leinsdorf, Bernstein, Ormandy, Martinon, Karajan, Slatkin, Muti, Thomas, and Previn—to name just 10 outstanding ones. There is nothing wrong with this new one, but there is nothing that sets it apart as something special. Certainly nothing about it sets it above those 10. It's pretty straightforward, a literal reading of the score, without a conductor's deep musicality and personality impressed on it. It's wonderful music, beautifully played; but there is no reason to add it to a collection that includes a few of the 10 I just named.

I guess this is "damning with faint praise". But I will insist that this is a beautifully played and sounding recording. It just has no real personality; it doesn't seem to be processed thru a second wonderfully musical mind after the composer's.

The Miaskovsky is still rare on records—and that surprises me. Ormandy recorded it before the stereo era, then Svetlanov did a fine recording in Russia; but where do you find those now? I suppose you can buy a big box of Svetlanov recordings that includes this, but where can you get it without all the extra discs?

Well, here. It's a beautiful recording—certainly the best sound ever for the Miaskovsky—but his symphony takes only 15 minutes. It goes very well with the Prokofieff (they were written around the same time by similar composers), but you will buy another less-than-outstanding Prokofieff 5 to get the Miaskovsky. And you have to decide if it's worth it. I think I will keep this new recording and mark it clearly MIASKOVSKY and file it there, because I have no reason to listen again to Petrenko's Prokofieff.

VROON

PUCCINI: *Il Tabarro*
Melody Moore (Giorgetta), Lester Lynch (Michele), Brian Jagde (Luigi), Roxana Constantinescu (Frugola), Martin-Jan Nijhof (Talpa), Simeon Esper (Tinca); Dresden Philharmonic/ Marek Janowski—Pentatone 5186773—49 minutes

The eminent maestro Marek Janowski (b. 1939) has made many recordings, but this Pentatone release of *Il Tabarro* appears to be his first encounter with Puccini. It's an appropriate choice. *Tabarro* is perhaps Puccini's finest distillation of the musical trends of his era and a prime example of his respect for Wagner (Janowski's specialty) and the power of *leitmotifs*. As Steffen Georgi writes in his notes, the project initially faced resistance from the publisher Ricordi, who felt that one-act operas were the domain of their rival, Sonzogno. But after the death of scion Giulio Ricordi in 1912, Puccini was free to pursue his plan for a trio of short operas to be presented together in one evening. *Trittico* was first performed at the Metropolitan in December 1918 (between the second and third waves of the Spanish Flu, I might add). *Tabarro*, based on a dark French melodrama by Didier Gold, is the first of the three and by far the most gripping.

Janowski and the Dresden Philharmonic lavish detailed attention on the score. The tempos are more deliberate than fleet, but Janowski knows how to build tension, and he delicately calibrates the rise and fall of orchestral dynamics to echo the ebb and flow of the Seine. My only reservation is that the studio recording doesn't quite achieve the theatrical immediacy the work demands. Aside from the vocal interpretations, I would prefer a more realistic acoustic space for the score's sound effects, such as the tugboat whistle and the automobile horns.

Melody Moore is Giorgetta, who dreams of an escape from her life as the wife of a barge owner twice her age. She has a warm soprano voice, with equal strength across the registers, but she phrases with too much legato and not enough of the pointed *parlando* (speaking tone) essential to the *verismo* style. As her husband Michele, baritone Lester Lynch fares better, partly because his timbre has a natural vibrancy that enlivens his utterances. But both tend to generalize the caustic and ironic remarks that punctuate their contentious conversations. Puccini requires specific expressions of subtext, especially in phrases like Giorgetta's heartbreaking "Come é difficile esser felici" (How difficult [for us] to be happy!), or Michele's outburst "Sgualdrina!" (Slut!), when he is left alone on stage, resigned to the loss of his wife's love.

Best of the three leads (all of whom are American) is tenor Brian Jagde as Luigi. His voice has just the right kind of tonal clarity and raw power for the brash stevedore in love with Giorgetta, and he gives seemingly spontaneous meaning to every word. He is magnificent in his two impassioned outbursts. The first is a rant against what we would today call economic injustice ('Hai ben ragione'). The second is the emotional apex of his passion for Giorgetta, as he asserts that he would not hesitate to kill in order to possess her completely ('Folle di gelosia!'). The latter is a particularly thrilling moment. Janowski and the sumptuous orchestra threaten to overwhelm Jagde, who manages to hold his own amid the exciting clamor. Jagde also blends well with Moore as Luigi and Giorgetta celebrate their shared past and dreams of the future ('E ben altro mio sogno'). For once, Puccini's predilection for unison writing really makes sense: these two lost souls have found a unique connection.

The handsome packaging includes the original text, along with English and German translations.

ALTMAN

RACHMANINOFF: *Piano Concerto 2;*
RAVEL: *Concerto*
Helene Grimaud; Royal Philharmonic/ Jesus Lopez-Cobos—MDG 6502165—56 minutes

MDG is reissuing much of the Denon catalog. This was recorded in 1992. Mark Koldys reviewed it (Sept/Oct 1994) and said:

Yet another ho-hum Second; it strikes no fire in the first two movements and then tries to make up for it in III. It's well played, to be sure, but not my idea of Rachmaninoff. The Ravel is strait-laced and even humorless; despite the felicities of sound and touch, again the essence of the piece has been missed. And the last movement is barely Presto.

I suspect Mr Koldys is right about the Ravel. I have never been fond of that concerto—that is, I don't care enough for the music to compare recordings. But the Rachmaninoff is conducted well, with almost exactly the same tempos as in the Ashkenazy and Bachauer recordings in my library. True, Grimaud is not Ashkenazy or Bachauer. Next to them she seems to skim the surface. Hers is definitely not a Russian sound, and that may be what Mr Koldys missed in the recording. I'd never put this in a list of 5 or 10 best; but if you like a more delicate (French?) touch, the sound here is very nice, despite a few moments where the strings are overpowered by the brass.

VROON

RAHBARI: *Symphonic Poems 9+10*
Reza Fekri, t; Ladislav Fancovic, sax; Prague Metropolitan Orchestra/ Alexander Rahbari
Naxos 574208—57 minutes

Iranian Alexander Rahbari (b. 1948) has composed 10 symphonic poems under the title *My Mother Persia*. I reviewed 4-8 (M/A 2020). More were reviewed earlier (N/D 2019). Everything I said in my previous review holds here. We hear authentic Iranian scales and rhythms, exotic atmosphere and tangy orchestration. There are texts and translations in tiny print. Brief descriptions in the notes.

GIMBEL

RAVEL: *Left-Hand Concerto;* see AMMANN;
Piano Concerto; see RACHMANINOFF
Rhapsodie Espagnole; see DEBUSSY

REICH: *8 Lines; City Life; Music for 2 or More Pianos; New York Counterpoint; Vermont Counterpoint*
Holst Sinfonietta/ Klaus Simon
Naxos 559682—73 minutes

This is the first recording of *Music for Two or More Pianos* (1964), which Reich wrote before his leap into phasing and minimalist pieces. The pianists are given nine chords, and they can hold them out, arpeggiate them, add rhythms to them, play them inside the piano, or phase them as they do here, perhaps anachronistically. Reich reproduced the score and performance instructions in his book

Writings on Music, and he acknowledges the influence of Morton Feldman, Karlheinz Stockhausen (*Refrain*), and Bill Evans; indeed, the chords look more like jazz chords than anything classical. This performance takes nearly 11 minutes and is closer to Feldman, Cage, and La Monte Young than what most of us know from Reich.

Eight Lines is the 1983 revision for full ensemble. The acoustics are expansive; the Bang on a Can recording (Nonesuch 79451, May/June 1998) is close-up. The pianos here are further back, acting more as continuo. The atmosphere is similar to Bang on a Can's, which Rob Haskins called "depressingly pedantic"—I call it slightly urgent. The piece fares better in this more reverberant hall, though some of the individual voices are smeared.

Vermont Counterpoint requires the flute soloist to play along with 10 recorded flute parts. Anne Parisot and Delphine Roche turn in a brilliant, vivacious performance that—partly because of better sound—has more immediacy than the recording by Ransom Wilson, the dedicatee (EMI 6624, Sept/Oct 2008), though their rhythms have a few rough edges showing. *New York Counterpoint* does the same with several clarinets. Evan Ziporyn on Nonesuch has a mellow tone, and the various himselves come across like a rich ensemble; here, Andrea Nagy is brighter, and her rhythms aren't as locked in, so it sounds like a scattering of soloists.

In 1995's *City Life* Reich took taped fragments of speech and teased melodies and rhythms out of them, and then scored the whole thing for ensemble with tape. Other taped sounds, many vehicular, figure as well. The sound effects make the piece gimmicky, and they tend to get in the way, though Jack Sullivan (July/Aug 2002) and Ian Quinn (Jan/Feb 2004) enjoyed it.

ESTEP

REIS: *Guitar Pieces*

Salvatore Fortunato—Brilliant 95939—56 min

Dilermando Reis (1916-77) has been described as one of the most popular Brazilian guitarists of all time, beginning to make records in 1941 and recording about 100 original compositions as well as classical music until 1975. Unfortunately, he did not write down his music and it was left to guitarists in the 1990s to transcribe it into standard notation—and that is used for most of the music here.

Reis's compositions are quite romantic and are expressed well on the guitar in the capable hands of an excellent player. Italian guitarist Salvatore Fortunato was born in 1990. His technique and sense of the music are exemplary, his expressive playing of Reis's flowing melodies and rich harmonies reminiscent of popular piano music of the period.

The recording shows not only the composer's variety of styles but also the guitar's ability to portray them. From the introspective 'Fim de Festa' followed by the lively 'Xodo de Baiana', contrasting works sustain the listener's interest, though some tunes are quite similar (such as 'Sandrinha' and 'Si Ela Perguntar').

In repeated sections, more contrast of tone, especially some varying degrees of *ponticello*, would show the wide tonal possibilities of the guitar and augment the improvisatory nature of the style.

The music here is always well played, tuneful, stylish, and clean. Sit back and enjoy this music that is so organically suited to the guitar, and you will get a deep sense of Brazilian guitar music from the first half of the 20th Century.

MCCUTCHEON

RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF: *Operas*

Profil 19010 [25CD] 31:30

In September/October 2018 I reviewed Profil's collection of all the Tchaikovsky operas, remarking how fine the performances were and generally commenting favorably about the sound (all the performances were from radio sources). Now Profil has issued a 25 CD box of all the Rimsky-Korsakoff operas, derived from similar sources and with many of the same singers. I list the performances in this set:

1. *The Maid of Pskov* (Ivan the Terrible) Pirogov, Nelepp, Shumilova/ Sakharov 1947
2. *May Night:* Maksakova, Shumskaya/ Golovanov 1946
3. *Snow Maiden:* Firsova, Kozlovsky/ Svetlanov 1957
4. *Mlada:* Koroliov, Tugarinova/ Svetlanov 1962
5. *Christmas Eve:* Shpiller, Pontryagin/ Golovanov 1948
6. *Sadko:* Khanayev, Petrov, Barsova/ Nebolsin 1946/47
7. *Mozart and Salieri:* Gmyria, Ognevoj/ Grikurov 1963
8. *The Tsar's Bride:* Shumskaya, Ivanov, Borisenko/ Svetlanov 1958

9. *Tale of Tsar Saltan:* Yaroshenko/ Yeltsin 1956

10. *Kaschey the Immortal:* Rozhdestvenskaya, Lisitian/ Samosud 1949

11. *Pan Voyevoda:* Korolev, Rozhdestvenskaya/ Samosud 1951

12. *Invisible City of Kitezh:* Petrov, Roszhdestvenskaya/ Nebolsin 1956

13. *Golden Cockerel:* Koroliov, Kazantseva/ Gauk 1951

14. Fragments from *Vera Sheloga, Nausikaa,* and *Servilia*

That's a lot of Rimsky-Korsakoff, but I won't complain because his operas are all very beautiful, with passionate arias, duets, choruses, and rich, almost unbelievably sensuous melodies. Most of the librettos center around Russian folk tales, romantic triangles, and cultural traditions specific to the Russian people. All of the performances here are top notch, with great casts.

I would have preferred the more evenly cast 1950 recording of *Sadko* under Golovanov with Nelepp and Shumskaya, but this earlier version has its merits as well and hasn't been as available as the other performance. Alexandr Gauk's 1951 *Golden Cockerel* isn't even listed in that opera's discography so I'm glad Profil chose it for this set. In addition to Koroliov's doddering, richly sung King Dodon, we are given the great Nadezhda Kazantseva as the Queen of Shemakha. Her account of the 'Hymn to the Sun' is worth the price of the entire set. She dispatches the chromatic coloratura with casual ease, capping it with a superbly taken high D. Her range did not extend to the optional high E towards the end of the second act, but in all other respects she is the standard by which others are judged.

Svetlanov's 1958 *Tsar's Bride* is drawn from a concert performance, and the audience is very enthusiastic. With that cast, who could blame them? The 1963 *Mozart and Salieri* from Leningrad has only been available in a poor, badly pitched transfer before now. Here those problems are corrected and the performance is one of the best. The recordings of *Snow Maiden* and *The Maid of Pskov* have been available before, but these transfers finally do the music and performers justice.

There are a few things to pick on. In order to contain all the music on 25 CDs, two of the operas (*Snow Maiden* and *The Golden Cockerel*) begin mid-disc. That doesn't bother me, but others may be irritated. There are very few, if any, pauses between acts. A number of extra alternate interpretations of certain arias are on these discs as well. Most are placed at the end of the opera in question, but *The Tsar's Bride* has them before Act II is finished, which may lead to some confusion if one is not familiar with the opera.

Most of the timings in the booklet are accurate, but they should have been proofread better before release. The booklet gives us the cast list for each opera and the years of the original recording, but only cursory plot summaries. With a set this big, it's not surprising there are no texts or translations. If you have the Gergiev Philips sets of some of these operas, you're in luck. If not, you'd better start learning Russian.

Despite my gripes, I would recommend this set to anyone who loves Rimsky-Korakoff's operas. The sound has been restored beautifully, the performances are almost unbeatable, and the price very affordable. Get this while it's available!

REYNOLDS

RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF: *Scheherazade;*
see STRAUSS

RIZZA: *Sacred Choral*

Ave Generosa; Veni Jesu; Fire of Love; My Child; O Sapientia; O Clavis David; O Oriens; Mary Slept; Ave Maria; Oculi Mei; O Speculum Colume; Mysterium Amoris; Trinity Blessing
Gaudete Ensemble/ Eamonn Dougan
Convivium 56—58 minutes

Margaret Rizza (b 1929) is a British opera singer turned composer. She also has been a cultural activist who has taken classical musicians into hospitals, prisons, special schools, and inner-city settings, bringing great music to people who haven't had access to it. Rizza also has become a known figure in contemplative Christian circles, composing the sort of spiritually-charged fare we hear on this program.

'Ave Generosa,' a Hildegard poem of devotion to Mary set for choir and small orchestra, was commissioned by Harry Christophers and The Sixteen and premiered at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall in 2008. You don't have to go to church to hear Margaret Rizza's music.

Her style owes something to the repeated chant lines of the Taize idiom and to the gentle, radiant harmonies that have become *de rigueur* in our Rutter-Lauridsen choral era. The words of Hildegard, the psalmists, St John of the Cross, the Celts, Thomas Merton, and Latin liturgy are given musical life by a lovely choir and a small ensemble of strings, organ,

oboe, and clarinet. If you choose to listen passively, the music will be pleasant, though you might not need all 58 minutes of it every time. But this is music that benefits from what you're willing to bring to it. If you accept it as it was meant—as an invitation to prayerful contemplation—the rewards may be greater. There is a story about a rabbi whose disciples couldn't understand why he was spending so much time praying before *Shacharit*, the formal morning service. "I pray", he told them, "that I might be ready to pray". That's the spirit I found in this music. And amid the political, economic, and medical chaos that was gripping us as I listened in late December, I embraced it gratefully.

GREENFIELD

RODRIGO: *Concierto de Aranjuez; Fantasia para un Gentilhombre*
Xianji Liu, g; Spanish Radio/ Pedro Amaral
IBS 42020—45 minutes

Two of the most often performed and recorded guitar concertos by a prizewinning young Chinese guitarist, Xianji Liu, who now teaches at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, his *alma mater*. The classical guitar has gained a strong following in China, with a number of excellent performers working hard, and they are now taking their place on the world's stages. Liu is one of them.

Rodrigo's *Fantasia para un Gentilhombre*, based on the music of 17th Century Spanish composer Gaspar Sanz, is given a lively performance of contrasting movements and tuneful themes. The *Concierto de Aranjuez* likewise demonstrates Liu's formidable technique and musical understanding.

Liner notes mention that Liu hopes to demonstrate "integrating East-West cultural elements" with the goal of having "interpreted Rodrigo's music in a brand new way". I don't hear any of that. With brilliant conducting by Pedro Amaral, both concertos are well played, spirited, and technically proficient—with sparkling scale passages, but a still rather standard interpretation.

Liu is a fine, developing artist, and this well-recorded disc is to be commended. This reviewer looks forward to hearing what he does with less standard repertoire.

MCCUTCHEON

ROSSI,M: *Toccatas & Correntes;*
see UCCELLINI

ROSSINI: *Matilde di Shabran*
Sara Blanch (Matilde), Victoria Yarovaya (Edoardo), Michele Angelini (Corradino), Emmanuel Franco (Aliprando), Giulio Mastrototaro (Isidoro), Shi Zong (Raimondo); Gorecki Chamber Choir, Passionart Orchestra/ José Miguel Perez-Sierra—Naxos 660492 [3CD] 197 minutes

Matilde di Shabran is one of Rossini's most fascinating and accomplished works, the last of a series that he composed for Rome, where he had had major successes, including *The Barber of Seville* and *La Cenerentola*. Since 1815 he had been working in Naples, where he primarily wrote serious works that would become the stylistic and structural base on which Donizetti, Bellini, and Verdi would build their serious operas.

Matilde, first performed in February 1821, was, by contrast, a work with a very mixed tone, blending serious threats and comically exaggerated characterizations. The technical term was "opera (or melodramma) semiseria". The secondary role of Isidoro echoes Figaro in *Barber*, though he is an itinerant poet rather than, like Figaro, a man of many practical skills. Isidoro's entrance-aria has passages that are strikingly similar to ones in Figaro's own entrance-aria, 'Largo al factotum'.

The opera's serious aspect is concentrated primarily in the tenor role: Corradino is a tyrant who claims to hate women, but ends up being tamed by the fearless Matilde, though not before he tries to get her thrown off a cliff—a plot point that some characters on stage do not take very seriously.

Perhaps this blending of the serious and the ridiculous has caused the work not to fare well. Most opera fanatics were unaware of it before a 2004 recording. That used the version that Rossini prepared for Naples half a year after the Rome premiere, and it offered Juan Diego Florez and Annick Massis (Decca, Jan/Feb 2007). Then came a DVD of a splendid 2012 production from the Rossini Festival in Pesaro, with Florez again, plus Olga Peretyatko (not reviewed). The latter is one of the best videos of any Rossini opera.

Here we have a world-premiere recording of the work's original Rome version. It blends three performances from a July 2019 staged production at a Rossini festival held every summer in the German town of Wildbad, in the Black Forest region.

The work's full title is *Matilde di Shabran, or the Beauty and the Iron-Hearted One*, a

phrase that refers to Matilde's attempts—eventually effective—at breaking down the resistance of her captor, the ferocious Corradino. The work third major role, Edoardo Lopez, is a pants role for mezzo or alto, and there are several appreciable parts for lesser characters.

The cast is not as stellar as on the Decca CD or DVD. But most of the singers hold their own quite admirably: I gather that the hall at Wildbad is not huge, because nobody is forcing the voice to carry. Even better, nobody is afflicted with an annoying wobble. Giulio Mastrototaro, as Isidoro, is often unsteady, but I was troubled even more by his tendency to hit a note a bit off-pitch and sometimes to half-speak it. Perhaps he was effective in this role of a pretentious bumbler, but all we have here is the sonic aspect.

The main roles are cast at full strength: tenor Michele Angelini (as Corradino) is a real discovery, brilliant in coloratura (if a bit weak on his lowest notes). Sara Blanch is, by turns, fiery and touching as Matilde, and Victoria Yarovaya continues her triumphant series of Rossini portrayals in the pants role of Edoardo Lopez. (See reviews in March/April 2018 and 2019.) Yarovaya is apparently the same singer who, in earlier years, recorded under the name of Victoria Zaytseva. The most unexpected discovery for me was the leading baritone, Emanuel Franco (Aliprando), who tosses off the coloratura as fluently as the soprano in their duet in Act I.

Certain of the singers interpolate a loud high note near the end of a number. The audience loves it, but it feels a bit crude to me.

The orchestra and chorus (both from Poland) are conducted at brisk but flexible tempos—just right, in other words—by Perez-Sierra, whom I was first pleased to encounter in Rossini's *Aureliano in Palmira* (Jan/Feb 2019). The spiffy fortepianist Gianluca Ascheri adds little humorous bits—just enough, not too often.

Applause has been edited to a bearable minimum. The booklet-essay is helpful, though in tiny type. The libretto is available online, but it is only in Italian. Music lovers outside of Italy would surely love to follow this recording with an English translation. English is increasingly the international language understood in countries as different as, say, Brazil, Sweden, Hungary, and Japan.

This new recording would be a great and inexpensive way to enter the sound world of Rossini's mature operas. It fascinates as it goes along, thanks in part to its mingling of serious and comic elements. And it allows us to hear the composer's first thoughts on some numbers, as well as a few (highly competent) numbers that Giuseppe Pacini composed for the Rome version and that Rossini later replaced.

Another difference: Isidoro sings in standard Italian here, but in Naples, consistent with a long tradition, the role was in local dialect. This, along with many other basic facts about the versions, goes unmentioned in the otherwise helpful essay.

Committed Rossinians will want to have this well-performed world-premiere recording of the Rome version. For the mainstream (non-specialist) opera lover, either of the Florez releases remains the basic recommendation.

LOCKE

RUBINSTEIN: *Trio;* see Collections

RUIZ-PIPO: *Guitar Pieces*
Wolgang Weigel—Naxos 574167—57 minutes

Antonio Ruiz-Pipo was born in Granada, trained in Catalonia, and spent many years in Paris. German guitarist Wolfgang Weigel collaborated with the composer for the last 5 years of his life and has issued this as the second of a series devoted to his compositions.

The best-known piece, 'Cancion y Danza No. 1', is the most tuneful and engaging one here.

The rest of the pieces are written in a free-form, prelude-like style using contemporary vocabulary. While played quite musically by Weigel, they seem to wander aimlessly, lacking memorable themes and motives, let alone development, as if searching for something to hold onto but not really finding it. Occasional Spanish references surface, as in the fourth and fifth *Preludios a Obara*, but they do not take us anywhere beyond their statements and restatements.

Judging from the performer's deep respect for the composer, as well as my respect for his artistry, there must be something to this music.

MCCUTCHEON

RUNESTAD: Choral Pieces
Secret of the Sea; Alleluia; Let My Love Be Heard; Sing, Wearing the Sky; Live the Questions; We Can Mend the Sky; Fear Not, Dear friend; Proud Music of the Storm; I Will Lift Mine Eyes; Ner Ner
Kantorei/ Joel Rinsema—Naxos 559892—65 min

The first program devoted exclusively to the works of Jake Runestad (b 1986) came from

Craig Hella Johnson's Conspirare and was one of the best choral releases of 2019 (Delos 3578, N/D). This time around, Kantorei, another exceptional American choir, plights its troth with the young composer and, again, the results are exceptional. Note that five of these songs are recorded here for the first time. 'Let My Love Be Heard', Runestad's achingly sad and beautiful commentary on love and loss, is the only selection to appear on both programs. So, if you were impressed with the composer the first time, you have every reason to seek him out again. If you haven't made his acquaintance, this release is an excellent opportunity to do so.

What is it about Runestad that attracts highly pedigreed choirs like Kantorei and Conspirare? For starters, his music is as rewarding to sing as it is to listen to. It is difficult (been there!), but so juicy—melodically and emotionally—that getting it into the voice doesn't seem like work. Moreover, Runestad's music moves unerringly to interesting and unexpected places within the confines a single work. His 12-minute *Secret of the Sea*, for example, is a nautical voyage of excitement, agitation, and emotional intimacy, with each distinct emotional state given direction by the violin, piano, and percussion brought on to augment the voices. To sing it convincingly, you'd better be ready to head off on a cruise. In 'Let My Love Be Heard', you're grieving, surrendering to the lush harmonies surrounding you, and counting triplets like mad all at the same time.

Runestad also brings out the dancer in his singers. 'Sing, Wearing the Sky', which begins with bending pitches from the violin evoking the wonders of India, quickly mutates into a sacred dance. Even if you aren't light on your feet (and believe me, I'm not) it's a delight to make the music sound that way.

The last thing I'll mention is Runestad's connection to the words he has chosen. When waves begin crashing on the shore of life or the soul takes to the sky, the images are vivid. He's even willing to duck out of the way to let a text take center stage. In 'Live the Questions', a setting of the poet Rilke's wise and tender letter to a friend, the words emerge so lovingly that the harmonies barely breathe on them as they flow by. Wherever I look in Jake Runestad's music, I find meaningful, engaging, and accessible ideas that make me want to sing. From the sound of things, Kantorei feels the same way.

GREENFIELD

RUOFF: *Toccatas 2,4,5,6; 9 Leichte Stücke; 3 Phantastische Tänze; Sinfonische Fragmente; Via Dolorosa*

Jan Lehtola—Toccata 567—78 minutes

This is Volume 1 of the complete organ music by the German composer Axel Ruoff, someone who was completely unknown to me—and a startling original. Born in Stuttgart, he has taught at several institutions in Germany and Japan, and most recently was the Academic Dean at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Stuttgart. He has written several organ pieces as well as choral, orchestral, symphonic wind music, concertos for piano, guitar, cello, and horn, stage works, opera, pieces for solo instruments, songs, and other vocal music.

His favored form for keyboard music is the toccata, used in the original version of the form, consisting of alternating sections of virtuosic figuration and counterpoint and creating an overall sense of improvisation. In French organ music of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the toccata was transformed into a virtuosic texture of rapid manual figuration heard over a slow moving theme in the pedals. Ruoff has found himself at home with the French organ tradition and was heavily influenced by Messiaen, Langlais, Dupré, and Guillou.

Much of his inspiration is found in biblical passages or sacred texts, as evidenced in the toccatas on this program. Three of them are based on scripture: Samson and Delilah, Psalm 24, and a stunning realization of an apocalyptic vision in the Book of Revelation. The fourth is inspired by the 17th Century poem *Morgengesang* by Johann Matthias Schneuber, which uses imagery of the rising sun as a metaphor for the revelation of Christ.

The *Sinfonische Fragmente* is informed by the Lamentations of Jeremiah; and the 1986 *Via Dolorosa*, perhaps the most unusual of these pieces, portrays the path Jesus walked to his crucifixion. The *9 Leichte Stücke* and *3 Phantastische Tänze* are short (under three minutes), secular character pieces that would make delightful additions to a recital program.

His style is full of dissonant tone clusters, rhythmic ostinati of alternating duple and triple rhythms, and a driven, almost manic energy coupled with an uncompromising power in its use of the full resources of the symphonic organ. I found it emotional, intense, logical, and wholly original in its conception and use of the organ. You will either

hate it as "noise" or be riveted by the uniqueness of his voice.

Lehtola has made several recordings of unknown or forgotten composers for the organ (J/A 2016; J/A 2018; J/A 2019; J/A 2020; J/F 2021), making convincing arguments for them, owing in large part to his virtuosic, musical, and committed playing. This recording is particularly impressive: the technical demands of this music are high and he makes it sound easy. The marvelous 4-manual, 82 stop 1980 Veikko Virtanen organ is in Turku Cathedral, Finland. Extensive notes on the composer and music with specifications. If you have a taste for avant-garde organ music, give this a try.

DELCAMP

RUTTER: *Anthems; Hymns; Gloria*
Richard Marshall, cornet; Black Dyke Brass Band/ Nicholas Childs; Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus/ Darius Battiwalla
Naxos 573130—62 minutes

These pieces were, of course, originally intended to be sung, but they sound wonderful as played skillfully and sensitively by one of England's finest brass bands. It is a pleasure to hear the restraint, the emphasis on warmth and sweetness. I would enjoy this more without the quivering vibrato so often heard in both solo and ensemble passages. But it's a characteristic trait of most British brass bands.

KILPATRICK

SAINT-SAENS: *Carnival of the Animals;*
MORPURGO: *Grandpa Christmas*
Kanneh-Masons Family; Olivia Colman, narr
Decca 4851156—64 minutes

Carnival of the Animals has been recorded many times and is still programmed at concerts. Most recordings include narration that introduces each of the 14 sections with a poem about the animals (or instruments) described by the music. The narration was not the composer's idea but was added over the years as a way to introduce children to classical music. The most famous narration was written by Ogden Nash. It is silly, nonsensical, and full of awful puns. Most recordings use it. I grew up on the Arthur Fiedler recording from the early 1960s narrated by Hugh Downs. Downs—and most of the other narrators, read the text as if he didn't believe it.

This new recording has a new text by Michael Morpurgo, read by Morpurgo and actor Olivia Colman. The text has a better relationship to the music, the meanings are clear (unlike Nash's play-on-words groaners) and Ms Colman believes what she is saying. She has a warm, comforting voice that makes you want to listen, and the text allows her to explain the animal (and instrument) relationships to the music. As well-known as Ms Colman is (particularly for her performances in *The Crown* and *The Favorite*), her name is not prominent on the cover.

The second piece, *Grandpa Christmas*, also has text and narration by Morpurgo based on his children's book of the same name. He has arranged music by Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff, Grieg, and Bartok related to the stories told by a grandfather to his granddaughter. Like the Saint-Saens, the text is spoken before each musical selection. Morpurgo's poetic texts are heartfelt and engaging. Most of the seven musical pieces are well known (for example, 'Flight of the Bumblebee').

Most of the small orchestra is members of the Kanneh-Mason family, a group of 7, all under 20 years old. This includes the two pianists in the Saint-Saens. Friends of the family play the double-bass, flute, clarinet, glass harmonica, and xylophone. There is no biographical information about the Kanneh-Masons, as if you already know who they are, and none about the other players. They are not always together (sometimes on purpose), there are few mistakes, and most of the sections in the Saint-Saens are played too slow or too fast. Probably more rehearsal would have helped. There is apparently no conductor.

This is a recording where the text and narration are worth listening to, but the musical performance is not. The English and French booklet includes pictures, colorful art, and descriptions by the producer and performers about the scores.

FISCH

SAY: *Moving Mansion; 3 Ballades;*
SCHUMANN: *Piano Quintet*
Fazil Say, p; Casal Quartet
Solo Musica 340—55 minutes

Turkish pianist and composer Fazil Say originally wrote the ballades and *Moving Mansion* as piano solo pieces; adding the string quartet gave them a lot of color, and it doesn't sound extraneous. His style is neo-tonal and flavored with Turkish modes and meters, but it all goes down smoothly like better-quality movie music. Nothing is groundbreaking or particularly inventive, but it is pleasant and not derivative.

Say and Schumann would seem to be odd bedfellows, but as the program leapt backwards in time, I realized that they work brilliantly in theory; the Schumann fails in the performance, though. The quintet is an outpouring of his happiness, and it needs more exuberance. On the technical side, the slow movement suffers from unaccountable rhythm errors. The dotted-quarters and eighth notes of the march sound like triplets; in the agitato section, Say gives the tied notes short shrift, and some of the phrases end up almost in 7/8 time—Turkish territory! While I respect the musicians' elegant sound, the quirks handicap the piece.

Notes are in German, English, and Turkish; Say's biography suffers from laudatory inflation.

ESTEP

SCARLATTI: *Sonatas*

Volume 25: Pascal Pascaleff, p
Naxos 574146—68 minutes

Volume 6: Carlo Grante, p
Music & Arts 1299 [7CD] 480 minutes

There are 26 volumes in Naxos's Scarlatti series, so far, and they have assigned the work to 24 pianists. (Soyeon Lee and Sergio Monteiro have each played twice.) This is volume 25.

Pascal Pascaleff is a Bulgarian in his mid-20s. His biography says he has been on competition circuits as both a contestant and a jury member. He apparently plays mostly 19th Century repertoire, and this is his first recording. He doesn't advertise (or display) knowledge of any 17th Century music or style, and his only other 18th Century music is a few Bach pieces.

It is not clear why Naxos picked him for Scarlatti's music. His keyboard dexterity is fine, of course, but I don't hear that he has much to say musically in these pieces. He plays cleanly without finding much differentiation or expressive depth, treating the scores like exercises. He renders long passages in a consistently loud staccato, smoothly and neatly, but so what? Consistency isn't necessarily a virtue in this music. When he connects the notes, it's conventionally, with harmonic pedaling, not so much with his fingers and imagination. The performances are reliable, efficient, and forgettable.

I'd like to hear him in the longer Schumann, Liszt, and Scriabin pieces advertised on his web site. He obviously has the fingers and concentration to play them, and perhaps that music would inspire him to get beyond his clean surface.

His assigned sonatas are 18 that most listeners probably won't recognize as familiar: K 153, 167, 206, 221, 243, 252, 281, 297, 307, 343, 350, 371, 408, 437, 451, 480, 501, and 538. The unfamiliarity and the low price might be sufficient reasons to acquire this, but Carlo Grante is better.

Grante's project deserves highest praise. This 7CD release as Volume 6 completes the comprehensive series that he started in 2009 (Volume 1 was reviewed by Rob Haskins in Mar/Apr 2010, and Volume 4 in Nov/Dec 2016). The first five volumes included 28 CDs, and the grand total is now 35.

The packaging makes sure we know he's playing a top-of-the-line Bösendorfer concert grand piano. For the earlier volumes, he had used a Bösendorfer borrowed from Paul and Eva Badura-Skoda. For this last volume he played a new one, recorded at the company's factory showroom in Vienna.

Grante has been following manuscript sequences by library sources, not strictly the Kirkpatrick catalog numbers (or Longo, or Pestelli). His primary source is the set in Parma. So, he had not got around to most of the sonatas from K 50 to K 100 until now, because those are only in the Venice collection, not Parma's. The 119 sonatas here are K 31-40, 42, 45, 51-52, 58-68, 70-86, 88-93, 95, 97, 102-103, 117, 141-147, 452-453, 514-555, and 14 other sonatas that don't have K numbers. Sonatas 88 to 91 each have three or four movements.

The 14 uncatalogd sonatas are fun to hear, and possibly first recordings (because they are missing from all of the standard editions and indexes). Among those, the piece labeled 'Haffner 5' seems to be evoking a collection of squawking birds, or something, but I haven't figured out the species.

For all the careful presentation of sources and performance practices in the booklet, Grante's performance itself is frankly ahistorical. It matches the clean modern sound of his new piano. He scrubs out all the 19th Century pianistic editing and re-composition by Carl Czerny, Alessandro Longo, et al, which earlier generations of pianists learned. He doesn't sound like Horowitz, Tipo, Pletnev, Argerich, or other mainstream pianists trying their hands at Scarlatti. Where those pianists were satisfied with projecting conventional brilliance and adrenaline, Grante probes for

thoughtful nuances and gentler rounding. In the flashiest pieces, he seeks interesting melodic details among the slower notes played by the other hand. He doesn't attempt extreme contrasts of tone colors, like Federico Colli (Sept/Oct 2018).

In repeats Grante does not add improvised notes to embellish the phrases, but he varies his touch or the balances subtly. He stays safely close to the meter, not making these pieces into adventurous tone poems (like Enrico Baiano on harpsichord). In his essay he explains why he sometimes interprets the word *tremolo* as a fast single-note repetition, sometimes as a trill.

There are some miscalculations (for example, K 39 really is too fast), but Grante's interpretive choices generally make sense with his thoughtful preparation and analysis. In dealing with such a vast collection of music (569 sonatas!) it is remarkable that he has found this many convincing ways to project a variety of expressions. I listened to Grante's volumes 1 and 2 last year while reviewing a similar piano set by Christoph Ullrich (Mar/Apr 2020). In that comparison I was most impressed by the way Grante characterized and differentiated the pieces from one another, probing for surprising expressive details. I notice less of that here in Volume 6. His delivery seems more generic, at least in the easy pieces that probably didn't take much rehearsal.

There might have been a bit of a rush to get this done: he recorded all eight hours of this music in one week—an astounding task. I'm convinced there was some judicious modern digital recycling to help him along the way. In the first half of the familiar and treacherously difficult K 141, I noticed some distinctive right-hand figures happening in exactly the same way both times (copying and pasting part of the same take on a repeat). Despite such shortcuts, the level of artistry here is distinguished.

I miss the swagger, humor, and deliberately crunchy roughness that harpsichordists find in this music. Grante and his Bösendorfer make consistently pretty and rounded sounds, as that instrument is designed to do. It's attractive in its own way. This genial performance and the recorded sound are good enough that Grante makes me want to go listen to his whole series sometime...even though modern piano isn't my general preference for this rugged and unpredictable music.

LEHMAN

SCHEIDT: *Christ Who Art Day and Light*
Basel Madrigalists/ Fritz Naf; Ensemble Galliarda/ Marianne Luthi, Manfred Harras
Cantate 58002—62 minutes

This recording was originally released in 1988. The program is devoted entirely to the music of Samuel Scheidt, save Robert White's setting of the hymn 'Christe, qui Lux est et Dies' sung in *alternatim* fashion (polyphonic verses alternating with chant). The major works on the program are the motet 'Christe, der du Bist Tag und Licht' from Scheidt's *Cantiones Sacrae* of 1620, and 'Christ, der du Bist der Helle Tag' from a collection of songs published in Nuremberg in 1656. Individual verses of the first motet are set for 2 to 8 voices, creating many opportunities for extremes from massive to intimate expressions of emotion. 'Christ, der du Bist der Helle Tag' has some gorgeous harmonies, though Scheidt also makes extensive use of solo vocal timbres.

Between choral works come several lovely ensemble pieces for viols or recorders. The Pavane, Galliard, and Courentes comes from Scheidt's *Ludi Musici, Prima Pars* (1620). The three Symphonias derive from his *LXX Symphonien auff Concerten Manir*, suggesting a style in line with his vocal concertos.

In all, the music is beautiful and well played and sung. The tempos are lugubrious, though, and voices are sometimes indistinct. Notes are in English, but there are no texts.

LOEWEN

SCHMITT: *Tragedie de Salome Suite; Musique sur l'Eau; Oriane et le Prince d'Amour Suite; Legende*
Susan Platts, a; Nikki Chooi, v; Buffalo Philharmonic & women's choir/ JoAnn Falletta
Naxos 574 138—61 minutes

Once you get past the cover art—Regnault's bizarre painting of Salome—this is more than fair sailing all the way. *La Tragedie de Salome*, though listed on the album as a symphonic poem, is the 1910 suite Schmitt culled from his 1907 ballet. The young Stravinsky admired the work and is its dedicatee. The initial segment is soaked in atmosphere, sultry with harp and celeste coloring. It moves from a hothouse aura into the dance episodes, some of them using irregular meters with jagged accents. Their primal clashes have caused Michael Doleschell of the CBC radio program Sound Magic to describe Schmitt as a musical Fauvist. The transitions into the dance segments are

handled with consummate artistry. The dances have not only animated rhythms, but sophisticated harmonies from skilled use of added-note chords and whole-tone phrases. You readily hear the influence of the work on Stravinsky's *Firebird*.

Musique sur l'Eau is a brief yet substantial setting of Albert Samain's poem. The text is full of love and languor, gorgeously vocalized by the composer. A masterpiece of period essence, it's Art Nouveau music, if such a thing ever existed. You can picture it accompanying Jean Delville's rapt painting "The Love of Souls" as the couple ascend in glowing purple and gold.

Like Ravel's *Bolero*, *Oriane at le Prince d'Amour* (1938) was a commission from Ida Rubinstein. Exquisitely voiced opening fanfares lead to varied dance sections. The virtuosity of Schmitt's orchestration rivals anything from the postromantic era. The music includes a near-quote from *La Mer*. It's a curious case of work from an epigone of Debussy and Ravel, yet not at all gone to seed.

Legende was originally a concertante saxophone piece written as therapy for the Bostonian Elisa Hall, who had a respiratory ailment. This is the 1918 version that replaced the sax with a solo violin. It could be a tone poem with violin obbligato. The solo part interjects between floods of orchestral tone. Gentler washes of delicate scoring both surround and support the soloist, the music ending in tender reminiscence.

It'd be hard to imagine a better introduction to Schmitt's music than this. The performances are outstanding. Platts's singing in *Salome* and Chooi's playing in *Legende* are exemplary. Falletta's conducting is first rate, her tempos and phrasing ensuring coherence in the music. She's alert to every nuance, which these pieces have in abundance. The Buffalo Phil sounds radiant, lavishing TLC on every work. Edward Yadzinski's informative notes include a text and translation. If, like me, you can never get enough of fin-de-siecle excess, this recording's for you.

O'CONNOR

SCHUBERT: *30 Minuets*
Daniel Lebhardt, p—Naxos 574145—52 minutes

Naxos has a seemingly endless stable of pianists. Each new recording seems to have a new one, or so it seems. I definitely do not care to hear more than a few of these D.41 minuets at a time. While pleasant enough, they begin to sound the same after a while. Listeners may take some solace in the fact that ten of the dances are lost. The 15-year-old composer showed some talent, but hardly reflected what was to come in the future. Dull and repetitive if heard on end, the recording also includes some landler and ecossaises (about seven minutes). Since these date from the future of his shockingly short life, they are the product of the more mature composer and wear better.

Hungarian pianist Lebhardt does as well as anyone can expect with this thankless task, and the sound is very good. For Schubert completists only.

BECKER

SCHUBERT: *Piano Sonatas in E-flat, D 568; A minor, D 845*
Mathieu Gaudet—Analekta 29183—71 minutes

This release, unnecessarily called "The Power of Fate", is Volume 3 of a projected 12-volume survey of Schubert's major works for piano. The pianist (b 1979) is French-Canadian who combines a full-time job as emergency physician with musical activities. We have not reviewed Volumes 1 and 2, only an earlier recording of Rachmaninoff's Preludes (M/J 2010) when James Harrington found Gaudet's playing very good but "too careful".

Schubert seems to be in good hands with this artist. His interpretations are clear, unselfconscious, and sufficiently expressive. The "big" A-minor Sonata in particular is quite excellent and not unlike the performance by the masterly Walter Klien (Vox 5173) that I listened to for direct comparison. Gaudet takes the repeat in I, but Klien does not. Around 2:30 in IV I wished Gaudet had relaxed a bit and, as Klien does, brought out the lyricism of the melody that hovers over the perpetual motion. In III of Mozart's A-minor Sonata, which may have inspired Schubert's IV, the major-key section offers a similar respite from the somber onward rush of eighth notes, and this needs to be made palpable, or else the finale comes to resemble some kind of etude.

In the lovely E-flat Sonata, long a favorite of mine, Gaudet strikes me as somewhat rigid and lacking in charm, even though he describes the character of the music well in his liner notes. I again listened first to Klien (Vox 5175) whose flexible timing and finely differentiated dynamics result in a well-nigh ideal rendition that Gaudet fails to match. He also might have mentioned in his liner notes that there is an earlier three-movement version of this sonata in a dif-

ferent key, D-flat. Gilbert Schuchter (Tudor 1640, J/F 2018), among others, has recorded it.

One peculiarity must be pointed out: In several movements (II and III of each sonata) Gaudet adds notes that are not in the score. Although these additions (a trill here, an ornament there, even some single high notes) are tasteful and harmless, I do find them gratuitous. This application of 18th Century performance practice to early 19th Century music goes too far, and I cannot imagine that Schubert, playing his unpublished sonatas to friends at home, would have added anything he had not written down (or would not have written down anything he had added). As I have argued in earlier reviews, such additions do not improve the music but merely draw attention to the cleverness of the performer.

REPP

SCHUBERT: *Piano Sonatas, D 784+850*
Barry Douglas—Chandos 20157—72 minutes

This is Volume 5 of the Solo Piano Works. Others in this series have proved to be quite good, and this one joins them. By now Douglas has shown his pianistic worth, and readers who have started with Douglas need not fear adding this one as well.

D 784 dates from 1823, just five years before Schubert's untimely death. It is a thoroughly serious work in three movements. At this time the composer was undergoing treatment for syphilis and understandable bouts of depression. It is not until the final movement that we encounter any real accelerated movement, and even there joy is kept at bay. Played with deep concentration and void of any outward display, Douglas wears this seriousness with emotion, but not self-pity.

D 850 from 1825 is the better known of the two sonatas and finds the composer in more amiable spirits. Three of its movements are marked allegro, and the lovely slow movement is marked 'con moto'. Here the competition is keen. If I find Douglas's slower tempos seizing my attention somewhat less than the livelier Gilels or Lewis, his accomplishment is not to be dismissed.

Filling out the program are two selections from the *Schwanengesang* as arranged by Liszt. Not quite what you'd expect in this Schubert survey, but welcome nevertheless. I suppose Douglas found it hard to resist the famous 'Standchen', and you will too. Good notes, good sound, and great music.

BECKER

SCHUBERT: *Piano Sonatas in G, D 894; C minor, D 958*
Andrea Lucchesini—Audite 97767—74 minutes

This is the final volume of these fantastic sonatas. They are also magnificently played by this Italian pianist, who has given us a three-disc series that grows in stature with repeated hearings.

It was a bold move on Schubert's part to follow the long, concentrated, and deeply moving 'Molto Moderato E Cantabile' opening movement of Sonata D 894 with an 'Andante' slow movement. That it works is testament to the intensity of Schubert's creativity. Lucchesini is a master of every gesture and produces a beguilingly crystalline tone without forcing his sound. The final two movements hold one's attention with their natural flow of dynamics.

The same can be said for D 958. I was forced to listen again to the other CD of this series in my collection, and I decided that purchasing the remaining disc would be a must. The Steinway D sounds terrific, and it remains difficult to accept that this life-affirming music has only emerged from the shadows during my lifetime.

BECKER

SCHUBERT: *Sonata in B-flat;*
GLASS: *Etudes 2, 6, 16*
Simone Dinnerstein, p
Orange Mountain 147—72 minutes

Here we have a beautiful release from Ms Dinnerstein. It is called "A Character of Quiet" but might just as well be called "Molto, Molto Moderato". I'm not complaining—at least I'm not for most of the music. Still, the slow tempo for Glass's Etude 2 seems *way* too indulgent. (I've said many times that we need different performances of new music, and this one is different all right, so maybe I shouldn't complain.) A more measured approach works very well for Etude 16, and in fact it's the best performance of this one that I've heard. Etude 6 whips along as it should, but Dinnerstein takes appropriate rubato when called for and thus gives the big chordal climaxes their due.

