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This Issue

A Chat with Barbara Frittoli

Coming in the NEXT ISSUE:

The Summer Scene: festivals coast to coast

James Conlon: Home at last

New Jersey's "Northern Lights"

Donald Runnicles turns 50, with flourishes

The Sounds of Singapore

Overview

Music in Concert

Highlights

March 1 A most unusual concert: in celebration of his 75th birthday, New York Philharmonic music director Lorin Maazel leads the orchestra in an entire program of his own compositions—a one-night-only event. Two works, Monaco Fanfares and *The Giving Tree*, are US premieres; three are New York premieres, including *The Empty Pot* and *Irish Vapours and Capers*. Narrator Jeremy Irons is among individuals taking part.

March 4 The adventurous Houston Grand Opera [see interview with David Gockley in this issue] stages its second premiere of the season, Mark Adamo's *Lysistrata, or the Nude Goddess*; the libretto by the composer is based on the Aristophanes comedy. Sex is at the forefront: the wives of Athens and Sparta withhold their favors in order to bring their men to heel and end the inter-city war. (It works). Stefan Lano conducts.

March 11 Familiar repertoire, new band: James Levine conducts *The Flying Dutchman* with the Boston Symphony—his first opera-in-concert with his new orchestra. The cast is headed by Juha Uusitalo in the title role; Deborah Voigt is Senta, Mikhail Petrenko is Daland.

March 24 Letting no grass grow beneath his feet in his first Boston season, Levine premieres two BSO commissions in a single concert: John Harbison's *Darkbloom: Overture for an Imagined Opera* and Charles Wuorinen's Piano Concerto No. 4, written for and performed by Peter Serkin.

March 26 Tchaikovsky's *Maid of Orleans* comes to the Washington Opera in a production from Teatro Regio in Turin created for Mirella Freni, who sings the title role—a part that has brought her much acclaim; Kirov baritone Evgeny Nikitin makes his company debut as Thibaut, Corey Evan Rotz is Joan's suitor, Raymond. Conductor Stefano Ranzani, who led Teatro Regio's original production, also makes his first Washington appearance.

April 4 The Kirov Orchestra under Valery Gergiev arrives at Carnegie Hall for a three-concert stint. Among the highlights: Prokofieff's Symphony No. 3 and Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony.

April 7 It's an adventurous month for the Philadelphia Orchestra: on the 7th Charles Dutoit conducts the US premiere of James MacMillan's Symphony No. 3 (*Silence*). On April 27 conductor Rossen Milanov leads the world premiere of the commissioned Horn Concerto by Nicholas Maw; Philadelphia principal Elizabeth Starr Masoudnia is the soloist.

April 14 As part of its Centennial Commissioning series, the Minnesota Orchestra engaged Wolfgang Rihm for an unusual work: a Concerto for Viola and Clarinet; its world premiere will be performed by Minnesota principals, violist Thomas Turner and clarinetist Burt Hara, under the baton of music director Osmo Vänskä.

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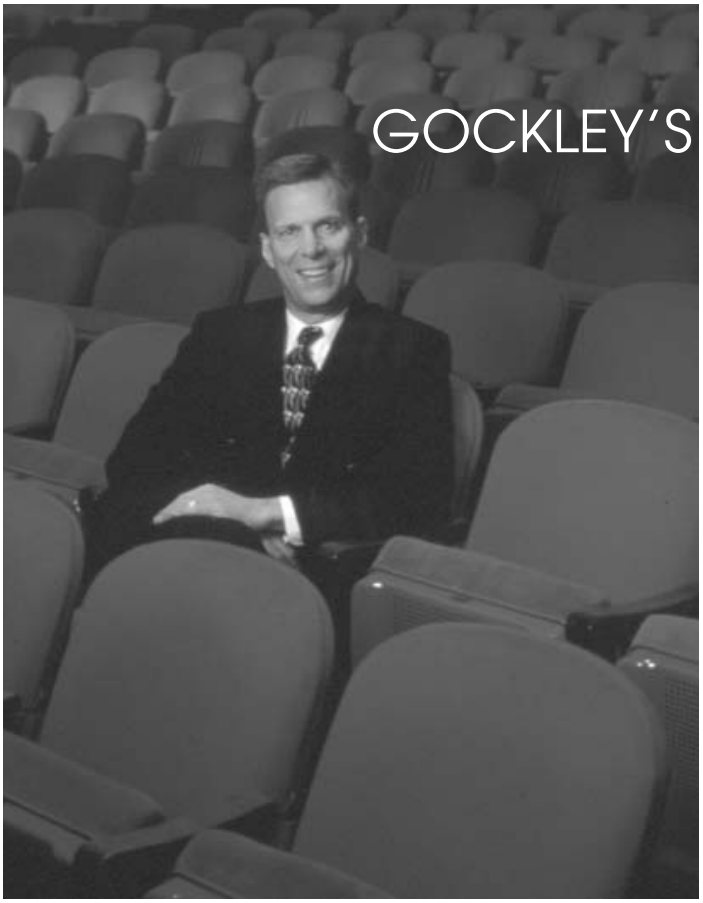


GOCKLEY'S GRAND OPERA

Houston director ponders past, present, and future

Patrick J Smith

Meeting David Gockley, general director of the Houston Grand Opera, at a New York hotel recently—he, nattily dressed in a black turtleneck and pants and sporting a close-cropped hair style—I saw a youthful, vigorous man who looked much the same person I have known for donkey's years. Is this, I thought, really the Grand Old Man of American Opera, who has run the Houston Grand for 32 of its celebratory 50 anniversary years? Who has premiered almost 30 works, mostly American? Who has sponsored innovations in outreach such as OperaVision (in-hall television), multi-modular performances of opera in parks, and numerous broadcasts from Houston worldwide? He looks too young for all that.

But indeed it was the Grand Old Man of American Opera, acceding to that non-existent but important title with the death two years ago of John Crosby, the founder of the Santa Fe Opera. Gockley began his career at the Santa Fe Opera under Crosby, and there learned the value of the rehearsed ensemble system of opera performance, at the time largely ignored in the rest of the country. He naturally brought the idea to Houston when he was made general director on 1972, while still in his 20s, implementing it with a production of *The Marriage of Figaro* directed by Wesley Balk.

"Then they were performing instant opera in Houston", he said of the company founded in 1955 by the German expatriate Walter Herbert. "The stars flew in Sunday or Monday and we opened eight days later, with three days of rehearsal. The sets were flown in as well, and you hoped when they were unloaded that they were all from the same opera. Now and then everything clicked, but more often it did not."

Since Gockley has been with opera for almost 40 years, I asked him to comment on its changes in that time. First, on audiences. "Yes, they have gotten younger and more diverse", he said, "despite high prices and the massive number of alternatives for their dollar. Companies, too, have become a lot less board-dominated and more staff-dominated, and less playthings of the upper class. Also they are American-run, unlike almost all companies when I started."

And repertory? "Of course there have been changes, and not only in the number of new works performed. Handel, Monteverdi, even Vivaldi are being performed, and we are always looking for the new, the novel, and the newsworthy. It is the curiosities that vitalize the operation, plus the fact that there are singers today for such repertory."

I asked him about the developments he has seen in singing and singers. "No question there are more singers, and in general better ones, although what has also changed is that the big stars are more in demand. When I began, European opera houses were still recovering from the war and couldn't afford those singers, who came here. But now they are wanted everywhere, and we have to plan far ahead."

Such advance planning, he feels, has benefitted by the use of co-productions.

"Co-productions go way back, to Beverly Sills's appearing in a single production for several companies. They save on rehearsal time and allow companies to present artists who would otherwise be unavailable. For instance, next season we will be doing *Manon Lescaut* with Karita Mattila and Vladimir Galouzine. It's a co-production with Chicago Lyric, and we'll have it after they do it. European companies and general directors don't like co-productions, but they make immense good sense here, and everybody does them."

If the Houston Opera over the years has been known worldwide for one thing, it is for

performing new works, of all kinds and styles, and this is directly owing to Gockley's leadership. It is certainly the chief company in the United States in that respect, and its endeavors are backed by a budget of over $20 million. The company pioneered the works of Carlisle Floyd, a Gockley favorite, from his *Susannah* through his latest, *Cold Sassy Tree*. It has also led the way in what has been termed "CNN opera", tied to current events, like *Harvey Milk* by Stewart Wallace and Michael Korie, or *Jackie O* by Michael Daugherty and Wayne Koestenbaum; the most famous is John Adams and Alice Goodman's *Nixon in China*.

Works as diverse as Meredith Monk's *Atlas*, Michael Tippett's *New Year*, and Philip Glass's *Making of the Representative for Planet 8* have been presented by the company, as well as such lighter fare as Mark Adamo's *Little Women* and Rachel Portman's *Little Prince*. Gockley's appetite for new works refuses to be satisfied [for the newest on the list, see review in Opera Everywhere in this issue]. The 2004-5 anniversary season includes three contemporary works, two of them world premieres.

But it would be a great mistake to assume that the Houston Grand Opera is only a new works factory. With its two theaters in the Wortham Center (built in large part because of Gockley's efforts), the company can present big- and small-scaled opera, old chestnuts, and more unusual and ambitious fare. It can present ensemble work, with young singers on the way up, and full-scale star opera.

"We engaged Karita Mattila as Fiordiligi in *Così Fan Tutte* before she became the star she is today, and also Renee Fleming", Gockley points out. "We were then able to bring Renee back in *La Traviata*. Christoph Eschenbach, when he was conductor of the Houston Symphony, led ten operas with his orchestra for us, including a *Parsifal* staged by Robert Wilson. We are lucky in that, every season, we have six, seven, or eight slots that we can fill. We can then get a critical mass of new work, out-of-the-way old work, and famous operas all acceptable to our various supporters and subscribers. And this is important, because it is getting harder and harder to persuade a public to buy season tickets."

And here Gockley's optimism diminished. Although he cited the outreach of his radio broadcasts, now worldwide, and of such radical innovations as his public performances with enlarged television images outdoors—and television even inside the opera house—he remains skeptical about the future of the art form.

"Pop culture", he said, "could overwhelm opera. Music education is way down, and all sorts of entertainment venues are putting pressure on us.

"Take for instance sports venues: the new basketball arena in Houston has a dining room and a wine cellar—this is not for the popcorn and peanut crowd, but for an audience competitive with our audience. When does a young person come into contact with opera during his growing-up years? Can we hold our own against the incursion of pop culture?"

And then Gockley brought up a central issue, which most general directors dismiss—the cost of a ticket.

"How do you get people into the theater at a reasonable price? The ticket issue, in my estimation, is huge. Houston is a working-class town, and there isn't the intellectual curiosity that there is in New York. In addition, it's very difficult to publicize anything in the newspapers unless you have a newsworthy 'hook'—a new production of an opera is no longer enough to get into the pages of the Sunday paper the week before."

And yet, even with his skepticism, the Grand Young Man remains hopeful: "It may be a rear guard action, but it's one worth fighting."

It would seem that, with the vision of David Gockley and the facilities in production he possesses in Houston, that hope may be grounded, not in dreams, but in reality.

Kathryn Harries (Aunt Bea) presents her niece Anna Christy (Muffin Brenner Corelli- bride) with an embarrassing gift in Lyric Opera of Chicago's world premiere of A *Wedding* .

PHOTO BY DAN REST

A Wedding adorns a banner Lyric season

John von Rhein

William Bolcom has been the unofficial resident composer of Chicago Lyric Opera since 1992, when the company gave the premiere of its first Bolcom commission, *McTeague*. His eponymous adaptation of the Arthur Miller play *A View from the Bridge*, followed in 1999 and has since traveled to the Metropolitan Opera. On December 11, the Lyric unveiled its latest Bolcom opera, *A Wedding*, based on director Robert Altman's 1978 film comedy of the same name.

The opera is not only a considerable improvement over the scattershot movie but a sharply engaging entertainment in its new guise. Altman, who co-wrote the libretto with Bolcom's frequent collaborator, Arnold Weinstein, showed his usual talent for keeping many balls in the air while neatly skewering his subject, a society wedding joining the offspring of two dysfunctional families.

Many among the enthusiastic first-night audience hailed from the same Chicago suburbs satirized in the opera, which is set in a mansion in Lake Forest, Illinois. The mansion is home to the old-money Sloans, whose matriarch, Nettie (Kathryn Harries), has the supreme bad taste to expire in an upstairs bedroom while the wedding reception is in progress below. Her son-in-law, Luigi (Jerry Hadley), is an Italian ex-waiter longing to escape Lake Forest and his marriage to drug-addicted Victoria (Catherine Malfitano). Luigi and Victoria's son, Dino (Patrick Miller), is a randy military-school cadet who has married Muffin Brenner, the daughter of nouveau-riche Snooks Brenner, the good-ol'-boy head of a Louisville trucking company, and his wife, Tulip (Lauren Flanigan). The Sloans are snooty hypocrites. The Brenners drip Southern-fried vulgarity. Complications, as they say, ensue.

It takes nearly one act of the two-act comedy to sort out the principal characters (there are 16, sensibly reduced from the 48 that cluttered Altman's film). *A Wedding* then zeroes in on the goofy romance between Tulip, stuck in a loveless marriage, and Jules Mackenzie Goddard (Jake Gardner), the Sloan family doctor and society art dealer, who awakens feelings in her she scarcely knew she had. The lovers plan a rendezvous at a motel near the Dairy Queen in Tallahassee. As the flustered Tulip (a role created by Carol Burnett in the film), Flanigan stopped the show with her big, bluesy aria, 'I'm Just a Woman in Love'. Gardner was less fortunate playing an improbable caricature (he's also Victoria's drug dealer).

Mark Delavan was sensational as Snooks, shaking his hips like Elvis in a twangy country-rock ballad about how he gave up whoring and boozing for red-state "moral values". In a later, bitterly funny scene, he assailed the "blue-blood white trash" family his daughter married into. Bolcom's knack for spot-on musical parody came to the fore in an English-country-ballad-style duet between Aunt Bea (also Harries), the self-styled "socialistic blight on the

Sloan family crest", and the hired guest, William Williamson (Timothy Nolen). Their soft-shoe song and dance was hilarious, oozing sexual innuendo.

Some critics found Bolcom's style too light, accessible, and tuneful to qualify as contemporary opera, but too closely wedded to classical musical manners to make it as a Broadway musical. But that's their problem. *A Wedding* aspires to be nothing more than a nifty modern comedy of manners, and in that it succeeds. A huge cast of gifted singing actors brought it off beautifully under Altman's direction and the nimble conducting of Dennis Russell Davies.

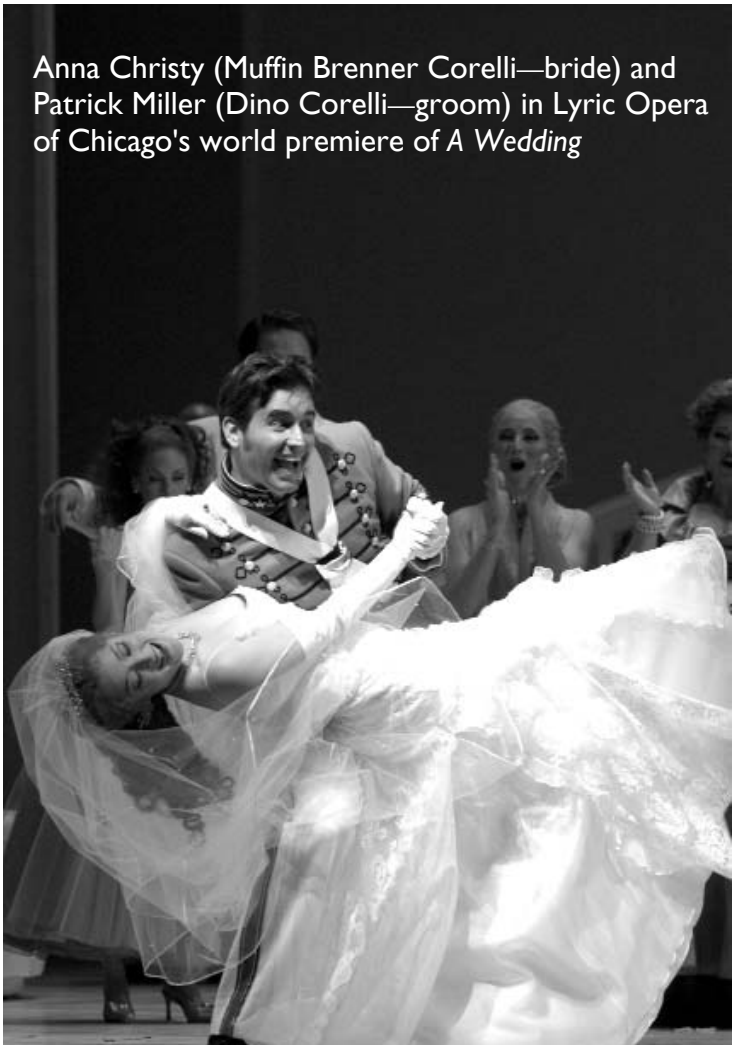
The set, designed by Robin Wagner, was an elegant parody of suburban conspicuous excess, full of garlands and tchotchkes. A large moveable staircase and gossamer curtains helped to sort out Altman's typically overlapping dialogs and multi-leveled stage action. Dona Granata's costumes reflected the vast social gulf separating the conjoined clans. Patricia Birch's choreography was so fully absorbed into the dramatic scheme that one was barely aware of it.

Nearly every principal singer was given something to sing. Miller had a swaggering, Platters-style rhythm and blues number about how irresistible women find him. Anna Christy, as the bride Muffin, got to display her dazzling coloratura. Hadley wielded a clear, ringing tenor. Patricia Risley, as Diana Sloan (enmeshed in an affair with the Caribbean butler, sung by Mark S Doss), was as lithe a dancer as she was a singer. Other standouts were Beth Clayton as Toni Goddard, the "take charge" Sloan sister; and Maria Kanyova as Rita Billingsley, the bossy wedding director.

Clearly Lyric Opera believes in Bolcom: the company already has commissioned him to write a fourth opera, which is scheduled to be premiered before 2010. Meanwhile, he's three for three in Chicago.

The Lyric had another success in the fall with the belated company premiere of Janaček's *Cunning Little Vixen*, which opened November 17. Far from a children's opera, the Czech composer's bittersweet fable has wise, adult things to tell us about love, sex, death, and the unending cycle of life. Chas Rader-Shieber's production, with sets and costumes by David Zinn, found glimmers of unspoiled nature in the childhood memories adults tuck away in their mental attics. Frogs hopped on yellow swim fins, rabbits climbed atop large painted armoires, squirrels cranked up an old Victrola. Antique furniture and miniature houses set at odd angles revolved on a turntable, lest we had forgotten the opera is about the continuity of life. The director may have ignored the erotic attraction of the Forester (Jean-Philippe Lafont) to Vixen Sharp-Ears (Dina Kuznetsova), but at least he refused to sentimentalize her odyssey from cub to den mother.

Janaček's atmospheric score is a tapestry of terse dialogs, ravishing orchestral interludes, and genre scenes so skillfully drawn you



Anna Christy (Muffin Brenner Corelli—bride) and Patrick Miller (Dino Corelli—groom) in Lyric Opera of Chicago's world premiere of *A Wedding*

can all but smell the damp moss of the forest. Sir Andrew Davis, Lyric's resident Janaček specialist, is a master of its subtleties. The conductor relished its lyrical poetry, transparent scoring, and speech-driven rhythms, making his able orchestra a vivid force in the drama.

With her luscious, wide-ranging soprano, Dina Kuznetsova was an irresistibly feisty and charming Vixen. Lauren Curnow's rich, steady soprano blended beautifully in the Fox's love scene with the Vixen. Lafont was warmly moving in his final apostrophe to the joys of love and the changing of the seasons. Among the fine ensemble members were Dennis Petersen as the lovesick Schoolmaster, Kevin Langan as the rueful Parson, and Philip Kraus as the sentimental poacher, Harasta.

An unbeatable team of world-class Mozarteans helped the Lyric launch its 50th anniversary season with a superb new production of *Don Giovanni* on September 18. The company had an illustrious roll call of *Don Giovanni*s to surpass, beginning with its very first, "calling card" production of the Mozart masterpiece in 1954, which starred Nicola Rossi-Lemeni, Eleanor Steber, Bidu Sayao, and Leopold Simoneau. But surpass itself the Lyric did, even with soprano Karita Mattila, the Donna Anna, falling ill shortly before opening night. Her cover singer, Lauren McNeese, took over the role admirably.

The Welsh bass-baritone Bryn Terfel led an exceptionally strong and well integrated ensemble of singing actors, Christoph Eschenbach conducted a finely detailed reading of the score, and the celebrated German director Peter Stein proved that less is more when it comes to staging Mozart.

Stein and his artistic team—set designer Ferdinand Wögerbauer, costume designer Moidele Bickel, and lighting designer Duane Schuler—found the elusive balance between *dramma* and *giocoso*. Set in 1795 Venice, this *Don Giovanni* was smartly minimalist. Stucco walls in sunbaked browns and blues were flanked by open space and sky. There was nothing to distract the audience from a realization that took its dramatic and psychological cues directly from the music.

Stein treated the Don's attempted seduction of Zerlina (the fresh and engaging Isabel Bayrakdarian) as a subtly erotic tug of war. Once Susan Graham's Donna Elvira joined them, this sexual skirmish became a richly comic *pas de trois*. This Elvira (it was Graham's first time out in the role) vacillated between tender devotion and vengeful resolve with utter conviction. Terfel's Giovanni was a predatory if charming sadist who knew his shelf life was soon to expire; his powerful voice turned to honeyed insinuation for 'La ci darem la mano'.

Mattila's fiery Donna Anna (heard in later performances) was a tower of vocal strength in her own right. The Italian bass-baritone Ildebrando D'Arcangelo made an endearing, robustly sung Leporello. Tenor Kurt Streit stretched the tempo of 'Dalla sua pace' to the breaking point but brought macho dimension to the normally wimpy Don Ottavio. Kyle Ketelsen was the hot-headed bumpkin, Masetto. Andrea Silvestrelli made a properly sepulchral Commendatore.

In his Lyric Opera debut, Eschenbach lifted the level of orchestral playing and choral singing to a high level, beginning with a vigorous, finely articulated account of the overture.

A CHAT WITH BARBARA FRITTOLI

Photo by Marty Sohl

Barbara Fritolli as Desdemona in Verdi's *Otello*

Her Desdemona can break a heart

Bridget Paolucci

When Barbara Frittoli is in New York for performances at the Met, she always goes to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "I take a book with me—any book—or a score to study, and I sit there", says the 37-year-old Italian soprano. "I can be alone and see something fantastic. Then, after a while, I

take another seat. I like to be surrounded by art that's not talking and singing and making noise!"

Frittoli sang Desdemona in the Met's September performances of *Otello*, including opening night. As ARG went to press, however, she cancelled her scheduled appearances in March as Elisabetta in the Met's *Don Carlo*. After Mozart performances in Florence and Paris, she repeats the role of Desdemona in Monte Carlo this summer, then goes to Barcelona to sing Liù in *Turandot*, followed by the Verdi Requiem in Tokyo.

Desdemona has become her signature role, with performances at La Scala, Munich, the Paris Bastille, and the Vienna State Opera as well as the Met. Interviewed backstage in her dressing room after one of her *Otello* performances, she is still radiant from the excitement. She has just changed out of her costume, and on that warm fall evening she is dressed in white, from her tailored shirt to her perky boots, a study in casual chic. In a review of the opening night performance, her beauty prompted one New York critic to describe her as "an exquisite Venetian Madonna, using her coolly poised, unblemished soprano to shape phrases in ways that broke more than one heart".

He is not the only writer to have found her performance emotionally wrenching. On stage, the soprano dared to be absolutely still during most of Desdemona's solo scene in the last act, a scene that includes her two major arias, the 'Willow Song' and the 'Ave Maria'. In her charmingly accented English, Frittoli explains why she chose to remain motionless: "What I think is best for my Desdemona is not to do anything, because in that moment she knows that she has lost everything. In the first act, she's so happy. She's completely in love, and this love is powerful. That's why she's so destroyed at the end, because her first love will be her last. She senses that it's over. She accepts death. She's scared, but she accepts it, and she's very calm."

"When I'm really in pain and sad, when I feel really desperate, my way to be desperate is to stay still—not to agitate, you know, or to run here and there. It's to stay still. If you feel the pain of your soul, then you can't move."

When preparing a role, Frittoli begins by immersing herself in the original literary source. Next comes a study of the libretto, and only then does she begin her study of the music. "Music is the primary thing, but it comes at the end because you have to know exactly what you're saying and what other people are saying in order to react to everything. I hear every, every word, and I can react to every word."

Frittoli's ability to react to other characters is one of her strengths, as is her ability to bring fresh insights to a single word or phrase. Her performances are intimate and understated, as though she is permitting the audience to eavesdrop on the character's inner life. Despite her intellectual approach to a role, the emotional power of her performances seems to come from her own connection with the character. "A piece has to give me something", she says. "I want to feel it myself."

Her voice has a creamy sound, evenly produced from top to bottom, and her musicianship is impeccable. Conductor Joseph Colaneri, who led the preliminary rehearsals of *Otello*, says, "The phrasing is very beautiful. You get that sense of shape and inevitability in her singing; you know where a phrase is going, where it's going to arc, where it's going to have its big moment. She's got superb breath control. In the 'Ave Maria' she can spin out these long, long phrases. And being a native Italian, she brings that wonderful sense of the color of the language—all the nuance, all the shades of meaning."

Frittoli's expressivity and the richness of her voice have prompted some opera lovers to regard her as the soprano destined to carry on the Italian tradition, the successor to Mirella Freni. Although Frittoli says she is "very happy and proud if people say that", she shrugs off any such mantle, saying that her voice is a matter of technique, of how Italians are taught to sing.

Barbara Frittoli was born in Milan on April 19, 1967. At age nine she was enrolled in the Verdi Conservatory to study piano. Three years later, in fulfillment of a requirement at the conservatory, she sang in a chorus of 600 children. The conductor noticed her and persuaded her to study voice. She made her professional debut in 1989 at the Florence May Festival in the Bucchi rarity *Il Giuco del Barone*. In 1992 she sang the Countess and Fiordiligi under Riccardo Muti. Mozart roles predominated in the early 1990s, but it was a Verdi role, Leonora in *Il Trovatore*, that established her as a major artist on the La Scala roster in 2000. She recorded a collection of Verdi arias and has gradually added Verdi roles to her repertoire, "step by step" she says, indicating that she selects roles very carefully.

Frittoli made her Met debut in l995 as Micaela. She went on to sing Mimi, Donna Anna, and Luisa Miller, as well as Desdemona. She returns in September as Fiordiligi in *Così Fan Tutte*, the role she sang most before her Desdemona performances and which she will repeat at La Scala in December. She finds the Mozart character endearing, and yet she seems equally drawn to the technical demands of the role. "It's a challenge—*una sfida*", she reiterates in Italian. "You have to know all kinds of

technique. You have legato lirico, you have coloratura—like a chicken", she says with her impish smile, poking fun at the elaborate nature of coloratura by imitating a chicken, clucking and flapping a pair of imaginary wings!

Her sense of fun is never far away. Backstage she is warm, spontaneous, and relaxed, a breath of fresh air in that sometimes rarified atmosphere. Joan Dornemann, an assistant conductor at the Met who has frequently coached Frittoli, describes her as "very real, very open, and extremely serious about what she does. She does her research, and she works hard to capture two things that sometimes seem directly opposed to each other: the absolute accuracy of the music, and the real emotion, the real reason for the music being the way it is. Barbara is very outspoken and at the same time very untemperamental. She has a deftness for turning situations away from being chaotic, and she's funny. She has a rich interior life, I think, and she's able to talk about other things: how her family is, her daughter, how you cook this sauce and why you don't cook it that way—things regular people talk about. That's what I like very much about her: the mystique is all on the stage."

"No hang-ups of any kind", says Colaneri. "She's very calm in rehearsal and she adds a positive energy to the room. She comes perfectly prepared, and when she begins to rehearse you get a real sense that she has already worked out a start-to-finish architectural shape for the character."

Once Frittoli has thought through a role and tested her ideas in the initial performances of an opera that is new to her, she says that her interpretation does not change. She is an independent spirit who relishes the rehearsal process and works well with colleagues, yet is uncompromising in her characterization. According to Dornemann, "When Barbara feels deeply about something, she's quite capable of convincing you that it goes that way—and that's good. She's quite irresistible!"

Frittoli says she always finds a way to work in tandem with conductors and directors. To illustrate her point, she moves her hands in parallel motion, weaving them back and forth like a pair of skis. The sports metaphor is not surprising. She has always been athletic, and her favorite sports include parachuting, riding, ice skating, and rock climbing.

She stopped rock-climbing and parachuting after she married bass Natale DeCarolis and her daughter, Arianna, was born. The couple live in Monte Carlo, and she traveled with her daughter until Arianna reached school age. Separation from her family is painful, and when we spoke in September Frittoli could hardly wait for her stay in New York to end so she could return home. When asked if family gives her equilibrium in a field as glamorous as opera, she quickly dismisses any notion of glamour. "Glamorous, no! When you are on stage, yes. When you are off stage, you have to disconnect." She makes a sharp chopping motion with her right hand. "This world is fantastic when you're on stage, but you can't live with your mind always there", she says. And she means it. "I'm very disciplined and I'm very relaxed. I go on stage, I do my thing, then it's finished. I think this is my power as a performer; you can't stay focussed on this all the time.

"I have to be a mother, I have to be a wife, I like to be with people I like. In New York, I embroider a lot and I go to the museum. This is my life here—very, very alone. But it's good for the voice, the not talking," she says, stroking her throat.

It is quiet backstage after the *Otello*. Other members of the cast have left with a small coterie of friends and colleagues. Only a couple of guards remain at the stage door entrance. Frittoli plans to check her computer as soon as she returns to her apartment. "Yesterday I saw my daughter on the web", she says. "Oh my God, I was crying."

VANESSA LIVES

LA Opera does right by Barber's neglected opera

Kiri Te Kanawa as Vanessa

Richard S Ginell

Samuel Barber's first opera, *Vanessa*, was given a launch that any composer would kill for. It was premiered by the Metropolitan Opera in 1958 (the Met's first performance of a full-length American opera in 24 years), with one of the starriest casts that could have been assembled for any opera at that time, led by the now-fabled modernist Dimitri Mitropoulos. It won the Pulitzer Prize, it traveled to Salzburg, it was even held over into the

Met's 1958-59 season. A recording of the production was made almost immediately by then-lordly RCA Victor, issued in two editions—a modestly trimmed 98-minute version on two-LPs and a full-length, 114-minute three-LP version. One prominent New York scribe hailed it as nothing less than the best opera ever written by an American.

Today, even though the recording has been continuously available except for a brief hiatus in the early 1970s, *Vanessa* has nearly vanished from the boards. Why? Blame the serial-minded tastemakers who scoffed at anything new that didn't conform to their line. Blame the disastrous reception for Barber's second big-time opera, *Antony and Cleopatra*, at the opening of the new Met in 1966, which had the effect of blighting the composer's reputation for a generation and more.

But don't blame the opera, for it's a good one—maybe not as great as its earliest proponents thought, but one that has a solid score, doesn't resort to cheap sentimentality to manipulate an audience, and thoughtfully leaves you pondering its ambiguities well after the curtain falls.

Barber's orchestrations are masterly, setting the scenes with sometimes scurrying, often powerful strokes, rooted in tonality but not afraid to employ dissonance. Gian Carlo Menotti's libretto is superb, psychologically absorbing in its study of these characters' denial of reality (and aren't we lucky that Menotti did not set this libretto to one of his own stale-verismo scores?). There is one bona fide hit aria, the melting 'Must the winter come so soon?' sung by Erika shortly after the curtain goes up. There is also a timely issue on hand, for Erika in effect aborts her unborn child in an alleged suicide attempt. (Interestingly, the original version finds Erika exclaiming, 'His child, his child! It must not be born. It must not be born', as she flees into the freezing night, but in the revised 1964 version, Barber and Menotti leave out 'It must not be born', which makes Erika's motive more ambiguous until later.)

Los Angeles Opera clearly believes in *Vanessa*, for they gave it a first-class airing, with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa as the box office lure (opening night, November 27, in the middle of a distracting Thanksgiving weekend, was virtually packed). Dame Kiri was perfectly cast as the self-delusional Vanessa—the role calls for a world-class diva, an older woman but still beautiful in appearance—and her big, opulent voice filled the 3,098-seat Dorothy Chandler Pavilion with no problem.

In an inspired move, the company landed Rosalind Elias, the original Erika in the 1958 Met production, in the role of the old Baroness. Her voice could barely be heard, but for a good deal of the time, it didn't matter, for the character is entirely silent in the first and last scenes, and Elias sat there with a chilly look of ghostly imperiousness. Again, perfect.

One wondered what was going through Elias's mind as she sat mute, watching the much younger, highly expressive mezzo Lucy Schaufer singing the role that she originated. Well, my imagination was spinning at least; Elias's Erika of 1958 had metamorphosed into Elias's Baroness of 2004, sitting and waiting in vain for the return of Anatol for 46 years. Director John Cox's production contributed to the illusion; everyone was in period dress from roughly a century ago, yet the set was an ultra-modern front parlor with glass walls and a sweeping white staircase. It was as if this was the sequel to *Vanessa* in which, as human nature dictates, life repeats itself over and over.

John Matz sang Anatol with acceptable bravado, and David Evitts gave a waggish account of the sometimes inebriated old Doctor. Conductor Simone Young probed deeper into the score than perhaps anyone else has so far, drawing out lingering tempos in 'Must the winter come so soon?', reveling in the brilliant orchestrations, making the final Quintet a thing of ripe, *Rosenkavalier*-like beauty. Let the next recording of *Vanessa* be hers.

GIORDANO'S JEST

Teatro Grattacielo unearths an honorable opera

Patrick Dillon

It's easy to poke fun at Giordano's *The Jest* (to ascribe to *La Cena delle Beffe*—The Supper of the Pranks—the traditional English title of the Sem Benelli play on which it's based). Its blood-and-sex story of overmoneyed, overleisured urban aristocrats with no better pastimes than fighting over the party girl of the moment and playing elaborate, sadistic practical jokes on one another has nothing to do with America 2004, where moral values are uppermost and the high-and-mighty are just too dang Christian to indulge in such questionable tactics. (Who watches *The Sopranos*, anyway?)

Its words—Benelli's, as vastly edited by Giordano and then, in places, amplified by Benelli himself—can seem queasily perfumed, and its musical language alternately bullishly blunt and pastel-prettified. Its climax registers as a wet-dream conflation of the final curtains of *Rigoletto* and *Il Trovatore* ('Egli era tuo fratello!' the tortured antihero gloats to the baritone, who has just mistakenly killed his own beloved tenor sibling). There's nothing about it that breaks any new ground.

But damn, if it doesn't work! Benelli's four-hour, four-act Florentine revenge tragedy was an instant hit at its premiere in 1909; and the role of its troubled protagonist, Giannetto, proved irresistible to many of the era's leading actors—and actresses: Sarah Bernhardt, for one, donned her Renaissance tights and breeches and offered *La Beffa*, as Jean Richepin's French version was called, to New York audiences in 1910. Nine years later, the brothers Barrymore launched *The Jest* in English, with John as Giannetto (indelibly captured in photos, pale and intense and draped, his crouching hunchbacked servant peering eerily from the folds of his cape) and Lionel in the flashier role of the villainous Neri. Even the habitually grounded head of Dorothy Parker took wing ("Park the children somewhere, catch the first city-bound train, and go to the Plymouth Theatre, if you have to trade in the baby's Thrift Stamps to buy the tickets"). In 1941, Benelli's play was still holding the stage in revivals when director Alessandro Blasetti made a sumptuous film adaptation, with the lush screen goddess Clara Calamai making history with the first bare breasts in Italian cinema.

All of which is to say that Giordano's interest in *La Cena delle Beffe* wasn't some kind of oddball fixation; at its premiere at La Scala in December 1924, with Toscanini in the pit, the opera rode the crest of a wave of popular fascination with the play and others like it—a wave whose initial momentum, a decade earlier, had generated a trio of school-of-D'Annunzio operas by other prominent *veristi*: Montemezzi's *L'amore dei Tre Re* (after another Benelli drama) and Mascagni's *Parisina* and Zandonai's *Francesca da Rimini* (both with texts by D'Annunzio himself). And his terse, pared-down operatic *Cena* certainly created its own stir, especially if one's reference point is the kind of effect made by new operas in the 21st Century, most of which don't long survive their premieres: it had already traveled all over Italy, and to Spain, England, and Argentina, by the time it made its Metropolitan Opera debut at the end of 1925, in a gilded staging that trotted out Frances Alda, Beniamino Gigli, and Titta Ruffo in the leading roles, under Tullio Serafin's baton.

The Met offered what amounted to a mini Giordano festival that winter, with his two biggest successes, *Andrea Chenier* (Rosa Ponselle joining Gigli and Ruffo) and *Fedora* (Maria Jeritza and Giovanni Martinelli), starrily welcoming their new sibling to the repertory. Alda made memorable recordings of a pair of short solos from the opera, one from her own role-to-be, Ginevra, the other from the *seconda donna* role of Lisabetta—a sentimental turn that can stop the third-act show as effectively as *Chenier*'s Madelon's, 28 years its senior.

There's no other solo, however brief, that can match anything in *Chenier*. Like almost all his verismo colleagues except Puccini, Giordano seems to have spent most of his good tunes very early on. It was instructive to hear, a few days before *La Cena*, New York City Opera's campy revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella*: no one would claim this as one of Richard Rodgers's best scores, but for a man who, at roughly Giordano's age at the time of *La Cena*, had written hundreds of songs and hadn't yet gotten round to *The Sound of Music*, its hummability quotient is remarkably high.

But maybe good tunes weren't Giordano's

point; there's a mastery of mood and pacing in *La Cena* that's also exceptional. Take, again, the third act, which surehandedly juggles a potentially awkward trio of high drama, comedy, and sentiment, nowhere more strikingly than in the central sequence of the octet, whose seven-parts-comic majority is ruled by the soaringly serious line of the loyal Lisabetta, Lisabetta's solo and duet with Neri, and Giannetto's increasingly desperate plea to Neri for a truce in a game that's already gone too far. Once more, comparison with a recent City Opera production put Giordano's achievements into relief. The entirety of *La Cena delle Beffe* could be performed during the first act of Charles Wuorinen's new opera, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, which numbingly lumbers along with no apparent sense of where it's headed or how it's going to get there. In City Opera's program notes Wuorinen boasts of not being an opera "specialist", as if that were somehow a shameful occupation. Audibly, it's not an opinion that Giordano shared.

Nor, incontrovertibly, does Teatro Grattacielo, the extra-specialist verismo-in-concert aggregation that presents its all too brief (one-night) season every late autumn in New York. Grattacielo may not have invited the very finest diners to the table for its *Cena*, but not one of them was immune to the flavor of the evening's entrée. Veteran tenor Lando Bartolini seemed to have lost some of the high-end security that distinguished his work in last year's *Guglielmo Ratcliff* and looks no more like a leading man than he ever did; but he knows the style cold and put across a difficult role with an appreciable cocky swagger. Michele Capalbo was one of Grattacielo's better leading ladies, and even without the film's bare breasts or the libretto's sparkling, diaphanous negligees she certainly looked the role of a Florentine femme fatale; though the middle of the voice sounds a bit overweighted, there's a similar glamour to the tone that places her closer to Carmen Melis and Hina Spani than to paint-peelers such as Iva Pacetti and Adelaide Saraceni, to name a quartet of early Ginevras.

But the earnest Patryk Wroblewski both looked and sounded all wrong as Neri, a role that cries out for a big, dark, snarling dramatic baritone and an in-your-face temperament; and Tracy Rhodus seemed strangely tested as Lisabetta, which should be a relative piece of cake next to her usual high-soprano fare. Everyone else, though, was fine, with particularly nice turns from tenors John Pickle and John Easterlin, the always enjoyable mezzo Maria Zifchak, and character bass Lawrence Long. Alfredo Silipigni supported them all as if he were Serafin guiding Alda, Gigli, and Ruffo. He wasn't and they weren't, but as ever, the Grattacielo crew came close enough to the mark to bring an unfamiliar work to life and afford a fascinating peep through the cultural keyhole of a bygone but still resonant era.

Michael Tilson Thomas

THE MAHLER PROJECT

PHOTO BY SUSAN SCHELLING

San Francisco's CD cycle proceeds, with Grammys on hand

Marilyn Tucker

With the recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 9 that will be compiled from tapings of five concerts on succeeding days last September, the San Francisco Symphony's self-produced Mahler project is now more than half completed. The Symphony No. 6, first in the series that will encompass all nine works, took a Grammy for Best Orchestral Performance in 2002, and was followed the next year by a Grammy honoring the Third Symphony as Classical Album of the Year. The First and Fourth are also available, and the massive Second, called the *Resurrection* (but not so dubbed by Mahler), has just been released, with soloists soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian and mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberson.[Review in this issue]

Under Michael Tilson Thomas, currently in his tenth season as San Francisco's music director, the Ninth was played only about a year and a half ago. For unspecified reasons it was decided to hold up recording at the time, and there were many who thought then that the decision might have been a mistake, that no set of performances could surpass it—a hasty conclusion, as it turned out. The second time around, the orchestra displayed a valedictory sense of perfection in overall scope as well as the tiniest of details, bringing glory to all concerned. From the splendid sheen of the strings to the cathedral outpouring of the brass, all 100 minutes were swept up in an urgency that is at the forefront of the exciting partnership between Thomas and the orchestra, one that grows in maturity with each passing season.

The long slow movement that opens the work was a model of meditative restraint, its sound being luxuriant, the intonation pure. The rhythmic framework was sketched in a breathtaking partnership between the cellos and solo horn, acting principal Robert Ward, who outdid himself over and over during the evening.

After the long Andante came the mood-changing scherzo dance movements, the first a sunny advertisement for a lighthearted outdoor country fair etched with personality-plus, the second one a fierce-sounding Burleske that seemed to threaten violence in the jagged trumpet solo trumpet of WH Williams. Once again, the mood changed with the last-movement Adagio, in which Thomas was ever the seasoned guide in the balancing act required for its contrasts of loud and soft, high and low, luxuriant and ghostly. With no detail too insignificant for Thomas's overarching control, the panorama was balanced and richly satisfying.

The San Francisco Symphony's Mahler project has already been trumpeted in music magazines as "historic". If that's the case, the thousands of listeners who filled every seat in Davies Hall over the five days of the recording of Symphony No. 9 can consider themselves an integral part of that history. It was *that* good.

Mahler wasn't the only thing on the agenda of the symphony last fall. There were memorable performances with bass-baritone Thomas Quasthoff in Schubert songs, violinist Itzhak Perlman playing and conducting Bach, and a first San Francisco performance of John Adams's *Naïve and Sentimental Music* under the baton of Alan Gilbert. Originally written for and at the request of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, which premiered it in 1999, the Adams work reveals itself as a three-movement symphony of 50 minutes with the massive scope and scale of Bruckner. The old John Adams style of combining pop melody and Reichian minimalism is still there but has been fully transformed in shape and affect. The second movement melody is spellbinding, one of the most beautiful I've heard.

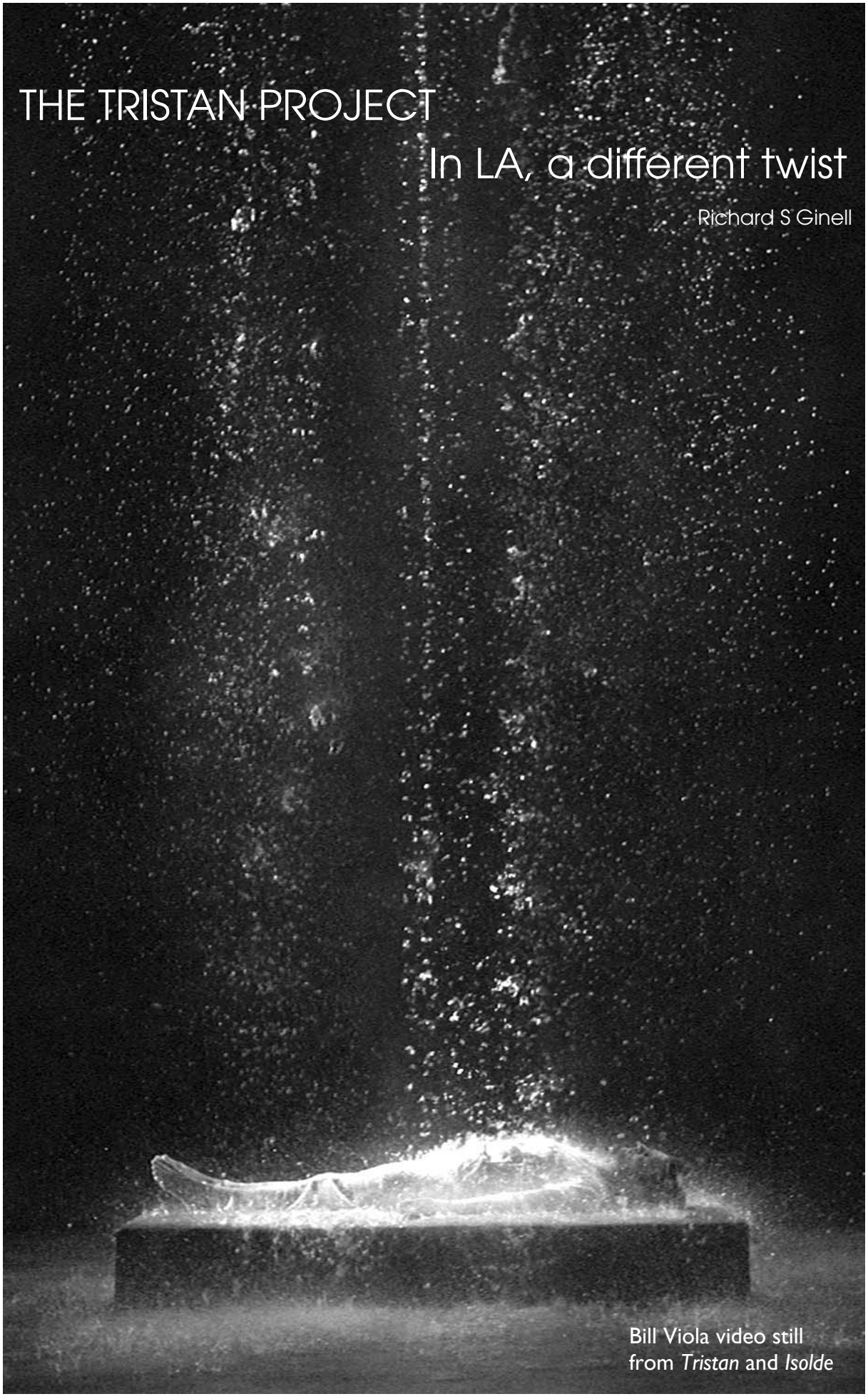
Many US audiences don't like to stick around for "new" music. The orchestra management wisely placed *Naïve and Sentimental Music*, whose title is derived from an essay by Schiller, at the top of the program, to be followed after intermission by Midori in the Beethoven Violin Concerto. But in the performance I heard, Adams was given an immediate and lengthy standing ovation. As for Midori, she offered perfect technique and very little heart, "an impeccable ice sculpture in sound", as one local critic put it.

H + B AD

THE TRISTAN PROJECT

In LA, a different twist

Richard S Ginell



Bill Viola video still from *Tristan* and *Isolde*

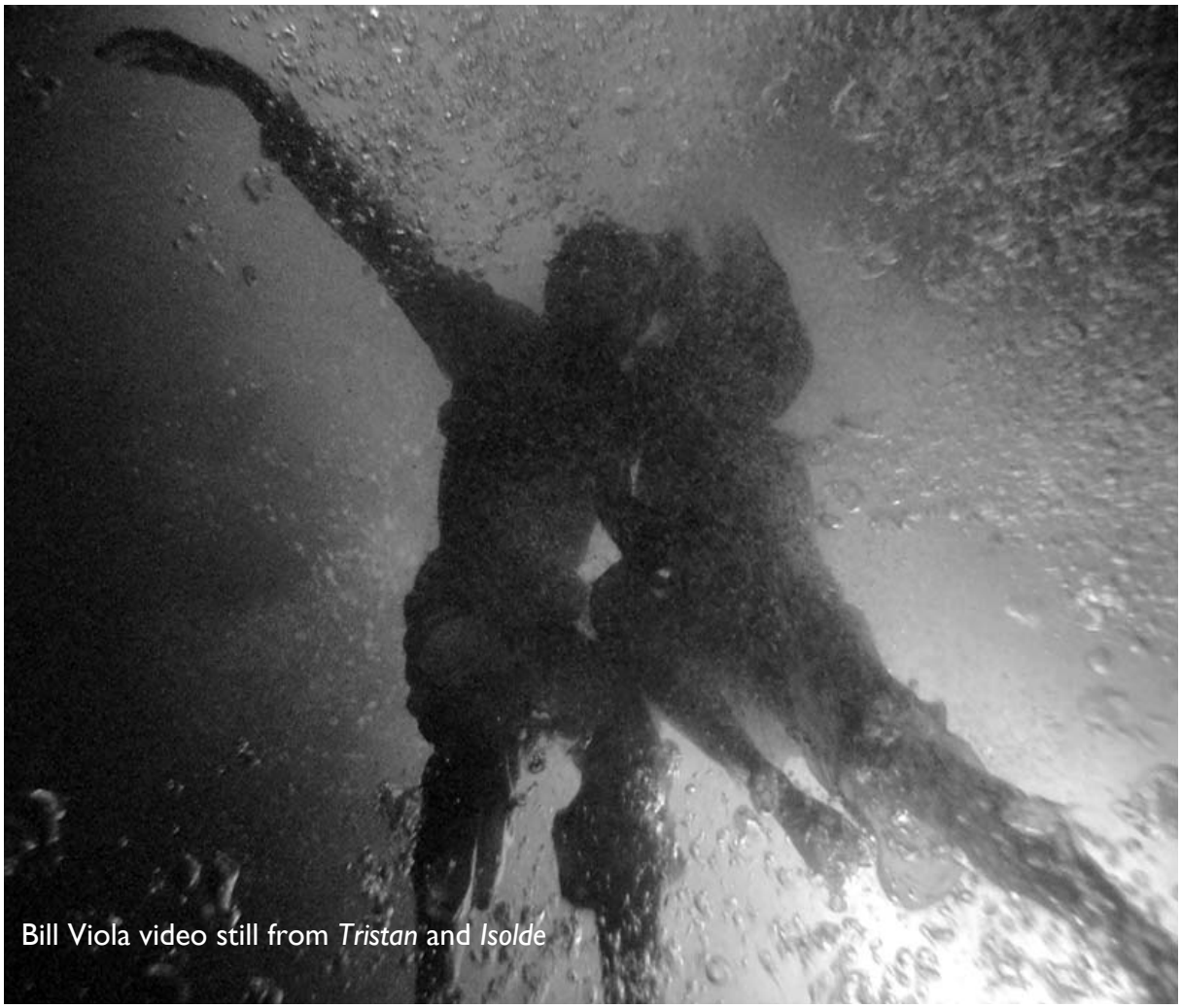
PHOTO: KIRA PEROV

Tristan und Isolde is powerful stuff. Given any kind of a good performance, the opera will drive you crazy with its overheated emotions, its mad philosophy about love finding fulfillment only in death, and its refusal to resolve harmonically until the final minutes of the nearly five-hour score. You don't have to know anything about chords, bars, and rests in order to feel the music's unease, or to experience the ecstatic sense of release after the last sounds have streamed through the hall—yes, even in the ultra-modern, anti-romantic Walt Disney Concert Hall, where the opera generated something close to a full charge of its power December 3-5.

It was ballyhooed as "The Tristan Project", a collaboration between Esa-Pekka Salonen (who was conducting his first *Tristan*), the Los Angeles Philharmonic (which was playing its second, having been in the pit for Music Center Opera's 1987 production), the video artist Bill Viola (his first opera, period), and director-provocateur-LA resident Peter Sellars. It was supposed to explore new ways of interpreting a mysterious masterpiece through multimedia means, going beyond the literal plot into the subconscious, drawing parallels with 20th- and 21st-Century works that had been influenced on some level by *Tristan*.

Yet the key decision that made this *Tristan* an event was a practical one: to divide the performance over a period of three days, one act per day. There is some precedent for this. Leonard Bernstein's Munich *Tristan* was performed and recorded in concert form one act per evening in 1981, though months rather than hours separated each act. On the LA Philharmonic's more compressed time scale, *Tristan* was turned into a *Tristan* Festival, almost a *Ring* in itself, a special occasion where the audience could take each act home and contemplate it before venturing out for more. It was a total immersion experience with room to breathe, freed from the rigor of sitting through three consecutive 80-minute-plus stretches of high-intensity music theater with insufficient intermission breaks. For the musicians and the singers—especially the singers!—fatigue was no longer a crippling factor. Thus, everyone was relatively fresh by the time the great Liebestod rolled into place, and *Tristan* could make its effect, more so than in any live performance that I have attended.

Perhaps this is a viable way to preserve



Bill Viola video still from *Tristan* and *Isolde*

Bill Viola video still from *Tristan* and *Isolde*

Wagnerian opera—which was conceived in a far less stressful time—in the 21st Century. After all, even for the most dedicated dinosaurs among us, life is speeding up, attention spans are decreasing, our personal schedules are getting more crowded, and as a result, many of us simply do not have the time or stamina to spend five straight hours with Wagner anymore. Indeed, in our instant-gratification age, it's hard for us to imagine the rigorous technical mastery, intellectual concentration, uninhibited outpouring of total emotional expression from within, and first-rate inspiration that Wagner was able to combine and put forth in this opera.

On the other hand, perfect Wagnerites who wanted to see all three acts found themselves stuck paying three steep admission prices for the equivalent of one opera. To wit, the cheapest seat in the house would have set you back $108 for the three acts, while a desirable top-of-the-line orchestra seat would have come in at $375 (the top price at LA Opera, if they had done a fully staged *Tristan* this season, would have been $190—almost exactly half!). And this is assuming that one could get in for three acts at all, since the Phil's heavily booked individual subscription series only included one act at most. Do I hear cries of ripoff anywhere?

Moreover, what we were seeing in Los Angeles was not the finished article; Paris Opera will get the full show this coming spring, and it will return to LA with further revisions in three or four years. There were no sets and little stage business, just a conductor, his orchestra and singers, and a film of impressions and images projected on a giant screen in back of the orchestra and on a tiny one above the balcony for those in the orchestra view seats.

Sellars's LA staging seemed to be limited to exploiting Disney Hall's surround-sound properties, with the singers and a few solo musicians occasionally perched in the Balcony, Garden, and Terrace levels at various points around the room. That created some impressive sonic epiphanies and a few visual misfires. Tristan and Isolde are supposed to rush feverishly into each other's arms at the beginning of the Act II Love Duet; instead they lurched awkwardly a few steps downwards on opposite wedge-shaped seating areas on the sides of the hall, definitely at an extreme distance from each other. Presumably Sellars's intentions—

honorable or not— will be more detailed in Paris.

Viola's film made it to the performances, though even here one imagines that additional work will be done on the road to Paris, for there were a few awkward gaps. Shot mostly in agonizingly slow motion, with some stunning time-lapse images involving water and fire, and coarse-grained black-and-white sequences, the film could be confusing, illuminating, pretentious, and sometimes irrelevant to the sounds in the hall. Virtually the last third of Act II was spent focussed upon a still image of a sunrise as seen through the branches of a tree, perhaps symbolizing the lovers' fear of the approaching day. The program warned of "a brief scene of nudity" in Act I but there was a lot of nudity, including a long distracting sequence where two actors playing Tristan and Isolde slowly take off all their clothes in a striptease disguised as part of a ritual-like ceremony of "purification". Another, far more erotic sequence didn't need exposed flesh; it consisted of Tristan and Isolde staring intently into each other's eyes as the camera circled during the night music of the Love Duet, ever so gradually embracing. Most effective was the scene of the Tristan character striding into the fire during the Love Duet.

Again, as in previous attempts to create new audio-visual concert experiences in this 21st-Century hall, it was the music that had the strongest effect—old-fashioned, single-media, 150-year-old music by a genius, played with acoustic instruments little changed from Wagner's day and sung by humans pretty much the way they have sung since the Stone Age. Salonen drove the score hard and fast, each act coming in at around 80 minutes, though he did take his time in the crucial Act I Prelude and Liebestod. The Philharmonic played brilliantly in Acts I and III, with lots of detail illuminated by the clear Disney Hall acoustics, but I did notice a loss of fervor at the start of the Act II Love Duet, which didn't catch fire until its conclusion.

And Salonen had the singers to give Wagner's impossible demands a chance to be heard. Topping the list was soprano Christine Brewer, who possessed the vocal heft needed for Isolde, displaying a matronly timbre that has a most honorable historical example, Kirsten Flagstad. Tenor Clifton Forbis's baritonal Tristan could turn a little grainy under pressure, but he came through with some sensitively expressive passages in Act III. Mezzo-soprano Jill Grove's Brangane was outstanding—powerful and affecting even when heard from the extreme right high terrace. Not using a score, which gave him more freedom for physical acting, bass-baritone Alan Held was commanding at all times as Kurwenal; and Stephen Milling turned his imposing, compassionate basso loose upon the role of King Marke.

After the conclusion of each long act, it was sometimes difficult to remember that yes, there was other music on these programs, too. Preceding Act I was Berg's *Lyric Suite*, done to a brisk, exhilarating, at times surprisingly plush turn by Salonen. Act II was set against the anti-Wagner, a selection of music from Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (based upon a suite stitched together by Erich Leinsdorf) that, when ripped from the context of the complete opera, sounded like a monotonous succession of film cues. The prelude to Act III was Kaija Saariaho's song cycle *Cinq Reflets* (in its West Coast premiere) that grew out of her contemporary *Pelléas*-like opera, *L'amour de Loin*. With soprano Heidi Grant Murphy and baritone Kyle Ketelsen engaging in monologs and dialogs, the song cycle was a glittering, floating, trilling, languorous, seductively orchestrated jacuzzi bath much like the opera itself.

One could play the forbidden love angle forever in choosing companion pieces for *Tristan*; the literature overflows with possibilities. But, Wagner's overwhelming music—not really of this earth, yet pulsating with the most untamed passions ever captured on paper— swept all before it.

MADISON'S MIGHTY NEW ORGAN

A landmark instrument in a brand-new hall

Matthew Power

Stepping from his airport taxi straight onto the stage of Madison's splendid new Overture Hall on November 20, German organ builder Philipp Klais was astonished at the audience awaiting his pre-concert talk. These things usually attract a few dozen anorak-clad technophiles, yet such is the excitement generated by this latest king of instruments that Klais found himself in front of 1,000 eager listeners.

The organ, the exclusive gift of ex-TV anchorwoman and retired company chief Pleasant Rowland, is required to be both a partner to the hall's resident Madison Symphony Orchestra (which moved into its new home in September) and a convincing solo instrument. Klais's ears quickly picked up the twang of Wisconsin vowels. "I couldn't help noticing how Madison people say the word 'cow'", he told the audience. (It takes a long time and includes just about all five vowels.) "I have tried to make an organ that speaks your language with my accent", he joked.

The Madison Symphony under John DeMain (kicking off his 11th year as music director) swarmed into action with Vaughan Williams's Overture to *The Wasps*. Within a minute the hall's unforgiving acoustic was apparent in the fast-moving ensembles. Yet this wrap-around sound doesn't lose its appeal (twice I turned around as percussion and harps seemed to be behind me in the stalls). With the orchestra seated inside an acoustic shell within the stage house, the auditorium gets a sound of almost overwhelming clarity and warmth. For larger ensembles (or indeed dance), an apron of adjustable height augments the stage or can be lowered to form a pit. Mendelssohn's seldom heard *Scottish* Symphony was helped by incisive direction and stylish playing, creating a far different soundworld from Vaughan Williams, yet one which, at 40 minutes' duration, takes a long time to inhabit.

Belgian composer Joseph Jongen composed eclectically, influenced by his teachers D'Indy and Strauss, and moved from his native Liège to become director of the conservatory in Brussels. He wrote his popular Symphonie Concertante for Organ and Orchestra (Op.81) in 1926-7. Right from the opening, the strings' rhythmic drive set the pace with woodwind and brass in hot pursuit. Shortly, with Thomas Trotter at the console, the organ's lyrical interjections showed off rich flutes and celestes, most effective in the impressionistic non-functional harmony. The movement built, the power of the organ's reed choruses matched that of the orchestra, and plenty more waited in the wings.

In the Scherzo the orchestra took up the organ's syncopated rhythms, before the Divertimento became elegiac, alternating organ and woodwind. Trotter's impeccable articulation was evident in the impassioned climax before its sparkling mutations closed the movement, its quiet acquiescence marred only by the persistent whistle of a hearing aid somewhere in the audience.

The Lento contrasted with the other movements and demonstrated the organ's accompaniment skills as it partnered imploring legato string passages and wandered through a landscape of harmony and melody shared with the orchestra. A serene close enabled the thrilling moto perpetuo of the last movement

to make its effect. Reeling arpeggios and brass fanfares created a vibrant tapestry of sound, demonstrating the excellent balance between organ and orchestra. Every note of the organ's virtuoso toccata was audible, even when it dived beneath the waves of undulating orchestral texture. What is actually a very fine work amalgamated all players at last in a combined crescendo of overwhelming proportions.

Two days after the inaugural orchestral concert, Trotter took over as solo recitalist, launching his program with Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor. The work can take on comic horror-film proportions in the wrong hands, but Trotter's choice of it as curtain-raiser was atmospheric, the fugue and its ornaments slick to the end. Those familiar with Trotter's programs, especially on native English organs, will not be surprised by his inclusion of a John Stanley *Voluntary in C* (Op.5:1). Like the French baroque composers, Stanley stipulates the stops he requires for each movement, and these were described beforehand. Two sensitively constructed Canons in A flat major and B minor by Schumann followed.

Michael Nyman, a commercial minimalist most famous for his score to Jane Campian's film *The Piano*, supplied a hypnotic organ work, *Fourths, Mostly*. Commissioned for the opening recital at Birmingham Symphony Hall in England, it contains a lively pedal part that showed off Trotter's deft footwork. The surprise ending sans coda left us eager for the second half. After the break, Leon Boellmann's *Suite Gothique* demonstrated the romantic colors of the instrument like a miniature organ symphony, the grand Toccata conjuring its vast specter despite this dry acoustic, which was exaggerated by a capacity audience of 2,400.

Unusual but welcome were the masterfully and zany *Variations on an Old American Air* by 19th-Century American Isaac Flagler. (The "old American air" is Stephen Foster's 'Old Folks at Home', known in the UK as 'Swanee River'.) Clearly enjoying himself, Trotter camped these up to the full, thanks to the abundant palette at his disposal, providing a rich *jeu de fond*, winsome tremulant, twittering flute, and gothic pedal solo. "I thought you'd like that", he surmised as the audience erupted in applause. Edwin Lamare's transcription of Wagner's Overture to *Rienzi* was grandiose, its final unison tutti allowing blazing reeds to vibrate through this winning auditorium. A thunderous ovation brought forth Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumble-Bee* (melody in the pedals) and the ubiquitous but perfectly executed Widor Toccata. Overture Hall is lucky to boast a landmark pipe organ, and it couldn't have had a more able advocate than Thomas Trotter.

Loft Gothic. AD

From Bellas Artes to Broadway

Richard Traubner

In Mexico City, the largest city in this hemisphere (if not the world), one can find a variety of musical-theater attractions, from popular folk-dance fiestas and *revistas* (revues) to Broadway and local musicals, to ballet and grand opera—though not necessarily all at once, and in productions of varying quality. When I was in the Distrito Federal (D.F.) for the first time in early December, the musicals were out in full force: *Annie*, *Joseph and His Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Chicago*, *Cabaret*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, as well as purely Mexican spinoffs, like *Salón México*, suggested by a popular film of the late 1940s.

I was disappointed that there was absolutely no zarzuela; an e-mail from the arts council confirmed the sad fact that this Hispanic art is not faring well in "New" Spain at the moment. Theaters that once presented zarzuela abundantly still dot the city—on my hotel's street there were three splendid examples—but there apparently was damage to several playhouses in the *centro historico* during the 1985 earthquake. Opera has a spotty history in the city: according to well-informed local sources, productions appear suddenly (often with little advance warning) followed by long, opera-less months.

Most operas play at the spectacular Palacio de Bellas Artes, a D.F. landmark built a century ago with a neoclassic exterior, but only finished in the 1930s with a completely different, gorgeously art-deco auditorium and lobby—as if a 1900 Budapest theater was hit by the SS Normandie. (Not forgetting the Tiffany stained glass curtain and dome, which somehow don't clash with the angular plaster and metalwork.) It's quite a sight, and I chose to hear a Christmas choral concert there in December that brought choirs from all over the country to this luxurious setting. The voices were excellent, singing all kinds of seasonal music, old and new.

The best impressions were made by the Fraternidad Coral, using colorful costumes and choreography, and ending their segment with a boy hitting a pinata, and the Coral Mexicano de INBA, which performed anonymous 16th-Century Spanish anthems, complete with a baroque band that reinforced the Elizabethan sound of Spain's contemporary Golden Age. David L Arontes Reyes, the dynamic director of the latter group, led all the choirs together for the rousing finale of Vivaldi, Mozart, and (predictably) Handel's 'Hallelujah!'.

Violonista en el Tejado (to give the Spanish title of the famous musical of stetl life in Russia a hundred years ago), was produced at the Centro Cultural Telmex, a large-scale complex that boasts *two* theaters for musicals. The *Fiddler* theater seemed just like the Gershwin or Minskoff theaters on Broadway—modern, large, very comfortable, using amplification (needed, partly, because the orchestra was reduced to strings and synthesizers). At least there *was* an orchestra: at the Bellas Artes, most of the performances of the seasonal *Cascanueces* (*The Nutcracker*) used recordings.

Some American assistance (director, choreographer, designer) helped make this a first-rate *Fiddler*, but the large Mexican cast made it glisten, led by the son of the famous Mexican film star of the 1940s, Pedro Armendariz, as Tevye the milkman. Knowing some Spanish and every word of the English lyrics from the recording (and who doesn't know them?) helped make this a memorable evening, and I was just as teary-eyed as I was last year at the Broadway opening of the revival. Wisely, the Mexican production retained the Jerome Robbins staging more thoroughly, with sets that echoed the original 1964 look. Silvia Mariscal was a winning Golde. Part of the pleasure was seeing how a large Mexican family audience (and I would venture to guess that most of it was not Jewish) laughed, cried, and tapped along just as enthusiastically to the show's high points as a New York crowd.

Back in New York, the Rodgers & Hammerstein musical *Cinderella* was given its second mounting at the New York City Opera this past November, with mirthful and melodious results. All attention was centered this time on

the campy cast, including John "Lypsinka" Epperson as the nasty stepmother—all Joan Crawford eyebrows and shoulders and the demented hauteur. Lea DeLaria was a gung-ho, butch stepdaughter Joy; and, most exotically, Eartha Kitt was a Fairy Godmother out of *The Cat People*, purring part of her great duet, 'Impossible'. The songs once again held up marvelously (except for the dull interpolations), and in the waltz sequence in the second act, I experienced a sort of *opérette à grand spectacle* transcendence, part Mogador and part Radio City Music Hall! This, thanks to the old-fashioned sets and costumes, Rodgers's irresistible waltzes, and the wonderful Robert Russell Bennett arrangements.

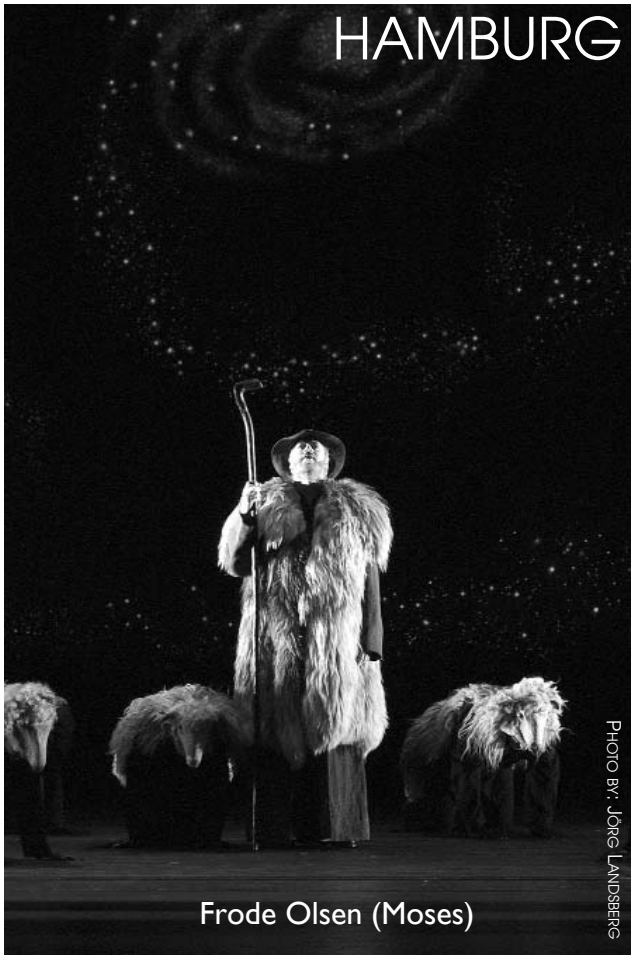
In December the Irish Repertory Theatre, which last season mounted a joyous revival of *Finian's Rainbow*, courageously offered the American premiere of Noël Coward's flop operetta, *After the Ball*. In 1954, at London's Globe Theatre, this seemed an unsettled mixture of Coward's nostalgic and by then already dated musical style with Oscar Wilde's mannered but still performable society play *Lady Windermere's Fan*. It's the Irish Wilde who still comes off best today, with the Coward songs making variable impressions.

Reworked by Barry Day and director-designer Tony Walton, the overstuffed original has been pared down to the essential characters (mostly well played at the IRT) and had its songs rearranged for piano and sometimes a few instruments. The mildly sensational story is still told, but the songs often seem extraneous in Coward's most punctuated way, with his all-purpose sadness-of-lost-love ballads and his little male- or female-group comic choruses. They are mostly fun to hear, but they don't usually make the Wilde more wildly comic or romantic. Two that did stand out were the songs written for the Australian character of Mr Hopper, played originally by Graham Payn, then Coward's lover. Greg Mills sang them with the fresh energy that the rest of the show lacked. Kathleen Widdoes was a bubbly Duchess of Berwick, Kristin Huxhold a lovely Lady Windermere, Mary Illes a moving Mrs Erlynne, and I have to mention Drew Eshelman and Josh Grisetti as two laughable aristocrats who looked just like the chinless or toothy fellas you often saw in *Punch*. Walton's sets and costumes gave a refreshingly restrained though still glittery view of late-Victoriana.

Gilbert & Sullivan's wondrous operetta *Princess Ida*, which had its premiere in between the radiant *Iolanthe* and the titanic *Mikado*, is the Savoy partners at their peak. It's not done nearly enough these days, what with *Pirates* everywhere, still coasting on the success of its New York revision 25 years ago. (Last year's Chicago production of that work, which I reviewed in these pages, has just reopened in London's ENO to less than kindly reviews). *Ida* may have structural and character problems, but the blank verse doesn't bother me anymore at all, and the music is so beautiful, and so atmospherically scored, that it submerges any little libretto quibbles in its frothy foam.

So it was a pleasure to hear a nicely played *Ida*, and see it mounted without apologies and without any of the hideous vulgarities that marred Ken Russell's heinous production at the ENO a decade ago. Thanks go to New York's Village Light Opera, which has been doing G&S, other operettas, and musicals for eons. Three things were notable. The title role was radiantly sung and played by soprano Kristen K Vogel—may she travel far in operetta! Jeffrey Kurnit's Hildebrand was also a remarkable turn—a gruff, bug-eyed, hoarse-voiced king who really seemed little inclined to tolerate nonsense, and who looked like a wild character from Gilbert's *Bab Ballad* illustrations come to life. And last, but certainly not least, Ron Noll's flavorful, sly additions to Sullivan's instrumentation, done with the greatest affection, gave a nice Erich Wolfgang Korngold sparkle to this medieval work, extending the trumpet voluntaries in a Warner Bros.-*Robin Hood* fashion. With its big chorus, and its lovely Ida, the company gave full flavor to the ensembles, particularly the stirring end of Act II, and also to the "rattle of the complicated battle", admirably soft-shoed—and repeated—in Act III. (A G&S encore today? Oh, rapture!)

Finally, in *Souvenir*, Stephen Temperley's two-person play seen at the end of 2004 performed by the York Theatre Company, Judy Kaye gave an arresting, full-bodied, beautifully(?)-sung impression of Florence Foster Jenkins, the society dame who earnestly thought she was a first-rate singer. As history relates (told to the audience by her accompanist, one Cosme McMoon), she only fooled herself—her audiences had to stuff handkerchiefs into their mouths to stop crying with laughter at her off-key, wildly phrased song recitals. Even World War II servicemen, at her final, legendary Carnegie Hall recital, were hoarse with hilarity. The play revolves on the diva's ludicrous, unconscious innocence—how could she possibly *not* have known her limitations? To say any more would give too much away; I enjoyed Kaye's heroic misinterpretations and nuanced acting, and the fundamentally moving conceit. But I think Jack F Lee, good accompanist that he was, was wrong for the part of McMoon—the part requires a real actor who can also play the piano.



Frode Olsen (Moses)

Schoenberg *Moses und Aron*

Wes Blomster

In 1932 Arnold Schoenberg put aside *Moses und Aron*, his only opera, upon completion of two acts. Author of the libretto as well, he sketched an opening scene of a third act, but composed no music for it. Although up to his death in 1951 he spoke of completing the opera, he did no further work on it after 1932.

It was not, however, the pressures of life in exile—Schoenberg came to the United States in 1933—that account for the unfinished state of *Moses*. As the production premiered at the Hamburg Staatsoper on November 14 makes clear, it was rather the irreconcilable conflict between an abstract ideal and its concrete realization at the heart of the story that stood in the way of completion.

Schoenberg was unable to find a way for Moses to communicate the concept of an "unimaginable" god who forbade graven images to a people eagerly awaiting the casting of a Golden Calf.

In the Hamburg staging director Peter Konwitschny underscored both the universality and the contemporary urgency of the dilemma that frustrated the composer. The dance around the calf, the central scene of the opera, is commonly staged as an orgiastic skin show manifesting the people's demand for visible idols. Konwitschny, son of famed conductor Franz Konwitschny and widely regarded as the finest director working in Germany today, set the dance in the oppressive canteen of a modern factory. Born and raised in Germany's late, unlamented eastern communist state, he focussed attention on the failure of the Marxist dream of the 20th Century.

Thus, not the struggle for a new theology was the director's concern, but rather the failed quest for a better society. Philosophic debate, after all, means little to an overworked people faced by the harsh demands of daily life.

Konwitschny displayed his genius with several original touches. Outstanding was the hobby horse procession in the Calf scene of riders masked as Germany's current political leaders. Equally striking was the pairing of Socialist chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and conservative opposition leader Angela Merkel, wrapped in each other's arms in a grotesque waltz. And in an interlude between acts not in Schoenberg's score, a frustrated Moses attempts to hammer out the Ten Commandments on an antique typewriter. His "mountain" was a heap of crumpled drafts behind him. (The scene was without music.)

All this, of course, would be little more than another example of "Regieoper"—the directorial excess frequently encountered in German opera houses today—without the musical excellence of Hamburg's forces. Outgoing general director Ingo Metzmacher conducted a top ensemble with thorough understanding of a score developed from a single 12-tone row. The chorus, reenforced by Poland's Cracow Radio Chorus, numbered 106 singers. A total of 160 vocalists, dancers, actors, and extras appeared on stage.

Schoenberg might well have been amazed at the melodic richness that gigantic Norwegian bass Frode Olsen brought to Moses's *sprechgesang*—spoken delivery with fixed pitches and rhythms—and by the lush lyricism with which Germany's veteran heldentenor Reiner Goldberg portrayed the helplessly torn Aron. Sets and costumes were by Johannes Leicker; Werner Hintze served as dramaturg.

Schoenberg thus staged is clearly no longer only for the atonally adept.

OPERA IN MADRID: REBORN
In a refurbished house, it all comes together

Donald Vroon

In January of 1994 the Liceu, Barcelona's great opera house, burned down. Its loss allowed for a complete reorganization of the opera as the house was rebuilt with all the modern conveniences alongside its classical glories. When it reopened in October of 1999 the Liceu immediately became one of the important companies on the European scene. Barcelona is a thriving city, and the Liceu is one of the places singers love to perform. The greatest international stars put in an appearance, and the musical standards are high. When I was there in 1999 I was very impressed.

Madrid has also undergone a rebirth and joined the same international elite. The Royal Opera House did not burn down, but it was gutted and totally reconstructed in the late 1990s. The goal was to have modern facilities on the highest possible level and still maintain the glory of the age of opera that the building always represented. Planning for a new house in Madrid, as in Barcelona, gave everyone an opportunity to reorganize. The administration was reworked to be less dependent on local and national politics. The orchestra was reconstituted as a new organization, independently managed. The result is certainly the best orchestra in Spain. It is called both Orquestra del Teatro Real (Orchestra of the Royal Theatre) and Orquestra Sinfonica de Madrid (Madrid Symphony). The hiring of Jesus Lopez-Cobos as music director gave everything musical a strong focus.

In November I was in Madrid for a few days and got to see *Macbeth*. Here, in an actual production, one could see and hear how everything has come together to make this one of the world's great opera houses. I don't think I am too easily impressed—I grew up with the Met in New York—but that evening with Verdi in Madrid was one perfect night at the opera. It was double cast, and the cast I heard had Russian singers as Macbeth and his lady. Vassily Gerello and Tatiana Serjan both seemed perfect in their roles. Certainly Lady Macbeth requires great acting as well as great singing, and this woman had it all. The rest of the cast was Spanish, and all were more than adequate. The choral work was excellent—and is important in this opera.

The staging took advantage of the advanced facilities. It managed to be slightly avant-garde but still relevant and reasonably natural. There was a witches' cauldron, for example. There were ramparts. There were also exposed pipes. Why? But I thought about

that only a few minutes before I said to myself, "Why not? It's not really distracting." The Royal Opera is small enough that no eyes had to strain to see everything (unlike the Met), and no ears had to strain to hear anything. That's good news for the singers, because it means no strain on the voices.

The orchestra was wonderful. For the 12 performances of *Macbeth* they became a Verdi orchestra and sounded utterly idiomatic and right for the music. And, of course, the conductor (Lopez-Cobos) had a lot to do with that. He has an uncanny knack of entering the world of any composer he is conducting. He does not cover everything with his own sauce, as so many conductors do. He becomes transparent, so you hear the composer direct—or as direct as possible. Lopez-Cobos is conducting opera nine months of the year these days, and six months are in Madrid (plus one month in Barcelona this year). His opera work in the USA has been at Chicago Lyric, and next fall will be at the Met (Massenet with Renée Fleming). He was also the music director at Berlin Opera for ten or eleven years. But I think of him as an orchestral man—a man who knows how to get the most out of an orchestra. In Cincinnati he got such a beautiful sound out of our orchestra that his 15 years here will always be viewed as golden ones. In Madrid he is at it again. The orchestral playing was surely the strongest facet of this production.

This year's season in Madrid began with *La Dolores* by Tomás Bretón in late September. Before it ends in mid-July it also includes a Henze opera, two performances of Massenet's *Cleopatre* with Montserrat Caballé and her daughter, *The Barber of Seville*, *Lohengrin*, *Traviata*, *Don Carlo*, *Magic Flute*, and *Frau ohne Schatten*. There are also two performances this spring of *Elena e Costantino* by Ramón Carnicer (19th Century). In addition, there's a New Year's Eve zarzuela, a ballet series, and concerts with orchestra by Renée Fleming and a local favorite, Teresa Berganza. There is also, to my amazement, a complete series of shorter operas for children, which began in November with Donizetti's *Rita* and includes a Britten work.

Looking at the facilities, the activities, the operas produced, the singers presented, the length of the season, and the musical level, one can only conclude that this is now one of the world's great opera houses. If you will be in Spain anytime during that long season, you will find opera in Madrid a real treat.

VIOLINISTS COMPETE IN MOSCOW

The "Paganini" contest: first of its kind

Shirley Fleming

If the *Musical America International Directory of the Performing Arts* can be believed, Russia—home to musical contests of almost every sort including that rarity, a viola competition—had long been lacking a comparable event devoted exclusively to the violin. That changed in 2003 when an enterprising young lawyer named Maxim Viktorov, in love with the instrument, founded one. The Moscow Paganini Violin Competition launched its second edition late in 2004, and we were invited to attend the final concerto round, along with three European critics.

By the time we arrived, 23 competitors had been narrowed to six finalists—two Russians, a Ukrainian, a Korean, a Kazakhstani, and a British-based Chinese—who were put through their paces during a long afternoon in the Tchaikovsky Hall of the Moscow Conservatory: complete concertos by Sibelius, Vieuxtemps, Tchaikovsky (twice), Mendelssohn, and at the end, Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No.1.

We hardly needed a crystal ball to sense that the last would be best. Our expectations had already been aroused by 21-year-old Alyona Baeva from Kazakhstan who, alone among the competitors, had been invited to dinner with the critics the night before and whose biography was the only one printed and distributed in advance. It was clear that official eyes and ears were on her, and her Shostakovich concerto told why: it was a searing performance, with the slashing double stops and crunching, primitive dance of the Scherzo balanced by a finale of beautifully modulated violin song and a long, positively luscious cadenza. It left one dazzled, and it won her the Grand-prix. First prize went to Kwun Hyuk Joo of Korea, whose intense fling through Vieuxtemps's showy Violin Concerto No. 5 did justice to both its melodious first movement and its breakneck finale.

The Grand-prix was by no means Baeva's first taste of success: she has been winning prizes since the age of nine, played in Carnegie Hall at 14 in a program called "Virtuosi of the 21st Century", and has toured in a dozen countries in various parts of the world. Immediate plans, as winner of the Moscow Paganini Competition, involve appearances in Russia, and she seems in no hurry to push an already promising career: "I'm not looking for a manager now," she said in fluent English. "I'm waiting for someone I like to come to me." At the gala closing concert in the stunning New Stage hall of the Bolshoi Theatre, she repeated the Scherzo of the Shostakovich with no loss of fire.

Kwun Hyuk Joo

That gala concert, with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, seemed oddly balanced, as it was not the winners but the judges who got the lion's share of attention. After brief solos by the four top competitors, the seven judges took over for performances of their own, lasting well over three hours. No complaint about the quality of the playing: the five Russians (all bearing the title of "People's Artist of Russia"), along with one Lithuanian and one Romanian, boasted glittering resumes and gave sizzling performances of Bizet's *Carmen Fantasy*, Saint-Saëns's *Havanaise*, a Paganini concerto, and the like. The design of the concert was no doubt based on the theory that the well-known names could be relied on to draw an almost full house, which they did. In any case, the atmosphere was gala, the winners won prizes ranging from $6,000 to $10,000, and for Baeva the promise of a CD; she was also awarded the use of a 1723 Strad for the coming year, on loan from the State collection of rare stringed instruments.

(I cannot resist reporting that several of these instruments were shown to us, under armed guard, and that two 19th-Century vio-

lins had acquired a 20th-Century adornment: a small hammer & sickle, etched into the wood.)

Our visit to Moscow was brief, but long enough to detect a curious undertow of self-examination in some of the surprisingly candid comments made to us. "Mass culture is very low in Russia right now", remarked Maxim Viktorov, who says he founded the Paganini competition in the hope of stimulating interest in classical music. "Now is the time for the violin. All the great things in violin playing were done some time ago." Much the same general assessment came from the director of the Music College of the Moscow State Conservatory, who shook his head sadly over his claim that the young people of Moscow don't know who Tchaikovsky is. "But," he added with a slight smile, "in America there are young people who never heard of Faulkner." He went on to express frustration with a lack of financial support for Russian educational institutions—"A bank clerk makes two or three times as much as a professor"—and he expressed a sense of isolation: "We would like more cultural contact with Europe, more contact with European schools. We are a little inert here."

Whether the Moscow Paganini Violin Competition will make a name for itself outside Russia—the word "international" is not part of its title—remains to be seen. It also remains to be seen if the winners' recordings become generally available. The CD of the 2003 winner, 17-year-old Moscow Conservatory student Lena Semenova, is impressive and beautifully produced and packaged; possible distribution by Virgin Records, we were told, was under discussion. In the meantime, if Alyona Baeva returns to play in New York one of these days, I will certainly be there to hear her.

Alyona Baeva

THE *RING*, GIGANTIC

Dress rehearsal: *Die Walkure*'from The *Ring Cycle*

PHOTO BY: SUE ADLER

And Australia's very own

Robert Markow

In Australia, size matters. Its people are not particularly boastful (except, perhaps, when it comes to their legendary drinking ability), but when they put on a big show, it can be something truly worth bragging about. Such was Australia's first fully home-grown production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, presented in three cycles at Adelaide's 2,000-seat Festival Theatre last November and December (I attended the first cycle, November 16-22).

Actually, the *Ring* had been presented before in Australia, once in 1913 by an itinerant English company led by Thomas Quinlin, and again in 1998 when Adelaide imported Pierre Strosser's production from Paris's Théatre du Chatelet. Australians did not especially like Strosser's production, prompting Stephen Phillips, artistic director of State Opera of South Australia, to initiate a campaign for Australians to do it themselves—and better.

Nearly everything Phillips accomplished was on a Wagnerian (read Australian) scale, beginning with the cost: 15.3 million Australian dollars (about $12 million US). The state government of South Australia expects to earn back most of this through cultural tourism (80 percent of the audience came from out of state and from 22 foreign countries). The cheapest seats went for over $600 Australian (about $500 US) for the cycle, and ascended to a stratospheric $1,500. Prices notwithstanding, seats for all three cycles were 90 percent sold out nine months in advance, and the hall was completely sold by curtain time.

The production employed the largest scenic designs ever conceived for a theatrical production in Australia. These were the work of Michael Scott-Mitchell, designer of the Sydney 2000 water and fire cauldron. More than 300 people were involved in the *Ring*: orchestral musicians, principal singers, children (labor laws being unknown in Nibelheim), supernumeraries, administrative personnel, publicists, even masseurs and physiotherapists to straighten out stiff muscles and sore backs. The roster of orchestral musicians numbered 130, of whom nearly 100 were in the pit at any given time on a rotating basis. There was a technical crew of 80, half of whom were needed for the Immolation Scene alone, and 35 truckloads of scenery. The Adelaide *Ring* was officially proclaimed the biggest and most expensive theatrical production in the history of Australia.

Was it all worth it? Absolutely. Israeli conductor Asher Fisch led the enlarged Adelaide Symphony with total understanding of the huge architectural structure of the cycle, infusing it as well with myriad details of dynamic

Christopher Doig Wotan and John Brocheler in *Rheingold*

nuance, felicities of phrasing, and elegant lyricism. The orchestra was superb, and won the loudest applause when it appeared on stage for a collective bow after *Götterdämmerung*. The principal singers, nearly all of whom came from Australia or New Zealand, ranged for the most part from very good to outstanding. John Wegner proved to be one of the most viscerally exciting, even terrifying Alberichs since Gustav Neidlinger, yet one who also found room for lyricism when required. The Wotan was Dutchman John Bröcheler, with a voice that bespoke authority and control in *Rheingold* but a rose to truly grand heights of expressiveness in *Walküre*. There were reports of men crying in the audience during his farewell to Brünnhilde.

Siegfried was perfectly cast in the eponymous opera as Canadian Gary Rideout—physically youthful and athletic, as well as vocally ardent, heroic, and tireless. The *Götterdämmerung* Siegfried was sung by an American, Timothy Mussard, who still seemed to be suffering from the throat ailment that forced him to cede the role to his cover Rideout in *Siegfried*. Richard Greager was a nervous wreck of a Mime, nearly stealing the show from Rideout in Act I of *Siegfried*; and Duccio dal Monte ruled the stage as Hagen in *Götterdämmerung* with his massive, deeply sonorous voice. Elizabeth Campbell excelled as a raving Fricka, and Kiwi Richard Green brought a gorgeous but unmenacing voice to Hunding. Australia's reigning international vocal artist at the moment seems to be Lisa Gasteen, who portrayed Brünnhilde with great power and endurance but did not infuse the role with any particular depth of understanding.

For a director, Phillips brought in Elke Neidhardt, who had already worked for 13 years as resident director of Australian Opera (1977-1990), and has been involved with several *Ring*s in her native Germany. "I wanted this *Ring* to be something beautiful to look at", she asserted in a press conference. True to her word, most of the sets and costumes (by Stephen Curtis) were a pleasure to see, often executed with flair and imagination. Her concept trod a fine line between the modern and the traditional, the intelligent and the silly. The forest canopy in Act II of *Siegfried*, for example, consisted of hundreds of green, helium-filled balloons (each of which had to be individually deflated after the performance and blown up again for the next). However, Neidhardt's claim that "I didn't do anything that's not in the score" was hard to accept when the Woodbird (Shu-Cheen Yu) entered doing a perfect cartwheel, sported the same flaming red hair as Wotan and all his progeny, and even carried a mini-spear.

Neidhardt's emphasis on drama was borne out even before the cycle began, when the hall was plunged into total darkness—TOTAL!—for the opening of *Rheingold*. Not even Bayreuth's blackout is so complete, as the pit there does emit a faint glow. In Adelaide, the conductor was invisible to the musicians, so they had to resort to following a tap light mounted on the podium for their initial entrances. Wagner would have loved it! He also would have loved the water curtain designed by United Utilities Australia, which spanned the entire opening of the stage. In front of this the Rhinemaidens cavorted, giving the audience the illusion that it was looking down *into* the river. Five thousand gallons of water were pumped from below the stage to the fly tower 50 feet above, where it was compressed and released into an opaque membrane. At the bottom the water was collected and recycled back to the top.

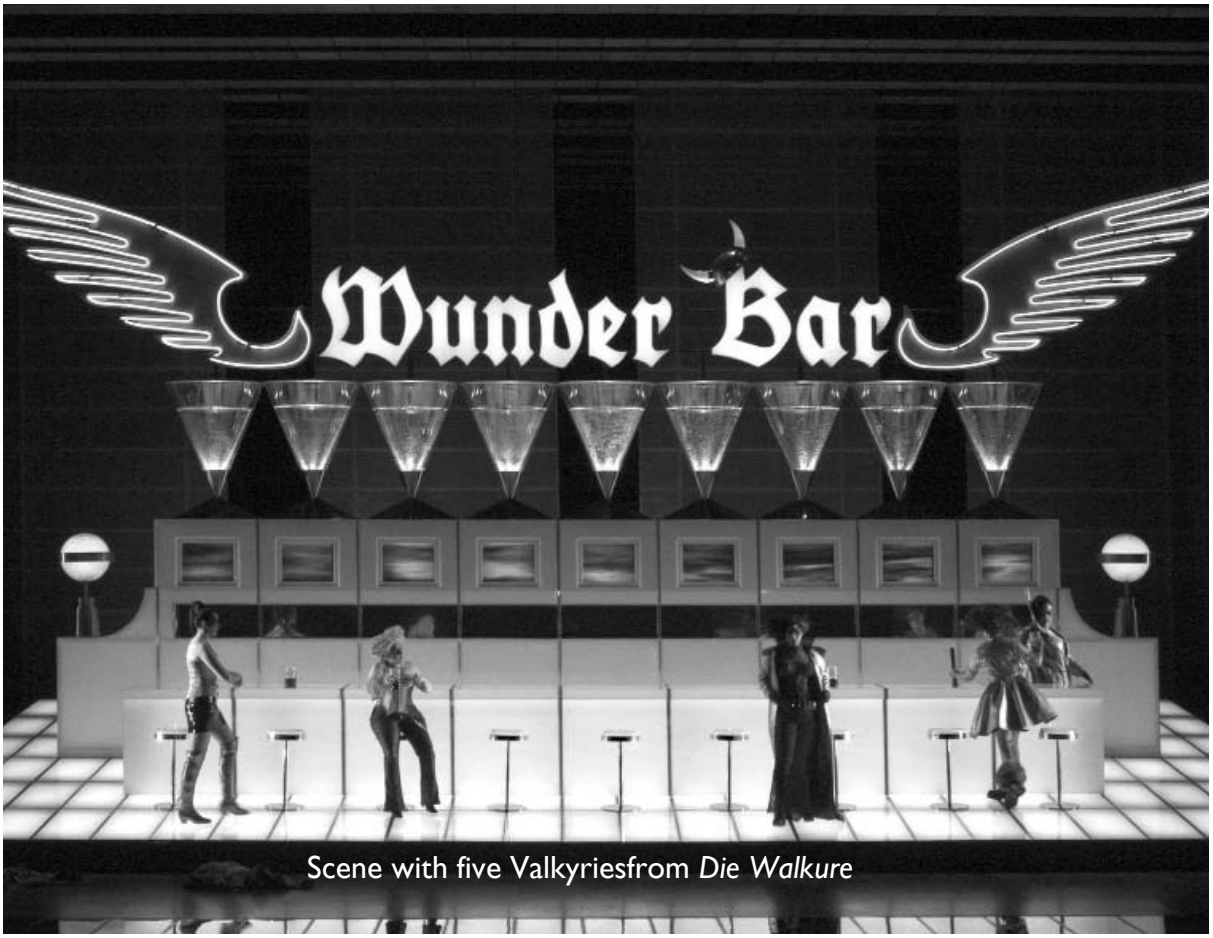
The blackout and the water curtain weren't the only things Wagner would have loved in Adelaide. Brünnhilde's rock was surrounded by real fire—lots of it—and she would have been severely scorched had not her "rock" (a tilted disc mounted on a pole) risen about 20 feet off the stage. Down in Nibelheim, Alberich turned himself alternately into a huge dragon and a toad that really hopped. Loge emitted flashes of fire from his fingertips.