The Schubert is very good. Most of the time she uses slow tempos to bring the sense of wandering that characterizes his two most important final compositions (the other is *Winterreise*). In one spot—the angry, rapidly modulating chords near the end of exposition and recap—she decides to rush thru them, which is the big (and only really detrimental)

miscalculation in the movement. In IV she favors a dry approach with minimal pedal. One can justify this with Schubert's notation, but I think the interpretation is too literal. Still, she is an artist of the highest caliber, and this release will delight many.

HASKINS

SCHUBERT: *Quartets 6+13; Movement*
Schumann Quartet—Berlin 301410—65 minutes

To encounter a Schubert quartet album without *Death and the Maiden* is certainly encouraging, though the runner-up *Rosamunde* is here.

Lest you assume who this group's favorite composer might be, it is worth noting that three of these artists are siblings, bearing the weighty family name "Schumann". Their recordings range from Mozart and Verdi to Ives and Shostakovich, but this album suggests that Schubert may be closest to their heart, or at least a stylistic median.

Quartet 6 is a fine choice to start off with, and although it is not always considered an important work, these musicians clearly believe that it is. There's a bit of Mendelssohn's high spirits and inherent drama, and the crisp recording makes it sound symphonic. Although the composer was later dismissive of such teenage efforts, to modern ears it is obviously the work of a wunderkind from whom much can be expected.

The album is called *Fragment*, making the Quartet Movement in C minor (D. 703) its unlikely title track. It appears here with the brief Andante fragment included, a pleasing 2-1/2 minutes that might be easy to overlook. The liner notes are written for the layman and dwell at length on Schubert's unfinished works and temperamental approach to writing.

Some thought went into the programming: early quartet, fragmentary yet pivotal piece, and accomplished mature quartet.

This brings us to Quartet 13 (*Rosamunde*). Much has always been made of Schubert's expressiveness, and while that is evident here, elegance is also a major element of style for the Schumann players. The opening is powerful and convincing, and while II maintains this high level, I can only compare it a little unfavorably to the melancholy, otherworldly tone captured by the Juilliard Quartet in a recording from decades ago. By the time IV comes I find myself unexpectedly weary of this well-written, well-performed music. Although the run time is just over an hour, that is usually more than enough of almost anything. If the wonderful single movement quartet had been omitted, it might have turned out fine. The symphonic sound may be partly to blame, making these thoughtful performances a bit too explosive.

Previously I have reviewed the unremarkable Fitzwilliam Quartet recording of this piece (S/O 2020), and the Signum Quartet's middling effort (J/A 2018). There's plenty of competition in these pieces, but the Schumann Quartet can be proud of this one for sure.

DUTTERER

SCHUBERT: *Quartets 6+14; song transcriptions*
Signum Quartet—Pentatone 5186 732—79 min

When I reviewed the Signum Quartet's previous album of Schubert quartets and transcriptions ("Aus der Ferne", J/A 2018), I might have guessed that they would attempt to step into the same river twice. That particular recording had a decent *Rosamunde* and inconsequential instrumental renderings of lieder that ended by bogging the whole thing down. So it is this time as well.

'Ins stille Land' is a very brief yet haunting song, but you wouldn't know it from the elevator music version that opens this album. 'Fruhlingslaube' is given the same treatment, all the worse in that this is a composer with emotional heft and complexity.

As for Quartet 6, I am interested that these would-be Schubertians picked a piece so distant from the center of his musical solar system. It does not quite compare to the Schumann Quartet's rendition (above). The opening movement offers ample opportunity for furious fiddling, but the musicians lose their way in the Andante, again by being too muted. The concluding two movements are both on the level, and bolster the overall performance.

Helping to inflate this album to 79 minutes (the exact same duration as their previous album), violist Xandi van Dijk transcribes 'Abendstern', 'Auf dem Wasser zu Singen', 'Das Grab', 'Schwanengesang', and 30 seconds of the song 'Der Tod und das Madchen'. The latter is of course meant to pave the way for Quartet 14, the centerpiece of the recording. No chamber work has come my way with quite the same frequency as this one, and it has dampened my enthusiasm for it a bit. The Valchev Quartet's reissue (N/D 2020) was better than any of the histrionic *Death and the Maiden*

recordings by 20-somethings that I have heard in the past few years.

To be fair to the Signum Quartet, this rendition is adequate; it is occasionally melodramatic in the first movement, but power and feeling are mixed in as well. Likewise in II, there is uplifting beauty, but then Thomas Schmitz's overemphatic cello playing makes the ending drag. These musicians manage to make III and IV sound important and exciting—something many ensembles cannot seem to do.

I'm sure another such compilation will appear at some point. Schubert has plenty of quartets, and more songs than almost anyone else in history. Perhaps this group could take a breather, though, and come back to this sort of material with a different perspective.

DUTTERER

SCHUBERT: *Symphonies, all*
Chamber Orchestra of Europe/ Nikolaus Harnoncourt—ICA 5160 [4CD] 252 minutes

In all the middle movements in the first four symphonies the tempos are too fast. They have no grace or charm; they are hard and stony. The first and last movements are OK, but he does take exposition repeats consistently. Sometimes that is annoying.

Harnoncourt's wife, Alice, was at all the rehearsals for these concerts, with a score in her lap and a privileged position in relation to the conductor. In her write-up she speaks of the tremendous "energy" in these performances. That is impressive, but it is sometimes downright aggressive. I want the music to unfold naturally; and I want more grace, wit, sweetness, and elegance. No one did Schubert better than Beecham and Bruno Walter.

No. 5 is quite good here, but it is by far the most recorded of the early symphonies, and there are quite a few excellent recordings.

6 isn't bad either. You have to expect some movements in all these symphonies to take longer, because Harnoncourt is a dogmatic repeater. His tempos are not slower at all, no matter how long the movements take.

In No. 8 (the *Unfinished*) taking the exposition repeat throws off the whole balance and makes the Allegro take longer than the Andante. Some other conductors do that, too—for example, Barenboim—but the recordings made in the Golden Age (say from Furtwangler thru Beecham and Walter) skip the exposition repeats in Schubert as they do in Mozart.

The 9th, then, confirms what we expect: I seems endless with the repeats. The Andante is OK. The Scherzo takes about 5 minutes longer than usual (repeats). True, the contrasting trio is even more of a relief that way, but I feel beaten down by the scherzo itself. The final movement is of the Toscanini and Munch type—5 minutes faster than, say, Solti! It's another case of "Vivace" taken to mean "fast" rather than "lively". But who would buy a whole set of Schubert symphonies for the 9th?

There are far worse performances of many of these symphonies. I respect Harnoncourt's musicality even when I don't agree with his decisions. And where are you going to find (in today's market) better recordings of the early symphonies? The orchestra is smallish but sounds good—no "period" elements, though someone writes in the notes of "stripping away the varnish of centuries"—propaganda common in our time. This is not irritating PPP stuff. The recordings were made way back in 1988 in Graz at festival concerts. There is applause, but the sound is excellent.

VROON

SCHUBERT: *Symphony 9;*
KRENEK: *Static and Ecstatic*
Cleveland Orchestra/ Franz Welser-Most
Cleveland 2 [SACD] 77 minutes

This performance of the Schubert Ninth Symphony is a wonderful surprise. It moves along without indulgence and sings and dances. Too many performances of this piece are grand and heavy-handed, but this one, played by a reasonably big orchestra, creates the aura of chamber music and making music for the sheer joy of it. The woodwinds are outstanding, the strings excellent, and special praise goes to the trombones. Schubert used the trombones a lot in this work, and many trombonists (and conductors) seem to think of it as almost a display piece for the instrument. Welser-Most and the Cleveland trombones do not take that approach, and the result is magical.

From the onset, something seems different. The opening theme moves along fairly quickly with a sweet affect. The first big entrance is not overpowering, and the trombones blend rather than dominate. Never do textures get heavy or the pacing ponderous. This thing sings. The Allegro follows suit; it dances and is full of life. The rhythms in II are marked at first, but they lighten up under the graceful woodwind solos, making for a nice

contrast. In one slow, chordal transition, woodwind chords open up like flowers in a slow time-lapse video. Nowhere does anything sound fussy. The relatively dissonant section can get heavy, but not here, and the lithe chamber-like transition back to the main idea is nicely phrased. III is light, easy on the accents, and the strings shape and phrase their fast underpinning passages. The trio is marvelous and beautifully balanced. It would be easy for conductor and orchestra to go all-out in the finale, but everything remains in character. Again, it sings and dances, ending as fine a Schubert Ninth as I have heard or expect to hear.

I am no admirer of Ernest Krenek's music if for no reason other than that his opera *Jonny Spiel Alt* eclipsed Erich Korngold's wonderful *Das Wunder der Helianne.* Works like Krenek's Second Symphony I can tolerate, but *Static and Ecstatic* (1972) for chamber orchestra, one of his major pieces, is another matter. It is in ten short movements, some serially composed and others tonal "interludes". The work is one of those spiky "everything but the kitchen sink" pieces with the usual bag of tricks that instruments are capable of, and it becomes annoying after 10 of its 20 minutes. Admirers of this music can rest assured that it is brilliantly played and recorded.

The sound is excellent in the Krenek, perhaps a little congested in the Schubert, but only a little and in no way does it impede enjoyment. The booklet is not as gaudy as the book that came with the first issue on the Cleveland Orchestra label, but it is not standard issue, either. It is a thin production about 7.5 inches square and contains promotional essays about the orchestra, a long article by Welser-Most, and short essays about the music. In his comments about the Schubert, Welser-Most called this performance "one for the ages". It is.

Two issues ago, I reviewed another program with these forces—music by Strauss, Beethoven, Prokofieff, Varese, and two modern composers I did not know. I asked Nathan Faro to review the last three, which he kindly did, and better than I ever would have. I have to believe that many in the classical music buying public had the same predicament I had, but it came with a big book full of pictures, creating a sense of occasion. This newcomer is list priced at $24, and the book is nothing special. That alone will create a predicament for many people, some favoring Schubert, others Krenek, and some unwilling to pay so much for this combination. That said, you can think of purchasing this issue as a contribution to the orchestra. In return, you will be rewarded with a grand recording of Schubert's last symphony.

HECHT

SCHUBERT: *Trios; Notturno*
Noah Bendix-Balgley, v; Peter Wiley, vc; Robert Levin, p
Palais des Degustateurs 21 [2CD] 133 minutes

Trio 2; Trio in B-flat; Notturno
Busch Trio—Alpha 632—66 minutes

The numbered piano trios are both late works, written when Schubert was no doubt aware that his own death was nearing. These are monumental works, long and grand in scope, with the first (in B-flat) somewhat more lyrical, the second (in E-flat) more dramatic. In fact, though, each is large enough to encompass the whole of Schubert's emotional world: the strife alongside the almost agonizing beauty. These passages of pain and yearning, appearing in almost every movement, come back again and again, usually in different keys and varied instrumentation. In one case (the finale of the E-flat) one of these themes is borrowed from the Trio's slow movement. This is music that works its way into your soul and never goes away.

There is also one textual variant in the finale of the E-flat. The whole piece is long, and as Schubert wrote it, the finale (a sonata) lasts more than 20 minutes. He was persuaded to shorten the movement, which he did by eliminating the exposition repeat and making two cuts in the development. The trio was published in this shortened form, which became the text in the Breitkopf & Härtel complete edition later in the 19th Century. Many present-day performers have restored the cuts, and, it seems to me, there are three defensible positions: 1) do the original long version because that's the way Schubert conceived it; 2) observe the cuts, even though it excises some strong music in the development because that's what Schubert later requested; or 3) restore the development cuts (about 2-3 minutes), but skip the exposition repeat. You'll be happy to know that all three possibilities are included on these two issues. Bendix-Balgley et al. include both the long and cut versions so can choose (or listen to them back-to-back thereby hearing the same music for about 35 minutes!); the Busch Trio observes the cuts, but skips the repeat.

In addition to the two big trios we have two fillers: a one-movement trio in B-flat, which is very early (D 28; Schubert was 15); and the lovely *Notturno*, which was the original slow movement for the B-flat Trio.

The performers here all have excellent pedigrees. Bendix-Balgley, who is still in his 30s, was concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Symphony (2011-14) and is now First Concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic. Cellist Peter Wiley was cellist in the Beaux Arts Trio (1987-98) and succeeded David Soyer in the Guarneri Quartet from 2001 until 2009. And Robert Levin has achieved renown for both performance and musicological work, particularly in Mozart.

The jacket for the other CD gave me a minor shock when I saw it: Busch Trio. Great, I thought, it must be an Adolf Busch reissue. But no, these are young musicians, ranging in age from late 20s to mid 30s. Violinist Mathieu van Bellen is a native of the Netherlands, while cellist and pianist, Ori and Omri Epstein, are brothers from Israel. The group met while studying in London; they now live in Brussels. Their name comes from Van Bellen's violin; he plays the ex-Adolf Busch Guadagnini.

The performances are all first rate, with a deep understanding of the exquisite agony that characterizes so much Schubert: smiling through the tears, as it were. The Busch group is consistently a bit faster than Van Bellen, but I found all tempos quite fine except for that borrowed quote in the E-flat finale; I would prefer a more relaxed tempo there. Sonics are all good, except I found Wiley's cello was sometimes covered too much by the piano.

These, though, are small complaints. Both are excellent, though I would choose the Van Bellen just to get both trios, and the notes are more extensive. Either, though, can go alongside old favorites: Stern, Istomin, Rose or the Fontenay Trio.

ALTHOUSE

SCHUMANN, C: *Piano Pieces*
Eugenie Russo—Paladino 28—64 minutes

This Austrian release is misleadingly titled "Clara Schumanns Klavier". The piano in question, a Streicher *Hammerflügel* manufactured in 1868, is shown on the cover and inside the booklet. It did not belong to Clara Schumann. She played on it just once in January of 1870 in the small hall, later known as the Brahmssaal, of the just inaugurated *Musikvereinsgebäude* in Vienna. That was her farewell recital, and she never returned to Vienna as a soloist (her last visit was with a singer in 1872), though she kept playing in public for another two decades. The piano was retained by the manufacturer, perhaps as a souvenir, and eventually went to the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna, where this recording was made.

It is pertinent to note that Clara's close friend Brahms did own an almost identical instrument. He wrote to her that he always had the sound of this piano in mind when he composed his late piano pieces. And there is a recording of these pieces played by the American pianist Ira Braus on an 1871 Streicher piano belonging to the Frederick Collection in Massachusetts. In reviewing it, William Bender (J/F 2008) thought the instrument "suit[ed] most of [the pieces] but not all", notwithstanding Brahms's avowal. But of course the condition of the instrument may also play a role.

The present piano seems to have been well maintained. It is a good instrument that one can listen to with pleasure—a far cry from the wretched fortepianos of yore and only slightly inferior to 20th Century instruments. The program includes the first two of the *Soirées Musicales*, Op. 6; *Souvenir de Vienne*, a virtuosic elaboration of the Austrian anthem; the Sonata in G minor; the Three Romances, Op. 11; the four *Pieces Fugitives*, Op. 15, the last of which is identical with the Scherzo of the Sonata; and the first of the three Romances, Op. 21. These are all attractive compositions in a (Robert) Schumannesque style, and indeed Clara's husband often offered advice or even collaborated on some pieces.

The pianist, Eugenie Russo, is an American in her 60s who has been living and teaching in Austria for many years and whose first name, incidentally, is the same as Clara Schumann's oldest daughter's. Her playing is competent but a little stiff, and her dynamic range does not include a true *piano*, let alone *pianissimo*. Should this be blamed on the instrument? In any case, I prefer Domenico Codispoti's suave performances on a modern Steinway (Piano Classics 10193, M/A 2020), one of my top choices for last year. About half of his program is the same.

I should add that this recording is not new. It was made in 2007 and released in 2013 but has only recently been made available for downloading and streaming (with a different cover image, showing the artist), and perhaps that is the reason why it was sent out for review only now. Anyone interested in hearing it might indeed want to consider those alterna-

tives to purchasing the CD, whose price is exorbitant.

REPP

SCHUMANN: *Quartets*
Emerson Quartet
Pentatone 5186 869—77 minutes

This is the Emersons' first recording of the complete Schumann quartets, but not precisely their first dip in this particular pool. Back in the quartet's earliest days they recorded a set of four discs containing, supposedly, "The Great String Quartets" for Book-of-the-Month Records. The eight pieces so selected (which omitted Beethoven—a thing that seems almost inconceivable now, given the orgiastic celebrations just past—and only barely edged into the 20th Century with the Ravel 1902 Quartet) included Schumann's Third. After the Emersons contracted with Deutsche Grammophon, DG bought the recordings and reissued them; therefore there is still a very early Emerson Schumann 3 out there.

So here they are now, re-recording that work and adding its companions for Pentatone. The playing is pretty much as we have come to expect from the later Emersons, which is to say strong, elegant, and yet a bit more ferocious and coarser than need be. That's something of a problem in these works, which, as Schumann's only chamber music without piano, tend to uncertain and sometimes overladen textures. There is a lot of loud music here, and much that demands to be hit hard, but somehow recoils from the act. (The finale of 1, Mendelssohnian in everything but Mendelssohn's inimitable lightness of touch, is a prime example.)

The most effective, somewhat to my surprise, is 2, which is the least played of the three outside complete sets, and in some ways the oddest. After the burbling F-major I comes a completely unexpected shift to A-flat for the slow movement, and then the music works its way back (via a C-minor Scherzo that is damnably tricky rhythmically) to a finale that combines the amiable bumptiousness of the *Spring* Symphony's finale with the grander span of the Second Symphony's (a subsidiary theme is nearly identical to one in the symphony). The Emersons are unexpectedly tender, even caressing, in the slow movement, and the finale seems to gather up the different strands with virtuosic ease.

Elsewhere I'm less convinced. The finale of 1 would be brilliant—hell, *is* brilliant—for the sheer panache of the playing, the viola playing especially (Lawrence Dutton's command will never grow old for me), but all the same the players just clobber things too roughly. The respite of those few mysterious bars of calm A major before the great grinding motor whirls back into action is arresting just because you hear it nowhere else.

As for 3, this is where Schumann really did overreach. Take that miraculous texture of the second theme of I, where the high cello soars against a backdrop of syncopated notes from the rest of the quartet. To Schumann, this was just a texture, a way of combining melody and accompaniment; it didn't occur to him (the pianist) that the four players of the quartet weren't like his own left and right hands, capable of grasping the whole and performing it entire. It can be done, obviously, as this and many other of the multitudinous recordings of the work attest; but it has to sound easy, and—as a matter of brute fact—it is like sweating blood, as I've heard from every quartet player I've ever asked about the passage.

In a similar way the violence of the last variation of II, the growls of the viola in the slow movement, and the incessant rhythm of the finale are all things it's difficult to get right as a quartet player; there's something slightly synthetic about the whole operation. The Emersons blunt that feeling sometimes but never quite dispel it.

THOMSON

SCHUMANN: *Quartet 3;*
SHAW: *Essays*;
SHOSTAKOVICH: *Quartet 9*
Calidore Quartet—Signum 650—72 minutes

I think the Calidores outdo the Emersons here. They are gentler with the music's accents, though the last variation of II is still plenty strong in that respect. They manage the syncopated accompaniment to the first movement's second theme more deftly than the Emersons and the attacks with greater care. The finale is still rather a problem, but that's the piece, not the performers, who do everything they can to smooth over its repetitions and idiosyncracies.

The Calidores as a string quartet are more reliable guides to their repertoire than they are as program-note writers. They write that the Ninth is one of Shostakovich's most "uplifting and optimistic works", on the surface, but that there are darker undercurrents, revealed by Jewish and "klezmer" elements in this music, written two years after the anguished and

fraught premiere of Shostakovich's Symphony 13, *Babi Yar*. I don't hear anything uplifting or optimistic in the Ninth Quartet, beyond the first few bars. Even in the opening it ventures uncertainly into the minor and even the Phrygian, and the "motto" that first enters near the end of I (and comes back repeatedly, even to the last bar of the piece) has the minor third over the tonic. Anxiety is the prevailing mood, when it's not mechanistic ferocity or semi-jocular sadism, and of those "klezmer" elements I hear nary a whisper. There *are* optimistic Shostakovich quartets—the Sixth and Tenth, and even the Fourth (which has, indeed, a lot of explicitly Jewish material in it)—but the Ninth isn't among them.

That said, the Calidores tear into it with a will, and even triumph in the final bars, which they style as "fireworks" and where I hear only a clanking, implacable machinery.

In between come Caroline Shaw's *Three Essays,* premiered by the Calidore at the BBC Proms in 2018 and recorded here for the first time. They are about the 2016 American elections. 'Nimrod', the first, is about the man who, after Noah's flood, superintended the building of a gigantic edifice, a tower that would reach Heaven. God declares that from people who disobey the word of God, the word of man shall also be taken away, and the workers, fallen suddenly into a disunity of tongues, can no longer understand one another. Here there are fragments of language-like motifs trying to connect and interrupted by vast changes of landscape that might or might not symbolize the tower that was never finished. 'Echo' is about echo chambers, and there is one fantastic irruption, in the center of the piece, where things spin about faster and faster until the whole fuses into one tremendous crash, like an asteroid collapsing into the black hole that is already inside it. III, 'Ruby', is about both the gem and a computer language of the same name developed in Japan in the late 90s; it's haunted by a repeated D, always vanishing from one part and occurring somewhere else. The piece as a whole is fascinating, and though the Calidores do it up about as well as I can imagine, I'd still like to hear other quartets try it.

THOMSON

Word Police

A New York Times reporter referred to a painted glass ceiling as "frescos" in late December. Frescoes are paintings on (in) fresh plaster (plaster that has not dried).

SCHUMANN: *3 Romances; Fantasy Pieces; Fairy Tale Pictures; Violin Sonata 3;*
SCHUMANN, C: *3 Romances*
Haoli Lin, v, Jianan Liu, p
Naxos 579067—73 minutes

Clara Schumann was overshadowed by her phenomenally gifted husband Robert, but he held her talents in high esteem and encouraged her to compose, which she did up until about the time he died. The *Three Romances* were written in 1853 in response to Robert's own of that year. Suffice it to say that the disc programmer was kind to place Clara's set before Robert's.

Robert's *Fantasy Pieces* were originally written for clarinet in 1849. These are brief, dreamy pieces like the *Fairy Tale Pictures* written for viola in 1851.

I regret the choice to include the Third Violin Sonata in this program. It is one of the composer's late, subpar works and can't hold a candle to his other two sonatas, which are masterpieces.

Han Lin has a relaxed, warm, Central European manner that suites this music well. This is intimate music written for the salon, not the stage. The glossy studio sound is full but a bit congested in the louder passages.

Lin plays a violin built in Naples in 1732 by Nicolo Gagliano.

MAGIL

SCHUMANN: *Piano Quintet;* see SAY

SCRIABIN: *Polonaise; Sonata 6; 5 Mazurkas; 13 Preludes; 2 Impromptus; 4 Etudes*
Pervez Mody, p—Thorofon 2667—67 minutes

This is the 6th volume in Pervez Mody's series of Scriabin's piano music for Thorofon. As with the others, Mody has built a well-played program with a wide variety of pieces from different periods in Scriabin's compositional life. There will be at least one or two more volumes to complete the series. Sonata 8 is the only one not yet recorded, along with a youthful, 1886 Sonata-Fantasy and an incomplete Sonata in E-flat minor from 1887-89. Only Volume 1 (2570) has not been reviewed in ARG. Volumes 2-5 were covered: 2579, Nov/Dec 2011, 2590, Mar/Apr 2013, 2612, Sept/Oct 2014, 2632, Nov/Dec 2016.

The big works on this release are the early Polonaise (1897) and the exceptionally difficult late Sonata 6 (1911-12). Preludes come from Opp. 33, 35, 48, and 67 (1903 to 1913), The other works, Mazurkas Opp. 25 and 40,

Impromptus Op. 10, and Etudes Op. 8, all fall into the early period (1894-1903) and are clearly under the influence of Chopin.

Following through with the scores showed how detailed Mody's interpretations are. He pays close attention to the many markings in every Scriabin work. Nowhere is this more evident than in Sonata 6. This dark and almost evil work was never performed in public by the composer. When he played it for friends "he would stare off in the distance away from the piano . . . He seemed frightened and sometines shuddered." In the coda the score says "the terror surges, it mingles with the delirious dance". It is not an easy work to listen to, and the musical and technical difficulties certainly rival Ravel's 'Scarbo'.

With superb piano sound from Thorofon and extensive, detailed music analysis in the booklet, this installment of Scriabin continues Mody's excellent series. When finished, I imagine this will probably be a reference set for many years to come.

HARRINGTON

SCRIABIN: *Piano Concerto;* see PROKOFIEFF
Poem of Ecstasy; see STRAUSS
SESSIONS: *Piano Concerto;* see WINHAM

SHEEHAN: *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom*
Timothy Parsons, ct; Michael Hawes, bar; Jason Thoms, b; St Tikhon Choir/ Benedict Sheehan
Cappella Romana 421—76 minutes

In 2015 the Patriarch Tikhon Russian-American Institute commissioned Benedict Sheehan to compose "an entirely new musical score for the Liturgy in English, but in the Russian style". Sheehan composed unmistakably in the Russian style, but, as he writes in his program notes, in recognition that "Orthodoxy in America is an extremely diverse landscape today", he incorporated elements of "medieval Eastern chant, 20th Century minimalism, American folk singing, and the high tradition of Western church music" in order to reflect the broad range of American culture.

It would take a lot more familiarity with this work for me to pick out the various elements he sought to include, though I can hear touches of John Tavener. What I hear is a ravishing and lushly romantic work solidly in the tradition of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and Gretchaninoff. It is beautifully recorded and performed by the Saint Tikhon Choir, founded in 2015 by artistic director Sheehan, who is Abbot Sergius of St Tikhon's Monastery in Waymart, Pennsylvania. The choir has a sublime purity of sound with soaring sopranos and steely basses. By longstanding tradition, music in the Orthodox Church does not include instruments.

The release comes with two discs. The CD includes just the music with members of the choir taking the roles of the liturgical leaders. The other is a Pure Audio Blu-ray that includes the entire liturgy recorded at its liturgical premiere at St Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral in Washington, DC on October 20, 2019 celebrated by His Eminence Metropolitan Tikhon, Primate of the Orthodox Church of America. It is an astonishingly elaborate ritual in a magnificent edifice with transcendent iconography and including many changes of luxurious vestments. It is hard to imagine a more effective expression of the Orthodox understanding that the Liturgy is, as Sheehan writes in his notes, "the consummation of all created things, and the expression of their purpose, meaning, and direction. In the Liturgy is contained the whole drama of God's relationship to His creation."

The Blu-Ray includes has high resolution surround sound. (Unfortunately I don't have the equipment to appreciate that.) It takes a little patience to navigate its menu. The video portion is all in one track, so you can fast forward through it but not move from track to track.

I have only limited experience with the Orthodox Church, but I have loved its music since I was a child singing Gretchaninoff. Watching this Liturgy is an opportunity to witness intimately the inner sanctum of the church building and the elaborate symbolism of Orthodox worship. For me it was spiritually exalting.

Notes and texts.

R MOORE

SHOR: *Images from the Great Siege; Verdiana*
London Symphony/ Smbatyan
Naxos 579061—51 minutes

The great siege described in the title is a 14th Century battle by the Knights of Malta against the invading Ottoman Turks. The Ottomans slowly gained control of the Southern Mediterranean and Iberia and sent an Armada of 200 ships to conquer Malta. The Knights were considerably outnumbered, but were victorious. Alexey Shor's program, subtitled "an orchestral cycle", describes the events before, during, and

after the battle. Shor's romanticized music follows the action and might be considered underscoring for a film, if Shor's orchestrations and themes were less prominent. The battle sequences are full of energetic action music; the quiet moments are elegiac and introspective. Several dance rhythms are used, including a spritely gavotte, a minuet, a lovely barcarolle, and some Latin-influenced tempos. Unfortunately, Shor's music has a tendency to meander without actually accomplishing much. At 38 minutes it seems long.

The second piece, *Verdiana* uses themes from Verdi's operas re-scored using Latin dance rhythms: tango, bossa nova, and samba. You can recognize some of melodies from the operas, and it's all blended nicely. The orchestrations are complex and interesting. The problem is whether you like Verdi arranged like this. It's entertaining, but it's a sort of *Name That Tune* type of listening. The booklet has descriptions of the 13 sections of the *Siege* and the use of Verdi's themes in *Verdiana*. The London Symphony plays admirably and conductor Smbatyan directs the score with authority.

FISCH

SHOSTAKOVICH: *24 Preludes & Fugues*
Sviatoslav Richter, Emil Gilels, Tatjana Nikolayeva, Dmitri Shostakovich
Profil 20054 [5CD] 347 minutes

This set will appeal most to connoisseurs of Richter and in particular Shostakovich's preludes and fugues. I am neither. I love Richter but he's never been one of my special pianists, and the preludes and fugues are works that I admire but don't love. Anyway, the set aims to create as close to a complete Richter performance of these works as possible, and since Richter didn't believe in large, cyclic works, his performances needed to be augmented by others (hence Gilels and Nikolayeva). I have to confess that I was most drawn to the performances of Gilels, which were unfailingly more poetic and had more luminous tone.

Since all of these recordings come from older radio studios and concert performances, there are imperfections here and there (slight drop-offs, small changes in the pitch level of the piano across tracks) that may argue against purchase. But several of the recordings are here published for the first time, and the set concludes with the welcome bonus of Shostakovich's own performances of all 24.

HASKINS

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Songs & Romances*
Margarita Gritskova, mz; Maria Prinz, p
Naxos 574031—57 minutes

Shostakovich's songs are evocative, though the accompaniments are spartan, and he usually wrote more memorable themes and melodies in his instrumental works. Add to that the tendency of western singers to sing mainly in English, French, German, or Italian, and you have a recipe for obscurity. This recital is a fine introduction to his songs, which draw their lyrics from Russian, Japanese, English, Yiddish, Greek, Italian, and Spanish sources (all were written using Russian translations).

Gritskova has a commanding voice; it is not creamy or virtuosic, but it suits the style well. From the first few notes it is clear that she has labored to find a way to express all the emotion inherent in every phrase. From the folk tale of 'The Dragonfly and the Ant' to the flirtation of 'Whence Comes Such Tenderness', from the martial futility of 'The King's Campaign' to the lopsided romance of 'Pentozalis', Gritskova gives each song its own character and each character his or her own personality. Her diction is plenty clear, too.

I do wish a male singer had shared the program for some variety, though the sameness of mood is more from the composer's reserved style in his songs than a fault of the singer. It is probably best to take this a third at a time. Prinz's playing is solid but stolid: she follows the dynamics, but her phrasing is straightforward rather than creative. The piano part isn't as sensually rewarding as with a lot of other vocal repertory or even Shostakovich's piano music, but that calls for even more imagination.

As for the booklet, Naxos heard our pleas and included either texts or good synopses for each song, in Russian (Cyrillic alphabet), English, and German. Delos released Shostakovich's complete songs from 2002 to 2005 with transliterated Russian and translated English texts; women and men share the singing duties (Sept/Oct 2002).

ESTEP

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Symphony 11*
London Philharmonic/ Vladimir Jurowski
LPO 118—58 minutes

This is beautifully recorded and played, but be aware that the tempos are rather fast. Both the first two movements are by far the fastest I know. The recordings I have of this are by

Bychkov, Rostropovich, DePreist, and Nelsons; I prefer all of them to this one. If you think the brooding in those recordings is excessive, you should try this one. Also, the LPO is a very refined orchestra—more so than most of the others, and less Russian than the others. (The Rostropovich is with the London Symphony, which has always come closer to a Russian sound in Russian music than any other British orchestra.)

There is too much applause at the end; it could have been faded out sooner.

VROON

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Viola Sonata; Cello Sonata arr viola*
Veit Hertenstein; Minze Kim
Hanssler 20011—62 minutes

Mr Hertenstein himself arranged the Cello Sonata for viola and piano, and it works astonishingly well. The only places that sound less than ideal in I are where the viola is in the stratosphere, but I think that is because the piano part is still in its original octave where it would be closer to the cello. If Hertenstein and Kim perform this again, they should experiment with changing octaves in the piano as well. Only in the opening figures of II and at their return do I miss the heft of the cello.

Hertenstein's playing is warm and nuanced; in fact, he brings more persuasive individuality to the piece than many cellists! His intonation is not always spot-on, but the shadows it casts are faint. The cryptic yet evocative Viola Sonata is given a reading filled with gentle humor and a sense of discovery. Kim is a delight to hear as well; her tone exudes strength and integrity even in the softest moments. This is a recording I'll gladly return to.

ESTEP

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Quartet 3;*
see SCHUMANN

SIBELIUS: *Kullervo*
Lilli Paasikivi, mz; Tommi Hakala, bar; YL Male Choir; Minnesota Orchestra/ Osmo Vänskä
BIS 2235 [SACD] 80 minutes

I mentioned not long ago (M/A 2020) that I thought *Kullervo* was a great piece, and I urged readers who liked late romantic music to give it a try. Well, here I am again with the same message. To use a vinyl reference: you could drop the needle anywhere, listen for 30 seconds, and be convinced this was strong, compelling music.

This was Sibelius's first major work, one that found immediate popularity and propelled him into the role of Finnish composer. As a total work, though, *Kullervo* is peculiar. There are five movements, three (1, 2, and 4) for orchestra alone. The finale includes a narrating chorus; and III, where all the dramatic interchange takes place, has the chorus and two soloists. These two singers are Kullervo and his long-lost sister, and the plot is simple: Kullervo unknowingly seduces his sister, and in the final movement the chorus narrates his suicide.

Osmo Vänskä has all the credentials you would want for a Sibelius conductor. He is Finnish-born (in Sääminki), played clarinet in the Turku and Helsinki Philharmonics, studied conducting at the Sibelius Academy, and conducted the Lahti Symphony before becoming chief conductor in Minnesota in 2003. While with the Lahti Symphony, he recorded all the Sibelius symphonies, including *Kullervo*. That recording was highly praised by John McKelvey (S/O 2001), and I can only echo his enthusiasm listening to this Minnesota recording, taken from 2016 concerts and previously released as BIS 2236 (May/June 2017).

Under Vänskä the music has wonderful flow and coherence. As I said, simply drop the needle, and you'll believe. The YL Male Choir, founded in 1883 at Helsinki University, is Finland's oldest Finnish-language choir, and they are excellent and enthusiastic in their role as narrators. Less impressive, unfortunately, are the soloists. Paasikivi was Vänskä's mezzo in his Lahti recording, and now, nearly two decades later, she sounds too matronly to be anyone's sister. And Hakala, the baritone, has too wide a vibrato and too little core to his voice. As far as soloists are concerned, I'm more drawn to Johanna and Ville Rusanen, who actually *are* brother and sister; they sing in the Lintu recording with the Finnish Radio Symphony (M/A 2020). For the orchestral movements, though, Vänskä is hard to beat!

ALTHOUSE

SIBELIUS: *Symphonies (all); Kullervo*
Lilli Paasikivi, mz; Tommi Hakala, bar; YL Male Voice Choir; Minnesota Orchestra/ Osmo Vänskä
BIS 2506 [4SACD] 5:14

This is the first ARG review of Symphonies 1 and 4. And disconcerting listening it is. Once past the serene, subtle, atmospheric introduc-

tion by solo clarinet and rolling timpani, my overall impression is that Symphony 1 is hectic. Yes, Vänskä adheres to the composer's dotted half-note tempo (108) in I. But here it feels a lot faster than one might think, not because of the number of notes per measure but his conducting style: on edge, sometimes speeding up when no accelerando is called for. And the engineering and conductor increase the nervousness with direct, unenhanced, harsh violins and blaring brass that often drown the woodwinds. The lack of transparency makes me think that Sibelius was not nearly as good an orchestrator as he was by the time he got to Symphony 4.

In II Vänskä's perfect execution makes the many simultaneously off-beat rhythms feel unsettling, which must have been Sibelius's intent. Otherwise, more accelerandos, raw violins, and brass and strings bury the woodwinds. III, taken at the marked tempo (dotted half-note = 108) feels hectic, especially at the mini-fugue starting at 1:12, first with flutes, then adding oboes, clarinets, and bassoons; it sounds like a scramble where the players can barely stay on the beat. In IV Vanska is finally quite steady and disciplined with just a slight tendency to rush.

What a contrast to Symphony 4, here a lugubrious trudge. It opens somewhat sloppily with the cellos and string basses often entering late rather than on the beat in support of the melody line. I's development, which starts with the cellos followed by the staggered entry of the violas and violins, is like watching ice melt, until Sibelius himself comes to the rescue with a giant crescendo and the piling on of winds and brass. What a relief that Vänskä moves II lightly and brightly with neat definition, free of idiosyncrasies, rushing, etc. III is a return to the opening of I, trudging along without thrust or direction, a slow drip, drip, drip, even in the coda. IV is best of all, straightforward with no dickering and the transparent textures displaying Sibelius's subtle orchestration.

One puzzle in both 1 and 4: why such tinny cymbal crashes? Vänskä's 1 can't begin to compare to Ormandy's 1962 recording with the Philadelphia Orchestra, superbly remastered on a Sony "Essential Classics" album, paired with Leonard Bernstein's incomparable Symphony 5 with the New York Philharmonic. To my surprise, in 4 I turn to Ormandy once again for his 1978 RCA recording with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the most satisfying I've heard, dark and brooding but deeply emotional.

Three of the album's four CDs have already been reviewed in ARG: Symphonies 2 & 5 (May/June 2012); 3, 4, & 7 (Nov/Dec 2016); and *Kullervo* (May/June 2017 and above in this issue, originally a 2CD album with Olli Kortenkangas's *Migrations* and Sibelius's *Finlandia* with chorus). Here's a quick comment on each.

John McKelvey calls this recording of Symphony 2 "one of the two or three greatest"; I find II metronomically exact rather than flowing, the rapid triplets in III taken at such breakneck speed that they lack rhythmic clarity, and the majestic ending of IV metronomic exactness rather than sweeping grandness. I agree with Donald Vroon, who praises the album's fullness and clarity of the sound, despite some brittleness. Symphony 5 is what caught me up. Vänskä attends to the score's finest details and gives each movement a gait and flow that become gripping. In III the *ppp* strings are amazingly transparent; even the grace-note bounces in the cellos and basses cut through. The clarity is helped by Vänskä dividing the violins left and right. 5's originality makes me mourn that the composer would soon start spending the last half of his 90 years having run out of fuel. I prefer Ormandy's 1972 RCA Philadelphia recording of 2.

The remaining symphonies are on the same album. For Mr Vroon Vänskä makes Symphony 3 "seem episodic. It just meanders and never seems to go anywhere." But Vänskä makes me understand for the first time that I is the opening of a (1) major (2) symphony. I've apparently adjusted to the bright sound and the conductor's super-quiet moments. Instead of II being a trivial throw-off, here its Finnish originality saunters coherently. In III the finely projected tone colors and gradual acceleration lead to a dramatic, pungent canonic climax before the long chorale-like finale that still doesn't make sense to me, but Vänskä sustains it well.

Colin Davis once said that Symphony 6 reminded him of Palestrina. Karajan's heavenly Berlin Philharmonic recording from 1967 on DG is like a prayer service in the Sistine Chapel. Vänskä, like Karajan, begins with sustained legato tone and floating buoyancy, but after about 5 minutes he begins to lose steam. II here is like a study with every note value measured exactly. Then distinct articulations and impulses on most notes make the last two movements more muscular and dramatic than

melodic. No Palestrina (or serenity) here. In 7 Mr Vroon found this performance "more concise and coherent, less a matter of atmosphere", better than 3 and 6. To me it moves stiffly for the first 8 minutes, then comes to life quite powerfully until the end. But Vänskä can't compare to Karajan's melodic sweep and sheer poetry, sustained in one 23-minute arc, with the BPO on DG, also from 1967.

One look at the score of *Kullervo*, Op. 7, with its vast stretches of blank space, and you know why to me it's 79 minutes of mind-numbing melodies with repetitive stretches of ostinato accompaniment, muddy string writing, little development, and no counterpoint. Not much happens in I and II. Vänskä makes the 5/4 folk-dance elements of III foot-tapping, and the chorus is superb. The baritone (Kullervo) and mezzo are very good. The vocal parts for soloists and chorus are like a rhythmic plainchant on one note with cadences. IV, sounding like the *Karelia Suite*, brings to mind the mediocre incidental Sibelius wrote a lot of. In V Kullervo tells why he falls on his sword when he realizes that the woman he raped is his sister (oh, Wagner, where are you when we need you?). Don't blame Vänskä, who makes the most of it, despite the trashy cymbals. Paul Althouse has a higher assessment of the music, but we agree on the performance.

FRENCH

SILVESTROV: *Messenger;* see MOZART

SIVELOV: *Symphonies 3+4; 5 Pieces*
Malmo Opera Orchestra/ Joachim Gustafsson
Toccata 571—63 minutes

When I listen to this music by Niklas Sivelov, a Swedish pianist and composer born in 1968, I imagine an intelligent, good-humored man working alone in a laboratory, experimenting with the themes he has created. He stacks them neatly, dumps them on the table, interlocks them, crumples them up, unfolds them, and holds them up to the light, delighting in whatever strikes his fancy.

The result is boisterous and pleasantly dissonant; rhythms jostle each other like subway passengers, but suddenly the train leaves and there is calm. Passages almost inadvertently sound like neo-classical Stravinsky, Ligeti, Hindemith, Shostakovich, and even Rouse, though they arise naturally from the tools Sivelov uses; they are not imitations. Although I can appreciate what he is doing, I am neither better nor worse for having observed the process. The pieces have energy and vivacity but no direction. The playing is generally good but sometimes scrappy, and the sound is boxy.

ESTEP

SMYTH: *Quartet 4;* see MAIER

SPOHR: *Clarinet Chamber Pieces*
Rocco Parisi, cl; Joanna Klisowska, s; Francesco Bissanti, p—Brilliant 95638—46 minutes

During his lifetime, the German violinist Ludwig (Louis) Spohr (1784-1859) was a household name, known for his dazzling performances, innovations as a conductor, and hearty contributions to early romantic music. He traveled in the same circles as Beethoven, Weber, Meyerbeer, and Mendelssohn; and he completed a substantial catalog of compositions. His ten operas and nine symphonies occupied a regular part of the 19th Century repertory; and his friendship with fellow virtuoso Johann Simon Hermstedt generated a sizable oeuvre for the clarinet. The four concertos are technically demanding showpieces for the concert stage; and as such, they usually garner the most attention. Yet Spohr's work for the clarinet in smaller forms is just as appealing.

Italian clarinetist Rocco Parisi enlists his compatriot Francesco Bissanti for a recital of Spohr's clarinet chamber music, including the Potpourri, the Andante with Variations, and the Variations on a Theme from *Alruna*, an opera requested by the Duke of Sondershausen but never staged. The central piece of the program, though, is the 6 German Songs performed by the Polish coloratura soprano Joanna Klisowska.

Parisi offers nice phrasing, good fingers, and a wide range of dynamics; but his thin tone is harsh and spread at loud volumes and his intonation is often poor. Klisowska sings with superb clarity and diction, even if her readings are rather straightforward. Bissanti is solid at the keyboard, always sensitive to texture and line.

HANUDEL

STANFORD: *String Quintets; 3 Intermezzos*
Krysia Osostowicz, v; Ralph de Souza, v; Garfield Jackson, va; Yuko Inoue, va; Richard Jenkinson, vc; Benjamin Frith, p—Somm 623—67 minutes

Somm and the Dante Quartet have spent some time recording Charles Villiers Stanford's string quartets. Now most of the Dante Quartet, and the inner half of the Endellion Quartet, finish the project with the two string quintets,

filling out the disc with another first recording, of the Three Intermezzos, Op. 31, composed for clarinet but with cello as an alternative.

The quintets are, in a word, glorious; they have all the brightness and richness of Brahms, though in fact neither was dedicated to him, or indeed to anyone else. Joseph Joachim was the immediate recipient of both, though there's no evidence of performances by him. What there is is vast evidence of Stanford's love for, and emulation of, Brahms. And of others: No one can listen to this without thinking, in the finale of the F-major Quintet, of Bedrich Smetana's First Quartet and the moment when the composer's piercing tinnitus asserts itself. The falling-fifth motif and the dramatic tremolo are unmistakable; Smetana might as well have signed his name to the piece himself. The F-major Quintet is shot through with that love, permeated by it, and though the friskier bits of the music aren't precisely Brahmsian, the whole undoubtedly is.

The C-minor Quintet, unlike its sibling, didn't get as far even as publication, and this is its first recording. The standout here is the slow movement, which is both beautiful and intricately enigmatic; I don't know quite how to describe it. The rest of the piece is more explicable, the finale in particular bouncing along like a friendly retriever.

The Intermezzos are lovely, also in a late-Brahmsian way. I wonder whether their being written (originally) for clarinet has anything to do with Brahms's own late fascination with the clarinet.

Somm's recording quality has, as ever, some points against it; but this is a major release of music that ought to be known to everyone and is not.

THOMSON

STRAUSS: *Also Sprach Zarathustra;*
SCRIABIN: *Poem of Ecstasy*
Seattle Symphony/ Thomas Dausgaard
SSM 1025—52 minutes

Beautiful sound.

A major complaint: there is almost no space between the two pieces. It sounds like Strauss lost his way and meandered all over the place, but that's just Scriabin. And I don't want to hear anything after the ecstatic Strauss, even if it does have "ecstasy" in its title. It sounds uninspired after *Zarathustra*.

The Strauss is a brisk performance, but very well played. Often I wanted more breadth and more smoldering passion before the ardor. The overall time is 32 minutes, which is fairly normal, but nothing is subtle or stretched or seems romantic or majestic. It's downright prosaic. Still, the music cannot fail. I love it every time I hear it, and I loved it here. If you want a rather straightforward *Zarathustra* with plenty of impetus, here it is. If you don't care for the Scriabin, it is easy to find other excellent recordings of the Strauss.

VROON

STRAUSS: *Dance Suite after Couperin; Divertimento*
New Zealand Symphony/ Jun Märkl
Naxos 574217—66 minutes

Richard Strauss apparently had a fixation on Couperin. In 1923 he wrote a ballet based on 19 harpsichord pieces by Couperin. That is the source of the Dance Suite, which has 8 movements. The Divertimento (also 8 movements) is from 1941. It sounds much better than the Dance Suite, and Gerard Schwarz's recording sounds much better than this one. The Dance Suite sounds ancient here, complete with minimal vibrato on the strings. Erich Leinsdorf recorded it with better-sounding instruments and faster tempos (ASV). I suspect neither of those other recordings is readily available, but I don't like this recording at all—and this is not important music.

VROON

STRAUSS: *Intermezzo Interludes;*
BRAHMS: *Symphony 4*
Bavarian Radio/ Mariss Jansons
BR 900192—72 minutes

The Strauss Intermezzos are not much recorded. We have reviewed Jarvi (Chandos), Mehta (Sony), Schwarz (Delos), Halasz (Naxos), and Welser-Most (BR). It is usually fill for another Strauss piece. Here it is, I suppose, fill for the Brahms 4th.

This was a Carnegie Hall concert November 9, 2019; Jansons died November 30. I think of him as a too-fast conductor, but he is not so fast here. In fact, the Brahms is among the slowest in every movement. Yet it sounds "light". I think that's because of two things. The most obvious is the sound, which is not very deep or rich. The other is his tendency never to dwell on any theme, so that he seems to be pushing thru the music—even if the actual speed is not fast. It never pauses, extends itself, or breathes.

I want Brahms richer and warmer, so—as usual—I am not attracted to this conductor.

And it's only fair to admit that I'm not thrilled by the sound of this orchestra, though they are obviously excellent players.

In fairness I should add that the final movement of the Brahms is very coherent here—and it often isn't. He makes it a seamless whole.

VROON

STRAUSS: *Salome*
Laila Andersson-Palme (Salome), Curt Appelgren (Jokanaan), Ragnar Ulfung (Herod), Barbro Ericson (Herodias); Royal Swedish Opera/ Berislav Klobucar—Sterling 1843 [2CD] 98 minutes

The classy Swedish company Sterling has been issuing a number of complete operas with soprano Laila Andersson-Palme. I've reviewed excellent performances of *Gotterdammerung* (M/J 2018) and *Tosca* (J/F 2020) with her, and here we have a sizzling Salome from Sweden 1990 with Andersson-Palme as the anti-heroine. In the first of two booklets that come with the set (the other is a German-English libretto), Andersson-Palme discusses her approach to the role and the different productions she sang in over the years. She stresses time and again how she insisted on singing piano when the composer asked for it, though her fidelity to the score was challenged by a number of conductors (she tells who they are in the interview, but I won't reveal that here). She is, of course, absolutely correct; and this recording shows just how faithful she was to Strauss's markings. Nothing in the role is too much for her. From the shining top C-flats to the growled low G-flats, she has a command of the entire range. She doesn't wobble and never forces her voice to do more than it can. Her Salome is suitably sexy, regal, and bratty. I especially like the way she sings the "Es ist kein Laut zu vernehmen" passage—with whispered intensity that hints at her growing madness.

The other singers are all first-rate too. Ragnar Ulfung was still singing well when this was recorded. He does not use sprech-stimme, but actually sings the role. His characterization is right up there with Julius Patzak's immortal performance on Clemens Krauss's 1954 studio recording. Barbro Ericson does indulge in some intentional register breaks here and there, yet her Herodias is memorable for all the right reasons. She still had a good high B-flat too. Curt Appelgren's beautiful bass-baritone is balsam to the ears, and if he isn't as fiery as some interpreters he is more human. The entire cast is effective. Berislav Klobucar was one of those conductors who knew how to work with singers to bring out the best in a score. The sound is very clean broadcast stereo.

I urge any lovers of this opera or these singers to get this while it's available. I also hope Sterling will continue to release recordings with Andersson-Palme (is any of her *Lulu* extant?).

REYNOLDS

STRAUSS: *Songs*
Daniel Behle, t; Oliver Schnyder, p
Prospero 11—61 minutes

When the publishing house of Bote and Bock agreed in 1906 to publish Richard Strauss's Six Songs, Opus 56 they added a clause stipulating that they would hold the rights to his next group of songs. Strauss was outraged at their demand and for 12 years did not to write any songs at all. Instead he turned his attention to opera and composed *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. The publisher was furious and threatened him with legal action. In spiteful response Strauss sent them a set of 12 songs, *Krämerspiegel* (Shopkeeper's Mirror), an outrageously sarcastic attack on music publishers with texts by Alfred Kerr, then the most celebrated drama critic in Germany. The publisher refused to accept them as fulfillment of their contract and brought suit against Strauss, who finally yielded and submitted three Shakespeare settings (his excellent Ophelia songs) and three Goethe settings, his Opus 68.

This program concludes with *Krämerspiegel*, Opus 67, from which the album gets its name: "Un-Erhert" (Outrageous), with its cover depicting a jester showing his backside. The songs may not be among Strauss's greatest, but did Strauss ever write a bad song? The music is mostly lovely and is often in vivid contrast to the vitriolic texts. Along the way you hear some ravishingly gorgeous music, particularly the long prelude to 'Von Hendlern Wird die Kunst Bedroht' also heard as the postlude to the final song, 'O Schröpferschwarm, O Hendlerkreis', which he used a quarter-century later for the horn solo in the moonlight scene of *Capriccio*.

The program begins with two strongly contrasting songs, 'Winterweihe' and 'Winterliebe', and includes *Gesange des Orient*, Opus 77 and four other songs. His singing of 'Waldseligkeit'

and 'Traum durch die Dämmerung' is utterly rapturous.

I reviewed another release of Strauss songs by Behle and Schnyder (J/A 2012). After making notes about this performance I looked up what I wrote about that earlier one and found the same assessment: wonderful stylistic assurance and depth of textual understanding; a beautifully controlled voice displaying clarity, agility, and accuracy; exceptionally good enunciation; scrupulous attention to dynamics providing heightened drama that artfully animate the songs. He has a lovely, light lyric voice that he uses with both delicacy and energy. When he sing softly, sometimes reducing his voice to barely audible, he is especially effective. At full voice he can sound edgy and some may prefer a voice that is sweeter and has more meat on the bones, but this is singing of great artistry.

Schnyder again offers first-rate collaboration as the two give a beautifully shaped and performed account of this program's nicely contrasting moods and themes.

The plastic-free packaging comes with texts and translations by Richard Stokes, who also wrote the substantial program notes.

R MOORE

STRAUSS: *Symphonia Domestica;*
RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF: *Scheherazade*
London Philharmonic/ Zubin Mehta
BBC 117 [2CD] 90 minutes

This seems like a rather strange pairing, unless you subscribe to the teaser on the box that says these two works "offer vastly different experiences of married life". Well, you wanted a theme, now you have a theme. Also curious is that these two pieces, each about 45 minutes long, require two CDs and we have no fillers. Both were recorded in concert at Royal Festival Hall—the Strauss in 1988, the Rimsky-Korsakoff in 1992.

At any rate we have Strauss's depiction of domestic life: husband, wife, and young child. When composed, Strauss had a quite definite program in mind, but it was later suppressed. The liner notes here give a good summary, which I think will be helpful to anyone who doesn't know the piece well. *Symphonia Domestica* is a complex work, tinged with egotism and, for some, vulgarity, but it is hard to deny Strauss's incredible creativity and skill in writing for a mammoth orchestra (quadruple woodwind, 8 horns, etc.). This piece will never have the allure of the more famous tone poems, but it certainly doesn't show a composer in decline. Mehta does a fine job bringing this work to life. Under his direction the London Philharmonic has a rich, warm sound, lovely and unhurried. The intensity of the love scene in the Adagio will make you, well, envious!

Scheherazade is another work perhaps tinged with vulgarity, and here I find Mehta less compelling. This needs the theater of conductors like Stokowski or Bernstein, but Mehta seems bland and literal, particularly in the opening movement. Henrik Hochschild is fine in the extended solo violin sections, and the orchestra plays very well. The first three movements, though, are short on color and passion; they sound as though they *need* a little vulgarity. The finale is fine, with blazing brass in good shape—though I might argue that if you have a good orchestra, it's very hard to kill the ending of *Scheherazade*.

This doesn't seem essential. Get the old Stoky (London Symphony) for R-K and Karajan for Strauss.

ALTHOUSE

STRAVINSKY: *Serenade; Ballet movements;*
see PROKOFIEFF

TAVENER: *Preces and Responses; Death of Ivan Ilyich; Mahamatar; Populе Meus; No Longer Moan For Me*
Abi Sampa, singer; Matthew Rose, b; Steven Isserlis, vc;, Trinity Boys Choir; Philharmonia Orchestra/ Omer Meir Wellber
Hyperion 68246—72 minutes

Tavener died painfully of heart problems in 2013. These pieces may be construed as a postmortem, with the assistance of Steven Isserlis and friends.

Preces and Responses (arranged by Isserlis for 8 cellos) was his last piece. The arrangement has intimations of Elgar in its sumptuous beauty.

Death of Ivan Ilyich, text by Tolstoy, is about the agony of death, unfortunately appropriate in this context. Scored for bass and orchestra, the stuttering fear is overwhelming. Text included. The ordeal ends in heaven.

Mahamatar for cello and sufi singer is composed of ethnic chant with chorus and orchestra. This finds Tavener in unusual territory, with modal scales and exotic meditation.

*Populе Abi*is for sweet orchestra with cello and timpani. Abi, the Sufi singer heard in the previous piece, again contributes authenticity.

No Longer Mourn for Me is a chorale for 8 cellos. It is an appropriate conclusion.

The program is an appropriate tribute to this renowned composer.

Notes by Isserlis.

GIMBEL

TELEMANN: *Overture, Concertos, Sonata, Sinfonia Melodica*
Indianapolis Baroque Orchestra/ Barthold Kuijken, fl—Naxos 573900—65 minutes

In his notes, flutist Barthold Kuijken comments on Telemann's easy and unlimited capacity for invention. He was certainly one of the most prolific composers and would appear to have explored every conceivable genre, structure, style, and form. And as anyone who has played Telemann's music can confirm, his music makes people happy. This may be because he himself had a happy disposition; his contemporaries seem to have thought so. Kuijken notes that Telemann understood completely the technical and expressive possibilities of each instrument he composed for—which gives one joy to play his music. In this spirit, one might appreciate the joyful sounds of the Indianapolis Baroque Orchestra.

Barthold Kuijken directs the ensemble and Leela Breithaupt joins him on the concertos that call for two solo flutes. The program includes the Overture in C (R 55:c4), Concerto for Two Flutes in G (R: G1), Flute Sonata in E minor (R 50:4), Concerto for Two Flutes, Violin, and Cello in D (R 54:D1), and concludes with the Sinfonia Melodica in C (R 50:2). Regardless of the technical demands of individual movements, each of these works comes off easily. Most are French courtly dances, which require a light execution. Players seem to understand this style completely in their phrasing, expression, and ornamentation. It is a delight to listen to.

LOEWEN

TELEMANN: *St Mark Passion*
Veronika Winter, Anne Bierwirth, Georg Poplutz, Markus Flaig, Ekkehard Abele; Rheinische Kantorei; Kleine Konzert/ Hermann Max
CPO 555347 [2CD] 84 minutes

Ralph-Jürgen Reipsch notes that Telemann composed more than 40 passion oratorios while living in Hamburg from 1722 to 1767. The St Mark Passion of 1759 on this release was known to modern scholars only through a set of parts copied by Telemann's grandson. But a full score was later uncovered, and it serves as the basis for this performance.

Telemann's Passion covers events between the Last Supper and Crucifixion. It ends abruptly with Christ's last words on the cross and the final chorale 'Erbarm Dich Mein O Herre Got'. One outstanding feature of Telemann's original score is that he gives the evangelist parts to the alto rather than to the tenor. Reipsch echoes speculation of other scholars when he suggests this may have resulted from Telemann's uneasy relationship with his tenor Wilhem Jacob Credius. Following the guidance of Telemann's grandson, Hermann Max has transposed these parts for tenor.

As one might expect, the arias are largely operatic in nature—highly ornamented with scales, and in da capo form. Telemann's creativity is on display here through his genius for word painting. For example, the fiery tenor aria 'Dich, Kuss, der Freundschaft Sichres Zeichen', sung by Poplutz representing Jesus, is filled with challenging fioritura to evoke the fiery kiss of friendship. In the tenor accompagnato 'Ihr Fliehet' he has the violins play rapid scales to evoke the flight of the disciples. Rapid scales return in the aria 'Wie Spielend Fährt auf Glatten Wellen', sung by Ekkehard Abele representing the allegorical figure Loyalty, but here Telemann gives them to middle- and low-range instruments to evoke the rolling of waves. Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

THALBERG: *The Art of Singing Applied to the Piano; 3 Schubert Lieder; On Wings of Song; Mi Manca la Voce*
Paul Wee—BIS 2515 [2CD] 139 minutes

Sigismond Thalberg (1812-71) was a renowned piano virtuoso whose skills rivaled Franz Liszt, who was one year older. The invited guests who witnessed the famous "duel" between the two pianists at a salon in Paris (1837) seemed to agree. Although Thalberg himself encouraged the rumor that he was the illegitimate child of a pair of noble Austrians, his actual parents were from Frankfurt and (judging from their names) Jewish. He was also a composer, though his original works are considered insignificant. His virtuosic opera transcriptions enjoyed great success but are performed rarely now, having been overshadowed by Liszt's. But he also prepared transcriptions where the emphasis was not on bravura but on playing beautiful melodies as if sung, an illusion whose creation was a special-

ty of his. Those works are little known now and we must thank Paul Wee for unearthing a treasure trove.

L'art du chant appliqué au piano consists of 24 pieces that could be considered etudes for "singing" on the piano. As Wee mentions in his excellent notes, the scores were not easy to find, and this appears to be only their second recording. (There was a recording by Mordecai Shehori on Cembal d'amour 194.) The melodies—some familiar, others obscure—come mostly from operas and sometimes from songs, as they do also in the additional five pieces on the second disc. Their transcription is quite literal, with only the elaborate accompaniment and pianistic layout as Thalberg's contributions. Those are superbly crafted and enable a sensitive player with the necessary technical equipment to make the melody stand out against a varied background of textures and harmonies. With rare exceptions there is no showiness, but the pieces are far from easy to play, as Wee points out. Doing them justice requires not only musical sensitivity but also supreme technical ability of a subtle kind, involving touch, control of dynamics, fingering, and pedaling. Paul Wee has it all.

This admirable young man attracted attention last year with a release of some of Alkan's most difficult works (BIS 2465, not reviewed). He is not only profoundly musical but has been able to maintain a crackerjack technique alongside a decade-long busy career as a barrister in London. His dedication to the current project is an unselfish gesture that many music lovers will appreciate.

I wondered about his background, but his biography mentions only that he studied at the Manhattan School of Music before turning to law. There is no information about date and place of his birth, even on the Internet. But he is evidently in his 30s, and on the basis of his name, looks, and certain clues I venture the guess that he hails from Singapore.

Thalberg's transcriptions are beautiful creations and beautifully played here. The fact that nearly all melodies are slow may seem to create a problem for prolonged listening, but my attention and pleasure never sagged, though I did listen in several installments. While the pieces are hardly suitable for massed concert performance, they are well worth considering individually as fillers or encores, and courageous amateurs might want to try their fingers on some of the easier ones—if they can find the scores.

REPP

TOGNI: *Piano Pieces 5*
Aldo Orvieto—Naxos 573986—58 minutes

This completes Mr Orvieto's survey of Camillo Togni's (1922-93) piano music; I reviewed the first volume (Jan/Feb 2014). This time around, the works date mostly from the late 30s and are described as "redolent of Chopin and Liszt". Maybe. The Op. 4 Piano Piece sounds more like a mix of Liszt and Bartok. The Fugato and Allegro, Op. 7, breathes Neoclassical air with its classical figurations and counterpoint. The far more tonal *Studio* in D-flat does indeed approach Chopin, but without any of the magical sonority that that composer could elicit from the instrument. More novel is the 1990 cadenza to Mozart's Concerto 24, which begins quietly and dissonantly, only gradually beginning to deal with some of Mozart's music and with the virtuosic passagework one expects to hear in a cadenza. A 1945 cadenza for Mozart's Concerto 25 (1949) is much more straightforward. Mr Orvieto plays beautifully.

HASKINS

UCCELLINI: *Sonatas, op 4;*
ROSSI, M: *Toccatas & Correntes*
Davide Monti, v; Maria Christina Cleary, harp; Alberto Rasi, viola da gamba; Rogerio Goncalves, dulciana—Stradivarius 37166—79 minutes

This program celebrates a time—the mid-17th Century—when the violin was still quite a new instrument and violin composers and virtuosos were exploring and expanding its capabilities. Composer and instrumentalist Marco Uccellini (c 1603 or 1610-80) held important positions at the Este court and the cathedral in Modena and at the Farnese court in Parma.

Thomas D. Dunn's 2020 *Grove Music Online* article about Uccellini attests to the composer's significance in the history of violin music: "The solo violin sonatas of Opp. 4 and 5, the latter of which is the first printed collection devoted entirely to solo violin sonatas, represent the highest point of development in that genre before JH Schmelzer and Biber. They are longer and in a more virtuosic style than Biagio Marini's and are clear counterparts to keyboard toccatas."

Sonata 5 is especially toccata-like (in fact its title in Italian is "Sonata over [or] Toccata"). All four musicians in Arparla revel in its lively character and florid roulades with vigorous and engaging performances. Sonata 4 is quite different. Here it's just harp and violin creating a delicate texture as a backdrop for ornament-

ed flourishes in free meter. The duo's carefree mastery exemplifies the Italian ideal of *sprezzatura*, that hard-to-translate term that roughly means "skilled nonchalance". It's the art of making hard things look easy. These same two players are joined by the dulciana (an ancestor of the bassoon) for Sonatas 11 and 13. There are 14 violin sonatas by Uccellini in this program, all played very well.

You'll notice that although there are six keyboard pieces in this program, there is no keyboard player in Arparla. The keyboard pieces are by Michelangelo Rossi (1601 or 1602-56) who, despite being an organist and composing operas, madrigals, and keyboard music, was most famous in his lifetime as a violinist.

No violin music by Rossi is known today, and I fancy that he might have written in a style similar to Uccellini's. Rossi's toccatas are known for their bold chromaticism, abrupt key changes, dancelike imitative sections, and cascading figuration. All these elements translate very effectively to solo harp, and that is how they are played here. To quote from the booklet, "the 17th Century Italian harp has little instrument-specific repertoire, so often borrows from the vast keyboard repertoire."

One reason I like harp adaptations of this repertoire—the first I heard was Frescobaldi performed by Andrew Lawrence-King on a Hyperion release in the early 1990s—is that long chains of 16th notes retain their resonance and amplify the richness of the unequal temperament. In this respect the harp is a good combination of the organ's sustained sound and the harpsichord's more quickly damped strings.

In one piece, the manuscript 4th toccata (XIV in the Kenneth Gilbert edition), the harp is joined by violone playing the long pedalpoint notes. It would be interesting to experiment with more addition of violone bass (as some organists do using pedals when they play Rossi's published toccatas), or even arrangements of Rossi's music for violin and continuo. Perhaps the inventive players of Arparla might wish to try that out.

C MOORE

VAINBERG: *Piano Quintet arr; Children's Notebooks*
Elisaveta Blumina, p; Ingolstadt Georgian Chamber Orchestra/ Ruben Gazarian
Capriccio 5366—77 minutes

Vainberg's Quintet (1944) is a good introduction to his music. He and his friend Shostakovich greatly respected each other, and anyone who loves his more famous comrade's music should get to know his as well. The high-register piano melody made of repeated notes in III is similar to the second theme in II of Shostakovich's Cello Sonata, for instance. V is an odd movement, with a violin part that sounds disconcertingly Celtic. I've wondered before about that alien influence, and the notes here announce that it is indeed a Scottish jig. Now to find out what prompted Vainberg to pop such a surprise on his Russian audience!

The quintet is around 45 minutes long, but it is nicely paced, never too sparse or too crowded; the themes are fertile ground for development. My favorite recording is by the Stamitz Quartet with Aneta Majerova (S/O 2017) with lively playing and excellent sound. This is an arrangement for piano and string orchestra by Mathias Baier; Vainberg himself had arranged several of his own pieces for chamber orchestra, so the idea is not farfetched, especially considering the symphonic length of the piece. To compare this to a well-known example, string-orchestra performances of Shostakovich's Eighth Quartet usually strike me as clotted and counter-productive. This is rich rather than clotted, but it still does not convince me entirely. The most impressive parts are where solo voices take a turn, as in the rhapsodic violin solo in IV after the stern introduction. The quintet comes across like a concerto grosso, and the piano part tends to oppose the strings rather than stand with them. Many string passages are impressive, but there are weaknesses where the chamber writing doesn't translate to a large ensemble. Examples: when a whole section plays a triple or quadruple stop, or in the central climax of V where, if Vainberg had been writing for a full orchestra, the string sections would likely have been *divisi* for a fuller texture.

Vainberg also wrote three sets of *Children's Notebooks* in 1944; two are here, Opp. 16 and 19. The titles of these short pieces are tempo markings rather than the usual programmatic kind. To my Western ears they are melancholy, a little crafty, and subtly dark, sharing an aesthetic with the wonderful Winnie the Pooh cartoons the Russians produced from 1969 to 1972, "Vinni-Pukh"—which Vainberg scored, incidentally. The playing from everyone is fantastic; notes are in English and German.

ESTEP

VAINBERG: *Viola Sonata 3;* see DRUZHININ

VANDINI: *6 Cello Sonatas; Concerto in D*
Francesco Galligioni; L'Arte dell'Arco
Dynamic 7890—55 minutes

Antonio Vandini (1690-c. 1778) is a little-known Bolognese cellist and composer who built himself a fine reputation playing in several major orchestras and writing this music for the cello. The sonatas are all in three movements beginning with a slow one. His style is baroque, heading in the direction of classical and makes enjoyable listening. Vandini is pictured on the cover and in the liner notes as playing with an underhand bow grip. Since the picture was drawn by his contemporary, Pier Leone Ghezzi, we'd better believe it! Our present performer, Galligioni, plays it so, though he admits he was tempted to play it the normal way. Another oddness in this music is the prevalence of high-register virtuosity. This has led a previous performer, Antonio Mostacci, to play it on a 5-stringed piccolo cello. His recording is played with cellist Antonello Manzo and Paolo Poti on harpsichord (Tactus 692202, May/June 2018). I liked that recording and hoped to see the cello concerto. And here it is.

This cellist has also has found a third movement for one of the sonatas that only came to us with two on Mostacci's recording. Also, he plays all this with bassoon continuo played by Paola Frezzato and some with harpsichord and some with chamber organ, both played by Roberto Loreggian. Also he plays it all on a normal cello with four strings. Now what's the advantage of that? Isn't it easier on five? There is no indication in the music. His playing is even more convincing to me than Mostacci's, though that is not to put you off that release. Mostacci takes some repeats that Galligioni ignores.

When I add all of this up, these are both fine renditions of music written by a composer fresh to our ears and well worth hearing. Both will remain on my shelves.

D MOORE

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: *Job; Songs of Travel*
Neal Davies, b; Halle Orchestra/ Mark Elder
Halle 7556—70 minutes

Ralph Vaughan Williams completed *Job: A Masque for Dancing* in 1930 between his Third and Fourth Symphonies. The seed of the work was an idea by William Blake scholar Geoffrey Keynes to celebrate Blake's centenary (1927) with a ballet based on pictures from Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job.* When Keynes asked Vaughan Williams to write the music, the composer agreed as long as the work was referred to as a masque and there was no dancing on toes. Michael Kennedy wrote that the result freed English ballet from imitative influence. Annotator Andrew Burn added that VW was inspired by the drawings' examination of "human suffering in relation to a deity of justice; the superlative prose of the 1611 King James Bible; and the opportunity to use Elizabethan, Jacobean, and traditional folk dances [in] an idiomatic English dance style." VW titled each of the nine scenes with a quote from the Biblical *Job* and included a lengthy description of the ballet in the published score. I often think of *Job* as VW's tenth symphony. It is that great a work.

The composer anticipated that it would be easier to have the work performed in concert than staged as a ballet, and he led its 1930 concert premiere in that form. The ballet was first staged a year later. The work is dedicated to Adrian Boult, who made *Job's* first recording in 1946 and followed it with at least three more. He also conducted it in the US with the Chicago and Boston orchestras.

Mark Elder leads a fine, dramatic performance, but it takes time to get going. I is lyrical enough but also static and held back. II could be more rhapsodic. Its big moments are better but still a bit on the lifeless side. The big hymn tune has more life but does not sing the way it should. This problem continues in III, though the brass canon mocking the 'Gloria' of a mass is exciting. Things improve in IV and reach a terrific climax. V is quiet and a little eerie, but the loud music is wonderfully powerful, and from there things take off. VI is quiet, mysterious, and well balanced. VII is spirited and lively, controlled when it needs to be, and the huge organ entrance conquers all. This is excellent, dramatic music, and the muted trombone snarls at the end could bite one's head off. In VII the violin solo is beautifully played in a sweet, intimate way that is just right. Note how nicely the winds are balanced with the warm chordal accompaniment. The pavane that follows is dignified, with nicely balanced winds, rhapsodic violins, and excellent dignity, building to a fine climax. VIII begins with a strong introduction that is followed by a lively, yet full, rich galliard. The flute takes over nicely in IX. Powerful climactic

chords follow with good brass, and the ending is quiet and restful.

The Halle has come a long way under Mark Elder, but I am not always fond of his interpretations. His Vaughan Williams has not been definitive, but this is strong, nicely conceived, and well played and recorded. The best *Job* available it is not, and there is a lot of competition. Of Boult's four recordings, my favorite is his glorious, expansive, and regal last one (EMI). Its one drawback is the unimpressive organ. Richard Tiedman preferred Boult's first on Dutton (S/O 1997). Phil Haldeman's is the second one, now on Decca. Avoid Boult on Everest (M/A 1995). As for an outright favorite, Richard Tiedman's is David Lloyd-Jones on Naxos (S/O 1997). Along with the Boult I also like Andrew Davis's flowing, dark, and mysterious first recording (Teldec) and Vernon Handley's dramatic reading. Another recent entry is Davis's dramatic and colorful second recording that Don O'Connor favorably reviewed (J/A 2017). I like it, too, but prefer its misty predecessor.

In the *Songs of Travel* Elder and the orchestra are excellent. Bass-baritone Neal Davies sings intelligently, projecting an image of wonderment and mystery, especially in V; and his phrasing is well synchronized with the orchestra's. But there is a touch of hardness and sometimes intense vibrato in his voice. His tone seems to emphasize high harmonics, so he sounds especially good in his high register. The overall vocal sound is similar to Christopher Maltman on one of those BBC discs; his voice is richer and more bass-like, and Thierry Fischer's conducting of the BBC Symphony is more assertive, perhaps too much so. I usually prefer voice and orchestra to voice and piano, but the best performances that I know of this work are with piano. John Shirley-Quirk with pianist Viola Tunnard is unmatched, regardless of accompaniment. Bryn Terfel is almost as good, without quite the dark richness and understanding. Thomas Allen is similar to Terfel, but with orchestra.

HECHT

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: *Symphony 5; Scenes from Pilgrim's Progress*
BBC Symphony/ Martyn Brabbins
Hyperion 68325—67 minutes

It is well known that the Fifth Symphony has a connection with *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Actually, this composer wrote music off and on for John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* from 1906, when these scenes were written, until 1949, when he completed his opera or oratorio (he preferred to call it a "morality", but it has been staged as an opera).

Symphony 5, from 1943, was dedicated to Sibelius and has a number of themes that turn up in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The mood is similar, too, as his wife often pointed out.

The 1906 scenes we have here include a few hymn tunes, such as the one he wrote for 'Who Would True Valour See' (He Who Would Valiant Be). The words are Bunyan's, the tune (Monks Gate) was based on a folk tune he had heard at that place. The composer was editing the English Hymnal, published that same year (1906), and he wrote many of the hymn tunes, often anonymously. Anglican churches still sing his hymns, but many American hymnals have published 'He Who Would Valiant Be' with a different tune—a later one, by an American. The 'Shepherd's Song' in this 1906 work is Psalm 23, but again the tune is by the composer—and this one never caught on at all. (It could hardly compete with the Scottish tune, Crimond.) The final scene is a joyful Sanctus, which is then followed by a short epilogue.

I rather like this selection of pieces—early inspirations from a book he loved. Kitty Whately is the mezzo soloist and Marcus Farnsworth the baritone. One song is sung by a "folk voice"—here Emily Portman.

Carl Bauman (March/April 1992) told us that this composer published 5 pieces based on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, including the 2 on this record. The full opera was reviewed in November/December 1992. We generally prefer that Boult recording to the only other one, by Hickox.

The symphony is gentle music, mostly, with a "spiritual" atmosphere. Perhaps he was seeking comfort during the War. The opening movement reminds me of one of the Sea Interludes from Britten's *Peter Grimes*, which dates from about the same time. The music is gorgeous—and almost ecstatic sometimes, too.

This recording of the symphony is 2 minutes faster than the Previn recording I am used to. It is lighter, has less weight and warmth and depth; but it is very beautiful and perhaps even more pastoral. The orchestra is wonderful, and the music comes across. There's no need to replace the Previn (London Symphony, 1972—was on RCA), but this is a terrific recording; and the 2 minutes make little difference.

VROON

VILLA-LOBOS: *Cello Pieces*
Yuko Miyagawa; Aki Kuroda, p
Odradek 406—63 minutes

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) was not only a great composer, but also a cellist! Here we have most of his works for cello and piano, including the 6-movement *Pequena Suite*; the 4-movement Sonata 2 *(Divagacao—Wandering), Impressoes Seresteiras* (Evening Impressions) for piano solo, and transcriptions of the Aria and Toccata from *Bachianas Brasilieras 2,* and 'O canto de cisne negro' from his tone-poem *The Shipwreck of Kleonikos.*

Miyagawa likes to slither expressively. Kuroda's pianism is sensitive and gentle, except when she chooses to surprise us with vehemence. These ladies work well together and I suspect that the composer would generally like their portrayal of his music. I am surprised that there are no percussive effects in *Divagacao,* also that *Impressoes Seresteiras* isn't listed as a solo piano piece in the notes, though that is how it is played here. Another minor point is that we only get the last two movements of the three-movement *Bachianas Brasilieras 2.*

The recorded sound is fine. It has been more than 20 years since we have had so much of this master's cello music on one program. But why has nobody seen fit to play Sonata No. 1?

D MOORE

VIVALDI: *Arias & Sonatas*
Myriam Leblanc, s; Ensemble Mirabilia
Analekta 9137—60:47

This release should be termed "Vivaldi light" since it mostly contains arrangements that extensively adapt the original instrumentation for an instrumental trio of Antoine Malette-Chenier (triple harp), Marie-Michel Beaupalant (cello), and Gregoire Jeay (baroque flute and recorder), often with the flute substituting for one of the original string parts, the cello on continuo, and the baroque harp substituting for everything else. The arias are from the following operas, and I note reviews of complete recordings: *Il Farnace* (Nov/Dec 1991, Mar/Apr 1996, Nov/Dec 2002, May/June 2012), *Ercole sul Temodonte* (May/June 2011), *Il Giustino* (Sept/Oct 2003), *Arsilda* (Sept/Oct 2005), and *Bajazet* (Sept/Oct 2005).

The exception is the cantata *All'ombra di Sospetto*, which perfectly fits the instrumentation of this small ensemble, and the continuo realization on harp is excellent. It is also perhaps the best performance on this recording. Myriam Leblanc has a pleasant voice, but in many of the opera arias her upper tessitura becomes a bit strident—but not in the cantata. There are two earlier recordings of this cantata by Julianne Baird (Mar/Apr 1992: 204) and Silvia Vajente (July/Aug 2012: 259); Leblanc joins them as another acceptable option. The concise booklet includes texts and translations and biographies, but little about the music.

BREWER

VIVALDI: *Bajazet (Tamerlano)*
Marina De Liso (Andronico), Arianna Vendittelli (Idaspe), Sophie Rennert (Irene), Delphine Galou (Asteria), Filippo Mineccia (Tamerlano), Bruno Taddia (Bajazet); Accademia Bizantina/ Ottavio Dantone—Naive 7080 [3CD] 156 minutes

Attentive collectors may already own a recording of this opera, a work concocted by Vivaldi for Carnival season in Verona, 1735 (R 703). A previous recording under the remarkable Fabio Biondi was welcomed by John Barker (Sept/Oct 2005). Some arias (e.g., Irene's 'Sposa, son disprezzata') have also been recorded separately by such fine singers as Cecilia Bartoli.

This is a "pasticcio": the composer brought together arias from previous operas by himself or someone else and stitched them together, usually with new arias and recitatives. The aim was often to allow scheduled singers to display their special gifts. The practice was long derided by music historians and critics, obsessed by romantic-era notions of originality and composerly authority. But recent performances have demonstrated that a well-constructed pastiche can work just as effectively as an opera composed from scratch.

The composers whose arias we know are incorporated here include Vivaldi himself (8), Giacomelli and Hasse (3 each), Riccardo Broschi (2), and one by Porpora that was later replaced. The surviving score in the Turin library, mainly in Vivaldi's hand, also contains numerous new arias by Vivaldi (that is, in addition to his 8 re-used ones), but lacks music for five arias that we know were sung at the performances. Suitable numbers from operas of the period (4 arias by Vivaldi and 1 by Giacomelli) have been inserted in this recording, with the texts from *Tamerlano* underlaid hypothetically.

The libretto by Piovene will be largely familiar to devoted lovers of Baroque opera,

because Handel used it for his *Tamerlano* (London, 1719). Handel's opera has been reviewed 9 times here since late 1987, and I devoted a few enthusiastic paragraphs to it in my book *Music and the Exotic from the Renaissance to Mozart*.

I'm happy to know Vivaldi's well-crafted version as well, not least because the current performance is so stylish, energetic, and generally well tuned. It surely helps that the recording was made over a period of ten days (in a convent in Ravenna), rather than on the wing at a stage performance with the singers moving around and perhaps not always attending primarily to beauty and consistency of tone.

As Reinhard Strohm's authoritative booklet-essay tells us, Vivaldi borrowed numerous arias that were associated with two renowned singers of the day: the super-famous Farinelli and Vittoria Tesi. The latter was a female contralto renowned for her wide range, perfect intonation (at least early in her career), and dramatic acuity. She was sometimes called La Moretta (the Mooress) because her father was of African origin. (He was a lackey—that is, a liveried manservant—in the employ of a noted castrato.) Tesi may be the most notable early opera star of African descent.

The borrowed arias are indeed demanding—many of them very showy, others slow and quite touching. The singers are nearly all up to the task.

Some countertenors take roles that lie a little too low for them, in order to make sure that they can handle the highest notes. Fortunately, that is not often the case here with Filippo Mineccia, who brings real bite and flair to the title role of the Mughul (Turco-Mongol) tyrant Tamerlano, while still maintaining solid tone, note by note—not spitting consonants out at the cost of vowels. He certainly never sounds pressed at the top end of his range. I am delighted to make his acquaintance.

The four female singers are generally fine, and well differentiated in vocal quality, so one can generally tell who is singing. The two sopranos playing male roles (Marina De Liso and Arianna Vendittelli) find just the right "tone", not overdoing the toughness and thereby spoiling the crucial beauty of voice. The two who get to play women, Sophie Rennert and Delphine Galou—listed as mezzo-soprano and contralto—have particularly rich voices.

Sometimes one or another of the female singers sings a bit too fast for comfort or overdoes an aria's emotive content, losing momentary clarity of pitch (as in the Idaspe and the Asteria on Disc 2). This would be acceptable in a performance, but could easily have been avoided in the studio sessions.

The only real disappointment is the baritone (Bruno Taddia), in the somewhat secondary role of Bajazet: his voice is quite weak on the low end, he sometimes semi-shouts (e.g., in the excellently crafted quartet, borrowed from Vivaldi's *Farnace*, Disc 2, track 21), and his coloratura is huffy (see Disc 2, track 15—a superb aria of frantic despair by Giacomelli).

All of the singers, Taddia included, are wonderfully communicative in the recitatives, and especially in the several instances of recitativo accompagnato: that is, recitative accompanied by fully written out orchestral figuration rather than just chord-based improvisations from the basso continuo.

The recording is Volume 65 in the "Vivaldi Edition", and that Naive series is based on the 450 Vivaldi works that survive in manuscripts in the National University Library of Turin. I urge lovers of Baroque music to look out for other releases in the series. Among other operas of Vivaldi that have appeared in the series, I might mention *Argippo*, *Catone in Utica*, and *Farnace*.

The 2004 Biondi recording includes an all-star cast: David Daniels, Patrizia Ciofi, Elina Garanca, Vivica Genaux, and Ildebrando d'Arcangelo—but no libretto. The new recording is offered at a sensible price, and its thick booklet includes the libretto in Italian, French, and English.

LOCKE

VLADIGEROV: *Symphonies 1+2; Earth Overture; Heroic Overture; Autumn Elegy*
Bulgarian Radio/ Alexander Vladigerov
Capriccio 8050 [2CD] 141 minutes

Pancho Vladigerov (1899-1978) was born in Zurich, Switzerland and raised in Bulgaria. After the death of his father, his mother and her two sons moved to Sofia, where pianist-composer Pancho and violinist Lyuben could attend better schools. At age 11 Pancho headed to Berlin on a scholarship to study composition with Paul Juon. Later his composition teachers were Fredrich Gernsheim and Georg Schumann. After two years in the military, he worked as theater composer for Max Reinhardt and on theater production in Vienna, where two of his works were played by the Philharmonic in 1922. He traveled in circles with writers like Stefan Zweig, Arthur Schnit-

zler, Franz Werfel, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal and composers like Bartok, Kodaly, Strauss, Ravel, Glazounov, Hindemith, Schoenberg, Rachmaninoff, and Szymanowski. The rise of Hitler induced the half-Jewish (on his mother's side) Vladigerov to return to Sofia in 1932, and he became a full professor at the Academy of Music. From then on he worked unencumbered by political dictums even after the Communists took over. His output included two symphonies, overtures, five piano concertos, an opera, a ballet, chamber music, piano music, and songs. After he died in 1978, his Sofia home became a museum.

Vladigerov's music blends influences from Western and Eastern Europe, the latter usually based on Bulgarian folk dances. But the works here are far different from the ones on a previous Vladigerov disc I reviewed (Sept/Oct 2007). That program was romantic, warm, and partly impressionist. None of it was as violent, brassy, or consistently loud as most of the works here.

Vladigerov completed his First Symphony in 1940 when Bulgaria was under pressure from the Nazis and struggling to remain neutral. Annotator Christian Heindl noted that Bulgaria's situation might explain the violent, triumphant, and nationalist nature of a symphony full of loud, triumphant brass, warlike vigor, modal harmony, orchestral color, and folk tunes (some from Bulgarian songs, others composed by Vladigerov). Influences include Respighi, Rozsa, the Russian romantics, and early Bartok. The symphony is not "movie music", but the atmosphere is cinematic.

It opens with a huge, brass-led passage that is at once celebratory, ominous, violent, colorful, and full of folk atmosphere. The Adagio is full-textured and lyrical but in its way, agitated, though a modal violin solo offers some pull-back in a starry and nocturnal passage. The Scherzo is dominated by Bulgarian dance rhythms of 5- and 7-meters. The Finale is big and expansive, with atmosphere similar to I, but slower and broader. Some is written as a canon. This music is more exultant than I, with more of those odd-number rhythms introduced in the Scherzo, and things become more aggressive up to the ending.

Symphony 2 (*May*, for string orchestra) appeared in 1948. (Its nickname may illustrate how a prominent composer survived under the Soviet thumb in the "satellite" countries. May Day can be a festive celebration of Spring or International Workers' Day, with Marxist connotations.) The work favors full textures over solos, with occasional dance rhythms and consistent movement. I opens expansively with lush texture and a warm, hopeful ambience. The faster section is folk-like, optimistic, and Eastern European in tone. Much of it is also hymnlike, with varying moods and tempo. The ruminative Adagio Molto opens with a solo line in the viola section that gives way to a slow folk tune in the violins over a complex moving bass. The overall ambience is peaceful, dreamy, and yearning. Textures become leaner in the wistful Tempo di Valse Lento that reflects on Vladigerov's time in Germany and Austria with music that is slow, lean, gentle, and inward. The finale's opening is urgent and approaches a chest-thrusting strut. It pays homage to the folk music of his native country with cheerful and carefree melodies. The development and reprise are based on material from the first two movements. Vladigerov called that finale an affirmation of the young generation.

The concert overture *Earth* appeared in 1933, soon after the composer returned to Bulgaria. Employing three folk themes, the work paints a colorful, vigorous, evocatively lyrical, and, toward the end, often discordant portrait of Bulgaria's landscape, culture, and society.

Heroic Overture was apparently written to celebrate the Communist takeover of Bulgaria on September 9, 1939. It opens in a heroic vein before settling into a dark brooding passage, and from there changes moods: celebratory, strife-ridden, and lyric. The sound of Rozsa, especially in this work, makes me wonder if Vladigerov knew him.

'Autumn Elegy' (1922) is an orchestration of the second of Vladigerov's Three Piano Pieces. Its look to Nature takes it back to the more impressionist and atmospheric music on the earlier Vladigerov disc, though it does have a loud central section.

A great deal of this music is loud, and many listeners will find it too much—especially Symphony 1, which could use some cutting. This is colorful, exciting music; but more lyricism and quiet passages would be welcome. The recording is harsh in the strings and exaggerates the rawness of the brass. These recordings were made from 1970 to 1975—not a great time for Eastern European recording.

Christian Heindl's notes are comprehensive and well written. This is an interesting and often enjoyable release, but newcomers to this composer's orchestral music might want to start with the earlier issue.

HECHT

WAGNER: *Arias; Wesendonck Lieder*
Jenufa Gleich, s; BBC Orchestra/ Fabrice Bollon
Stone 81038—59 minutes

The wonderfully named Jenufa Gleich is an up-and-comer in the opera world who participated in Jaap van Zweden's Naxos Ring cycle (Helmwige and Third Norn). She makes a point in the booklet that Wagner loved the Italian traditions in the Bel Canto repertoire and based his vocal writing on them. That they don't often sound that way today is more a reflection on the performances than on Wagner's music. Gleich, on the other hand, reflects that in her singing. There are other more naturally beautiful voices, yet she combines her colorful tones with excellent musicianship to give us a fascinating and different recital in repertoire that has been recorded hundreds of times.

Her first aria is from Wagner's first opera *Die Feen*. It goes on for nearly a quarter of an hour and depicts the conflict Ada feels between her immortality and her love for the mortal Arindal. The music sounds like Weber and Marschner and has a pseudo-cabaletta that refuses to end. Gleich capably shows the varied moods of the piece, sustaining our interest even when Wagner (as was his wont) goes on longer than necessary.

Elisabeth's arias from *Tannhauser* display Gleich at her best, as do Senta's Ballad and Brunnhilde's 'Ewig war ich' from *Siegfried*. The soprano captures the fear and hesitant ecstasy of the Valkyrie maid. She takes the quick top C easily and makes it sound part of the phrase, rather than a surprise high note.

Her lyricism holds her in good stead for the *Wesendonck* lieder as well. She artfully navigates the rather soggy poetry, suggesting the suppressed passion in the music without overstating it. Fabrice Bollon is an excellent conductor for this, always working with his singer without smothering her. The BBC Orchestra of Wales offers lush accompaniment.

I look forward to hearing more of Gleich's work in this repertoire. She has an instinctive grasp of how this music should go and an imaginative way with the texts. They are included, with translations.

REYNOLDS

WAGNER: *Die Meistersinger*
Georg Zeppenfeld (Hans Sachs), Klaus Florian Vogt (Walther), Jacquelyn Wagner (Eva), Sebastian Kohlhepp (David), Christa Mayer (Magdalene), Adrian Eröd (Beckmesser); Staatskapelle Dresden/ Christian Thielemann
Profil 20059 [4CD] 274 minutes

A lengthy opera such as Wagner's *Meistersinger* doesn't require a lengthy review when there is little but praise for Christian Thielemann's exquisitely traditional reading of the score and a top-tier cast. The recording comes from the 2019 Salzburg Easter Festival, in a staging co-produced by the Dresden Opera, the Tokyo Bunka Kaikan, and the New National Theatre, Tokyo, and directed by Jens-Daniel Herzog. Profil's release captures all the hustle and bustle of the stage performance, bringing this audio document to vivid life.

The expansive 184-page booklet does not include a libretto, but there are many photos and a wealth of essays, including Maestro Thielemann's "Plea for Tolerance". A paean to the ideals of German culture, *Meistersinger* is often associated with the country's infamous nationalist excesses. The 2017 Bayreuth production, directed by Barrie Kosky (J/F 2020), confronted that head on. But Thielemann suggests that the work can be seen as "an opera of integration". The hero Walther von Stolzing "has sung a song that breaks the constraints of the former rules, yet one and all are happy to hail him as the victor". The community understands that they "achieve something together, not fighting against each other". To this end, even the nominal villain Beckmesser does not descend into caricature, but retains humanity and dignity, thanks to the expressive but never vulgar singing of Austrian baritone Adrian Eröd. As Hans Sachs, Georg Zeppenfeld's rich and flowing tone lends the character an added measure of virility that goes with his half-hearted flirtation with Eva. Vitalij Kowaljow is a clear-voiced Pogner.

Klaus Florian Vogt, whose unforced lyricism graced the Kosky production, takes on the role of Walther again here. In Bayreuth he was paired with the ethereal Anne Schwanewilms. He is once again lucky in love, partnered by the excellent Eva of Jacquelyn Wagner, a soprano with a steely purity of tone, smooth attacks and releases, and a clean trill in the ensemble that follows the 'Prize Song'. An American whose talents have yet to be fully appreciated in her native country, Wagner pre-

viously impressed us in the title role in a starkly effective Theater an der Wien production of Weber's *Euryanthe* (J/A 2020). Sebastian Kohlhepp and Christa Mayer (David and his beloved Magdalene) are also first-rate vocal personalities. All in all, there is a remarkable stylistic coherence among the singers and the forces of the Dresden Staatskapelle that Thielemann ably exploits, whether in the perfectly controlled chaos of the Act II finale, the memorable choral numbers, or in the sublime blending of voices in the Act III Quintet.

ALTMAN

WAGNER-REGENY: *Genesis; Mythological Figures; Orchestral Music with Piano; 5 French Pieces*
Michaela Selinger, a; Steffen Schleiermacher, p; Berlin Radio Symphony/ Johannes Kalitzke
Capriccio 5413—60 minutes

Rudolf Wagner-Regeny is new to these pages; born in 1903 in what is now Reghin, Romania, he studied at the Leipzig Conservatory and the Berlin-Charlottenburg Academy. He stayed in Germany through the war years even though his wife, Leli Duperrex, was half Jewish. He held positions at the Music Academy in Rostock and the Music Academy in East Berlin, where he died in 1969.

The oratorio *Genesis* (1955) sets the creation account in Latin; it calls for alto, mixed chorus, and small orchestra, and uses Genesis 1:1 to 2:1 but with one startling change: in place of verse 28, the Lord's Prayer is sung (in Latin). Instead of a command to humanity to replenish the earth, we have, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Instead of a command to subdue the earth and to have dominion over every living thing, there is the plea, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil", perhaps as a warning to anyone who would attempt to rule all the living.