Neidhardt also incorporated numerous touches of humor for the benefit of fun-loving Aussies. The Valkyries were tarted up to resemble a gregarious bunch of girls out for a night on the town, which they accomplished with much gusto in the "Wunder-Bar", probably the most striking set of the entire production. There they monitored Wotan's stormy approach on the weather channel. The inexperienced Siegfried initially tried to waken Brünnhilde with a few quick pecks on the cheek before he discovered that a deep, passionate kiss would work better. And the dragon Fafner was not beneath giving Siegfried the finger in his dying moments. The audience was in stitches.

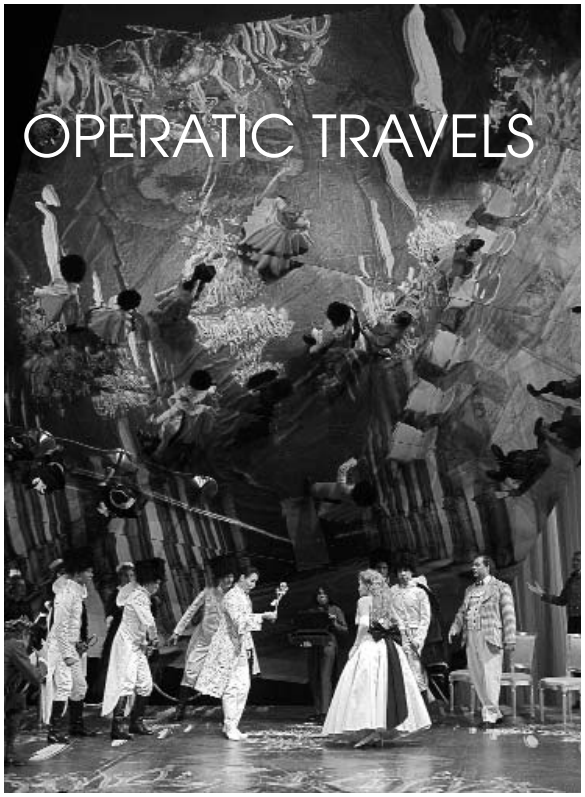
A host of ancillary activities was available between performances: lectures, symposums, backstage tours, and no fewer than eight exhibitions, including one on scenic design sent directly from Bayreuth and one on, of all things, gold and rings.

If Wagner hadn't discovered Bayreuth as an ideal town for his Festspielhaus, he might have instead chosen Adelaide. This eminently pleasant, unbustling city of just over a million souls projects a quiet charm, remaining outside the stream of mass tourism and representing something of a throwback to a quieter age, with its colonial architecture, well-preserved Victorian buildings, parks, churches, and cafes. It boasts some of the finest museums in the country and a cultural life at least equal to that of flashier Sydney. The surrounding countryside is lined with rolling hills and produces more than a third of Australia's wine, some of it outstanding. And, perhaps most important, it is remote enough, located on the southern rim of Australia facing Antarctica, so that it must be a destination in itself; for the Wagnerian experience, it required careful travel plans.

Public response to the *Ring* was overwhelming. The rafters shook at the end of *Götterdämmerung* when the cheering was at its peak. "I have never experienced an audience like this", exclaimed conductor Asher Fisch. A 15-CD recording ("the world's first Super Audio CD recording of the *Ring* in surround sound") has been promised from the Melba Foundation, due out in late 2005. So far there are no plans for a revival, though Phillips hopes to rent the production to an Asian enterprise or two (the 2008 Beijing Olympics is a prime target). Stay tuned to Wotan's weather channel.



Scene with five Valkyriesfrom *Die Walkure*



Lady Macbeth in Moscow, *Rosenkavalier* in Helsinki, and more

George Loomis

Back in 1994 when the Metropolitan Opera did Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* for the first time, some (though not I) thought the work was ill served by Graham Vick's updated production, in which the bored heroine Ekaterina watched television and her seedy father-in-law Boris helped himself to beer from a refrigerator. Those curious to see the opera in a form closer to what the score specifies might conceivably find the Bolshoi Theater's new production of interest, although it's hardly worth a trip to Moscow.

Things have been looking up at the Bolshoi recently, but the producer Temur Chkheidze seems to have reacted to the opera's shocking vulgarities with the prudery of a Soviet censor. There was nothing appalling about the male workers' groping attack on the cook Aksinya. And the scene where Ekaterina consummates her adulterous relationship with the laborer Sergei—one of the most notorious in opera—found the audience's attention diverted from the central act by men with flashlights apparently trying to track down the couple. Meanwhile, Ekaterina and Sergei did their thing behind a bed while Shostakovich's graphic music lacked a cogent visual analog. Yuri Gegeshidze's sets, all in wood and gloomily lit by Vladimir Lukasevich, represent the prosperous Izmailov family home as curiously dilapidated.

At the second performance, on November 21,Tatyana Smirnova sang with a fine, rich voice and alert musicality, but stronger direction is required if her Ekaterina is to appear spirited instead of downtrodden. Valery Gilmanov let his big, black bass voice do his acting for him in the service of Boris's odiousness. Roman Muravitsky sang Sergei with a strong, muscular tenor, and Maxim Paster's sweet-sounding tenor fit nicely for Ekaterina's weak-willed husband Zinovy. Alexandra Durseneva was an assertive Sonyetka.

Zoltan Pesko, an experienced opera conductor currently music director of Lisbon's San Carlos Theater, set high musical standards in his Bolshoi debut. Although the Bolshoi has performed the opera in its revised, toned-down form as *Katerina Izmailova*, these are its first performances of the original version since that famous night in 1936 when Stalin saw it and mandated its disappearance from the stage. It should have packed more punch.

Valery Gergiev loves an opportunity to assert the superiority of his Mariinsky Theatre over the Bolshoi, which may explain the performance two days later of Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades* in a production specially conceived for Moscow and presented in the Tchaikovsky Hall, a concert hall. Given the venue, the production by Alexei Stepanyuk was understandably sparse, yet his direction of the principals had them interacting with an affecting intimacy that more lavish treatments might not allow. The action, smartly lit by Andrei Tarasov, played out with few props on a large square surface that changed colors—green (no surprise) for the final gambling scene—against black surroundings, with rectangular illuminated openings in back for entrances and exits; fuzzy projections of St. Petersburg above added nothing. Given the context, the elaborate period costumes from the Mariinsky's old, realistic production seemed out of place.

For the occasion, the Mariinsky brought its reigning Hermann, tenor Vladimir Galouzine, and the accomplished soprano Olga Guryakova (who actually counts Moscow's Stanislavsky as her home theater). Galouzine's portrayal of the obsessed gambler was as powerful as ever but more tightly controlled and with little of the ranting that can make his Hermann seem crazed. Guryakova's voice is somewhat on the light side for Lisa but has a lovely, shimmering beauty that retained its allure even in the canal scene's most impassioned utterances, and she brought an expressivity to all she did.

Alexander Gergalov sang Yelestsky's aria in

consummate style, and Viktor Chernomortsev was a robust Tomsky. Probably for logistic reasons the orchestra was oddly positioned on the hall's main floor, with its back to the audience. Gergiev thus faced the audience, while also turning to cue singers. Viewed from this vantage point, his much-discussed unorthodox technique didn't appear especially difficult to follow, and in any case the orchestra responded handsomely to his familiar brooding, intense approach to the score.

From Moscow, Helsinki is easily reached by overnight train, a journey well worth it if rewarded by the Finnish National Opera's glorious new production of *Der Rosenkavalier*, seen at the premiere on November 26. This company has to compete with all the major opera houses for top Finnish singers, but it could hardly have done better than with its *Rosenkavalier* cast, which included Finns in the three principal women's roles and a bass from Illinois as Baron Ochs.

Soile Isokoski's voice was shown to be a perfect instrument for Strauss: resonant, richly textured and of ideal size—weighty enough for the music's lushness but never cumbersome. Her portrayal of the Marschallin was wistful yet beautifully controlled and never sentimental, which made it all the more poignant. Few, if any, sopranos are held in higher esteem today than her compatriot Karita Mattila, but after this performance Isokoski must be regarded as every bit her equal.

Marco Arturo Marelli's production supplied an ideal framework for this remarkable characterization, full of the kind of novel touches that can make a familiar opera seem fresh without distorting its dramatic essence. It was amusing to see the Marschallin's black servant return with a second cup of morning chocolate after detecting Octavian's presence in her bedroom. At the end he returned not to look for a handkerchief but to serve breakfast once again, now to Octavian and Sophie. The clichéd technique of having characters freeze worked beautifully for the presentation of the rose, when Octavian is struck dumb by Sophie's beauty. And before the final trio you felt Octavian's anguish as he stood between the two women in his life, each seated alone on a bench.

Marelli updated the action to roughly the time of the opera's premiere. Dominating the set of each act (which he also designed) is a huge overhead mirror reflecting colorful floor patterns. And in Act I a slowly moving stage allows items of the Marschallin's furniture to move imperceptibly across the stage and out of sight, symbolizing her preoccupation with the passage of time.

Monica Groop's engaging mezzo was right on the mark as Octavian, and she made the essential bond between Octavian and the Marschallin seem truly genuine. Eric Halfvarson was also highly welcome as a graying, rather dapper Baron Ochs, singing incisively yet with tremendous power. Helena Juntunen was a charming Sophie, though others have sung the high-lying phrases with more grace. Mika Pohjonen, velvety of voice as the Italian Singer, appeared with dark glasses and cane like Andrea Bocelli. A few untidy moments apart, Muhai Tang led a vital, impassioned performance.

A three-hour ferry trip across the Gulf of Finland can take one from Helsinki's gleaming modern opera house to the century-old, Nordic-style theater of the Estonian National Opera in Tallinn. Eduard Tubin's *Barbara von Tisenhusen* is a rarity in all parts of the world except Estonia, where the new production unveiled on November 27 is the company's third since it gave the premiere in 1969.

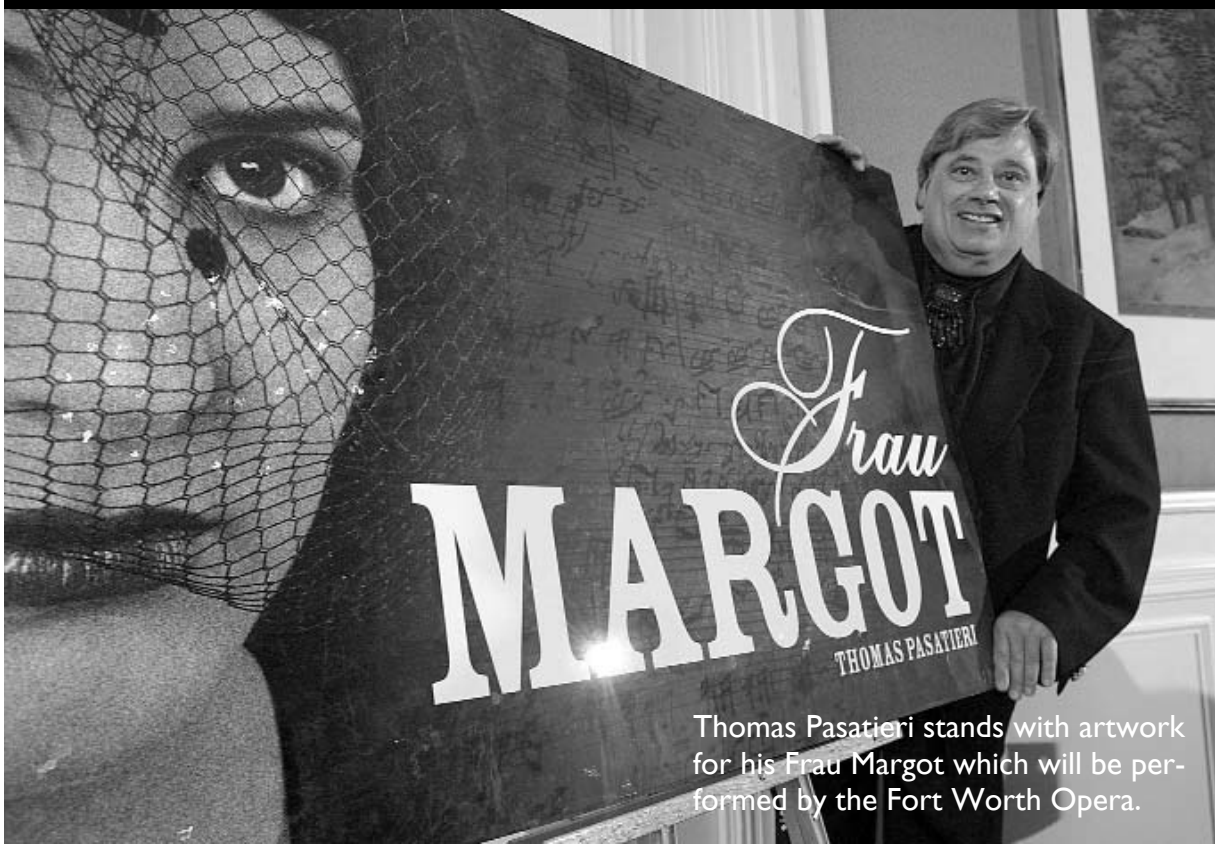
Interest in Tubin's music has grown steadily since Neeme Järvi began recording the symphonies shortly before the composer's death in 1982. Now there's a second complete set led by Arvo Volmer, who became artistic director of the Estonian National Opera last August and presided over the new production. The opera's story, set in 16th-Century Estonia, is as simple as it is grim. Young Barbara transgresses a prohibition against noble women marrying commoners without family consent. Family honor thus tainted, her three brothers, armed with a court order, throw her under the ice of a frozen lake. *Barbara* proved a gripping piece, interestingly crafted from a nine-note passacaglia theme. Sibelius, Shostakovich, and Honegger are often cited as influences on Tubin, but his operatic defies style easy categorization. There's room for Estonian local color in some arresting choral scenes, but the opera's three compact acts move swiftly and decisively to the bleak close.

Barbara could make a greater effect than Endrik Kerge's conventional staging allowed; and Eldor Renter's period costumes, with ermine trim, gold chains bearing medals, and floppy hats, were almost too elaborate. The musical side under Volmer, however, was accomplished. Heli Veskus's creamy soprano served Barbara's music admirably, and she resolutely projected the girl's unshakable conviction that she acted honorably. Roland Liiv's appealing tenor served for her lover Bonnius, and Rauno Elp was forceful as the lead brother Jürgen. Teo Maiste displayed a smooth, expressive bass as the ineffectual parson Friesner, who tries to persuade the brothers to relent.

Here & There

News from around the classical music world

Awards & Appointments



Thomas Pasatieri stands with artwork for his Frau Margot which will be performed by the Fort Worth Opera.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FORT WORTH OPERA ASSOCIATION

Carlyle Floyd, whose operas include *Susannah* and *Of Mice and Men*, was among those awarded a National Medal of Arts, presented by the president in the Oval Office in November. Choreographer Twyla Tharp was among the recipients as well.

Forth Worth Opera has commissioned **Thomas Pasatieri** to write an opera titled *Frau Margot* to a libretto by **Frank Corsaro**, based on his play of the same name, not yet produced or published. Corsaro will direct the premiere, scheduled for the spring of 2007. It will be Pasatieri's first opera in 20 years; his *Seagull* of 1972 was widely performed. *Frau Margot* deals with a widow's haunted memories of an unhappy marriage and the dire consequences that result from her increasing insanity.

Munich Symphony Orchestra has named **Philippe Entremont** as principal guest conductor; he will lead the orchestra on a five-week, 26-city tour of the US starting in October. Entremont, who remains active as a pianist, is conductor laureate of both the Vienna Chamber Orchestra and the Israel Chamber Orchestra, and is principal guest conductor of the Shanghai Symphony. In 1997 he founded the biennial Santo Domingo Music Festival, of which he is artistic director.

George Tsontakis won the 2005 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition ($200,000) for his Violin Concerto No. 2; the work was given its world premiere in 2003 by the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra conducted by Miguel Harth-Bedoya, with soloist Steven Copes. Tsontakis, a faculty member of Bard College, joins the ranks of such previous winners Ligeti, Boulez, Adams, Adès, and Corigliano.

George Garrett Keast, an associate conductor with the New York City Opera, has been named to the new position of resident conduc-

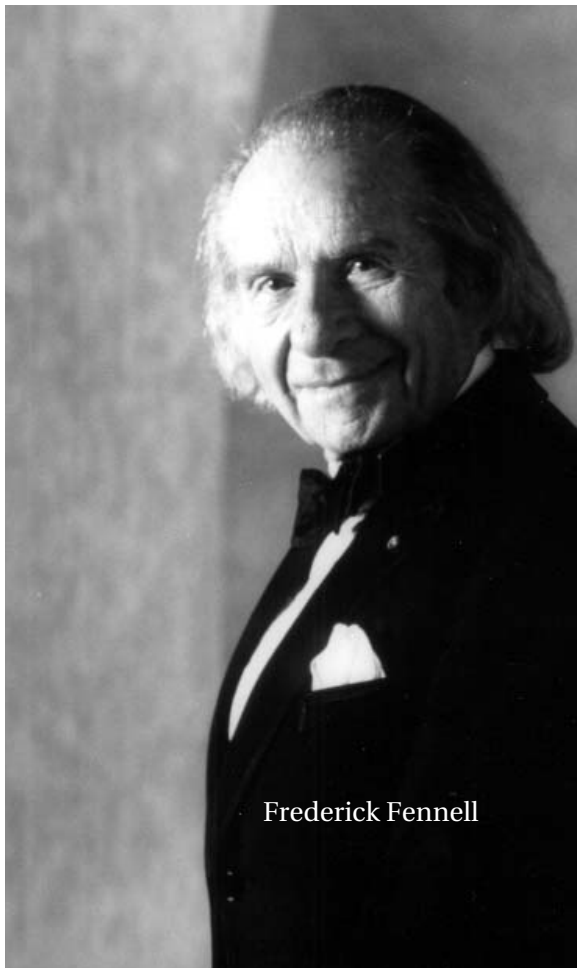
tor of the Queens Symphony Orchestra, where he has been a guest conductor over the past two seasons; he also holds a faculty position with the Music at Port Milford Chamber Music Festival in Canada.

Dame Joan Sutherland was among six recipients of the Kennedy Center Honors, bestowed by the president at the White House on December 5. Other musical notables also receiving the honor were Sir Elton John and composer John Williams, winner of five Academy Awards for his film scores.

The **Atlanta Symphony** under music director Robert Spano has embarked on a two-year project of concerts and recording of works by Osvaldo Golijov for Deutsche Grammophon. On the list is the one-act opera *Ainadamar*, which will be semi-staged next November; Spano led the world premiere at Tanglewood in 2003.

Obituaries

Conductor **Frederick Fennell** died in Siesta Key, Florida on December 7 at the age of 90. As founder of the Eastman Wind Ensemble and the foremost band conductor of his time, he put band music on the musical map through many recordings and guest appearances. His two-volume LP set of Civil War music, complete with canon fire recorded at the Gettysburg Battlefield, was a landmark of it kind. He studied conducting with Serge Koussevitzky at Tanglewood, taught at Interlochen for more than 50 years, and was principal guest conductor of the Dallas Wind Symphony.


Frederick Fennell

Soprano **Renata Tebaldi** died in San Marino, on December 19 at the age of 82. The well-beloved singer, who began her career in Italian regional opera houses, was already renowned when she made her Metropolitan Opera debut as Desdemona in January 1955, having been launched by Toscanini at La Scala in the mid-1940s. Her association with the Met (her second role there was Mimi) continued for 18 years and encompassed 270 performances, until her retirement singing Desdemona—in 1973. An authorized biography was published in the mid-90s, and she came to the Metropolitan Opera House to sign copies for a devoted public.

Victoria de los Angeles died January 14 in Barcelona, where she was born in 1923. She had a long career—at least 50 years—and I had a long talk with her when she was about 60 and still singing very well but avoiding the highest-lying roles and songs. She was as sweet as her voice and full of Spanish dignity and kindness, charm and sympathy. That came across in her interpretations. She started out with early music (her recordings for EMI are still available) and became a coloratura soprano, then more of a light lyric. She worked with every great conductor. Her *Boheme* and *Carmen* with Sir Thomas Beecham are still legendary. The Puccini was with Bjoerling, who also joined her in *Madama Butterfly* under Barbirolli. She even sang Wagner at Bayreuth.

No one sang Spanish songs of all periods better than she did. Her 80 recordings were all for EMI and included 21 complete operas. Her voice was simply beautiful, with flawless intonation and phrasing. Her humanity and vulnerability were always moving.

DONALD VROON

OPERA EVERYWHERE

Jeanne-Michele Charbonnet as Lady Macbeth

CHARLOTTE, NC

Opera Carolina: Verdi *Macbeth*

In its 56 years, Opera Carolina has grown from a small community group of volunteers—originally called the Charlotte Music Club—into a highly respected professional company with opulent productions and national aspirations. While they offer only three or four performances of each of their four mainstage operas each season, the company typically occupies Belk Theater, Charlotte's flagship performing arts venue with 2,000 seats, for eight full weeks every year readying their lavish stagings.

The extended incubation was spectacularly evident in the grand season opener, a flashy production of Verdi's *Macbeth* in its long-overdue Charlotte premiere. Scene changes between battlefield and castle were accomplished with admirable fluidity. A transparent scrim sheathed the entire stage all evening long, swept by foreboding clouds when Macbeth and Banquo first emerge from battle, lit up by eerier effects when we visit the bearded coven of prophetic witches.

As it turned out, another function of the scrim may have been to protect the audience from the onstage pyrotechnics. Watching the Scottish king's final encounter with the witches on the barren heath, I could actually feel the heat of the final lightning flash in Row N!

The royal couple wasn't quite that hot, although they threw themselves energetically into director Jay Lesenger's bold concept. Mark Rucker in the title role tended to waddle across the stage rather than striding decisively like a bloodthirsty warrior. But if Rucker's stocky frame sometimes seemed to be channeling Rigoletto, his rich baritone gripped the music forcefully as the wheel of fortune lifted him to the throne. Then in Act IV, he melted quite convincingly in 'Pieta, rispetto, amore' as he perceived that he'd lost the moral high ground irretrievably.

With her flowing red hair (or wig), soprano Jeanne-Michèle Charbonnet cut quite an imposing figure as Lady Macbeth. Listening to her steely voice steamrolling through her arias and cabalettas—sour at first, but sweeter when she warmed up—you'd hardly suspect that most divas embellish the wicked temptress's earliest music with trills and coloratura filigree. If the intricacies of milady's letter scene were beyond her grasp, Charbonnet proved surprisingly supple and soulful in the climactic 'Una macchia é qui tuttora!' sleepwalk.

You might say that Charbonnet was often more like Shakespeare's primitive Lady M than Verdi's wily makeover. Perhaps that was the intent of Charlotte Opera artistic director James Meena, since he leaned heavily on the Bard's original text in the supertitles for Piave's

landmark libretto. Meena also did a fine job with the musical atmospherics in guiding the Charlotte Symphony through the score. Trombones heralded the saturnalia on the heath with extra gusto, and before the troubled queen's nocturnal ramble, Eugene Kavadlo's forlorn clarinet cast a pall over the palace.

PERRY TANNENBAUM

CHARLOTTE, NC

Charlotte Symphony: Beethoven *Fidelio*

A celebrated suffragette sings the title role in the most visionary proto-feminist opera of the Romantic Era. Surely this must be a Hollywood pipedream of Samuel Goldwyn dimensions, no? Reality nearly outstripped improbable fantasy—in the largest American city named after a woman!—when suffragette *namesake* Susan B Anthony took her place at the vanguard of an opera-in-concert presentation of Beethoven's *Fidelio* by the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra. Anthony emphatically proved that her billing wasn't a stunt. On more levels than one, she wore the pants in this production.

Portraying the brave, devoted Leonore, the vivacious soprano scorned the usual concert finery worn by guest soloists. "Disguised" as Fidelio, she appeared in black slacks, black vest, and a positively Byronic wide-collared white blouse. With her platinum hair, Anthony was a dashingly romantic action hero, and her singing had all the spinto fire you could wish.

So it was no small achievement that bass baritone Thomas Jesatko emerged as an intimidating adversary, booming forth the sforzandi of the vindictive Don Pizarro. The confrontation between these two powerhouses down in Florestan's prison cell was absolutely thrilling. Anthony surpassed herself in this dramatic climax, calling upon extra reserves for the moment she discarded her disguise.

Both she and Jesatko also outclassed Michael König in his US debut as Florestan. In *his* concert duds, König apparently felt he could forego any intensive acting. The hopeless desolation was missing when he began the famed 'Gott, welch Dunkel hier!', though he rose to the heroic transport that accompanies Florestan's delirious vision of Leonore. Making his US debut as Rocco, Guido Jentjens was even more overmatched vocally, nor could he make much of the scrappy jailkeep's comical attributes, decked out in a formal tux. But Sari Gruber had no such problems with the peasant wantonness of Marzelline, proving to be a delightful pepperpot as she fell for the disguised Fidelio.

The opera-in-concert format, initiated by the orchestra's music director Christof Perick two seasons ago with *Der Freischütz*, once again proved felicitous for the unique demands of *singspiel*. Local radio host Mike Collins filled in the narrative thread, relieving the singers of their travails with dialog. Thrusting the Charlotte Symphony onstage and emphasizing the orchestral element of *Fidelio* was a mixed blessing at first, as the ensemble stumbled over the argument of the *Leonore III*, inserted in place of Beethoven's prescribed overture. But after overpowering the first half of the Marzelline-Jaquino duet, the orchestra attuned itself sensitively to its proper role, gently pointing up the symphonic splendor of Beethoven's scoring under Perick's precise baton.

Overall, the enhanced prominence of the choral writing was the most unalloyed benefit of the concert format. The magnificence of the Oratorio Singers of Charlotte, prepared by Scott Allen Jarrett, was slightly muted for Act I when only the men appeared, vocally portraying the downtrodden prisoners of Seville in their affecting peep of sunlight. After intermission the full co-ed ensemble, 170 voices strong, placed upstage behind the full orchestra and our triumphant protagonists, shook the Belk Theater auditorium and electrified the audience, exulting in Florestan's final liberation. A happy ending more than worthy of MGM.

PERRY TANNENBAUM

Susan B Anthony

CINCINNATI

CCM: Zemlinsky *Der Geburtstag der Infantin*

The name, if not necessarily the music, of Alexander von Zemlinsky (1871-1942) is well known to students at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. A gift from Zemlinsky's widow made possible the CCM library's reading room, and every six years CCM hosts an international composition competition named after him. In 1987 the school produced the American premiere of his opera *Der Kreidekreis* (The Chalk Circle).

So much for the where; now for the what and why. Art frequently reflects life, mirrored through the prism of personal experience, as a kind of mental therapy. Such is the case of Zemlinsky's opera *Der Geburtstag der Infantin, oder Der Zwerg* (The Birthday of the Princess, or The Dwarf). As a young man Zemlinsky fell in love with the man-enchanting Alma Schindler (later Alma Mahler-Werfel-Gropius). Alma was both fascinated and repelled by Zemlinsky. In her memoirs she calls him "an ugly dwarf". Her repulse severely wounded him, and for the rest of his life he was fascinated by the concept of "the ugly man"—which he considered himself to be. His pain found its fullest expression in his 1922 *Geburtstag*.

His opera is based on the short story by Oscar Wilde (1889) with a libretto by Georg C Klaren. Zemlinsky insisted that a major alteration be made in the libretto, changing Wilde's innocent but unfeeling pre-pubescent Infantin (Princess) into a young lady fully aware of her own beauty and fully cognizant of her determined cruelty. Briefly: a Renaissance Princess receives a dwarf as a birthday present. He is unaware of his physical deformity and ugliness. Only the maid Ghita is sympathetic to the Dwarf. The Princess cruelly leads him on until he confesses his love for her, whereupon she gives him a mirror, mocks and rebuffs him. Seeing his ugliness for the first time and suffering from the cruel taunts and rejection by the Infantin, the Dwarf dies of a broken heart.

Musically the opera is a curious hodgepodge of styles, overtly frantic and confusing in its initial exposition of the plot. It settles down to a post-Wagnerian, Straussian haze with the appearance of the Dwarf and his troubles. The music then becomes emotionally effective, if not particularly memorable. It also calls for some particularly hefty singing from the tenor Dwarf.

For this production in the Cohen Family Studio Theatre (November 19-21) the always imaginative stage director and head of the CCM opera department, Sandra Bernhard, set the Renaissance story in our own time in a high school setting complete with homecoming rituals, queen crowning, and dance, reflecting our society's prejudices, choices, and cruel game playing. The Princess has chosen to be content in her own exclusive little world with a circle of friends similar to herself (here her Maids divided into "Queen Bees" and "Wannabes"). When the Dwarf (here a full-grown teenager, but physically handicapped, foreign, possibly gay) enters her world she can only mock and reject him as someone "different".

The entire production, with projection designs and English surtitles, was prepared by Bernhard. A bare stage set with a few chairs arranged as a classroom was covered with computerized graphics taken from two Women's Educational Media films, "It's Elementary—Talking about Gay Issues in School" and "Let's Get Real". The films were constantly, silently, projected on the walls, floors, and singers (all clad in white, except for the darkly-clad Dwarf). Stage action was frequently physically active, complex, a bit distracting, yet the furious rushing about of the Maids finely mirrored the complex activity of the music. When the music slowed down to concentrate on the relationships between the Dwarf, the Princess, and the maid Ghita, the staging slowed down as well.

The intimate confines of the Studio Theatre preclude an orchestra of the size demanded by Zemlinsky's music. Two pianos, although excellent played by students Ana-Maria Dafova and Yoon Song, were a pale reflection of Zemlinsky's lush orchestration. Kelly Hale, CCM professor of opera and coaching, led a coherent, effective performance, assuring an amazing precision of ensemble even with difficult sightlines and frantic stage action. Alicia Gianni's Infantin was blazing in voice and demeanor, nailing the sumptuous romantic musical lines. The Dwarf of tenor Leo Falcón was a total triumph. His is a gracious, floating lyric tenor; and although the role is one calling for Wagnerian vocal splendor, Falcón (and presumably his teacher and coach) cleverly found vocal means of getting through and around the difficulties. So at ease was Falcón that he even was capable of singing while lying flat on his back or stomach. His insight into the emotions of the story and music was deeply penetrating, staggeringly real in expression. But the Dwarf is not a role for him in a larger theater.

The youthful Don Estoban (the Princess's advisor) was most mellifluous, but lacking the cutting edge of necessary irony. The delicately sympathetic Ghita of Kelly Hutchinson was well sung and expressive. The seven Maids were a sturdy, well-knit ensemble.

CHARLES H PARSONS

HOUSTON

Houston Grand Opera: Catán *Salsipuedes* [premiere]

In its continuing outreach to Houston's large Hispanic population [for more on which, see interview with David Gockley in this issue], Houston Grand Opera adorned its fall repertoire, October 29 to November 14, with the world premiere of *Salsipuedes, a tale of Love, War and Anchovies*, the company's second commission of a Spanish-language opera by Mexican composer Daniel Catán. His *Florencia en el Amazonas* was first performed by the company in 1996, followed by productions elsewhere in the United States and an HGO revival and recording in 2001.

From appearances in the audience, it looks as though Houston general director David Gockley's efforts are paying off. But while young Hispanics were spending an evening in the opera house, what they heard was rather light, unimaginative operatic fare, where a musical style reminiscent of Puccini's operas was spiced with Caribbean dance rhythms.

Salsipuedes tells the story of two young pop singers who have to leave their new brides at the hotel on their wedding night to sing at the commissioning of a new warship built to protect the island republic of Salsipuedes from Nazi submarines. The ship sets sail at the end of Act I, before they can debark, and their new wives spend the next act and a half trying to catch up with their now-partying husbands. Up to this point the plot line, including its use of partner-swapping disguises, has a good bit in common with *Così fan Tutte*. According to Catán, it is based upon an actual incident involving a band caught onboard a reconditioned Cuban ship during World War II.

Suddenly, in the middle of Act III, comedy turns to melodrama. The Salsipuedean dictator, his henchmen, and the ship captain are all double-dealing, smuggling anchovies to the Nazis. To cover it up, the dictator is assassinated, the ship is to be torpedoed and the passengers drowned, but the captain turns trueheartedat the end, putting everyone in the lifeboats and sacrificing himself.

Unfortunately, the plot is barely credible, bordering on banality, and for all its accessibility Catán's musical score has little harmonic momentum. The cast, including eight current and former members of Houston Opera Studio, sang brightly and effectively at the November 6 performance. Leading roles were taken by baritone James Maddalena, tenor Chad Shelton, baritone Scott Hendricks, soprano Ana Maria Martinez, and mezzo-soprano Zheng Cao. Guido Maria Guida conducted the Latin-flavored score enthusiastically.

CARL CUNNINGHAM

NEW YORK

Manhattan School: Hoiby *A Month in the Country*

Is it a coincidence that the Los Angeles Opera revives Samuel Barber's *Vanessa* to a warm reception [see Richard Ginell's review] at the same time that the Manhattan School of Music revives Lee Hoiby's *A Month in the Country*, also welcomed? The operas are roughly the same age (1958 and 1964), both were out of step with current tastes, both fell rather quickly into oblivion. And now both emerge simultaneously to make the case that their neglect has been unjustified.

A Month in the Country, based on Ivan Turgenev's 1850 play with a libretto by the late stage director William Ball, was premiered at New York City Opera in 1964, where it had some success; it went on to Washington D.C. in 1965 but then languished until a production in Boston 17 years later—at which point Hoiby changed the title from *Natalia Petrovna* to Tergenev's original one.

It is easy to view the opera as an anachronism in the 1960s. It is melodious, warmly emotional, harmonically conservative, direct in its reflection of the characters' dilemmas. It doesn't hesitate to gush a bit, but it also has some nicely restrained and subtle episodes. And it does not, like so many modern stage works, put the burden of interest in the pit. The orchestra is colorful, mood-setting, and supportive, but the voices are the focal point, and they tell the tale clearly.

The play is both poignant and funny. The assortment of people entangled at cross purposes under one roof during a summer holiday includes the young matron Natalia Petrovna, bored to tears and more or less in love with the poet Rakitin, who returns her affections; the handsome young tutor Belaev, who unwittingly arouses Natalia's real passion; the charmingly cynical Dr Shpigelsky, in pursuit of a profitable marriage with the family's ditsy ward. Add to these Natalia's husband, her mother-in-law, and niece Vera, and the domestic pot boils furiously. At the final curtain, a few have found happiness, some have fled the scene and some are left as they began.

Hoiby's sets all this with skillful pacing, a general sense of momentum, expressive arias, and well-knit ensembles. The bouncy self-righteousness of the Doctor, supported by bubbling humor in the orchestra, creates a

Manhattan School of Music in the finale of Lee Hoibys *A Month in the Country*

plum role for any tenor; a duet for Vera and the tutor is genuinely tender; a big solo scene for Natalia, in despair at the end of Act I, pulls out all the stops, and her Act II opening becomes a kind of incipient mad scene, underlined by a pungent orchestra. The opera's final episode, an ensemble about loneliness, is impressively somber.

Manhattan's young cast brought energy and confidence to the first of three performances. JennyRebecca [sic] Winans was well in control of the quite demanding role of Natalia and convincing in the intensity of her emotional outbursts. Yoosun Park's appealing soprano was just right for the innocent and hopeful young Vera, and Vivian Krich-Brinton flitted brightly through the coloratura of the daffy ward, Lisaveta. Jon-Michael Ball ran away with the role of Dr Shpigelsky; Liam Bonner's pleasant baritone nicely defined the modest and well-meaning character of the tutor, Belaev. As the poet Rakitin, Charles Temkey was dramatically a bit stiff, but his sturdy bass filled the part nonetheless. Conductor Steven Osgood and the school's orchestra did handsomely by the score, and Hoiby's instrumental colors got their due. The composer had a right to look pleased when appeared on stage for a bow.

The realistic set by Michael Schweikardt, a cozily furnished mid-19th Century country living room with a curving staircase to an upper door and a glassed-in view of trees beyond the house, was delightfully apt.

SHIRLEY FLEMING

NEW YORK

Metropolitan Opera: Wagner *Tannhäuser*

The Met revived its 1977 production of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* for the first time in about 13 years this season, with a largely new cast and a new conductor. While some if not all of the new singers did well, the performance as a whole lacked tension and drama, not to mention excitement. I put much of the blame on the four-square conducting of Mark Elder, whose rigidly held tempos and frequent lingering over details (he reminded me of Giuseppe Sinopoli in his approach) drained the opera of much of its vitality. He allowed the singers and the orchestral solos much leeway in holding on to notes (especially high ones) and fussing about words.

On paper, the cast looked promising. The German tenor Peter Seiffert made his Met debut in the title role, and although at the age of 50 his voice now is sometimes wobbly (especially if he holds his notes too long), he still has a clear, ringing top and enough power;

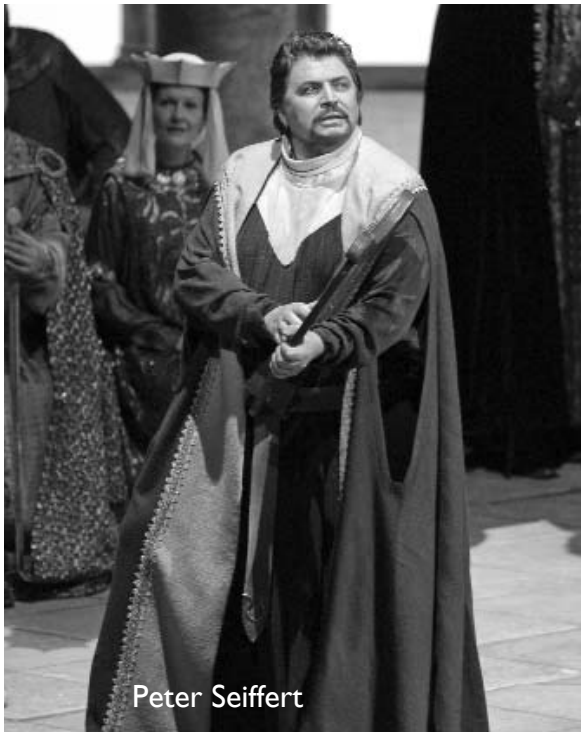
his low notes, however, sometimes were grainy and a bit muddy. His well-routined interpretation was not particularly compelling; he paced himself carefully and finished the 'Rome Narrative' well. But his diction, while very good, was sometimes rather fussy, as if he had been taught by Fischer-Dieskau. Michelle DeYoung (Venus) was visually quite appealing. She has a rich voice but she didn't seem comfortable, singing much of her role slowly, deliberately, and with little temperament—and she looked at the prompter too much. A slimmed-down Deborah Voigt, in her first Met Elisabeth, sang her two arias beautifully but, to my surprise, her voice lacked the power to soar over the ensemble in the finale of Act II, even though she advanced to the footlights and sang at the audience, not to her colleagues.

Wolfram must be one of Thomas Hampson's best operatic roles; his warm, lyrical sound, his elegant phrasing, and his finely honed theatrical skill made him the most compelling singing actor in the cast. By his bearing and reactions to what was going on around him, he commanded attention even when he was silent. But he, and Elder, milked 'The Evening Star' for all its splendor, and his tonal beauty made the aria an impressive display piece. And while Kurt Moll's handsome bass has lost some of its velvet, he delivered the Landgrave's speech with resonant tones and commanding presence. In a minor role, Charles Taylor made a good impression as the nasty Biterolf. But since this was the Paris version of the opera, the other knights didn't get to sing much.

Assigning the part of the Young Shepherd to a hooty boy soprano was a mistake. Jason Goldberg could not sing his a capella part in tune; in my experience, only an accomplished female singer (Kathleen Battle comes to mind) is able to do that. In addition, Master Goldberg cavorted around the stage in an aimless manner ill suited to his role—a jarring detail that should have been forbidden by the stage director.

The choreography for the denizens of the Venusberg, credited to Norbert Vesak, seemed gymnastic rather than sensual; the frequent couplings looked mechanical and joyless. The Met chorus sang vigorously and well, and the Met's fine orchestra took advantage of Elder's indulgence, for instance in the postludes of the arias, to show off their virtuosity. That's all well and good if kept within reasonable limits, but it should not slacken dramatic tension as it sometimes did. The production by Otto Schenck and the designs by Gunther Schneider-Siemssen are traditional and realistic; if you've been to the Wartburg (never mind the Venusberg), you'll recognize them.

KURT MOSES



Peter Seiffert

PHOTO BY MARTY SOHL

ROCHESTER, NY

Strouse *East and West* [premiere]

Fantasy and reality collide in *East and West*, a pairing of one-act operas by Tony and Grammy Award-winning composer Charles Strouse. Presented in November by the Eastman School of Music, it's based on Strouse's 1985 one-act opera *Nightingale* and introduces a new work, *The Future of the American Musical Theater*.

Steven Daigle directed two alternating casts in four performances of *East and West*. Music director Benton Hess conducted an ensemble from Eastman's Philharmonia Chamber Orchestra, with orchestrations by Michaela Eremiasova and Eastman graduate student Jairo Duarte-Lopez.

Provocative though they are, these two works are perhaps just as much Light and Dark as East and West. Both operas take place in the present day in a performing arts center at the fictional University of Tallahassee. The Story Teller, played on November 6 by Jonathan Michie, is the minister of chaos. His running commentary is the thread that ties the two works together.

The story of *Nightingale* is based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale. Sam Haddad, in his role as the emperor of China, projected his character's loneliness with a powerful, resonant voice. His aides, played to comic perfection by John Buffet and Jared Schwartz, track down the handmaiden who can lead them to the nightingale, believed to be the remedy to

the emperor's sadness. The handmaiden, sung by Julia Foster, was just as convincing in her timidity. In this Chinese fable, goofiness is nearly as powerful as sadness.

The two peacocks were well projected by Sarah Howes and Yvonne Douthat, whose sweet mix of concern and cattiness seemed inspired by the women of the BBC's "Absolutely Fabulous". They were just two examples of the fine talent in this cast. We forgot that we were watching students who are acting as if they're students who are acting. Great singing coupled with solid character development paved the way for a cohesive ensemble performance, dotted with plenty of inside jokes for music school veterans.

Soprano Annamarie Zmolek created a memorable and stunning nightingale. As the fable goes, when she's put on display and caged, the nightingale can no longer sing, and so the court acquires a mechanical bird, played with great pathos by Laura Mayes Schweibacher. In the end, the Emperor begins to die a smug and cocky death, and yet the nightingale and the maid valiantly return to vanquish death and revive him. It leads to an emotional, moving finale to a gloriously wacky work. The Western half of the evening, tinged with frenetic bitterness, begins at the dedication of a new performing arts center at the University of Tallahassee. It's an event that brings together illustrious alumni who haven't seen each other since they created the hit Broadway musical, *The Grass Is Greener*, 25 years earlier. *The Future of the American Musical Theater* plays up the absurdities of academia and of Broadway—the pomposity, the personality conflicts, the prima donnas. Dr Paul Golden, a well-meaning yet clumsy department chairman, was played by Allen Stowe, who manages to sing lyrics like 'Wel-come to Ards-ley Hall at the Uni-ver-sity of Talla-hasseee' with feeling. Sam Haddad stole the show with his portrayal of Ned Hammer, a famous stage director who has devolved into a self-absorbed old coot. Anna Elder played up tarty star Annabel Stewart to perfection. Grant Knox as Peter Stein, the composer of *The Grass Is Greener*, was an endearing master of hyperbole.

Flashbacks are seamlessly woven into the action, and as Dr Golden took questions from the audience for the panel of luminaries, the evening catapulted into existential angst when one student asked, "What's the future of the American musical theater?" Jonathan Michie, the Story Teller in "East" who returns as author Joseph Auerbach in "West", ties everything together as the theater muse—and perhaps even as Strouse's spokesman on the fate of musical theater.

JANN NYFFELER

PARIS

Orchestre National: Honegger *Jeanne d'Arc*

One of the most highly anticipated opening concerts of the new symphonic season in Paris was of the Orchestre National de France and Kurt Masur. Starting his second season as music director of the orchestra, he was joined in late September by the Choir of Radio France and a luxury list of soloists for Honegger's *Jeanne d'Arc au Bucher*. A work of power and extraordinary impact, it was made doubly significant in the vast Basilica of Saint-Denis, which held, until the Revolution, the tombs of the kings and queens of France.

This work, an oratorio with an operatic pulse, is seen more and more frequently on programs in Europe. The title role, with spoken text, was delivered by the esteemed actress (and sometimes opera stage director) Marthe Keller with an uncommon nobility and intensity. Daniel Mesguich was Brother Dominique, and younger members of the same famed family of actors, Sarah and William, insured that the dramatic lines were delivered with the needed intensity.

Soprano Laura Aikin sang the Virgin with limpid tones, and the luminous mezzo Sophie Koch was the Marguerite. Canadian mezzo Marie-Nichole Lemieux—only a few years after winning the Queen Elizabeth of Belgium Competition and now a major star— was a moving Catherine. Tenor Donald Litaker sang his four roles for each with special character; his burly, grotesque Porcus, particularly, remains etched in the mind. Bass Nicolas Rivenq completed the talented lyric team.

Despite recent media talk of the lack of respect for conductors and discipline problems with the established French orchestras, the orchestra played with fervor and attention to detail under Masur's baton. The text of Paul Claudel, about a simple girl who gets swept up by forces beyond her control and beyond understanding, is often acid in its commentary.