The music is quite restrained and tonal but not entirely post-romantic, let alone neo-classical; tempos are all slow to moderate. The first time through, I thought it was boring, but every hearing drew me in more and more, with new subtleties and connections revealing themselves. The passage where God creates man, which leads into the paternoster, contains some of the most divine, elegant, and glorious writing I've heard in an age; but "lead us not into temptation" is suddenly stark and chilling. Wagner-Regeny balances complexity with clarity and dignity with warmth in a masterly way. The playing is rapturous, and I could listen to Michaela Selinger's lovely voice all day long. There are sly nods to Bach, Haydn, Brahms, Mahler, and Orff, but the style is individual; the only truly bizarre part is where God creates the beasts of the field and the theme resembles a cross between Strauss's *Vienna Blood* waltz and the opening of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony. This is a piece I will enjoy getting to know better and better over the years.

The simply named *Orchestral Music with Piano* (1935) is obviously indebted to Stravinsky's neo-classicism. It is by turns jaunty, pensive, festive, and fugal; but it lacks Stravinsky's acerbic wit and off-kilter personality. The piano part is hardly virtuosic, and in general the music is pleasant but unfulfilling.

Mythological Figurines uses 12-tone techniques, but it is one of the most attractive 12-tone pieces I know of. Wagner-Regeny treats his listener with gentle respect, and his orchestration skill is impressive. Five French Piano Pieces are divided into the dodecaphonic *Three Perfumes*, wispy and then coquettish, and *Two Homages to Cuisine*, hesitating and then lively. The sound is resplendent; notes are in German and English, and texts are in Latin and German. Don't miss *Genesis*!

ESTEP

WALTON: *Symphony 1;* see Collections

WEISS: *Lute Pieces*
Danijel Cerovic, g—Naxos 574068—66 minutes

From the precision and clarity of the first notes one knows that Montenegrin guitarist Danijel Cerovic is completely serious about transcribing the lute music of Sylvius Leopold Weiss for the classical guitar. He treats the music with the respect it deserves, with clear articulations and spirited tempos.

The short Fantasia in C minor stands out as my favorite track on this recording with its crystalline ornaments, which—though several are executed with blinding speed—do not detract from the overall quiet mood of the music.

In Weiss's well-known 'Tombeau sur la mort de M. Comte de Logy', complete with its descending stairstep scale representing the cause of Logy's unfortunate demise, Cerovic competently establishes the somber, mournful mood of the homage, but bends the pitch of several bass notes in an unusual ornamental fashion that appears unstylistic. But this is the

only appearance of that technique on the recording.

The two sonatas are well played, but in the first, No. 29 in A minor *(L'Infidele),* there are moments of rushing that do not add to the musicality. I prefer the second one, No. 28 in F *(Le Fameux Corsair),* where there is none of that. It ends with a brilliantly executed Presto.

All in all, this is an excellent recording by a fine performer who brings this music to life with a style and creativity.

MCCUTCHEON

WELLESZ: *Die Opferung des Gefangenen*
Wolfgang Koch (Field Commander), Robert Brooks (Prince's Shield Bearer), Ivan Urbas (Head of the Council); Vienna Concerto Choir, Vienna Radio/ Friedrich Cerha
Capriccio 5423—56 minutes

The recording comes from a radio broadcast in 1995 from Vienna's Konzerthaus. It is called a world-premiere recording (accurately, I think), and comes on the heels of numerous other recordings of Wellesz works that have been reviewed in ARG (see Index), including nine symphonies (that magic number!), some string quartets, and two concertos. A set of imaginative Robert Browning sonnets, in German translation, was recorded by Renée Fleming and the Emerson Quartet.

So who was the long-lived Egon Wellesz (1885-1974)? To scholars and music lovers who, like myself, are "of a certain age", Wellesz was a respected, well-connected, and much-published musicologist from Austria who ended up teaching at Oxford. His carefully constructed and influential writings and scholarly editions deal with such varied topics as Byzantine (Eastern Orthodox) Chant, Baroque opera, Fux (the eminent 18th Century Viennese composer-theorist), and Schoenberg (who was Wellesz's own first composition teacher).

But Wellesz was also a composer of great skill and imagination, whose works are getting renewed attention, as with other composers who, like him, mostly hewed to a late-tonal or expanded-tonal style. If you are attracted to the music of Schreker, Zemlinsky, Krenek, or Von Einem, Wellesz's name is another you will want to be looking for. His music was new to me, but I like what I have heard.

Actually, *Die Opferung des Gefangenen* is more accessible than many other works by Wellesz. The title page describes it as "A Cultic Drama for Dance, Solo Voices, and Chorus [and Orchestra], after the Transcription by Eduard Stucken of a[n Ancient] Mexican Dance-Play, Arranged and Set to Music by Egon Wellesz".

Opferung was written in 1924-25 and performed in Cologne, Magdeburg, and Berlin in 1926-30. It then vanished until it was revived in 1995—apparently as a concert piece without dancers, sets, or costumes (hence with less "cultic" quality)—in the performance that is belatedly released here.

Dancers are central to this work as originally conceived. They carry out the action, and the chorus, for the most part, sings about what is happening or will happen. Solo vocal parts are assigned to a few characters. Apparently each is the "double" of a character whose role is also danced. The captive prince mentioned in the title has no singing double: his role is utterly mute, indicating, I assume, his powerlessness but also forcing audience attention on his dancing and gestures. I would love to see a full production of this fascinating and colorful work, which, for me, contains echoes of certain of Brecht's Lehrstücke, such as *Der Jasager* (1930), as memorably set by Kurt Weill. (That work likewise involves a person—in that case, a child—who gets sacrificed for some "greater good".)

The plot comes from an Aztec or Mayan ritual play and involves a tribal chieftain who, with his people, forces the chieftain of a conquered tribe to don royal robes and to marvel at and enjoy the pleasures and riches of the victor's realm. And then the local people, having both celebrated and humiliated the vanquished chieftain in this manner, lead him to the spot where "Eagles" and "Jaguars" (armed troops of the victorious chieftain) kill him behind their shields and then place his corpse on the altar, as the chorus sings hymns of praise to this "hero" whose spirit is now rising and will takes its place on a throne next to his worthy ancestors.

From today's point of view, this may all sound hopelessly exoticizing and demeaning. But Wellesz reportedly considered the work a comment on the decline of Western civilization, as represented by the disasters of World War I. These disasters included, in the war's aftermath, Germany's punishing economic collapse, which was already, by 1926, spurring the rise of fascism. Hitler would seize power seven years later and drive Wellesz and many other notable musicians into exile. (Wellesz, a devout Christian, was partly Jewish.)

The music for *Opferung* is sharply profiled,

with frequent ostinato rhythms and the chorus often singing in unison. I was reminded sometimes of Orff's *Carmina Burana* (1937), some grim moments in Weill's *Mahagonny* (1930), or the Act 1 chorus from Puccini's *Turandot* (1926), where the people of Peking urge the executioner to kill the Princess's next victim.

Some of the moments of wailing and keening for orchestra or voices are similar in style and mood to passages in Debussy's *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (1911). An early passage for full chorus (track 4) and the concluding chorus (track 19) make powerful use of short poetic lines, in the manner of the hieratic finale for men's chorus of Busoni's Piano Concerto (1904), whose text praises the power and deeds of Allah (God). Other listeners will surely pick up different echoes and parallels.

The orchestral prelude gives a compact sense of the work's stylistic variety and vividness. It opens with a pentatonic passage for unison brass over drum rolls that reminded me of 1950s Hollywood "sword and sandal" epics set in biblical or other ancient days—a time period for which "primitive" and emphatically repeated materials were often thought appropriate. Of course, some leading Hollywood composers (e.g., Max Steiner and Erich Wolfgang Korngold) came from the same Central European cultural world as Wellesz, so the stylistic resemblance may be quite natural!

The prelude continues with a rich, marchlike string passage reminiscent of Mahler and then dissonant, highly rhythmic music for full orchestra in the manner of, say, Honegger.

This varied style continues and feels like an appropriate way to respond to the shifts in the scenario, such as the chorus's respectful thoughtfulness after this stage direction: "The gesture made by the [captive] prince expresses a noble decisiveness and a readiness to face death. His warriors display the same attitude. As a result, the victors, from this point on, no longer regard him as an enemy—rather, as a being who has been dedicated to the gods as a holy sacrifice."

In the absence of staged performances (or a video), we have this recording, a richly informative booklet-essay, the full libretto (but in German only) with the detailed stage directions from the score (all helpfully track-numbered), and a photo of a magnificently costumed 1927 production from Magdeburg. All of this helped me to reconstruct the work in my mind and to feel strongly involved. Fortunately, my German is pretty good. Capriccio should try harder to bring their fine wares to the attention of music lovers outside the German language-region.

The booklet also crucially misplaces an apostrophe: the tenor role is not "The Princes' Shield Bearer". He is the shield bearer of a single prince: namely the foreign warrior who will eventually be put to death.

The conductor, Friedrich Cerha, is himself a composer, best known for having completed Berg's final opera, *Lulu*. The performance is at once powerful and, in its many colors, quite varied. The vocal soloists are steady and forthright: they sing somewhat impersonally, as is appropriate in a highly ritualized work. The acoustic is natural: the fuller passages do not distort or overwhelm. But this means that the dynamic range is quite wide. I turned up the volume in quieter moments, and tried to remember to turn it down quickly when the quiet passage seemed to be ending in order to spare my ears in the next fortissimo.

The musical style is immensely communicative. Wellesz was a truly fine composer: this one composition is surely on the level of his best musicological work (which is to say first-rate). I recommend *Opferung* and its recording to anybody interested in the "freely tonal" composers of the 20th Century.

LOCKE

WIDOR: *Symphony 8; Symphonie Romane*
Christian von Blohn, org
Naxos 574207—82 minutes

This is Volume 4 in the Naxos series of the complete symphonies, the recording of which is being shared by Wolfgang Rubsam (M/J 2020) and Blohn. It competes with a current series on Centaur (M/J; J/A 2020), begging the inevitable question, do we really need another recording of the Widor symphonies? They have been recorded several times and on more suitable organs: Van Oosten (MDG), Schmidt (CPO), Pincemaille (Solstice). For the *Symphonie Romane* there was Daniel Chorzempa at St Sernin.

No. 8 is the least played and, at 50 minutes, the longest of the symphonies. The best of the six movements are the heartfelt Adagio (V) and the Finale, a darkly powerful movement full of an almost barbaric energy. I find the other movements rather dull and not interesting.

Symphonies 9 and 10 are Widor's acknowledged masterpieces in this form and represent the apogee of the French symphonic organ style. No.10, *Symphonie Romane*, was inspired

by the romanesque architecture of St Sernin in Toulouse. It uses two Gregorian chant themes, the Easter gradual 'Haec dies' used as a leitmotiv through the four movements, and the Easter sequence 'Victimae paschali laudes' in the Cantabile (III).

This fine player manages the complex technical difficulties in both symphonies with ease, giving very convincing, engaging, and exciting performances, especially of the *Romane*. He plays on a 3-manual, 55-stop 1893/1933/2007 Voit organ in St Josef's in Sankt Ingbert, Germany—not the best sound for this music. Notes by the performer.

DELCAMP

WILSON: *Symphonies 2+5*
Scottish National Orchestra/ Rory MacDonald
Linn 643—54 minutes

Thomas Wilson (1927-2001) spent most of his career as an academic in Scotland where he advocated and practiced serialism. His music is not harsh and mostly lyrical.

Symphony 2 (1965) follows the classical format: sonata form-like opening movement, expressive slow movement, rambunctious finale. Rhythm is clear, without distorted angularity. Counterpoint is clean. The work fits in with conservative British modernism.

Symphony 5 (1998) is his final score. It is in a single movement with 6 sections, many very slow. The atmosphere is valedectory, with the atmosphere of Love-Death in the Wagnerian sense. The serialism is mostly in the background, and there is little angularity and a hint of Bergian tonality. It requires sympathy and patience.

This is its second recording, the other with the BBC. Wilson is considered "the father of Scottish contemporary music". His work is impressive and always interesting; he is underrated in this country.

GIMBEL

WINHAM: *Sonata for Orchestra; Composition for Orchestra;*
SESSIONS: *Piano Concerto*
Barry David Salwen; Orchestra of the West, Polish Radio Symphony/ Joel Suben
Albany 1823—48 minutes

This all-too-brief release demonstrates both the incredible range of compositional possibility in 12-tone music as well as the continuing need for writing that gives it the justice it deserves. First, the music. Godfrey Winham (1934-75) was born in the UK, studied with Hans Keller, and eventually moved to the US to take a doctorate at Princeton. While there, he participated in the then-nascent school of 12-tone composition originating there; his dissertation consists of an essay and the *Composition for Orchestra* (1963). It uses 12-tone arrays, which are networks of 12-tone lines whose verticals also contain sonorities of all 12 tones. I'm sorry I don't have time to describe it better, but I imagine it sounds sufficiently forbidding.

Winham's *Composition*, however, is anything but forbidding; although it is often dissonant, there are just as often passages where the presentation of all 12 tones is spread farther out or contains repetitions, with the result that the music often sounds like late romantic music. A German predilection is present, but the result is never as dense as Schoenberg or as sickly sweet as Berg. It is an astonishing piece.

Winham's *Sonata for Orchestra*, one of his final works, consists of two movements; he was unable to complete the third before he died of cancer. Here the music alludes to tonality. (Winham's wife, Bethany Beardslee, calls it in the liner notes "tonal", but "largely triadic" is closer to the mark.) Now many of us know that in the 1970s there was a kind of Neoromantic movement going on, including composers like David Del Tredici, George Rochberg, Jacob Druckman, and others—not a small amount of it was connected to a kind of nostalgia for the great tonal music of the past, or at least a distorted remembrance of it. Winham's piece is unabashedly triadic with a form that seems ordinary but which I suspect is anything but. Like the music of Fred Lerdahl, this music shows how familiar sounds from tonal harmony can appear again in a music of great depth and originality.

We also get a fine performance of Roger Sessions's only piano concerto (1956). Sessions strikes me as a true heir to Schoenberg, both in the general ethos of his music and in its density. Sessions also came to 12-tone music gradually and largely intuitively, but it's significant that this process happened several decades after Schoenberg's own striving toward his new method. Unlike the Winham *Composition*, the listener will not find it surprising that this is a 12-tone work. Still, I think it rewards repeated hearings.

And now for my soapbox on writing about 12-tone music. We really do need someone who understands its workings but who can write as well about how the rows are actually

realized as sound. To say, for instance, that a 12-tone piece begins with the prime form of the row later answered by its retrograde is tantamount to describing the opening of Mozart's K. 333 sonata as "the opening gesture contains a hexachordal segment of the B-flat major scale accompanied by a trichord from that segment". It means even less than what it says, and goes absolutely nowhere in characterizing the grace and charm of the opening theme. Won't someone volunteer to accomplish this important task?

HASKINS

WINTERBERG: *Violin Sonata;*
see FEINBERG

WOOLF: *Requiem*

Nicky Spence, t; Philip Higham, vc; Anthony Gray, org; Iain Burnside, p; Vox Luna/ Alex Woolf
Delphian 34240—56 minutes

Alex Woolff (b. 1995) is on the vanguard of young British composers. He achieved great success with *Angel Heart*, which Stephanie Boyd (M/J 2019) urged families with young ones to seek out.

His *Requiem* is recorded here for the first time. Vox Luna, the UK vocal ensemble founded by the composer in 2018, makes its recording debut here. This is a Requiem that departs from the traditional Latin liturgy as set by Mozart, Berlioz, Verdi, and others. As Benjamin Britten did with poems of Wilfred Owen in his *War Requiem*, Woolf has here on a smaller scale set three poems by Julian Clarke (b. 1937) who was National Poet of Wales from 2008 to 2016. The accompaniment is for organ, solo cello, and piano. Sometimes the chamber choir sings a cappella, sometimes with organ. The Clarke settings are for tenor with piano and cello accompaniment. Woolf comments that the choice of accompaniment is intended to suggest a joining of the sacred and the secular—organ for sacred and piano for secular.

The work can be understood as having three sections, each related to one of the poems. The composer writes in his notes that the opening movement (Introit) "begins in darkness" as organ and solo cello set a hushed and pensive mood that leads into the choir's prayer of supplication, an urgent plea for eternal rest and perpetual light for the dead leading directly into the Kyrie with its appeal for mercy. Where a Dies Irae movement traditionally would follow, the music flows seamlessly into 'The Fall', the first of the Clarke poems, a powerful lament for victims falling from the sky "like leaves, ruble, dust" on September 11, 2001 and marking humanity's "second fall from grace". It is performed poignantly by Nicky Spence accompanied by Philip Higham and Iain Burnside. The Offertory follows as a response to Clarke's words, an appeal that the dead "fall not into darkness", giving amplified meaning to the Latin words. It is a brilliantly conceived sequence.

The organ enters triumphantly as the second section begins with the ecstatic praise of the Sanctus that softens introspectively on the words "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest" as the organ accompaniment dissolves into silence and Spence returns on that same pitch soon joined by cello and piano for the second Clarke poem, 'A Crowd of Cares', with its reference to grieving for "the dear one I loved, the glorious stag", a reference to Christ crucified and followed again seamlessly as the choir enters a cappella with the Agnus Dei and its prayer to "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world". It is another superbly conceived sequence.

The solo cello enters at the very end of the Agnus Dei with a transition into the final poem, 'The Year's Midnight', which offers the hope of springtime renewal of the earth for "the fallen, ground to dust, borne on the shoulders of the wind" suggested by repeated upward notation. The lamentation of the first poem is transformed into an assurance of renewed life: "The burning bush. The rainbow. Promises. Promises." The sequence culminates rapturously with an entirely a cappella 'Pie Jesu' and finally a setting of 'In Paradiso' that revisits earlier motifs, particularly the prayer for eternal rest and perpetual light.

As Woolf remarks, "This movement advances the despair-to-hope, sin-to-redemption narrative, which I hope permeates the work as a whole." This exquisitely lovely concluding segment starts softly and builds to an anguished plea for rest of the dead before settling back into serenity and ends with a return to the opening call for rest on the word "requiem" and brings the work full circle to a close. This is ravishingly tonal yet unmistakably daring music of our time. I found this an immensely moving composition.

The performance is exceptional. The choir (5-4-3-4) sings with excellent balance, clarity, and tonal warmth. They perform elegantly and eloquently with members taking solo parts. I've reviewed Nicky Spence's splendid singing

many times and find him at his best here. Higham is poignant as cellist, and Burnside is as always a most dependable collaborator. Together these performers create an atmosphere expressing the hope that permeates the work. Each time I listen draws me deeper into this exceptionally creative and immensely important Requiem for our time.

The liner notes include comments from the composer about his concepts of the requiem and a clear and concise commentary by Wolfgang Marx on the evolution of the requiem as a musical work.

Texts and translations.

R MOORE

WUORINEN: *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*
Boston Modern Orchestra Project/ Gil Rose
BMOP 1075 [2CD] 1:32

Wuorinen's take on Salman Rushdie's elaborate children's story is set in an adaptation by James Fenton. One might not expect this hyperserialist to be anyone's first choice to write children's opera, but here it is, and it's a charming surprise. If you haven't read the book, you will need to find a summary (easily found online). The booklet is not much help: the story is maddeningly complicated and can't be briefly summarized.

Wuorinen's music is more Stravinsky than Schoenberg, light on the chromaticism and heavy on octatonic materials. There is plenty of whole-tone presence and often jaw-dropping orchestration. Vocalists manage their considerable challenges with astounding dexterity. This was recently staged by the New York City Opera, and I wish I could've attended. It must have been a great show. The entire libretto is included (all 60 pages of it).

If you have reservations about this composer, put them aside and enjoy this. The composer died in 2020: this was apparently his final work.

GIMBEL

ZAJC: *Nikola Subic Zrinjski*
Kristina Kolar (Eva), Anamarija Knego (Jelena), Aljaz Farasin (Lovro), Robert Kolar (Nikola); Rijeka Opera/ Ville Matvejeff
CPO 555335 [2CD] 116 minutes

Ivan Zajc (sometimes spelled Zaytz; 1832-1914) was the leading figure in Croatian musical life in the late 19th Century: head of the Zagreb opera house and professor of piano and voice at the city's conservatory. He had studied in Milan and is sometimes called, with local pride, "the Croatian Verdi".

That is nationalist hyperbole. Now that I've heard this recording of his best-known work, the opera *Nikola Subic Zrinjski*, I'd say that he was capable of writing attractive, short-breathed passages and stringing them together but rarely built much dramatic thrust over the span of entire scenes or acts. The music also tends to strike a few of the same moods again and again. I actually like the work, and it held my interest. I just don't think that excessive praise helps his cause.

This opera is jolly and martial a lot of the time (especially in the many choral and ensemble numbers). In that sense, it resembles much Donizetti and early Verdi. Try the number for the Ottoman troops in disc 1 track 6 ('May Allah protect every step you make!')—stirring stuff, and free of any exotic style-markers.

I warmly recommend *Zrinjski* to people interested in the spread of Western European musical manners and practices (in this case: operatic traditions primarily associated with Italy and France) to the smaller lands of Europe and to other parts of the world. This whole process is relevant not only to Eastern Europe. The increasing professionalization of musical life in Croatia during what is now called the "Zajc era"—trying to raise musical life to meet international norms, and simultaneously stoking pride in local history and culture—resembles developments occurring around the same time in such places as Norway (with Svendsen and Grieg) and the United States (Bristow, Paine, Dvorak, Macdowell, Ives, and Chadwick).

The plot derives from a famous German play by Theodor Körner about the Croatian leader Nikola Zrinjski (also known as Miklos VII Zrinyi, because he may well have been Hungarian) and the famous battle of Szigeth (Szigetvar), where the combined Croatian and Hungarian forces inflicted severe losses on the invading troops from Ottoman Turkey, sufficient to stop their advance on Vienna. It also helped that the sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent, already in ill health, died the night before the battle. (The Ottomans would try again in 1683, besieging Vienna for months until driven back by multinational forces.)

The characters are general Nikola Zrinjski, his devoted and patriotic wife Eva, their daughter Jelena, her sweetheart Lovro, Sultan Suleiman, and his emissary Mehmed Pasha. (There is also an Ottoman physician, clearly

Jewish, named Levi!) The plot is very episodic, as in some other operas based on political and military struggles (e.g., *The Huguenots* and *War and Peace*).

Briefly: Jelena and Lovro want to be together, but her father (Zrinjski) persuades Lovro to do his patriotic duty and join the army trying to repel the Ottomans. Sultan Suleiman sends Mehmed to bid Zrinjski to surrender the city. Instead, Zrinjski sets fire to the old city and moves his troops to the new city. Jelena, fearing that she will be tortured or killed by the Turks, asks Lovro to stab her to death, which he does. Her parents, when he tells them, sing: "Oh God, thank you for gently taking her away!"

The Turks invade the new city. The opera ends with a large choral number where the Croatians urge each other to go to war: "Dying for our homeland, oh, what delight! Fight the foe! He must, must go down." This number is widely sung by Japanese male glee clubs.

As the curtain comes down, we see, in a kind of pantomime, Lovro and Zrinjski fall, fighting. Eva throws a torch into a powder magazine, which causes a huge explosion, and the new city, full of Turkish soldiers, is destroyed.

The performance shows generally high competence—it is a long-time staple in Croatia: the single most-performed opera in the entire repertory of the Croatian National Theater in Zagreb. This recording uses the orchestra and chorus of Rijeka, the third largest city in Croatia (known in Italian as Fiume), which was also the city of Zajc's birth and early career. (A different Croatian opera—Gotovac's *Ero the Joker*—is actually better known outside of the homeland. I found it extremely entertaining—Nov/Dec 2020.)

The biggest shortcoming is in the roles associated with the two main Ottoman characters. Luka Ortar lacks the many low notes necessary to convey the authority and power of the sultan. The singer listed here as "Giorgio Surian jr.", singing the role of Mehmed Pasha, is the son of the world-famous Giorgio Surian. I greatly enjoyed the elder Giorgio's rendering of the comic-bass role in Franz von Suppé's *Sailor's Homecoming* (May/June 2018). The younger Giorgio is not remotely on the same level. His voice is thin and wavers on high notes. These two roles thus come off as pasteboard villains, greatly weakening the work's dramatic tension between Muslim invaders and Christians defending their homeland.

The two other main roles are taken by what I assume is a married couple: Robert and Kristina Kolar. They sing wonderfully, with richness yet near-total control, often shading their voices to express moods and plot developments. (Oh, how wonderful singers can be when performing in their native language!) The soprano and light tenor who are the young lovers Jelena and Lovro are clean and pure (she always, he most of the time). If you get a chance to hear Anamarija Knego or Aljaz Farasin, don't miss it! The Rijeka orchestra and chorus seem fully on top of the notes.

The booklet contains an informative though somewhat uncritical essay, praising Zajc's "almost divinely inspired melodic invention". Without going so far as to invoke heaven, I'd agree that the tunes are often quite good, even memorable.

So, all in all, one can welcome this recording, apparently the first to be widely available. (There was a previous one on a Croatian label, conducted by Milan Sachs.) I can't help but wonder whether other works by Zajc may be even better. He spent 7 years writing and conducting German-language operettas in Vienna and wrote some others in Croatian. His energetic, melodious, good-humored style would seem to suit operetta. Several of his operettas are performed in Croatia but seem not to have been recorded yet. Who knows?

Zajc also wrote dozens of sacred works, including fully orchestrated masses. (Croatia is a majority Roman Catholic country.)

LOCKE

Festival: Trendy Words, or The State of Journalism

The US Weather Service recently told everyone after predicting rain that "there may be flooding issues". That is illiterate. They simply meant "there may be flooding". What has "issues" to do with it? I guess they simply have to use trendy words. Or maybe they want to sound like TV weather people. Everyone, it seems, imitates TV. Pitiful! (But predictable: people don't think. TV does their thinking for them—even sets their vocabulary.)

The Week tells us that an aircraft "had experienced engine issues". Can an airplane "experience" anything? And what are "issues"? An online article talked about loans that experienced default. Again, can a loan experience anything? How stupid and illogical this kind of talk is—but it's everywhere.

Collections

Collections are in the usual order: orchestral, chamber ensembles, brass ensembles, bassoon, cello & double bass, clarinet & saxophone, flute, guitar, harp, harpsichord, miscellaneous, oboe, organ, piano, trumpet & brass solos, viola, violin, wind ensembles, early, choral, vocal.

Degenerate Music

Sinigaglia, Sonnenfeld, Finzi, Levi

Roberto Fabbriciani, fl; Giacobbe Stevenato, v; Davide Casali, cl; Orchestra Abima, Verdi Wind Orchestra/ Davide Casali

Tactus 900005—67 minutes

All the composers here—Leone Sinigaglia (1868-1944), Kurt Sonnenfeld (1921-97), Aldo Finzi (1897-1945), and Vito Levi (1899-2002)—were living in Italy during World War II and persecuted by the fascists; some escaped deportation or confinement in concentration camps and some didn't. To see these works labeled as "Degenerate Music" seems painfully ironic, because none of them is remotely modern. Instead, they sound more like romantic music—especially Levi's violin concerto. Other works, like Sinigaglia's suite for flute and orchestra, suggest folk music. A lyrical tone permeates them all.

The recordings seem to have been made in different halls or with different recording engineers. Levi's concerto is a concert performance for sure—the coughs are a dead giveaway. This is a good compilation, especially for listeners interested in this dark time in our history.

HASKINS

Karajan in Rome

WALTON: *Symphony 1;* **SUTERMEISTER:** *Requiem;* **GHEDINI:** *Viola Concerto;* **HENZE:** *Antifone*

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, s; Giorgio Taddeo, b; Bruno Giuranna, va; Italian Radio Rome, Berlin Philharmonic/ Karajan

Urania 121389 [2CD] 128 minutes

Herbert von Karajan led the Walton, Sutermeister, and Ghedini in concerts with the RAI orchestra in Rome in December 1953. The Henze is a Berlin Philharmonic performance from 1963.

Giorgio Federico Ghedini (1892-1965) was born in Cuneo, Italy. He studied piano, organ, cello, and composition at the Turin Conservatory before going to the Liceo Musicale in Bologna, where his composition teacher was Marco Bossi. After working as a conductor, he taught harmony and composition at conservatories in Turin, Parma, and Milan before becoming director of the one in Milan. His most famous students were Luciano Berio and Claudio Abbado. Ghedini wrote *Musica da Concerto* for viola, viola d'amore, and string orchestra in 1953. The soloist starts the piece on viola, and about halfway through, after a quiet orchestral interlude, the score presents the option of continuing with viola or switching to viola d'amore. It even suggests a tuning scheme for the latter's seven strings. Those instruments are different enough to make that change tricky, and as far as I can tell Bruno Giuranna made the switch. The concerto sounds unlike any other Ghedini work I know, particularly in its absence of open organum harmony and Baroque inflections. Think of a richer, more approachable Alban Berg: passionate, mysterious, even forbidding, as it wanders through dark colors, moods, tempos, and techniques, stretching tonality in the process. Sometimes it is hard to tell where it is going, but it is always doing something interesting while getting there. Tom Godell waxed enthusiastically about it in his review of Mela Tenenbaum's recording, which I have not heard, noting the way the "buzzing overtones, stunning double-stops, and ineffable sweetness of the upper strings of the ancient viola d'amore contrast vividly with the sound of the modern string ensemble" (J/A 2002).

Bruno Giuranna was one of the founders of I Musici. This recording was his solo debut, and it is a beauty. The viola d'amore sound seems a little raw in contrast with the rich tone of the viola but not distressingly so, and the RAI strings do their work well. (Giuranna's observations about Karajan are interesting, particularly when he marveled over how great a conductor Karajan was before he became, "the kind of industrialist of music, the big manager of records, production and so on, that he became".

Swiss composer Heinrich Sutermeister (1910-95) attended the Universities of Basel and Paris and from 1931 to 1934 the Munich *Akademie der Tonkunst* where he studied composition with Carl Orff. After returning to

Switzerland he concentrated on composition. Influences include Orff, Arthur Honegger, and Werner Egk. Of his several operas, his best known is *Romeo and Juliet* (1940), once conducted by Karl Bohm, who encouraged him to keep composing. His haunting Missa da Requiem is a stark, dark, and moving work, sometimes suggesting a German-Swiss Stravinsky, say a starker *Symphony of Psalms.* Introitus unfolds in a sad choral processional that gives way to the soloists before returning to a baleful orchestra and chorus, who march like a procession of tumbrils rolling by a tempestuous crowd before fading away. 'Dies Irae' begins violently, sounding choral alarms over a threatening orchestra. Out of that emerges the soprano of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf at her most clear-toned. After grabbing our attention, she turns awestruck, the orchestra follows suit, and sadness takes over as in a narrator-response church service. Sometimes Stravinskian rhythms punch out in the orchestra and chorus. This is savage sounding stuff, but it soon gives way to wonderment before fading away. In the Offertorium, the baritone is a quiet, ritualistic presence, with the chorus entering quietly about midway. There is also a bit of Schoenberg's eerie Melisande scene near the end of *Pelleas and Melisande.* The Sanctus's beginning is rhythmic, alarmed, and agitated until hushed repeated phrases in the chorus lead to the soloists, who seem to be conversing before the movement builds to a triumphant, climactic ending. Agnus Dei returns to mournful addresses from the soaring soprano in a dialog with a sad, resigned chorus. In the last section the forces make one last effort to exalt the deceased until the work slowly reaches a climax and subsides into the distance. The soloists make their final comments followed by a hushed choir and orchestra, ending one of the saddest Requiems that I have heard. The orchestra acquits itself well, the chorus is excellent, the soloists are splendid, and the sound is decent monaural.

The least interesting work for me is Hans Werner Henze's *Antifone.* Like most Henze I have heard (not much), it is a spiky piece with little melody. Karajan's quasi-lyrical approach helps, though Henze afficianados might disagree. The performance and recording are very good.

Finally, Walton, not a composer Karajan is identified with, and this is the most frustrating recording here. Sometime after Karajan had conducted a strong concert performance of *Belshazzar's Feast,* EMI producer Walter Legge, Walton, and Karajan met informally in Italy, and Legge asked Karajan, who was making a series of recordings with the Philharmonia, to record Walton's First. The idea fell through after the conductor asked Walton to make some orchestration changes. He later conducted the performance and broadcast with the RAI Symphony recorded here, the only recording of the work that we have from Karajan. (Walton, who was in Italy at the time, was not told of the concert and never got to hear it, much to his anger and regret. Later, he would resent Karajan's lack of interest in his music in the conductor's later years.) Karajan's interpretation is fiery when appropriate, but capable of lyricism and full textures when called for. There are some sour woodwinds and brass and an unsophisticated string sound, but Karajan's influence with and control over the orchestra is palpable, and it played its collective heart out. I doubt if they knew the work, and it is a wonder that their performance sounds as good as it does. The recording is rough but listenable, and you can hear it well enough to wish Karajan *had* recorded the symphony with the Philharmonia. This recording also appears on EMI's Karajan entry in its *Great Conductors of the 20th Century* series. I have not heard it and cannot compare sound quality, but Urania's program is far more interesting. A major drawback is the lack of a booklet.

HECHT

National Orchestral Institute

GERSHWIN: *Concerto in F;* **HARBISON:** *Remembering Gatsby;* **PISTON:** *Symphony 5;* **TOWER:** *Sequoia*

Kevin Cole, p; NOI Philharmonic/ David Alan Miller—Naxos 559875—76 minutes

Compelling: the perfect description of these four performances. No matter what criticisms I have of each of them, that remains true. Kudos to David Alan Miller.

The Gershwin (1925) immediately has keen articulation, tight rhythms, hand-in-glove ensemble between Cole and Miller, and solid form and continuity. The engineers serve up a perfect balance between them as well. The sound is ambient, but inner details should be much clearer. The NOI Philharmonic is a training orchestra of advanced players that meets annually for a festival at the University of Maryland. At a point in I it's clear that the cellists don't have top-of-the-line instruments; in II the flute soloist lacks a first-class instru-

ment and the skill to make it sound better than it is. And string articulation at the opening of III is muddied at Miller's fast *agitato* tempo. But through it all, Kevin Cole, who is a music director, arranger, composer, vocalist, and archivist, delivers a stylish, lyrical, spot-on, exciting performance. Yes, this recording may not match the sheer panache and Cadillac sound of Earl Wild, Arthur Fiedler, and the Boston Pops; but it is now my alternate choice.

Harbison's seven-minute *Remembering Gatsby* (1985) is perfect to follow the Gershwin in both key and style. It's another high-energy performance. It too is loud, and inner clarity is not the best. But there is so much foot-tapping excitement here that you'd have to be really uptight not to enjoy it.

"The other half" of the album contains two works I describe as intellectualized. True, Tower describes the structure of *Sequoia* (1981) as like a giant sequoia with a basic root (or pedal point) from which all the other roots branch out in order to hold the tree's huge height, an "incredible balancing act". What I hear is another relentless, loud work that comes across like a rhythmic etude, i.e., an intellectualized abstract work. Miller propels this difficult 16 minutes with a sense of inevitability that easily matches Leonard Slatkin's 1984 recording with the St Louis Symphony on Nonesuch—quite a testimony to the excellence of the NOI Philharmonic.

Walter Piston's Symphony 5 (1954) is free of any such descriptions; it plainly is abstract music that uses traditional symphonic forms. But, as with David Diamond's symphonies, I don't relate to either Piston's notion of melody or rhythm. I'd say, "They think too much and feel too little", but that's a description not of them but of my response to them. Still, in I Miller conveys clear sustained rhythms, so well played that he holds my attention. In the Adagio (II) I don't get the connection between the tonal melody and the 12-tone accompaniment, but Miller sustains an attention-holding forward flow as the movement expands from a few instruments to the full orchestra near the end. The Allegro finale brings lively rhythms and a much-needed bright major key, but to me the rhythms have a kind of "forced cleverness", like modern choral arrangements based on traditional Christmas carols with a few "wrong" notes included to make them seem contemporary. Again, Miller keeps the form tight with a strong sense of forward movement.

FRENCH

Sturm und Drang 2

HAYDN: *Symphony 29; Fan me vere tecum flere (Stabat Mater);* **GLUCK:** *O del mio dolce ardor & Tutto qui me sorprende (Paride ed Elena);* **JC BACH:** *Symphony in G minor;* **MYSLIVECEK:** *Tu me disprezzi (Semiramide)*

Ida Ränslöv, mz; The Mozartists/ Ian Page
Signum 636—72 minutes

This is the second volume of a projected seven-CD project to record music from the Sturm und Drang era. As you no doubt remember from your music history classes, Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress) was a movement in Germany around the 1770s that emphasized subjectivity, passion, increased drama, and high emotion. The name came from a 1776 play by that name, written by Maximilian Klinger, but the movement was seen in all the arts. We can see it now as a kind of response against the frivolity of rococo and galant styles, and we can view the great classical style—the style of Mozart, late Haydn and early Beethoven—as a synthesis of the galant style with Sturm und Drang.

Ian Page and the Mozartists take a fairly liberal view of S & D. I doubt if I would include Gluck in the movement (even though he did bring more seriousness to opera through his reform). And JC Bach's symphony (from Op. 6), his only one in a minor key, is fairly tumultous, but not for me an obvious choice. But this hardly matters. What I find interesting about this collection of pieces is that all were written between 1765 and 1770.

All of this music is splendidly done. Ida Ränslöv, a young, Swedish mezzo, sounds great in her selections, which stretch her range on both ends. The playing of The Mozartists is likewise first rate; their articulation of fast passage work, e.g. in the finale of Haydn's 29th, is impressive indeed. The release includes full, detailed notes, bios, and texts with translations. Great for anyone interested in little-known music from the 1760s.

ALTHOUSE

Viva Italia

Cassado, Scarlatti, Handel, Verdi, Binder, Lehar, Henderson, Modugno, Sartori
Siobhan Stagg, s; German Symphony Brass Quintet—Capriccio 5402—67 minutes

Here is an unusual program: arrangements for soprano with brass quintet. The soprano is Siobhan Stagg, an Australian who has won plaudits for her opera performances in Vienna,

Berlin, London, and Chicago. The quintet is members of the German Symphony Berlin.

After an instrumental opener (Gaspar Cassado's 'Toccata', fashioned to resemble something by Frescobaldi), Stagg is heard in Scarlatti's *Su le Sponde del Tebro* (On the banks of the Tiber), a cantata that has a sparkling trumpet in three movements. Stagg has a big voice that especially fits the lower-pitched middle movement, but she also handles the high passages nimbly. Naturally, even when playing quietly, the accompaniment texture of brass instruments is thicker and more present than strings. In Handel's so-familiar 'Lascia ch'io Pianga', it's odd to hear the second stanza accompanied by the bass line only (unison horn and trombone).

The Overture to Verdi's opera *Il Vespri Siciliani* sounds rather tepid here, the brass players seemingly more concerned with maintaining tone and intonation than with imitating the fiery orchestral original. They are appropriately buoyant accompanists, though, in the lively aria 'Merce, dilette amiche'. The album also includes an aria from Lehar's *Giuditta*, Modugno's popular 'Volare', Sartori's 'Time to Say Goodbye', and Verdi's 'Caro nome' (*Rigoletto*) in the swinging setting Luther Henderson did for Canadian Brass.

Andreas Binder's little three-movement, seven-minute *Concerto Italiano* (2007) is a surprising gem in the middle of the program. In a hair-raising 'Vento di Querceto' (The wind over Tuscany), the brass players really let loose. In 'Una Passeggiata a Roma' (A walk through Rome), a lovely tuba solo leads to some very nice whistling by the trumpet players. And in 'Il Traffico di Napoli' (The traffic in Naples), breezy lines lead to a snappy ending.

KILPATRICK

For Early Instruments

Bernard Foccroulle, org; L'Achéron; Clematis; InALTO; Ensemble Alarius

Ricercar 421—55 minutes

I clearly remember my recorder teacher, Bernie Krainis, saying that "Old music is really new. No one's heard it for centuries." I also remember, as an avowed early music acolyte, finding the names of some of my favorite "period" musicians were also performers of modern music. I particularly remember the recording of Paul Hindemith's *Kammermusiken* that included Jaap Schröder and Anner Byslma (1968, reissued Mar/Apr 2012). This new release is a 40th-anniversary celebration of the Belgian Ricercar label, whose early catalog included both "old" and "new" compositions.

Part of this celebration of the label's history begins with the reissue of a Wergo recording for Pierre Bartholomé's 1968 'Tombeau de Marin Marais', commissioned for the Alarius Ensemble, who were members of the *Musiques Nouvelles* group. In concert, Marin Marais, Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber, and Carlo Farina would alternate with new works by Pierre Boulez, Henri Pousseuer, and Philippe Boesmans. In 1968 the ensemble included Janine Rubinlicht (violin), Robert Kohnen (harpsichord), Wieland Kuijken (viola da gamba), and a young Sigiswald Kuijken (also viola da gamba). I had been aware of this group's 1969 Telefunken release of 17th Century Italian sonatas and a 1973 Deutsche Harmonia Mundi recording of Central European instrumental music (both have been reissued on CD), but I was not aware of their new music connections.

The remainder of this new release includes other contemporary works for "old" instruments by Philippe Boesmans for organ ('Ricercar Sconvolto', a disturbed or ravaged ricercar, 1983), two compositions by Bernard Foccroulle ('Nigra sum', 2012, for soprano, cornetto, and mean-toned organ, and 'L'uscita dell'infern', 2019—The Way Out of the Inferno—for two cornets, four trombones, and organ, based mostly on Dante's *Purgatorio*), and a new pair of works, in a very different style from the earlier 'Tombeau' by Bartholomé (Toccata and Scena, 2017, for two violins, two violas, cello, organ and harpsichord, and theorbo). In addition, the label commissioned Benoit Mernier's 'Fancy on Teares' (2020, for a consort of viola da gambas, based on John Dowland's *Lachrimae* pavans). Aside from the very fragmented style of Bartholomé's 1968 'Tombeau de Marin Marais' and Boesmans's 'Ricercar Sconvolto', the other compositions emphasize sonorities and lyricism. I found especially enticing Foccroulle's 'Nigra sum' (no text is supplied for this often set excerpt from the Song of Songs) performed by Alice Foccroulle (soprano), Lambert Colson (cornetto), and the composer.

Aside from the historical reissue of the Alarius Ensemble, the other performers are mostly known from their early music recordings: Clematis (Frescobaldi, Sept/Oct 2020; Hacquart, Nov/Dec 2006; Nov/Dec 2017: 236, Nov/Dec 2018: 187, Jan/Feb 2020: 184), L'Achéron (JB Bach, Mar/Apr 2017; Gibbons,

Mar/Apr 2018; Holborne, Sept/Oct 2014; Scheidt, July/Aug 2016), InAlto (Ricercar 399 & 419), and Bernard Foccroulle (as organist, JS Bach, May/June 1992, Nov/Dec 1999; Frescobaldi, Mar/Apr 2018; Weckman, May/June 2015). While contemporary music might not be on the play list for most afficionados of early music, each of these works display the creativity and sensitivity of these four composers to the possibilities of new sonorities offered by "period" instruments. This new recording documents how composers could put "new wine in old wineskins".

BREWER

Mon Ami, mon Amour

Matt Haimovitz, vc; Mari Kodama, p
Pentatone 5186 816—62 minutes

Here is a program of French music, mostly of the early 1900s. The biggest works are the sonatas by Francis Poulenc and Claude Debussy. Gabriel Fauré wakes us 'Apres un reve' with a 'Papillon'. Darius Milhaud offers an Elegie and Maurice Ravel a Kaddish, the latter arranged by Haimovitz for cello and piano. Haimovitz also arranges two pieces for violin and piano by Lili Boulanger and plays three pieces by her sister, Nadia.

Haimovitz studied cello with Leonard Rose, who was also my teacher. His phrasing is exaggerated sometimes—can seem too loud for comfort or too soft for audibility and slithering into the underbrush. Still, he has fingers of steel, roaming about in high registers with notable accuracy. He works well with Japanese pianist Kodama, who studied with Germaine Mounier and has recorded all of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas and 5 concertos, not to mention his string quartets arranged for piano, and numerous other works by others.

This program was recorded a year ago in California. The sound is good.

D MOORE

Russian Piano Trio

Alyabiev, Glinka, Rubinstein
Brahms Trio—Naxos 574112—76 minutes

Despite having been together for nearly three decades, the Brahms Trio seems sparsely represented in recordings. Violinist Nikolai Sachenko and cellist Kirill Rodin are both gold medalists at Moscow's Tchaikovsky competition, and it doesn't take long to notice that this is a well-honed group.

Alexander Alyabiev (1787-1851) isn't a name that comes up all that often. He fought bravely in the Napoleonic Wars, and on shaky evidence he was convicted of murdering a colonel who died at an all night gambling party. In an astonishing twist of fate, Alyabiev was exiled to his own hometown in Siberia, where he was allowed to compose in peace. His music is graceful and understated. His 1815 Trio in E-flat is truly one of the first written by a Russian, though only a single movement remains. It is ten minutes of bliss—romantic piano matched with classical-era strings.

At 18 minutes, the 1834 Trio in A minor isn't even half as long as Schubert's Trio 2, written a few years earlier. This is modest music, perhaps suited for the salon. Alyabiev was primarily a writer of vocal works, and his penchant for melody shows through here. Although these are Russia's "ur"-trios, they are certainly worthy of much of what was written in Europe at the time.

Glinka's Trio in D minor (*Pathetique*) was originally scored for clarinet, bassoon, and piano. This transcription is the work of 19th Century Czech violinist Jan Hrimaly, and it's hard to say why he did it. But this is a fine little trio; II gives pianist Natalia Rubinstein a chance to generate some energy, and III has lovely melodies played on the strings. Piano dominates the outer movements too much, both in the acoustics and in the overblown writing.

Anton Rubinstein may have towered over 19th Century Russian music, but he lets the side down here on his early Trio in G minor, Opus 15. The first two movements are too languid, with simpering strings and an air of hesitation. The Allegro assai is a welcome relief, but halfway through the concluding Moderato, the bottom falls out and all is swoony melodrama again. It sounds like the music of a tired man who has outlived his era, but it is the work of a 22 year old.

Naxos loves a series, and the album cover clearly designates this as the first volume. The Brahms Trio has already recorded the four later installments, all to be released in 2021! They are throwing in a few big names (yes, Tchaikovsky), but two thirds of the material is by composers who are rarely heard. Probably they will be a mixed bag, like this one, but let's give some credit for the fact that it is something different.

DUTTERER

On the Rock

Chaulk, Hynes, Kelland, Power, Withers, Wareham, Rogers
Ofra Harnoy, vc; Mike Herriott, tpt, trb, electric bass, perc; Amanda Cash, Alan Doyle, Kelly-Ann Evans, Heather Bambrick, v; Maureen Ennis, g; Kendel Carson, fiddle; Fergus O'byrne, g, banjo; Bob Hallett, accordion, mandolin, Irish flute
Analekta 8909—48 minutes

This album is a perfect example of the kind of ensemble recording that has been taking place since the pandemic made it impossible for musicians to sing and play together in a normal way. We've all seen videos that show school kids—or out-of-work orchestra musicians—each in a little window, each in their own room, each playing or singing their own part. What binds things together is a click track that each musician hears through headphones, ensuring that all play at the same tempo. There is no actual interaction with other musicians. The video recordings are assembled and made to blend by a sound engineer.

Ofra Harnoy is a famous Canadian cellist; she plays like a soloist, with commitment, and always sounds wonderful. Perhaps most impressive is 'Barrett's Privateers', a cello-choir setting of a song by Stan Rogers (1949-83), where Harnoy plays all 11 parts with confidence, resonant sound, and amazing intonation. She collaborates in most of the pieces with her husband Mike Herriott, a trumpeter who also plays horn, trombone, electric bass, and percussion. He arranged all of the pieces and was the recording engineer. Other participants include singers, guitarists, and so forth.

The album is subtitled 'A Newfoundland Songbook', and the pieces include melancholy folk songs and lively dances. As with any recording, I enjoy and appreciate some pieces more than others. I don't enjoy the ones where the individual parts sound merely safe and accurate, where the playing is skilled but not spontaneous, where there is no sense of a group striving together to make something artistic happen.

A well-done video of 'Let Me Fish Off Cape St Mary's' can be found by searching online for Ofra Harnoy.

KILPATRICK

Fame is proof that people are gullible.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Italian Postcards

WOLF: *Italian Serenade;* **MOZART:** *Quartet 1;* **BORENSTEIN:** *Cieli d'Italia;* **TCHAIKOVSKY:** *Souvenir de Florence*
Cremona Quartet; Ori Kam, va; Eckart Runge, vc
Avie 2436—66 minutes

The Quartetto di Cremona's premise is simple: music evoking Italy, written by visiting composers—4 nationalities, 3 eras, showing maximum variety, but no common thread.

Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade* comes off shrill, and the sound quality seems decades old. Apparently this was recorded at Italy's Tenuta Banna castle, which is probably great for Renaissance choral works but not quartets.

The teenaged Mozart's Quartet 1 is played stiffly, in a stately manner befitting third-rate Baroque music. The Mozarteum Quartet of Salzburg proves that this can be polished, elegant, and, well, Mozartean. A fatal sleepiness drags the Cremona players down.

Contemporary composer Nimrod Borenstein's *Cieli d'Italia* is a world premiere, commissioned by the group. It is a modest seven-minute piece, a very late romantic mashup with plenty of pizzicato. Despite its maudlin air, this is a likeable composition.

Half the album is occupied by Tchaikovsky's Sextet in D minor, the *Souvenir de Florence*, and the artists are joined by Jerusalem Quartet violist Ori Kam and the Artemis Quartet's founder, cellist Eckart Runge. The energy does not flag, and the requisite passion is there. This work is completely in the musicians' wheelhouse, and only the fact that the sound quality is comparable to a 1980s cassette tape lets it down.

No doubt the Cremona Quartet liked the idea of a concept album, but much of it is lost in translation.

DUTTERER

Unheard-of Treasures: Female Composers

MAIER-ROENTGEN: *Sonata;* **SCHUMANN, C:** *Romance 1;* **BEACH:** *Romance;* **BOULANGER:** *D'un Matin de Printemps, Nocturne;* **PEJACEVIC:** *Trio*
TrioW—Naxos 551438—70 minutes

"Oh, another disc of 'women's music', played by—let's see, 'trioW'? 'W' for 'women', obviously." Actually, no. TrioW is two women and a man, all of whose surnames start with W (hence the name), and if you are looking for misty-weepy-pretty stuff, you had best stand

back, because much of the music here is high-octane.

Mind you, there *is* "pretty" here: Clara Schumann's Romance and Amy Beach's piece of the same title are "salon" music. There's nothing wrong with that; a lot of Clara's husband's music fits the same bill, and I love it for the same reasons. But the other works here are different.

Amanda Maier-Roentgen had (dare I say it) a fairly (stereo)typical career path for a female composer of her time and place: She wrote some brilliant pieces, married a musical husband, stopped performing (though continuing to compose), devoted herself to family, died young. I cast no doubt on her choices, which were (after all) hers and no one else's. What I want to talk about is her violin sonata, which is strong and determined material, nothing either to sneeze at or weep over.

Lili Boulanger died even earlier, at 25, and her *D'un Matin de Printemps* is not at all the flowery occasional piece you'd guess from the title, but a vigorous and almost insolently brilliant work that does much to explain her enduring renown as a composer. The Nocturne, from seven years before, is much calmer and more conventional in mood, but the same spark is there.

As for Dora Pejacevic's Trio, the only work here involving all three instrumentalists, who knew that such a work was possible to a Croatian woman of the early 20th Century? I certainly didn't. She, like Maier-Roentgen and Boulanger, died young, at 38, and seems nonetheless to have left behind a sizeable catalog. If I were in Croatia I would be looking further into her music.

Is it mere coincidence that these three died young, while Schumann and Beach lived long? I hope so. But long lives, except in very exceptional cases (Mozart, Mendelssohn) lend themselves to greater recognition. These three seem more like people who die almost without being heard from at all, like Arriaga or Rott, only without even their renown (except for Boulanger).

THOMSON

Rossiniana

Elena Antongirolami, vc; Melissa Galosi, p
Dynamic 7884—63 minutes

'Themes, Variations, and Fantasias' is the subtitle of this conglomeration of cello compositions. Rossini was a cellist and wrote for it as well. This program begins with his Allegro Agitato, which appears to lack a piano part, here reconstructed by Guido Johannes Joerg. It makes an effective opener. Rossini's contemporary, Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870) contributes Theme Varie. 'Feuillet d'album de Rossini' was published in 1863 for either French horn or cello and piano.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968), for his cellist friend Gregor Piatigorsky, arranged *Figaro,* consisting of tunes from Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, originally for cello and orchestra but rescored by Piatigorsky with piano accompaniment, as here. Friedrich August Kummer (1797-1879) returns us to the past with *Reminiscences des Operas de Rossini et de Bellini*. Kummer was also a cellist. This work was originally scored for cello and string trio, though it works well this way as reconstructed by Lamberto Luigi.

Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959) wrote his Rossini Variations based on a march from *Mose in Egitto*; it was also dedicated to Piatigorsky. Offenbach (1819-80) pays *Homage a Rossini* in a considerable 15-minute suite for cello and orchestra from 1843, here adapted for piano accompaniment by Jean-Christophe Keck. This sounds rather as if an orchestra would have helped. Finally, we're back to Rossini himself with *Une larme—Theme et Variations*. This comes as a relief after the previous noisy neighbor and makes an enjoyable ending to a demanding production.

Our two performers make the most of this material, working together with strong technique and involvement. They are in their mid-20s and have built quite a reputation, playing together since 2013. They don't seem to have made it to the US yet, but I'm sure they will. The recording is well balanced and the sound is fine.

D MOORE

Tanbou Kache

Diana Golden, vc; Shawn Chang, p
New Focus 279—66 minutes

This is cello music based on Haitian sources, working its way through the 20th Century and out at this end. It begins with Justin Elie's (1883-1931) 'Legende Creole', originally a violin piece, here transcribed for cello and piano, five minutes of joy and thoughtfulness blended together. Werner Jaegerhuber (1900-53) wrote a cello suite in four movements based on Bach and recalling him with relish while pianist Chang gets to go to lunch. Frantz Casseus (1915-93) checks in with *Suite Haiti-*

enne, four movements originally written for guitar. Now we meet Carmen Brouard (1909-2005) wrote 'Duo sentimental', an effective 5-minute piece composed for a Canadian student of hers. Julio Racine gives us a three-movement *Sonate a Cynthia* dedicated to his musician daughter and written only a year before he died. It is a modernistic but effective work. Our youngest member is Daniel Bernard Roumain, who was born in 1970 in the US and whose 5-minute 'Feniel' is a transcription from an 80-minute work originally written for electric violin and electric keyboard—minimalist and rather repetitive. Jean "Rudy" Perrault (b. 1961) is a professor at the University of Minnesota Duluth and gives us a 5-minute theme & variations called 'Still around' for solo cello, and a 7-minute cello & piano depiction of 'Brother Malcolm', a piece paraphrasing an imaginary "conversation between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X" about Barack Obama's inauguration to the presidency. These make a fine ending to an unusual and enjoyable program.

Cellist Golden tells us that she became interested in Haitian music while working at the Open Access to Music Education for Children, a music center for Boston's Haitian community, where she met a number of cello students who had left Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. She went into research and eventually developed this program, which she plays with feeling and accuracy, as does her pianist partner. The title translates as "hidden drum" and refers to Werner Jaegerhuber, who inspired generations of Haitian composers.

D MOORE

Dear Mademoiselle

Astrig Siranossian, vc; Nathanael Gouin, Daniel Barenboim, p—Alpha 635—72 minutes

This program is a tribute to Nadia Boulanger. That French composer, conductor, and eminent pedagogue lived from 1887 to 1979 and taught all of the composers played here. The works are Piazzolla's *Grand Tango*, Stravinsky's *Suite Italienne* (arranged by Piatigorsky), Boulanger's 3 Pieces, Elliott Carter's 22-minute sonata, and three short works arranged by the players; Philip Glass's 'Tissue No. 7', Michel Legrand's 'Medley', and Quincy Jones's 'Soul Bossa Nova'. Pianist Barenboim steps in only for the Boulanger pieces.

Siranossian is a new cellist to me, and this seems to be only her second recording. She plays with strength and passion on a Ruggieri cello made in 1676, bringing off this varied program very effectively with fine assistance from her friends on their pianos. The variety of styles expressed here is a test of taste, from Carter's serious sonata to Jones's jazzy piece. The recorded sound is excellent.

D MOORE

Con moto

Friedrich Thiele, vc; Naoko Sonoda, p
Genuin 20716—70 minutes

Here is the 2nd place winner of the 2019 Deutscher Musikwetthewerb Award and the ARD International Music Competition playing a program containing two of the strongest sonatas in the cello literature and more. Brahms's Sonata 2 was written in 1886 and is joined here with Shostakovich's Sonata from 1934. They are both played with unusual passion and dexterity.

In addition we have Henri Dutilleux's (1916-2013) *3 Strophes sur le nom de Paul Sacher* for solo cello, written in 1996, the year this cellist was born. To complete the program, we have Wieniawski's (1835-80) Scherzo Tarantelle, written in 1855 for violin, here transcribed for cello by Arturo Bonucci, but still sounding mainly in the stratosphere.

Thiele studied cello with Peter Bruns for five years at the University of Music and Theatre in Leipzig. Since 2016 he has studied with Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt in Weimar. He has played concertos with numerous fine orchestras and chamber music as well. This recording is played with such polish, enthusiasm and detail that I really want to hear more from him. He and his pianist partner work together with remarkable panache. She studied piano in Tokyo and at the Berlin University of the Arts under Rainer Becker and is well known as a chamber musician. She has been here in America.

This is an important release that should be in all of our collections. It is recorded well.

D MOORE

Moments in Life

Sebastian Fritsch, Lisa Nessling, vc; Olga Watts, hpsi; Oliver Treindl, p
Genuin 20712—64 minutes

These four moments are played by Fritsch, a 2019 award winner of the Deutscher Musikwettbewerb Competition. Born in 1996, he has already developed a fine career and reputation and is still studying the cello with Nessling,

who joins him here in the Vivaldi Sonata in A minor, R 44.

The five *Signs, Games and Messages* from Gyorgy Kurtag (1926-) are highly enjoyable little pieces. In Schumann's three Fantasy Pieces, Op. 73, he Fritsch is joined by pianist Treindl. That warms them up for the major work on this program, Rachmaninoff's 35-minute Cello Sonata—one of my favorite pieces both to play and to hear.

This celebratory release is worth your consideration. It is beautifully played and recorded and introduces us to a new cellist whom we shall hear from again soon, I'm sure.

D MOORE

Canadian Paradigms

Chatman, Mann, Miller, Morawetz, Wallace, Robinovitch

Christopher Ayer, cl; Jennifer Dalmas, v; Kae Hosoda-Ayer, p—Centaur 3826—59 minutes

A native of Fredericton, New Brunswick, Christopher Ayer has served as Professor of Clarinet at Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas for the past 19 years. This is a recital of clarinet chamber works by 20th Century Canadian composers. His wife Kae Hosoda-Ayer, Professor of Piano at Baylor University, joins him; and his SFA faculty colleague Jennifer Dalmas plays violin.

The program includes three multi-movements works: a Trio by University of British Columbia professor Stephen Chatman (b. 1950); a Clarinet Sonata by the former Winnipeg Symphony Principal Clarinet Leslie Mann (1923-1977); and *Approaching the Spring Place* by retired New Brunswick composition professor Michael Miller (b. 1932).

Three single-movement pieces begin the album: the Clarinet Sonata by the Bohemian-born University of Toronto professor Oskar Morawetz (1917-2007); 'Passages' by Winnipeg composer and teacher Sid Robinovitch (b. 1942); and 'Propulsions' by Utah native and McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario) professor William Wallace (1933-2017).

The scores are modernist yet accessible, greeting the listener with offbeat themes and harmonies in an extended tonality. The Wallace and Chatman begin and conclude the presentation; and they stick in the ear with catchy rhythms, shifting meters, and clever statements. The Ayers sell each work with energetic renditions; and the piano lays the foundation with a surging array of dynamics and colors. The free-blowing clarinet set-up produces a pleasant sound; but it can fray at loud volumes and yield some questionable intonation. The violin adds a light and buoyant line in the Chatman that fits the eccentric humor of the piece.

HANUDEL

James Campbell

Arnold, Berg, Debussy, Jeanjean, Lutoslawski, Pierne, Weber

with John York, p—Crystal 330—57 minutes

Canadian clarinet soloist James Campbell taught at Indiana University for 31 years; and noted British pianist John York taught at the Guildhall School in London for 33 years. They first met in 1971 while studying in Paris; and when Campbell was asked to tour his home country, York was a natural partner. Between 1973 and 1980, Campbell and York produced four albums for Crystal Records. Here are some high points of their work.

The Berg Four Pieces and the Jeanjean 'Carnival of Venice' were recorded in Santa Barbara, California in 1973; the Arnold Sonatina and the Weber Silvana Variations were recorded in Norwich, UK in 1976; and the Debussy *Premiere Rhapsodie*, the Lutoslawski *Dance Preludes*, and the Pierne 'Canzonetta' were recorded in London in 1979.

The tracks hold up well almost half a century later. Campbell's wide range of dynamics, zesty tempos, and incredible fingers—especially in the Jeanjean—remain important benchmarks for aspiring professionals. York is phenomenal at the keyboard, combining prodigious technique and instrumental command with a profound understanding of each score, composer, and moment.

HANUDEL

Reunion

Arnold, Bozza, Burgmuller, Muller, Popovic, Saint-Saens, Yuste

Ognjen Popovic, cl; Mirjana Rajic, p

Genuin 20557—64 minutes

Two decades ago, Serbian musicians Ognjen Popovic and Mirjana Rajic struck up a friendship while studying and performing in Munich. Career opportunities led them down separate paths: Rajic became a prominent recitalist and pedagogue in Dresden; and Popovic returned to Serbia, where he worked as the Principal Clarinet of the Belgrade Philharmonic and taught at the Faculty of Music. They reconnected in Dresden for a January

2020 recording session of music for clarinet and piano that contrasts concert favorites with lesser known gems.

The program includes the Arnold Sonatina, the Bozza Aria, the Burgmuller Duo, the Muller 'Chateau de Madrid', the Saint-Saens Sonata, and the Yuste 'Estudio Melodico'. Popovic finishes the album with two of his own novelties: 'Banat Dance' and 'In My Heart'.

This is wonderful on the ear but falls short with the heart. Popovic and Rajic submit splendidly clean and polished readings; but only Rajic digs into the scores with emotion and the full weight of her instrument. Popovic has a gorgeous sound, nice phrasing, marvelously fluid fingers, and some good jazz inflections; yet his range of colors and dynamics is narrow and his ideas are few. The selections here deserve more.

HANUDEL

Centennial

Feery, Mendelssohn, Peacocke, Washington
Jose Antonio Zayas Caban, Joel Gordon, Ryan Smith, Shelley Washington, sax; Casey Rafn, p
Navona 6309—50 minutes

The American suffrage movement of the 19th Century culminated in the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, which states that "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex". The victory, though, was not universal; over the next half-century, women of color faced overt and often vicious discriminatory obstacles that crippled their ability to cast a ballot. Today these hurdles are fewer; yet women everywhere continue to deal with sexism in one form or another.

Here, three women composers associated with Princeton University mark the 100th birthday of the amendment with a renewed call for complete equality and the right to live and work in a society with dignity, fairness, and respect. Kansas City native and Princeton PhD student Shelley Washington performs on her baritone saxophone duet 'Big Talk' with Puerto Rican saxophonist and Minneapolis-based Jose Antonio Zayas Caban. New Zealand native and PhD candidate Gemma Peacocke operates electronics next to Caban on alto saxophone in her composition 'Skin'.

Irish composer and Princeton PhD recipient Amanda Feery enlists Caban on soprano saxophone, Iowa-based saxophone pedagogue Ryan Smith on tenor saxophone, and Minneapolis pianist Casey Rafn in her trio 'Gone to Earth' after the 1917 feminist novel of the same name by English romantic poet Mary Webb (1881-1927). The Fanny Mendelssohn Trio in D minor ends the recital with Caban playing the violin part on soprano saxophone, Kansas City saxophonist and educator Joel Gordon playing the cello part on tenor saxophone, and Rafn.

The new compositions rely on an assortment of modernist avenues, from extended techniques to minimalist backdrops; and the performances are capable and effective. The Mendelssohn Trio has some balance and tuning problems, the latter especially notable in the upper register of the soprano saxophone. Rafn stands out with his clear tone, reverberant articulation, and terrific technical command.

HANUDEL

Luft

Buxtehude, Cabezon, Cobian, Datta, Gardel, Nisinman, Piazzolla
Maja Lisac Barroso, sax; Marcelo Nisinman, bandoneon—Prospero 4—49 minutes

Slovenian-Swiss saxophonist Maja Lisac Barroso and Argentine-Polish composer and bandoneon player Marcelo Nisinman have performed together for eight years. Here, in an album produced by Swiss Radio, they present 11 duets that include three by Piazzolla, two by Nisinman, and one each by Buxtehude (1637-1707), Spanish Renaissance organist Antonio de Cabezon (1510-66), and Argentine tango composers Juan Carlos Cobain (1896-1953), Pedro Datta (1887-1934), and Carlos Gardel (1890-1935).

The concert is very strong. Barroso and Nisinman capture the grit and sensuousness of the Rioplatense dance and the solemnity and mystery of the music that predates the modern canon.

Barroso plays with an open and free-blowing sound that bears the imprint of the Sigurd Rascher school, yet she manages it well at all dynamics; and in some passages she defers a little too much to the bandoneon. Nisinman boasts a deft and assured command of his instrument, handling several contrapuntal lines with ease; but rapid articulations can be fuzzy and slapdash. The arrangements are excellent, adeptly subverting traditional roles and taking advantage of the considerable range of the saxophone family.

HANUDEL

Art of the Mandolin

Avi Avital—DG 4838534—58 minutes

The program is a sort of survey of music from the baroque to the present. The instrument is beautiful and beautifully played by one of the few people who make it a specialty. I saw him in concert in Italy (where the instrument is much more familiar than it is here) and was very impressed.

There's a Vivaldi 2-mandolin concerto with the Venice Baroque Orchestra, a familiar Beethoven movement (we have reviewed a few recordings of the whole sonata), a sonata by Paul Ben-Haim, one by Scarlatti, and pieces by Henze, David Bruce, and Giovanni Sollima—the latter two still living. Any one listener is unlikely to be happy with all the music, but something will please you.

VROON

Guitar Concertos

Corigliano, Caravassilis, Siegel
Jakob Bangso—Orchid 100142—72 minutes

This is a superb program of three very different contemporary guitar concertos, none under 18 minutes long, with a standout Danish guitar soloist.

The orchestra in John Corigliano's *Troubadours* establishes a captivating setting for the guitar entrance, whose recorded sound has a bit too much presence. This leads to a demanding, extensive. but rather directionless section of passagework. Corigliano's indubitably modern sense of orchestration, brandishing intimate knowledge of all the instruments and what may be asked of them, is rich, virtuosic, and spacious; and his themes range from sensitive, as in the guitar cadenza, to roguishly boisterous in tutti sections. The closing section with the troubadour theme is riveting and breathtaking, stretching the listener's sense of tonality and counterpoint into the 21st Century. The piece concludes with portamentos from instruments not usually associated with this technique, yielding a surreal landscape that is perfectly balanced with the guitar's harmonics.

Constantine Caravassilis's *Saudade* (2018) is a joy to hear, especially III, where the feeling of saudade (longing) is artfully portrayed with a wide dynamic range.

Wayne Siegel's *Chaconne* is interesting, but the relatively short ground gives the 18-minute piece a decidedly minimalist feel, with repeated sections and notes bordering on tiresome. Although Siegel has many interesting ideas for variation, the music could have been stated much more succinctly.

Mr Bangso's technique and musicality know no limit in every piece presented here. He is one with the excellent Tallinn Orchestra from Estonia, admirably conducted by Kaisa Roose, who is from Bangso's native Denmark.

MCCUTCHEON

Kromos

Ismo Eskelinen, g—BIS 2395—61 minutes

Most of the pieces on this program of contemporary solo guitar music were commissioned by Finnish guitarist Ismo Eskelinen, a powerful player who teaches at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki.

The truly virtuosic title track, *Kromos* by Sebastian Fagerlund, opens the program, with sounds ranging from vigorously strummed chords to ultra-delicate *pianissimo* harmonics in a sectional piece that maintains the listener's interest because of the variety of textures and moods in each section as well as the amazing passagework in the fast sections. The composer says he wrote the piece in order to learn about the guitar, but it certainly doesn't sound that way—Fagerlund must be a quick study!

Composer Kalevi Aho's *Solo XI* includes an interesting exploration into the world of Arabic music and improvised in a 2-section piece that is atmospheric and moving. Olli Mustonen's Guitar Sonata 2 has a number of moments that remind the seasoned listener of pieces commissioned by the late Julian Bream, concluding with a powerful contrapuntal climax.

Tan Dun's *Seven Desires*, composed for Sharon Isbin in 2002, is performed with technique that borders on the incredible, with Eskelinen excuting an ultra-fast tremolo that does not call attention to itself in its technical mastery, but rather simply adds a very clean component to the texture, reminiscent of the Chinese *pipa*.

Composer Jukka Tiensuu's *Daydreams* uses a guitar slide and electronic echoes, but not a distracting amount of electronica. It is definitely atmospheric, and has a variety of textures and moods. The program concludes with the quieting 'Psalm' by Timo Alakotla.

An excellent amount of space is left between major works on this recording, enough time for the listener to cleanse his aural palette in processing what has just been heard and prepare for whatever's next. Kudos

to producer and sound engineer Simon Fox-Gal for the sensitivity shown to both the pieces and the silences. Liner notes by the composers themselves discuss their processes, which gives the listener more of a connection to the music.

All in all, this is an excellent recording of creative contemporary compositions from a guitarist who can handle all of it, technically and musically.

MCCUTCHEON

Italian Guitar

Nava, Anelli, Pettoletti, Molino, di Domenico, Dominici

Massimiliano Filippini
Cremona 19047—66 minutes

In this recording of lesser-known repertoire, Italian guitarist Massimiliano Filippini plays a period instrument made in 1823 by Gaetano Guadagnini in music of 19th Century Italian composers.

Filippini knows how to shape phrases for a musical effect, and he does so with meticulous attention to the classical and romantic period stylistic tenets that apply here. For the most part, the playing is good, though marked by some inaccuracies in the most technically demanding moments.

In *Le Staglioni dell'anno* by Antonio Maria Nava, the playing is acceptable, but has moments of a fast, unnerving vibrato that I've never seen documented as performance practice in period literature, and whose intensity, while placed at appropriate moments, detracts from the musicality of the line. This does not occur elsewhere in the recording.

Standing out strongly in spirit and technical mastery are three pieces by Giovanni Navone di Domenico (1839-1907). These are joyfully played as if they are Filippini's favorite works and firmly in his wheelhouse.

This is unusual repertoire, some of it new to this reviewer. That would make it a positive addition to the library of any classical or romantic period guitar aficionado.

MCCUTCHEON

14 Histoires de Guitares

David Jacques, g
ATMA 2806—76 minutes

Canadian guitarist and scholar David Jacques, who holds a doctorate in early music performance and teaches at his alma maters, Laval University and Cegep de Sainte-Foy, has presented us with rarely recorded music and also a fascinating collection of guitars made from 1665 to 1972. Prepare to learn a lot about the guitar's history and the origins of contemporary guitar music.

Jacques offers at least two contrasting pieces for most of the instruments. His playing is quite artistic, with clean tone and easy-to-follow phrasing. The instruments have pleasant tone, especially the Panormo instrument on tracks 1-3.

The historical guitars presented here have their own unique sounds, and the way they sound today is based on what we believe to have been their original sound as well as how they have been maintained and repaired or rebuilt. No information on their specific histories is given, but they are well recorded and special. Two examples are Guiot's terz guitar, tuned a third above the normal guitar tuning, and Mast's lyre-guitar, with a beautiful round bass sonority.

Jacques treats every piece, no matter how simple, with utmost care—even a straightforward etude by Fernando Sor is performed artistically on a period guitar.

The first half of the recording includes guitars whose sound is much like contemporary classical guitars, but realistically recorded to show the delicacy of their tone. The second half includes two 5-course baroque guitars and the steel-stringed Italian *chitarra battente*, used to demonstrate two pieces by Mauro Giuliani—definite high points of the recording!

The theorbo-guitar, new to this reviewer, is not as long as the baroque theorbo, but nonetheless has an extended headstock to accommodate unfretted bass strings. Jacques has made three effective arrangements for this unusual instrument.

The 37-page booklet is outstanding, with photographs of the instruments and interesting descriptions of the guitars, their makers, and their players. It is like a masterclass with Professor Jacques, whose knowledge of the subject is deep.

If you are a fan of guitar history or simply enjoy well-played music from the past 200 years, don't sit here reading this review. Go buy this unique history of the guitar—you have to hold it in your hands to appreciate it!

MCCUTCHEON

People are willing to pay more to be amused than instructed.

Le Romantique

5 centuries of romantic music on the 8-string guitar

LANCELLE: *Viennaoiserie;* **DOWLAND:** *2 Fantasies;* **BACH:** *Prelude, Fugue & Allegro;* **REGONDI:** *Reverie;* **GRANADOS:** *Valses Poeticos;* **DELPRIORA:** *Feuilles d'Album;* **MERTZ:** *Le Romantique*

Damien Lancelle—Baros 14—70 minutes

To music history buffs the subtitle might cause a bit of confusion, but French guitarist Damien Lancelle justifies this as music with an emotional element, and that has occurred in every style period.

Opening with an original waltz fashioned on romantic works for the guitar, 'Viennoiserie', Lancelle plays with a rich, full-bodied tone and clearly defined melodic lines on an 8-string guitar that makes full use of its extended range in the bass. This is lovely writing with a sparkling arpeggio sequence.

JS Bach's Prelude, Fugue & Allegro exhibits straight ahead playing, lacking a bit of refinement in the fugue, but technically strong in the concluding movement, with beautiful ornamentation at the final cadence, though it could have sounded somewhat more conclusive.

Giulio Regondi's 'Reverie' is stylistic, to be sure, and with a few more years playing at this high level, Lancelle will surely start to feel the spaciousness and thoughtfulness of this music in a more substantial way. His tremolo—an important part of this piece—is clear and even.

Granados's *Valses Poeticos*, my favorite pieces here, have sparkling scale passages and overall clarity, and each has a discernable flavor that Lancelle brings out to the fullest. The extra bass range on his guitar helps. 'Tempo de valse lente' stands out. A little more spacing between movements would have been nice, giving the listener a moment or two longer for reflection. A wider variety of tone colors would have been welcome, but overall Lancelle's playing of this music is very nice, with a vibrant interpretation of the concluding two movements.

The program concludes with the title track, 'Le Romantique' by Mertz.

MCCUTCHEON

Alex Park, guitar

Park 0—71 minutes

Guitarist Alex Park has studied with a number of excellent teachers and is currently pursuing a doctorate at the University of Southern California while simultaneously teaching at his alma mater, Pepperdine University.

With the exception of David Russell's arrangement of a traditional Irish tune and Debussy's 'Girl with the Flaxen Hair', all the pieces on this recording are from the popular classical guitar repertoire of about 50 years ago. In engaging performances of Isaac Albeniz's 'Leyenda' and Luis de Narvaez's 'Conde Claros', Park's tone shows a great deal of variety that is missing from many other performers these days, and is quite expressive.

Francisco Tarrega's 'Recuerdos de la Alhambra' shows Park's generally smooth tremolo and intelligent sense of phrasing, but with some imperfections—an out-of-tune note here and there, a few slightly muffled notes. The other tremolo piece included here, Barrios's 'Limosna por el Amor de Dios', fares better, with a thoughtful delivery.

Manuel Ponce's 'Gigue', originally attributed to Sylvius Leopold Weiss in Andres Segovia's concert programs to lend the work some credibility, is played with spirit; but with the occasional shortened note and unclear ligados one can hear the qualities of a debut recording. Handel's Sarabande and Variations needs more attention to articulation in the accompaniment, something that should be easy to achieve given Park's high level of technique.

Liner notes and information about the pieces and transcriptions are completely absent, and a visit to his website yields no further details.

Alex Park is a developing artist—let's see where he goes next!

MCCUTCHEON

An Idea

RUDNEV: *The Old Lime Tree;* **ARNOLD:** *Fantasy;* **BARRIOS:** *La Catedral;* **JOSE:** *Sonata;* **BROUWER:** *An Idea*

Kristina Varlid, g—Simax 1369—51 minutes

Norwegian guitarist Kristina Varlid (b. 1994) is an exceptional artist. She presents a program here of 20th Century works flanked by two lovely stand-alone pieces.

In Sergei Rudnev's 'Old Lime Tree' Varlid displays a fine example of pristine romantic style, with flowing phrasing, exquisite tone colors, and dynamics that engage the listener. Her meticulous attention to detail is refreshing—nary a buzz or muffled note here.

Varlid's spectrum of expression is wide and deep, evidenced by her interpretation of Mal-

colm Arnold's collection of miniatures, *Fantasy*, written for Julian Bream, as well as Augustin Barrios's *Catedral*, a high point of this recording, especially the climactic 'Allegro solemne', one of the best recordings of this movement this reviewer has ever heard!

Similar vast extremes demonstrating Varlid's command of the instrument are in the concluding movement to the sonata by Antonio Jose, where explosive *rasgueados* are juxtaposed with sonorous, lyrical passages.

Closing the recording with Cuban Leo Brouwer's 'An Idea', Varlid leaves us with a spacious calm.

What can't she do?

MCCUTCHEON

Ambaraba

Saint-Saens, Henze, Mikheev, Ginastera, Debussy, Rodrigo, Iglesias, Ravel, Fahndrich
61 strings—Genuin 20694—66 minutes

This is a plucked-string ensemble—a German harpist, a Russian mandolinist, and an Iranian guitarist. Each instrument has its characteristic color and techniques.

What an ethereal experience! An excellent studio recording by technician Alfredo Lasheras Hakobian yields sonorities that transport the listener deep into Saint-Saens's 'Aquarium', a tonal appetizer for the contrasting music that is to come. In this excellent transcription, the trio demonstrates a cohesive, flowing sense of ensemble, and a collectively marvelous sound marred only occasionally by the muffled sound of the harp's pedals.

Mandolinist Ekaterina Solovey has a rippling, pure tremolo, and performs 3 of contemporary Russian composer Boris Mikeev's 7 Character Pieces, which brings out many voices on a solo mandolin.

We also hear an excellent, virtuosic arrangement of Ginastera's three *Danzas Argentinas* with a sensitively-played II and a driving III filled with clear, dazzling rhythms and powerful momentum. The balanced instrument tones, if one is familiar with the original work for piano, only enhance and expand the listener's appreciation of the possibilities in the music.

The guitar often plays a lesser role in this ensemble, mostly an accompanying and supportive role, so it is a welcome surprise to hear guitarist Negin Habibi perform a stunningly evocative solo, Rodrigo's 'Un Tiempo fue Italica Famosa.' The guitar is also prominent in an arrangement of Alberto Iglesias's film score 'Hablo con Ella'—originally for guitar and orchestra—where Habibi slips authentically into the role of flamenco soloist.

Debussy's 'Laideronnette, Imperatrice des Pagodes' has a definite impressionist sound and some beautiful moments, but could have used more definite accents. The concluding title track, 'Ambaraba' by Walter Fahndrich, originally composed for synthesizer, is probably more fun to play than to listen to, and differs from the rest of the music heard here in its absence of musical meaning, communicating little more than eight minutes of snappy rhythms and instrument interplay.

If you are looking for creative arrangements of a wide variety of music performed by musicians who are completely in control of their instruments, this recording is not to be missed.

MCCUTCHEON

20th Century Organ

Kevin Bowyer—Nimbus 1708 [4CD] 300 minutes

This is a reissue of several recordings Bowyer made in the 90s, and can be described as an encyclopedia of 20th Century organ music, containing 48 pieces by composers both known and unknown. The known include Nielsen, Hindemith, Schoenberg, Langlais, Alain, Gorecki, Pärt, Glass, Tavener, and Harvey. The less-knowns include Franz Syberg, Per Norgard, Alan Ridout, Wilfrid Mellers, Jame IIiff, Brian Ferneyhough, Sofia Gubaidulina, to name but a few.

Bowyer is currently Organist to the University of Glasgow and has enjoyed an extensive concert career, touring through Europe, Australia, Japan, and America. He has released numerous recordings encompassing a great chunk of the organ repertory and is celebrated for his performances of contemporary music of extreme technical difficulty. So it is no surprise that Bowyer understands this music and plays it with absolute conviction, astounding virtuosity, and superlative musicianship. I was particularly taken with his performance of three of the "classics": the Nielsen *Commotio*, Hindemith's Sonata 2, and the Schoenberg *Variations on a Recitative*, a riveting performance that makes one actually think about learning it.

The recordings were made at three locations: Odense Cathedral, Denmark; Chapel of St Augustine, Tonbridge School, Kent UK; and Jack Singer Hall, Calgary Center for the Performing Arts. Unfortunately, the only organ

identified is the Marcussen in Odense Cathedral, but there are no specifications given. Extensive and informative notes on the music. A must recording for the intrepid listener who seeks a comprehensive survey of unfamiliar 20th Century organ music.

DELCAMP

American Organ

Stephen Burns, Randy Grabowski, tpt; Matthew Andreini, perc; Randall Harlow, org

Innova 959 [3CD] 179 minutes

This is meant to present "the most comprehensive recording ever made of contemporary American organ music, representing the *full diversity* [my emphasis] of styles prevalent in contemporary American classical composition: 25 works by American composers over 25 years". A third parameter set out by Harlow is that the composer not be an organist, thus to "refreshingly avoid the well-worn gestures and techniques oft overused by incorrigible organists ...non-organists such as these here often present novel and challenging figurations and compelling new sounds from the instrument". Whew! I would point out that, by definition, Harlow's "full diversity" is in fact not "full" if you are leaving out 25 years of compositions by organist-composers.

Of the 25 only Libby Larsen, Jennifer Higdon, Michael Daugherty, Samuel Adler, and Lukas Foss were familiar to me. Two of the pieces are for trumpet and organ, and one involves percussion in a unique way: *Sizzles* uses the organ's low tones to vibrate small objects placed on drum heads. I was astounded by the extraordinary originality in how these non-organists used the instrument.

Harlow is Associate Professor of Organ and Theory at the University of Northern Iowa. He specializes in "the outer reaches of the organ repertory, from avant-garde contemporary and electro-acoustic compositions to forgotten works of the past". He is a superb player who gives seemingly effortless performances of this complex music. After listening to the three discs I was very impressed with his musicianship, conviction, and commitment to this music. He plays on the 4 manual, 132-rank 1928 EM Skinner in Rockefeller Memorial Chapel at the University of Chicago and finds an astonishing array of colors and novel effects.

Extensive and informative notes on the music, though the print size and color layout of the booklet will require magnification to read. An impressive production and a must for the avant-garde enthusiast.

DELCAMP

French Romantic Organ

DUBOIS: *Toccata;* **DUPRE:** *Prelude & Fugue in G minor;* **LEFEBURE-WELY:** *Sorties in E-flat, B-flat; Andante;* **BOELLMANN:** *Toccata;* **MESSIAEN:** *Offrande au Saint Sacrement;* **GIGOUT:** *Toccata;* **FRANCK:** *Piece Heroique;* **WIDOR:** *Toccata;* **VIERNE:** *Berceuse; Lied; Westminster Carillon; Symphony 1 Finale*

Richard Lester—Nimbus 5999—80 minutes

I initially thought this was a nice collection of the high points, albeit oft-recorded, of the French romantic repertory. As I listened the organ began to sound a bit strange, and on examination of the specification I found it to be completely digital. No mention of that on the booklet cover. The 3-manual, 42-stop instrument is found in St Luke's Church in Buckfastleigh, England. It is touted as using "a very high-quality custom-designed audio system affording a splendid recreation of a Cathedral organ in a moderately spacious acoustic". Really? As with most digital organs the most effective sounds are the lower pedal and color stops, while the least effective is the plenum or full organ sound—which here is just plain hideous. To top it off, Lester is noted for his "period-instrument recordings", so why is he playing on a "non-period" instrument for these pieces? Avoid.

DELCAMP

German Organ 1854-57

REUBKE: *Psalm 94;* **KUHMSTEDT:** *Fantasy; Sonata in G;* **VAN EYKEN:** *Sonata 2*

Halbier Schlager, org

LAWO 1205—79 minutes

This program is meant to present examples of German organ music in a period of changes (mid-19th Century) in organ-building in Germany. These organs allowed for a greater range of dynamics, especially the ability to make crescendos and diminuendos, with a palette of tone colors inspired by the sounds of the orchestra.

The most familiar piece will be the sonata by Julius Reubke (1834-57), written in 1857 at the ripe age of 23, and probably the greatest example of the influence of these changes in organ building and playing. It was inspired by Liszt's "Prophet-Fantasie" (as his *Ad nos* was often called) and B-minor Sonata. It is in one

movement with three parts, mono-thematic, and closely follows the somber and dramatic text of Psalm 94. It has remained a staple of the organ repertory ever since.

The other pieces are by unknown composers who were active in this period. Friedrich Kühmstedt (1809-58) was a church musician in Eisenstadt. His early pieces are traditional in style; but his later ones, including ones heard here, show the influence of the New German School. The three-movement sonata uses Liszt's idea of a single theme and is considered his most significant and original contribution to the organ music of this period. At 24 minutes, nearly as long as the Reubke, it doesn't sustain interest.

Jan Albert van Eyken (1823-68) was born in Holland and studied with Mendelssohn and Niels Gade. He enjoyed an extensive concert career, and his playing was compared to Hans von Bülow's. He wrote several pieces including a toccata and fugue on BACH and organ arrangements of 24 of the preludes and fugues from Bach's WTC. The sonata is in three movements with a middle movement reminiscent of his teacher's *Songs without Words*. It is an engaging and exciting piece worthy of resurrection.

Schlager is a fine player and handles the technical challenges in these pieces with ease. He is organist of the Paulus-Sofienberg Church in Oslo, and plays here on the church's 3-manual, 37-stop 2014 Eule organ, built in the German romantic style.

Extensive and informative notes on the music and composers by the performer.

DELCAMP

Slavonic Reflections

Nelly Akopian-Tamarina, p
Pentatone 5186 756—58 minutes

Nelly Akopian-Tamarina (b 1941), who studied with the famous Alexander Goldenweiser, is considered one of the last living representatives of the Russian romantic tradition. I reviewed her previous recording of Brahms pieces respectfully (M/J 2018), though I was not convinced by her interpretations, which were characterized by slow tempos and wayward rubato. These qualities are even more evident in this recording, which derives largely from a recital she gave in London's Wigmore Hall in March of 2009. The program consists of nine Chopin Mazurkas and Janacek's *In the Mists*, followed by two encores recorded the previous year—a *Fairy Tale* by Medtner and a Mazurka by Liadov.

The interpretations, as well as the artist's heartfelt liner notes and photographs of her at the keyboard, demonstrate a fierce dedication to conveying the emotional content of music she loves. Her extreme sensitivity and ability to control timing and dynamics are admirable, but she goes too far. In her hands the music becomes a series of freely timed expressive gestures but thereby loses its rhythmical and metrical skeleton. There has to be a balance between musical structure and expression. What we hear here are serious distortions, even caricatures, of what I believe the composer intended and what can be heard in recordings by authoritative artists such as Rubinstein (Chopin) and Firkusny (Janacek). Here the Mazurkas are much too slow, and their rubato too extreme. What happened to the dance? The Janacek pieces are grossly distended and bent out of shape. Although she seems to play with honest feeling and without self-consciousness, I did not enjoy these performances with their eccentric unbridled emotionalism.

REPP

Piano Duo

RONTGEN: *Franck Variations; Beethoven Variations;* **REINECKE:** *Andante & Variations; Bach Variations;* **BRAHMS:** *Haydn Variations*
Mark Anderson & Michelle Mares
Nimbus 5996—71 minutes

This release is titled "Julius Röntgen, Piano Music 5, Music for 2 Pianos". One might question the inclusion of more music by other composers. The two big sets of variations by Röntgen (1855-1932) were never published. Anderson created a modern edition of these works as a part of this recording project (available from Nimbus Music Publishing). Röntgen studied with Reinecke and performed Brahms's Concerto 2 under the direction of the composer. To generously fill out this program, the three major sets of variations by Reinecke and Brahms are perfect.

Röntgen's Franck Variations (1903) are based on a 19-measure folk song, 'Chant de la Creuse', which was not composed by Franck, but included in his large collection of short harmonium pieces called *L'Organiste* (second of the 7 pieces in D major and minor). 12 variations with a Finale make for a good sized, very satisfying work. The Beethoven Variations (1917) are based on the main theme from the Finale of Quartet 13. There are 7 variations and

a coda in the 13-minute work. Again the playing is very good. We are looking at an excellent duo exposing listeners to world premiere recordings of music they are fully committed to. Anderson's booklet essay is absolutely first rate.

Reinecke (1824-1910) is represented by an early *Andante and Variations* (1844) known and praised by his teacher, Schumann. The Bach Variations are based on the Sarabande from French Suite 1. There is an extended canon and much use of dotted rhythms that build to a Finale reminiscent of a large-scale Baroque cadenza. Both pianists are able to display their ample technique and dead-on ensemble. The Brahms *Haydn Variations* stands up well to many of the great pianists who have recorded it.

HARRINGTON

French Piano

Rameau, Debussy, Boulez
Jozsef Balogon—Hungaroton 32843—70 minutes

A promising concept that doesn't quite pay off. The Rameau pieces (in G and G minor) are mostly played with no pedal (I believe some is used in 'Les triolets', but it's not nearly enough). It's possible that Balogon is trying to emulate the sound of the harpsichord, but in the process he leaches almost all of the gravity and expression from the music, turning Rameau into a kind of second-drawer Rococo composer. Pity!

Things are much better in the Debussy—both books of Images. There is a certain no-nonsense attitude in the approach, a little restraint that seems appropriate for Debussy. But there are also moments of unexpected rubato, lingering, that work very well, especially in 'Reflets dans l'Eau' and 'Cloches a Travers les Feulles'; and the considerable virtuosity he has in his fingers makes for extremely fleet and satisfying 'Mouvements' and 'Poissons d'Or'.

If any doubts of Balogon's virtuosity remained after the Debussy, the 2001 *Incises* of Boulez dispels them. Here the fastest repeating notes I have ever heard alternate with more ornate, frenetic passagework, producing the effect that Boulez described of all his music: "organized delirium". It would be quite something if Balogon recorded the three sonatas. I did notice that he's done Liszt's *Transcendental Etudes*, also on Hungaroton. I'm eager to hear that release.

HASKINS

The Little Tin Box

Childhood Memories
SMETANA: *The Moldau;* **GRIEG:** *Anitra's Dance;* **MOZART:** *Rondo Alla Turca; 2-Piano Sonata;* **DEBUSSY:** *Dr Gradus Ad Parnassum;* **WALDTEUFEL:** *Skater's Waltz;* **BEETHOVEN:** *Symphony 5;* **BROWN:** *The Current;* **COUPERIN** *: Les Barricades Mysterieuses;* **SCHUMANN:** *Scenes from Childhood;* **LUCH:** *I Wish I Could Turn Back Into A Kid*
The 5 Browns—Steinway 30166—60 minutes

The 5 Browns are siblings and claim to be the most commercially successful classical group today. They have performed extensively for nearly 20 years and are the first family of 5 to have all attended Juilliard. They have appeared on many TV shows. The New York Post said "One family, five pianos and 50 fingers add up to the biggest classical music sensation in years." The 15 tracks on this program are composed of four piano quintets, two duets, and nine solos. The concluding solo is an improvisation by 6-year-old Poppy Luch, daughter of Desirae Brown, so family talent extends to a new generation.

According to the booklet, the works presented here "are intended to illustrate an emotional encounter with childhood memory". OK, I'll go with that: I played the Grieg duet with my mother as a youngster, the Mozart Rondo and 'Träumerei' in my early teens, and a duet version of Beethoven's 5th with my girlfriend in high school.

Unfortunately, to quote Gil French from a review in the last issue, this is purely a "pops" album. It is a hodge-podge of arrangements (and some originals) of well known pieces. We only get one movement of Grieg, Mozart (Sonata 11 & 2-Piano Sonata), Beethoven, Debussy, and 5 of 13 pieces in *Kinderszenen*. It might make for an effective concert, but falls short as a recording to sit back and listen to.

This recording was made in 2016 and suffers from an uneven piano sound with little of the brilliance and clarity I expect of any Steinway release. The ensemble playing is also not as dead-on as I expect in good several-piano recordings. The marketing of the 5 Browns probably means this will (like many of their other records) make it high up in the Billboard Classical Chart. It won't get played again in my house.

HARRINGTON

The Diabelli Project

Rudolf Buchbinder, p
DG 4837707 [2CD] 96 minutes

Coupled with what I now consider the best recorded performance of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* is the set of variations left to us by Hummel, Kalkbrenner, Kreutzer, Liszt, Moscheles, FX Mozart, Schubert, and Czerny. These have been done before, though not with any regularity.