Although Honegger was a member of the so-called *Les Six*, this work seemed more inspired by German late-romantic models. The performance, like most of the concerts by this top Radio France orchestra, was recorded for national broadcast. The silence after the final pianissimo chords ended seemed to go on forever as the audience held its collective breath before the stormy applause.

FRANK CADENHEAD

CONCERTS EVERYWHERE

Russian pianist Anastasia Voltcho; see page 46

LOS ANGELES

LA Master Chorale: Reich *You Are (Variations)* [premiere]

Outside Los Angeles, it's not exactly basic knowledge that the Walt Disney Concert Hall has another resident ensemble besides the LA Philharmonic—the world-class Los Angeles Master Chorale. But Steve Reich knew, having been impressed by a performance of *The Desert Music* from this group in the late 1980s and when the chorale offered a commission for its first season at Disney Hall, Reich signed on. However, the world premiere of the new piece had to be pushed back to the Master Chorale's second season in Disney when Reich couldn't meet the deadline, and it finally arrived October 24 in a program cryptically titled "Dare".

Because Reich has a penchant for compulsively reinventing himself, each new piece of his continues to be eagerly awaited. But this time, he had little new to say in *You Are (Variations)*, falling back upon territory that he had already explored in *Tehillim* more than two decades ago.

Cast in four sections, with the same fast-

fast-pause-slow-fast sequence and a similar length (nearly 28 minutes) as *Tehillim*, each movement sets and repeats a single line of text. Two were in Hebrew and two in English, including one marvelously self-revealing maxim, "Say little and do much". Once again, Reich's hammering signature syncopations took hold via four mallet percussion instruments and four pianos, while 12 strings cushioned the noise underneath and 18 amplified voices from the chorale carried on canonic conversations overhead.

Reich has always been at his most persuasive when his music has a jazzy pulse and an affirmative, uplifting buoyancy as it does here; indeed, the dour, static textures of his video theater pieces and chamber works of the last decade or so have been banished for now. Yet despite the nice grooves and good if not striking new melodic ideas, this piece doesn't leave you soaring. Perhaps one reason was the harsh amplification in Disney Hall. It was like a bad early digital recording, glaring and quite timing.

Elsewhere, the Master Chorale's enterprising music director, Grant Gershon, continued to demonstrate his programming savvy, offering a propulsive performance of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, whose syncopations, text sources, and at one amazing point, harmonies linked up uncannily with the new Reich piece. And he prefaced the main works with a pair of psalm-based motets by Brahms and Josquin Des Prés.

RICHARD S GINELL

NEW YORK

ASO: Bruno Walter Symphony No. 1

[US premiere]

Leave it to Leon Botstein and his American Symphony Orchestra to bring us the North American premiere (and only the third performance anywhere) on October 15 of Bruno Walter's Symphony No. 1 in D minor. Most ARG readers know Walter as one of the previous century's greatest conductors, a kindly man with a benevolent countenance, one of those rare conductors who was both respected and loved by virtually every musician who ever played for him.

Walter was renowned mostly as an interpreter of music of the distant past—Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Bruckner, and Brahms—yet his four-movement, 50-minute symphony is thoroughly representative of the era in it was composed (c.1907). It evokes the hyperemotional romanticism of early Schoenberg (particularly *Pelleas und Melisande* and *Gurrelieder*), Zemlinsky, and Richard Strauss in its pervasive use of dense counterpoint, lush orchestration, expanded tonality, and angular melodic lines.

The score calls for an oversize orchestra including triple or quadruple woodwinds, six horns, four trumpets, and two harps. Percussion is used in abundance—this is a *loud* symphony! Walter certainly knew how to orchestrate. The coda to the first movement, for example, is terrifying in its Straussian horn fanfares over a rumbling bass. Unfortunately, the symphony does not contain sufficient textural contrast; nor is there a single memorable theme. Developmental passages sound more labored than inspired. Nevertheless, Botstein evidently strongly believes in this work, as he conducted it with insight and passion, coaxing his musicians to play their hearts out for him.

Most Botstein ASO programs have a theme. This one was "Complicated Friendship", referring to the professional and personal relationship between Walter and Hans Pfitzner. Walter the conductor heavily promoted Pfitzner the composer and led the premieres of a number of Pfitzner's works, including the opera *Palestrina*, whose Three Preludes opened Botstein's concert. But when Pfitzner joined the Nazi Party, things changed. The nature of their now uneasy relationship was set forth in Botstein's highly informative essay in the program book, supplemented by excellent program notes from Walter biographer Erik Ryding. Alexander Markov was soloist in Pfitzner's fiendishly difficult Violin Concerto, which he tossed off with great élan and aplomb.

ROBERT MARKOW

NEW YORK

Anastasia Voltchok: an excellent debut

Russian pianist Anastasia Voltchok won the gold medal at Cincinnati's World Piano Competition in 2003, and among her awards was a New York recital debut—an excellent one—at Alice Tully Hall on December 17. Voltchok is still youthful in appearance, although to judge from the program biography she is not quite (as Mossorgsky might have described it) "an unhatched chick". She began studying piano at the Moscow Gnessin School when she was five and has won many prizes, both abroad and in the US—including first prize at the University of Maryland Competition.

The program began with Three Pieces from Prokofieff's ballet *Romeo and Juliet* in the

composer's own effective arrangement for piano. Her account of 'Montecci e Capuleti' was lyrical and well proportioned, albeit less swaggering than one is accustomed to hearing, but she brought a scampering scherzando lightness to 'Juliet as a Young Girl' and a foreboding poignancy to 'Before Farewell'.

I was especially impressed with her way with Rachmaninoff's Sonata No. 2, for me a *bête noire* of a piece that I ordinarily dislike with passion. Voltchok chose the second, abridged edition, which alleviates some of the work's pachydermic texture, and even more to her credit, she created an attractive, songful flow. She came as close as anyone I have heard to making the music viable, even enjoyable.

I was really looking forward to hearing Chopin's Polonaise-Fantasy, Op. 61, a bona fide masterpiece, and was sorely disappointed when Voltchok omitted it and went straight into the two other Chopin pieces on the second half of her recital, the Nocturne Op. 27:1 and the Scherzo No. 2 Op. 31. (She did, however, play two encores, 'Oiseaux Tristes' from Ravel's *Miroirs* and Chopin's *Revolutionary* Etude.) There were many felicitous details, a sense of understated composure and gravity in the Nocturne; and along with the self-effacing flow and balance she brought to the Scherzo, one of Chopin's most Beethovenian works, she was correctly observant of Chopin's voice-leading in the quasi-trio second theme (a requirement that escapes many).

Turning to Liszt's clever but gaudy arrangements of Schubert's *Winterreise*, she brought a vivid, icy chill to the introductory phrases of 'Der Lindenbaum', depicting the wind blowing through the branches; but her account of 'Der Leiermann' sounded warm and comforting, completely missing the implied numbness of that last song in Schubert's unbearably pessimistic cycle. Lay the blame, perhaps, on Liszt. Let it be said for Voltchok that, unlike the hordes of Russian pianists who adore these arrangements, she seems to be one of the few who is actually familiar with Schubert's original. She gave a fleet, suitably diabolic account of Liszt's own First Mephisto Waltz.

HARRIS GOLDSMITH

NEW YORK

American Symphony: all-Czerny

Carl Czerny's splendid studies dissect every module of pianism and had a role in taking piano playing out of the home and into the concert hall. Their comprehensive greatness overshadows the rest of Czerny's compositions, which number more than a thousand. Unlike the exercises, these lie on the shelves of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, unpublished and virtually unperformed.

Since the University of Alberta's 2002 all-Czerny festival in Edmonton, recordings have been made and musical forays begun. Over half the 33 pieces listed on Amazon are for instruments or ensembles other than solo piano—among them a Symphony in D not heard in this country until the American Symphony's all-Czerny concert on November 14 at Avery Fisher Hall, titled "Beethoven's Pupil".

Czerny, who lived from 1791 to 1857, was a brilliant keyboard virtuoso, a fearsome sight reader, and a prolific composer, whose orderly teaching methods were matched by disciplined energy. The ASO's four-work sampling, conducted by Leon Botstein in what he called "an overdue act of reputational reparation", came off elegant and appealing but not transcendent. There is a difference between being worthy and being newsworthy. In Czerny premieres surfacing after 150 years, what might have been inventive is submerged in later developments—envelopes he pushed were pushed more dramatically by others—and latter-day listeners can't pick out what was once ground-breaking.

The piano exercises, some still in print, do exactly what they set out to, and wouldn't be faulted for not sounding musical, though performed at concert level (as they practically never are) they happen to. Czerny's orchestration, on the other hand, has a certain amount of doubling, as opposed to the dense polyphony and harmonic textures of his renowned predecessors and contemporaries. Neither aggressive nor enraging nor silly, these Czerny selections contain sparks of color worthy of Schubert, and also moments of Mozartean facility, as well as of Beethoven's muscle and Haydn's staunchness.

Psalm 130, *Aus der Tiefe* (Out of the Depths) and *De Macht des Gesanges* (The power of Song) were in the idiom of the choral warhorse and easy to listen to. (Bach's psalm wording, "Aus tiefer Noth schrei ich...", out of deep pain I shout, matches its anguished music.) The psalm's lovely "I wait for the Lord" went nowhere—it was too literally waiting.

The British-Australian pianist Piers Lane plowed into showy variations on Haydn's National Anthem tune. Lane has recorded little-known concertos by Moscheles (whom Czerny inspired), Moszkowski, and Grainger, among others.

The concluding Symphony in D tells today's listener that the composer knew exactly what was appropriate. The vigorous Allegro molto quasi presto traced the tonic chord; the Adagio's harmonic colors preceded and re-

sembled Schubert's; the Scherzo, complete with horn call, galloped in triple time, and the final Allegro molto had a phrase from the hymn tune, *St Anne's*—18 years ahead of Mendelssohn's use of hymn in the "Reformation" Symphony.

Selection, programming, note alignment, and page numbering were a painstaking task. The music world owes a debt to the American Symphony staff and Otto Biba of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, of whose trove this concert represents less than one percent.

This program's effect equaled the exact sum of its parts. Maybe the next batch to be unearthed will add up to more.

LESLIE KANDELL

PASADENA

Ambassador Auditorium

Those words alone stir deep, satisfying memories among those lucky enough to have seen the likes of Horowitz, Rubinstein, Bernstein, Milstein, Price, Sutherland, Nilsson, Vickers, Tennstedt, Karajan—the full list is unbelievable—perform within its Burmese teak and Brazilian rosewood walls. The words also stir anger, for the hall has been essentially shuttered since May 1995 when its financially ailing owner, the Worldwide Church of God, eliminated the music.

But there were good tidings in Pasadena this winter. At long last, in May 2004 another religion group, the Harvest Moon Church, stepped in and bought the hall with the intention of using it for services and occasional music programs. And so, with a performance of Handel's *Messiah* by the region-wide forces of Jorge Mester and the Pasadena Symphony, Los Angeles Master Chorale, and an impassioned vocal quartet (Elissa Johnston, Suzanna Guzman, Randall Bills, Rodney Gilfry), Ambassador reopened December 17 before a surprisingly light turnout.

The Georgian-made royal-purple carpet and yellow fabric seats looked a bit faded, but everything else was as we remembered it. Oh yes, there was one other difference. The gleaming Turkish rose-onyx wall in the lobby was shorn of its notorious, often-derided dedication to "THE GREAT GOD".

The *Messiah* performance itself was one of those compromises between ye olde Victorian ways and the period-performance crowd: chamber orchestra, small chorus, racing tempos, and clipped ends of notes aligned with modern instruments; deep traditional cuts in the score (Nos. 34-36 and 49-52 gone, just like 50 years ago); no da capos; and emotional, almost operatic singing. It went well, it sounded fine in the familiar, somewhat warm, not-too-reverberant Ambassador acoustic, and that's about it; nothing revelatory or awry.

As the man once said, though, you can't quite go home again. Once the best concert hall in the region, Ambassador is now only one of several fine halls, since the Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Colburn School's Zipper Hall, and others have sprouted since Ambassador's closing. So far, the announced programming is nowhere near the level of Ambassador's glory days. But at least we can hear music there again, and that's something to celebrate.

RICHARD S GINELL

SEATTLE

Seattle Symphony: Beethoven Ninth

Gerard Schwarz has made a Seattle Symphony holiday tradition of Beethoven's Ninth in the past several years, with performances marking the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. It's a good fit for Seattle audiences, who may be formulating their New Year's resolutions as they listen to Beethoven's message of joy and brotherhood. And over the years Schwarz has increasingly fine-tuned his approach to this masterpiece, finding more depth in the first and third movements, delivering a taut but never rushed Scherzo and a powerful finale. Over time, too, the volunteer Seattle Symphony Chorale has matured into a chorus with expertise as well as enthusiasm.

Schwarz chose some interesting adjuncts to the Ninth to fill out the program for these performances. The opener was a spirited reading of Schubert's *Rosamunde* Overture, followed by Respighi's arrangements of three Bach Choral Preludes ('Come, Redeemer of our Race', 'My Soul Exalts the Lord', and "Sleepers Awake"). Those familiar Choral Preludes have just the right gravity to make a good counterpoint to the Ninth.

This year's vocal soloists were particularly strong. Soprano Alessandra Marc and tenor Gary Lakes, both noted for their command of heroic opera roles, had no trouble soaring above the orchestra even in Beethoven's dense scoring. Marc's high notes were brilliantly produced and utterly secure. So was the noble bass-baritone of Clayton Brainerd, whose opening solo set the tone for the choral finale. Sally Burgess, who had the thankless task of dealing with those mezzo-soprano lines, was mellow-voiced but often difficult to hear.

The orchestra, which is auditioning a series of guest concertmasters this year to find a permanent replacement for Ilkka Talvi, played

responsively for Schwarz. The French horn section, led by horn legend John Cerminaro, made an especially fine showing. Schwarz, now in his 20th season with the Seattle Symphony, drew responsive and polished performances from his players. The Ninth may be familiar turf, but there was nothing routine about the playing—or the joyous response of the capacity audience.

MELINDA BARGREEN

TORONTO

Gryphon Trio: *Constantinople* [premiere]

A highlight of the fall musical season in Toronto was *Constantinople*, by the local composer Christos Hatzis. This multimedia concert work, presented at Harbourfront Centre (an arts district on Lake Ontario), from November 10 to 13, by Music Toronto, Tapestry New Opera Works, and the Gryphon Trio, was five years in the development. In its final form, *Constantinople*—so named because the piece lies at a musical crossroads between Europe and Asia, drawing on a variety of World Music influences—is both fresh and powerful. This 90-minute, eight-movement, genre-defying work (Is it a cantata? A song-cycle? Chamber music?) never flags in its compositional inventiveness or intensity. A solemn religiosity predominates, but there are lighter moments as well. Think of John Tavener with a dash of Astor Piazzolla, and you'll have the general idea of *Constantinople*.

The vocalists were Maryem Hassan Tollar and Patricia O'Callaghan, two singers who represented the East and West through their respective vocal traditions: Tollar's intricate arabesques and O'Callaghan's elegant, lyric soprano. There's some electronic music too—but at the center of the work's musical conception lies a piano trio. Toronto's Gryphon Trio—violinist Annalee Patipatanakoon, cellist Roman Borys, and pianist Jamie Parker—were involved in the creation of the piece from the beginning, and on November 10 they gave a committed, *tour de force* performance.

The visual projections by Lionel Arnold and Jacques Colin were an ever-changing panorama of beautiful, evocative imagery from ancient cultures. Bernard White's set design and Heather MacCrimmon's costumes tastefully complemented the production. And Marie-Josée Chartier's direction and choreography were imaginative, if at times a tad arcane.

Constantinople's diverse elements add up to an astonishing musical, visual, and theatrical experience that's both complex and sophisticated. And yet, paradoxically, there's also an underlying stratum of naivete: the implicit message seems to be that all the world's problems could be solved with a big group hug. In fact, this work could well be controversial in some circles: is Hatzis celebrating the artistic trappings of religion while sidestepping its deeper meanings? Still, the notion, embedded in *Constantinople*, that cultural co-existence is possible, may be just what the world needs to be reminded of these days.


Gryphon Trio

Plans are afoot for both a tour and a recording, so it's likely that this unique and remarkable work will soon be heard beyond Canada's borders.

COLIN EATOCK

Critical Convictions

Access to Great Music

In the September/October 2004 issue, I wrote about the flood of excellent books and recordings available to those who can filter out mediocrity. Last November in the New York Times, Anthony Tommasini mentioned how many wonderful new CDs he has found, and how the diminished classical output of RCA and Sony has been compensated for by well-selected repertoire at EMI and other labels such as Naxos. He noted how judicious business models at certain labels have reinvented the old-fashioned idea of recording fresh repertoire and selecting artists on merit.

The Times article was mostly in response to the doomsday predictions of the BBC's Norman Lebrecht, who, with cynical exaggeration, claimed that 2004 would mark the end of the classical recording industry. As a follow-up in December, Stormin' Norman decided that symphony orchestras were also doomed, saying: "Aging audiences, declining education standards, misplaced accusations of elitism and a false perception of monoculturalism have pushed the orchestra to the margins of society. American orchestras are running deficits of up to six million dollars and facing wage strikes and threats of closure."

I am less pessimistic, but neither am I assuaged by Tommasini's optimism. The question of cultural decline and "dumbing down" has been written about by far too many intelligent observers to be taken lightly, and I don't think "lean-and-mean" business models are the solution. Even CNN's Lou Dobbs has instituted a "Cultural Decline" segment on his news and interview program (!) and he's quite serious. So the question lingers. Are we in a downhill slide and where will it end up? Symphony orchestras *are* in trouble. Radio stations by the dozens, including many NPR stations, *are* abandoning classical. The audience for classical *is* aging. Concert attendance *is* dropping. These facts can't be ignored, however well some record labels are able to navigate through the dumbing fog.

But let's understand something: Classical music speaks to a universal human need for deep meaning and emotion. Superficiality has always been the mainstay of majority tastes. It sells more, and if Madison Avenue and the media have become more efficient in pandering to pop "instant gratification", and if this has helped drive symphony orchestras "to the margins of society" (and I think there is a sense among culture observers that it has) then strategies must be found to combat this tendency.

This is a struggle that cannot be won, of course. We shall never awaken one morning to find classical selling as much as rock or pop. But neither is there always a hard line of segregation between listeners. Just as one can learn to understand and appreciate another language, many who grow up with one kind of music can learn to appreciate another kind, if given the opportunity,

If given the opportunity.

When I was in 6th grade in public school, our class marched into the Music Room for one hour, once a week. Music was taught by a short, plump, gray-haired lady who moved quickly and spoke emphatically. My memory of exactly what, or how, she taught is almost gone, but I do remember that she did not doubt, and therefore we *should* not doubt, the value and joy of classical music. I vaguely remember a film she showed about Mozart's life. There was a street of little shops in an old city, perhaps Salzburg. It was snowing. Music was playing. It was Mozart's music. That is all I remember, yet it made an impression for many years. I remember the teacher playing music on one of those boxy public-school phonographs. I also remember singing. What we sang I don't recall. What pieces she played I don't recall. But I know it wasn't the pop fare we heard at home. There was an assumption built into public school education that children should not only be exposed to classical music by the 6th grade, but that familiarity with the great composers was basic education. Remember "the three Bs"? The value of high culture was assumed, whether we "took to it" or not. Educated adults ran the show, and they hoped what was offered would rub off. Mozart's life was important. Beethoven's symphonies were profound. Bach's music was essential. Simple, implicit messages from teachers.

But after the 1960s, gray-haired ladies who loved classical music lost their authority. The new multiculturalism, and by default, cultural relativism, took over education, and new generations of children were taught that no art was better than any other art. Whatever they happened to like was just fine. No quality judgements would be made or, in fact, could be made. For how might one objectively know that "The White Album" was of less lasting value than Mozart's symphonies, or that the

complexities of African drums were less profound than the complexities of a Bach fugue? Or that "profundity" itself could be defended? Or if it could, what sort of profundity, assuming the term had meaning at all?

Since there was an egalitarian point to be made in a more "politically correct" society, "diversity" became a higher value than "the great composers". The logic of non-judgemental values seemed obvious. But no one stopped to question the logic. No one seemed to wonder how the idea of "diversity" as *better than* "the great composers" could *itself* be defended. In other words, if you say it is improper to make value judgements, you have just made one. One kind of education is valued over another. Teachers can't escape making value judgements about what's "best" for grade schoolers.

All this philosophical mischief comes from the tide of cultural relativism fashionable in academia. It becomes more generalized in the idea that one cannot claim a given *culture* is better than another—including, most especially, "elitist culture". Unfortunately, since that very idea originates in a culture—in this case, academic culture—how can one claim the idea of cultural relativism *itself* is better than any opposing idea?

Where subjective judgements are called for, one cannot escape making subjective judgements.

In the past, such judgements were made more confidently, and unequivocally, by the educated.

Political correctness aside, exposure to classical music for school children was, and is, a community effort. In the 50s and 60s in Seattle, conductor Milton Katims routinely brought the Seattle Symphony to the public schools. The musicians would set up in an auditorium or gymnasium and play for the entire student body.

If nothing else, it was the *sound* that got you. That sound, the sound of a full symphony orchestra, has no substitute. By choosing the right kind of music, an orchestra can leave students with an experience they never forget. Moreover, it was believed that introducing classical music to young people was that simple. Just do it.

Today, the Seattle Symphony only rarely visits schools, but they have programs that bus students to symphony hall. At four concert programs by members of the symphony, 10,000 5th graders a year are treated to classical music. The Access Project brings in 1000 students from disadvantaged neighborhoods, and the orchestra gives free community concerts several times a year in the evenings. At home base in Benaroya Hall, the Soundbridge project has a library of several thousand classical works that can be heard, musical instruments that can be tried, and educational exhibits.

Such beneficial public efforts, directed mostly at students, happen around the world. A lasting flame of enthusiasm will be lit in only a few, but the potential for enthusiasm will be kindled in many more who might not otherwise have been exposed to symphonic music.

It is my belief that to stop the downhill slide that Mr Lebrecht sees so clearly, we must give this latter group (the one I was a member of in my youth) affordable opportunities to explore classical music when the mood strikes. Public exposure can only go so far in aiding this cause. However many public programs are developed, one knows deep down that the discovery of any art is a personal matter. With music, it is something that takes place between the composer and the listener. Musicians are the skilled facilitators. What really has to grab someone is the work itself, and no one can say which work that might be, or at what time it might have an effect on an individual.

A dear-departed friend of mine used to tell how he became more deeply acquainted with classical music. On the day he was laid off from his job, not knowing what the future would bring, he drove home under a cloudy sky, randomly tuning the radio. A classical station was playing the opening chords of Prokofieff's *Alexander Nevsky*. Now, imagine the dark portent of those chords, followed by such epic struggle and tragedy, and how they hit my friend like the proverbial ton of bricks. He was dumbstruck at how the music—though it was intended for something else entirely—seemed to reflect his own bitterness, conflict, and confusion. The next day, he went to the record store and found the New York Philharmonic recording with Thomas Schippers on Columbia. He played it all his life, but it led him to explore other classical music, too; and because his epiphany had been such a random event, he always kept an open mind about what might strike him. He gravitated to relatively modern 20th Century works, though meeting him you would not have guessed that.

Without a radio station playing that music, my friend would not have had that experience. Had he attended a free concert, he would not have heard *Alexander Nevsky*. Had he not heard *Alexander Nevsky*, he would not have been struck so forcefully. Once he had gained, by random exposure, a sudden interest, and had familiarized himself with one work, he was able to go to the record store (because it was in the early 1960s) and hear more classical music—music he'd never paid much attention to.

Coincidentally, Prokofieff played a role in my own explorations. 35 years ago, my wife was introduced to the First Piano Concerto by

a friend, and in turn introduced it to me. This was pretty strange stuff as far as I was concerned, and at first I didn't care for it. But after a few hearings, I began to like it, and then to wonder what the other four concertos were like. I was able to explore these pieces at a record store and ended up buying them one at a time.

Consider this: If that seed of interest has been planted today, how would a young person find Prokofieff's piano concertos to hear? There are likely no radio stations playing them. A local library may not have them. A good record store may carry them, but you can't listen, let alone compare performances. Maybe there are a few seconds of snippets available on The Internet, but which snippets?

Access is the issue. Yes, exposure comes first, but once that happens, be it in a public or private venue, further exploration becomes personal—the fundamental relationship between a composer's work and an individual. I can think of no substitute for this connection. In all the developing stages of interest, that is essential; yet today that connection has been broken in the way we market music in America.

Insofar as record stores are concerned, long before the schools were awash in multiculturalism, in came shrink wrap. Record labels sealed up the music so it could not be heard. Joseph Epstein once remarked that he had learned more by visiting used books stores than by attending college. I believe him. Once I caught the bug, I learned more about classical music in record stores than in school, attending concerts, or listening to the radio. Thousands of older classical aficionados had a similar experience. Why were record stores so important? Because young people, whose funds were limited, couldn't take a chance buying something they were uncertain of. The traditional policy of "listen before you buy" allowed thousands of people to pursue music they did not otherwise have access to—and not only classical. Few radio stations played classical, jazz, or other minority forms, so the record store was the place to explore. *When you deny access, you deny the market.* By analogy, I have asked the question before in these pages, and again now: What would happen to *book* sales if book stores shrink-wrapped all the books, and one could only look at the covers?

Some record stores offer a limited selection of discs, or sound bites, to sample. But classical and jazz have a long history and longer compositional forms than pop. This music can't be adequately offered in bits and pieces. The argument has been made that people won't buy discs or booklets that have been handled by others. But these prissy arguments would disallow unpackaged books, or LPs before the 1960s, or hundreds of other items. Shrink-wrapping began in the LP era (and it even made some sense then, because LPs were prone to wear). It didn't begin at the dawn of civilization.

Another argument is that in-store listening is just too much trouble for store staff, and that CDs can easily be stolen. But one Seattle record store, Silver Platters, has a few hundred open CDs available for listening, with the discs themselves filed behind the counter. When someone wants to listen, the store retains that person's driver's license during the listening session in an area with chairs, CD players, and headphones. The process is very efficient. If record labels got rid of shrink wrap, the whole store could be set up this way, and the market for minority tastes greatly refreshed. The argument that people will take the CD home, copy it, and return it, makes no sense either, because you can't do that *now*. If it's a gift, the store can seal it before purchase. Furthermore, lots of merchandise we buy is not easily returnable.

Maybe the limited selection at the public library will suffice for the mildly curious, but it can never suffice for someone who wants to purchase many CDs. For this, specific recordings are all important. Still, libraries can perform a vital function. They, too, might set up a couple of CD players with headphones to allow the immediacy of listening. The CDs are already open, so why not? If someone can read a book in a library, why can't they listen to a CD? When I was developing my own tastes in the LP era, the biggest libraries *also* had listening booths. We were invited to listen. Today, at Seattle's Benaroya Hall, this need to listen has been recognized. Why haven't our stores and libraries recognized it? I believe this is crucial for our mass culture, and there is no halfway. We must feel *encouraged* to listen, not as if someone is doing us a big favor.

A few years ago, Blockbuster's record store chain decided it would break open the shrink wrap if someone wanted to hear a CD, then repackage it in a loose plastic sleeve if the person didn't buy. The store ended up with a mixture of factory-sealed discs and a smaller number of easily-recognized repackaged discs. One always felt a bit guilty for listening and not buying, because the store was doing a favor. And the resealed discs were easily distinguished from the supposed "pristine" ones. Also, teenagers began hanging around at the listening stations. Just like in the old days. And we just can't have teenagers listening to music in a record store, now, can we? Teenagers sit around doing homework and reading books in those comfy chairs at Barnes and Noble, but record stores don't want to be bothered by

customers hanging around. They just want to put money into the cash register.

Poor sales of the best music is, in part, a self-fulfilling prophecy. By their very nature, minority tastes in jazz, classical, and world music require greater access. Without access at the retail level, or in a library, such music won't often be heard. Music that can't be heard won't sell. By denying access, record labels and retailers *create* poor sales. Today, the message our retailers send is, "If you don't already know what you want, trust us or we can't help you." Thus, the critical connection between the artist and the listener is broken.

A few of my colleagues don't take this argument as seriously as they should. I think this is because they have reasonable knowledge of what they want. I ask them to put themselves in place of someone who is curious but uninformed about another kind of music. Imagine, for example, wanting to learn about South American folk music, wandering over to the World Music section of the store and facing a hundred shrink-wrapped recordings of unfamiliar music by folk singers you have never heard of. How to choose? How to gamble your money? Buy music for the cover art? This is what neophytes face in the classical section. So who wouldn't just give up and go back to familiar fare? No other merchandise I can think of demands such purchasing "in the blind". When you buy a CD, you are buying *music*, not cover art, not celebrity soloists, not a list of selections on the back of the case. You are also buying a particular performance. Yet the record labels demand that you buy something you cannot hear. They demand that you roll the dice or place your bets on someone else's opinion—including theirs, of course.

Although I am adamant about the return of universal in-store listening—and by implication, any high-tech way of making CDs accessible—I realize that the tide of culture may be against better music generally. Traditionally, support of high culture has been an upper socio-economic class activity, or at least it required leisure time. With the mass distribution of books and music (at first, sheet music) well over a century ago, it became more general. Nowadays, our overworked, high-tech, dual-income society is inundated with options, courted in a thousand directions through many electronic conduits. Appreciation of great music requires time.

The proliferation of high culture may have peaked and is now receding to a more historical level. How this tidal recession ought to be measured I have no idea. But once upon a time—only a few decades ago—one's neighbors (who may not have listened to much, if any, classical) at least knew the names of musicians like Heifetz, Stokowski, Stravinsky, and Bernstein. Classical music was part of the cultural milieu. I doubt that many of one's neighbors today are able to name a living classical musician, perhaps with the exception of one of The Three Tenors. Lack of knowledge could be the result of misplaced educational standards, or the result of a dumbing mass media; but it would seem as if we are going backwards and that Norman Lebrecht's cynicism shouldn't be taken too lightly. If we cannot convince even our public radio stations here in America of the value of classical music, where are we?

How far the tide recedes may depend upon commercial enterprises making a few concessions in their own interests. I am quite sure that greater access to recorded music would help sales. It would allow new artists in all genres more of a voice, as well as give all musical tastes a better chance to grow. We should allow those who are motivated, like my friend who heard *Alexander Nevsky* one day after losing his job, the opportunity to explore the vast amount of great music our hard-working musicians and sophisticated technology have produced.

HALDEMAN

Guide to Records

ADAM: *music*

Ensemble Anonymous/ Claude Bernatchez
Analekta 9816—57 minutes
Ensemble Micrologus—Zig Zag 40602—58:22

These are anthologies of music by Adam de la Halle (also known as Adam le Bossu, 1245 or 50 to 1285 or 88 or after 1306), and the core repertory of each derives from the musical insertions in *The Play of Robin and Marion*. This play, possibly written for the royal court in Naples, narrates the story of the shepherdess Marion, her boyfriend Robin, and the lecherous knight Aubert. The theme of Robin and Marion pervades the 13th Century, and this play is found in many other lyric compositions, including motets, rondeaux, and chansons.

The Ensemble Micrologus "infers a polyphonic/heterophonic instrumental accompaniment" for much of their performance. In the rondeaux, the voices are often doubled or replaced by other instruments; when this is a harp or lute, there is no major problem (though it is unnecessary), but when it is multiple bagpipes, the voices really can't be heard with any clarity. The Ensemble Anonymous adopts a similar method. I find particularly jarring the frequent use of a baroque chalumeau among the instruments, since the medieval *chalemie* was more likely a treble shawm. Towards the end of this recording, Claude Bernatchez's arrangements of a short song from the play and a motet from the Montpellier manuscript sound more like medieval minimalism.

What is misleading about both of these discs is that while they contain most of the musical insertions, neither includes Adam's play itself—a much more significant work than the short songs. The Ensemble Micrologus tells us their recording derives from a staged performance, so I expected the full play with its interpolations. What is on both of these recordings is more like a Broadway-cast album or the old D'Oyly Carte recordings of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas with just the songs (and a few additional motets and medieval dances) and no dialog.

For all or part of Adam's play you need to turn to earlier recordings. Two were directed by Thomas Binkley: a severely cut one with the Studio for Early Music from 1966 (rereleased on Teldec 21709), a longer but still truncated version with students from the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis (Mar/Apr 1994), and a longer version yet by the Ensemble Perceval (May/June 1992). Though both of these anthologies are interesting in their own right, the Ensemble Micrologus should do a DVD so that Adam's genius can be fully appreciated in the 21st Century.

BREWER

ADAMS: *Shaker Loops; The Wound-Dresser; Short Ride in a Fast Machine;* **BUSONI:** *Berceuse Elégiaque*

Nathan Gunn, bar; Bournemouth Symphony/ Marin Alsop—Naxos 559031—58 minutes

Alsop's John Adams program offers a good overview of the composer's oeuvre: in addition to the canonical Minimalist work *Shaker Loops*, the composer's elegiac, quietly romantic style is represented by *The Wound-Dresser*, his rare skill for orchestration by his arrangement of Busoni's *Suite Elegiaque*, and the exuberant, post-minimalist style he's most widely recognized for by *A Short Ride in a Fast Machine*.

None of these performances is better than the originals on Nonesuch and New Albion (though the Busoni arrangement has not been previously recorded), and the rhythmic accuracy that's needed to convincingly articulate the temporal layers of the busier pieces is lacking, particularly in *Short Ride*, where the incessant ticking of the woodblock wobbles distractingly. But Alsop's workmanlike performances are certainly up to the Naxos standard, and Gunn's tender interpretations of Walt Whitman's words in *The Wound-Dresser* are truly lovely. For the low Naxos price, this is a fine introduction to the music of John Adams.

QUINN

A KEMPIS: *Symphonies; Motets*

Celine Scheen, s; Stephan Van Dyk, t; Dirk Snellings, b; Ensemble Clematis/ Stephanie de Failly—Musica Ficta 8001—67:48

Yet another obscure composer to discover!

Nicoles or Nicolaus a Kempis (c 1600-76), was from a family of musicians active in Brussels in the 17th Century. We know next to nothing of his life, beyond his service as organist at one of the city's churches.

But he left five printed collections of music. One of them, a set of Masses and Motets for eight voices with continuo, dated to 1650, has been lost. The others, designated as his Opp. 1-4 (1644, 1647, 1649, and [?]"1642") are all titled *Symphoniae*, variously scored for 1-3 to 1-6 parts. The first three books add up to a total of 98 "symphonies" (or instrumental

sonatas), while Op. 2 and Op. 3 each contain four Latin motets for two vocal and three instrumental parts. Of Op. 4 only one instrumental part survives.

What is interesting is the clear Italian background to this music. There is no evidence that A Kempis ever visited Italy, but he clearly was familiar with the latest Italian trends, presumably through printed and even manuscript circulation. His motets show the clear absorption of Monteverdi's *concertato* sacred style, while the published collections of Giovanni Paolo and Andrea Cima, Biagio Marini (who visited Brussels in person in 1626), of Carlo Farina, of Marco Uccellini and of others had set the models for the instrumental sonata, stressing florid violin writing. Indeed, A Kempis seems to have been the very first composer in the Low Countries to compose in the new sonata style. While he included passages of virtuosic display, the general character of these "sinfonias" is a fairly clear directness, with folksy touches in the occasional citation of popular tunes of the day. Wind instruments are occasionally included among the strings. These publications were apparently of great importance for introducing Italian instrumental style into the northern musical world.

Their contents still make very agreeable listening, and it is surprising that they have not been addressed in recordings before. I may have missed other instances, but the only earlier sampling I can find is a single sinfonia from Op. 2 included in the *Effetti e Stravaganze* program the Concerto Palatino recorded for Accent (94102), thus placing his music amid his Italian models.

This is certainly the only full disc devoted entirely to the music of Nicolaus à Kempis. And it is a treasurable one. There are 18 selections in all, all but one taken from Opp. 1-3. The exception is a *Pavana Dolorosa* from Op. 4, which can be reconstructed by reference to a parallel composition of Peter Philips, the British expatriate who ended his days in Brussels. The three singers and the instrumental group of seven players do their work with suave sensitivity. One can even relish their concluding outbreak of joy when, after over an hour of very solemn and serious music, the players launch into a three-voice sinfonia on the wild *ciaconna* dance rhythm, with no holds barred and all banners flying.

Particularly fine booklet notes, with texts. Even if you are not a specialist in 17th Century music, you will find this over an hour of really beautiful listening.

BARKER

AMLIN: *Piano Sonatas 6+7; Variations; Preludes*
with **FINE:** *Piano Music;* **COPLAND:** *Piano Blues*
Andrew Willis—Albany 674—65 minutes

Martin Amlin, a baby-boomer now based in Boston, studied at Eastman and also with Nadia Boulanger. He's an active pianist (who's made a fair number of recordings, mostly of contemporary works, on both LP and CD) as well as a composer. This is the first of his music I've seen on records, though his piccolo sonata and sonatina on Crystal 711 were approved by Payton MacDonald (Nov/Dec 2001, p 269).

Amlin's language, with its plangent, highly-enriched triadic harmonies and verdant arpeggios, reminds me of another pianist-composer, Judith Zaimont. At his best Amlin is fluent, fresh, vital, sensuous, poetic. At his weakest he tends to lapse into prolix, improvised-sounding wanderings unchecked by self-critical discipline—always a temptation for a musician with Amlin's facility—though everything he writes falls easily on the ear (and no doubt under the performer's fingers, also). All of these pieces have lots of energy, lots of ideas, indeed lots of notes; his is definitely a "maximalist" aesthetic.

Five Preludes (completed in 1995) exhibits Amlin's abilities, and liabilities, well. II, an elegy, begins with a brief sequence of spare chords but almost immediately flowers into luxuriant cascades of figuration, as if the composer is simply too impatient with simplicity, and too full of exciting things for his fingers to do, to restrict himself to slow, simple music for longer than a few seconds. This elegy's airy, effusive gorgeousness is lovely, and it's one of the most effective pieces on the program. But the next two preludes are not quite as good, and too similar in style and mood to the elegy; the result is anti-climactic and a bit repetitive. The final prelude is a ragtime that, despite ebullient pianism and eccentric rhythmic displacements, is just too casual, too offhand, and too superficial. You'd never suspect the expressive nuances or depths of feelings this genre is capable of—as in William Bolcom's *Graceful Ghost*, for instance—from Amlin's tossed-off effort. We're left with a pretty good set of preludes that nevertheless could have been better had the composer lived up to his abilities—and that wears out its welcome before it ends.

The two sonatas leave me with similar mixed feelings. At times there's a dulling sameness to the restless waterfalls of notes and rhapsodic ecstasies. Still, there are many fine things here; I'd single out for praise the 'Lament' (II) of Sonata 7. I also like the modest (in both size and technical demands) *Eight*

Variations, with its clever and sharply contrasted miniature variants (tango, two-part invention, arietta, gigue, and so on) on a slow chorale. This is Amlin at his most neoclassic—not far from, say, Norman Dello Joio—and connects nicely with the rest of the program: Copland's *Four Piano Blues* and Irving Fine's *Music for Piano*. Both are finely crafted and delightful items, Copland's a typically canny, stylized excursion into American vernacular, Fine's into sunny Stravinskian neoclassicism.

My occasional qualms about Amlin's music may arise in large part from the performance and recording. Andrew Willis plays with lots of panache but too much pedal, and is hampered by a too-reverberant acoustic—apparently an empty recital hall—that adds a blurry haze of overtones and a clanky echo to much of the music. To hear how much better—clearer and also richer and more natural—Fine's *Music for Piano*, for example, can sound on a recording, listen to Michael Boriskin's splendid anthology of American neoclassic gems on New World 80402, which also includes Harold Shapero's lapidary, Scarlattian sonatas and Menotti's vivacious *Ricercare and Toccata*.

LEHMAN

ANTHEIL: *Symphony 3; Tom Sawyer Overture; Hot-Time Dance; McKonkey's Ferry; Capital of the World*

Frankfurt Radio Symphony/ Hugh Wolff
CPO 777 040—61 minutes

Jack Sullivan has written about at least two of the entries in Hugh Wolff's survey of the works of former "bad boy of music" George Antheil (1900-59), and I fully agree that his music is fresh and exciting, that Eckhardt van den Hoogen's notes are fascinating, and that the readings are first-rate (Sept/Oct 2000, March/April 2001). The present album sandwiches three smaller works—the rollicking 'Tom Sawyer' Overture (1949), the American-Romanian 'Hot-Time Dance' (1948), and the harrowing 'McKonkey's Ferry' Overture (1948)—between two major ones.

The first of these is Symphony 3 , the *American*, written at a time (1939) when Antheil was barely scratching out a living composing for films, writing lonely-hearts articles for *Esquire* magazine (!), and searching for a musical voice that would sound American. He believed he found it in this work, writing effusively to his patroness Mary Louise Curtis Bok (founder of the Curtis Institute) that "it is the America of the future, bold, fearless, new, and coming from the very breadth of the new continent". He wrote the 25-minute work while crossing the US by train. In I, jazz-age rhythms and determined locomotive propulsions are tinged by wonder and what might be hints of insecurity. While I hear Copland and Gershwin now and then, I am taken by Antheil's originality and boldness.

The notes rightly invoke the name of Mahler in discussing II, written while Antheil was staying at a very large ranch in Texas. While the harmonic and melodic language is his own, Mahler's voice is heard in the gentle yet grim marching bass line. In III, Antheil commemorates the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 'The Golden Spike' Andante, depicting the vastness of the newly connected country in sweeping gestures, the energy of railroading in a driving ending. The symphony ends with a suitably bustling, enthusiastic 'Back to Baltimore' Presto. I am very happy to have made this wonderful work's acquaintance.

The program ends with *Capital of the World* Suite (1953), a ballet based on Ernest Hemingway's novel where a young man travels with his sisters to Madrid, trains to become a matador, and is killed in the process. Composer-critic Virgil Thompson called the suite "the most original, striking and powerful American ballet score with which I am acquainted", and I won't disagree. The 17-minute work is in three parts: a hot-blooded 'Tailor Shop', pensive 'Meditation', and virtuoso 'Knife Dance'.

This is a superb recording, and I am rather amazed that this is my first exposure to music by George Antheil.

KILPATRICK

ARENSKY: *Quartet 2;* see Collections

AVISON: *Concertos after Scarlatti*

Cafe Zimmermann—Alpha 31—77 minutes

This is an extraordinary release, full of vitality, and I can only hope that Cafe Zimmermann will decide to record the other six concertos in this set. Only concertos 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, and 12 are included.

I have not before seen Alpha releases, so I was curious and interested to find three of them among my review discs this time. Despite the three-fold cardboard packaging rather than the customary jewel box, the covers are captivating. For each of these three releases, a painting was carefully chosen to accompany the music. A detail from the painting appears on the front flap; another detail is given on the second flap, and a reproduction of the full painting on the inside. Chosen for Avison's work is William Hogarth's *Shortly after the Marriage* (alternately titled *Breakfast Scene, or Early in the Morning*). Detailed notes about the painting are included in the booklet, along with a provocative quote: "Music is painting, painting is music." It is indeed gratifying to find another record label that takes such a unified aesthetic approach. There are a

few others, such as Hyperion and Naxos, but much more emphasis is given to the artwork here as an integral part of the release.

Coincidentally, Hyperion's catalog also has an excellent set of Avison's concertos after Scarlatti—my recommendation if you want the complete set (J/A 1995). I read with some shock that Mr Brewer found the Ensemble Berlin's recording of these concertos to be "boring" and "bland" (N/D 2002). With the fiery notes of the Cafe Zimmermann ensemble echoing in my ears, I immediately thought, "How could *anybody* make these concertos boring and bland?" This relatively new French ensemble has done such a marvelous job with these that if you're thinking of investing in the Hyperion, it might be worthwhile to wait and see if Alpha will release the rest. I visited the Cafe Zimmermann Website to see if I could find information on possible new releases, but found nothing. Nor was the Alpha Website any more informative.

As you have probably already gathered, the notes are far above average, in French and English. In addition to Professor Denis Grenier's essay on the Hogarth painting, there is a lengthy essay on Avison's work with the Scarlatti sonatas, written by Professor Emeritus Jack Cassingham from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. My only disappointment is that although there are several black-and-white photographs of ensemble members, there is no information about Cafe Zimmermann itself.

CRAWFORD

BACEWICZ: *Violin Sonatas 4 + 5; Partita; Solo Sonata 2*
Joanna Kurkowicz; Gloria Chien, p
Chandos 10250—69 minutes

Not only the best-known woman composer of her native Poland but very possibly the best female composer of the past century, Grazyna Bacewicz (1909-69) produced a substantial and impressive body of work that includes symphonies, concertos, quartets, and sonatas. Her early music combines late-romantic and modern neoclassic elements with a distinctly Polish flavor derived in part from Szymanowski; the result is close in style to such other Eastern European craftsmen as Miklos Rozsa. Later in her career, influenced by post-Bartokians like Lutoslawski and Penderecki, she experimented with atonal harmonies, unconventional forms, and "contemporary" scorings.

Bacewicz was herself a violinist and wrote quite a bit for her own instrument, including five duo-sonatas, a partita for violin and piano, and two solo violin sonatas. All of these date from the mid 40s to the late 50s and are written in her earlier, more traditional manner. There are some folk-style tunes and bustling ostinatos, and lots of activity and energy, but nothing quite as acrid as Bartok except perhaps the somewhat more chromatic and sinewy 1958 Second Solo Sonata. Allegros are dance-like toccatas charged with bravura excitement; adagios are nocturnal melodic arches rich in romantic ardor. These are sharply juxtaposed for maximum effect. The last three movements of the 1955 Partita, for instance, contrast a driving, muscular, ebullient Vivace with a tolling lament, this in turn followed by a bustling, rambunctious Presto.

These are exceptionally well-made and exciting compositions, effective as modern-but-traditional sonatas and violin showpieces. Anyone who cares about this kind of repertoire should hear them. Violinist Joanna Kurkowicz and pianist Gloria Chien play with flair, precision, and sensitivity, and are recorded in clear, potent, immediate sound.

There is strong competition, namely Arnold Belnick and Sergei Silvanksy, who performed the same program minus the Second Solo Sonata, but with the Third Sonata (for violin and piano), on Cambria 1052 (Sept/Oct 1996). That isn't as well recorded, especially the piano, which is somewhat recessed and muffled; but Belnick plays with razor-sharp articulation and an old-fashioned Heifetzian zing that Kurkowicz simply can't match. Just compare the presto finale of the Partita to see what I mean: Kurkowicz is excellent but Belnick is dazzling.