What makes this project unique are the New Variations (2020), devised by the pianist, who invited 11 composers to contribute a variation. It is hard to believe that Diabelli lovers will easily succumb to the new kids on the block. One thing is certain: Buchbinder makes a meal out of the newbies. He may not love all of them, but you would never know from his total commitment.

Like most new music, the quality of invention and inspiration varies greatly. None of the newcomers would really fit in comfortably with their predecessors, nor would you expect them to, so it is fair to group them separately as has been done here. There is just too much harmonic and rhythmic difference between them. The ones of greatest interest are Variation for Rudi by Brett Dean, Rock it Rudi! by Christian Jost, Variation on a Theme of Diabelli by Rodian Shchedrin, and Diabelli Variation by Jorg Widmann. The last is a delicious wrong-note affair that still maintains contact with the original.

For the Beethoven set, Buchbinder gives us a zippy performance of considerable energy and spirit. The Steinway D sounds magnificent as it is put through its many tasks, and Jed Distler's notes fit perfectly in this unusual scheme.

BECKER

Acts of Faith

Bach, Glass, Shatin, Scriabin
Nathan Carterette, p
Cart 0—62 minutes

This is a fine program. Each of the works is connected with a spiritual event or theme—perhaps a little more loosely in the case of Scriabin's *Vers la Flamme* or the Busoni transcription of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor. I found the Bach a little too literal and lacking in drama, but Carterette more than makes up for that in the remaining Bach works, Busoni transcriptions of chorale preludes: 'Ich Ruf zu Dir', 'Wachet Auf', and the glorious 'Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland'. Here he takes a fairly light interpretive touch, but the music sounds appropriately penitent or contemplative as a result.

Glass's *Mad Rush* is performed with great sensitivity and vigor, and the other contemporary work, the 1995 *Chai Variations on Eliahu HaNavi* by Judith Shatin, is particularly welcome. The treatment of this Jewish song, often sung at the end of Sabbath services, remains almost entirely in a diatonic or pandiatonic domain. Some of the variations are quite pointillistic—indeed I feel the specter of Copland's *Piano Variations* lurking behind several variations, and one called 'Majestic' distantly recalls the slow, chorale-like variation in Beethoven's Diabellis. It's a marvelous work and I hope it becomes better known: certainly it is a considerably more attractive work than Rzewski's popular *People United Will Never Be Defeated!*.

HASKINS

Leticia Gomez-Tagle

Sonatas by Scarlatti, Chopin, Liszt
Ars 38270 [SACD] 65 minutes

I'm not usually into gimmicks, but I like this one: the album is called "Si!" which might mean yes as well as its more obvious meaning, in that all the sonatas here are in the key of B minor. I also smile at the ordering of the works, closing with the innocent, modest Scarlatti piece rather than, say, the Chopin.

The technique is excellent, the interpretations less so but never too objectionable. Chopin starts well with a pliant and convincing I but ends with a IV that is more "Presto possibile" than the actual marking, "Presto, ma non tanto"—her fingers can handle the speed, but the music can't; it gasps for breath.

The Liszt is convincing overall, and Gomez-Tagle's technique gives even the most punishing passagework great clarity and elan. It stands side by side with performances by the best pianists, though I still find myself more thrilled with Yundi Li (DG, Jan/Feb 2004) or Jorge Bolet on London (May/June 1998), which Mr Schonberg pronounced "authoritative...there is a coherence, a continuous line, surging washes of color, and a grandeur that is unrivaled by any pianist who has recorded this masterpiece". As for the Scarlatti, the piece almost plays itself, but Gomez-Tagle gives it a few special touches; and its placement gives the impression of a wistful and elegant valediction.

HASKINS

Labyrinth

David Greilsammer, p
Naive 7084—70 minutes

From the age of 15, the pianist had a recurring dream of a labyrinth that prompted both terror and excitement. As the dream became more frequent, he decided to "reconstruct it, to make it exist" in the form of a piano recital. After several years of work, "little by little, the dream started disappearing from [his] life...." The program imitates the changes in direction one would take trying to get to the center of the labyrinth: short pieces are grouped in threes; the outer two are by the same composer, and the inner is by a composer who lived a few centuries before or after. Two pieces from Janacek's *On an Overgrown Path* flank a 'Les Sourdines' by Lully; two Beethoven bagatelles go with Crumb's 'Magic Circle of Infinity'; Ligeti etudes guard Bach's 'Contrapunctus 1.' At the center of the maze is the surreal, ecstatic 'El Amor y la Muerte' from Granados's *Goyescas*. Returning, we have Satie and CPE Bach; two commissions from Ofer Pelz called 'Repetition Blindness' comment on the Chaconne from Marin Marais's own *Labyrinth*. Scriabin's 'Nuances' introduces 'Le Chaos' from *Les Elementes* by Jean-Fery Rebel; Scriabin's 'Vers la Flamme' marks the exit.

The conceit is more convincing than expected; the musical whiplash is rarely too jarring. The problem is a lack of vitality in the more raucous pieces, like Beethoven's Op. 126:4, the Ligeti etudes, or the Ligeti-esque Pelz premieres. The farther Greilsammer gets into Rebel's 'Chaos', the more the gestures sound labored or tired rather than cutting or grand. The tremulos in Janacek and Scriabin lack electricity. Some of these subtleties are of course difficult to realize, but Greilsammer's technique keeps him from his expressive goal.

ESTEP

Female Composers

Backer Grondahl, Beach, Bon, Price+
Hiroko Ishimoto, p
Grand Piano 844—77 minutes

In order to give the widest possible representation, I think, Ms Ishimoto often includes single movements from character piece sets or multi-movement works in her program. For instance, Clara Schumann is represented only by the first of her three Romances and we hear only the second movement of Florence Price's sonata. Ms Ishimoto was trained at Juilliard and plays with infectious spirit and technical elan. She has devoted much of her career to performing music by women.

HASKINS

Alexander Kantorow, piano

Brahms, Bartok, Liszt
BIS 2380 [SACD] 66 minutes

Way back when I thought I had a shot at becoming a concert pianist, I performed (on my freshman recital) Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody 11. I haven't listened to the piece in all this time, so I was very glad to see it included in this delightful recital. As I compare it to my memory of my own interpretation, it's almost embarrassing to think how badly I missed the mark in terms of rubato, expressive range, and overall timing. Oh well; at least I know what it really should sound like now.

The idea of Rhapsody emerges as an overarching theme of the release, opening with Brahms's in B minor and including Bartok's Op. 1. Bartok's Rhapsody is a virtuosic, sprawling 20-minute work that reminds me most of Liszt; here and there you hear what Bartok will become, but the glimpses are few. Once more, Kantorow is the ideal guide.

The other major work is Brahms's Sonata 2. I must confess that I have never warmed up much to his three sonatas, though I have sometimes enjoyed hearing the third in concert. One might think it's because I dislike the overt virtuosity, but I absolutely adore his Paganini Variations; it might have to do with a feeling that the form is insufficiently clear. Whatever the reason, this time around it all came together for me. Like all the works here, Kantorow plays the Brahms with fire and poetry—nothing sounds dutiful, as it often does when I hear other recordings. Perhaps it's just because Kantorow, who studied with Pierre-Laurent Aimard, simply boasts superior technique and interpretive skill.

HASKINS

Kristian Ofstad Lindberg

LISZT: *Piano Sonata;* **SCHUMANN:** *Kinderszenen;* **BEETHOVEN:** *Sonata 23*
Lindberg 161 [SACD] 76 minutes

This Norwegian release is titled "Of Innocence and Experience", after a collection of poems by William Blake, and it is illustrated with some of Blake's mystical paintings. The program consists of some of the most often performed and recorded works in the repertoire, but the inter-

pretations here are respectable and can hold their own in a crowded field. Lindberg—presumably a relative of the sound engineer Morten Lindberg who produced this recording—is 40 years old and recently obtained a doctorate from the Norwegian Academy of Music. He also wrote the liner notes, and his playing is more impressive than one would expect from reading his unspectacular biography.

He starts with the Liszt Sonata, which is rock-solid technically, expressive, cohesive, and without any flourishes or mannerisms. Lindberg writes, "the pianist must also ensure that virtuosity does not overshadow the piece's musical expression", which may explain his refusal to accelerate in virtuosic passages such as rapidly descending octaves, as is commonly done. As a result he sounds a bit staid sometimes, and it could be argued that outright virtuosity in this piece is really an integral part of its expression. He also fails to create an aura of mystery at the beginning and later when the same slowly descending motif recurs. In the lyrical passages his touch could be more delicate.

For comparison I listened to a 2016 Wigmore Hall performance of the sonata by Nicholas Angelich (whose recording on Erato, not reviewed by us, was released the same year) and found it more romantic and riveting, but Lindberg's sober interpretation has integrity.

Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, too, come across as somewhat restrained emotionally, though thoughtful and sufficiently expressive. The ending of *Träumerei* is rather matter-of-fact, *Fürchtenmachen* lacks any fearful mood, and *Der Dichter Spricht* is not poetic enough. I also had the distinct impression that the engineers, not the artist, determined the silent intervals between tracks. If so, that was a mistake: the silences between a suite of short pieces are an integral part of the performance.

I have no complaints about Lindberg's *Appassionata*, which is excellent. In its clarity and drive it matches Arthur Rubinstein's 1963 recording (RCA 68006), which I selected for direct comparison here, but has much better sound. I enjoyed making the acquaintance of Mr Lindberg.

REPP

The gifts of God are there to be delighted in. To fall short of joy would be ingratitude.

—ELLIS PETERS

Paris Boulevard

Fin-de-siècle Piano

Satie, Hahn, Leoncavallo, Sauguet, Auric, Debussy, Ravel, Poulenc, Casella, Tailleferre, Wiener, Scotto, Tansman, Milhaud, Weill, Kosma

Dario Müller—Dynamic 7877—56 minutes

The 23 tracks include 8 by Satie and one each from all the other composers listed. Just about every notable French composer and several foreigners who lived and composed in Paris from the end of the 1800s to the middle of the 1900s can be found here. This collection offers a wonderful view of the music scene in Paris at the time, alternating energy and joie de vivre with some melancholy. Satie's originality and creativity is quite evident.

The entire program is balanced, well constructed, and very well played. It can be heard and enjoyed with many different levels of attention. Besides his sensitive and idiomatic pianism, Dario Müller (b.1946) has written a wonderful essay that ties this music together in the proper historical context.

HARRINGTON

Padua Piano Duo

POULENC: *Concerto;* **BRITTEN:** *Scottish Ballad;* **DEBUSSY:** *Premiere Suite*

Padua & Veneto Orchestra/ Luigi Piovano

Brilliant 96163—62 minutes

Duo Pianistico di Padova is Leonora Armellini and Mattia Ometto. Armellini is new to me, but Ometto has made a couple of excellent 2-piano recordings with Leslie Howard: Reynaldo Hahn (Melba 301148, Mar/Apr 2018) and Liszt Symphonic Poems (Brilliant 95748, not reviewed).

Poulenc's 2-Piano Concerto (1932) is a repertoire standard. The concert performance recorded here is quite good and captures all of the excitement the work can generate. I found it interesting that it was performed in London more than ten years after its premiere, with Poulenc and Britten at the pianos.

Britten's *Scottish Ballad* (1941) was no doubt composed with Poulenc's Concerto in mind. A substantial 15-minute single-movement work, it was written in the US for pianists Bartlett and Robertson. It also is quite a contrast with Poulenc. The work is based on a number of Scottish folk tunes including 'Dundee', 'Turn Ye to Me' and 'Flowers of the Forest'. After the introduction there is a lamenting funeral march that eventually moves into a Highland fling. The recording

here is from the same concert as the Poulenc. Pianists are ably accompanied by Piovano and the Padua Orchestra. They have a good measure of Britten's sound and orchestration.

A year after the concerto concert, Duo Pianistico di Padova got together to record the Debussy *Première Suite d'orchestre* (1882-84) in its version for piano four-hands. The version for orchestra is missing the third movement, and the piano duet version was not published until 2008. It is missing from most of the Debussy 4-Hands Collections in my library, and is an enjoyable student work that shows the French romantic composers' influence on him. Recognizable older masters include Saint-Saens, Chabrier, and Massenet. The work also paves the way for more mature and better-known works by Debussy like the *Nocturnes* and *Iberia*. The piece is nearly 30 minutes long and worth the while of anyone who enjoys Debussy's music.

HARRINGTON

Anthony Romaniuk

Bartok, Byrd, Mompou, improvisations
Alpha 631—78 minutes

This release is titled "Bells", and consists of single pieces (or in some cases, one movement of a larger work) by a wide variety of composers including Mozart, Shostakovich, Chick Corea, Rameau, Crumb—as Mr Romaniuk has it, the pieces suggest drones or pedal points, which result in bells. This conceit is sometimes (inevitably, indeed) strained, as in his assertion that the prelude to Bach's English Suite in A minor is bell-like because of the E-A-A opening of its theme. Sometimes he holds over one or another pitch in the piece, which does help cement the programmatic theme.

The other major gimmick here is that he performs on various instruments: a concert grand, harpsichord, fortepiano, and Fender Rhodes. Hearing the Bach prelude a second time on the latter (bathed in reverberation) is a little strange and also extremely nostalgic, as I did a lot of practicing on a Yamaha electric piano in one of the practice rooms of the high school I attended in Roanoke, Virginia.

With some exceptions, he plays all these instruments very well; his speedy reading of *The Bells*, by William Byrd, recalls the energetic, muscular playing of Anthony Newman in the 70s. On the other hand, his fortepiano playing in the Mozart Adagio in B minor is fairly wooden sounding—something we could accept before Kristian Bezuidenhout. Overall, he is at his best in contemporary repertoire. And although I leave this feeling that it misses more than it hits, I do admire this artist's imagination.

HASKINS

American Heritage

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR: *Deep River;* **BONDS:** *Troubled Water;* **BURLEIGH:** *From the Southland;* **GOTTSCHALK:** *Union; The Banjo;* **PRICE:** *Dances in the Canebreaks;* **DETT:** *Juba;* **STILL:** *The Blues from Lenox Avenue; Shenandoah; Swanee River;* **RZEWSKI:** *Down by the Riverside*

Jeni Slotchiver, p—Zoho 202008—70 minutes

Few recent recitals have been as enjoyable as Slotchiver's American Heritage program. I have a deep affection for many of these pieces, some of which I perform regularly at a small inner city church in Newark, NJ. When services resume, I now have a whole group of new pieces to try out thanks to Ms Slotchiver. I also have one note to fix that I learned incorrectly in Coleridge-Taylor's 'Deep River'.

We have many compositions here that honor the African-American musical tradition, as well as Union army hymns. 6 of the 8 composers on this program are of African descent and two of these are women. The arrangements are of sea shanties, songs of enslaved people, secular dances, and spirituals. They range in difficulty from moderately easy to the very complex piano writing of Rzewski.

Slotchiver has supplied exceptional program notes, and Zoho's recorded sound is state of the art. She has all of the technique and panache to effectively deliver music with such recognizable tunes as 'Yankee Doodle' and 'Swanee River'. Make no mistake, these are serious arrangements—nothing in a pops vein or light-hearted easy-listening piano styles. Certainly no such pianist could bring off the Rzewski or parts of Gottschalk's more blatantly virtuosic writing. I cannot imagine any American music lover who would not enjoy this program. We were all brought up on this music, and the arrangements here are well done, well played, and well recorded.

HARRINGTON

Bestiary on Ivory

Hsiang Tu, p—Bridge 9544—72 minutes

This recital collects 16 short animal-related pieces. There are the usual suspects like Saint-Saens's 'Swan' in Godowsky's over-wrought

transcription, Debussy's 'Poissons d'Or', and Rimsky-Korsakoff's 'Flight of the Bumblebee' via Rachmaninoff, but also some rarities like Bolcom's 'Butterflies, Hummingbirds' and Cowell's raging 'Tiger'. Messiaen, Granados, Ravel, Bartok, Schumann, Liszt, and Villa-Lobos appear as well. Hsiang Tu plays with verve and poetic intensity, giving each creature its artistic due. I wish the piano had been recorded more closely and warmly, but that is a minor complaint.

ESTEP

20th Century Foxtrots 2

Gottlieb Wallisch, p—Grand Piano 814—66 min

This is Volume 2 of entertaining dance music written by German composers during the Weimar republic. As with Volume 1 (M/A 2020) the dances were collected and are performed with elegance and warmth by pianist Wallisch. Like the Austrian and Czech composers represented on the earlier disc, the German composers, mostly known for "serious music", were prompted by music publishers to write popular (and commercial) dance tunes. From a rhythmic standpoint the German composers have a better grasp of dance arrangements, don't stray far from the basic rhythms, and mostly follow a consistent ABAA format. It's easy to imagine this inventive, rhythmic, and sensuous music played in pre-WWII German halls and cabarets. The dances include fast and slow versions of Foxtrots, the Shimmy, Blues, Tangos, and Waltzes, and some are world premiere recordings.

Although some of these dance forms were popular in America before WWI, German laws restricted their performance in dance halls. German soldiers, in particular, could be seen dancing the Tango. After WWI, European composers adapted the jazz-influenced and strongly rhythmical dance music they heard from visiting soldiers and from Western composers. The "new" music was played by hotel bands whose programs included Irving Berlin's popular Quick-steps and Rags.

One of the first jazz-influenced dances by a German "serious composer" was pianist Artur Schnabel's *Tanzsuite* in 1919 (not on this disc) followed by pianist Walter Gieseking and composer Paul Hindemith. Gieseking's *3 Dance Improvisations* include dance styles like fast and slow Foxtrots and Blues. Gieseking premiered Hindemith's *Suite* in 1922, which prompted Hindemith (also represented in Volume 1) to write dance music for puppet shows, including a catchy Foxtrot titled 'Tanz Der Holzpuppin'. In 1926 Paul Whiteman's band visited Berlin and introduced George Gershwin's symphonic jazz compositions. Many German "serious" composers were won over by the new music. Leopold Mittman's *Konzert Jazz-Suite* (1929) has lively music heavily influenced by Gershwin's songs in *Lady Be Good* (1924), and *Funny Face* (1927).

The popularity of jazz music and revues began to infiltrate German cafes, cabarets, and theater works. To meet the market demands piano arrangements by the composers themselves or by Gustav Blasser were included in the *Moderne Jazzmusik* editions of publisher Universal Edition in Vienna or Schott in Mainz. So influential were these piano arrangements that many were collected and published as "easy to play" versions in *The New Piano Book* published in 3 volumes. The 26 selections here are by well-known and obscure German composers. Each dance lasts no longer than 4 minutes. Some of the dances are arranged into sets with different rhythms and tempos.

Other composers and dances include: Kurt Weill's *3 Penny Opera* 'Tango' and *Marie Galante* '2 Pieces'; Eduard Kunneke's *The Veterinarian of Dingsda* 'Batavia Fox-trot'; Eugen D'Albert and Eduard Bornstein's 'Blues'; Max Butting's *15 Short Piano Pieces* 'Tango 14'; Kurt Herbst's 'Jazz-Etude'; Walter Neimann's *Modern Dance Suite*; Siegfried Borris's 'Quick-Fox' and 'Tango'; and from the interestingly named Fidelio F. Finke's *10 Kinderstucke* ' Shimmy No. 10'. Every composer's style is different and interesting, and all the selections are enjoyable.

Wallisch performs these pieces and their varying tempos with excellent pianism and grace. The excellent English and German booklet describes the composers, the musical influences, and the history of "Jazz-Age" dances in Germany. As a follow-up to Volume 1, this new edition is outstanding. I look forward to future volumes. The sound is excellent.

FISCH

Romantic Horn

Dukas, Gounod, Saint-Saens, Chabrier, Czerny, F Strauss, R Strauss, Schumann

Steiner Granmo Nilsen; Kristen Fossheim, p

2L 162 [SACD & Blu-ray] 60 minutes

This is a follow-up to the *Early Romantic Horn Sonatas* album of five years ago (Jan/Feb 2016: 204) by the same Norwegian artists. The

pieces, and the instruments chosen for them, show how various composers dealt with the horn as the traditional valveless instrument gradually added valves. For the first two works, soloist Steinar Granmo Nilsen plays a modern copy of an 1836 Raoux horn that has two piston valves. Paul Dukas composed his *Villanelle* (1906) for the valved instrument but specified certain passages that are to be played with hand-horn technique. Charles Gounod, in the preface to his *6 Pieces Melodiques Originales* (1839), tells the soloist to use hand and valve techniques as desired. For the next two pieces, Nilsen plays natural horn: an 1836 Raoux for the little Saint-Saens Romance (1874) and Emanuel Chabrier's longer and more involved Larghetto (1875), an 1800 Lausmann for Carl Czerny's elaborate and technically challenging *Andante e Polacca* (1848). In his natural-horn playing, Nilsen plays quietly most of the time, masking the differences between the instrument's three tone qualities.

Nilsen plays a 1900 Uhlmann Vienna horn (valved) in the program's last three pieces: Franz Strauss's Nocturne (1864), Schumann's Adagio & Allegro (1849), and Richard Strauss's Andante (1888). Although the instrument's sound is dark, it is more open than the others. And although we might guess that a valved instrument is easier to play than a natural one, we can hear that this one is physically challenging to play. The Vienna horn is a single horn in F; it does not have the double horn's short additional tubing that makes high notes feel more secure. So, in the Schumann, the sound of yearning, striving, and (finally) attaining seems more wrenching than I have ever heard.

Nilsen is a superb musician who makes wonderful things happen, even in the simplest pieces. Kristin Fossheim is an outstanding musician, too. Playing an Ernst Irmler piano from 1850-60, she brings out its rich bass and almost glassy timbre in the upper octaves. Perhaps the album's most memorable moment is its final sound—the piano's C-major chord fading away for a full 20 seconds after the horn has left.

KILPATRICK

Trumpet Concertos

Arutiunian, Peskin, Desenclos
Selina Ott; Vienna Radio Symphony/ Roberto Paternostro—Orfeo 200091—56 minutes

It's impossible not to notice Selina Ott's youthfulness: she looks like a college student—and indeed, she is 22 years of age. Two years ago she became the first woman selected as a winner of the ARD Music Competition. How does she sound? Like an important addition to the upper echelon of trumpet soloists.

The program offers three trumpet concertos—two Russian, one French—that were composed in a five-year span. The most popular is the Trumpet Concerto (1950) by Alexander Arutiunian, and recorded sound makes an immediate impression here. Everyone—Ms Ott and all instruments, melodies, and countermelodies—seem nearby except in big tutti moments. We are sitting rather close to Ms Ott, but not uncomfortably so. Soloists in the orchestra also seem close. The feeling is of chamber music. I'm not objecting; I hear things I haven't really noticed before in this often-played piece. Other impressions: tempos and phrasing are flexible, and Ms Ott is an excellent player.

Recorded sound for the next piece, Concerto 1 (1948) by Vladimir Peskin, seems more typical, with Ms Ott slightly in front of the orchestral mass, and others more distant. I have heard this piece only once before (May/June 2016), and I like it very much. The first solo phrase begins in the trumpeter's low register, and Ms Ott's is full and satisfying. The cadenza in I shows her excellent technical and interpretive skills, and the ending is exciting. II is full of beautiful melodies; III is a scamper with Ott delivering another spectacular ending.

Recorded sound for Alfred Desenclos's *Incantation, Threne et Danse* (1953) returns to the more detailed setup of the Arutiunian. In the three-minute 'Incantation', Ms Ott plays with admirable incisiveness. The dreamy, five-minute 'Threnody' has the muted trumpet weaving around various solo instruments. The finale is a nine-minute 'Dance' that almost immediately gives way to a long cadenza, becomes pensive, ends powerfully.

Selina Ott is a fine young trumpet player. Beautiful, committed readings by this orchestra, too.

KILPATRICK

Terrific Trumpet

Mouret, Haydn, Rossini, Albinoni, Vivaldi, Hindemith, others—Naxos 578185—73 minutes

A trumpet buffet with 23 varied selections from almost as many Naxos albums. First up is Jean-Joseph Mouret's ubiquitous 'Rondeau', a piccolo trumpet-and-organ reading by John

Roderick Macdonald and Martin Stephan; they also offer an Allegro by Albinoni. Also for trumpet and organ is Viviani's Trumpet Sonata 2 (the only complete multi-movement work on the album) with Niklas Eklund on baroque trumpet. Eklund, a superb player, is heard in several works: with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra in a Largo by Bedrich Weber and the Andante (Trumpet Concerto) by Hummel; with the Wasa Baroque Ensemble in a Grave by Corelli; with the Drottningholm Baroque Ensemble in an Adagio (Trumpet Concerto) by Telemann and an Allegro (Sonata a 5) by Torelli.

Vivaldi's infectious Allegro (Two-Trumpet Concerto) is given a tasteful reading by Michael Meeks and Crispian Steele-Perkins with the City of London Sinfonia. Other baroque works are offered by Miroslav Kejmar, Laura Vukobratovic, Thomas Reiner, and Norman Engel. Huw Morgan plays more recent works: Honegger's unaccompanied 'Intrada' and the mysterious II from Hindemith's Trumpet Sonata.

The program includes a few orchestral works with prominent trumpet parts: the famous fanfare and gallop from Rossini's *William Tell* Overture, the Hornpipe from Handel's *Water Music*, 'Toreador's Song' from Bizet's *Carmen*, the Allegro from Bach's Brandenburg Concerto 2, and 'Danse Napolitaine' from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. The album ends with the longest selection, 'The Trumpet Shall Sound' (*Messiah*) with David Blackadder on natural trumpet.

The booklet includes a diagram, with definitions, of the trumpet and its component parts. I'm glad the water key is not called a spit valve.

KILPATRICK

Heroic Horn

Schumann, Haydn, Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Beethoven, others

Naxos 578177—72 minutes

A horn buffet with 14 selections from as many Naxos albums. First is the opener of that most heroic of all horn works, Schumann's *Konzertstuck* for four horns, given a heroic reading by a horn quartet from the Seattle Symphony. Next, the American Horn Quartet is heard with Sinfonia Varsovia in a movement from Haydn's Symphony 31 (*Hornsignal*). A quartet headed by the brothers Bedrich and Zdenik Tylsar play a portion of Leopold Mozart's Sinfonia da Caccia, complete with simulated gunshots. The Tylsars are also heard in two-horn concertos by Handel and Josef Fiala.

Solo concerto movements are offered by the Buffalo Philharmonic's Jacek Muzyk in the Rondo from Mozart's Horn Concerto 2 (a beautiful reading at a rather restrained tempo), and Dmitri Babanov in III from Haydn's Concerto 1. In the chamber music realm is a movement from Mozart's Horn Quintet by Jeno Kevehazi with the Kodaly Quartet; the same horn soloist in II from the Brahms Horn Trio; and Wolfgang Tomboeck (on his very dark-toned Vienna horn) in III from the Beethoven Horn Sonata.

Interspersed are orchestral works with prominent horn passages: the Slovak Philharmonic in Tchaikovsky's 'Waltz of the Flowers' (*Nutcracker*) and the first four minutes of Wagner's *Tannhauser* Overture; the Polish Radio Symphony in II from Tchaikovsky's Symphony 5; and the Catalonia Symphony in the 'Carillon' movement of Bizet's *Arlesienne*.

A pleasant program with plenty of variety.

KILPATRICK

Forgotten Melodies

CLARKE: *Morpheus*; **STRUBE:** *Berceuse; Regrets; Sonata;* **FOOTE:** *Melody, op 44a; Sonata, op 78a*

Lauren Hodges, va; Jasmin Arakawa, p

Centaur 3833—53 minutes

A fine program of music somewhat, little, and barely at all known. We violists have a much larger repertoire than we are given credit for, and most of the fault is our own in not recognizing it.

Rebecca Clarke's *Morpheus*, at least, isn't unfamiliar; most violists will already know this more muted (literally!), softer elder sibling of the 1919 Sonata. But I imagine very few of us will have heard of Gustav Strube at all, and yet his pieces are the centerpiece of this program. The two short works are salon pieces of the sort that Strube was apparently known for writing—he was, among other things, conductor of the Boston Pops for 14 years—but the viola sonata is something else, a glowing three-movement work in the late-romantic style, American version, French-tinged subversion, from 1919. In this it shares a lot with its major discmate, Michael Foote's Sonata, originally for cello but reworked for viola also in 1919. The notes here conjecture that both works were destined for the Berkshire Festival Competition, where Louis Bailly was one of the judges. (Strube's Sonata is dedicated to

Bailly, who performed it in 1925.) The Foote was, indeed, lost altogether to the public until long after he died, and the 1919 viola version was found even later than that.

1919 does seem to be popping up a lot here, yes? The Clarke Sonata, also entered in the same competition (under the pseudonym "Anthony Trent") lost to the Ernest Bloch Suite on Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge's tie-breaking vote. The rivalry of Clarke and Bloch for the prize is well known; not so the likely presence of two other pieces as distinguished as these. There was a sort of outbreak of writing for the viola around this time (think of Hindemith's Op. 11:4, also from 1919), and in the 20s Hindemith, together with Milhaud and others, got busy creating a new repertoire for the previously-neglected instrument, but the seeds were already everywhere in postwar America.

The only other piece here is also Foote, the Melody Op. 44a, another violin original that suffers not at all from translation. The performances have a sort of sheen about them that I find very attractive; Lauren Hodges is a distinguished violist with a refined, mellow tone, and Jasmin Arakawa is her excellent partner.

THOMSON

Romantic Viola II

TOURNEMIRE: *Suite, op 11;* **CHAUSSON:** *Piece, op 39;* **VIERNE:** *2 Pieces;* **BERLIOZ:** *Harold in Italy*

Daniel Weissmann, va; Peter Petrov, p
Fuga Libera 765—72 minutes

The big piece here is Berlioz's *Harold in Italy,* in a newish (2001) transcription by the British musicologist Hugh Macdonald. We are informed in the notes that it has not been recorded before now "because of its difficulty". (The back of the box goes further, calling the arrangement "remarkable and formidably difficult".)

This is, to put it as politely as possible, a fib, if not a fiddle. Macdonald himself says that Franz Liszt's arrangement of *Harold* (which leaves the viola part alone) requires the pianist "to have a Lisztian technique in order to represent the brilliance and subtlety of Berlioz's orchestration". In contrast, his version is accessible to "accompanists of normal standing", which is *still* throwing roses at it. Take, for example, the passage a bit after square 44 (repeated after square 51) in the finale: The first violins are alternating two pitches in eighth notes; the seconds are rocketing up an octave and then another, and back down again, in triplets; and all the winds are in screaming dialog with the low brass. Macdonald drops the seconds altogether after two bars, because he wants the viola (here representing the entire low brass section, on the C string) to come through. This is not "highlighting all of Berlioz's harmonic modernity" (another claim made here); it's eviscerating it.

It's the same all through with the piano part: Macdonald simplifies to the point almost of self-parody. As for the viola part—well, the whole conceit of *Harold,* the idea that gave it birth, is that the hero *views* scenes, joins them in a desultory way, and then disengages again. This Macdonald jettisons, because it's just not right for the violist to be standing around while someone else has all the notes. Accordingly, a lot of the notes he simply drops, and the rest he assigns to the viola. The result is "formidably difficult" only in the sense that playing the entire first violin part of *Harold* with minimal accompaniment would be, and in exactly the same way: There are more notes, a lot more, but not more than any ordinary orchestral string player would expect over the same span of music. The *range* of the added material isn't greater than the range of the original solo part of *Harold,* nor is there greater technical difficulty in the range that is there (there aren't massively tricky double-stops or anything of that sort). Anyone—literally anyone—who can play the original solo part of *Harold* can play Macdonald's version.

So, in sum: Here's a "recitalist's" version of *Harold,* one suited to playing in concert with a pianist who is not Liszt or one of his avatars, and one that gets the gist of the piece across, albeit imperfectly, while methodically destroying the work's original conception. Give me the original Liszt, or (for a massive piano work whose viola participation is yet more nugatory than that) Ives's *Concord* Sonata.

The rest of the program is—oddly—more interesting, in a late-French-romantic sort of way. Chausson's Op. 39 'Piece' is fairly familiar (at least for cello; I had forgotten that it originally had a viola alternative), but the works by Vierne and Tournemire aren't, and they repay acquaintance.

I am not wholly convinced by the performances; Weissmann is a diligent and intelligent violist, but not an immaculate one; and there are a lot of double-stops in the II and III of the Tournemire (to say nothing of the many, many octaves in *Harold*) that don't really pass. But the music of all three shorter works is tender,

mostly quiet, mostly serene, and he makes the most of that vein, while Peter Petrov shows himself to be much more than an "accompanist of normal standing".

THOMSON

American Violin Sonatas

GOLDMARK, R: *in B minor;* **REINAGLE:** *in F*
Ting-Lan Chen; Nathan Buckner, p
Albany 1840—48 minutes

First impressions deceive. The title "American Violin Sonatas" suggests to me music written in my lifetime, but the *later* work here is from 1900. Rubin Goldmark, nephew of the better-known Karl (he of the *Rustic Wedding Symphony* and much else) was born in New York in 1872 and lived in the US (barring a brief time at the Vienna Conservatory in 1889-91) all his life.

The sonata heard here, his Op. 4, is reminiscent of Brahms in blustery mode. The piano part in particular has many elements that suggest Brahms, right down to the cross-rhythms, while the harmonic turn in the first bars of both outer movements suggests rather Dvorak. (There's more than a little of that modal seventh degree in here.) But the 'Air' (II) is a thing of unusual beauty, simple and straightforward and predominantly calm.

The sonata by Alexander Reinagle is a different sort of fish. Reinagle was not born in the US, but in Europe, and established himself in Edinburgh before moving to Philadelphia in 1786. This sonata is one of four published there, but while the other three are for solo keyboard, this one originally had some sort of melodic part. We don't know even for what instrument this part was written, let alone what notes are in it; as represented here, the melodic line is assumed to be for violin, and the part was composed from scratch, on the assumption that it was primarily "accompanimental", like the violin parts of Muzio Clementi's sonatas. It appears to be a perfectly plausible (and charming) addition.

The fine performers, by the way, are both professors at the University of Nebraska-Kearney. Would that more schools had such dedicated artists on the roster.

THOMSON

Ida Haendel: Decca Legacy

Decca 4841688 [6CD] 7 hours

Ida Haendel (1928-2020) was an important part of the music scene in the UK beginning in the 1930s and continuing for decades. She was a sought-after performer, recording artist, and teacher. She had an excellent start in her career with instruction from two of the greatest teachers of the time, Carl Flesch and George Enesco. Haendel's father was prescient and wisely moved his Jewish family from Poland to London in 1939 before the outbreak of WW II.

The first two discs contain recordings made in the 1940s. There are concertos by Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, and Dvorak and Beethoven's Violin Sonata 8 and Schubert's Violin Sonatina 3. The rest are short pieces that today are usually performed as encores, and this is the bulk of the material.

My impressions are that in 1940 she was fast and nimble but not always precise, which could be because she was only 12 years old. Her technique matured rapidly, and soon she was playing on a par with the leading virtuosos. Her last recordings from this period were made in 1947. Her next recordings for Decca were made in 1996. A few recordings from the 1980s also appear in this collection, but these were either not released or were put out on other labels. The Sibelius Violin Concerto recorded with the Israel Philharmonic led by Zubin Mehta in 1982 is just not as good as her recording with the Bournemouth Symphony led by Paavo Berglund in the mid-1970s.

The jewel in this set is the disc she recorded with Vladimir Ashkenazy in 1996 (Nov/Dec 2000): Szymanowski's *Myths*, Enesco's great Violin Sonata 3, and Bartok's Rhapsody 1 and *Romanian Folk Dances*. Sparks fly as the two musicians obviously enjoy playing together. Most remarkable is Ashkenazy's pianism. The piano parts are completely transformed in his hands. He did not approach the music as a mere accompanist. I felt like I was hearing the piano in these works for the first time. His range of colors is breathtaking. No other pianist plays these scores like he does. This disc alone is worth the cost of acquiring this set.

In later years Haendel played a Stradivarius built in 1699.

MAGIL

Bach & Beyond 3

BACH: *Solo Violin Sonatas 2+3;* **BERIO:** *Sequenza VIII;* **HARBISON:** *For Violin Alone*
Jennifer Koh—Cedille 199 [2CD] 86 minutes

This is Jennifer Koh's third and, I suspect, last installment in her Bach & Beyond series of solo violin pieces(May/June 2013, Sept/Oct 2015). This release contains the remaining two

solo works by Bach with two newer works. Luciano Berio (1925-2003) wrote his *Sequenza VIII* in 1976 as part of a series of works for different solo instruments. It is built on the notes A and B, which function as a sort of Chaconne bass in tribute to Bach's great work. It is a harsh, grating piece that is more interesting to read about in the booklet than to listen to.

John Harbison (1938) wrote *For Violin Alone* for Koh in 2014, not 2019, as the booklet states. Its seven brief movements are mostly dancelike. Harbison's harmonies are often a bit spiky, but his themes are lyrical, unlike Berio's. There are some pretty moments here, but nothing memorable or that I'd care to return to. As for her Bach, once again Koh shows that she is not a penetrating or individual interpreter of the master. Her playing is always bland, never letting the listener feel how monumental and even radical this music really is.

MAGIL

Corelli's Band

Augusta McKay Lodge, v
Naxos 574239—65 minutes

I first heard Augusta McKay Lodge when I reviewed her "Beyond Bach and Vivaldi" disc (Nov/Dec 2018). That was music for solo violin, but here Lodge has a continuo section: Doug Balliett, violone; Ezra Seltzer, cello; Adam Cockerham, theorbo and guitar; and Elliot Figg, harpsichord. They change the instrumentation for the different pieces, so there is a pleasant variety of sounds. The effects are often wonderful, like the opening Adagio of Corelli's Op. 5:3 Violin Sonata, which evokes a warm spring breeze blowing in the window. Lodge and her group have an excellent feel for textures abetted by the very full, clear recorded sound courtesy Samurai Hotel Recording Studio in New York (John Belushi still has fans). The varied continuo eliminates the problem of the monotonous sound of the solo violin that bothered me in her earlier disc. Only Bach, Paganini, and Ysaye could write for solo violin in such ways that I am captivated for the entire program.

Aside from the lovely sonata by Corelli (1653-1713), there are three violin sonatas by Giovanni Mossi (1680-1742), two published in 1716 and one in 1733, and two of unknown date by Giovanni Stefano Carbonelli (1694-1773). Their music is as enjoyable as Corelli's and quite imaginative, but Corelli's influence is strong in them.

Lodge plays a violin in baroque setup made by Jason Viseltear in 2014.

MAGIL

Between the Clouds

Wieniawski, Kreisler, Godowsky, Paganini, Vitali, Britten—Charlie Siem, v; Itamar Golan, p
Signum 652—71 minutes

This is something unexpected. Charlie Siem is a young man who has garnered a certain fame as a male model (of the Armani and Hugo Boss kind, not the JC Penney catalog kind) alongside his renown as a violinist, and naturally I was prepared for a modicum of overselling on one or both sides of the ledger. In truth, there are very few young soloists of either sex nowadays who aren't astonishingly photogenic, and Siem doesn't strike me as any more so than most. His playing is another matter.

At his best—which is most of the time—Siem is amazing: his intonation (especially) is impeccable, his bowing not far behind. The performances here of some of the Kreisler pieces ('Tambourin chinois' in particular), of the Wieniawski polonaises and 'Legende', and of the Sarasate 'Introduction et Tarantelle' rival any I've heard. It's the clarity of the double-stopping and the security of the bowing that get you; there seems no possibility of error.

And yet, elsewhere things seem a little off. The Elgar 'Chanson de Nuit' and 'Chanson de Matin' are immaculate and pretty, but no more than that; I hear little of the sort of caress most English violinists (Siem has an English mother and a Norwegian father) apply to Elgar as a matter of course, and the result is a bit wan. And Kreisler's 'Liebesfreud' is simply inexplicable. Siem can play double-stops flawlessly with an inimitable legato—the evidence is right here, elsewhere on the disc—but here he affects a high, almost throwaway spiccato that all but obliterates the pitches and makes nonsense of the line. Golan (a masterly accompanist, formerly partner to Vengerov among others) follows his cue with a thumping accompaniment that is far from the grace that both of them might have brought to the piece.

The much-studied, not so often played Vitali Chaconne gets an outing, as well as the Cantabile, ostensibly the only work that Niccolo Paganini actually wrote originally for violin and piano. At the end is a sort of curiosity: 'The Sally Gardens', an English folk song arranged by Britten and then rearranged by Siem. It's an

odd, short encore, given all the flash that has come before it.

THOMSON

Transatlantic

Callum Smart, v; Richard Uttley, p
Orchid 100149—75 minutes

The young British violinist Callum Smart has assembled a program of music from both sides of the pond. From England there is Elgar's Violin Sonata, Kate Whitley's Three Pieces, and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Romance. From the States, there is Amy Beach's Romance, John Adams's *Road Movies*, and Smart's own lovely arrangement of 'Amazing Grace' for solo violin.

Smart is a very fine violinist, but I find his temperament too reserved to hold my attention. Daniel Hope and Simon Mulligan make a profoundly different and very memorable impression in the Elgar, for example (July/Aug 2001). Smart's violin was made ca 1730-35 by the Cremonese master Carlo Bergonzi.

MAGIL

El Cant de la Sibilla

Musicaround Ensemble/ Vera Marenco
Dynamic 7875—65 minutes

This anthology includes a wide variety of medieval sacred music, primarily monophonic, though the performers add extensive drones and ad hoc polyphony. The most extensive work is the liturgical drama, *Ordo Prophetarum*, a litany of prophecies concerning Christ, but the dance-like improvisations seem out of place for such a serious sacred work. The Catalan version of the Sibyl's prophecy has had previous recordings (Nov/Dec 1999: 270, Mar/Apr 2000: 241, Nov/Dec 2017: 233) and the version on this new release has a comparable interpretation. It is beautifully sung by Eugenia Amisano, with a slight folk-like quality, with added choral or polyphonic refrains and instrumental drones, ornamentations, and percussion. Amisano is also the lead singer for Cantiga 422, 'Madre de Deus, ora', which also adds a full chorus on the refrains in polyphony.

Two selections have similar beginnings: 'Audi tellus, audi magni maris limbus' and 'Audi pontus, audi tellus'. The first is an abecedarius about the Last Judgement from the 11th Century with 24 stanzas, each beginning with the letters of the alphabet in sequence with a final "Alpha et Omega" added (only the first five stanzas, A to E, are sung on this recording). The verses are sung like chant by a men's ensemble but with added polyphony for the refrain. Only four of the opening stanzas (A, B, D, E) were recorded by Gerard Le Vot with a hurdy gurdy accompaniment (Studio 2602) and I prefer his interpretation as a solo lament for mankind. The second is a later adaptation of the opening stanza of the longer song as a verse for the responsory, *Libera me*, from the Office for the Dead found in the Huelgas codex. It is normally recorded as a distinct song (Nov/Dec 2002: 240, July/Aug 2010: 236, Sept/Oct 2015: 205), and on this new release it is sung like a gentle lullaby with a plucked accompaniment rather than a call to the Apocalypse.

The final track is the sequence, *Dies Irae*, sung by the men as chant, except for a brief concluding passage of added polyphony. This curious recording also includes three medieval motets, real examples of polyphony. While the 'Benedicamus Domino' from the Huelgas Codex is sung by women at the end of the *Ordo Prophetarum*, the other two are performed by instruments. Texts and translations.

BREWER

Carmina Predulcia

Schedel Songbook
Ensemble Almara—Naxos 551440—37 minutes

In this short program the Ensemble Almara presents music from the *Schedel Liederbuch*, named for its compiler Hartmann Schedel (1440-1515). The Nuremberg physician better known for his *Weltchronik* of 1493 also compiled a book of contemporary music between 1460 and 1467. It includes songs such as Dufay's famous 'Se la Face ay Palle', performed here by solo voice and instruments. Much of the program, though, consists of German polyphonic songs of unknown authorship. They are imaginatively performed here by an ensemble of voice (Elisabeth Pawelke) and various wind, percussion, and string instruments. Notes are in English but there are no texts.

LOEWEN

Buxtehude and Copenhagen

Jakob Bloch Jespersen, b; Concerto Copenhagen/ Lars Ulrik Mortensen, org, hpsi
Dacapo 6.220651—67 minutes

Lars Ulrik Mortensen's aim is to show off the musical riches of Baltic culture in the 16th Century. I like the way he mixes works by well-

known composers—Buxtehude, Weckmann, Förster, and Bruhns—with ones by less-familiar ones like Johann Erben, Johann Meder, and Andreas Kirchhoff. Of them only Förster and Erben had studied in Italy; but others, like Matthias Weckmann, had studied with teachers (Schütz) who had spent their formative years in Italy. Yet all of them contributed to the dissemination of Italian style: the agitated rhythms of *stile concitato*; the textural variety of concerto structures; the evocative use of dissonance; and fioritura in solo voices and instruments.

The opening cantata, 'Ich Bin die Auferstehung und das Leben' by Buxtehude, requires Jespersen to sing the same difficult scale-like passages played by cornets (Gawain Glenton and Josue Melendez) and dulcian (Jane Gower). The alternation between voice and instruments reaches extremes of virtuosity in the closing 'Alleluia'. The same requirements obtain in the vocal concerto 'Gott Hilf Mir', a setting of verses 1-4 and 13-18 of Psalm 69 by Johan Valentin Meder (1649-1719). Meder was a bass singer and organist who held posts in a variety of cities in the Baltic region before finally settling in Danzig (Gdansk) as Kapellmeister of St Mary's church. 'Gott Hilf Mir' opens with a short string sonata, like other German arias of the period. Sudden transitions to *stile concitato* passagework and suspensions adds considerably to the excitement. The range appears to get a little low for Jespersen.

Weckmann's Toccata in A minor is rhapsodic, suggesting his familiarity perhaps with the toccatas of Frescobaldi. His vocal concerto 'Kommet Her zu Mir' is a lovely multi-sectional work, marked by rapid passagework covering much of Jespersen's range, and serene lyrical singing with suspensions in the strings.

Three works are recorded here for the first time: Kirchhoff's Six-Part Sonata; and Förster's motet 'Jesu Dulcis Memoria' and Seven-Part Sonata. Like the other cantatas and concertos on the program, the motet is multi-sectional, with contrasting passages for instruments and voice, slow lyrical sections often leading to effusive fioritura. Jespersen notes that the Seven-Part Sonata is composed in the Venetian style. The work consists of contrasting sections of melodic, dance-like, and virtuosic passagework performed here by cornets, strings, and dulcian. It is a delightful recording, brilliantly executed. Texts and notes are in English.

LOEWEN

16th-Century Songs, Hymns, & Psalms from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

Nora Petrocenko, cantus; Radoslaw Pacholek, a; Maciej Gocman, t; Nerijus Masevicius, b; Ensemble Morgaine—Ayros 5—62 minutes

Waclaw of Szamotuly, Mikolaj Gomolka, Cyprian Bazylik, Krzysztof Klabon. Do these names ring a bell? They were among the most important composers at the time Sigismund II Augustus ruled the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from his capitals in Cracow and Vilnius. This Jagiellonian monarch had been inspired to import Italian art and artists, perhaps at the instigation of his mother, Bona Sforza. The cultural exchange contributed to the flourishing of home-grown Polish talent.