Still, even if you have the Cambria disc, I recommend the Chandos for Kurkowicz's rendering of the stunning Second Solo Sonata and three short encores (Oberek 1, Capriccio, and Polish Capriccio) not offered on Belnick's program. Lovers of fiddle music really can't have too much of Grazyna Bacewicz.

LEHMAN

BACH, CPE: *Gellert Odes & Songs*
Dorothee Mields; Ludger Rémy, fp
CPO 777 061 [2CD] 91:03

We remember Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach almost exclusively for his instrumental and orchestral works. He was, in fact, a prolific composer of songs (some 300 of them) as well, though many of his products in this category are very simple, straight-forward things in both vocal writing and keyboard accompaniment—a long way from what the German *Lied* would become in the 19th Century.

Ludger Rémy has long been a champion of CPE's music in general and his songs in particular. Playing the fortepiano as accompanist, he has collaborated with baritone Klaus Mertens in two earlier releases for the CPO label. In one, called *Lieder & Oden* and recorded in 1997 (999 549; S/O 1999), 21 selections were offered from a range of the composer's printed collec-

tions. In the next, called *Sacred Songs* and made in 1999 (999 708; not reviewed), the collaborators offered 22 selections from among the 58 songs that the composer published in two collections based on the poetry of the Hamburg pastor Christoph Christian Sturm (around 1780). In between those projects, bass Gotthold Schwarz and fortepianist Sabine Bauer recorded for Capriccio (10 856; J/F 2001) songs by both CPE and JCF Bach: by the former, 21 from two collections.

Of those 21, 17 came from *Geistliche Oden und Lieder*, which CPE published in 1758 and 1764. (One item from the 1758 collection was done by Mertens and Rémy in their 1997 program.) The texts came from the published collections of sacred poems by Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715-69), the Leipzig professor, poet, and playwright (born a pastor's son) whose eloquent spiritual lyrics bridged the gap between the contemporary movements of the Enlightenment and Pietism and anticipated the spirit of Kant. He and his poems were extremely popular in their day and for generations of Germans thereafter. We may now remember him mainly as the source for Beethoven's Six Gellert Lieder, Op. 48; but his poems were also set over the years by such diverse composers as Haydn, Loewe, and Tchaikovsky. CPE Bach found them an endless source of inspiration in his early maturity, and he treated them with the greatest respect, almost to a fault. Convinced that the texts (normally strophic) were the thing, he wrote the plainest melodies for them, over the barest of accompaniments.

As Rémy has now turned to the Gellert collections, some things have gone wrong. For one thing, he has a new partner in Mields. She is a conscientious singer; but her lean, dry, often vibratoless singing quickly becomes a trial in quantity. (Both Mr Lucano and I, in our reviews of the earlier releases, have commented on the rather soporific qualities of these simplistic songs. In fairness, though, the performers themselves recommend that listeners limit themselves to five or six at a time.)

Worse still is what has happened to the booklet. Yes, the full texts and translations are given. But, in place of proper annotations, we have an 11-column mess, author unidentified, cast in the form of a dialog between "A" and "B", a tediously chatty and rambling "conversation" about the poet and the composer. Lost are important points of information that could have been supplied in one-fifth the space. For instance, we are not told that the two published Gellert collections consist of 55 (1758) and 12 (1764) songs, a total of 67. These two discs offer a mere 30 songs—a stingy menu, when there is space for far more. In Rémy's sampling of the Sturm collections, the numbers in them are supplied for each selection. Here, we are given no idea what comes from where. (And the order is not unimportant: the composer tells us he published the songs in the order he composed them.) Nor is it explained why five of them are given just as piano pieces, without their texts (though the unsung words are, in fact, printed in the booklet).

All this is simply unworthy of CPO, which usually does things with responsibility and care. A good kick-in-the-pants is due either to or from Rémy, so that good sense can be renewed in any further explorations Rémy makes into this neglected literature.

BARKER

BACH, CPE: *Keyboard Music 12*

Miklos Spanyi, clavichord—BIS 1198—66 minutes

If nothing else, Spanyi's exploration of CPE Bach's keyboard music for BIS has allowed listeners to savor a wide range of keyboard music in the period between JS Bach and Mozart. I have to admit that I am becoming anxious for Spanyi to turn his considerable gifts to CPE's best-known keyboard works—the sonatas and other works for connoisseurs and amateurs—which still lack persuasive performances on records. This release contains music composed from 1755 to 1758: three sonatas and seven short character pieces (continuing the group begun on BIS 1087, apparently not reviewed in ARG). As usual, Spanyi has very little competition for this arcane fare, and it's hard to imagine performances that surpass his finesse and reliable interpretations. I remember hearing the short work 'La Gleim' on a recent release by Marcia Hadjimarkos for Zig-Zag (Mar/Apr 2004); her performance is as good as Spanyi's in every respect, and on the whole she makes a better showing by coupling famous works with obscure ones. Spanyi's release also contains excellent notes by the scholar Darrell Berg; among other things, Berg identifies the subjects of the character pieces and inspires me to a greater appreciation for the tender subtleties of CPE.

HASKINS

BACH: *Cantatas 10+47*

Sally Le Sage, Shirley Minty, Nigel Rogers, Neil Howlett; London Bach Society; English Chamber Orchestra/ Paul Steinitz

Lyrichord 8050—49 minutes

These performances, recorded in 1965, reflect a time when large-scale Bach was dropping from favor, but before the rise of period instruments. (Telefunken's complete set of cantatas under Harnoncourt and Leonhardt began in 1970, while in 1965 the leading light in this repertory was probably Karl Richter.) Of these

pieces Cantata 10 (the German Magnificat) is the better known; Cantata 47 (*Wer sich Selbst Erhöhet der Soll Erniedriget sein*) is a work of only five movements, but one is an 11-minute soprano aria that wears out its welcome. Otherwise, though, it is a fine piece with a richly fugal opening movement and a fine bass aria, along with a recitative and chorale.

These recordings are quite satisfying in their way. The playing is sprightly, if a little slower than customary today. The biggest difference lies in the chorus, which is more enthusiastic and less polished than we expect from present-day groups (and recorded very close). This is a liability, but only a minor one since committed, spirited singing by "the people" has its own advantages (and might be counted a mark of authenticity!). The soloists are all good; Neil Howlett is a bit heavy for today's tastes in Bach basses, but the others, notably a young Nigel Rogers, are very satisfying. Steinitz does a good job moving things along, and textures are nicely clear.

Packaged with the cantatas is a bonus disc with 17 excerpts from other releases in Lyrichord's Early Music Series. A useful advertisement, perhaps, or you could use it while reading the paper as a kind of sonic wallpaper from the baroque era. Whether you want the main CD will depend on your taste in Bach. If you like Rilling, you'll probably enjoy what is here.

ALTHOUSE

BACH: *Cantatas 56, 82, 158*

Thomas Quasthoff, bar; RIAS Chamber Choir; Berlin Baroque Soloists/ Rainer Kussmaul

DG 3458—50 minutes

These cantatas, all solo works except for chorales, are central to the bass and baritone repertory. As with so many of Bach's texts, these deal with death, its inevitability, indeed its desirability. Each is a sermon on the acceptance of death, a welcome acceptance since the heavenly kingdom is the reward.

Quasthoff has a fine voice for Bach, sturdy and rich through his entire range. He brings his skills as a lieder singer to the darker moments of the text, but overall the tone is optimistic. The tempos for 'Endlich Wird mein Joch' and 'Ich Freue mich auf meinen Tod' are so quick that Quasthoff has little to spare in the runs, and the spirit of the opening arias 'Ich Habe Genug' and 'Ich Will den Kreuzstab Gerne Tragen' is more about acceptance than pain. I am brought closer to the pain in older performances by Fischer-Dieskau, Hotter (Cantata 82), and Mack Harrell than I am with Quasthoff, but I cannot argue with the beauty of the singing here, seen most clearly in the lovely 'Schlummert ein'. The contributions by the RIAS choir and the Berlin Baroque Soloists are all very positive (including a fine oboist, Albrecht Mayer), and the sonics are excellent.

This release is certainly worthy of recommendation, but it joins a large field, which includes Souzay, Shirley-Quirk, Goerne, and the singers mentioned above.

ALTHOUSE

BACH: *Concertos*

Cafe Zimmermann—Alpha 13—69 minutes

I have commented on both this exciting label and this excellent ensemble above (AVISON). Here is yet another entry that is just as good, with the notes on this one giving us some background on the ensemble's unusual name and their *raison d'etre*.

As with the other Alpha releases, the painting is prominent in both the spirit and meaning of the program. It is *The Chocolate Girl* by Genevan artist Jean Etienne Liotard (1702-89). And, as with the others, Prof. Denis Grenier writes good commentary on the painting, linking it to the life and times of Bach and to the spirit of Enlightenment times.

This release is apparently the first for Cafe Zimmermann; the end of the essay says, "It is in the spirit of musical dialog that we begin this series of recordings of the Cafe Zimmermann ensemble." Cafe Zimmermann takes its name from the coffee house of Gottfried Zimmermann in Leipzig, home of the "collegium musicum" founded by Telemann in 1702. As the notes point out, the phenomenon of a part-time orchestra playing out of a coffee house represented part of the Enlightenment upheaval, as the orchestra was heretofore associated with either court or church. Bach became director of this orchestra in 1729, a post he held off and on for a number of years.

Thus, in tribute to this great—perhaps unparalleled—composer and the musical developments he represents, the Cafe Zimmermann offers a selection of familiar Bach concertos for various instruments, the program opening with one of the harpsichord concertos (S 1052), continuing with an oboe concerto (S 1055) and a violin concerto (S 1042), and ending with the Brandenburg Concerto No. 5. These are stunningly performed, with the utmost energy and joy, but with variety and delicacy. Long life to Cafe Zimmermann; may their recordings be many, their coffers full!

CRAWFORD

BACH: *Goldberg Variations*

Amati String Trio—Columns 99564—54 minutes

Though I have known about Dmitri Sitkovetsky's transcription of the *Goldberg Variations* for string trio, I have never listened to it before because of my allegiance to the original key-

board piece. My loyalty to the harpsichord was shattered when I heard Glenn Gould's 1955 piano recording, and like so many other music lovers, my eyes and ears were opened wide when I heard his 1981 recording.

Hearing this string trio version that Sitkovetsky dedicated to the memory of Gould is simply a continuation of that ear-opening process. Following along with my Ralph Kirkpatrick edition of the harpsichord score (which often has the right hand separated into two voices anyway), I notice that there is very little rewriting in this transcription, except in variations 20 and 23, where it is very effective and appropriate. Much of the difference in the music comes from the ability of the stringed instruments to sustain and vibrate. Legato passages are sometimes given comfortable string-appropriate articulations, and sometimes lines are split between instruments. The sustaining quality of the string trio adds a great deal to certain variations (like 15, 21, 25, and the quodlibet), and the ability to snap the double-dotted rhythms in variations 7 and 16 adds a kind of "zing" that I have never heard in a keyboard rendition. One of the most effective variations is the 19th, where the accompanying instruments play pizzicato under the solo line. The voicing is pretty much the same as the keyboard voicing, and the melodic voices are usually divided between the violin and the viola, while the cello nearly always plays the bass.

The Amati String Trio plays with taste and grace, but their allegiance is far more towards Glenn Gould's piano interpretation than to Trevor Pinnock's harpsichord interpretation. They play with full sustained sounds and glorious vibrato—something Gould would certainly have appreciated.

FINE

BACH: *Goldberg Variations; 14 canons; folk songs*

Celine Frisch, hpsi; Dominique Visse, ct; Cafe Zimmermann—Alpha 14 [2CD] 102 minutes

Pierre Hantaï's recent recording of the *Goldbergs* for Naïve (Nov/Dec 2003) surpasses all the available competition for its electric virtuosity and style. But this new release with Céline Frisch equals his in style, comes very close in virtuosity, and adds a couple of wonderful extra items that Bach lovers should not want to be without: sparkling instrumental performances of the 14 canons on the first eight notes of the Goldberg bass (which were discovered only in 1975), Dominique Visse's uproarious performance of the folk song 'Das Wasserrüben und Kohl', and an instrumental improvisation on another folk song, 'Ich bin so lang nicht bei dir gewest' (both might be sources for the two songs that appear in the final quodlibet of the *Goldbergs*). These two songs put the *Goldbergs* into a wider orbit, one that humanizes Bach's late masterpiece in a stunning way.

The improvisations of the Ensemble Instrumental Café Zimmermann are superb, and Visse overwhelms us with his compelling and inimitable vocal quality as he alters his voice to represent both male and female characters in the song. What a blast it must have been to record this track! Visse is an artist with a white-hot imagination, impeccable technique, and an enviable love for both performance and music.

Now to the harpsichord playing. Frisch plays the instrument beautifully. Her fingers touch the keys with the weight needed to activate the sound and no more; this gives every moment of the sound an incredibly vivid quality. She particularly shines in the Aria and slow variations like 13 and 15, when her right and left hands are sometimes so unsynchronized that the music almost—but never quite—unravels.

She also makes some interesting decisions for registration. She begins Variation 16 (the French Overture) with the manuals coupled and then plays the second, faster, section on one set of strings only, which makes the whole variation sound more whimsical than it usually does. Finally, she understands Bach's directive to play with a singing quality. Her bass lines in Variation 18 and others are connected and expressive; what a nice change from the staccato and mechanical bass lines that we too often hear.

In sum, here's a release that demonstrates some of the liveliest and imaginative music-making today; if only more musicians specializing in the mainstream or 20th Century took such risks and played with such excitement!

HASKINS

BACH: *Harpsichord Concertos*

after Vivaldi, Marcello, Prince Johann Ernst, Anonymous

Rainer Zipperling, vc; Thomas Boysen, theorbo, g; Daniel Oman, colascione; Naoki Kitaya, Naoko Matsumoto, hpsi—Raum Klang 20019—75 min

A brilliant idea: Kitaya adds continuo instruments to Bach harpsichord transcriptions of concertos by Vivaldi, Marcello, Anonymous, and Prince Johann Ernst. The more I hear it, the more I think that adding continuo to anything is like using lots of butter in cooking—it always improves things. This is an indispensable supplement to Peter Watchorn's complete recording of the harpsichord transcriptions on Hänssler (Nov/Dec 2000, deleted). Let me discuss its considerable strengths.

Kitaya is a brilliant artist who has technique to burn and lots of enthusiasm. His vir-

tuosity impresses in particular with the fireworks in the C-major Concerto (S 976, transcribed from the last concerto in Vivaldi's Opus 3, *L'Estro Armonico*). The continuo players—up to four other musicians in some cases—add much more than simple harmonic filler; for instance, Thomas Boysen improvises a lovely melody in the slow movement of the D-major Concerto (S 972, after Vivaldi's ninth concerto from Opus 3). Kitaya plays a fine instrument (built in 2001 by Burkhard Zander after late 17th Century Italian models and tuned in an unequal temperament). The sound places the harpsichord too far in the background. And I'm sorry that Kitaya didn't perform all the concertos. Still, for record buyers who didn't get Watchorn's set when it was available, Kitaya's release offers an exciting introduction to the works.

Interesting notes by Karsten Erik Ose, drawing from recent musicological research, that suggest we should widen both the period when Bach produced the transcriptions and the number of composers who influenced his later development.

HASKINS

BACH: *Organ Pieces*

S 527, 530, 536, 542, 572, 728, 769
Gerhard Weinberger—CPO 777 019—68 minutes

Volume 16 in Weinberger's noteworthy Bach series includes several of Bach's most significant and beautiful masterpieces played on a great historic organ. But this is solely for the most intrepid listener, for there are glaring deficiencies that cannot be ignored.

There is so much to find fault with about the performances that only a general summation can be given. Tedious, monolithic registrations that ruin polyphonic clarity alternate with fundamentally wrong registrations (in trios, right-hand parts overbalance the left hand; in Variation V of the Canonic Variations, Weinberger's use of an 8' pedal stop instead of a 4' means that there is effectively no alto voice in the S-A-T-B web; instead it has been turned into a S-T-T-B arrangement). Frequently the hands and feet are not together in faster movements. His insistent bumpy articulation often causes rhythmic imprecision. Some tempos drag unmercifully.

How a superb artist of Weinberger's stature could countenance such faults is not easy to understand, though a lot of this has to do with his promotion of what he passionately construes to be historical performance practice. I fear we have here a prime example of how over-zealous historicism in music has led to musically calamitous results.

With the reverberation in the church, at least five of the movements come out as little more than a hopeless jumble. Part of the cause for this must certainly be insufficient care in placing the microphones, but the terrible registrations are also a factor. Apart from the poor sonic definition, CPO's production is impressive, with outstanding notes by the performer, photos, and detailed registrations.

The organ in St Wenzel, Naumburg, was completed by Zacharias Hildebrandt in 1746 (about the time of the Canonic Variations) and was "proved" by Bach that year. Thus it is a genuine "Bach" organ, one the master knew and played. The instrument is a large three-manual of 53 stops and considerable gravity. It has a good number of 8' stops, even a celeste. Through the years it was subjected to many alterations until a complete restoration to its 1746 identity was carried out by the Eule firm of Bautzen in 2000. It has been seldom recorded.

If you want to spend the money to hear the organ, OK; but for heaven's sake, take the playing with a grain of salt. This is not how Bach's music should sound!

MULBURY

BACH: *Solo Violin Sonata 1; Partita 2;* MARTINU: *3 Madrigals*

Elmar Oliveira; Sandra Robbins, va
Elan 2212—72 minutes

This is the kind of Bach playing that made me dislike baroque music as a boy. The rhythms are four-square and inflexible, and phrases are often played with an overblown majesty that they simply do not possess. Bach's emotional world was far more varied, its nuances far more subtle, than Oliveira could convey back in 1988, when these recordings were made.

The Martinŭ Madrigals are played beautifully. The first is full of spunk and nimble rhythms, the second is a night music reminiscent of Bartok, the third is swift, syncopated, and playful. Oliveira and Robbins play with gusto, virtuosity, and obvious relish. While I can't recommend this for the Bach, I don't think I've heard the Martinŭ played better.

MAGIL

BACH: *WTC I*

Edward Parmentier, hpsi
Wildboar 401 [2CD] 127 minutes

Daniel Barenboim, p
Warner 61553 [2CD] 125 minutes

One of Bach's keyboard students reminisced that he used to listen to his teacher play through the entire WTC when Bach did not feel like teaching; on those occasions, the student recalled, hours passed like minutes. Listening to Edward Parmentier's new recording of the WTC I reminds me of this story because his performance engages the interest so com-

pletely. Parmentier has always impressed with his dexterity and with the forceful ardor of his interpretations; now there's also a thoughtfulness that makes his performances even more noteworthy.

Much of the interest on this release derives from his careful and expressive phrasing, which he chiefly accomplishes with generous and imaginative rubato. The approach works particularly well in the sequence-heavy episodes of fugues like the F minor and B minor, which sound miraculously different from one another. His creativity as a performer also appears in unusual but utterly convincing new viewpoints on these classic pieces: the fugue in D sounds a bit like a fantasy, a bit like a choral movement—quite a change from the performances that make it into a busy, fanfare-like etude.

I can't agree with every one of his decisions. The A-major Fugue and G-major Prelude move along just a little too moderately for comfort, but in both performances Parmentier brings so much detail in the phrasing that I'm never bored. The harpsichord (by Keith Hill; no information on design or tuning) has a delicate sound with a very fast decay; this suits Bach's contrapuntal music well enough, but the sound lacks the richness of more resonant French instruments like the Blanchet copy that Ottavio Dantone uses for his recording (my favorite) on Arts (Nov/Dec 2001). Nevertheless, Peter Nothnagle's engineering skills yield great depth, beauty, and clarity; coupled with Parmentier's artistry, the release should take its place alongside offerings by Verlet on Astrée (Jan/Feb 1995) and Suzuki on BIS (July/Aug 1997).

Barenboim's pianism recalls the grand older style of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; every phrase has its own inner life and beauty, dynamics change often and in extreme ways, bass notes gain added strength from doublings an octave below, the sustaining pedal helps to create a wonderful variety of shimmering tone colors. Bravo to Barenboim for bringing us this kind of *Well-Tempered Clavier*; younger musicians reared on more Apollonian pianists like Andras Schiff or Angela Hewitt (Jan/Feb 1990) now have the chance to drink a fresh and invigorating tonic. The performance will not be to their taste, I imagine; the passionate phrasing toward the close of the D-minor Fugue will probably strike them as hopelessly sentimental. I find it enchanting. And there are similar shadings and sudden turns of phrase thru the entire performance.

Many tempos are moderate to slow, which makes it harder to experience the particular qualities of each separate Prelude and Fugue. The sound is too reverberant, too homogenized. But these are minor problems. There are too many wonderful moments that more than compensate: Barenboim's majestic rendering of the pathos in the E-flat minor Prelude, his incredible singing tone in the A-flat Fugue, his unashamed bass doublings in the B-minor Prelude. It may seem paradoxical that I, a harpsichordist who loves period instrument recordings, have so much good to say about this release. But I feel strongly that musicians need to return to a more personal, more imaginative style of music making or we run the risk of stripping away the very things that makes concert going (or even home listening) so rewarding. In more than a decade of record reviewing, I've not had the opportunity to review a recording of the WTC by a venerable, world-class pianist who had the good sense to continue the best traditions of the past. Until Murray Perahia (or perhaps Richard Goode or—dare I hope—Leon Fleisher) records the WTC, I can't imagine a better recording of this work to enjoy for many hours to come.

HASKINS

BACH FAMILY: *Motets*

JC: *Lieber Herr Gott; Es Ist Nun Aus; Der Gerechte, Ob Er Gleich; Ich Lasse Dich Nicht; Fürchte Dich Nicht;* **J:** *Unser Leben ist ein Schatten;* **JM:** *Herr, Du Lässest Mich Erfahren; Nun Hab' Ich Uberwunden; Sei Lieber Tag Willkommen;* **JL:** *Unsere Trübsal; Das ist Meine Freude*

Clare College Choir/ Timothy Brown
Columns 290236—54 minutes

It is well known that JS Bach came from a long line of musicians who were prominent, especially in Thuringia, from the 16th Century onward. The composers represented in this collection of German motets are all JS Bach's seniors, though in one case—Johann Ludwig Bach (1677-1731)—only eight years his senior. He and JS were of the same generation, but a common ancestor is back at least five or six generations. The earliest composer here is Johann Bach (1604-73), great uncle of JS. The brothers Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703) and Johann Michael Bach (1648-94) were first cousins of JS Bach's father. As it happens, JM Bach was also JS Bach's first father-in-law, as his daughter was Maria Barbara Bach. If all of this is too confusing, I suggest you have a look at the Bach family tree in *New Grove*.

These are all sturdy, well-crafted compositions, demonstrating that JS Bach's musical gifts were not unprecedented. Many of the motets here draw on traditional Lutheran chorale texts and tunes. They are not all memorable, but I am sure that repeated hearings will continue to reveal distinctions. One work that particularly impressed me was Johann Bach's 'Unser Leben Ist ein Schatten', a multi-

sectional work alternating scriptural and chorale texts. The opening section (from Job 8:9; "Our life is a shadow on earth") is full of striking pauses and single voice parts trailing off on the word "schatten" (shadow). One is tempted to hear in this the foreshadowing of CPE Bach's musical personality. All of this is music well worth hearing, almost a snapshot of the Lutheran motet in the mid-to-late 17th Century.

Timothy Brown and the mixed choir of Clare College, Cambridge deliver stylish and highly polished performances. This is more a smooth English choral sound than an edgy German one, but the stylistic aplomb of these readings leads me to describe their tone as an English sound with a good German accent. The original recording dates from 1995.

GATENS

BARBER: *Vanessa*

Christine Brewer (Vanessa), Susan Graham (Erika), Catherine Wyn-Rogers (Old Baroness), William Burden (Anatol), Neal Davies (Old Doctor); BBC Singers; BBC Symphony/ Leonard Slatkin—Chandos 5032 [2CD] 122 minutes

Vanessa has not had the most happy run in the theater. It was first produced at the old Met(ropolitan) in 1958 with a repeat the following year at Glyndebourne. Gian Carlo Menotti, the librettist, presented it at his Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto (1961, in Italian), with another production in 1968 at the American Spoletto in Charleston, South Carolina. That was filmed for television. Since then, performances have been few and far between. The Indiana School of Music presented it three seasons ago as part of an extraordinary season of 20th Century opera, and it will be presented in April in Madison, Wisconsin.

Critical acclaim and disdain have divided popular opinion about the work. Whether one likes the work or totally rejects it seems to be based on whether one is a romantic or a realist, an elitist or a supporter of the common man, a musical conservative or a modernist. Some criticisms are difficult to explain away. Just where and when the story of the opera takes place is difficult to say. Menotti wasn't exactly clear or consistent in its setting. The original libretto says, "The action takes place at Vanessa's country house in a northern country, the year about 1905". But Menotti's Italian libretto gives the location as on the upper Hudson in New York. Presumably Menotti thought New York would be an exotic locale for his Italian audiences. Vanessa's workers are called peasants and entertain at the New Year's Eve party with their fiddles and accordions. What about the Old Baroness? Titled royalty? Vanessa refers to "our people", telling the Major-Domo: "Call our people in; have them stand by the door. They should begin their dances right after the (wedding) announcement". She and Erika (Vanessa's niece or possibly daughter?) order the evening's elegant dinner in French. It sounds just a wee bit elitist.

Do we really need to know where the opera takes place? It is the characters and their story that should take precedence. Both ladies are emotionally overwrought and unstable. The tenor, Anatol, is an opportunistic rogue, which he freely acknowledges. Also firmly in the realistic camp is Vanessa's mother, the Old Baroness. She regards Vanessa and Erika as fools and refuses to speak to them. The Old Doctor falls somewhere between the two camps—a realist doctor with a romantic streak. All this sounds to me like an excellent setup for a good old-fashioned opera plot.

Old-fashioned applies to the music as well. It is certainly sophisticated, as befits the story, and spot-on in its delineation of character and situation. There are plenty of "take home tunes" to beguile the ear and the heart. Erika's 'Must the Winter Come so Soon?' has become standard mezzo repertoire, and the concluding quintet, 'To Leave, to Break', never fails to engage the audience. It all sounds fine to me.

The opera has not often been recorded, possibly because its first recording was so extraordinary (RCA 7899): the original Metropolitan all-star cast, big names, big voices, distinct personalities, and all with almost a cult following: Eleanor Steber (Vanessa), Rosalind Elias (Erika—the performances practically made her career), Nicolai Gedda (Anatol), Regina Resnik (Old Baroness), and Giorgio Tozzi (Old Doctor) with Metropolitan Opera forces led by the great Dimitri Mitropoulos. Only the occasional harshness and lack of clarity in the recording were a detriment, but even these have been improved in the CD re-mastering.

Naxos published a decent recording in excellent sound (Mar/Apr 2004). But, other than its low price, it is not that competitive with the RCA. Now Chandos follows hard on the heels of Naxos—and is better. Better than Naxos, that is, if not quite outdoing the almost legendary RCA. Recorded sound on Chandos is certainly superior, and no one in the cast is embarrassing. Chandos bills the opera as three acts as opposed to the original four. Vanessa's Act 2 'Skating Aria' is omitted (a composer-condoned omission, I think). Brewer's supremely beautiful voice is heard to great effect. She doesn't capture the aloof, melodramatic haughtiness of Steber, but by making the character less of a prima donna Brewer makes her warmer and more sympathetic. Graham matches Elias every note of the way, sumptuous of voice, with a carefully constructed char-

acterization. Burden doesn't have the precise intonation and enunciation of Gedda, but he comes close enough to create a well-sung cad. The Old Baroness doesn't have much to sing, but Wyn-Rogers and Davies almost sing too beautifully for the characters they portray. Slatkin takes slower tempos than Mitropoulos, milking every romantic phrase but never dragging. The BBC Symphony plays luxuriantly.

Libretto and notes in English, French, and German

PARSONS

BARTOK: *Piano Pieces*

Rhapsody 1; Etudes, op 18; Suite, op 14; Sonatine; Im Freien; Allegro Barbaro

Andreas Bach—Oehms 348—69 minutes

In encountering a composer's first published work, it can be enlightening to listen for any hints of the directions his later music takes, as well as the earliest influences. Bartok's *Rhapsody* sounds much like the dark side of Liszt, but it doesn't delve into the gloominess that marks his later works. Nor do the harmonies engage in the piquancy we hear in his later works, after he has gathered folk songs from his native Hungary, Romania, and other Balkan countries.

Both composers were Hungarian. But Liszt sounds as Hungarian as Chopin's Mazurkas sound Polish. In other words, Chopin's "Polish" music has a French accent, and Liszt's Hungarian music has a German accent. We can hear similarities in the piano writing between Bartok and Liszt. We hear the large gesture and a sense of drama, plenty of melodies in octaves, and arpeggios acting as harmonic filler. We even hear harmonic progressions similar to those of Liszt. This music is suited to the temperament of the lyrical pianist, Andreas Bach.

In the Etudes as well, pianist Bach brings his lyrical sense to the fore. But by Opus 18 Bartok is in another harmonic world, much darker, much more introspective, much more intense. Somehow, Bach's reading of the Etudes doesn't have the intensity of, say, pianist Florent Boffard (HM 911733). Boffard goes wild-eyed into the climaxes, while Bach tends to pull back or hold back.

In the Suite we are already hearing the rustic harmonies we associate with Bartok's folk-based music. Again, Bach seems to round off the edges, whereas it might have been more satisfying to hear those rough edges. It's hard to say just what would do that. Perhaps a sharper attack. Perhaps not such a rounded sound. Perhaps a little less propriety, and more risk and abandon in the faster movements.

One could say the same for the *Sonatine*. It is a bit too civilized for my taste. Not having ready access to the score, I was startled by some of the G naturals Bach played at key points in the melody of I. I recall unapologetic G-sharps (startling in an otherwise D-major tonality) that added to the spice of the line. More varied articulation could have added to the color of this little piece.

Im Freien (Out of Doors) has a certain refinement that seems inappropriate here. It's too careful, as if the listener is inside, looking at the outdoors through a window. Lovely, but not quite satisfying. None of the night breezes, none of the smells and fragrances. Where is the drive in the finale?

This is one of the politest *Allegro Barbaro*s I've ever heard—a missed opportunity to be as rude as one likes. It seems Bach is unable to give himself that permission, even when it is warranted. He could have made more of the rhythmic irregularities and the rib-jabbing irregular accents.

BARELA

BARTOK: *Piano Pieces*

June de Toth

Vol 1: 7 Sketches; Sonata 1926; Hungarian Peasant Songs & Dances; 4 Dirges; Allegro Barbaro

Eroica 3000—50 minutes

Vol 2: Suite; 42 Hungarian Folk Songs for Children; 3 Burlesques—Eroica 3002—61 minutes

Vol 3: 6 Romanian Folk Dances; 10 Easy Piano Pieces; 14 Bagatelles; 3 Rondos on Folk Tunes; Sonatina; Romanian Dance 1

Eroica 3014—69 minutes

Vol 4: 43 Slovakian Folk Songs for Children; Petite Suite; Romanian Christmas Carols

Eroica 3130—75 minutes

Vol 5: 2 Elegies; 3 Hungarian Folk Songs; 9 Little Pieces; Improvisations; Out of Doors

Eroica 3131—66 minutes

Vol 6+7: Mikrokosmos

Eroica 3132 [2CD] 144 minutes

This is a gigantic pianistic marathon. I must admit to never having heard of June de Toth, a Hungarian-American pianist. It turns out that she is a gifted artist with a rather understated approach to Bartok's piano works. That isn't to say that she doesn't play very well, for she does. It is just that she takes a different, less flamboyant, plan of performing these sometimes-brittle works. The first four volumes were reviewed in March/April 1999 by John Bell Young, who was much more sympathetic to Ms Toth's approach than I am. It is true, as Mr Young says, that "She offers thoughtful and often eloquent readings that reject both hysteria and the kind of kamikaze approach" of many pianists. Yet I feel that she loses some of

the Bartok power in these demanding works. Yes, she offers flexible phrasing that emphasizes the music's folk roots and speech-like emphasis. Her *Hungarian Peasant Songs* and *For Children* are examples of this. But the larger- scale works, such as the Sonata, are rather lead-footed in comparison with Sandor or Kocsis. Is it possible that she takes this approach simply because she must?

As submitted for review, the first five volumes are boxed, with the two-disc set of *Mikrokosmos* presented separately. This is good, for I suspect that most listeners won't want *Mikrokosmos*, simply because they are teaching pieces that don't make very interesting listening unless you are currently studying piano. They are a wonderful set for learning.

The rather dull sound of her Baldwin piano also doesn't help. The notes are very brief—just two pages per disc, which includes the listings of the pieces. The first three have the same summary of Ms Toth's activities, while the last four don't mention her.

For somebody wanting Bartok's piano music I would suggest Kocsis, the various Hungarians on Hungaroton, or the old Sandor on Vox.

BAUMAN

BEACH: *songs*

Katherine Kelton, mz; Catherine Bringerud, p
Naxos 559191—78 minutes

The history of music is filled with stories of child prodigies. Many a modern prodigy does not fulfill his potential, but in saying this perhaps we are being too kind to their historical counterparts. Did Korngold as an adult ever write anything that quite fulfilled the potential he so amazingly demonstrated in his opera *Violanta*, composed when he was 17? Yes, he wrote many fine works afterward, even works of greater mastery, but they show only limited development beyond the stature he had already attained as a teenager. Mendelssohn produced his singular Octet at the age of 16, but as fine as his later career was, his later works show just as little advance beyond the abilities he already possessed as a lad.

Amy Beach (1867-1944) was also a prodigy. In the late fall of 1880, when she was 13 years old, she played for Longfellow. That visit inspired her to compose one of her earliest songs, 'The Rainy Day', a setting of Longfellow's poem of the same name (from which comes the famous line, "Into each life some rain must fall").

'The Rainy Day' opens this recording of 36 songs spanning Beach's entire career, ending with 'Though I Take the Wings of Morning', published in 1942 as her Opus 152. As simple and naive as 'The Rainy Day' is, it has a certain something that makes me return to it again and again. Indeed, I cannot read Longfellow's poem without singing the song to myself in my mind. If a song by the 13-year-old composer can get this recording off to such great start, it would seem that the songs that follow would only be that much more enjoyable. Well, this is where the prodigy factor steps in. Beach's mature songs are indeed lovely, but they don't match the expectations that 'The Rainy Day' produces in us. But this is the only adverse thing one can say about this otherwise excellent production. Beach was one of our nation's first important composers. Those who know and love her beautiful Piano Concerto or her vigorous Violin Sonata will find much to enjoy in her songs for voice and piano.

This is my first encounter with mezzo-soprano Katherine Kelton, but I hope not the last. She has a notably rich, dark voice that is gratifyingly smooth, more like an alto than a true mezzo. Her considerable technical merits allied with her solid musicianship combine to make her a convincing advocate of Beach's songs. Pianist Catherine Bringerud offers able accompaniment. The engineers cushion the performers in plush but realistic sound that places the voice and piano in natural balance with each other, with both performers just far enough back to allow details to emerge without seeming clinical.

Kelton, who teaches at Butler University in Indianapolis, is something of a Beach scholar and supplies the notes for the recording. Texts and translations (for the handful of songs in German) are included.

Beach may not have lived up to the potential she displayed as a teen, but she nonetheless became a fine composer in almost every genre. I can think of no better way to introduce a listener to her songs than through this delightful recording.

BOYER

BECK: *State of the Union; Sinfonietta; Death of a Little Girl with Doves*

Rayanne Dupuis, s; Slovak Radio Symphony/ Kirk Trevor—Innova 612—57 minutes

Jeremy Beck (b. 1960) writes in a typical American orchestral idiom reminiscent of Lukas Foss (one of his teachers), Vincent Persichetti, and Samuel Adler. *State of the Union* is a programmatic piece of a progressive political persuasion, written after George Bush's last State of the Union address in 1992; the notes speak of pompous politicians parading, an "uncomfortable lullaby" for children in a violent and abusive society, and a hollow celebration of false ideals; but the music sounds like just regular music, and my guess—I could be wrong—

is that speaking banal orchestral music to power isn't going to bring the mighty down or help a kid in a drug-infested housing project sleep any better.

Death of a Little Girl with Doves, an "operatic soliloquy" drawn from the correspondence of the French sculptor Camille Claudel, tells the story of a woman driven mad by her relationship with Rodin, to whom she was both apprentice and mistress. The letters are to her family, who installed her in the first of many asylums she was to inhabit in the last decades of her life. Beck gave himself a lot of text, and moves through it very quickly, which puts the music in the back seat; this is a wise choice, and the piece is a rather moving portrait of its tragic subject. All the same, with the staggering problems ravaging human societies all over the world today, not to mention the domestic issues Beck himself brings up in connection with *State of the Union*, it's hard to get terribly worked up about a privileged mad *artiste* in fin-de-siecle Paris.

By far the most effective piece is the lovely *Sinfonietta* for string orchestra; the music is given structure by a very clear formal design, and in freeing himself from reliance on a program or libretto—a crutch for him and a distraction for us—the composer is forced to work a fine and graceful piece from his lovely melodies and harmonies alone.

QUINN

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Sonatas 5-8*

Mauricio Pollini—DG 3034—70 minutes

Mauricio Pollini's isn't my favorite approach to Beethoven. The slow lyricism of Claudio Arrau and the heartfelt depth of Artur Schnabel are points of reference that make it difficult to be receptive to some of Pollini's choices.

It's not that his tempos are wrong. But what he does with them fails to convince the listener that they work. His sound is pinched in the opening of 5, and especially so in the grabbed chords of arrival in phrases (7:I). He keeps a taut line—so taut that you can't relax in slower movements (5:II) and certainly not in faster ones (I and III of 5 and 7). The listener is goaded along.

Rhythmically, he can get stuck at the high end of "second gear", never feeling the ease—and freeing motion—of that kick into "third gear". So while we hear his digital facility, we simultaneously feel caught in a relentless drive of faster-moving notes. It is restless playing, playing on caffeine. Even his articulation is somewhat limited in color, rather black-and-white. Rather than calling attention to the broader landscape, it seems we are called to focus on those white stripes passing by on the highway.

Pollini's phrases remain earthbound. An unyielding feeling of equal weight for each downbeat never allows a phrase to soar or create an arch or assume a larger shape. None of the irregularities in phrase size can reveal themselves. As a result, II of 5 and 7 plod rather than sing.

His musical motion is often relentless and without much variety. One gets the feeling that he grabs at certain notes or chords (as if for dear life) to gain his footing as if he is not totally at ease. And if he is not at ease, he cannot put the listener at ease. One can almost hear the metronome pushing him along.

It is surprising that an artist of this reputation so often jumps into phrases ever so slightly on the early side (7:I). This timing flaw disturbs the motion and the sense of proportion in and between phrases.

Pollini plays as if nothing surprises him. With no surprises there is no sense of discovery. A certain eccentricity comes across, when you can hear his vocalizations and the slapping of the pedal, as in 6:I. One longs for some drama but will not get it here. No surprises. Lots of predictability. Needless to say, no profundity.

BARELA

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Sonatas, all*

John Lill—Resonance 101 [10CD] 11:40

This set is a budget release previously available on ASV and Brilliant Classics. I first ran across it while reaching for examples of the Op. 2 sonatas for a piano literature class I was teaching. Questions from the class were immediate. Why are there strangely placed accents? Why does the piano sound funny? My biggest question was why, with the sea of options available in the Beethoven cycle, would anyone bother to record it with anything less than the best instrument and recording technology? (There are even several seconds of missing notes in the transition between *Les Adieux's* second and third movements.)

Indeed, there are awkward moments in the earlier sonatas, almost as if Lill is only a step beyond reading them. The Haydnesque fun of the early sonatas is clearly absent. Lill's playing is of the non-indulgent and sedate variety. Conservative tempos, strict timing, and little risk taking are the norm here. Fortunately this suits the later sonatas best. In spite of very slow tempos, the openings of 30, 31, and 32 project a satisfying weightiness unwelcome in some of the more brilliant early and middle period sonatas. I am particularly taken with his opening of No. 28—every bit as profound as my favorite, Richard Goode.

John Lill was a prizewinner in the Tchaikovsky Competition. Technically he is certainly up to the task. But these performances fall short in interpretation to many other great artists presenting this cycle. I still prefer Richard Goode, Serkin, or (my favorite) Claude Frank. Still, given the budget price, this set may be a good introduction to these masterpieces (though you won't find much information in the sparse liner notes).

BOLEN

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Sonatas 28+29*
Anton Kuerti—Analekta 3187—72 minutes

Austrian-Canadian pianist Anton Kuerti's career may be overshadowed by other "great" pianists of the last century, but I have rarely heard him play that I didn't find moments of pure magic. His is the kind of playing born out of years of experience and maturity. These late masterpieces are fertile ground for this overlooked master.

Both of these sonatas are remakes. Kuerti recorded the entire Beethoven cycle in 1974-75, and to much acclaim. Those familiar with the earlier recording will find these later performances freer, full of meaningful ideas, if not a bit reserved.

This interpretation of 28 is clearly personal. It opens with all of the introspective poetry one might expect from Arrau. The slow tempo offers a dramatic contrast to II without requiring an excessive tempo in the latter (often the bane of lesser artists) in order to get the point across. Kuerti handles II's relentless dotted rhythms with uncanny ease.

Some listeners will find the last movement of 28 as well as the monumental fugue of the *Hammerklavier* a bit restrained in tempo. Kuerti is (fortunately) resigned that he will not likely overwhelm his listeners with sound or tempo. Instead, he relies on his sense of nuance, timing, and architecture to deliver a completely satisfying listening experience. (Kuerti was a student of Serkin.)

Fine recorded sound and an excellent piano round out this impressive release.

BOLEN

BEETHOVEN: *Quartet 12; Piano Sonata 28*
Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields/ Murray Perahia, p—Sony 93043—57 minutes

I am sure I don't know the whole story of orchestrated versions of late Beethoven quartets, but I do remember I was excited by Bernstein's recording of the C-sharp minor (14, Opus 131). Now we have the E-flat (12, Opus 127) with Murray Perahia making his recording debut as a "symphonic" conductor. (He has often conducted concertos from the keyboard.) Nothing of Beethoven's quartet is changed, other than the strategic addition of double bass to the cello line. The effect of the music, though, is very different. Massed strings sound warmer and more comfortable than a quartet, and the music sounds easier to digest. The result is altogether more pleasant and attractive than the real thing, so it is hard to dismiss it, but in the end I think late Beethoven is supposed to be harsh and difficult. Bernstein upped the ante in Opus 131, making everything more intense and dramatic. Perahia, though, brings less theater to his piece, and the effect is lovely and compelling.

After the quartet transcription, which some will no doubt regard as a musicological violation, it seems a little odd to have Perahia toeing the line by playing the sonata in a new critical edition (prepared by Perahia and Dr Norbert Gertsch). He plays with his customary insight and sensitivity, achieving a lovely valedictory feeling in many spots. But there is little sense of struggle; instead of wrestling with Beethoven, Perahia seems to be appeasing him. To his credit, though, the playing is exceptionally secure and without mannerism or artifice.

In sum, the quartet is undeniably lovely, but I don't think I would go out of my way to add it to a collection. The sonata will please people who like Perahia's uncomplicated view of the composer.

ALTHOUSE

BEETHOVEN: *Symphonies 1+5; Egmont Overture;*
WEBER: *Oberon Overture*
London Philharmonic/ Klaus Tennstedt
BBC 4158—80 minutes

Tennstedt did not record either symphony commercially, so his many fans will undoubtedly welcome this release. For everyone else, caveat emptor. Too often Tennstedt overlooks or ignores Beethoven's instructions. Thus his tempo in the exposition of Symphony 1:I may be *allegro* (just barely), but it's hardly *con brio*. III is marked *Allegro molto e vivace*, but here again Tennstedt gives heed only to the first word. Also in III, he smooths out the dynamic contrasts, downplaying the humor that's so essential in this music. He suppresses the all-important pedal notes in the basses in *Egmont,* but overemphasizes the bass lines in Symphony 5. For the most part Tennstedt favors thick, heavy sonorities when a lighter touch would be far more effective, especially in Symphony 1.

Tennstedt's phrasing is square and often choppy—except in 1:II, which flows smoothly and gracefully. Here, for once, he pays close attention to Beethoven's tempo indication *(Andante cantabile con moto)*, allowing the music to sing while maintaining the necessary momentum. The *Egmont* Overture, on the

other hand, lacks forward thrust and any sense of tragic inevitability, though he does manage to whip his splendid ensemble into a considerable frenzy in the triumphal coda.

Tennstedt seems far more attuned to the titanic struggles of Symphony 5. Tempos are for the most part energetic and fiery. The fortissimo outbursts are startling, and even the transitional passages pack a considerable dramatic wallop. II is appropriately noble and eloquent, though the finale is episodic and too often bland. Even at its best, this performance does not begin to approach the elemental power and fevered intensity of Furtwängler. Tennstedt's effervescent, sylvan *Oberon* Overture is a welcome antidote to this conductor's turgid Beethoven.

These analog concert recordings date from 1989 to 1991, so there's some tape hiss coupled with substantial amounts of audience and stage noise. The latter sometimes intrudes on the performance itself (5:III). The horrible coughing and hacking of the audience between movements could easily have been edited out. Instrumental balances are often poor. The flute is much too loud in Symphony 1, but the piccolo is barely audible in either Symphony 5 or *Egmont*. Whether the conductor or the recording engineers deserve the blame for this is impossible to say. The dynamic range has been compressed, most obviously in Symphony 5. The orchestra produces a rich, creamy sonority—especially the strings—but their playing is sometimes sloppy, and they seem to have been caught off guard by Tennstedt's downbeat in both Symphony 5:I and *Egmont*.

GODELL

BEETHOVEN: *Symphonies 2+5*

Manchester Camerata/ Douglas Boyd
Avie 40—68 minutes

If you like Beethoven on lean-sounding period instruments, the 42-member Manchester Camerata may suit you. They play modern instruments, but the approach is closest to Roger Norrington. The strings number fewer than in Norrington's London Classical Players recording. There are only 2 double basses as against 4, 12 or 13 violins compared to Norrington's 16, 4 or 5 violas compared to 6, and 4 cellos to Norrington's 5. Norrington's forces are even larger in the Fifth, while Boyd's sound the same as in 2. Only in the last two movements of the Second does Boyd elect faster tempos than Norrington, and they do seem too quick. The quality of playing seems polished, but I am not particularly convinced by the results in the Second.