Reviewing recordings of music by Gomolka (Accord 2142; Sept/Oct 2015) and Szamotuly (Raum Klang 3801; Sept/Oct 2019) opened my eyes to the very high quality of vernacular choral music in Renaissance Poland. Their music frames this recording, along with several songs, hymns, and psalms by their contemporaries. The program also includes music by the Hungarian lutenist Balint Bakfark (1526-76) and organ music by Petrus de Drusina (c. 1560-1611).

In the introduction to his *Melodie na Psalterz Polski* (1580), Mikolaj Gomolka states that his music is "not for Italians, but for Poles, for our simple people". They are settings of translations Jan Kochanowski had published the previous year under the patronage of Piotr Myszkowski, the bishop of Cracow. Yet the dedication for Kochanowski's book was written by the Calvinist Andrzej Trzecieski, which suggests that the Polish Psalter and Gomolka's settings had an appeal that crossed the confessional boundary. A similar "trans-confessional" phenomenon obtained in the Netherlands of the 1540s and 50s, which produced the Souterliedekens of Clemens non Papa. Gomolka's tendency toward homophony and repeating rhythms (often beginning with a dactyl) suggests the character of a metrical psalter with polyphonic settings similar to ones published by the French Calvinist Claude Goudimel in the 1550s and 60s.

Performances of Gomolka's psalms (137, 127, 22, 91, and 30) show the full variety of possibilities: voices in four parts, solo voice with accompaniment, and instruments on the vocal parts. In vocal performances, singers alternate verses in Polish and Lithuanian

translations of Kochanowski's Polish published by Saliamonas Mozerka Slavocinskis in 1646. The setting of Psalm 130 by Cyprian Bazylik (c. 1535-1600) is more densely polyphonic, but performing it with solo voices and instruments makes it sound simple and song-like. Giving solo verses to the bass Nerijus Masevicius seems to add "depth" to the psalm text, which begins "Out of the depths I cry unto thee". The Lithuanian translation here is by Steponas Jaugelis-Telega (1653).

The second half of the program includes several dance-like songs. The instrumental performance of Klabon's 'Piesni Kalliopy Slowienskiej' exhibits triple meter in the style of a galliard, complete with hemiolas. The following setting of Psalm 117 by Waclaw Szamotuly is, likewise, energized by its dance-like rhythms, especially in the Alleluias. In my previous review of Szamotuly's psalm settings I noted stylistic similarity to works by Franco-Flemish composers like Clemens non Papa, Willaert, Verdelot, and Gombert. Those similarities persist here in Szamotuly's settings of several psalms. The final song on the program, 'Piesn Wieczorna/Giesmé Vakariné', is particularly beautiful. This is an excellent program—again, eye-opening. Unfortunately, the texts are in Polish and Lithuanian only.

LOEWEN

Madrigals for 3 Sopranos

Monteverdi, Frescobaldi, Carissimi, Draghi, others

Alison Hill, Katy Hill, Lucy Page, s; Christopher Bucknall, hpsi, org; Manuel Minguillon, theorbo

Brilliant 95995—61 minutes

Especially in the north of Italy, 16th- and 17th-Century courts sought to out-do each other in the excellence of their female singing trios. Known as a "concerto delle donne", this type of trio inspired the formation of Galan and is the theme of this program. These are fine performances, with interpretations well matched to the courtly elegance and spirit of the music.

The release's title, "Foolish Heart", comes from the opening piece, Domenico Mazzocchi's 'Folle Cor', where the singer warns the heart that seemingly happy sights will often mask, deceive, and vanish. The three sopranos in Galan are adept at a range of expression, from the fast and spirited (Luigi Rossi's 'Fan Battaglia') to the suave and slow (Monteverdi's 'Ohime Dove Il Mio Ben'). In Giacomo Carissimi's 'Siam Tre Miseri' they weep with bold purpose: theirs is not a quiet tearful resignation, and by turns the accompanying continuo players spur them on and support them.

By far the longest piece here is the 22-minute dramatic cantata *Lo Specchio*, composed by Antonio Draghi (1634-1700) in 1676 to celebrate the birthday of the dowager Empress Eleonora (1630-86), in whose Viennese court Draghi served as Kapellmeister. Quoting from the booklet notes, "This unusual and fascinating piece is so far unpublished in the UK, and this is certainly its first recording." Many fine attributes of the mirror (lo specchio) are applauded and enumerated in ornate language that sometimes made me smile. For instance, whereas "just and happy" (giusti e felici) are straightforward adjectives, the assertion that "correcting everyone, [the mirror] is loved by everyone" (corregge tutti e da tutti amato) strikes me as sarcastic or at least tongue-in-cheek. The final two sections of the cantata identify the dowager Empress by name, honoring her mirror-like virtues on her festive and happy day.

Notes, texts, translations.

C MOORE

For Francesco II D'Este

Vitali, GM Bononcini, G Bononcini, others

Sofia Pezzi, s; Ettore Agati, ct; Modena Barocca/Giovanni Paganelli—Brilliant 96236—53 minutes

This program of music dedicated to Francesco II D'Este (1660-94), Duke of Modena from 1674 until he died, is a testament to the Este family's important legacy across many generations as patrons of music. The family employed musicians, singers, composers, and—of particular significance to us today—copyists. Why significant? Because the copyists expanded the Este collection of music.

Francesco II especially was responsible for the development of the large Este music library. "Systematic documentation of music activity [...] led to the conservation of the performing scores; to the production of copies as required (largely made by local copyists); to the purchase of volumes from other important collections, such as that of [composer] Alessandro Stradella." The library survives today and all but three pieces here (totaling around 7 minutes) are in the Biblioteca Estense in Modena.

The pieces—cantatas and instrumental pieces by six composers—are well chosen, sequenced, and performed by Modena Barocca. One nice feature of the continuo group is that organ and harpsichord are played by two

different people (often in an ensemble one person plays both). This means that the two keyboard instruments can be used at the same time.

Intricate cello passagework animates the 'Ciaccona' by Giuseppe Colombi (1635-94); silky phrases caress in 'Il Nume D'Amore', a duet by Giovanni Bononcini (1670-1747) honoring the God of Love; and 'Coronata D'Applausi' by Giovanni Battista Vitali (1632-92) enumerates Francesco II's glories in a celebratory birthday cantata well performed by soprano Sofia Pezzi accompanied by three violins and continuo.

In *Cleopatra Moribunda* composer Giovanni Maria Bononcini (1642-78, father of Giovanni) portrays a wide range of emotions as he tells the story of the Queen's defiant death. Death is Cleopatra's choice over slavery, and the cantata is performed very effectively by countertenor Ettore Agati, leaping lightly across wide intervals in the aria 'Ma Che Pensi, Fortuna Crudele' and—along with the bass violin—descending in graceful lines as the asp's poison takes effect in 'Oh, Dell'Aspe Che 'l Seno M'Ancide.'

Notes by ensemble co-founder and organist Federico Lanzellotti include detailed summaries of the vocal texts; full texts in Italian.

C MOORE

Nadia Boulanger

American Decca Recordings
Instrumental & Vocal Ensemble
DG 484 1384 [5CD] 206 minutes

These recordings, all directed by the famous teacher, Nadia Boulanger, were originally released on American Decca from 1952 to 1954. The first disc includes Boulanger's second recording (1952) of madrigals by Claudio Monteverdi. The first had been released by EMI in 1937 (reissued in 1988 as EMI 61025 and in 1992 as Pearl 9994), and the tenor, Hugues Cuenod, and bass, Doda Conrad, participated on both recordings. The nine voices on this 1952 collection might not have the purity that is expected of early music singers, but the intonation, balance, and clear diction are evidence of Boulanger's sensitivity to Monteverdi's musical style; and, as a nod to historically informed performance, she even plays a harpsichord rather than the piano heard on the earlier release. A few of the works have instruments doubling the voices, and some have tasteful ensemble elaborations of the continuo, including a few inventive parts for Pierre Jamet on harp.

The musicality of both Monteverdi recordings and Boulager's intelligent selection illustrating the breath of Monteverdi's madrigals (from renaissance polyphony to baroque monody) were a foundation for the later "revival" of Monteverdi by Raymond Leppard, Dennis Stevens, and others beginning in the 1960s.

The second disc is Boulanger's anthology of the renaissance French chanson performed a cappella by eight of the singers from the 1952 Monteverdi recording with one new soprano. As with the Monteverdi recordings, Boulanger's selection supplied a reasonable overview of the genre from the early 16th Century (Josquin des Prez's 'Mille Regretz') to the *musique mesurée à l'antique* from around 1600, with Clement Janequin's 'Chant des oiseaux' as the final track.

The following two discs, recorded in 1953, include excerpts from baroque opera. One is extensive extracts from Marc-Antoine Charpentier's 1694 opera, *Medée*, which was not recorded complete until 1984 (Christie on Harmonia Mundi), and the other selections from six of Rameau's dramatic works. Sometimes Boulanger over-orchestrated Charpentier's music with added woodwinds and brass. In contrast to the Monteverdi recordings, this recording sounds under-rehearsed and with occasional lapses in tuning and ensemble balance, though Paul Derenne is a very effective *haut-contre* (high tenor).

The selections from Rameau's *Dardanus Castor et Pollux*, *Hippolyte et Aricie*, *Les Indes Galantes*, *Les Fetes de Hebe*, and *Acanthe et Cephise* would have been relatively unknown and unheard. In comparison with the Charpentier, the vocalists and instrumentalists sound better rehearsed and balanced, though the dances are a little pedestrian. Paul Derenne sounds less comfortable with the high range of Rameau's *haut-contre* roles, and the continuo realizations sound rather academic. Again, Boulanger's recording preceded later complete recordings of Rameau's operas. For example, *Hippolye et Aricie* has been recorded often since the first complete recording by Anthony Lewis in 1966 (Oiseau Lyre, reissued on Decca Eloquence 4829394, Sept/ Oct 2019).

The last recording in this collection is Brahms: the 1954 performance of the *Neue Liebeslieder*, the Three Quartets (Op. 64), the first of the Four Quartets (Op. 92, 'O Schöne Nacht'), and the first two of the Six Quartets (Op. 112, 'Sehnsucht' and 'Nächtens'). Boulan-

ger had recorded the *Liebeslieder* in 1937-38 with Dinu Lipatti, but for this release she was joined by her student, Jean Françaix and four of the singers often found on the other recordings in this box: Flore Wend (s), Nancy Waugh (mz), Hugues Cuenod (t), and Doda Conrad (b), who sounds a bit muffled here. Sometimes the quartet is overshadowed by the two pianos. The interpretations lack the elan and clarity of more recent recordings, such as the DG with Edith Mathis, Brigitte Fassbaender, Peter Schreier, and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (pianos: Karl Engel and Wolfgang Sawallish).

This last disc would not be the main reasons to acquire this collection. Rather, it documents the broad musical curiosity of one of the most influential teachers of the 20th Century and her convictions that music both old and new should be heard.

BREWER

Courts of Thessaloniki, Nikosia, Istanbul

Ex Silentio/ Dimitris Kountouras
Carpe Diem 16323—59:45

This is a collection of early music from different cultural regions in the eastern Mediterranean. Thessaloniki is represented with a *canzo* by the *trobador* Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (d.1207), 'No m'agrad iverns ni pascors' (I don't like winter or spring), who was briefly attached to the court of King Boniface of the newly founded Latin Empire of Constantinople. From the Balkan region is a Sephardic song in Ladino, 'El Rey de Francia'. The largest group of selections is from the Ottoman Empire. These include instrumental melodies by Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723) (see also Savall's recording of this repertoire, May/June 2010: 197) and Nikolaki Kemenceci (19th Century), and a song, 'Murabba' (Preserved Fruit) by Ali Ufki (1610-75). From Nikosia are three rondeaux and a virelai found in a manuscript used by French musicians at the Cypriot court of the Lusignan kings (similar works were recorded by the Huelgas Ensemble, Sept/Oct 1994: 248).

The performers allow themselves some interpretive latitude to explore unusual sonorities and chromatic inflections, especially in the Ottoman examples, and to add instrumental accompaniments, though I did not appreciate the addition of percussion to the rondeau, 'Se brief retour', from Cyprus. Texts and translations.

BREWER

The Mad Lover

Theotime Langlois de Swarte, v; Thomas Dunford, lute—Harmonia Mundi 902305—80:25

The title for this anthology was inspired by two grounds, based on different ostinatos, that John Eccles wrote as incidental music for a play about a melancholy man. In addition to Eccles, this collection of sonatas, suites, grounds, and divisions includes a single prelude for unaccompanied violin by Henry Purcell, the 'Sonata Sesta' by Daniel Purcell, two sonatas by Henry Eccles, and a number of selections by both the elder Nicola Matteis (c.1650-c.1714), an Italian immigrant to England, and his son, also named Nicola (late 1670s-1737). Many of these selections are also ostinato variations, such as the elder Matteis's 'Diverse bizzarie sopra la vecchia saraband o pur Ciaccona' (Various whimsies on the old saraband or, if you like, Ciaccona) or Henry Eccles's 'New Division on the ground bass of John come and kiss me'.

The sonatas by Daniel Purcell and Henry Eccles are very much in the style of Arcangelo Corelli's Italian contemporaries, while the elder Matteis's suite consists of dances and character pieces (such as the 'Aria Burlesca' and the 'Giga al Genio Turchesco'). The two unaccompanied violin fantasias by the young Matteis are found only in a German manuscript, though on this new recording the second movement of the unaccompanied Fantasia in C minor by the younger Matteis is missing. The interpretation of the first movement by De Swarte is significantly more expressive than the faster recording by Augusta McKay Lodge (Nov/Dec 2018: 183), who does include the following Molto Adagio.

Langlois de Swarte in the booklet described the ability of the 1665 violin by Jacob Stainer he played "to imitate the sound of the (singing or speaking) human voice". He varies his bow strokes to evoke the many different passions expressed by these compositions. De Swarte's sensitive interpretations are imaginatively supported by Thomas Dunford's lute continuo. While I have not heard the release by Theatrum Affectuum (Aeolus 10226, 2015), both the earlier recordings of music by Matteis and his contemporaries (July/Aug 1995 & July/Aug 1998) as well other more recent recordings (Amandine Beyer, Alpha 497, 2009, and Alice Julien-Laferriere (Jan/Feb 2021) are very good, but none match the sensitivity of De Swarte. I hope he will soon accept the challenge to perform music by the 17th

Century Central-European violinists, Schmelzer, Biber, and their contemporaries.

BREWER

La Peste

17th-Century Sonatas for a Time of Pestilence
Schmelzer, Castello, M. Rossi, S. Rossi, others
Les Barocudas—ATMA 2809—66 minutes

No, this is *not* a jump-on-the-pandemic-bandwagon CD with a clever name and little else. Far from it. The concept is very well thought out and the playing excellent. In 17th-Century Europe the Plague (La Peste) was devastating, a number of the composers represented here died of it, and all seven composers were "directly affected by the plague". Les Barocudas chose their program theme in September 2019, a few months before the global spread of the latest plague.

In the booklet each of the nine pieces is given a caption and there's a brief commentary about the caption's connection to the theme. This captioning unifies the CD into a single program about typical aspects of a plagued environment. Furthermore, the theme matches the music itself: "the music of the 17th Century, with its strong contrasts and clear phrases, perfectly conveys the turmoil of the era."

The composers were all violinists, and Marie Nadeau-Tremblay's exceptional violin playing both honors their memory and captivates today's listeners. She evokes the many moods of the program with unlimited expressive gestures at her command, from elegant filigree decoration in 'Sonata Seconda' by Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (1620-80) to subtle stretching of pitch in the chromatic lines of 'Sonata La Biancuccia' by Giovanni Antonio Pandolfi Mealli (c 1620-69).

"The Joyous Revelers" is the caption for 'Sonata Quarta' by Giovanni Battista Fontana, a light-hearted depiction of people whose attitude is to make merry because there was no way to out-run the coming disease.

"Premonition" is the caption for 'Toccata Settima' by Michelangelo Rossi, the only harpsichord piece in the program (Rossi was most famous in his lifetime as a violinist), where sour chains of chromatic thirds denote anxiety and unbalance as 76-cent semitones alternate with 117-cent semitones. "The composer intentionally exploits the tension created by these 'disturbing keys' [in unequal meantone temperament]".

"The Plague Doctor" is the caption for 'Sonata Seconda' by Dario Castello (c 1590-1631), a piece where highly decorated melodic lines emphasize melancholy. The atmosphere is heightened by the yearning vocal quality of the violin playing.

C MOORE

Queen Christina's Swedish & Italian Courts

Carissimi, Marazzoli, Mazzocchi, others
Armonia Celeste—Centaur 3797—71 minutes

The tide of celebrations marking the 1655 arrival in Rome of Queen Christina (1626-89), following her abdication as Queen of Sweden in 1654 and her conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1652, was one of the most opulent spectacles in 17th-Century Rome. Her courts were filled with music, and her renown as a cultural leader was unparalleled.

This program brings together vocal music (both secular and sacred) and instrumental music associated with Christina's court. The performances vary in quality. For instance, vocal gestures intertwine effectively in 'Mio Core, Mio Bene' by Giovanni Marciani (c 1605-63) performed by soprano, mezzo, lute, and harp; and there's a nice lilting spirit in 'La Chorista' for two violins, played by guest ensemble Pro Musica Rara with harp and theorbo from Armonia Celeste. In 'Memento Homo, Anima Peccatrice A Penitenza!', a cantata imploring mortals to repent and denounce worldly vanities (while citing numerous examples of people who have disregarded this call from God), there's a good range of expression.

Elsewhere some of the problems may stem from decisions made in the recording, balancing, and editing processes rather than by the interpreters. In several pieces the instruments in Armonia Celeste are too soft and the performances sound quite weak and lacking in conviction as a result. In 'Exulta Jubila' by Luigi Rossi (c 1597-1653) some solo vocal passages are labored as if the singers lack breath—but more likely it's because they need more support from instruments, especially as the text is about shouts of praise and trumpeters. In 'Quo Tam Laetus Progrederis' by Giacomo Carissimi (1605-74) the text has a lot of drama—a saintly warrior happily chooses to risk death as a "valiant soldier of Christ"—that does not come through in the performances. I experimented with several different volume levels, and although high volume did make the instruments sound a bit better, it then distorted the voices. Both pieces with the three play-

ers of Pro Musica Rara (two violins and baroque cello) are very good, so perhaps other pieces would have benefitted from their participation.

Although I liked Armonia Celeste's program of 17th-Century Italian music called *Udite, Amanti* (Centaur 3376, S/O 2015: 208), I did comment on similar weaknesses in the recorded sound and balance.

The release title here is *The Rebel Queen*. Notes, texts, translations.

C MOORE

German Baroque Bassoons & Bombards

Julie Roset, s; Paulin Bundgen, ct; Syntagma Amici; Vox Luminis/ Lionel Meunier
Ricercar 420—67 minutes

The Ricercar label has long been known for exposing listeners to the wide variety of music played on early instruments. This program emphasizes the sound of low double reed instruments, some of which were constructed explicitly for this recording based on works of art and on illustrations in Michael Praetorius's *Syntagma Musicum* of 1619.

Most of the music on the recording (perhaps all) comes from 17th-Century Germany. Several of the dances and sonatas are by well-known composers—Schütz, Schein, Scheidt, Vierdanck, Rosenmüller, and Theile. Then, in addition to anonymous works, there are pieces by less-known figures like Philipp Friedrich Böddecker (1615-83), Daniel Speer (1636-1707), Philipp Friedrich Buchner (1614-69), and Johann Rudolf Ahle (1625-73). The program emphasizes music for bassoons and bombards, played either solo or in consort. Several works, though, combine the sounds of low winds with either strings or recorders. The full effect of low-consort playing is on display in the two dances from Scheidt's *Ludi Musici* and the anonymous Sonata II for 2 alto bombards, 2 bass bombards, and quart bass bombard. The sound is rich and, well, reedy—enthralling especially when playing chordal passages.

Elsewhere the listener is exposed to how the instrument blends with strings. The most remarkable example is Speer's Sonata 2 for viola da spalla and bassoon. The viola da spalla, also known as the viola di fagotto, is a nearly cello-sized instrument that one played across the body, braced against the bow arm. The alternative name for the instrument is spot on—it has a timbre quite like a bassoon, only softer.

The technical capabilities of these instruments, and the mastery of the musicians playing them, is most readily grasped in the solo sonatas by Rosenmüller and Schütz's motet 'Invenerunt me Custodes Civitatis'. The motet is chromatic, which would require all sorts of inventive fingers to tune with the organ. The results are wonderful, though, not merely because Roset and Bündgen sing so beautifully, but because the tenor and bass bassoons (Elsa Frank, Stephane Tamby, and Jeremie Papasergio) blend so well.

Rosenmüller's Sonata is even more challenging for wind players, having to blend now with recorder, violin, and bass viol in a work dominated by rising and descending chromatic figures. Theile's Bassoon Sonata makes for quite a work-out for Papasergio, with its quick divisions and leaps between ranges.

The last piece on the program is Johann Rudolf Ahle's Christmas cantata *Fürchtet Euch Nicht*. Here solo voices, chorus, and ensemble of alto, tenors, and bass bassoons (representing shepherds) mostly alternate, but then come together for a glorious 'Amen' chorus. Unfortunately, the recording does not include texts. But this is an impressive program.

LOEWEN

Il Transilvano

from Italy and Hungary
Prisma Ensemble—Ambronay 312—58 minutes

This is a charming recording of a little-known repertory that demonstrates the influence of Italians and Italian music in 17th-Century Hungary. The name *Il Transilvano* is from a treatise by Girolamo Diruta (Venice, 1593) dedicated to the Prince of Transylvania, Sigismund Bathory. The bulk of the program, though, comes from a 17th Century collection known as the Codex Caioni, consisting of Italian and German music with Hungarian and Romanian folk music.

The 'Sonata Sopra La Monica' by Biagio Marini (1594-1663) gives Franciska Hajdu (violin) and Elisabeth Champollion (recorder) the opportunity to show off their technical skills in this variation of the well-known song 'La Monica'. Works of Hungarian origin are interlaced with Italian pieces, but they dominate in the second half. Giovanni Picchi's *Intavolatura di Bali d'Arpicordo* (Venice 1618-20) is the source for three Hungarian Dances—'Ballo Ongaro', 'Paduana ditta la Ongara', and 'Gagliarda Ditta

la Ongara.' They consist of simple melodies of Hungarian origin arranged by the Prisma Ensemble over simple harmonic foundation.

The two vocal works are a revelation. For 'Angoli Borbala,' sung by Hajdu, the ensemble created a rustic ambience with bird songs in the background. The song was collected by Zoltan Kodaly. This a beautiful, though desperately sad, song about a young pregnant girl who suffers and dies through her mother's maltreatment. The 7/8 meter gives the music an exotic character. The song begins in a slow, meditative tempo and then takes on a fast tempo. Here, with recorder divisions and drone-like playing in the violin, the song conveys a whirling, hypnotic effect. Enlish texts.

LOEWEN

Violin Sonatas

Kinga Ujszaszi; Tom Foster, hpsi
First Hand 89—57 minutes

This is one exciting release of show-stopping performances of an essentially "unknown" repertory of pieces for solo violin. Kinga Ujszaszi's violin playing is wonderful—creative, expressive, and moody (to match the moodiness inherent in these works). Tom Foster's harpsichord accompaniments are sensitive; and he gets extra marks for having created his parts essentially from scratch. It is titled *Cabinet of Wonders*, the first of a projected series of recordings of music from the famous *Schrank II* (Cabinet 2) representing the music holdings of the Saxon *Hofkapelle* in Dresden. Many of its manuscripts were compiled by the concert master Johann Georg Pisendel (1687-1755), and, as Michael Talbot notes, most of the music he amassed has not been edited. The program includes six works—a partita and five solo sonatas—by composers Pisendel had probably encountered in his travels. Pisendel was a violin virtuoso, a student of Vivaldi, and so it seems he might have been searching for challenging repertory to play.

The Partita in E-flat by Johann Joseph Vilsmayr (1663-1722) is recorded here for the first time. He was a student of Biber's and is known for only one publication—a set of Six Partitas (Salzburg, 1715). Following perhaps the inspiration of his teacher, he calls for scordatura violin. Adding to the complications are the wild divisions and multi-stopped strings, particularly in the Passagalia. Ujszaszi's level of skill really shines through here, though there's more to come. Vilsmayr was known for indulging in the *style phantasticus*, as did his teacher; Ujszaszi brings this out with exciting glissandos in the final movement of the sonata.

There are two sonatas here by Gasparo Visconti (1683-1731), in C minor and F, both recorded for the first time. Visconti had been a student of Corelli and published a set of six sonatas in London (1702-6). The manuscript for the C-minor Sonata has a complete set of written-out ornaments, which are not so much virtuosic as "quirky" (Talbot's word). The second movement includes some exciting chromaticism. I agree with Talbot's assessment of the lyrical quality of these sonatas. The first movement of the F major is particularly so, even quite simple to begin with. But the simple melody becomes the basis for a series of variations, including one with double stops evoking the sound of hunting horns.

The program continues with three sonatas by Johann Friedrich Schreivogel (fl 1707-49). Pisendel might have met him in Venice in 1716-7, and while there appears to have copied three concertos and two or three sonatas. The sonatas in E and D minor are from Dresden; the E-flat Sonata comes from the *Tartini Collection* at Berkeley University. The E-flat Sonata is recorded here for the first time. These are brilliant works, full of excitement testing the measure of the violinist's skills. The wild leaps and string crossings in the closing Allegro of the Sonata in E minor are breathtaking. Kinga Ujszaszi is a talented violinist. She has full command of the technique required, but also the musical sensitivity to pull off the lyrical movements. Lovely playing.

LOEWEN

Voices in the Wilderness

Early American Choral
Elizabeth Bates, s; Clifton Massey a; Nils Neubert; t; Seven Hrycelak b
Bright Shiny Things 141—51 minutes

This is music from the early days of the Ephrata Cloister, a celibate community founded by a Lutheran pastor from Germany in Lancaster County, PA. Pietism was the brand of Lutheranism practiced in the community's earliest days. The 18th Century hymns on this program were composed by Sisters of the Cloister, which places them among the first female composers in American history. The texts are in *echt* German, not the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect that would evolve later on. The first motet sequence ('Hidden Flowers') shows some Old World polyphony at work. The oth-

ers are homophonic SATB hymns crafted for worship. The solo quartet is excellent, especially soprano Elizabeth Bates, who carries the melodic responsibility of the enterprise with a cool, clear voice that sounds as pleasant in the stratosphere as it does at less treacherous altitudes. Because of its unvarying content, this offering would be of interest mainly to devotees of American cultural and religious history, especially the music of the colonial church. Texts and translations.

GREENFIELD

Echoes of Peace

SCHUTZ: *Verleih uns Frieden Genadlich;* **JOSQUIN:** *Tu Solus Qui Facit Mirabila;* **SCHNITTKE:** *Gospodi Isusje, Christe;* **ST MOKRANJAC:** *Tebje Pojem;* **RACHMANINOFF:** *Bogoroditse Devo;* **FJELLSTRO:** *Ave Maria;* **BRUCKNER:** *Ave Maria; Locus Iste;* **GJEILO:** *Ubi Caritas; Northern Lights;* **RHEINBERGER:** *Abendlied;* **PROY:** *Frieden;* **ROUECHE:** *Lux Aeterna;* **GOLDMANN:** *Von Guten Machten;* **RUTTER:** *The Lord is My Shepherd;* **NYSTEDT:** *Peace I Leave With You;* **arr PEDERSEN:** *Ned I Vester Soli Glader*

Andreas Mitscke; org; Bernd Bruckner, sax; Denkmalchor Leipzig/ Philipp Goldmann

Rondeau 6193—62 minutes

Leipzig's Denkmal Choir looks to be an ensemble of about 45 singers. They sound quite fine in this varied program that takes them from England to Russia across 600 years of choral repertoire. This was recorded in the cavernous hall of the Völkerschlachtdenkmal, Leipzig's monument to the 1813 Battle of the Nations. (That, you might recall, is where Prussia, Russia, Sweden, and Austria combined to bring Napoleon a defeat that left him spiraling downward toward his exile to Elba several months later.) The dome these folks are singing under reaches 299 feet into the air, creating an echo that can last for several seconds. Needless to say, a grand sound is achieved by the choir. (The Russian selections are especially overwhelming.) I have to wonder, though, whether all that reverberation doesn't homogenize things to the point that the pieces start sounding the same. A soundstage that makes for awesome Rachmaninoff, after all, might not confer equal blessings on Josquin, Schutz, or Rheinberger. Still, the program is titled *Echoes of Peace* so perhaps the resonance is put to a purpose outside the hall and beyond the sound of a single choir.

GREENFIELD

We Are

MAGLIONE: *The Wall Breaks Asunder;* **RUNESTAD:** *Sayareh;* **RUDOI:** *Last Kind Words;* **TORMIS:** *Teomehe-laul;* **CARNAHAN:** *Armistice 1918;* **COLEMAN:** *The Trumpet Sounds Within-a My Soul;* **arr ROGERS:** *Glory;* **KALLMAN & SPERRY:** *Pye Aleman;* **DiORIO:** *Let Us Plant Our Gardens Now;* **BARNUM:** *Death of the Ball Turret Gunner;* **ESENVALDS:** *We Are the Memory;* **RIST:** *Invictus;* **MOORE:** *Will the Circle Be Unbroken;* **JOHNSON:** *We Are*

Miami University Men's Glee Club/ Jeremy D Jones—Albany 1838—66 minutes

David Reynolds sang the praises of the Miami University (in Ohio) Men's Glee Club (J/F 2017), and the fellows come up aces here as well. This is contemporary fare that, like the earlier anthology, traverses a variety of styles, techniques, and poetic themes. There is a social conscience at work in these songs, and the singing bears witness to the messages of faith, equality, peace, and freedom that are alive in the music.

'Glory' from the 2014 film *Selma* jumps out of the speakers with prayerful exuberance and rhythmic abandon. A more somber tone is reached as peasants yearn for freedom in 'Song of the Serfs' (Veljo Tormis). Mid-Eastern energy dances at the core of Jake Runestad's 'Sayareh,' and a gentle spirit of inter-connectedness radiates from Craig Hella Johnson's 'We are', which gives the program its name. There are no dead spots, only the best of artistic intentions. Notes, texts, and commendable engineering augment the musical offerings.

GREENFIELD

Elegy

HOLTEN: *Nordisk Suite; Romische Elegy;* **PREVIN:** *Vocalise;* **RACHMANINOFF:** *Vocalise;* **FAURE:** *Elegie;* **NEES:** *Jardin des Olives;* **JANACEK:** *Elegie;* **HOWELLS:** *Take Him, Earth, For Cherishing;* **ELGAR:** *Go Song of Mine*

Eva Goudie Falckenbach, Hilde Venken, Sarah Van Mol, s; Ivan Goossens, t; Philippe Souvagie, bar; Luc Tooten, vc; Stephane de May, p; Flemish Radio Choir/ Bo Holten—Danacord 731—64 min

Elegies are sad affairs by definition, so it was fitting that I listened to this on the final day of 2020 while pondering the endless barrage of crap our country endured last year. But elegies can also offer consolation, so I'll keep playing this in 2021 and see how it goes. If I don't cheer up it won't be the music's fault, for this is a lovely program.

Let's start with the cellist, who plays every

note with rich tone and deep feeling. He performs a gorgeous Rachmaninoff 'Vocalise', then returns for a Fauré 'Elegie' that proves to be as moving with piano accompaniment as it can be with orchestra. I had never heard Andre Previn's 'Vocalise' for soprano, cello, and piano and am glad to have made its acquaintance. Previn composed it for himself, Yo-Yo Ma, and Sylvia McNair, and it is worthy of all three of them. The choir sounds especially beautiful in quiet moments, such as a second version of Rachmaninoff's 'Vocalise' entrusted to them and soprano Sarah Van Mol, who sings it handsomely. (The other soloists are good, too.)

I also admire the delicate excerpt from the conductor's own *Nordisk Suite* that opens the program. The singers grow a bit shrill when they cross The Channel into British repertoire, but sound fine the rest of the way. When I pass through despondency and feel ready to be consoled, these folks might just be able to help. Notes and translations are included.

GREENFIELD

Te Deum

Handel, Berlioz, Dvorak, Bruckner, Bizet, Braunfels, Naumann—Assorted orchestras & choirs
Hanssler 20071 [4CD] 225 minutes

Whoever wrote the *Te Deum* in Christianity's 4th Century, he created a prayer that would attract composers like moths to a flame. Verdi, MA Charpentier, Taverner, Lassus, Palestrina, Victoria, Tallis, Purcell, Praetorius, JC Bach, Lully, FJ Haydn, Michael Haydn, Mozart, Stanford, Parry, Sullivan, Vaughan Williams, Ireland, Beach, Kodaly, Penderecki, Part, Rorem, Rutter, and their brethren included in this collection are just some of the composers who have set *To Thee, O Lord* to music. Organists, too, have appropriated the traditional chant line of the prayer to create splendid works for the King of Instruments. 1700 years in the liturgy and the hits keep coming! The folks at Hanssler have dug into their vault to compile a Te Deum-Fest for us, so let us unpack the box to see what they've come up with. Before we do, though, may I say how spectacularly silly it is that with 7 different versions of the prayer in the offing—6 in Latin and 1 (Handel) in English—Hanssler did not see fit to include the text in either language.

Disc 1 **BRAUNFELS:** Leonie Rysanek, s; Helmut Melchert, t; Hermann Werner, org; Gurzenich Choir, Cologne Radio/ Gunter Wand

Walter Braunfels, you might recall, saw his music kicked to the curb by both the Nazis who found it "too Jewish" (whatever that meant), and the mid-century avant-gardists who had no use for a contemporary working happily in the shadow of Bruckner, Mahler, and Strauss. Gunter Wand was a champion of the Braunfels *oeuvre*, including the 1921 *Te Deum* written for soprano and tenor soloists, organ, and full orchestra. It is a rouser of a work that runs an emotional gauntlet from somber introspection to ecstasy to an apocalyptic vision that really raises the roof. It was performed nearly 100 times in the composer's day, though it has fallen by the wayside in ours. This recording was made in 1952 at a concert gala celebrating the composer's 70th birthday. I met it for the first time in S/O 2007 as Profil 6002, where it was paired with Hindemith's *Concert Music for Strings & Brass*, another work (and composer) Wand had championed after the war. I was mightily impressed with the *Te Deum* and with Wand's advocacy for it. But I must raise the flag of caution today as I did then about the tinny and distant 68-year-old monophonic sound captured onstage *in media res*. In May/June 2008 I reviewed Manfred Honeck's take on the Braunfels *Te Deum* with the Swedish Radio, another excellent concert performance, but in far better sound. So I can't identify Braunfels as the headliner here, though I'd certainly recommend getting to know the work.

Disc 2 **BERLIOZ:** Stuart Neill, t; Hans-Dieter, org; Dresden Choirs; Staatskapelle Dresden/ Colin Davis

We're not sure what was on Berlioz's mind when he commissioned three choirs, a brass-heavy orchestra, and a thunderous organ to take the stage for his *Te Deum*. Does it help to note that the work was conceived amid the revolutionary fervor of the late 1840s and quickly became a showpiece in the grand exhibition halls erected as the Industrial Revolution was coming of age in Europe? (It was dedicated to England's Prince Albert, one of the planners of London's Great Exhibition of 1851 and a visionary who played no small role in the modernization of his wife Victoria's island nation.) In 1855 a performance of the *Te Deum* was given at Paris's Palais de l'Industrie by a cast of some 1250 musicians. My goodness, what that must have sounded like!

This all-Dresden affair recorded in concert 22 years ago came to ARG as Profil 6039 (M/A 2007). Mr Vroon dismissed it as an also-ran, inferior in

every way to the John Nelson account he had praised to the hilt earlier (M/A 2002). I, too, admire Maestro Nelson's handiwork, especially the way he brings out vivid orchestral colors (woodwinds especially) that are muted in Dresden. He also encourages the different choirs to assert their individuality. Nelson was accorded fine organ playing by the estimable Marie Claire-Alain, and had Roberto Alagna as his tenor. What's not to like in all that? But dismiss Sir Colin outright? I think not. I love the crashes on the organ that sound right out of *Phantom of the Opera.* His tenor is superb, the Dresden choirs are as good as any, and the Staatskapelle sounds like, well, the Staatskapelle. The in-concert sound can be distant and a bit fuzzy in spots, but the changing moods of the work are vividly drawn and the messages come through loud and clear. When that magical "speravimus in te, in te Domine speravi" passage invokes the believer's trust in God, the performers sound totally on board. Davis omits a pair of short instrumental interludes, which detracts not a whit from the drama. (Nelson includes them.) Sir Colin gave us some mighty fine Berlioz in his day, and I would place this Dresden *Te Deum* in his win column without a second thought.

Disc 3 **BRUCKNER:** Pamela Coburn, Ingeborg Danz, Christian Elsner, Franz-Josef Selig; Gachinger Kantorei; Bach-Collegium Stuttgart/ Helmuth Rilling

DVORAK: Michaela Kaune, s; Peter Mikulas, b; Gachinger Kantorei; Bach-Collegium Stuttgart/ Helmuth Rilling

NAUMANN: Dresden Opera Chorus; Staatskapelle Dresden/ Herbert Blomstedt

The spiritual foundations of some of these *Te Deums* may be shaky, but not Bruckner's. He was a man of deep faith who took every syllable of the prayer to heart. Majesty, humility, tenderness, trepidation, and power are interwoven in this music in an inspiring and compelling way. You've probably heard it told that as Bruckner pondered standing before God in life eternal, he said, "I will present to Him the score of my *Te Deum* and hope He will judge me mercifully." (If that didn't work, we're all in big trouble!) I have Jochum and Barenboim on the top rung of available performances, and Rilling is right up there with them. The Stuttgart choir and soloists are all you could want and are caught in magnificent sound by the engineers. Paul Althouse singled this out (J/A 2010) as one of those recordings that "has the power to change your life". Enough said.

Dvorak's *Te Deum* was commissioned in 1892 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World. Premiered in New York, the piece has brash and brassy moments but boasts enough lyrical writing to remind us that Dvorak's melodic muse never took a day off. Soprano Michaela Kaune and bass Peter Mikulas sing those melodies beautifully. Though not as profound as Bruckner and Verdi in their settings of the text, the Dvorak *Te Deum* is worth getting to know and this one will do splendidly.

Johann Gottlieb Naumann (1741-1801) was a Leipzig composer whose *Te Deum* is a bright, snappy 13-minute affair with orchestra, organ, and choir coming together at full throttle. Maestro Blomstedt had a grand time with it back in 1980, and so will you. In the end, it's Disc 3 that turns any indecision about acquiring this set into a slam dunk in favor.

Disc 4 **HANDEL:** Dorothee Fries, Cacile Fuhs, s; Matthias Rexroth, ct; Thomas Cooley, t; Raimund Nolte, b; Collegium Vocale; Hanover Baroque Orchestra/ Ulrich Stotzel

BIZET: Angela Maria Blasi, s; Christian Elsner, t; Dietrich Henschel, bar; Munich Motet Choir & Symphony/ Hans Rudolf Zobeley

You wouldn't classify either of these as sacred works. The *Dettingen Te Deum* was composed to honor George II of England after a minor victory over the French in the War of Austrian Succession. With gleaming trumpets establishing a martial air, the 1843 work—one of 5 settings of the *Te Deum* Handel composed-is more an extended Coronation Anthem than a prayer. It's a grand piece, with three fine bass arias and a bunch of rhythms, cadences, and melodic bits that tip their caps toward *Messiah*, which had been premiered in Dublin two years before. John Barker characterized Maestro Stotzl's account as vigorous, colorful, and robustly recorded (J/A 2002). He also admired Herr Nolte, the bass, and he'll get no argument from me. The other soloists are borderline, especially the countertenor, who sounds like he has marbles in his mouth. Choral diction isn't exemplary either, with the darkly covered German vowels sounding unsuited to the English text. So while this *Dettingen* is likeable, lively and enjoyable, you might head to the Brits for more idiomatic choral singing and better soloists. (Stephen Layton and Simon Preston are discussed favorably in S/O 2008. I can vouch for Layton.)

19-year-old Georges Bizet wrote his *Te Deum* to earn a place for himself on the Paris

scene, but the work failed to make much of an impression. I confess, though, that I enjoyed every minute of his 20-minute, 5-movement setting of the prayer. There's some attractive writing for the soprano (Angela Maria Blasi is gorgeous), and a 'Fiat misericordia tua' fugue that sounds like pretty feisty counterpoint to me. Originally, this Bizet was paired with Gounod's *Saint Cecilia Mass* . In his review (J/F 1997) Don Vroon was enthusiastic about the Mass but said little about the *Te Deum* other than to note the composer's lack of religious sensibility. Fair enough. But while short on metaphysics, young Bizet's handiwork does give a happy ending to a valuable and enjoyable enterprise.

GREENFIELD

Heaven Full of Stars

ESENVALDS: *Stars; O Salutaris Hostia;* **DOVE:** *Seek Him that Maketh the 7 Stars;* **GOWERS:** *Viri Galilaei;* **STOPFORD:** *Ave Maria;* **MCDOWELL:** *Aurea luce;* **PANUFINIK:** *Deus est Caritas;* **TODD:** *Christ is the Morning Star;* **RUTTER:** *For the Beauty of the Earth;* **MEALOR:** *Ave Maris Stella;* **WEIR:** *Like to the Falling of a Star;* **WHITACRE:** *Lux Arumque;* **JACKSON:** *Creator of the Stars of Night;* **CHILCOTT:** *Salisbury Motets*

Martin Ford, org; Muriel Daniels, vc; Sarah Mistry, bell; Vasari Singers/ Jeremy Backhouse

Naxos 574179—82 minutes

This "star-based" program of sacred pieces by some of the most popular of living composers (Patrick Gowers died in 2014) is issued in celebration of the Vasari Singers' 40th anniversary. My favorites are the Esenvalds, Dove, Gowers, McDowell, Mealor, Whitacre, and Jackson pieces; but the whole program is mesmerizing and the performances are exquisite—perfect intonation, blend, expression, musicality, and sheer beauty of choral sound. Most are a cappella, but the ones with accompaniment are beautifully served by organist Martin Ford. Detailed notes on the music by one of the altos, Julia Ridout, with texts. I must get more of their recordings. May they flourish for another 40 years!

DELCAMP

Vasta, Reine de Bordelie

Bawdy 18th Century songs

Mondonville, Rameau, Monsigny, Benda, Campra, Royer—Almazis/ Iakovos Pappas

Maguelone 358409—67 minutes

I enjoy bawdy songs as well as the next person, so when I was sent this program of 18th Century French bawdy songs I was delighted. "The bawdy or ribald songs of the 18th Century demonstrate a liberty that may surprise the modern listener as much as he has, until now, been exposed to a totally biased image of that period's music. They exist to astound and charm as, at the time, the libertine spirit was synonymous with art, wit, and pleasure", says the notes.

Unfortunately, the booklet for this release is a bit of a mess. We are given the full text of *Vesta* with a frank and unexpurgated English translation, but the tracks on the disc (listed in the back) don't match up to what we're hearing. I got lost ten minutes into it and never figured out where I was. All the actors, singers, and musicians are very good and sound like they're having a great time. I won't write the names of the characters here (they are very naughty). It may be that listeners who are more fluent in French or schooled in 18th Century bawdiness will enjoy this more than I did. It's like being at a party where someone tells a joke and you're the only one who doesn't get the punch-line because you're not privy to the inside story. You smile and laugh along—and feel very stupid at your ignorance.

If depictions of comically lewd or frank sexuality offend you, move along—this isn't for you. If you're OK with humor about sexuality and noisy bodily functions, try this out. But you'd better be able to speak French if you want to be one of the In Crowd.

Funny performances, good sound, confusing booklet.

REYNOLDS

English Songs a la Française

Tyler Duncan, bar; Erika Switzer, p

Bridge 9537—62 minutes

These 25 songs by French composers—Hahn, Milhaud, Poulenc, Saint-Saens, Massenet, Roussel, Ravel, and Gounod—are settings of English texts, most of them composed while they lived in England in times of war. Texts are by Stevenson, Tagore, Shakespeare, Longfellow, Burns, and others.

Duncan and Switzer, husband and wife, have created an engaging and often charming program.

The idea for the album came from French baritone François Le Roux, who introduced them to 'Cherry Tree Farm' by Saint-Saens.

I don't know of any other recording dedicated solely to English texts set by French

composers, so this alone makes it a valuable addition to the catalog. This seems to be the only recording of Massenet's fine setting of Tennyson's 'Come to the Garden, Maud'. Ravel's delightful setting of 'Ye Banks and Braes' by Burns came as a surprise to me. I know of only one other recording of some of the 5 Gounod songs here (Hyperion 66801, N/D 1994) and find no other recording of the 7 settings of Tagore texts by Milhaud.

Duncan and Switzer perform the program beautifully and tenderly. His warm and lustrous voice is ideally suited to these songs. Her sure-fingered facility and sensibility is fully in evidence.

Le Roux wrote the excellent the liner notes about the circumstances of the compositions. Most of the texts are included.

R MOORE

English Songs 1

Holst, Clarke, Gurney, Bridge
James Gilchrist, t; Nathan Williamson, p
Somm 621—64 minutes

Somm has long been a proponent of British songs. This release, the first of a three-disc sampling of 100 Years of British Songs, presents songs by four composers—Gustav Holst, Rebecca Clarke, Ivor Gurney, and Frank Bridge—who were born in the late 1800s and lived through the horrors of the First World War and the extraordinary social, cultural, and political upheaval that followed.

Many of the earliest compositional efforts of these four were in song, an interest that continued in their lives. Holst became best known for his instrumental works, particularly *The Planets*. 'Venus' from that work has its origin in his early song 'A Vigil of Pentecost'. It and 'The Ballad of Hunting Knowe' are recorded here for the first time. Also included are 5 of his *12 Humbert Wolfe Songs*.

Rebecca Clarke never got the recognition she deserved and endured such patronizing neglect as a female composer that in her mid-50s she gave up composing and sought satisfaction or fulfillment in life as a governess. Of her 90 or so known works, 53 are songs and another dozen are choral works. Her intense setting of Housman's 'Eight O'Clock', one of four fine songs included here, tells the grim story of a prisoner awaiting hanging.

Declared "unteachable" by Stanford, Ivor Gurney struggled with mental health problems, which may account in part for what makes his songs so affecting. Of the four songs included here 'Down by the Sally Gardens' may be his best known, but 'Sleep' is for me one of the greatest songs of the 20th Century.