In the Fifth he is consistently slower than Norrington, especially in II. But in this symphony he seems somewhat rushed even though his total time is 35 minutes—more than a minute slower than Norrington. I must admit to preferring Furtwängler and Fricsay in this work, so perhaps my preferences aren't valid for you. Again, Boyd's strings just seem too stretched for this symphony.

Recorded sound is satisfactory but not overwhelmingly good. Notes are brief.

BAUMAN

BEETHOVEN: *Violin Sonatas 6, 7, 8*

Benjamin Schmid; Alfredo Perl, p
Oehms 341—62 minutes

The saying "the great is the enemy of the good" could easily apply to Beethoven's three Opus 30 sonatas. The third of these, in the key of G major, is a great work by any standard, even compared to other Beethoven works. It, the *Kreutzer* Sonata, the *Spring* Sonata, and the Tenth Sonata, Opus 96, are probably the most often programmed of Beethoven's violin sonatas, because people know and love these pieces and because they are so enjoyable to play.

It is so easy to forget about the 7th Sonata, one of Beethoven's great stormy C-minor pieces, and the subtle and almost understated 6th Sonata in A. But the whole opus is together on this recording, and all are played beautifully.

There is really little "interpretation" that goes into playing Beethoven's violin sonatas because the music is often written with such a strong sense of inevitability. The "job" of the interpreter is to play well in tune, observe all the dynamics, pay attention to the structure of the music, play with a beautiful and colorful sound, communicate with the other musicians, and allow all the voices to be heard. Schmidt and Perl do just that, and the result is Beethoven at his best.

FINE

BENTZON: *Variations; Cello Sonatas 1+3*

Niels Ullner; Rosalind Bevan, p
DaCapo 8226015—61 minutes

Danish composer Niels Viggo Bentzon (1919-2000) was vastly—one might say oppressively—prolific, considering that he not only wrote a huge number of pieces but that some of them were hugely long. His gargantuan assemblage of preludes and fugues called *The Tempered Piano* recorded on Classico 210 (May/June 1999) lasts over 16 hours (that's not a typo, folks). This is a composer with a serious "edifice complex"!

Fortunately most of Bentzon's compositions are more reasonable in size, though his 1977 *Volga Boatmen Variations*—Opus 354, no less—comes in at just over 22 minutes—rather

long for a set of variations on a single theme for unaccompanied cello. The cello-and-piano sonatas, the First from 1947 and the Third from 1971, are four- and three-movement works of standard proportions.

Bentzon's idiom is somewhere between Nielsen, Hindemith, and Shostakovich and could be loosely described as modern Scandinavian chromatic neoclassicism. As you'd expect from so productive a composer, the quality of the music varies. There are some masterpieces, notably the Third Symphony (DaCapo 9102) and the Third Piano Sonata (superbly played on an old HMV LP; the DaCapo CD is a disgraceful mess). But too often Bentzon is perfunctory and sloppy, spinning out notes with uncritical abandon.

Of the three pieces here, the ambitious First Cello Sonata is the most shapely, nuanced, and expressive. I, the longest of the four movements, is a mellifluous, arch-like sonata structure in moderate tempo. II is a bustling scherzo with a charming dotted-rhythm trio, III a short recitative, and IV a muscular allegro. The shorter three-movement Third Sonata is more spontaneous sounding and looser in form, but despite a few stretches of self-indulgent repetition (notably in II) it is an appealing and sometimes witty composition. That long set of solo cello variations on the famous Russian folk song has some fine things in it, but—no surprise—would benefit from pruning some of the figuration-on-autopilot variants. I guess Bentzon figured the more, the better; I would say anything not necessary is better left out.

Minor caveats aside, this is worth seeking out by lovers of modern-but-mainstream chamber music and definitely of interest to cello aficionados. Cellist Niels Ullner and pianist Rosalind Bevan play with spirit, polish, and fine musicianship; and DaCapo's sonics are clear and natural.

LEHMAN

BERKELEY: *Piano Pieces*

Margaret Fingerhut—Chandos 10247—75 min

As every commentator on Lennox Berkeley (1903-89) points out, he was more drawn to Gallic exemplars (Fauré, Ravel, Poulenc) than those of his native England (with the notable exception of Benjamin Britten). He had only scorn for the archaic modal harmonies and pastoral mysticism of Vaughan Williams, Finzi, Moeran, et al. Other kinships are to Chopin (explicit in his preludes and mazurkas) and (in his love for clear lines and classic forms) both Mozart and Stravinsky. Unlike all the abovementioned (and greater) artists, Berkeley is closer to Jean Francaix: a likable composer who nevertheless seldom achieves melodic distinction or that indefinable but crucial individuality that makes us instantly recognize his voice. Much of what he wrote consists of enriched-but-tonal harmonies spun out in idiomatic but not especially inventive figurations that fall easily on the ear but don't resonate in memory. At his least interesting he's conventional, superficial, salon-ish; at his best he's pungent, jaunty, elegant, or contemplative and expressive, with a subtle, understated poignancy.

Much of Berkeley's prolific output has been recorded. A representative anthology of his chamber music, suavely played by the Nash Ensemble, is on Helios 55135. His orchestral works, many recorded on Lyrita LPs in the 1970s, have been appearing recently in new performances on Chandos, with the First Symphony on 9981 (Nov/Dec 2002) and the Second on 10167 (July/Aug 2004). As part of this series Chandos has now released some of Berkeley's most significant piano pieces (once issued on a Lyrita LP). These include Three Pieces (1935), Three Mazurkas (1949), *Paysage* (1944), *Improvisation on a Theme of Manuel De Falla* (1960), and—both from 1945—Berkeley's most substantial and impressive piano compositions, a 12-minute cycle of Six Preludes and a big (24-minute-long) Sonata.

These last two show Berkeley at his best. The prelude set boasts lots of sparkle and dash, while the four-movement Sonata marries poise, brilliance, and grandeur. III, a mysterious, lilting, nocturnal adagio—it has the feeling of a sad lullaby—is the most searching in both harmony and emotion, and has remained a favorite of mine for the many decades I've known it.

Chandos fills out this program with a long, shapeless rhapsody called *Strange Meeting* by Lennox Berkeley's son Michael. Written in 1978, this item meanders along, despite an agitated and clangorous central climax, without establishing any particular character or purpose. It sounds like uninspired improvisation, and at 15 minutes long it's an exercise in self-indulgence. I'm not sure why Chandos keeps adding pieces by Michael Berkeley to his father's music; maybe Michael has stock in the company. He certainly doesn't have his father's compositional craft.

As you'd expect from Fingerhut and Chandos, this is a first-class presentation of Berkeley's music—though there is strong competition. Christopher Headington plays almost exactly the same program (minus the Michael Berkeley piece) on Kingdom 2021 with a brisker, more direct approach that offers a somewhat better projection of the music's structure. Fingerhut is dreamier, more poetic, perhaps a bit wayward in her tempo variations. Both are very well recorded, with Headington's piano more sharply focussed, Fingerhut's more sumptuous. I like both and would

be hard pressed to choose between them for either performance or sonics.

LEHMAN

BERKELEY,L: *4 Pieces; Sonatina; Theme & Variations;* **BERKELEY,M***: Lament; Worry Beads; Sonata; Impromptu*

Craig Ogden, g

Chandos 10261—56 minutes

Sir Lennox Berkeley—a contemporary of Walton and Tippett and a close friend of Benjamin Britten—composed three very attractive but neglected guitar works for Julian Bream: a terse but good-natured Sonatina (1957), the spiky Theme & Variations (1970), and a wonderfully lyrical Concerto (1974). Australian guitarist Craig Ogden, long a champion of British works for the instrument, is doing his best to revive interest in Berkeley's highly refined music. He already released a superb recording of the concerto (May/June 2002) and here he turns his attention to the solo works. In addition to the Sonatina and Theme and Variations, the program includes a world premiere recording of four early pieces Berkeley wrote for Segovia in 1928. Following the works by Sir Lennox, the program concludes with four ruminative pieces by his son (and Britten's god-son) Michael (b. 1948).

The early *Quatre Pieces* were composed in 1928 when Lennox was studying in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. He sent them to Segovia, but he never performed them; they were discovered after Segovia's death, among his papers. They could easily carry the title "bagatelles": they are student trifles that exhibit more than a hint of Les Six-style irreverence. Ogden plays the Sonatina and the Theme and Variations with a big, full sound and a powerful rhythmic impulse. His performances are not as colorful as Bream's (RCA 61595), but they are more vigorous. He also scores points for repeating the exposition in I of the Sonatina, which Bream does not.

Berkeley père and fils both experimented with serialism and atonality, but for the most part their music is in a comfortable neo-tonal idiom. Michael's language, at least in the pieces here, is notably tamer than his father's, without the latter's pointed dissonances and angular melodies. In their place are dulcet harmonies and an almost uninterrupted cantabile. The result is sometimes affecting, but on the whole there is too much introspection here to make a strong impression. When the music does get going rhythmically—as in the climax of the one-movement Sonata—it is very engaging; I just wish it happened more often. Two of these are premiere recordings: the ambitious Sonata (1982) and the Impromptu (1983—written for Julian Bream's 50th birthday).

Chandos's sound is clean and transparent, and the notes by Andrew Burn offer helpful guidance to the pieces.

RINGS

BERKEY: *Atlantic Fantasy; Cape May Solitudes*

Jackson Berkey, p

Soli Deo Gloria—41—47 minutes (402-341-4111)

It helps to have a bit of context for Jackson Berkey. None is supplied in the liner notes. And before you know anything about the music, on first hearing, you might well conclude these are not works one is likely to hear in a concert hall.

As for context: Berkey plays some keyboard parts in several recordings of the Mannheim Steamroller. This explains a lot.

He admits his use of references to Copland, as in the opening of I, and evokes some of George Crumb's piano timbres (IV)—both in *Atlantic Fantasy*). In II ('Jackson Cove Moonrise') of Cape May Solitudes, he makes reference to Chopin's E-minor Prelude.

Aside from these recognizable passages, much of this music has a stream-of-consciousness, new-age, improvisatory quality. Titled movements indicate a personal, intimate expression. Perhaps it is his ample use of pedal (along with the thin content) that suggests a preference for nostalgia (III of *AF*: 'Gull Friend at the Beach').

Somehow, the content does not invite one to take this music seriously. It is what one might call "pretty", but not very substantial. It can also sound a bit gimmicky. It's hard to imagine a serious pianist programming it, unless it were a good friend of Berkey's. I think of passages of repeated notes in *VSS Atlantis*—not convincing. He knows some "tricks", like the imitation of overtones by lightly playing notes an octave-and-a-fifth above a melody line. Nice, but to what expressive purpose?

In *Cape May Solitudes*, Berkey makes use of natural sounds: winds, seagulls calling, perhaps ocean waves, wind chimes. He creates a nice atmosphere. There are some nice, soothing effects; but again, they have a new-age sentimentality—what might be nice background music while working or getting a massage. The pentatonic melody and open fifths in III—'Sakura'—plus wind chimes offers a pleasant oriental flavoring. Again, meditative. The sound of high winds opens IV, a slow ode to his dear Siamese cat named Jaro who limped in his old age. A touching 'Last Goodbye', referring to the farewell of a man to his dying wife, closes the suite.

Berkey likes slow tempos, drones, repeti-

tive accompanimental figures, fragmentary melodies, sounds from nature, and lots of pedal. If you like that, you'll like this.

BARELA

BIBER: *Mystery Sonatas 2*
Monica Huggett, v; Sonnerie
Gaudeamus 351—57:18

As I wrote concerning Volume 1, these are technically accomplished performances of Biber's signature works (Nov/Dec 2004). What becomes more evident in this second volume is that Huggett does not seem to delve into the significance of these meditative works in the way that others have (Beznosiuk, Jan/Feb 2005). Though it is certainly owing to an error in booklet editing, and not a hidden statement of theological significance, the first work on this recording, 'The Crucifixion', is mislabeled as one of the "Joyful Mysteries", and Huggett treats it as a piece of virtuosic fluff. I also had a similar response to her performance of the 11th mystery, 'The Resurrection'. Here in the first of the "Glorious Mysteries", her playing seems to be restrained, especially in the variations on the song, 'Surrexit Christus Hodie'. And though her notes state that the intent in 'The Descent of the Holy Ghost' was to evoke "an intensely spiritual and ethereal atmosphere", the result sounds more like the soundtrack to an old horror movie. I would still recommend Manze (Nov/Dec 2004) or Beznosiuk first for these masterworks, though the latter is the better performance.

BREWER

BIBER: *Requiem & Mass*
Gabrieli Consort & Players/ Paul McCreesh
DG Archiv 3457—81 minutes

This new recording is a distinguished performance of two contrasting masses by Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber: a simple six-voice mass in B-flat and his extraordinary Requiem in F minor—both of them only available recordings. Along with these two major compositions are three keyboard works (Georg Muffat's Ciacona and two other anonymous Viennese preludes), two sonatas by Johann Heinrich Schmelzer, and a short offertory by Abraham Megerle (1607-80). Also included are two motets by Orlando di Lasso, which were still part of the common performance repertoire even in the 17th Century. Even Pavel Josef Vejvanovsky owned a set of the original part books. Though I have some reservations about some decisions made by McCreesh, all the works are performed in a very stylish and effective fashion.

In a number of respects, McCreesh attempts to present the most current results of the researches into historical performance practice. As in his Bach recordings, he often follows the one-performer-per-part hypothesis. In the case of Biber's *Mass ex B*, this may be misplaced. In comparison to Biber's other masses, this work is decidedly small-scale (especially if the 53-part *Salzburg Mass* is his), and McCreesh emphasizes this by only doubling the two soprano parts and using single singers for each of the four lower voices. The unique set of original parts for this work in the *Stift Seittenstetten* includes three distinct sets of parts for each of the six vocal parts and two copies of the part for organ; though each set was apparently prepared at a different time, they were already kept as a single complete set in the 18th Century. This means that more voices would be appropriate for this work. The only other recording of this Mass—by the St Florian Boychoir—not only uses a full choir, but also adds doubling instruments to most of the parts (Balance 9415, released in 1996), producing a much richer sonority than the Gabrieli Consort. McCreesh leads a good performance, but it just seems a bit light-weight for the contrasts between the single voice parts and the full chorus that are an essential part of Biber's creative scoring. I admit that the St Florian may be a bit too weighty (especially owing to the added instruments and the 16' violone), but overall it presents a better case for the musical style of this mass.

The offertory by Megerle, 'Peccator et Consolator', for two sopranos, is a short dialog between a sinful soul (who mostly cries out "O Maria") and a more verbose consoler. It was also recorded by both the Gabrieli Consort and the St Florian Boys, and I prefer the two young soloists on the St Florian recording (which also adds extra string parts to the sinner's expostulations). Though McCreesh's soloists are more flexible, the two women actually lack the richer vocal color of the two Austrian boys.

Biber's *Requiem ex F con terza minore* is a very different type of composition. In contrast to his other masses, including the *Mass ex B* and even his 15-part Requiem in A major, the F-minor Requiem is much more grave, both in terms of scoring, which is relatively dense in both the choir and orchestra, and in terms of the rich chromatic harmony. There have been three other recordings of this work. The one by Gustav Leonhardt is much weightier, owing both to his larger choral and instrumental forces and to his more sedate tempos (Nov/Dec 1993; see Valls; it was also briefly available as an RCA Victor Special Import). A recording by Philip Pickett and the New London Consort is very similar in tempo to Leonhardt; and though it uses only single string players, it attempts to follow the original performance parts exactly through the doubled chorus parts and multiple

organs, though he uses one instead of two bassoons (Oiseau-Lyre 436 460, deleted). For sheer sonority, though it is not the best current representative of historically informed performance, I would recommend the first recording made of Biber's F-minor Requiem by Hans Gillesberger with the Vienna Choirboys and the Chorus Viennensis (the older alumni of the choir) and the Concentus Musicus. Though the Vienna Choirboys do not trill, the anonymous alto soloist is more expressive than any of the countertenors used by Leonhardt, Pickett, or McCreesh (and McCreesh's "high tenor", Daniel Auchincloss, is a bit too earnest).

McCreesh also makes some significant decisions concerning the string instruments. One, the use of gut strings that vary in thickness so that the tension across all the strings is relatively equal, does create a warm, even sound, especially in the lower strings of the Requiem. More controversial is his decision to actually use *scordatura* in the first violin and first viola parts. He does this because these two parts ascend relatively high in their tessituras, and he presumes the violin may have been a violino piccolo and modifies the viola part to match. But all original 17th Century parts for the violino piccolo are actually written in scordatura, while the original parts in Salzburg for the Requiem are all notated normally. As is clear in the three other performances, and as is found in many other sacred works from the later 17th Century, the use of string instruments high in their tessituras was a way to allow these parts to be heard above a large ensemble. Unfortunately, the even balance in McCreesh's performance means that these upper parts are often covered by the sound of the choir and other instruments. Also, it should be disclosed that McCreesh does not use either of the two bassoon parts of the original materials. These are musicological quibbles, and though I believe they affect the overall performance, I must reemphasize that the depth and effectiveness of Biber's music is still very evident.

BREWER

BIZET: *Carmen*

Grace Bumbry (Carmen), Jon Vickers (Jose), Mirella Freni (Micaela), Kostas Paskalis (Escamillo); Paris Opera/ Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos

EMI 85505 [2CD] 152 minutes

When this *Carmen* was first released in 1970, it broke new ground. The performance incorporated some recently discovered music, jettisoned after the 1875 premiere: Morales's pantomime in Act 1 and an extended version of the Jose-Escamillo confrontation in Act 3. Gone were the Guiraud recitatives, replaced by the spoken dialog traditionally used at the Opera-Comique. Now we've become accustomed to the innovations through many other recordings (and we've also seen a shift back toward the sung recitatives), so this *Carmen* has lost its claim to uniqueness. It still holds up fairly well as a performance, and I enjoy it, though it's not among my favorites. Among its great assets are the idiomatic singing by the French chorus and supporting singers, the spacious sound, and the lively yet considerate conducting of Frühbeck (he drives the music powerfully forward but is still willing to indulge his singers when they want to dawdle—and Freni and Vickers often do). The four principals do not recite their own dialog, and the French actors who stand in for them sound, well, like a separate cast of actors.

Bumbry has the vocal goods for the title part: a quick, sultry voice with plenty of zing on top. Despite her alertness and flexibility, she's a very serious, even a heavy Carmen, without any humor or playfulness whatsoever. It's a fine piece of singing but not much more. Freni (in the second of her three recordings of Micaela) sings with lovely, full-bodied tone, softening her consonants and keeping her vowels round and Italian. I can't be too hard on her because I remember performances of *Carmen* at the Met, way back around 1970, where she was the sole redeeming element. Paskalis has a vibrant high baritone, a bit on the gritty side, and lots of swagger and confidence, especially in his duet with Jose. The most striking performer here is, of course, Vickers, who sounds angry and unhinged from the start. He alternates delicate soft singing (the end of the Flower Song) with heroic outbursts, but at medium volume his voice seems dry and insubstantial, unable to flesh out the music with the fullness of Domingo or Corelli.

Our reviewers consistently recommend two or three recordings of *Carmen*: Beecham on EMI, with De los Angeles and Gedda; Solti on Decca, with Troyanos and Domingo; and maybe Abbado and Berganza on DG. My own short list starts with the stylish Cluytens in 1950 (EMI), who also has the spoken dialog. Callas and Gedda (EMI) are dramatically riveting; Karajan, Price, and Corelli (RCA) take an also absorbing grand-opera approach, voluptuous and thrilling if hardly Gallic. And I keep returning to the underrated Carmen of Crespin (Erato), the only great French singer to record the role in the past half century. She may not be at her best, but she's close enough, and I love hearing her sexy voice play with the words. No one who buys the Bumbry-Vickers *Carmen* should feel cheated (unless you expect it to come with a libretto), but it's easy enough to do better.

LUCANO

BOESSET: *Aires de Court; Ballets*
Le Poème Harmonique/ Vincent Dumestre
Alpha 57—59:45

Just as in Italy the madrigal yielded to the lute song and monody, in France the passage from the 16th to the 17th Century saw the eclipse of the polyphonic chanson and the triumph of the *air du cour*. The latter was essentially a genre for solo voice with lute, though the pattern had variations. As its name suggests, the genre found its natural home in the courtly circles of the princes and aristocrats of France. It achieved considerable sophistication in the hands of poets and composers who (parallel with the evolution of the Italian lute song) connected their work with the traditions and theories of classical antiquity.

There was a goodly number of composers in this idiom, chiefly Gabriel Battaille (1575-1630), Antoine Boësset (1587-1643), Pierre Guédron (c1570-c1619), Sebastien Le Camus (c1610-77), and Etienne Moulinié (1599-1676). Over the years have come many anthologies drawing on these and other masters to represent the idiom, but only a few composers (Guédron, Le Camus, Moulinié) have been accorded a whole program of their own.

Dumestre and his group have already recorded programs dedicated to Guédron and Moulinié. Here he rounds out a kind of trilogy with this program of Boësset's music. Boësset was one of the most prolific composers of his circle, and it is the variety of his music that this program seeks to stress. So we are steered away from the plain lute song and towards either their polyphonic forms or to Boësset's music explicitly for vocal groups. There are four secular airs, in expanded polyphonic form, that represent the elegance and refinement of the *air du cour* at its best, supplemented by one of Boësset's spiritual airs.

To represent his involvement in the form of the *ballet du cour*, an obsession of the French court and nobility, we are given four instrumental pieces from a ballet of 1625 and a set of five vocal *récits*, character pieces used to preface dances in a ballet of 1621. And, to illustrate Boësset's participation in the cosmopolitan dimensions of court entertainment, we have an adaptation he made of one Italian song and his settings of two Spanish texts—one a quite boisterous representation of a serenade. Finally, to suggest contexts for Boësset's various musical categories, there is an anonymous French partsong, an adaptation of Juan Arañes's lively partsong about dancing the naughty *chacona*, and a piece for string ensemble by Louis Constantin (1585-1657), leader of the famous 24 Violins of the King.

The ensemble includes a vocal quartet that sings superbly plus nine expert instrumentalists. The long, rambling annotations (in French and English) are not conveniently keyed to the musical selections, which are in helter-skelter order. More information could have been given about sources and about some editorial and instrumentation decisions that leave me a little suspicious. (By the way, the titles and times for tracks 14 and 15 are switched in the booklet.) All that said, this is a very entertaining program.

BARKER

BOISMORTIER: *Flute Concertos; Solo Flute Suite; 3-Flute Sonata*
Barthold Kuijken, Marc Hantai, Frank Theuns, S Saitta, D Etienne—Accent 24161—73 minutes

Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (1689-1755) composed in every genre, but specialized in works for one to five instruments. In just over two decades, he wrote over 100 such works, flooding the Paris market with sheet music aimed at amateur players. Like Telemann, he wrote quickly and easily and probably profited greatly from his skills. In typical early baroque fashion, he did not always specify instruments, but the flute was quite popular in France in this period. His concerto for five flutes may have been the first French attempt at molding the Italian concerto ideal to French taste.

This performance was recorded in 1995 and only recently released. It is an excellent recital, played on period instruments. While none of the pieces are profound (but consider the intended performers), they have some charming moments, especially the dance movements. The first piece, the solo Suite, is played with grace and ease by Kuijken. It is refreshing to hear this music taken seriously and played with meticulous attention to detail.

CHAFFEE

BONNEAU: *A Frenchman in New York;*
see GERSHWIN

BOZEMAN: *Permutations of Pot Roast;*
DUPRE: *Stations of the Cross 1,4,9,13,14*
George Bozeman, Jr, organ—AFKA 442—67 min

Stop snickering or shaking your head. Bozeman, a Texas native and organ builder and performer, wanted to include improvisation in his 1981 recital at Methuen and a friend suggested that the letters in POT ROAST could be rearranged to create all sorts of words. That was the "inspiration" for this rather lengthy, 11 part "tribute" to the anagram. Bozeman used the alphabetical scheme of spelling any name in musical notes in the manner used by Duruflé (Alain) and others. From the initial two words there is Rap, Toots?, Rasp Toot, O Top Star, Soar to Sp(ace), and so on. What we hear

finally is a "tone poem" on interstellar travel and wonder. Sections are titled Blast Off, Mars passby, the wonders of Saturn, Telecommunication, etc. Sound interesting? Oh.

Alas, for Bozeman's apparent technical skills, this hodgepodge of self-indulgent rambling is paired with "another improvisatory" work. I can almost hear Marcel moaning "sacre bleu!". The Dupré interpretations are uniformly slow, all of them either somewhat or remarkably slower than the same movement timings of six other recordings (Renet, Chaisemartin, Gehring, Hamilton, Van Oosten, Falcinelli). Beyond that, these tracks from the Dupré are lacking in audible detail. While the instrument (Walcker 1863/Aeolian-Skinner 1947) is clearly large at 4-115 ranks, other recordings from there have been much clearer.

METZ

BRAHMS: *10 Folksongs;* SCHUMANN,C: *7 Songs;* SCHUMANN: *Liederkreis, op 24*

Werner Güra, t; Christoph Berner, p
Harmonia Mundi 901842—60 minutes

This is a celebration of the close relationship between the Schumanns and their younger colleague Brahms. These performers, along with actress Meriam Abbas, have devised a semi-staged concert program consisting of these songs and readings of letters to and from the three musicians; the recording, which carries the title *Schöne Wiege Meiner Leiden*, only has the songs, though a few letters are included in the notes.

The notes supply a moving account of their relationship, though the songs have little direct connection to the biographies. The Brahms songs, 10 of the 49 folksongs he published near the end of his life, include the favorites ('Da Unten im Tale', 'Schwesterlein', 'In Stiller Nacht'), all exquisite settings of straightforward melodies. Clara Schumann was acknowledged as one of the finest pianists of her century, and most of her compositions were piano works written for her own performance; she was spurred to write songs by her husband. As the notes point out, Clara's songs are more reminiscent of Mendelssohn than Robert; the quirky, often rhetorical moments that characterize many of her husband's best songs are absent with Clara, though several of her songs are well worth knowing.

Güra, a light, lyric tenor, is a wonderful exponent for these songs. His range of color is not particularly wide, but he has fine dynamic control, excellent musical instincts, and an altogether lovely instrument. Berner's accompaniments are on the same elevated level; his 'Warte, Warte, Wilder Schiffsmann' is terrific.

I'll have to leave to you whether you want this kind of mixed recital, complete with letters in the notes. Much as I appreciate hearing a concert with a theme, I have less enthusiasm for putting it on a CD. In the end I would prefer a Güra recital with only one of the composers. Perhaps my annoyance comes simply from being unsure how to file the CD and then my inability to find it in the future. If you can circumvent my petty complaints, though, the performances are first rate and highly recommended.

ALTHOUSE

BRAHMS: *Piano Pieces*

Schumann & Handel Variations; Waltzes, op 39; 4 Ballades; opp 76, 79, 116, 117, 118, 119; Sonata 3; Hungarian Dances
Walter Klien, with Alfred Brendel & Beatriz Klien
Vox 3612 [5CD] 4:55

This valuable collection presents almost all of the solo piano works by Brahms in highly engaging performances by Walter Klien, whose death in 1991 deprived the piano world of a major talent. The 16 Waltzes, Op. 39, appear in their original two-piano (or 4-hand) version as well as in the solo version Brahms made later.

Klien's Brahms differs quite markedly from such great Brahmsians as Rubinstein, Arrau, Katchen, and Backhaus, and it seems clear that he had formed his own idiosyncratic ideas about the music. While you may not always sympathize with his visions of it, you will never find his playing uninteresting, and most of the time it is refreshing and captivating. Klien had a big technique and tends to invest the music with big tone and pianistic brilliance, but there is also penetrating and consistent attention to dynamics and mood. His playing is always intense and can be vociferous, even volcanic, sometimes; and it is generally athletic in the more sonorous pieces. On the other hand, his pedaling is extraordinary and his sotto voce passages are mesmerizing and ethereal, fashioned by a remarkable ear for pianistic color.

The two sets of variations are superbly performed, among the finest recordings of these works to be found. The solo Waltzes prove to be the least satisfying entities in this set. They lack charm. Every one in the long series of brief, autumnal pieces is beautifully played. Some are particularly memorable and deserve mention here. In Op. 10, a rapt, incandescent Fourth Ballade steals magically on the ear. In Op. 76, the Capriccio in B minor is wonderfully stylish and technically meticulous while the bleak wistfulness of the Intermezzo in A minor is captured perfectly. In Op. 116, the Capriccio in D minor and the wintry Intermezzo in A minor are sublime. In Op. 117, the C-sharp minor Intermezzo is fine and delicate, unex-

celled by any recording I have heard. In Op. 118, the transparent, yet expansive Intermezzo in A minor, the Ballade in G minor, which soars in a performance of high integrity, and Brahms's darkest piano work, the E-flat minor Intermezzo, all stand out. All four pieces in Op. 119 are poignant, rippling, celebratory, as the case may be, in Klien's lovely performances.

The F-minor Sonata is given a cohesive, symphonic, and super-brilliant reading. The Hungarian Dances (with Alfred Brendel) and the 16 Waltzes (with Beatriz Klien) were originally issued on LP, of course. I recall hearing them years ago and thought, even then, these performances were unlikely to be matched—and still do.

Vox's sound cannot be described as state-of-the-art. It is souped up, not at all dim, but quite good—much more than acceptable. There is some distortion, especially in the treble, and sometimes the pedal action intrudes. But these things are not very important. Most of the time the piano seems to have been closely recorded. Nevertheless, it sounds very good and is in excellent tune.

MULBURY

BRAHMS: *Die Schöne Magelone*

Inge Borkh, narr; Konrad Jarnot, bar; Carl-Heinz März, p—Orfeo 050041—77 minutes

Brahms's 15 romances from Ludwig Tieck's *Magelone* make up his only song cycle, but this collection has never achieved the fame of similar collections of Schubert and Schumann. The texts inhabit a fairy-tale land and lack the psychological depths of Schubert's cycles, and Tieck's story is impossible to construct from the song texts alone. For this reason some commentators have added connecting links between the songs. In the liner notes for my old LP with Fischer-Dieskau and Demus (Decca 9401) Irving Kolodin precedes each song with a short synopsis of the story. In Eric Sams's book (*The Songs of Johannes Brahms*, 2000) he feels the necessity of placing each song in its literary context. For this recording a similar solution is adopted: the songs are interspersed with narrations read by Inge Borkh. They are in German and unfortunately not translated in the booklet (though the song texts are). Borkh's German is about as easily understood as spoken German gets, but non-speakers will be left in the dark. The narrations average about 1-1/2 minutes each and thereby roughly double the time for the complete piece.

This, then, is not for everyone. Many will not understand German, and others will not want to hear the narrations every time they play the music. The performances, though, are first rate. Jarnot, who studied with Fischer-Dieskau and sounds it, brings excellent control and range of color to the songs; some of the more tranquil pieces—eg, 'Ruhe, Süssliebchen'—are particularly lovely. Borkh's narrations, which sometimes adopt voices of the characters, are vivid; and März's accompaniments, sometimes rather difficult, are expertly done. The songs, taken outside the above problems, are at Brahms's usual high level, so this release is warmly recommended to those who are not bothered by the idiosyncrasies.

ALTHOUSE

BRAHMS: *Symphony 2;* **STRAUSS:** *Don Juan*

Czech Philharmonic/ Jascha Horenstein
Somm 37—60 minutes

This is the first recording I have come across with Horenstein conducting the Czech Philharmonic—at the 1966 Montreux Festival. *Don Juan* is a splendid performance—lots of swagger and derring do. The Don's swash was definitely buckled. Slow passages are very expressive and romantic. Horenstein (with help from the engineers) brings out many details previously buried—bassoons, viola lines, etc. Sonics are very crisp: instruments sound crystal clear. A little more resonant ambience would have been welcome.

The Brahms performance is also outstanding. It is warm, romantic, soft-focussed, with little heaven-storming, even in the development—an approach quite appropriate for this congenial, pastoral movement. II is more gutsy than in most performances, but Horenstein ends it in a welcome warm glow. The Allegretto Graziano (III) is mostly untroubled calm, but forthright enough. Its central *Presto ma non assai* offers proper contrast. The finale is certainly *con spirito*, but I am spoiled by a performance I heard in Tanglewood where Charles Munch conducted the Boston Symphony in the most thrilling, brilliant, dashing performance I ever heard. Horenstein's finale is certainly rousing enough. There are rumors of many more Horenstein releases in the offing. I hope that the Czech Philharmonic is well represented; Horenstein and the orchestra seem very *simpatico*.

FOX

BRAHMS: *Symphony 3; Serenade 2*

London Symphony/ Bernard Haitink
LSO 56—69 minutes

The Third is a most unusual piece, and those who think of Brahms as old fashioned and too conservative would do well to consider what happens here. Not only do all movements end softly, but the symphony has no real slow movement or scherzo. The middle movements are both in C, perhaps to compensate for that

key (the dominant of F) being almost completely absent from the outer movements. Brahms puts the finale in the tonic minor, which seems backwards. Aren't you supposed to begin in the turmoil of a minor key and then have last-movement resolution in the major, as in the Tchaikovsky Fourth? In any case the clouds clear in Brahms's finale, and F major returns with the theme from the opening movement—another fairly unusual technique for the composer.

These pieces were recorded in concert in 2003 and 2004. The London Symphony, which the liner notes credit as the world's most recorded orchestra, plays the intricate symphony quite well. Haitink keeps tight reins on the piece, which is probably the most practical way to solve the rhythmic complexities. There are several spots in the outer movements, though, where I want the music to surge, and Haitink doesn't comply. It comes off sounding too careful. In these sections one could also wish for a darker, richer sound than the LSO offers. These shortcomings, though, do not apply to the Serenade, a lighter, cheerful piece that suits the orchestra well. The scherzo and finale, for example, have a lively, spontaneous feel, which results perhaps from the concert venue.

So, not a bad release, but also not one to supersede old favorites. For those interested in Haitink I would suggest his Concertgebouw Third (now a third of a century old), but not his Boston recording from the 90s.

ALTHOUSE

BRAHMS: *Violin Concerto; Symphony 4*
David Oistrakh, Czech Philharmonic/ Antonio Pedrotti—Supraphon 3780—76 minutes

Both of these pieces were recorded in concert, the concerto in 1961, the symphony in 1957. Oistrakh is terrific in the concerto, fiery and impassioned. Each movement is quicker than in his two famous studio recordings (with Klemperer and Szell), but nothing sounds too fast or rushed. If you want tender romanticism, this won't be your performance, but for raw excitement it does quite nicely. The orchestra plays well enough, though in truth the oboe (who has, as Sarasate put it, the only melody in the entire piece) is nothing special. A major drawback here, though, is the sound, which is consistently wiry and somewhat unpleasant. Because of this, it is hard to recommend this to anyone other the Oistrakh "completists"; we have so many good recordings in better sound.

Pedrotti takes the Fourth Symphony fairly briskly and conducts with passion. The Czech Philharmonic plays quite well, and the presence of the audience seems to add to the occasion. This would be a fine recording for those like exciting, muscular Brahms (as opposed to the pensive, philosophical Brahms), except for the recording quality. Like the concerto the sound has a veneer of grit, and there is terrible print-through at the very beginning. I can tolerate a lot of superfluous noise in recordings, but with so many better-sounding Fourths available, why bother?

I'm afraid this is a recording that did not need to be issued.

ALTHOUSE

BRAHMS: *Symphony 4;* see Collections

BREVILLE: *Violin Sonata 1;*
CANTELOUBE: *In The Mountains*
Philippe Graffin, v; Pascal Devoyon, p
Hyperion 67427—70 minutes

I felt great anticipation when I got this for review. Previous releases by this duo had never been short of fascinating, and I expected the same of this. Unfortunately, I was to be disappointed.

I had never heard of Pierre de Bréville (1861-1949) before, and this disc has shown me why. His Sonata of 1918-19 is lovely and well crafted, but the lack of memorable themes makes it less than endearing. Also, at about 37 minutes long, a few catchy tunes would certainly help the listener keep track of how the music develops. Perhaps I'm being picky; I certainly have an easier time following this sonata than the violin sonatas of Delius.

Joseph Cantaloube (1879-1957) had more talent for writing catchy tunes than Bréville, and it shows in this Suite of 1904-6. The very opening of the first piece, 'Outdoors', has such a different feeling from the Sonata—it feels like a breath of fresh air. 'Evening' follows, and it is lovely and pensive. 'Holiday' is third, and it starts out low-key and becomes modestly exuberant before winding down again. 'In the Woods at Springtime' vaguely recalls Debussy and is soft and lovely, with undertones of eroticism.

While neither of these works is what I'd call a masterpiece, they do make for pleasant listening. The performances and sound are first rate, as usual from this duo and this label.

MAGIL

BRIDGE: *Suite for Strings; 2 Intermezzos; 2 Old English Songs; Waltz Intermezzo; 2 Entr'actes; 2 Songs of Robert Bridges; Sir Roger de Coverly; Todessehnsucht; The Hag*
Roderick Williams, bar; BBC Wales/ Richard Hickox—Chandos 10246—68 minutes

Here is Volume 5 in a superb series of Frank Bridge's orchestral music. The works cover a wide span of the composer's life. Three are

listed as premiere recordings: *Two Songs of Robert Bridges, Todessehnsucht,* and *The Hag*. The first and last of these are early Bridge songs for baritone and orchestra, richly intoned by Roderick Williams. *Todessehnsucht* is an arrangement for string orchestra of a Bach funeral chorale. The nostalgic *Two Old English Songs* ('Sally in Our Alley' and 'Cherry Ripe') are also scored for strings, as is the 'Christmas Dance' *Sir Roger de Coverly*.

The remainder, except the 21-minute *Suite for Strings*, is sophisticated orchestral miniatures. The *Suite*, in four movements, is the most substantial work here, composed in 1909 when Bridge was 30. It is one of his finest works; and Hickox, as expected, delves deeply into its darker emotions. William Boughton on Nimbus is not quite as melancholy, but no less effective, depending on one's preferences for shading and balance. This is a beautifully played and produced program of under-valued British music, and is recommended along with the other volumes in the series.

HALDEMAN

BRITTEN: *Les Illuminations; Simple Symphony; Bridge Variations*
Franziska Hirzel, s; Kiev Chamber Orchestra/ Roman Kofman—MDG 601 1275—68 minutes

While there is nothing particularly "wrong" with this recording, there is nothing particularly "right" or commendable either. Kofman goes for generally slow tempos without any sense of involvement or enjoyment of the music. The thin, wiry string tone doesn't help matters either. They are particularly harsh in *Illuminations*. The *Bridge Variations* are weak, with no snap or bite. Hirzel is also weak, losing breath in an effort to keep on pitch or to scale down the size of the voice, plus wobbling on sustained notes. Well, maybe there is more "wrong" than "right" in this recording. With all the fine competition out there, just about anybody's recording would be better.

PARSONS

BRITTEN: *Nocturnal;* **BACH:** *Violin Partita 2*
Edin Karamazov, lute—Alpha 56—50 minutes

This is, as far as I'm aware, a first: a lutenist playing a transcription of a work originally written for the modern guitar. The reverse happens all the time, of course; lute transcriptions make up the lion's share of the performing guitarist's 16th and 17th Century repertory. But here we have the opposite, a lutenist playing Britten's mercurial *Nocturnal*, probably the crowning work written for the classical guitar in the 20th Century. What motivated the lutenist, one Edin Karamazov, to do this? Why did he choose to play such a formidable guitar work on his lute? And why pair it with a transcription of Bach's Violin Partita 2? And perhaps most important of all, who *is* Edin Karamazov?

On these and other momentous questions the notes are exasperatingly mute. They offer no information on the performer or his remarkable project. Instead, the booklet begins, inexplicably, with a lengthy academic essay on the 1791 painting by Girodet-Trioson that decorates the case. This is another first. (The painting, *Endymion Asleep*, has obvious ties to the Britten and to Dowland's 'Come, Heavy Sleep', on which the *Nocturnal* is based. To be fair, the painting *is* really something. Was this perhaps meant to be sold in a museum gift shop?)

But back to the music. Karamazov's playing of the *Nocturnal* is considerably more ragged and inexact than modern guitar performances. It has a rhythmic and interpretive freedom typical of sophisticated early music players (and not typical of staid, conservatory-trained guitarists). This is distracting at first, as are a few technical details. It is clear that some of the brilliant figuration here simply does not sit well on the lute. After all, Britten famously assimilated the geometry of the guitar fingerboard so well that he composed one of the most idiomatically "guitaristic" works ever written by a non-guitarist. Had he been writing for lute he surely would have composed some passages differently. But beyond these infelicities, the performance is remarkably powerful; Karamazov's musicianship is so forceful that I found myself attending to the piece with uncommon intensity. The performance is gestural and often explosive; the staccato bursts of the 'Uneasy' movement are visceral and unnerving, and the passacaglia theme booms out on the low, unfretted strings.

The Bach Partita is often played on the lute, so there is less novelty here. Still, Karamazov's performance has its eccentric moments. He begins the celebrated Chaconne, for example, not with the work's famous chordal proclamation, but with a searching solo melodic statement of the theme's upper voice. Why? Who knows? It makes little sense historically or musically, and the notes, of course, offer no explanation. In other passages his playing is a little too stop-and-go for me: too many rhetorical pauses and individually shaped gestures, not enough consistent momentum. But, as in the Britten, there are many wonderful moments here. He is clearly a gifted musician. If I only knew who he was.

RINGS

BRITTEN: *Saint Nicolas*

Joseph Frank (Nicolas); Christ Church Cathedral, Indianapolis Festival Orchestra/ Frederick Burgomaster—Four Winds 3023—46 minutes

In a miracle of bad timing Four Winds has released its recording at the same time that Decca has re-released Britten's own, recorded in the Parish Church at Aldeburgh, 13-14 April 1995 (475 6156). There is also stiff competition from fine recordings by Steuart Bedford (Naxos 557203, Nov/Dec 2004) and Matthew Best (Hyperion 66333).

Britten's recording is monaural yet makes a stronger sonic effect than Burgomaster's. Britten composed the extensive choral parts for mixed choir (used in the three older recordings), but the Indianapolis choir is composed of the cathedral's girls' choir and choir of men and boys. The result is bottom-heavy choral sound. The English boys, particularly the treble soloist, simply out-sing their American counterparts. Joseph Frank is bland, a bit of a wobble here and there, and, simply, no competition to Pears. Sorry, but the Four Winds recording is for the good citizens of Indianapolis.

Four Winds prints the English text; Decca does not. Decca does reproduce the LP cover and jacket notes, but get out your magnifying glass.

PARSONS

BRUCKNER: *Mass 1*

Isabelle Müller-Kant, Eibe Möhlmann, Daniel Sans, Christof Fischesser; Chamber Choir of Europe; Württemberg Philharmonic/ Nicol Matt
Brilliant 92212 [SACD] 51 minutes

Bruckner's first numbered mass is heard much less often than the two later ones, but it has all the earmarks of the composer. It may lack those moments of breathtaking beauty we find in later Bruckner, but this work, written right after Symphony No. 0 when he was about 40, has the solemnity and rich contrapuntal writing that characterize his best work.

The performance is a good one, spacious in tempo and vividly recorded. The Chamber Choir of Europe (formerly the Nordic Chamber Choir) numbers about 35, which many will feel is too small for a Bruckner work with orchestra. In any case they do sing quite well, as do the soloists (who have but a small part). At times Matt's tempos seem too deliberate, particularly in comparison with Gardiner's performance, which is several minutes faster (DG 459 674). You might sum up the differences by saying Matt gives a devotional performance, while Gardiner's is for the concert hall.

This is a Super Audio CD (SACD), which requires a multi-channel SACD player and a surround system. It is compatible, though, with standard CD players, and it sounds excellent that way. On a surround sound system it probably sounds even better and may further justify Matt's spacious tempos. In general, though, I would recommend Gardiner's performance, which is coupled with several Bruckner motets.

ALTHOUSE

BRUCKNER: *Symphony 3;* WAGNER: *Tannhäuser Overture & Venusberg Music*

Halle Orchestra/ John Barbirolli
BBC 4161—79 minutes

Barbirolli was not generally regarded as a Bruckner specialist, but his interest in the composer's music was apparent as early as 1939, when he performed Symphony No. 7 with the New York Philharmonic. Later he also conducted Symphonies 4, 8, and 9. Symphony 3 was added to the list in 1964, when this performance was recorded. The Nowak edition is employed, and the recording was made in the Free Trade Hall in Manchester. The Wagner item was recorded five years later, in 1969. Both pieces, though sonically generally satisfactory, are monaural. This is understandable in reference to the Bruckner, since FM broadcast stereo was not customary in the UK when it was recorded.

Barbirolli's performance is quite good—expressive but not unduly distorted. His tempos are palpably faster than VPO/Böhm (Decca) in I and II—not necessarily such a bad idea—but are otherwise standard. He conveys an admirable sense of progression and continuity, and his molding of themes, phrases, and larger structures is flexible, affectionate, but never sentimental. The Halle's playing is committed, its ensemble solid, though a little hard-edged in climaxes—a problem aggravated by sonic distortion. The *Tannhäuser* Overture and Venusberg Music is likewise well shaped and nicely played, though the Halle's string players are insecure at certain points in the Venusberg scene.

The excellence of stereo recordings by Dresden/Jochum (EMI), Bavarian Radio/-Jochum (DG), Cleveland/Szell, and Böhm makes it difficult to issue a general recommendation for this release.

MCKELVEY

BRUCKNER: *Symphony 7*

Champs Elysées Orchestra/ Philippe Herreweghe
Harmonia Mundi 901857—60 minutes

Czech Philharmonic/ Lovro von Matacic
Supraphon 3781—69 minutes

The timings make it clear that these two performances are *very* different. Indeed they are—and not only in respect to tempos. Matacic is traditional to a fault in his Austro-German ori-

entation, while Herreweghe isn't a bit traditional, but offers a performance played by only 74 musicians, employing—now hear this—historically correct instruments! The picture is scrubbed clean, but is the paint removed along with the dirt? Herreweghe plays essentially the Nowak edition of the score, but without the cymbals and triangle that reinforce the climax of the Adagio. He is clearly guided by a view that such matters were the ideas of Bruckner's well-intentioned admirers rather than the composer himself. The actual evidence is so ambiguous that nobody will ever know, but there's no doubt that the inclusion of these percussion instruments significantly increases the power of this crucial passage.