Like Holst, Frank Bridge is best known for his instrumental works and for being Benjamin Britten's teacher. His *Four Songs* heard here are powerful in the way they evoke what Wilfred Owen called "the pity of war, the pity war distilled" especially in the final song of the program, 'Journey's End', which poses the questions of a nervous lad left at boarding school for the first time. His feelings may reflect the anxiety of a generation ravaged by war with his question: "What will they give me when journey's done?"

James Gilchrist has been a devoted advocate of British songs in many previous releases. Here he partners with Nathan Williamson in a collection of significant but less known songs. His silvery voice and lucid diction are hallmarks of his art as an exponent of song. With beguiling affect and deeply expressive delivery, he gives these songs all I as a listener could desire. Williamson, who also wrote the program notes, is just as raptly attentive to the subtlety, tenderness, and anguish of these songs.

The recorded sound is warm and intimate without sounding too close. The generous spacing between groups of songs gives time to get up and stop the CD player to allow the weight of each group to sink in. I look forward to the later volumes.

Notes and texts.

R MOORE

Dichterliebe

BEETHOVEN: *An Die Ferne Geliebte;* **MENDELSSOHN:** *Songs;* **SCHUMANN:** *Dichterliebe*
Patrick Grahl, t; Daniel Heide, p
Avi 8553021—72 minutes

Patrick Grahl is a light lyric tenor still in his early 30s. I have heard him as the excellent evangelist in last year's recording of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* recorded in St Thomas Church, Leipzig. William Gatens described his performance as "eloquent but not histrionic" (N/D 2020). "Dichterliebe" (Poet's Love) is the title of this program of songs by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Schumann. It appears to be Grahl's first solo album, and it is terrific.

His program notes give his thoughts about singing these songs, but he never explains why he chose them. The texts all tell of lovers separated by distance or failure of a relationship.

Beethoven's *An Die Ferne Geliebte* tells of a budding romance of one who is separated geographically from "the distant beloved". Schumann's 1840 cycle *Dichterliebe* concludes the program with its tale of a romance ending unhappily. In between are 10 songs of Mendelssohn, which seem to continue where Beethoven left off and correspond generally to finding solace in nature at a time of separation and eagerness to be reunited.

Grahl's singing is marvelous. He sounds a bit like a young Peter Schreier (with whom he studied) in his clear and knowing delivery of the text but with a warmer and sweeter tone. His careful delivery of each song shows the keen and well-formed sensibility of an already well developed lieder singer. The sound of his voice is exceedingly lovely. If you go to his website you can see a full performance of *Dichterliebe* by him and Heide. As Heide demonstrated in accompanying Andre Schuen in Schumann (M/A 2017) and Schubert (M/A 2018) he is a superb collaborator.

Notes in German and English. Texts in German.

R MOORE

En Sourdine—French Songs

Laurent Naouri, bar; Frederic Loiseau, g
Alpha 628—42 minutes

Perhaps with the intent of expanding the audience for classical music Alpha has been releasing some strange items. Recently I reviewed their program of recomposed (or maybe it's truer to say decomposed) Schubert songs and pieces (J/F 2021). In this issue you will find my review of an unusual program of excerpts from Bach cantatas with a jazzy arrangement as an unlisted encore.

Here we have a bizarre destruction of favorite songs by Fauré, Poulenc, and Debussy. It is horrible.

You take an outstanding operatic baritone and have him sing in hushed tones like he's in a box somewhere with a microphone on his lips and distorted arrangements and improvisations of the piano accompaniment by a jazz guitarist, and it sounds like a cheap lounge performance. It is just plain ludicrous to hear the final song, Fauré's 'En Priere', performed with the melody line whistled.

Notes attempt to justify all this. Text and translations.

R MOORE

Unexpected Songs

Nordheim, Baden, Hovland, Karlsen
Daniel Saether, ct; instruments
LAWO 1204

This is "the first of several releases in Daniel Saether's effort to develop a repertoire for countertenor where period instruments are used in contemporary music".

The obvious question is "Why?"

Flute, recorder, theorbo, gamba—and a lot more—are pleasant enough to listen to. The countertenor has a pretty nice voice, but one grows tired of the same vocal range in every piece (well, he does become a baritone at the end of the mass by Karlsen—rather briefly). The mass has organ accompaniment, as does the 22-minute Karlsen anthem, *My Soul Thirsts for God*. All the composers are Norwegians, and two of them are still alive. Most of the music was written in this century. None of it is ugly or unbearable, but much of it sounds like recitative, and much of it is repetitive.

Obviously, this is a special interest album. If you have an interest in a countertenor singing "new music", try it.

VROON

My Favourites

Joan Sutherland, s; Richard Bonynge
Decca 4826448—81 minutes

This collection of recordings by the legendary Dame Joan Sutherland issued by Decca in their Eloquence series was chosen by the soprano herself and includes her characteristically modest notes on the program. Moffatt Oxenbould, in recalling his longtime friendship and professional association with the singer, writes about her "integrity and honesty" and willingness to be a "team player". If there were critics who felt she lacked artistic temperament, no one could say she lacked character, and her graciousness of spirit permeates the album.

Some selections are obvious choices, such as the 'Mira, O Norma' duet from Bellini's *Norma*, taken from the complete 1964 recording with a ravishing Marilyn Horne as Adalgisa. The quality of the remastering illuminates a particularly remarkable aspect of their remarkable collaboration: the way each singer retains her individual vocal character while creating a perfect blend. The most technically demanding excerpts—such as the Queen of the Night's Act I aria, the *Sonnambula* finale, and scenes from Verdi's *Attila* and Massenet's

Esclarmonde—are distinguished by her dedicated musicianship. So many singers produce their tone in a way that keeps them just slightly behind the beat. But Sutherland's attacks are scrupulously in rhythm, and this decisiveness reflects a respect for the printed notes, no doubt encouraged by her husband, Richard Bonynge, who leads every number on the album.

Other high points are the coloratura chestnut 'Il Bacio' (Arditi) and her humorous hodgepodge accent for Noel Coward's 'Operette' from *Countess Mitzi*, which begins, "My father was Hungarian, My mother was from Spain". She pays homage to the non-secular with Gounod's 'O Divine Redeemer' (apparently sung in English), and there's the haunting Andante from Gliere's *Concerto for Coloratura and Orchestra* ("such a relief", she quips, "not to have to remember the words"). Rather than the coloratura warhorse 'Lo, Here the Gentle Lark' (one of my own guilty pleasures), she programmed another Benedict song, 'The Gypsy and the Bird'. French *melodie* is represented by a lovely reading of Hahn's 'Si mes vers avaient des ailes'. And she can make the words count when she wants to, as in a dramatic excerpt from Leoni's *verismo* opera *L'Oracolo*.

No texts are included, but the booklet is rich in photos, including many color costume sketches. Also Dame Joan's Christmas Pudding recipe (timed well for the release of the recording), which "was handed down to me by my mother".

ALTMAN

Serenata Latina

Rolando Villazon, t; Xavier de Maistre, hp
DG 4838238—58 minutes

Mexican tenor Rolando Villazon emerged as an operatic tenor in 2000. With a timbre and vocal weight similar to Placido Domingo his career was on an excellent trajectory until 2007 when he underwent surgery to remove a congenital cyst on one of his vocal cords.

After rehabilitation, he returned to the opera stage and later emerged with a new identity as a Mozart tenor. Here we find him very comfortably singing songs from Latin America in arrangements with harp by his collaborator for this album, Xavier de Maistre.

The program includes 4 pieces each by Carlos Guastavino and Alberto Ginastera, 9 songs or folk songs by others, and 4 pieces for solo harp. Villazon's vibrant singing is too operatic too much of the time; it is fitting for Julian Aguirre's 'Caminito', but he is most effective when he sings softly as in Yvette Souviron's 'Al Banco Solitario' or 'La Rosa y el Sauce' by Gaustavino, which work well with the gentler tone of the concert harp. I wish he didn't tend to lunge at notes so much. Xavier de Maistre is superb. His skillful rapid plucking in Zequinha de Abreu's 'Tico-Tico no Tuba' alone makes this worth hearing.

What is especially valuable about this release is its attention to the cultural mix of European, African, and indigenous elements in Latin American music.

Notes, texts, translations.

R MOORE

Friends & Rivals

Lawrence Brownlee, Michael Spyres, Xabier Anduaga, t; Tara Erraught, mz; Virtuosi Italiani/ Corrado Rovaris—Erato 526947—79 minutes

While the audio catalog is overloaded with tenor collections, this teaming of *two* star bel canto tenors is a welcome change of pace. Erato's well-conceived "Amici e Rivali" is a tribute to Rossini's unparalleled tenor duets, with Lawrence Brownlee and Michael Spyres stand-ins for Giovanni David and Andrea Nozzari, opera stars of their day who were paired in the premieres of no less than five of the works Rossini introduced in Naples.

As Hugo Shirley relates in his notes, David was "renowned for his brilliant top register and florid style", while Nozzari, after an illness at the start of the 19th Century, developed into a more "baritonal tenor, with no less agility". Here Brownlee is the sweeter-voiced of the two, with a more seamless connection to the upper range, while Spyres boasts a more virile richness in his middle and lower registers. In fact, despite his undeniable ease up to and beyond high C (in evidence here, and in his stirring performance in the title role of Mozart's *Mitridate*, N/D 2017), Spyres could have pursued a career as a lyric baritone—which, I understand, is how he started out. He is a delectable Figaro in the Act I 'All'idea di quel metallo' from *Barber of Seville*, interpolating a solid low F-sharp that many a bass might envy. It is a joyous performance, complemented by Brownlee's elegant and exuberant Almaviva; rarely is the duet sung by a pair so evenly matched in facility and style.

The rest of the album is devoted to the Naples operas, though *Maometto II* is represented by excerpts from the revision Rossini

composed for the Paris Opera as *La Siege de Corinthe*. The two take on the unjustly imprisoned Earl of Leicester (Spyres) and the duplicitous Duke of Norfolk (Brownlee) in *Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra*, Rossini's first opera for Naples, composed in 1816, just months after the Rome premiere of *Barber*. They play a game of "Anything you can sing, I can sing sweeter" in the rivalrous pairing of Ricciardo (Brownlee) and Agorante (Spyres) from *Ricciardo e Zoraide*. If this weren't enough, there's a *third* tenor on hand: Xabier Anduaga joins Brownlee for the more genial duet of Ricciardo and Ernesto from that same opera, and then brings intensity to Iago, opposite Spyres as Otello. In the trio for Otello, Roderigo, and Desdemona ('Ah vieni, nel tuo sangue'), Brownlee is Roderigo and Desdemona is sung by Tara Erraught, a refined musician with a lovely, burnished mezzo-soprano. The same three singers take part in a fabulous coloratura showdown at the climax of 'Qual pena in me gia desta' from *Donna del Lago*. Erraught makes a welcome return as Palmira in an extended scene from *Siege of Corinth*.

The versatile Anduaga is also called to duty for what would be the climax of any Rossini tenor-fest, the celebrated trio 'In quale aspetto imbelle' from *Armida*, an opera that boasts six tenor roles. Although there is always a risk of sameness with this repertoire (the Naples operas were all composed under the conventions of *opera seria*, unlike the comic gems Rossini composed for Venice, Rome, and Milan), the gifted ensemble, with their various strengths, makes this a lively program. Corrado Rovaris is the fully engaged conductor, leading the splendid Virtuosi Italiani. The booklet includes texts and translations.

ALTMAN

In Memory
Vivian Liff

Vivian Liff, a longtime ARG critic, died November 4 2020 on the Isle of Man, where he lived most of his long life. He was born in 1926 in London. He contributed reviews to many journals besides ARG. He was the co-author of *The Primadonna*, an advisor to EMI on their historical vocal reissues, president of the London Recorded Vocal Art Society, and a recognized expert on historic singers and their recordings.

The Newest Music I

FARO

Error Correction: In my review of the Pacifica Quartet's latest release (Cedille 196) in November/December 2020, I erroneously listed the group's current violist as Guy Ben-Ziony; it is in fact Mark Holloway.

KARPMAN: *Brass Ceiling;* **STEINER:** *Sergeant York Overture;* **GIACCHINO:** *Medal of Honor Suite;* **COHAN:** *Over There;* **MOSHIER:** *A Portrait of Honor;* **DEBEASI:** *American Sniper Suite;* **BEAL:** *The Long Road Home Suite;* **GOLDSMITH/BERNSTEIN:** *The Great WW II Medley;* **BERLIN:** *God Bless America; KEY: Star-Spangled Banner;* **ISHAM:** *Army Strong;* **WILLIAMS:** *1941 March; Jedi Steps and Finale*
US Army Field Band & Soldiers' Chorus/ Col. Jim R Keene—Navona 6297 [CD+BluRay] 70 minutes

This is a strange time for anyone to be an American, no matter where you stand. This year has only further complicated my feelings on the subject, so I wasn't sure what I'd think about this album, titled "Soundtrack of the American Soldier". These high-quality, committed performances from the US Army Field Band and Soldiers' Chorus compelled me to set aside those feelings. The opening track, 'Brass Ceiling' by Laura Karpman, is a favorite, as is John Williams's cheeky march from the film "1941". The suite from the video game "Medal of Honor" is a treat as well—film composer Michael Giacchino's talent for writing exciting, emotional music is apparent even in this early career entry. I'm sure that for many listeners the military-themed nature of this album will be the deciding factor in its purchase; either way, the polished and dedicated performances by this excellent ensemble are worth hearing.

HAMBURGER: *Chamber Symphonies 1+2*
Ensemble Caprice/ Matthias Maute; Metropolitan Orchestra of Montreal/ Vincent de Kort
Leaf 235—33 minutes

Last issue I reviewed Jaap Nico Hamburger's piano concerto, his first release (Leaf 238). I found it to be a vibrant, if scattered work—and I did not like that the runtime was only 22 minutes. These two chamber symphonies are better crafted, with a more consistent early modernist style. The first chamber symphony, subtitled 'Remember to Forget', is inspired by the life of Ligeti, particularly his escape via train to

Hamburg after the 1956 Hungarian revolution. It is full of energy and drama, though perhaps more concerned with the escape itself than the deliverance it promised. The second chamber symphony is subtitled 'Children's War Diaries', inspired by five diaries kept by teenage victims of the Holocaust. III and IV are touching and elegiac, while retaining an avant-garde shell. The outer movements are more harrowing, with anxious plucked ostinatos in the strings, militaristic snare rolls in the percussion, and sudden outbursts of cacophony. I'm not sure if the piece manages to strike a balance between shock and peace, but it certainly has a wealth of interesting ideas. Once again I'm left with an album that feels too short and music that would be even more compelling on a larger canvas.

O'REGAN: *A Letter of Rights;*
FENNESSY: *Triptych*
Chamber Choir Ireland, Irish Chamber Orchestra/ Paul Hillier—Naxos 574287—68 minutes

In the year 1215, the Magna Carta was first drawn up—a groundbreaking challenge to the supremacy of the English monarchy and over time one of the most potent symbols of liberty. In 2015 composer Tarik O'Regan and librettist Alice Goodman were commissioned to write *A Letter of Rights*, a cantata for choir and orchestra to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the legendary document. Goodman—perhaps best known for her librettos for John Adams's early operas—strikes a reverent tone in her text, the weight of the hundreds of years of history borne by this document not lost on her. But the libretto is also immediate and visceral: it depicts the arduous process of preparing sheepskin to make parchment, comparing it to the blood spilt in the name of liberty. O'Regan's music rises to the challenges set by this marvelous libretto. It is also reverential and meditative; that is, until the statement of rights is reached. "Liber homo" sets off a swell of energetic elation and determination, as if to represent the throngs of people waking up free at last. All the music is essentially tonal but interesting. The other piece on the album—David Fennessy's *Triptych*—is completely different, a radical three-part exploration of human consciousness. I 'Letter to Michael' sets a 1909 letter of German psychiatric patient Emma Hauck to her husband to come and collect her. The words, "Sweetheart come" repeated endlessly, were so densely packed together on the letter that the page was nearly black with ink. This visual is reproduced in music with dense, dissonant polyphony of overlapping wailing figures—both haunting and entrancing. In II, 'Remember Not', this overlapping technique is used with a cadence from a Lassus psalm to convey growth of identity in an almost perpetual present. III, 'Hashima Refrain', embodies a sense of decay, setting text found on a wall of Japan's abandoned Hashima Island to stuttering, fading music. Two utterly different works, but both deserving of your attention. This has to be one of my favorite choral albums in quite some time.

KUAN: *Memory of Mountain;*
HOFFMAN: *Nautilus Symmetry;*
Violin Concerto 2
Cho-Liang Lin; Taipei Chinese Orchestra/ Li-Pin Cheng—Naxos 574180—77 minutes

The modern Chinese orchestra combines the music and instruments of the traditional Jiangnan sizhu folk ensemble with the structure, size, and scope of a Western orchestra. The four sections of the orchestra—winds, plucked strings, bowed strings, and percussion—yield a markedly different sort of sound than Western orchestras, with emphasis on delicate strings, reedy winds, and a rich variety of percussion. Though originally formalized to improve traditional Chinese music, Chinese orchestras also perform substantial works influenced by Western music—such as the three works on this disc. Nai-Chung Kuan's *Memory of Mountain* was originally written as a banhu concerto, but is rewritten here as a violin concerto. Each movement conveys a scene from the Alishan mountains of Taiwan; the outer movements depict the ancient mysticism and harvest celebrations of the native tribes, and the lively middle movement illustrates the more modern image of a train chugging thru the mountains. This is a wonderful, dazzling showpiece, with plenty of technical challenges for the soloist. Joel Hoffman, a Canadian-American composer who regularly teaches in Beijing, has a different approach in his two works for Chinese orchestra. Kuan shows the restraint and assuredness of a composer long familiar with the medium; Hoffman revels in the sounds at his disposal, bringing special attention to colors largely unfamiliar to Western audiences. His second violin concerto, *Snow in Spring*, is an appealing work, setting sweet, lyrical melodies in the violin against formidable, recurring chords in the winds. *Nautilus Symmetry* is more mod-

ernist—you can tell that he is playing with colors he hasn't worked with before. Like a nautilus shell, it is composed with symmetrical structures. Stormy, restless outer sections encompass a quiet center with a beautiful traditional Chinese song. It is a fascinating piece. If you are unfamiliar with Chinese orchestras, this album would be an exciting place to start. I found it eye-opening.

TAYLOR: *Symphonies 4+5; Romanza*
English Symphony; BBC Wales/ Kenneth Woods
Nimbus 6406—64 minutes

Over the course of the last century, as the symphony declined in Europe as the utmost measure of compositional prowess, it thrived in Britain. Today, the United Kingdom is possibly the symphony center of the world, by quality and quantity. Matthew Taylor's symphonies (fresh and compelling) have convinced me that he belongs in the upper echelon of contemporary British symphonists. Though tonal, his music is often quite dissonant. He writes with a keen ear for pacing, structure, and form, in control whether the music is highly concentrated or expansive. His working-out of material is intelligent and natural, always in support of the argument at hand. He builds from foundations laid by Nielsen and his teacher Robert Simpson; this is especially true in the ebullient Fourth Symphony, written in memory of John McCabe, also a noted symphonist. It is a true force of nature, radiating with celebratory spirit. I is dominated by resplendent polyphony, recapitulated in the Haydnesque romp of III. At the symphony's center is an emotional slow movement, a melancholy but calm elegy. The Fifth Symphony could not be more different. Though it is written for a smaller Beethovenian orchestra, it is bursting with intensity. Taylor wrote I to be a sonata allegro movement in the urgent vein of Beethoven's Fifth. It is explosive and ferocious, capped with a terrifying timpani cadenza. Two shorter, more delicate intermezzos follow, limiting the instruments to flute and strings—often two or even one to a part. The symphony ends with an expansive Brucknerian adagio, slowly and patiently working out its material right up to its roaring climax. A solo quartet of cellos return to the warm, delicate textures of the intermezzos—before it is snuffed out by a minor chord in the brass, sealing the tragic nature of the symphony. Also included with the symphonies is a 'Romanza' arranged for larger forces from his Sixth String Quartet. It is beautiful and lyrical, with a pleasing richness in the harmony and texture. But this is just a bonus. The real prizes here are the two symphonic masterpieces. Recording, performances, and notes are all excellent. This an incredible release, not to be missed.

KRAGGERUD: *Equinox*
Simon Callow, narr; Henning Kraggerud, v; Arctic Chamber Philharmonic/ Kraggerud
Simax 1376 [2CD]—144 minutes

Equinox, subtitled "24 Keys to a World Before It Slips Away", is an ambitious odyssey with music by Henning Kraggerud and words by Jostein Gaarder. It is a massive violin concerto in four parts—or four interconnected concertos—spliced with sections of accompanying narration. Or perhaps it is a massive narrated story spliced with sections of an accompanying violin concerto. Gaarder's narrative is detailed and dense—really, it is a narrated novella. It follows a man travelling the world on a westward longitudinal path, visiting various locales and learning about the metaphysics of life and our place in the world in parable-like situations. The "world slipping away" in the subtitle refers not only to the fragility of our planet, but also the twilight of the narrator's life. I'm uneasy with certain aspects of it—it smarts of Eurocentric tourism, and its attempts at profundity don't always hit the mark—but it is overall interesting and satisfying. Now for the concerto(s). Each movement is in a different key—hence, the 24 keys of the subtitle. Though Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* is a clear inspiration, much of the music is romantic in style—sometimes archaically so. I hear a lot of Kreisler in this—fireworks in the solo part and rich melodies with an old-world flavor. There are sections that get a bit more dissonant and frenetic, but they never approach a modernist sound. I enjoyed the music, but it lacks substance and I'm not convinced it holds up as a large-scale work. It feels like an extended showpiece—utterly incongruent with Gaarder's metaphysical narrative. Individually, these are fine works; put together, though, they detract from one another. In the end, the whole is less than the sum of its parts.

FERRERO: *4 Modern Dances; Intermezzo Notturno; Parody; Landscape with Figure; My Blues*
Pomeriggi Musicali/ Carlo Boccadoro
Klanglogo 1418—57 minutes

This is an album of music for chamber orches-

tra by Italian composer Lorenzo Ferrero. Like many other contemporaries, he has charted a path in composition guided by rock, blues, and jazz. Unlike the wild energy of some rock-influenced music, his tends to be unfussy and laid-back. For instance, his *Four Modern Dances* are more quiet and contemplative than the rock, electronica, and disco music they are inspired by. His music often strikes me as minimalist in the sense that he builds a formal foundation from harmonic patterns, from which variation can grow. 'My Blues', a melancholy mood piece with meandering harmony, has such a fruitful progression that Ferrero reuses it as the foundation for 'Intermezzo Notturno' from his opera *Mare Nostro*, this time more uplifting in a depiction of daybreak in the violin. *Landscape with Figure* uses a dark, plodding pattern as a foundation, from which a melody slowly emerges, as if stretching to find a path to sunlight—before retreating back into the darkness. 'Parodia' is the best piece on the album, as well as the clearest example of Ferrero's methods. He applies the Renaissance concept of parody to Depeche Mode's song 'Behind the Wheel', using its harmonic progressions and a Nymanesque rhythmic pulse as a foundation for free variation. Sometimes the melody is fully expressed; sometimes it dissolves into fragments peppered all over the ensemble. When these fragments reform into a stronger return of the melody, the effect is electric. This is a great album—I am glad to hear rock-minded orchestral music that is reflective rather than theatrical for a change.

MORAN: *Points of Departure; Angels of Silence; Fragments of a Lost Baroque Opera; Star Charts & Travel Plan I; Yahrzeit*
Daniel Bubeck, ct; Zachary James, b; Maria Rusu, va; University of Delaware Symphony/ James Allen Anderson—Neuma 123—54 minutes

In the notes for this album, Robert Moran lists influences as wide-ranging as Haydn and Glass, Wagner and Cage. His music does not strike me as eccentric, though—rather, he follows a musical impulse regardless of style or approach. The most apparent constants are that the music is approachable and deeply felt. Like Ferrero above, Moran has written a piece influenced by modern dance, *Points of Departure*. His is certainly louder and more energetic, but it is also far more optimistic than any dance-piece I've heard. The elegiac *Angels of Silence* for viola and strings follows and could not be more different. It is 20 minutes of slow, atmospheric music, with the solo viola drifting above slow, indeterminate harmonic changes in the strings. This is a piece to be heard with the Feldman part of your brain—get in tune with the glacial pacing and let the endless possibilities of the music's path wash over you. The short but shimmering 'Star Charts and Travel Plan I' has elements of indeterminacy, too—though it is also written out. It shares the spirit of Cage's *Atlas Eclipticalis*, if not the practice. *Fragments of a Lost Baroque Opera* for countertenor and orchestra uses standard baroque forms as a vehicle for experimentation. In III, for instance, the fast Aria II uses rhythms more common in bebop than in baroque opera. 'Yahrzeit' ends the album with a setting of a poem of remembrance for basso profundo and orchestra. This is an incredibly moving work—no frills, just beautiful lyricism and vocal writing. The soloists and the University of Delaware Symphony give spirited performances.

EVANS: *The Adventures of Florian*
Janacek Philharmonic/ Stanislav Vavrinek
Navona 6301 [2CD] 104 minutes

This is a big-hearted orchestral fairy tale of warmth and imagination. Michael J Evans adapted the Henry Beston tale of the same name, putting the *Twelfth Night*-like gender intrigue into a context that affirms trans and gay people. Though there are thrills and chills across Florian's adventures, this is firmly a family-friendly affair. Following in the footsteps of Prokofieff in *Peter and the Wolf*, Evans assigns instruments to characters, such as the bass trombone to the mysterious Enchanter and the English horn to the conniving witch. A shrieking quote of Bernstein's 'I Feel Pretty' in the clarinets is the witch's cruel daughter. The main character is represented by the oboe when he is known as Isabella; he is then represented by the soprano saxophone when he transitions and is known as Florian. There is a full written narrative to accompany the tale, as well as gorgeous illustrations fit for a storybook by Apolline Etienne (unfortunately, both are only available on the Navona website). The music is approachable and engaging—though the piece feels a bit too long and the pacing sags in the middle (the slow exposition for the Enchanter's castle is twice as long as it should be). Even so, this is a delightful work that could easily be adapted with narration for a family-oriented concert.

Dimensions 3

GODSEY: *Symphony 1:I;* **OSTERFIELD:** *Silver Fantasy;* **MATAMORO:** *Bretema;* **SIMONSON:** *2 Pictures;* **CUNNINGHAM:** *Symphony 7; Impromptus*

Lindsey Goodman, fl; Janacek Philharmonic/ Jiri Petrdlik, Stanislav Vavrinek; Moravian Philharmonic/ Pavel Snajdr; Moravian Philharmonia Wind & Percussion Ensemble/ Petr Vronsky

Navona 6311—52 minutes

I have sometimes been frustrated with compilation albums like these—whether it is because the pieces don't really belong together or because the quality of pieces can vary greatly. I felt as much with the previous entry in this "Dimensions" series (Navona 6311, M/A 2020). This third volume is a major improvement. These are all enjoyable works of substance that stylistically make sense next to each other, all with a relatively approachable modernist sound. Navona mainstays Paul Osterfield and Michael G. Cunningham make appearances. Osterfield's 'Silver Fantasy' for flute soloist, winds, and percussion opens ominously, leading to a satirical finale in equal parts Ives and Shostakovich. Cunningham supplies some neoclassical impromptus as well as a short, delightfully illustrative symphony depicting the four elements of nature. The best work comes from newcomers to the label. The first movement of Andre E Godsey, Sr's Symphony 1 'Themes for Soren Kierkegaard' opens the album—a beguiling piece of hope and foreboding that makes me want to hear the whole work. Miguel Matamoro's visceral, mysterious 'Bretama' captures the image of cliffs slowly breaching and withdrawing from the surround fog and clouds. My favorite of the works is Eric Simonson's *Two Pictures*, which uses fragments of works by Beethoven and Berlioz to create striking new pieces. The transformations are complete, creative, and unbound from their original contexts—resulting in a truly exciting work. I recommend picking up this album, easily the best compilation Navona has released in some time.

GRAVINA: *3 Pieces;* **CASSAR-CORDINA:** *Waiting;* **MUSCAT:** *Mesogeios;* **VELLA:** *Fine Line;* **GREGORY:** *Wind;* **GARZIA:** *Scent*

Malta Philharmonic/ Sergey Smbatyan

Navona 6322—60 minutes

This is an exciting compilation of new music by Maltese composers. Two works are inspired by literature. Albert Garzia's 'Scent' is based on "Perfume: The Story of a Murderer" and evokes the haunting beauty of the perfumes at the story's center, as well as the bloody, horrifying secret of their origin. Veronique Vella's 'Fine Line' takes inspiration from *Memoirs of a Geisha*, drawing the listener into its world with the vibraphone, leading to gorgeous, sweeping figures in the full orchestra. Alexander Vella Gregory's *Wind* is a set of evocative interludes culled from a larger symphony about Valletta, Malta's capital. It is a work of lighter substance, often quietly delicate and beautiful. My favorite works both involve Maltese folk music. Euchar Gravina's *3 Pieces* were originally written for banda, a Maltese folk ensemble; when arranging them for orchestra he incorporated the sounds of the banda. He shows an interest in Ligeti, with great attention to texture and timbre in his slowly shifting masses of sound. Gravina looks toward modernism; Christopher Muscat takes a more grounded approach in 'Mesogeios.' He incorporates musical elements from around the Mediterranean basin, with Francesco Sultana performing on Maltese folk instruments. It is an intense work brimming with vitality, capturing dance traditions of the region with exciting results. Sergey Smbatyan and the Malta Philharmonic give these works excellent performances.

English Horn Alone

The Newest Music II

BOYD

Gudipati, Kendall, Silverman, Brandon, Obermüller, Bielawa, Arditto

Jacqueline Leclair—New Focus 272—40 minutes

Jacqueline Leclair has graciously presented in this album a series of robust, powerful, and technically nonpareil performances of works for solo English horn. Leclair's interpretations demand your whole attention, to fill your mind's ear. Lyrical passages pervade the works of Meera Gudipati (*Ray of Hope*) and Lisa Bielawa (Synopsis No. 10, 'I Know This Room So Well') while earthy, dark timbres of contemplation take form in the works by Hannah Kendall (*Joe*) and Karola Obermüller (*Different Forms of Phosphorus*). Jenni Brandon's *In the City at Night* plays out as a varicolored and impassioned soliloquy-fantasia. *Layered Lament* by Faye-Ellen Silverman begins with electronics painting a starry, desolate landscape in sound, interrupted by the English

horn's furious, insistent melodies rich in pitch bends and timbral trills. *Musica invisble* by Cecila Arditto is "based on the exploration of new possibilities for English horn" and calls for the performer to speak through the instrument: passages from L. Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" ("Off with his head!") combine with tapping on the instrument. You're there with Alice, acutely aware of the Mad Hatter's pocket watch marking the passage of time you don't have. I'd urge students to program this work on their recitals: your audience will be wide-eyed with the spell this piece casts and no one will soon forget the performance. Bravo to Leclair for having the courage to take center stage and commanding it with such aplomb, ebullience, and genius.

Amarcord Vienna

Davy, Breinschmid, Beethoven, Gürtler
Sebastian Gürtler, v; Michael Williams, vc; Gerhard Muthspiel, db; Tommaso Huber, accordion
Orlando 32—53 minutes

This album is a ravishing delight. The musicians attack the demands of these pieces with near-unbelievable perfection. *My Spanish Liver* is a gem not to miss—its sumptuous drama and fervent nature will have you jumping out of your seat to dance to is rhythms. *Heartless* will no doubt become a staple of your date night playlist, and *Swing on Beethoven* treats its subject material in a gleefully clever way: my knee is bouncing to the music and my smile is getting wider and wider as I listen to it and write this. This is the album you should buy for your friend who isn't already in love with classical music—the display of extreme artistry both in the arrangements and the performances will bring joy to whoever has the pleasure of listening.

HERTZBERG: *The Wake World*
Jesica Beebe, Andrew Bogard, Samantha Hankey, Maeve Hoglund; Bryn Coveney, hn; Steven Franklin, tpt; Edward Babcock, Bradley Loudis, perc; Eunice Kim, v; Euntaek Kim, Fender Rhodes, Grant Loehnig, p/ Elizabeth Braden
Tzadik 4030 [2CD] 87 minutes

With just 5 instrumentalists and a cast of 9, David Hertzberg's opera *The Wake World* takes listeners on a fantastical journey that's equal parts weird and wonderful. The premiere production took place at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, where the artwork adorning the the gallery's walls acted as sets or even an extra set of cast members. Audience members were encouraged to wander the space as the performance happened, a "choose your own adventure" way to experience Hertzberg's lush, supernatural score. The opera was inspired by those very paintings; on seeing the space for the performance, Hertzberg was reminded of Aleister Crowley's story "The Wake World", and with this literary fantasy world in mind, wrote the libretto himself. Though this work premiered in 2017, you can still traipse yourself into Hertzberg's eery and illustrious fairy tale thanks to a wealth of information and behind-the-scenes video at Opera Philadelphia's website.

Air Electrique

Theremin & Piano
Auerbach, Schillinger, Kavina, Beluntsov, Rostovskaya
Thorwald Jorgensen, theremin; Itzel Medecigo, mz; Kamilla Bystrova, p—Zefir 9676—59 minutes

The theremin is an instrument whose sound and sight are delightful. And what a joy to listen to Thorwald Jorgensen's performances here alongside Kamilla Bystrova's dedicated and superb piano playing. Formerly a percussionist, Jorgensen's adoration of theremin virtuoso Clara Rockmore moved him to study and master this instrument that's barely 100 years old. While there is a dearth of repertoire for the theremin and a lack of a pedagogical tradition for the instrument, this album is a convincing and powerful collection of the work that is available, performed with exquisite and (quite literally) gravity-defying technical prowess. Don't miss Joseph Schillinger's *Bury, Bury Me Wind*, where the theremin's timbre is so deliciously close to Itzel Medecigo's opulent mezzo-soprano voice that the mind sometimes is unsure of which is which. Lydia Kavina's Suite is downright magical, and Valery Beluntsuv's Fantasy is a showstopper of dramatic proportions. This album is very special.

Confessions

Assad, Lyons, Cipullo, Kirsten, Djupstrom, Larsen
Laura Strickling, s; Joy Schreier, p
Yarlung 18798—61 minutes

Laura Strickling dedicated this album to the memory of her aunt, Janet Strickling, who was a powerful supporter of the album but died from Covid-19 before she could hear the finished product. This album feels like an homage to femininity: the lovely, the messy, the

graceful, the rough-around-all-the-edges, and the sisterhood we share with others, with people who encountered it before us and have helped us navigate our own womanhood—and the legacy that we write in the colorful story of our actions and dramas and innermost contemplations. This is a collection of poignant works, pieces whose words and notes exhibit storytelling at its finest. If you see yourself in the texts, you'll yourself feel seen and understood; if you don't, you'll still be wildly entertained. Clarice Assad's *Confessions* comes across almost like Sex and the City's art-song cousin. Grooving, luxurious, and sensual, the music supports Naomi Major's text, whose lines ooze both indulgence and an anxious consciousness of it. *Songs of Lament and Praise* by Gilda Lyons brings together several texts from the 10th-12th centuries and sets them with her fluid, florid, melodic aesthetic. Lyons calls for the soprano to be gymnastic and graceful, and to hold the space of the performance with a deep sense of reverence. Strickling fulfills and FILLS this role, her voice as a siren-chameleon, changing shape and color and nature with total control as contexts switch and emotions bend ever so slightly from word to word. The fourth movement struck me with exceptional strength: the poem, titled "A Mother's Lament", begins "My hands shake, My poor body totters, My breasts are sapless, My eyes are wet." *How To Get Heat Without Fire*, composed by Tom Cipullo with a poem by Marilyn Kallet, is a tour de force of sound and story. Amy Beth Kirsten's *To See What I See* is cleverly constructed and exudes gravitas: with this snippet of text from Shakespeare's "Hamlet", we hear Ophelia's lament and feel uncomfortable pangs of empathy. Kirsten's setting adds depth to this text: a daunting task well executed. Michael Djupstrom's *Teasdale Songs*, with texts by Sara Teasdale, paints tender moments with explosive feeling. His use of the upper register of the piano—Joy Schreier's artistry in full display especially in the subtle, understated moments—lends a magical patina to these pieces. Libby Larsen's *Righty 1966* is a forceful *bildungsroman* in miniature, Michele Antonello Frisch's text transporting the listener through moments of a childhood played out inside fantastical dreams and outside on the baseball field. Sarah Eckman McIver's flute flutters gracefully, tenderly alongside our protagonist. With this album, Strickling has paid homage to the feminine, gathering her audience in a warm and brilliant embrace of sisterhood, and she has left a weighty chapter of her own legacy here.

HARRIS: *Symphony 6; Face*
Allison Bell, Fiona Campbell, Henry Choo, Joel Amosa; Voices New Zealand, Auckland Philharmonia/ Giordano Bellincampi, Antony Hermus
Naxos 573994—65 minutes

Symphony 6, *Last Letter* (2015), by Ross Harris has given me goosebumps. The work is a setting of four poems by Vincent O'Sullivan, with three orchestral interludes in between. The first poem, "Last Letter Home", was written by O'Sullivan after reading a news item about Reyhaneh Jabbari, an Iranian woman who was condemned to death for killing a policeman who had raped her. O'Sullivan felt that this story would be the right type of subject matter for Harris to explore and bring to life for others. And O'Sulliivan's words in the sonorous translucence of Fiona Campbell's mezzo-soprano above Harris's cloudy, tarnished bronze canvas—rife with bass clarinet gestures and crystalline cluster chords high up in the sonic stratosphere of the work—give that eerie feeling of being present alongside history. The blunt opening prose sticks to the chest: "The words learned as a daughter I must now forget, Forget how the word of God once stood as a Friend, Forget how the word for No does not mean Yes." As does the second movement's prose, O'Sullivan's expansion of a Greek folk song where a daughter pleads with her mother "not to sing about me when the sun has set". This symphony will bring you to your knees with its dark, prismatic colors and elegiac torment. Harris has done right by these women both fictional and not: he's written them into memory with a vividness you won't soon forget. Face (2018) is also constructed on touching subject matter: Vincent O'Sullivan's libretto discusses "the trauma of facial injuries suffered by soldiers in the First World War and the pioneering work of Sir Harold Gillies", a New Zealander who was important in the early years of plastic surgery. When performed, a video by Tim Gruchy is projected behind the performers: a series of images of faces, inspired by an artwork titled *The Soldier's Face* by Barry Cleavin. Henry Choo's tenor is especially moving here alongside Allison Bell's striking, luscious soprano and Joel Amosa's powerful, expansive baritone. Bravo to the performing forces: these works should become classics.

MORRIS: *Chamber Music for Our Times*

Eric Silberger, Cindy Wu, Ji-In Yang, v; Andy Lin, va; Nan-Cheng Chen, vc; Han Chen, p
Navona 6310—70 minutes

Dr Craig Madden Morris is a child psychiatrist and a professor at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons—and he really can compose! His Romance for violin and piano is tinted with sensitive, fragile seconds in the piano (a tender and moving performance by Han Chen) and soaring, truly romantic lines in the violin (played fervently, elegantly by Eric Silberger) that never go quite where one expects. Piano Quartet 1 *(Johnny and Tony)* was inspired in part by Brahms and Dvorak. Yet these immensely lush harmonies, rich and abundant, feel somehow at liberty in a way that similar creations by Brahms and Dvorak can't. During this pandemic I've felt frustrated at being in a musical profession and not a medical one: I've wanted to help. And yet I ache for the works that may have been written had Morris not chosen to divide his time between the two. Please buy this disc and listen to this music. It's an original take on tradition, and is aural beauty at 100 proof. Massive congratulations to all involved.

Playing on the Edge 2

Babcock, Kinney, Fong, Burwasser, Summers, Harris—Sirius Quartet—Navona 6315—63 min

An Interchangeable Collection for String Quartet: III Odlo by Ian Erickson is an eight-minute galaxy of dissonant scratchings and silvery sul-ponticello tones, played as if the gravitational pull of the earth were especially strong on the right hands of the players. Quartet 3 by Marga Richter is lyrical and bare, letting the listener steep in the harmonies and dissonances emerging from her counterpoint. The work sounds very mid-century. Although this piece isn't listed on the works page of her website, I assume that its birth may not have been too far behind her second quartet (1958). Jennifer Castellano's *Images by Paul Klee* gives us a triptych of sonic color: every harmonic, every sul ponticello, every glissando feels natural and necessary. Castellano has made a world of sonic pigment all her own here. Brian Field's Quartet 1 has a true gem of a second movement: here we get that delicious sense of longing, of needing, as the strings climb higher and higher on their fingerboards: almost like they're attempting to touch heaven. Mari Tamaki's *Sneak into the Q—City* is exciting, vigorous, and succulent. Hats off to the Sirius Quartet for yet another compelling album of contemporary string quartet works.

LUDWIG: *The Anchoress*
Hyunah Yu, s; Mimi Stillman, fl; Matthew Levy, sax; Prism Quartet; Piffaro—XAS 110—37 min

In this set of works—*The Anchoress* and *Three Anchoress Songs*—composer David Ludwig and poet Katie Ford bring us into the world of the anchorite: one who has given up society to live as a mystic hermit, devoting to prayer and to the furthering of religious thought and philosophy. In 13th Century England, this way of life was especially favorable, and of the 780 anchorites living between 1100 and 1539, most were women: anchoresses. Ludwig has chosen a tremendously modular instrumentation for *The Anchoress*: PRISM quartet's rainbow of saxophone sonorities are used to infuse these musical textures with allusions to instruments of the time: sackbuts and shawms. And Piffaro, the Renaissance Band's full array of renaissance wind instruments all but transport our ears to the earthy, magical, God-filled world sparked by Katie's words. Written in poetic prose and sung by the crystalline, exacting voice of Hyunah Yu, these words give us many facets of this shadowy past. Several delightfully obstreperous chords signal the beginning of VII, followed by some dark, terrifying, but beautiful prose. A loud and sudden interjection by the winds in III while the Anchoress is speaking of "visions lit during fever, thrush, or pox" immediately brought to mind Hildegard von Bingen, trusting that voices that might appear ominous to others were indeed the voice of her creator. Ludwig gives the Anchoress and her message full spotlight: rarely are the instruments or their melodies dominant; instead they're brought together so that the amalgamation of tones offers a nearly psychedelic timbral haze behind these tales of visions and duty, terror and dreams. *The Anchoress* is haunting, sparse, and yet fulfilling.

Three Anchoress Songs, written while *The Anchoress* was "in gestation", gives flutist Mimi Stillman and saxophonist Matthew Levy tremendous space for emotion and energy: the tumbling pitches at the beginning that crescendo into an absolute frenzy of marvelous cacophony is delicately and expertly balanced by the pale, pastel tones of III (with Stillman on piccolo). The work ends with the two artists faintly singing Machaut's rondeau 'Doulz viaire': an ending that makes me feel

like I've somehow stumbled onto a secret, candle-lit ceremony, centuries old. Terrific performances of these works by these artists give us a peek into history. If only works like this could be performed for high schoolers while they're studying the Middle Ages!

Dream Drapery

Mellits, Morris, Schwantner
Karen R Clark, a; Galax Quartet
Music & Arts 1297—63 minutes

Galax Quartet is Elizabeth Blumenstock and David Wilson on Baroque violins, Roy Whelden on viola da gamba, and David Morris on Baroque cello. They tune to A=415. Listen to the driving, groovy rhythms of Marc Mellits's Quartet 2 *(Revolution)*: it works. It works really well. Joseph Schwantner's *Dream Drapery Thoreau Songs* is a series of thoughtful meditations, a perfect foil to the kinesthetic work before it. He gives us so much breathing room, room to contemplate and soak in Thoreau's poetry, sung by Karen R. Clark in her haunting, dark, honey-gold voice. Each of these six movements offers a different shade of textural ether, on a spectrum from V's somber yet sparkling 'Dies Irae' to the final movement's spirited and urgent rhythmic motion that comes dotted with lyrical, airy motifs. Robert Morris calls his quartet, *Radif IV, Stars of the Highest Magnitude*, a "music maze". Radif comes from the Persian word for order and refers to a collection of melodies that have survived for generations through oral tradition. Each movement of this quartet (these 7 movements have been arranged by the composer for Galax Quartet out of a full collection of 20) is named after Arabic names for stars of the highest magnitude. The music is bright and kaleidoscopic, with gorgeous use of sul ponticello, pizzicato, and the otherworldly sound of crystal goblets. The Galax Quartet shines here and has chosen a compelling program that carries the listener through a delightful, soul-brightening journey.

SVEINSSON: *Der Klang Der Offenbarung Des Göttlichen*
Filmorchester Babelsberg; Filmchor Berlin/ Davio Por Jonsson
Sono Luminus90017—35 minutes

Kjartan Svenisson's work is an "opera without divas"; with no performers on stage, listeners are allowed to create their own story lines, helped along by stunningly beautiful theatrical sets painted by Ragnar Kjartansson. The album case shows these sets to us in miniature: a bleak oceanside, the sky dark and the rocky shore even darker; a bonfire ravaging through an ancient ruin at night, smoke rising up to a pitch-black sky just barely teal at its edges; a smoldering sunset on a glacial landscape. This piece was inspired by "World Light", a book by Icelandic Nobel laureate Halldor Laxness. The book's message concerns the "incurable longing for beauty and its catastrophic consequences", and the opera brings this aesthetic sojourn straight to the audience: we are surrounded by immense visual and aural beauty for 35 minutes, face-to-face with whatever this beauty constructs in our minds. In each of the four acts, Svenisson's music gives us a slow-moving atmosphere. Act I opens with a powerful melody in the strings, warm and gorgeously harmonized, gaining in urgency as it repeats and builds. The choir gives Svenisson's ethereal notes a haunting performance. Each act carries echoes of the acts on either side, and the overall calm of Svenisson's writing here builds slowly but terrifically. I dare you to take the 35 minutes to listen to this work, stare deep into the artwork, and observe what your mind brings to the stage.

Festival: Trendy Words, or The State of Journalism

We were told in one respectable news source that politicians were about to "crater" a program—I guess they mean, drastically reduce it. "Crater" is not a verb, and dictionaries still call its use as a verb "slang". Its transitive use is not even recognized; a program can "crater" (slang for decline), but one cannot crater a program.

Speaking of politics, the newspeople have a specialized jargon. One has read about an effort to "flip a blue state". What does that mean? It is jargon, not plain English. And one article told how a party was trying to "grow their majority". That makes no sense. You can grow vegetables, and you can even grow a beard; but you can only increase or add to your majority (or reduce it).

Economist magazine, about a place: "It smells badly in hot weather." They write badly. Places cannot smell "badly" (only your nose can) but can smell bad—or even stink.

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