Herreweghe cites the example of the Leipzig Gewandhaus, whose orchestra was said to be about the same size as the group employed here. But Bruckner, quintessentially Austrian, must surely have had the Vienna Philharmonic in mind for his music. The Vienna orchestra had about 88 permanent players in the 1880s, and the addition of a quartet of Wagner tubas would bring their strength to 92—about what the Florida Orchestra will use when it plays the work this spring. But this is way more than the 74 players Herreweghe uses. This small band (along with the gut strings) characterizes his gentle and softly contoured presentation of the work. It is surely enjoyable on its own terms, though it's much less powerful, commanding, eloquent, and imposing than others. The difference is enhanced by tempos that are about as fast as any ever preserved on records. Frankly, and despite the fact that it has its effective passages, I prefer the more conventional, slower, and larger-scaled concepts of Böhm (Andante and DG), Jochum (EMI and DG), Haitink (Philips), et. al., but if you're persuaded otherwise, this may be your dish, the more so since its sound is so natural, detailed, and precisely focussed that there's nothing much between you and the music.

Matacic was born in Croatia, but from early on grew up and was educated in Vienna, so his musical orientation is definitely Austrian. His reading of Bruckner 7, unlike Herreweghe's, will therefore challenge no established sensibilities, for it is conventionally Austrian, with mainstream tempos and interpretive ideas. It also employs the Nowak edition, but the cymbals and triangle are put to work in the climax of II. The Czech Philharmonic is a fine orchestra—one of Europe's greatest—but its sound is very different from the VPO. It is slightly more hard-edged, less voluptuous, with a slight Slavic cast to the sound of woodwind and brass. It nevertheless works well for Bruckner, and the Czech players perform splendidly for Matacic. This is a reissue of a 1967 performance, and it is offered at a reduced price in Supraphon's Archive series. The sound has a little less presence and is less open and natural than more recent DDD issues, but is otherwise undistorted, robust, and generally satisfactory. At its modest price, this is easy to recommend, and should supply much to enjoy for most listeners.

MCKELVEY

BRUCKNER: *Symphony 8;* **DVORAK:** *Symphony 8;* **ROSSINI:** *Semiramide Overture*
Philharmonia Orchestra/ Carlo Maria Giulini
BBC 4159 [2CD] 134 minutes

I reviewed a Giulini account of Bruckner 7 with the Philharmonia in March/April 2004. It was less than well-played and directed. I was therefore not enthusiastic when I faced the task of reviewing this Bruckner 8, and its 86-minute playing time revealed it to be about the slowest performance of the symphony ever recorded. Bruckner 8, after all, even in a brisk performance ten minutes faster, is physically challenging, even to the point of exhausting the patience and attention span of many listeners. Here is one that could challenge the patience of the most ardent Brucknerian!

Right? No, decidedly *wrong*! In reality, it is almost frightening in its intensity, gripping the listener tightly in its clutches until its thunderous final climax dies away an hour and a half later. I came away emotionally wrung out, with a whole new perspective on this work, which I'd heard dozens of times in the concert hall and on records. There are fine accounts on records by Furtwängler, Böhm, Szell, Jochum, and others; but I have to say this one tops them all. The Philharmonia—slack and imprecise in the earlier Bruckner 7—is at the absolute top of its form here, rivaling Böhm's VPO and Furtwängler's Berlin Philharmonic. The stereo recording, made in the Royal Festival Hall in 1983, is spacious, robust, detailed, full-blooded, and does full justice to this phenomenal performance. Nowak edition.

It is hard to pinpoint more accurately the greatness of this recording, except to say that the conductor is inspired and mesmerizes his players onto a level of intensity and virtuosity they might never have thought possible. If you think Bruckner is boring and long-winded, give this great account of his longest and most physically challenging work a try. This recording is not only recommended, it is mandatory for any serious listener who has an interest in this composer's art.

The Dvořak 8 is an older monaural item, recorded in the Albert Hall in 1963. It is also a very good performance—one of the best despite a lack of stereo sonic imaging. At 35:41

it is also a fairly slow performance, but tension is well maintained, and concentration and intensity of expression never suffer. Giulini's reading is fresh, flexible, and full-blooded. It manages to combine the robust forward progression of the outer movements with a more relaxed and thoughtful treatment of II and III. Giulini, like Vaclav Talich, relaxes the tempo slightly to shape the wistful tune that appears in the final measures of III. That works quite well, but Szell and most Czech interpreters of this work don't do it. The Albert Hall isn't one of the best recording spaces, but this recording is fresh, clear, open and undistorted—one of the best I've heard from this venue.

The Rossini overture (also in mono) is conventionally well played and recorded, but it is less inspired than the other pieces. It is substantially excelled by performances by Beecham and the Philadelphia on Sony and by Malcolm Sargent and the VPO on EMI. Nevertheless, this is one of the finest BBC Legends issues I've ever encountered, and it is recommended unequivocally.

MCKELVEY

BUSONI: *Elegies; 7 Short Pieces; Prelude & Etude*
Roland Pöntinen, p
CPO 999853—73 minutes

Precocious and prodigiously gifted, Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) was one of kind. Born of Italian and German-Jewish parents, he became a legendary pianist, a revered teacher (his students included Petri, Mitropoulos, Grainger, Weill, and Varèse), an aesthetico-moralistic philosopher who wrote grandiloquent artistic manifestos calling for a return to classic forms, a music theorist who propounded a system of 113 heptatonic modes and proposed using exotic scales and subchromatic intervals, an indefatigable adopter of neglected or alien music who dashed off the longest and grandest piano concerto ever written, gothic and fantastically virtuosic transfigurations of Bach, and a fantasy on American Indian themes for piano and orchestra. He exuded an aura of high-minded Victorian idealism, prophetic aestheticism, untrammeled creative genius.

And yet, like Liszt, Busoni wasn't just fascinating; he was complex, contradictory, subtle, genuinely odd—and tainted with something of the crude showman, even the unsavory charlatan. He could descend without qualm to kitschy operetta pastiche in his salon pieces, and, in his most original music, to something much darker and stranger: a spectral eeriness of authentic menace and profound metaphysical disquiet. This darker quality emerges most clearly in his unfinished final masterpiece, the opera *Doktor Faust* and in the magnificent orchestral diptych, a Sarabande and Cortege, that he wrote as an ancillary study for *Faust*.

Of all of Busoni's many piano works, the great 40-minute-long cycle of Seven Elegies, completed in 1909, most clearly exhibits this peculiar sense of being haunted by a strange, unfathomable doom. Still they, or at least the first six of them, are pianistic showpieces (Elegy III even tosses in a fleet, glittering rendition of 'Greensleeves'!), bejeweled with quicksilver arpeggiations and filigree ornamentation. Their combination of superficial brilliance, ornate theatricality, and disturbing but submerged angst is quintessentially late-Victorian yet only turns up in the occasional inspired eccentric. One senses it in Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and JM Barrie's *Farewell Miss Julie Logan*, in the haunted and haunting canvases of Albert Ryder, in the pseudo-Victorian fables of Edward Gorey.

Busoni wrote the last of the Seven Elegies, titled 'Berceuse Elegiaque', after experiencing a dream-vision of his dead mother. Unlike the earlier elegies, its lilting, seraphic waves are spare, pure, unadorned, its harmonies a bitonal halo of resonances. The seance-like, ineffably tender, heartbreaking loveliness of this music is unforgettable and unlike anything else; it is surely one of the most sublime creations in all of Western music. Busoni was well aware of its value and uniqueness, and made an orchestral version of the Berceuse also; in addition there's an arrangement for chamber ensemble by Schoenberg. Both have been recorded several times.

Seven Short Pieces "for the Cultivation of Polyphonic Playing", to give the title in full, are lucid, brisk or stately, no-nonsense etudes in Busoni's idiosyncratic but plausible recreation of baroque idiom, about as far from the deeply personal elegies as it's possible to imagine, yet still stamped with the composer's inimitable imprint. As are the paired Prelude and Etude "on Arpeggios", from 1923, the former rippling yet introspective, the latter proud and exultant.

Roland Pöntinen plays with impeccable technical assurance and interpretive authority, and CPO's recording is notable for its bloom and naturalness, sacrificing some clarity for fuller, richer sonority—a trade-off quite appropriate for this music. I haven't heard the competing available CDs: Geoffrey Douglas Madge on Philips 420740 (May/June 1988), a six-disc set including all of Busoni's major piano works, and Fabio Grasso on Solstice 158 (May/June 1999) earned plaudits from Arved Ashby and John Bell Young (both of whom wrote particularly informative and interesting reviews that grapple with Busoni's overall

achievement)—but I can't imagine that Pöntinen isn't among the very best who've ever recorded Busoni's ever-astonishing Elegies.

LEHMAN

BUSS: *Percussion Overture; Scenes from the Holy Land; Currents; Modern Times*
Jerald Reynolds, narr; Robert McCormick, perc; Kim Stirzaker McCormick, fl
Capstone 8735—67 minutes

Howard Buss writes friendly, enjoyable music. He has a firm grasp of form, and all of the pieces on this release are well constructed, but nothing here is original: lots of pleasant melodies and predictable harmonies. The third piece, *Modern Times*, is especially irritating. The work is for flute, narrator, and percussion. The composer wrote the lyrics—never a good idea. The first movement expresses his frustration with modern technology. Between the dorky rapping of Jerald Reynolds and the text ("Tech-no meg-a-byte t-v" etc) I wonder if Mr Buss had ever really listened to rap or hip hop. And I couldn't figure out what he was complaining about about technology since he clearly doesn't mind digital media. Furthermore, the mix is terrible, and I could barely hear the narrator. As usual, Robert and Kim McCormick turn in excellent performances, but I hope they involve themselves with better projects in the future.

MACDONALD

BUXTEHUDE: *Sacred Cantatas*
Was Frag' Ich nach der Welt; Jesu, Meine Freud und Lust; Sicut Moses; WennIch, Her Jesu, Habe Dich; In Te, Domine, Speravi; Jubilate Domino; Wie Schmeckt es so Lieblich und Wohl
Katherine Hill, s; Matthew White, ct; Paul Grindlay, b; Aradia Ensemble/ Kevin Mallon
Naxos 557041—59 minutes

The term "cantata" is anachronistic when applied to these sacred vocal works of Buxtehude. To 17th Century ears, the term implied accompanied secular vocal chamber music, most often with an Italian text. Works for the church would more likely have been called sacred concertos or even arias, a term with broader implications in Buxtehude's day than now. These works are very different in format from the mature church cantatas of JS Bach, and even they were not called cantatas until the 19th Century. The German works on this program take their texts from devotional poetry or chorales, and they are set in musical sections corresponding to the stanzas of the text. The Latin works have scriptural texts that are subjected to more varied treatment than their German counterparts. Three of the works here are for three voices (ATB), the rest for a single solo voice. All but one include obbligato instruments. The exception is 'In Te, Domine, Speravi', for three voices and continuo. The program also includes Kevin Mallon's arrangement for strings and continuo of Buxtehude's Passacaglia in D minor, originally for organ.

The Aradia Ensemble is a period-instrument group based in Toronto, specializing in music of the 17th Century. Kevin Mallon, their Irish-born director, is a violinist and singer in his own right and in this program performs on the violin as well as directs. The performances are clean and energetic, with a light and buoyant quality that brings them to life. There are many fine recordings of sacred vocal works by Buxtehude, but each recorded selection is bound to be different. (*New Grove* lists 114 sacred vocal works, a few with doubtful attributions.) The present recording can stand with the best of them, and the Naxos bargain price just makes it all the more attractive.

Mallon and Aradia have done quite a few recordings for Naxos. I have reviewed past releases of Advent cantatas by JS Bach (Naxos 554825; Nov/Dec 2001), the Christmas Midnight Mass and Te Deum of Charpentier (Naxos 557229; Nov/Dec 2004), and music for *The Tempest* attributed to Henry Purcell, along with other Purcell works (Naxos 554262; March/April 2001). For the most part, I have been impressed with their performances, though I had some reservations about the Charpentier. Their Buxtehude will not disappoint.

GATENS

BYRD: *Propers for Ascension, Pentecost, Corpus Christi; O Salutaris Hostia, Ab Ortu Solis, Alleluia Cognoverit Discipuli, Ave Verum Corpus, Pange Lingua*
The Cardinall's Musick/ Andrew Carwood
Gaudeamus 332—74 minutes

This ninth volume in a survey of Byrd's choral music contains music from the two books of Gradualia, music meant for Catholic liturgies. Seven pieces are propers (the parts of the mass that change from day to day as contrasted with the ordinary of the mass—the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei—which remains the same), and five pieces are for devotions to the Blessed Sacrament.

The propers consist of an Introit, sung as the priest approaches the altar to commence the mass, two Alleluias (Ascension and Pentecost) or a Gradual and Alleluia (Corpus Christi), to be sung between the Epistle and the Gospel, an Offertory to be sung when the bread and wine are brought to the altar, and a Communion to be sung when the bread and wine have been consumed. The Corpus Christi settings come from the first book of Gradualia

(1605) and are in four parts, as are the Blessed Sacrament pieces. The other two propers are from the second book (1607) and are in five parts.

We've welcomed previous releases in this series, and Volume 9 lives up to the generally high standards of its predecessors. It is presented here by all-male forces: altos, tenors, baritone, and bass. The five-voice pieces are all with two altos, tenor, bass, and baritone, while the four-voice pieces are all alto, two tenors, and bass. The sound of the ensemble can be wearing in large doses and, although the singing is technically excellent, there are moments when things smudge either because of minor lapses of pitch in this difficult writing or just the inherent muddiness of all these male voices on close intervals. I enjoyed the approach of The William Byrd Choir on Hyperion in their first (and so far only) volume of the Gradualia, which used a female soprano as the uppermost voice more, since it resulted in a wider range of tone color and more feeling of space in the harmonies. But don't wait for more from that group: their last volume was recorded in 1990.

With the exception of the *Ave Verum Corpus*, this is not music for newcomers to Byrd. The soaring song of his settings of the ordinary in the three masses is not here. Instead, these are densely written, almost gnarled settings that take careful listening to "get" and are probably nightmares to sing. Byrd specialists or collectors of this series will want this. Others should be prepared to listen over and over again, preferably with the text in front of them, before the light finally shines and the beauty of this music is revealed.

I wish Carwood had been given more space for notes. The four columns of tiny type in the booklet seem far less than he could tell us about the music and his performance choices, though I am grateful for what is given. There is nothing wrong with the recorded sound.

CHAKWIN

CALDARA: *Il Giuoco dei Quadriglio (Card Game); Chamber Sonata; Lungi dal'idol mio; Vicino a un Rivoletta*

Julianne Baird (Clarice), Patrice Djerejian (Ottavia), Laura Heimes (Camilla), Judith Pannill (Livia); The Queen's Chamber Band/ Stephen Alltop—Albany 705—66 minutes

Is it possible that this is the first recording of an opera by Caldara? Antonio Caldara (Venice, c.1670-Vienna, 1736) was a contemporary of Bach, Handel, Scarlatti, and Vivaldi and highly regarded in his own time. The 18th Century music historian Charles Burney declared him "one of the greatest professors both for the Church and the stage that Italy can boast". Caldara's catalog has 80+ operas, most of them composed for the royal court in Vienna, where he was firmly ensconced for more than 20 years. The royal court of the Hapsburgs indulged their passion for music, commissioning, supporting the opera, sometimes even performing as well. The Emperor, Charles VI, studied harpsichord and conducting with Caldara, and his two daughters sang on numerous occasions in the family celebrations of birthdays and namedays.

For the Empress's birth day in the summer of 1734 Caldara composed the short delightful operatic confection recorded here. The Grove encyclopedia lists *The Card Game* as a cantata, but is more properly termed a *serenata teatrale* or chamber opera, a popular vocal form at the Viennese court. Caldara composed roles for the young archduchess Maria Theresa and the composer's own wife, Caterina. Each of the four lady singers gets her own da capo aria, separated by a brief dialog in recitative. All four join for a concluding quartet. The orchestration is for strings and continuo with the occasional flute and lute. It is all a gentle pastime for a summer evening, no dramatic outburst, simply happy, graceful time-passing.

The four ladies are a well-matched group. Baird has a lot of experience at such baroque delights and comes off more in the spirit and abandon of the music. The contralto Djerejian sounds the vocal depths with a bitter, shrewish Ottavia.

The Queen's Chamber Band are a graceful, unobtrusive lot in the serenata, but get to display their own delicate finesse in a short instrumental sonata of four dances (alemanda, corrente, giga, gavotta). The two tiny solo cantatas rounding out the recording each consist of two recitatives and two arias, both simple aural confections, nicely performed by Baird and Djerejian.

Libretto in Italian and English.

PARSONS

CANTALOUBE: *In the Mountains;* see BREVILLE

CARTER: *Variations;* see Collections

CHAUSSON: *Concerto;* **DEBUSSY:** *Violin Sonata;* **LECLAIR:** *Violin Sonata, op 9:3*

Weiss Duo; Coup d'Archet Quartet
Crystal 835—62 minutes

I was struck by the fact that the Debussy and Leclair were recorded 35 years before the Chausson (2004) and wondered what the differences would be both in performance and engineering. Unfortunately, after so many years as concertmaster of the Chicago Sym-

phony and the Monte Carlo and Los Angeles Philharmonics, Sidney Weiss hasn't changed or improved at all. He has the same narrow, nervous, bird-like vibrato that he uses in exactly the same way in every phrase, no matter how the character of the music changes. He has the same slight unsteady intonation and slight inability to sustain a line over a long stretch, the same imperviousness to tone color, and the same basic approach, which I can only describe as a loud frontal assault. Worst of all, he conveys not an ounce of stylistic variation among these three very different composers. How anyone can make Leclair sound like Chausson and how a person can perform Debussy with the subtlety of a Mack truck is beyond me. There's neither lift nor flight in any of it. And in the Debussy and Leclair, the piano is recorded so two-dimensionally that you practically ignore it.

In fact, it's Weiss wife, Jeanne, who gets the shortest end of the stick in the Chausson as well. It's a pity her piano is so drowned in a swimming pool acoustic that her articulation is made to sound like an amorphous blur. When some of her solo work does come through, it's about the only thing in this recording that has expressive depth. The solo violin is so ceaselessly and irritatingly forward that it was next to impossible to ever really sort out the string quartet, which is made up of four Los Angeles-area musicians. In fact, as the sound fades at the end of movements, I think I hear artificial reverb that's been added to make up for missing qualities, which may account for the virtual inaudibility of everyone but violinist Weiss.

FRENCH

CHOPIN: *Ballades; Barcarolle; Berceuse; Fantasy in F minor; Scherzo 3*

Vassily Primakov, p—Tavros 166528—72 minutes

Tavros is a new label that currently has only two releases. They are obviously proud of this young Russian pianist and devote a considerable amount of space to his background, along with three color photographs attesting to his rugged good looks. All of this would be meaningless if Primakov were less than worthy of attention. Fortunately, his artistry makes for an enjoyable if less than overwhelming initial encounter.

The marvelous Fantasy in F minor does not take you by storm. It is a somewhat understated traversal where the pianist displays more sensitivity than temperament. If it stubbornly refuses to move from the drawing room, it makes no blunders and cleanly articulates Chopin's music. If it lacks an epic scale, there is room for such an approach.

In the *Barcarolle* it becomes clear that *sturm and drang* is not a major part of Primakov's makeup. His readings are primarily lyrical and informed with a searching quality that seeks out all that is beautiful in the music. Needless to say, there is a considerable amount of this to be found in these works. To the pianist's great credit is his careful attention to Chopin's frequent beguiling shifts of harmony. Too often these pass under the fingers of pianists with little or no emphasis.

Scherzo 3 is strongly played, but part of this impression may be owing to the closeness of the recorded sound. While we are never in the pianist's lap, we are only a few feet from his instrument. This clarity must be tamed by lowering the volume to restore some space, if not resonance. The laid back *Berceuse* comes across well, though the forward clarity of the sound does rob it of some magic.

"Cautious" is the word that comes to mind most often when thinking about Primakov's Ballades. All is correctly in place, but there are times when he shies away from any over-the-top climaxes by retreating to lesser volume or an ever-so-slight tempo reduction. Ballade 2 has an especially telling *Presto con fuoco* section following an untroubled statement of the opening theme. This violent contrast is too subdued, and the storm clouds never disrupt the calm. If you value beauty above all, and have little toleration for unsettling contrasts, these interpretations may be just what you are looking for. Since the world can always use a little extra beauty they may satisfy you in a way that escapes me. I'll try elsewhere when I need a Chopin fix.

BECKER

CHOPIN: *4 Scherzos; Impromptus*

Yundi Li—DG 477 5162—53 minutes

Li plays the treacherous B-minor Scherzo with astounding digital control, achieving at the same time complete clarity and focus. An air of daring, tempered by absolute poise, pervades his performance. His tone is burnished, and a wide variety of touches further enlivens the music, but he never loses sight of the demonic undercurrents. I have not yet heard anyone play the white-hot scales at the end with the frightening brilliance of Horowitz, but Yundi Li comes close.

The B-flat minor is no less impressive. In both of the first two pieces he allows the quiet middle sections to stagnate, unfortunately. Li maintains remarkably tight-knit cohesion in the Third Scherzo, and though it has a generally lighter, more slender effect than we customarily hear—which is refreshing—he brings a blistering ferocity to the conclusion. Despite the many marvelous aspects of the first three works, with the Fourth Scherzo Li reaches a

new and inspired artistic level, all in all, quite amazing in one so young as this 21-year-old pianist.

Once again, digital finesse, tonal polish, and elegance prevail in each of the three beautiful, and in the case of the Second and Third, deeply poignant, Impromptus. It may be possible but it will indeed be difficult to find finer Chopin playing than this. Certainly it will not be possible to find Chopin played with a higher, more Olympian technical finish.

DG's recorded sound is sumptuous, and Li's Steinway concert grand sounds almost too good to be true. But, of course, it is an instrument of extraordinary beauty, flexibility, and transparency; and he coaxes from it its very best.

The only unfortunate thing about this release is its parsimonious content—it's only 2/3 of a CD!

MULBURY

CODAX: *Cantigas de Amigo*

Supramusica—Verso 2012—46:37

Though it may not be mentioned in most books about art song, these seven short lyrics constitute perhaps the earliest known song cycle. Probably written in the 13th Century by Martin Codax, about whom very little is known, the songs were copied as literary texts as late as the 16th Century as a distinct set. They are also perhaps the only preserved musical examples of *cantigas de amigo* (songs of love), as opposed to the more famous *cantigas de Santa Maria* associated with Alfonso el Sabio. Finally, the fact that the lyrics are presented in a woman's voice, longing for the return of her lover from the sea outside of Vigo in northern Spain adds a particularly poignant sorrow to what are simple lyrics. Unfortunately, in the unique manuscript of these seven songs (now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City), the sixth song has musical staves but no notes, so that performers have adopted various solutions to its reconstruction. Because of these special qualities, the set has attracted a number of complete performances. Recent ones by Susan Rode Morris (Nov/Dec 2000), Paul Hillier (July/Aug 2000), Drew Minter (Nov/Dec 1994: 239), and Mara Kiek (Sept/Oct 1988) have been reviewed here. The first recording, with the unique vocal timbres of Andrea von Ramm and Richard Levitt and the Studio for Early Music, was originally released in 1973 (reissued on EMI Reflexe).

The present recording by Supramusica is a strange mixture of performance styles, in that some stanzas of these poems are spoken and others sung. This eliminates the need to reconstruct a melody for the sixth song. The soprano and reciter Fuensanta Escriba has a very pleasant voice and brings an authentic and dark quality to these songs, missing in the singing of Susan Rode Morris, Paul Hillier, and Drew Minter; I only wish that rather then the pseudo-dramatic recitation, she was allowed to just sing. Also, since the ensemble Supramusica is dominated by instrumentalists, the improvised preludes, interludes, and postludes tend to dominate the performance. For example, the first song, which lasts only 2:43 as sung by Paul Hillier or 3:11 in the more elaborate performance by Andrea von Ramm, is expanded by Supramusica into a 10:31 epic. These flamboyant accompaniments overburden the direct personal expressions of longing in Codax's lyrics.

Though the recording includes two further *cantigas de amigo* by Joan Airas de Santiago and Joan Garcia de Guilhade, reconstructed by contrafactum from melodies included among the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, that is not enough to raise my estimation of this project. I cannot recommend highly enough the direct and heart-rending interpretation by Mara Kiek.

BREWER

COPLAND: *Chamber Music*

Music from Copland House; Borromeo Quartet

Arabesque 6794 [2CD] 123 minutes

This album contains almost all of Aaron Copland's chamber music. Why the Nonet for strings was omitted is a mystery, since there are almost enough string players already here. All they needed was one more cello. I guess the camel's back was feeling weak by then. It is a pity, since the performances here are uniformly excellent and beautifully recorded. The set is presented in chronological order, which lets us feel Copland's progression from his French influences with Nadia Boulanger through his jazz period (the *Ukelele Serenade* is effectively played), and culminating in *Vitebsk,* with its quarter tones lending ethnic verismo to its effect.

The Sextet of 1932 is performed with panache, though I still prefer it in its orchestration as Symphony 2. The dramatic 1943 Violin Sonata is warmly handled, while the 12-tone Piano Quartet of 1950 is played to the hilt, with great energy where called for. Paul Dunkel's rich-toned flute is heard in the lovely Duo and the two late Threnodies for flute and string trio, written in memory of Stravinsky and Beatrice Cunningham.

The early works include the Two Pieces for String Quartet and another Movement of 1923, a lovely work. The Two Pieces for violin and piano are welcome, also the Vocalise for flute

and piano of 1928. Most rare perhaps is the Prelude for piano trio of 1924, an earlier version of what became the first movement of the Organ Symphony. All of this is played with tonal beauty and a feeling of involvement on the part of the players that makes this rather a special release by a number of fine musicians from the New York area.

D MOORE

CORELLI: *Concertos, op 6*
New Dutch Academy/ Simon Murphy
Pentatone 5186031 [SACD] 63 minutes

Turn this on and get ready to wallow in the sound! I may have to invest in an SACD player yet. This is a super audio hybrid—not a digitally remastered old recording like some others in the series (see Vivaldi, this issue) but an original recording of a relatively new Dutch ensemble.

Because of its high quality, I wish I could say this is Volume 1 of a new complete set of Corelli's popular Opus 6 Concertos, but it isn't. Rather, it's part of a recording project to celebrate 350 years of Corelli's musical presence. One of the goals of this project is to combine Corelli's well known music with some of his lesser known gems; thus, this program includes concertos 4, 8 (the famous *Christmas* Concerto), 11, and 12 of the violin concertos, along with a sonata and a fugue.

The notes describe Corelli as a cult figure and compare him to performers like Jimi Hendrix, asserting that he "was the hard rocker of his day—a cult figure with a cult following". And reviews of the recently launched New Dutch Academy suggest that this ensemble is the right medium for this "18th Century rock 'n roll". I don't know that I'd go quite that far; such comparisons overlook some important differences of worldviews and substance. But this musical ensemble is one of the more vibrant I've heard in a long time—but not outre or different just for the sake of being different. This brilliance, combined with the astonishing sound, offers a whole new listening experience. Part of the orchestral sound comes from heavy use of theorbo, archlute, and guitar in the continuo along with harpsichord or organ. The insistent strumming gives a wonderful freshness to the music.

The sound is very full and overpowering, unlike the thin scratchiness that used to plague some early instrument recordings. To me this almost sounds like a fusion of early and modern instruments, with a good deal of the romanticism that one hears in older recordings of Corelli's Opus 6. One thing I like is that the orchestra never gives the impression of playing fast just to show off or to see how much faster they can play a given piece than the next orchestra. If they fly along, one feels they have a good reason for flying, just as when they linger over romantic moments, one knows they're savoring the beauty.

We'll be hearing more from Simon Murphy and his outstanding ensemble.

CRAWFORD

COUPERIN: *Harpsichord Pieces;*
see FRESCOBALDI

CURRAN: *Maritime Rites*
Malcolm Goldstein, v; Joseph Celli, eng hn; Steve Lacy, Jon Gibson, sax; Leo Smith, tpt; George Lewis, trb; Pauline Oliveros, accordion
New World 80625 [2CD] 2:01

Alvin Curran (b. 1938) is probably best remembered as a co-founder of the anarchic 60s collective Musica Elettronica Viva, a group that embraced the Cagean "anything goes" aesthetic and grafted it onto a Marxist ideological world view. Frederic Rzewski and Cornelius Cardew were two of its more distinguished members. Since that group's heyday, Curran has divided his career between Italy and America—he currently holds a position at Mills College in Oakland and has maintained his residence in Rome since 1964.

Maritime Rites (1985) is a collection of ten mostly 11-minute "environmental concerts for radio", broadcast, according to the notes, by over 50 National Public Radio affiliates back in the 80s, and now evidently accorded "legendary" status. They've been out of circulation since then, and now here they are, made available to the public again thanks to New World.

These pieces originated with a road trip by the composer up the Eastern Seaboard in 1984, with recordings made of "every foghorn, bell buoy, maritime gong, and whistle along the way". (Curran hails from Rhode Island.) Separately recorded improvisations by ten new music notables (including Curran) were then "orchestrated" by Curran using these natural sounds as accompanying compositional material. "As nature is spontaneous and unpredictable, so is the music of man", declare the notes, and that pretty much describes these programs' general (decidedly salty) atmosphere. Among the most famous contributors are Pauline Oliveros and John Cage; Jon Gibson and Malcolm Goldstein might also be familiar names to new music aficionados. Unexpected cameo appearances are made by Anthony Braxton and Curran's erstwhile Yale professor, Elliott Carter, whose influence may be felt decisively on the periphery of this project, if you think about it long enough.

Since these are all essentially different compositions based on material by different artists, there is a good deal of stylistic variety

in the set. Some pieces (those built around the improvisations of Leo Smith and Steve Lacy) have a jazz flavor; some retain the old MEV noise esthetic (Joseph Celli, Malcolm Goldstein, George Lewis). Clark Coolidge offers a good old-fashioned text-sound piece. Serene minimalist tonality is represented by the entries of Pauline Oliveros and Jon Gibson (whose soprano sax noodlings recall those of Terry Riley). John Cage quietly recites the words "ice, dew, food, crew, ape" over a catchy foghorn duet of descending fifth and descending third. Curran's grand (24-minute) finale presents a gradually thickening texture of foghorns and bells (with Elliott Carter occasionally saying "rite, rite, rite, rite"), and culminates in a chorus of Alvin Currans accompanied by the sounds of Brooklyn Bridge traffic. A rendition of "Rolling Home" closes out the set.

The atmosphere is seasoned with additional verité components: lighthouse keepers, Coast Guard personnel, lobstermen, a museum guide. New England accents abound. The work has the touching function of a memorial in some cases—Cage and Lacy are no longer with us, and the same may be said of several of the foghorns, not to mention the no-longer-audible traffic sounds of the Brooklyn Bridge. 60s avant-gardism has also gone the way of all flesh— "[The MEV movement] was revolutionary, but did not generally have the consequences we'd imagined", Curran observes, though he seems to retain confidence in the continued influence of their tenets. I'm not so sure, but New World continues to create a formidable library of such documents, and collectors and libraries will value consummately presented samples like this.

Also included as appendix are the original program introductions, attached to the ends of each disc. They are repetitive and really unnecessary—they may be skipped, of course.

GIMBEL

DALLAPICCOLA: *Tartiniana; 2 Pieces; Piccola Musica Notturna; Marsia; Variations*
James Ehnes, v; BBC Philharmonic/ Gianandrea Noseda—Chandos 10258—73 minutes

As this collection of his orchestral music shows, Luigi Dallapiccola (1904-75) continued to write traditional tonal music influenced by Respighi and Stravinsky even after adopting Schoenberg's dodecaphony in other pieces. Still I wouldn't describe either the tonal or atonal selections here as Dallapiccola at his best, for his strongest and most characteristic works are usually vocal—text-settings and operas. Writing for instrumental ensembles, whether chamber or symphonic, Dallapiccola, with his penchant for exquisite detail and refinement, often seems bloodless, flickering, ghostly, insubstantial.

Tartiniana, from 1951, is a 15-minute-long, four-movement divertimento for violin and small orchestra that reworks themes by the baroque composer Giuseppe Tartini. The obvious model here is Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*, though Dallapiccola is also following in the footsteps of his countrymen Casella and Respighi. None of this highly stylized neoclassicism does a thing for me, but if you like his predecessors' contributions to the genre you'll like Dallapiccola's also.

More interesting and satisfying—in my view the best work here—is Dallapiccola's 20-minute suite from his ballet *Marsia*, from 1947. The language combines impressionist and more chromatic elements, a suitable amalgam for this grim, cautionary myth of a mortal musician foolish enough to compete with a vengeful god. It sounds rather like Ravel imitating Schoenberg, and though it won't leave you humming any tunes it certainly evokes pagan tableaux at once sensuous and shimmering yet marmoreal, dark, horrific.

The remaining three works are atonal, in Dallapiccola's typical Alban Berg-in-Italy mode. Both Two Pieces, from 1947, and Variations for Orchestra, from 1954, are orchestrations of chamber pieces, the former originally for violin and piano, the latter for solo piano, and both, despite some noisy outbursts (and a strident II in the Two Pieces), are terribly thin, indeed phthisic, in scoring. I've always preferred the original versions, which convey Dallapiccola's enigmatic fantasy and austerity without seeming so emaciated. The more effective original piano version of the Variations is called *Quaderno Musicale di Annalibera*; it's recorded on ASV 1034 (Mar/Apr 1999).

Piccola Musica Notturna, from 1954, is only 9 minutes long and shows Dallapiccola at his most will-'o-the-wispy. The title is a play on Mozart's famous serenade and surely also on the composer's own surname. Dallapiccola's night music is mysterious and suggestive, replete with half-glimpsed shadows that never materialize.

Performances are excellent, as are sonics, but be aware that owing to the nature of the music much of this is recorded at a low volume, and turning your stereo up enough to hear the quiet sections will likely make the occasional loud sections *too* loud.

LEHMAN

DAVIDOVSKY: *Simple Dances; Cantione Sine Textu; Quartetto; Salvos; String Trio*
Susan Narucki, s; Empyrean Ensemble/ Ross Bauer—Arabesque 6777—53 minutes

Mario Davidovsky (b. 1934) is best known for his famous series of *Synchronisms*, works that combined "normal" concert instruments with taped electronic sound in close musical proximity. These were all the rage back in the 60s and 70s (the series continued through the 80s), and won the composer a Pulitzer Prize. He directed the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center for many years and has most recently taught at Harvard. This extremely well-played collection of chamber works brings us up to date with some of his more recent non-electronic activities.

The program opens with six *Simple Dances* (1991, 1999), a knotty little set scored for flute, cello, piano, and two percussionists. After a mostly elegant introductory "solo" (for flute, but accompanied by ensemble friends) and pas de deux (for flute and cello, again with associates' commentary), the piece proceeds with highly abstract sketches of a waltz (a very nervous one), sarabande (opening with church bells), march (Teutonic variety, complete with barely recognizable quotation of 'Innsbruck ich Muss dich Lassen'), and tango (Davidovsky is Argentinean). Schoenberg liked doing this sort of thing and was the obvious model, but this set seems a little too continuously discombobulated for maximum effect.

Cantione Sine Textu (2001) is the most recent work here. This is fairly literally a "song without words", though the title itself is used occasionally as text. The wonderful soprano Susan Narucki weaves in and out of the Webernian ensemble of flute, clarinet, guitar, and bass like a modern-day Cathy Berberian, blending in as a Berio-ish fifth instrument, though she is sure to get the last "word" in at the end (as singers tend to do).

The *Quartetto* (1987) is actually a flute quartet. It's dedicated to Harvey Sollberger, who recorded the first of Davidovsky's *Synchronisms* back in the 60s for CRI. The piece begins with tastes of voluptuous Varese-ian melody caressed with shapely Schoenbergian *klangfarben*. Soon the music explodes with vigorous athleticism and brazen competition. The quiet third part offers a tense but expectant respite. A brief but wild scherzo finale leads to a screeching end, dissolving everything into fragments and ending with one single unassuming pitch. Flutist Tod Brody leads his excellent ensemble with commanding virtuosity.

Salvos (1986) is a single-movement sextet for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, harp, and percussion. The notes make a point of designating this piece "one of the most abstract and formally elusive works on this disc", though I suspect we could have been given more helpful listening strategies. Finally, 1982's String Trio also "inhabits an unstable world of heightened intensity". Its "startling variety of textures and timbres" fly by in dizzying profusion. This time annotator Ross Bauer does offer some thoughts on approaching the work, but, alas, it's just not enough. This piece was included on Bridge's Davidovsky collection (9097, N/D 2000, newest).

All told, fans of retro modernism will value this well-executed release. Others will need to decide how far the sun has set on this mode of production.

GIMBEL

DEBUSSY: *Suite Bergamasque; Epigraphes Antiques; Valse Romantique; Reverie; 1st Arabesque; Beau Soir; La Flute de Pan; La Plus que Lente; 3 Preludes*
Stephane Rety, fl; Nicolas Tulliez, hp
Skarbo 4032—67 minutes

I must admit I am a fan of all things Debussy, and similar to anyone with advanced music training, I have extensively performed and analyzed his music, contemplated his profound influence on 20th Century music, etc. Despite the latter, I usually return to the former when I stumble on a great performance of his music. This recital is one of those occasions.

Debussy's music lends itself well to transcription, and given his famous solo writing for flute and harp (*Afternoon of a Faun, Pelleas*), combining the two instruments for an entire recital seems a natural choice. Rety and Tulliez brilliantly convey the beauty, delicacy, intimacy, and sheer elegance of this music. I enjoyed listening to this recording many times over, usually losing any sense of time while pulled into the delightful daydreams only Debussy can evoke. Rety never overplays this music, and he explores a wide range of tone colors in appropriate places, especially in the evocative and somewhat esoteric *Epigraphes Antiques*. Tulliez, a performer trained in North America (Juilliard, Royal Conservatory of Toronto, Yale) enjoys a diverse European career as an orchestral harpist and chamber musician. His playing on this recording is stunningly accurate, colorful, and deserves the highest praise.

I would like to add a word of caution. Debussy's music, especially some of the works heard here (e.g. 'Clair de Lune') suffers the ignominious fate of being packaged as New Age, or worse yet, background music for entertainment only. If you think this recording would be nice music to accompany your wine drinking or tea-sipping, you are not giving the

musicians the respect they deserve for such a fine performance. Buy this recording and give it your utmost attention, and I think you will have a transcendent experience.

CHAFFEE

DEBUSSY: *La Mer;* see MAHLER 2
Violin Sonata; see CHAUSSON

DIABELLI: *Rondo Militaire; Scherzo; Guitar Sonatinas & Sonatas; Romance; 3 Pieces; Funeral March for Michael Haydn; 2 Waltzes*
Wolfgang Brunner & Leonore von Strauss, fp; Klaus Jäckle, g—Profil 4085—59 minutes

Here is a good cross-section of Diabelli's music for two fortepianos and guitar. Much of this resulted from Austria's love of music. The notes point out that Metternich's Austria had become a police state, so the Middle Class withdrew from anything that might be considered political and became flooded with amateur music performances. Musicians obliged by supplying music voluminously. Anton Diabelli was both a composer and publisher who engaged vigorously in meeting both portions of this new consumer demand.

The young Diabelli moved from Salzburg to Vienna in 1802 and became so impressed with Michael Haydn that he decided to devote his life to music, writing a funeral march for Haydn when he died in 1806. Since his two instruments were the guitar and the piano, he elected to write it for guitar. By 1824 he took control of the publishing house he worked for. From that time onward he was active in writing and publishing works for the popular Viennese musical tastes. By the time he retired in 1851 his catalog included over 9000 works!

Some of these works were written to higher musical standards than others. They are polished and require considerable talent to perform. The three musicians heard here are Salzburg-based and participate in the Hofmusik ensemble. All play well and are recorded very atmospherically. Good notes.

BAUMAN

DOHNANYI: *Violin Concerto 2; Piano Concerto 2; Harp Concertino*
James Ehnes, Howard Shelley, Clifford Lantaff; BBC Philharmonic/ Matthias Bamert
Chandos 10245—76 minutes

Toward the end of my high school years I began to take an interest in living composers. How exciting that some great composers were still alive! I was fascinated with Vaughan Williams. I took a real liking to Howard Hanson. And I was pleased with Erno Dohnanyi, who was also the pianist on an EMI (Angel) LP of his *Nursery Variations* and Piano Concerto 2. He certainly wasn't as inspired as Rachmaninoff, but I heard some of the same spirit there.

Certainly Dohnanyi was a fabulous pianist—as anyone can tell by the writing here. It is as idiomatic as Rachmaninoff's. There are even some thrilling big string tunes, and Bamert and the BBC players make them sound quite wonderful.

Still, one has to admit that this is not a brilliantly inspired piece. The third movement is particularly pedestrian. When I bought that LP (still have it) I listened almost entirely to the other side ('Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star').

The other two pieces were written when Dohnanyi had settled in Tallahassee. Now I have nothing against Tallahassee, but old world composers in the sterile surroundings of American cities have seldom produced much worthwhile music—at least not for long. How could anyone be inspired by this country? (They all said they were, but who would admit he wasn't?) Stravinsky and Schoenberg in LA? No.

And the concertino is pleasant largely for its special sound—harp and chamber orchestra (strings and some nice wind solos). But it has been recorded more than once, and there's a fine new recording on Bridge (9160) that's as good as this one. But it's not a great piece. Nothing from Tallahassee is.

The program opens with the dreadful Violin Concerto 2, a lot of sound and fury signifying nothing at all. I like the First Violin Concerto, but that was from Europe, not Tallahassee. The conclusion of the first movement of this one is rather nice—but that is partly relief that it is concluding. II is also the dogs. III is an Adagio. I have often thought that Dohnanyi was one of those composers who should never have written anything but Adagios. It suits him. It is rhapsodic, and one would have to call it the most bearable movement (to be honest—I was going to say "most attractive", but no other movement is the least bit attractive).

It cannot save the concerto, though—it's too little too late. The last movement (there are four) is one of his best fast movements, but that's not saying much. It's still full of utterly vapid busywork.

By the way, this is the only violin concerto I know of besides Stravinsky's where the only violin on stage is the soloist. There are no orchestral violins.

My advice: don't buy this for the violin concerto—you won't like it. But if you don't have the piano concerto or the concertino you may play this every few years. Gorgeous sound and playing.

VROON

DONG: *Earth, Water, Wind, Metal, Fire; Pangu's Song; Blue Melody; Crossing; 3 Voices*

Chen Tao, Tod Brody, fl; Hong Wang, erhu; Daniel Kennedy, perc; Ann Yao, zheng; Sara Cahill, p; San Francisco Contemporary Players/ Olly Wilson—New World 80620—70 minutes

Kui Dong (b. 1966) hails from Beijing and has degrees in composition and theory from that city's Central Conservatory of Music. She moved to the US in 1991, earning her doctorate in composition at Stanford. She currently teaches at Dartmouth.

Earth, Water, Wind, Metal, Fire (2001) is a piano suite expressing the elements "believed in China to make up the material world". (See James Dillon's recent *Book of Elements* [N/D 2004] for another recent pianistic treatment of this topic.) Ms Dong has been busy absorbing Western "advanced" new music techniques, like so many of her expatriate colleagues (Bright Sheng, Tan Dun, and the like). Here we have Ligeti (in the minimalist chord clouds in I and V), Debussy and Ravel (in the occasional impressionist harmony, itself derived from Asian influences), Crumb (in the piano preparations in III and IV), and Cowell (in the occasional clusters). Pentatonicism is always in the background (and often in the foreground), and Chinese instruments are often suggested. American syncopation pops up now and then. The piece is evocative, if a bit scattered and unsure of itself. She definitely shows good spirits and a jovial world view.

Pangu's Song (1998) is a virtuosic dialog for flute(s) and percussion. Busy flutist Tod Brody makes another strong impression (see Davidovsky, above). *Blue Melody* (1993), for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, is an exercise in heterophony inspired by a group of Chinese women singing together in (blue) funeral attire.

Ms Dong worked with computer music gurus John Chowning and Chris Chafe at Stanford, and *Crossing* (1999-2000) is an extended sample of her work in that area. The piece is in three movements. The first consists of the usual space-age atmospherics (it amazes me that this predictable sort of thing still pours out of electronic music studios). II opens with some quiet electronic drumming, soon interrupted by an attack of Western industrial noise and some suspicious twanging from disembodied electric guitars. Then the "Crossing" occurs—the atmosphere becomes luminously pentatonic, and we hear some disembodied Chinese opera spinning out into space. III opens with what could be a Chinese poem recited by a disembodied male voice in canon with itself. Gongs and metal appear, as does Ms Dong singing "a song she learned as a little girl". The piece evaporates into nothing.

Finally, *Three Voices* (1998) is a trio for xiao (bamboo flute), erhu (Chinese violin), and zheng (Chinese zither), in Western Chinese-influenced academic style. The nine-minute, single-movement work is, like so much on this program, extremely episodic and moves freely from one idea to another without what we might consider "continuity" or "direction", in spite of the numerous "climaxes" that sporadically occur. ("Formally, her music often proceeds one gesture at a time", as Jules Langert's fine notes point out.) This (seemingly?) improvisatory way of working becomes paradoxically predictable after awhile, but there is no question of Ms Dong's skill and professionalism. It remains to be seen what she might give us in the future.

GIMBEL

DONIZETTI: *Ugo, Conte di Parigi*

Tasuharu Nakajima (Ugo), Doina Dimitriu (Bianca), Carmen Giannattasio (Adelia), Dejan Vatchkov (Folco), Sym Tokyurek (Luigi V), Milijana Nikolic (Emma); Donizetti Theatre, Bergamo/ Antonino Fogliani

Dynamic 449 [2CD] 140 minutes

Ugo had the misfortune to be the last of four operas to be premiered in the exceedingly short opera season of Carnival 1831-32 at Milan's La Scala (December 26, 1831 to March 20, 1832). The premiere of Bellini's *Norma* had opened the season and after a contentious opening night almost immediately established itself as an immortal masterpiece and audience favorite. Most of the *Norma* cast (Giuditta Pasta, Giulia Grisi, Domenico Donzelli, and Vincenzo Negrini—all opera superstars) were back to create Donizetti's opera. But by then Pasta would already have sung in *Norma* (34 performances), Rossini's Desdemona (13 performances) and Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* (8), plus rehearsing these and *Ugo*. Even Pasta was feeling the strain and requested Donizetti to tone down the complexities of her role (Bian-

ca) in *Ugo*, which the composer obligingly did. Donizetti had already composed most of the music in Naples, setting each selection as the libretto arrived from its author, the celebrated Felice Romani. It helped a bit that Donizetti, adhering to common practice at the time, recycled bits and pieces of his earlier, not as good, *Francesca di Foix*, *Imelda de' Lambertazzi,* and *Castello di Kenilworth*. On arriving in Milan Donizetti was horrified to find that the Austrian state censors (Austria then ruled the area) had been hard at work on Romani's libretto and were demanding considerable changes. Regicide is never an appropriate subject in a country ruled by a monarchy. But a contract is a contract, and Donizetti followed through with the necessary emendations. When *Ugo* finally opened (March 13) it was a disaster and only lasted five performances. At least Donizetti could recycle some of *Ugo*'s music in later operas. But that's another story. *Ugo* was performed at six other venues, but after the 1846 performances in Lisbon was not heard until 1977 when it was recorded in London by Opera Rara.

The opera's plot is made more complex and confusing than necessary by the censor's demands, but, briefly put: Luigi V (Louis V) has recently become king of France. Folco d'Anjou plans to play the weak king against the forceful and effective soldier Ugo (more recognizable as Hugues Capet, soon to be the first of the Capetian kings of France). But no, Ugo remains loyal to Luigi and will not aid Folco in acquiring the crown for the house of Anjou. Luigi's fiancee, Bianca d'Aquitaine, secretly loves Ugo and despises Luigi. She is horrified to find that her sister Adelia also loves Ugo. Luigi approves a marriage of Adelia and Ugo, whereupon Bianca is so enraged she declares her love for Ugo and demands that he confirm it. Ugo will not, and Luigi is so angered by Ugo's apparent unfaithfulness that he orders him imprisoned. Bianca urges Ugo to lead a revolt against Luigi, but he refuses. Ugo's soldiers revolt without him, but Ugo puts down the revolt and declares his allegiance to Luigi. Luigi frees Ugo and the wedding of Ugo and Adelia proceeds. Folco suggests to Bianca that poison might be a good way to get back at Luigi. Her plot is discovered by Emma, the widowed mother of Luigi, and as Emma summons the guards, Bianca drinks the poison herself, declaring it her revenge and bequeathing her hate and love to those about her.

So it's not the most compelling of stories, but it does have some mighty fine mature, mid-career music. (*L'Elisir d'amore* followed a mere two months later, also in Milan). The frequent duets for the ladies are particularly felicitous, much of them languid, of long flowing lines. Each of the principals gets enough arias to keep them and the audience happy, and if Bianca's finale isn't quite the spectacular showpiece Donizetti wanted, it's an effective sad conclusion to a sad soul's life.

I have not heard the Opera Rara recording, but Desmond Arthur reports it (Nov/Dec 1994) mostly favorably with sopranos Janet Price (Bianca) and Yvonne Kenny (Adelia) as "particular fine", Della Jones (Luigi) "a solid mezzo", but tenor Maurice Arthur "a rather wimpy Ugo". A tiny note only in English in Dynamic's booklet expresses Dynamic's thanks to "the soprano Doina Dimitriu who sang despite a slight illness, making it possible to realize this recording". The lady certainly has nothing to be apologetic about. Perhaps she is not as confident, dramatic, or risk-taking as she would have been if feeling well, but she sings beautifully, with only a hint of strain or tiredness. No problem with Giannattasio or Nikolic; they offer some splendid singing. But what are we to make of Sim Tokyurek (Luigi)? The role was composed for a female mezzo-soprano, but here is sung by a male alto—beautifully sung. He sounds so much like a female mezzo that I was quite taken aback to read that he is a man. Ugo is the title role, but Bianca is the star of the show. She gets all the drama and big duets and tunes, leaving not much for Ugo. Nakajima fills the role very well. He's solid, attractive enough of voice, but nothing special. I suspect he fills the role much like Arthur does for Opera Rara. The Folco of Vatchkov is not very pleasant to the ear. Orchestra and chorus under Fogliani are ship-shape and supportive. In all, it's another good entry in the sweepstakes to record all 72 of Donizetti's operas.

Libretto and notes in Italian and English.

PARSONS

DONOSTIA: *Basque Preludes; Mosaics*

Jordi Maso, p—Naxos 557228—79 minutes

In January/February I said that Ricardo Requejo's boring performances of these pieces emphasized the mediocre technical demands Jose Donostia himself confessed to. What a discovery to have Jordi Maso make music of it all! With the very opening notes, he seems to *announce* the individual style and character of each Prelude and then sustains each phrase in a moving arc with its own integral flow, weaving them together into a whole cloth for each of the 21 Preludes. When the opportunity presents itself, as in the extroverted Prelude 11, he contrasts one style in the right hand with another in the left, giving the music depth and playfulness. With Maso, I only wish that every child (including myself a few years back) had teachers who could instruct them in the art of

how to achieve insight with such technically accessible (with Requejo I used the word "mediocre") material.

The seven additional works presented here are referred to on the cover of Requejo's Claves recording as *Mosaics*, but not in the liner notes. On this Naxos album, the title isn't mentioned at all. So I'm not sure of its authenticity. What counts is that this time the seven of them are anything but boring. Even when the writing is at its most naive, as in the 'Andante for a Basque Sonata', Maso makes exquisitely flowing music out of it by giving its ornamentations an elegant classical era touch. In 'Nostalgia', which is part Debussy, part guitar, and part original voice, he terraces the dynamics with highly effective use of the pedal and startlingly effective use of dynamic contrasts (precisely the opposite of what I wrote about Requejo). The inventive arpeggiated harmonies in 'Heartfelt Prayer' achieve an exquisite treble lilt with Maso's use of rubato, slight retards, and long liquid lines. Requejo made the 'Basque Minuet' stiff, digital, and harsh without any allusion to the dance. Immediately with Maso, because of his sparing use of pedal and maximum use of upturned light inflections, it has as much character as the 'Ascot Gavotte' at its best. The muted, lingering, and highly inventive 'On the Banks of the Ter' has a complete change of mood, touch, and style with an ebb and flow that never dies. The following 'Tiento and Song' continues its harmonic and stylistic base but with a big-voiced Andalusian flair. And finally, Maso turns the 'Homage to Juan Arriaga' into a floating Haydnesque dance—appropriately enough, since Arriaga's music was very much in the style of Haydn.

The engineer gives the piano a full rich sound but with two potential drawbacks. The theatre it was recorded in sounds more like a church that's too big and resonant, but not offensively so. Also, the treble is a bit too bright, especially in loud passages, but it's nothing that can't be tamed with a slight downward twist of the treble knob. In all, neither were drawbacks for me. Maso has made me fall in love with music that I had dismissed just two months ago.

FRENCH

DUKAS: *Piano Pieces*
Tor Espen Aspaas—Simax 1177—72 minutes

The complete piano works of Paul Dukas amount to the four works contained on this recording. As a fastidious craftsman and notoriously harsh self-critic, Dukas was prone to discard all creative efforts that dissatisfied him. His resulting output is relatively small, unless archaeology one day turns up some missing treasures.

The major work here is the Piano Sonata in E-flat minor. It is a behemoth of a piece in four movements, and takes about 45 minutes in performance. Bearing a dedication to Saint-Saens, this is a very serious work that eschews most of the composer's colorful fantasies in favor of muscle and sinew. It cannot be easy to play, and few pianists have been tempted. A recording issued by Chandos several years ago had Margaret Fingerhut offering this same program, and the ever-ready Naxos label has also stepped in with pianist Chantal Stigliani giving her views in constricted sound.

John Ogdon offers a fine reading on EMI but does not include the balance of the piano music. Since collectors will find it convenient to get all four works on one disc, it becomes a choice between Aspaas, Fingerhut, and Stigliani. In the Sonata that becomes an easy decision, as Fingerhut stretches things out to 48 minutes and pushes the button marked "dull" a little too often. Since I have already indicated a major sound problem with Stigliani's ordinary readings, Aspaas wins by default.

Actually, his performances of all four works is without major fault, and the sound is quite good. If nothing convinces me Dukas was totally in his element at the keyboard, the music should present no problems for those accepting of Reger or Busoni. At around 19 minutes The *Variations, Interlude and Finale on a Theme by Rameau* is the second longest work on the program. The baroque style is almost totally eclipsed by the imaginative digressions from the simple minuet theme. It may take a while to fully digest what Dukas had in mind, but the persevering listener will eventually be rewarded. No such problem exists with the brief 'Prelude Elegiaque' or 'La Plainte, au Loin, du Faune', an elegy for his departed friend Claude Debussy.

If the Sonata appeals to you, I recommend you supplement this recording with the rather special reading by John Ogdon, who gets through the piece in 41 minutes without any sacrifice.

BECKER

DUSSEK: *2-Piano Concerto;* see FRANCK

DVORAK: *Cello Concerto;* **IBERT:** *Cello & Winds Concerto*
Jacqueline du Pré; Liverpool Philharmonic/ Charles Groves; Michael Krein Orchestra/ Michael Krein—BBC 4156—55 minutes

Like many of the BBC releases, this one documents a rather special event: a concert at the Royal Albert Hall in 1969 where Du Pré played

the Dvořak Concerto. It is a fine performance. She is in full command of the work, and Groves is right with her despite her massive rubatos. It is not quite my cup of tea, but I admit she does it with great conviction and remarkable accuracy, even when swooping and sliding endlessly. A 43-minute Dvořak Concerto is long for a work that most people get through in about 37, but it is well worth hearing when done with such passion.

The perky little Ibert concerto is an interesting contrast, played with considerable flair in a 1962 studio recording. It makes a good program, since the Dvořak contains so many wind solos that the Ibert fits right in soundwise. The notes are totally convinced that this Dvořak is much better than Du Pré's studio performance on EMI. I haven't heard that and the balances may be better there, but she was at her best in concert, and this is quite impressive. Try it!

D MOORE

DVORAK: *Czech Suite; String Quintet in G*

Ensemble Acht—MDG 603 1259—56 minutes

This is a somewhat puzzling release, for it begins with a modern transcription by Ensemble Acht's clarinetist, Ulf-Guido Schäfer. It is nicely written but seems totally unnecessary when one compares it with Dvořak's original. Ensemble Acht plays it well, and MDG has supplied a spectacular recording. Overall I prefer three or four of the eight other recordings that I have of this delightful music, particularly by the Czech Philharmonic conducted either by Libor Pesek (Virgin) or Vaclav Neumann (Teldec).

Dvořak's wonderful String Quintet adds a double bass to the standard string quartet. It, too, reeks of Czech rhythms and dances. Ensemble Acht offers a creditable performance that lacks just a touch of Czech-ness. (Some passages move a little too quickly for my tastes.) If sound is your primary goal, then this is a good enough performance in spectacular sonics. Each of the five instruments sounded as though it was physically present in my listening room. For almost as good sound in superior performances I would suggest any of the following recordings: Bayer 100184 by the Stamitz Quartet—my favorite—(July/Aug 1993), Lotos 75 by a Czech Quintet that includes Josef Suk as principal violin (Nov/Dec 1999), or Supraphon 1461 played by the Panocha Quartet (Sept/Oct 1993).

The notes are fine.

BAUMAN

DVORAK: *Quartets 11+12*

Panocha Quartet—Camerata 28025—64 minutes

On and on we go. This is at least the third recording of Dvořak's *American Quartet* by the redoubtable Panocha Quartet. The first came in November 1982 on Supraphon 0581 (July/Aug 1991), the second in December 1994, also on Supraphon (Jan/Feb 1997), and this newest in April 2002. There are also about a dozen other recordings by high quality Czech string quartets from the Smetana Quartet onwards. Virtually any of these can be safely recommended, but my own favorites are the Panocha and the Stamitz Quartet, whose recordings on Bayer have an immensely satisfying Czech grit and style. Theirs are my absolute favorites, but the first and second recordings by the Panochas have a wonderful polish to them. This new recording is also good but not quite up to the performance standards of the earlier ones. The same comments apply to Quartet 11.

The recording here is lovely and very natural. It also sounds as though the instruments are in your listening space. The notes are brief but much better than in earlier Japanese issues.

BAUMAN

DVORAK: *Rusalka*

Gabriela Benackova (Rusalka), Eva Randova (Foreign Princess, Jezibaba), Peter Dvorsky (Prince), Yevgenyi Nesterenko (Water Sprite); Vienna Opera/ Vaclav Neumann

Orfeo 638 042 [2CD] 140 minutes

Any recording of *Rusalka* faces the almost perfect competition of Decca 460 568, with super sound, Renée Fleming, Ben Heppner, Eva Urbanova, and Franz Hawlata, conducted by Charles Mackerras (May/June 2000). But this one from Orfeo is not to be rejected outright. It preserves the first ever performance at the Vienna Opera (April 10, 1987) and is a quite winning interpretation. It is sung in Czech by predominantly Czech and Slavic singers, so there is a bit of a strident edge to the voices, except for Nesterenko, who sings beautifully yet like a spirit possessed (he's even better than Hawlata). All seem to be dramatically wrapped up in the story, with a sad sensitivity from Benackova and Dvorsky. Randova curiously doubles as Jezibaba (the Witch) and the Foreign Princess, managing a differentiation of voice for both characters. Neumann conducts the Viennese in a most magical performance.

Trilingual notes and plot synopsis are included, but no libretto.

PARSONS

DVORAK: *Symphony 6; Golden Spinning Wheel*
Czech Philharmonic/ Charles Mackerras
Supraphon 3771—70 minutes

This symphony is wonderful but not one of the best known ones of Dvořak. Even so, I have 16 recordings of it, 7 by the Czech Philharmonic. The other six are by Vaclav Talich (Nov/Dec 1991), Jiri Belohlavek (Jan/Feb 1994), Karel Sejna (Mar/Apr 1996), Karel Ančerl (July/Aug 1994), Vaclav Neumann (Nov/Dec 1987), and Libor Pesek (Jan/Feb 1990). All but Sejna and Talich are in stereo. This new one by Sir Charles is estimable but not the best.

I have great respect for Mackerras, for he studied with Vaclav Talich in the 1950s and generally gives good performances. But somehow this concert performance, while certainly not too quick, has a few repeated touches that seem too brash. It's almost as though he forgot his studies with Talich. The playing of the Czech Philharmonic is superb. They respond very well to every shading and nuance that Mackerras wants. The sound is spacious and well focussed.

In short, this recording has almost everything except the most desirable performance. For that, almost any of the other Czech Philharmonic recordings will do nicely, plus one by Kubelik and the Berlin Philharmonic on DG and Vaclav Smetacek and the Prague Symphony on Praga. The absolute finest are the Kubelik and Belohlavek.

I first fell in love with the *Golden Spinning Wheel* on an old Urania LP conducted by Vaclav Talich. That was a cut performance but it still had all the magic the piece can give. Now the Talich is (was?) on Supraphon but its monaural sound precludes it from first place. I think the finest modern recording is the one on Chandos led by Jiri Belohlavek—followed by the Mackerras.

Good notes round out the issue.

BAUMAN

DVORAK: *Trios 2+4*
Vienna Trio—MDG 342 1262—60 minutes

The first volume of this set was reviewed in January/February. This is typical of many MDG recordings. The sound is very fine, with almost perfect natural sound in my listening room. I can close my eyes and picture the three instruments sitting about 15 feet in front of me. The notes are likewise complete and helpful.

The performances? They are fleet and well played. This young (early 30s) group has rightly been called one of the leading trios active today. But finally I miss the meatier playing of the Borodin Trio (Chandos, Mar/Apr 1994) and the Beaux Arts Trio (Philips, Mar/Apr 1997). Whatever you do, though, don't miss the Smetana Trio in the *Dumky* (Nov/Dec 2000). They are so effortless and natural that they are unbelievable. Their recording is also first class. The first two of these sound more truly Czech, even though neither is. But the Smetana Trio really owns it. Don't misunderstand me: the Vienna Trio is polished, but they don't have the tonal qualities and the style of playing that I prefer. III and IV of Trio 2 are especially interesting, with a light, bouncy rhythm that is quite infectious; but it just doesn't seem right for Dvořak. The same is true in the *Dumky*.

BAUMAN

DVORAK: *Symphony 8;* see BRUCKNER

EISLER: *Violin Sonata*
with sonatas by Roger & Walter
Hagai Shaham, v; Arnon Erez, p
Talent 93—64 minutes

This recording has the title "Viennese Jewish Composers", but I hear nothing overtly Jewish-sounding (liturgical, modal, or reminiscent of music from the Yiddish theatre) in any of the music. There are touches of musical Vienna.

Hanns Eisler (1898-1962) was the son of the philosopher Rudolf Eisler. He studied with Schoenberg and Webern, was close friends with Berthold Brecht, and was a devout socialist. Eisler left Vienna during the Nazi era, and in 1937 he traveled to Spain, Paris, Denmark, and finally America. It was during his year of travel that he wrote his only violin sonata, appropriately subtitled the *Die Reisesonata*. Eisler remained in America until 1948, when he was forced to leave the country because of his participation in the film industry as a communist (he wrote music for some Hollywood films). He moved to East Berlin, where he taught at the German Academy of Music and wrote the music for the GDR national anthem.

This sonata is a strong piece. It does have what might be influence of Schoenberg in some of the textures and voicings, but it decidedly does not employ the 12-tone system (Schoenberg was quite disappointed that Eisler was not interested in that).

After considerable success in Vienna, Kurt Roger (1895-1966) left Vienna for America in 1938. While in Vienna he studied with Schoenberg, and like Eisler he chose not to write in the 12-tone system. Roger had a great deal of success in America and was invited back to Austria in 1948 to lecture on American music at the Salzburg Mozarteum. He wrote his very lush and succulent Violin Sonata in 1944 when he was living in New York. It was given its first performance in 1958 and remains unpublished (which is a shame). For me III, a lush Largo

movement, is the musical high point of the piece. I also like the slightly strange waltz that precedes it and gives the piece an ever-so-slight Viennese touch.

Bruno Walter (1876-1962) did not consider himself a composer, but boy could he write!

He wrote his Violin Sonata (actually called Sonata for Piano and Violin in the manner of Mozart) sometime before 1909, when it had its first performance. There is a bit of Korngold in the piece, something I noticed even before reading in the liner notes that in 1908 Walter lived in an apartment in Vienna directly under the Korngold's apartment. Apparently during much of the year he could hear the nine-year-old Erich improvising at the piano. It is a shame that Erich's father, Julius Korngold, the reviewer for the *Neue Freie Presse*, didn't like Walter's music. Maybe it sounded a bit too familiar to him!

The playing on this recording is great. I haven't been disappointed yet by a recording by Hagai Shaham and Arnon Erez, either by their playing or by the wonderful and unusual music they choose to record.

FINE

ELGAR: *Organ Sonata; Pomp & Circumstance 4;*
STANFORD: *Fantasia & Toccata; Short Preludes & Postludes, Set 2*

Christopher Stokes—Lammas 160—67 minutes

The title for this program of organ works by Elgar and Stanford is *Sounds Romantic*, and that is certainly appropriate, considering not only the character of the music, but the personality of the Manchester Cathedral organ and the apparent affection for this repertory of Christopher Stokes, who has been organist and choirmaster there since 1996.

Elgar did not write a great deal for the organ, but his Sonata in G is a major work by any definition. Few organists are able to bring it off convincingly. Not long ago I reviewed the collected organ works of Elgar performed by John Butt. Reading between the lines of his program notes, one surmises that Butt does not much care for the piece, calling the organ writing "ungrateful", and that comes through in his performance on the organ of King's College, Cambridge (Harmonia Mundi 907281; May/June 2002). Stokes, in contrast, seems completely attuned to the spirit of the music and delivers a performance that is coherent and elegant. *Pomp & Circumstance* March No. 4, of course, is a transcription of the orchestral original. The transcriber is not identified, but Lemare transcribed all five marches, and that seems the likeliest guess. The transcription may be "rather fun", as program annotator Tom Bell says, but as with nearly all such transcriptions, it is at best a pale reflection of the original.

Stanford was a slightly elder contemporary of Elgar. (By the way, the two composers detested each other personally.) He wrote considerably more for the organ than Elgar, including five substantial sonatas late in his career. The Fantasia & Toccata, an earlier work dating from 1894, the year before the Elgar sonata, is probably Stanford's most substantial organ work apart from the sonatas. The second set of Six Short Preludes & Postludes, Opus 105 (1908) shows the composer's closest approximation to the run-of-the-mill British short organ pieces of his day, except that Stanford's quality of inventiveness is several degrees better than his organ-loft contemporaries, making these pieces gems to be treasured. Three of them are based on psalm tunes by Orlando Gibbons, while the concluding Allegro in D minor is probably the best known of Stanford's organ works. Here again, Stokes seems completely at one with the repertory.

The organ of Manchester Cathedral is an appropriate instrument for this music. Like so many English cathedral organs, its history is somewhat checkered. In 1871, Hill & Son built an instrument for the cathedral, and the same firm rebuilt it in 1910. It was revoiced in 1918 by Harrison & Harrison, who restored and enlarged it in 1934. The organ sustained serious damage in an air raid in 1940, but was restored between 1952 and 1957, incorporating what survived of the 1934 pipework. Some high-tech bells and whistles have since been installed. In many ways, it has the quintessential English romantic sound that both composers would have had in mind. The quieter registrations and solo colors are the most exquisite and effective. Full organ seems to be all top and bottom, with very little middle, and without the all-out passion one finds in, say, Cavaillé-Coll at his best. A case of British reserve? The chorus reeds do not integrate themselves with the flue chorus, but seem something of an alien presence. This is shown most dramatically in the Stanford Allegro in D minor. These quibbles should not deter anyone from acquiring this happy combination of repertory, instrument, and artist.

GATENS

ELGAR: *Symphony 2; Introduction & Allegro*

Lyn Fletcher, Ann Lawes, v; Timothy Pooley, va; David Watkin, vc; Halle Orchestra/ Mark Elder
Halle 7507—76 minutes

Elgar's Symphony 2, like many of his major compositions, is an elusive work. It is not at all like Beethoven 5 or 7, which, like a train, convey you on a trip from A to B, enjoying the

scenery on the way in a well-connected succession of intermediate stops, on a precisely established schedule. When the train stops at B, well, you have arrived, you are there, get off.

Far from being self-organizing, progressive, open and direct, Elgar is oblique, discursive, and full of side issues. It is up to the conductor to straighten things out and supply some sense of progression and direction in the performance itself. To the extent that he is able to accomplish this task of organization and presentation, the performance will be effective and convincing. If he fails, it will come across as a jumble of meaningless notes and meandering episodes. Sir John Barbirolli, the Halle's illustrious conductor from 1943 to 1970, was more skilled in this game than anyone else. He had played cello in the LSO under Elgar himself, knew and loved the composer, and conveyed his intent in actual performances unerringly. His recordings usually profit from this organizational talent, and are therefore often unexcelled. This is surely true of Symphony 2 in E-flat, which he recorded for EMI with this very orchestra.

Mark Elder's performance is slower, less intense, more subdued, not as expressive, and far less progressive and clearly organized than Barbirolli's. It is sincere and deeply felt, and it's also well played by the contemporary Halle, but it lacks the logic and sense of forward motion that Barbirolli obtains. The recorded sound is clear, cool, and well balanced; but it's a little more diffused and less sharply focussed than one might wish. It is hard to fault this performance in detail, but it does fail to distinguish between main themes and side issues as well as it should. Indeed, it meanders aimlessly in many instances.

The *Introduction and Allegro* presents a less demanding organizational task. It is conventionally well played and directed by Elder and his Halle players; but, once again, he does not rise to the level of intensity and conviction that Barbirolli attains with the Sinfonia of London in his recording for EMI.

The Florida Orchestra has in its archive a performance of Elgar 2 conducted by Jahja Ling in 2004. The recorded sound is clear, well-balanced, sharply detailed and focussed, with excellent frequency response and dynamic range. It conveys a more forward sonic picture than the Halle recording. Jahja Ling does not achieve the last ounce of swagger and detail, the total logic of progression that Sir John obtains, but he comes close—much closer than Mark Elder. TFO plays splendidly, with sparkling brass, woodwind, and percussion. Someday it may be offered to the public.

MCKELVEY

ELGAR: *Choruses;* see STANFORD
Violin Sonata; see FAURE

FALLA: *La Vida Breve; El Amor Brujo; 7 Spanish Folk Songs; Homenajes; 3-Cornered Hat Dances; Master Peter's Puppet Show; Psyche; Harpsichord Concerto;* **ORBON:** *3 Cantigas Del Rey; Himnus ad Galli Cantum*

Julianne Baird, s; Marta Senn, Cecelia Angell, mz; Fernando de la Mora, t; Rafael Puyana, hpsi; Solistas de Mexico, Simon Bolivar Chorus & Orchestra/ Eduardo Mata

Brilliant 6734 [3CD] 186 minutes

These are budget reissues of some well-received Dorian releases from the early 1990s.

In his enthusiastic review of *La Vida Breve*, Justin Herman wrote that the "conducting, choral singing, and orchestral playing—slightly rough—are supremely idiomatic and light in texture, but the climaxes carry a compelling sense of the tragedy" (Nov/Dec 1994). I agree, though I don't find the orchestral playing particularly rough. In any case, this *Vida Breve* is lively and played on a human and theatrical scale, as opposed to grand opera. Herman's note that the singers sound like their ages and "readily convey their stations in life" is very important in the case of Marta Senn's Salud, who manages to be both passionate and vulnerable, as well as tragic and delicate in her grief-stricken collapse at the end. Herman also mentions the second act dances, "excellently done by Carlos Enrique Iglesias and a full contingent of dancers". Many were improvised. They certainly sound authentic, as does the work of what sounds like a genuine street singer. A great deal of credit must go to the understanding and experienced baton of Mata and the idiomatic and enthusiastic playing of the orchestra. My benchmark is the more operatic EMI set with Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos and Victoria de los Angeles. Frühbeck de Burgos's conducting is darker and warmer, as is the orchestral playing. De los Angeles sings exquisitely, but more like a diva than a heartsick young girl. Any lover of this opera should have both recordings and should probably look for the DG with Teresa Berganza, which I haven't heard.

Mata and his orchestra seem to know every nook and cranny of *El Amor Brujo*. The reading is light and supple and has a real *rightness* in terms of phrasing and pacing. Marta Senn proves quite clever in the way she darkens her voice for this work. Mr Raymond wrote that it "never catches fire" (Nov/Dec 1995). I see his point but like it a lot for the virtues I've mentioned. If you think you might agree with Mr Raymond, the Spanish Overview lists many alternatives (Sept/Oct 2002). The favorite is the Stokowski with a great Philadelphia orchestra.

Stokowski's is on a larger scale and is more electric than Mata, but it's not as inevitable in phrasing. Shirley Verrett sings with earthy energy, but I'm not as comfortable with her in this idiom as I am with Senn. More Gypsyish and full of Spanish color than Stokowski or Mata is Ernest Ansermet's discerning and colorful performance with Marina de Babarian (Decca). I have not heard the Overview's second choice, Maazel with Grace Bumbry. My favorites are Mata and Ansermet, followed by Stokowski.

Marta Senn continues her winning ways with the *Seven Popular Spanish Songs,* performed in the Berio orchestration. Again, she seems able to change her sound to suit each song, with some particularly eerie head tones.

Homenajes is a set of five exquisite, intimate, French-influenced orchestral portraits of composers. This beautifully cultivated suite of miniatures is not to be missed, and this is the only recording I know.

CD 3 was issued in 1996 (May/June). *Master Peter's Puppet Show* is a gem for puppets and hardly just for children. The work is a kind of narrated opera, based on the story of Don Gaferos and Princess Melisendra from *Don Quixote*. The music draws on ancient Spanish tunes, popular modal street songs, French influence, and Stravinsky's *Histoire*. The story is described in the declamatory style of Spanish street-corner storytellers by Master Peter's assistant, Trujaman. The music is full of street pageantry and fanfares, medieval courtly grace, and even a romantic aria. The performance is a fine one, and I really like the way Lourdes Ambriz's Trujaman sounds like a boy soprano. I prefer this recording slightly to Simon Rattle's fine Decca, which is less of a "storyteller". Mr Bauman slightly favored the Pons recording over Mata's. Pons uses a real boy soprano, and Mr Bauman cautioned that some would be uncomfortable with this casting. I haven't heard it but will make it a point to do so.

Falla wrote his Harpsichord Concerto for Wanda Landowska. Mme Landowska may have been disappointed in what turned out to be a chamber piece for six instruments, but the harpsichord dominates because it was written for her own large, full-sounding instrument. There is a lot of Stravinsky in I and III, especially III. II is more religious and medieval in nature and is based on a chant. This is the one performance in this set that is disappointing, particularly in the outer movements, where Puyana's light touch, too-blended textures, and rounded rhythms fail to catch the Stravinskian bite of the piece. The performance works best in the chordal II. Mr Bauman likes this more than I do but prefers Veyron-Lacroix, which I have not heard. The Overview favors Igor Kipnis (Sony), which I have also not heard. John Constable's recording (Decca) gets great sound and catches the edginess of the piece, but is a bit heavy, especially in II. Some of the problems lie with the piece itself—it's a difficult work to bring off.

Psyche is a kind of *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* in Spanish, with frequent use of modal melodies for chamber group and soprano.

Julian Orbon (1925-91) was a Cuban composer born in Spain. He headed the Orbon Conservatory in Havana until the Revolution, when he moved to the National Conservatory in Mexico City before finally settling in New York in 1964. He studied with Aaron Copland, and much of his music was influenced by his mentor. His early style was neoclassicist, but he turned more romantic as his career proceeded. The works in this set are for voice and chamber group and sound nothing like Copland. *Himnus (1956) is a combination of modern, Spanish folk, and medieval organum, with many open parallel harmonies and pure head tone that sometimes recalls timbres in English choral music.* Cantigas (1962-64) is similar but more dance-like and Renaissance in style. Julianne Baird has a boyish voice of remarkable purity that fits the medievalism of these works—and the more French style of Falla's *Psyche*.

Aside from the Harpsichord Concerto, the sound on these recordings is remarkably full and lifelike. The notes are interesting but lack information about Julian Orbon. The supply of librettos varies. *Master Peter* has an English libretto, but *Vida Breve* does not. Not all the performers are listed for CD 3, a problem inherited from the Dorian originals. I would have no idea that Lourdes Ambriz sang Trujaman but for Mr Bauman's persistence in calling Dorian when writing his review. All that aside, this is an outstanding reissue and a convenient collection of Manuel de Falla's works.

HECHT

FARBERMAN: *Re/Collections; Timpani Concerto; Early Hudson Valley Scenes; Concerto for Cathy; Trumpet Concerto*

Jesse Berger, shofar; Gila Harel, v; Anna Elashvil, Rumen Gurov, tpt; Cathy Gerardi, ob; Todd Crow, John Van Buskirk, p; Jonathan Haas, timp; Matthew Beaumont, perc; Sofia Orchestra, Rousse Orchestra/ Harold Farberman

Albany 688—69 minutes

The first track on Albany's latest release of the music of Harold Farberman is basically a concerto for the shofar and a small ensemble. The Jewish Museum in New York City commissioned the piece. A klezmer violin and clarinet are also important. Some of the dramatic ges-

tures are typical, but there are some genuinely original and creative moments in the piece, especially with respect to orchestration. There's a great moment at 3:50 when the solo shofar and at least a dozen more offstage shofars are playing together—quite memorable. I suspect this piece will attract many performances.

The Timpani Concerto gives Jonathan Haas a chance to demonstrate his formidable skills as a timpanist. His performance is intensely expressive and dramatic. Nothing to complain about. Farberman's Double Concerto for single trumpet (or two trumpets) from 1956 shows another side of his vocabulary. This is a pops piece, complete with swing beats, smooth trumpet lines, and glossy orchestration. I feel like shopping at Macy's.

MACDONALD

FAURE: *Violin Sonata 1*
with **FRANCK:** *Violin Sonata*
Lola Bobescu; Jacques Genty, p
Testament 1360—52 minutes

with **ELGAR:** *Violin Sonata*
Elmar Oliveira; Robert Koenig, p
Artek 19—45 minutes

Lola Bobescu is a Romanian who went to study at the Paris Conservatory in the 1930s. She teamed up with another Paris Conservatory graduate in 1945, Jacques Genty, and together they moved to Belgium to teach and give concerts. These recordings date from 1950, after they had been together for five years.

They are unremarkable performances by second-rate musicians. The Franck never attains the level of rapt concentration I consider essential. The Fauré fares a little better, if only because it is an easier work to bring off. Genty remains too far in the background, but this may be a fault of the recording.

Compare Bobescu and Genty's Fauré with Oliveira and Koenig's, and we can hear the potential the score has. I admit this is partly owing to the more advanced recording technology—tone colors are audible here that were rarely heard on records in 1950—but the musicians are also far superior. They are much better at shaping the phrases, injecting drama, and conveying the slow movement's tenderness.

Their Elgar is quite good too, though not up to the level of Daniel Hope's (July/Aug 2001) or Midori's (Jan/Feb 1998). Indeed, the opening sounds a touch perfunctory.

MAGIL

FERRANDINI: *Catone in Utica*
Kobie van Rensburg (Catone), Simone Schneider (Marzia), Johnny Maldonado (Arbace), Robert Crowe (Caesar), Florian Simson (Fulvio), Sandra Moon (Emilia), Neue Hofkapelle, Munich/ Christoph Hammer—Oehms 901 [3CD] 188 min

Anyone exploring the sites and sights of Munich will have visited that Rococo gem, the Cuvilliés-Theater, designed by François Cuvilliés as part of the Munich Residenz palace of the Bavarian Electoral (later Royal) dynasty of the Wittelsbachs. One of the chief treasures among the few surviving baroque theaters and opera houses, and gloriously restored after damage in World War II, it is still in use today. To celebrate the 250th anniversary of its opening on October 12, 1753, it was decided resurrect the very opera that inaugurated the house. And, as performed in that theater in October 2003, here it is.

Giovanni Battista Ferrandini (1710-91) was born in Venice and spent some of his later days in Padua, but the bulk of his career was in Munich, where he died. He was held in high esteem and helped make Munich a great capital of music and opera. He was teacher to members of the very musical Wittelsbach family, and one of his most distinguished pupils was the Elector Max III Joseph. Another of his many vocal students was the tenor Raff, who was to create the title role of Mozart's *Idomeneo*. Little of Ferrandini's music has achieved any latter-day circulation. A 30-minute *Pianto di Maria* ("Giunta l'ora fatal") was long misidentified as a work of Handel, and was thus included in a program of Handel's "Marian Cantatas & Arias" recorded by no less than Anne Sofie von Otter for DG Archiv (439 866; M/A 1995—deleted).

For his 1753 opera, Ferrandini used one of Metastasio's well-established librettos, which had already been set for Munich, in 1736, by one of Ferrandini's predecessors, Pietro Torri (c1650-1737). The libretto is best remembered today in one of Vivaldi's last operas, recorded under Scimone for Erato and currently, in a fuller reconstruction, under Malgoire on Dynamic (403). But in the course of the 18th Century it was set by upwards of 30 composers in all, including Leonardo Leo, Johann Hasse, Carl Heinrich Graun, Niccolo Jommelli, JC Bach, Niccolo Picinni, and Giovanni Paisiello.

Its plot in some ways parallels Handel's *Julius Caesar*, if shifting Caesar's operations westward from Alexandria to Utica in North Africa. Based on historical events, it traces Caesar's mopping up after the murder of his rival Pompey. A remnant of the Senatorial resistance took refuge in Utica under the command of Cato the Younger, a Roman noble of

high moral stature and conservative political outlook. As in Handel's opera, Metastasio has Pompey's widow, Cornelia, on hand as a focus of struggle and vengeance, though under the name of Emilia. A fictional romantic tangle is created between a daughter of Cato, Marzia, in love with Caesar, and an African king (originally Juba, here Arbace). Metastasio used Cato as mouthpiece for a lot of provocative glorification of republican resistance to tyranny—likely to appeal to the Venetian Vivaldi, of course, but strange stuff for one of the great princely courts of Europe. So controversial was Metastasio's libretto, indeed, that the poet produced two endings for it: one honored the historical fact of the defeated Cato's suicide rather than submitting to Caesar; the other, more attuned to baroque theatrical taste, had Cato survive for reconciliation with Caesar. Contrary to what one might expect, Vivaldi chose the latter, happy ending, while Ferrandini used the tragic, anti-autocratic one.

Ferrandini's score is not a great one, but it is full of substantial, even appealing things, and of some interest for its transitional style, moving away from baroque conventions but only partly caught up in German pre-classical sensibilities. (For instance, it has no duets or ensembles, only solo arias.) Skilled in vocal composition, Ferrandini set some truly virtuosic challenges for his singers here, himself stipulating the extensive embellishments to be used.

The international (but heavily American) cast includes no dazzling singers but some quite fine ones. There are two castrato roles, both taken here by countertenors. The one inconsistent member of the cast is the American Crowe: Caesar was written for a soprano castrato, and Crowe is identified here simply as "soprano"—which is to say he is one of today's falsettists who call themselves *sopranista* and push their range up high. Crowe actually has a rather mezzo color, but his problem is that sometimes his fluttery punching out of individual notes in rapid passages becomes a terrible mannerism: his singing of the Act II aria 'Soffre talor del vento' is a veritably unlistenable example of this.

More pleasing is the other countertenor-for-castrato here, Maldonado, a New Yorker of Puerto Rican descent with a slightly feminine-sounding voice but reliable technique. German soprano Schneider has a somewhat dark and heavy voice, rather more mature and matronly in color than one might expect for a lovelorn daughter. She might better have swapped roles with Ohio-born Moon, whose lighter and more deft voice understates the ripe bitterness of Pompey's widow. Of the two tenors, the German Simson has a good basic quality and technique well suited to Caesar's treacherous henchman; he contrasts with the more acidulous Catone of South African Van Rensburg. The latter's is not at all a sensuously pleasing voice, but has the technical security to triumph over the demands of his role—just listen to him bring off the florid 'Si sgomenti alle tue pene' in Act I! All of the singers bring to their portrayals the rich dramatic engagement that on-stage performance will elicit, but Van Rensburg particularly responds to theatrical possibilities: his Act II confrontation with Caesar crackles with dramatic excitement, and a parallel scene in Act III is not far behind.

Christoph Hammer has developed a fine period-instrument orchestra and leads it with color and vitality. I would question a few of his textual decisions. There are cuts, especially in the recitatives, a few of which are replaced with speech rather than singing. Compression of a few arias is pardonable, but Hammer does not explain why he has relocated an aria for Emilia and given it instead to Marzia. There are gaps in the surviving score, and Hammer fills them in dubious ways. A missing "battle sinfonia" in Act III is replaced with a piece from a much later opera (of 1775, by Antonio Tozzi). And since the final chorus and a concluding ballet is lost, Hammer has replaced it with the slow movement from a symphony by Ferrandini's patron (and builder of the Cuvilliés-Theater), Elector Max III Joseph himself—attractive musically, but very much a letdown dramatically. Still, Hammer is admirably honest about these diddlings.

All in all, this is a rewarding and interesting release. It brings back to life a composer who should not be entirely forgotten. It widens our access to the vast range of settings of librettos by Metastasio. And it offers valuable insight into the operatic world of 18th Century Munich that, 28 years after the Ferrandini premiere, would generate Mozart's *Idomeneo*.

BARKER

FINZI: *Clarinet Concerto;* see Collections

FIRSOVA: *Forest Walks; Earthly Life; Before the Thunderstorm*
Ekaterina Kichigina, s; Moscow Studio for New Music/ Igor Dronov—Megadisc 7816—59 min

"Up out of an evil clinging pool I grew, whispering like a reed, breathing the forbidden life passionately, languidly, and tenderly." The line from Osip Mandelstam, the Russian poet who died in Stalin's Gulag Archipelago, fits Elena Firsova (b. 1950) like a glove. She was a student of Edison Denisov and came of age as a composer in the Brezhnev administration and was denounced along with Denisov and Sofia Gubaidulina in a famous 1979 meeting of the

Soviet Composers Union. She neither compromised her art nor emigrated from the Soviet Union (she left for England only after the USSR dissolved), and the three Mandelstam cantatas on this record document the beauty and integrity of her passionate, languid, tender whispers against the oppressive doctrines of so-called socialist realism.

Her pre-emigration musical language in *Forest Walks* and *Earthly Life* is intensely dissonant but quiet; tissue-thin wisps of melody and dark harmonies suggest a Mahlerian vastness, but with the coloristic sensibility of Takemitsu. Suggestions of tonality bubble to the surface just when there are no more authorities to be pleased, in the post-Soviet (1994) *Before the Thunderstorm*, intensifying the flavor of Mahler but in the uniquely modern context of the chamber orchestra.

The Studio for New Music Moscow turns in a superb and sensitive performance that beautifully sets Kichigina's sparkling jewel of a soprano.

QUINN

FORTEA: *Guitar Pieces*

Agustin Maruri—EMEC 062—71 minutes

Daniel Fortea (1878-1953) was a student of Tarrega and one of the most important guitarists in Spain in the first half of the 20th Century. He performed all over the country and was one of the most influential guitar instructors in Madrid (Regino Sainz de la Maza was one of his students). He was a colleague of the great guitarists of the day, including Segovia, Llobet, and Pujol (the booklet includes a wonderful picture of the four of them, with the young Segovia doing his best to adopt the posture of the long-hair intellectual, complete with pince-nez).

As this recording demonstrates, Fortea was also a prolific composer. His compositions are very similar to Tarrega's, showing an accomplished mastery of what one could call the Spanish salon style. There are some imaginative textures here and there, and the melodies are direct and well-shaped; the harmonies and forms are pretty predictable, though. The recording's "authenticity" is heightened by the fact that Agustin Marruri—the very fine guitarist here—plays on Fortea's own 1928 Domingo Esteso instrument.

Considering the primarily historical interest of the record, I wish they had done a better job with the booklet. The pictures are wonderful, but the English translation of the text borders on unreadable. The Spanish original is fine, though, and includes much more information than the garbled English summary.

RINGS

FRACKENPOHL: *Brass Quintets 2+5; Pops Suites 4+5; Carolina Trio; arrangements*

Carolina Brass—Summit 406—69 minutes

Arthur Frackenpohl (b 1924) taught at SUNY Potsdam from 1949 to 1985. While his biographical sketch says that he has "over 400 published instrumental and vocal compositions and arrangements to his credit", it seems safe to say that he is best known in the brass world, where it is likely that every college-trained musician has played something with his name on it. As shown by Brass Quintets 2 and 5, his original works are witty, toss brief melodic fragments around, and show harmonic influences of Hindemith.

The rest of this program consists of arrangements of considerable imagination and skill. *Carolina Trio*, commissioned by Carolina Brass, is a setting of 'Carolina in the Morning', James Johnson's 'Charleston', and 'Dinah' (the last including some fine singing by the brass players). Pops Suite 4 offers 'Carolina Brass Rag', 'NC Blues', and 'Guilford March'; while Pops Suite 5 includes 'Moonlight March', a terrific reworking of Beethoven's sonata. Also included are settings of Joplin's 'Maple Leaf Rag', a quirky Poulenc Waltz, 'Under the Double Eagle' March, 'St Louis Blues', a medley of 'Colonial Sketches', and 'Puttin' on the Ritz'.

The recorded sound has trumpets quite direct and everyone else quite indirect. Still, the performances by Carolina Brass are excellent. Its members are trumpeters Timothy Hudson and Don Eagle, horn player Bob Campbell, trombonist David Wulfeck, tuba player Matt Ransom, and percussionist John Beck.

KILPATRICK

FRANCK: *Symphony;* **DUSSEK:** *2-Piano Concerto*

Frantisek Maxian, Jan Panenka, p; Czech Philharmonic/ John Barbirolli

Supraphon 3779—71 minutes

The Franck symphony (recorded in 1963 as an LP) does not display Barbirolli or the orchestra favorably. It is tentative, episodic, and poorly integrated. The orchestra seems not to be in touch with the conductor's ideas at some points; and there is no firm, deliberate progression in the first movement, which comes across instead as a series of unrelated episodes. II and III are somewhat better, but not in any sense inspired. The final climax is marred by a curious spastic hesitation at the end, which quite spoils its effectiveness. My affection for JB is well documented, but this is surely about his worst recorded performance.

Jan Ladislav Dussek (1760-1812) was, like his contemporary Beethoven, a piano virtuoso

as well as a prolific composer. He wrote almost exclusively for the piano, composing, along with other works, 29 piano sonatas and a dozen concertos. The notes observe that the B-flat Two-piano Concerto was completed in 1806, at about the same time as Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto. It would be satisfying to report that it is a work of comparable stature, but it is not. It is instead a virtuoso piece full of busy and difficult hurdles for the two soloists, but with little of the depth of feeling and imposing musical architecture of the Beethoven. It is of course interesting to hear Frantisek Maxian and his student Jan Panenka cope with its formidable challenges without apparent strain, but it isn't otherwise a work that would invite repeated hearings. Barbirolli, an experienced accompanist, is in much better form here than in the Franck and fashions a fine reading of a score that is not imposing musically. Unlike the Franck, which is recorded in excellent stereo, the Dussek is monaural. The sound is actually well balanced, detailed, and quite satisfactory in frequency response and dynamic range, but does not sonically separate the two pianos and creates the impression of a single super-pianistic event.

The Dussek concerto is the more attractive item here, and this is the only recording listed in current US catalogs.

MCKELVEY

FRANCK: *Violin Sonata;* see FAURE & Collections

FRESCOBALDI: *Harpsichord Pieces*
Aapo Hakkinen—Alba 178—75 minutes

with **COUPERIN, L:** *Suites in D & E minor, Passacaille in G minor, Pavane in F-sharp minor*
Gustav Leonhardt—Alpha 26—62 minutes

Two releases including some of the most important works by the first great keyboard virtuoso of the baroque, Girolamo Frescobaldi. Häkkinen's release reminds me very much of one by Pierre Hantaï for Astrée (July/Aug 1997). The harpsichord (modeled after Italian design) is pitched quite low (A = 349 Hz) and has quite a reverberant tone. His playing has finesse and virtuosic flair—no surprise, since his biography lists Bob van Asperen and Hantaï as his teachers. I sense the latter's influence in Häkkinen's performance of the fiendish *Cento Partite* and the ninth toccata from Book 2. To his credit, he also has a sensitive, lyrical side, which he shows off in his poignant performance of the intabulation of Arcadelt's 'Ancidetemi Pur'—the only one that's really impressed me since I heard Colin Tilney's account on Dorian (Sept/Oct 1991). Häkkinen offers a great cross-section of Frescobaldi's best known works—hardly any ephemera here. In short, this release is important for the music it presents as well as for the artist's own considerable gifts. I predict we will hear much more from him.

I haven't heard a new recording from Leonhardt in some time. He has always impressed me with his almost supernatural control of the instrument and the penetrating sobriety of his interpretations. Listening to his new release of Frescobaldi and Couperin, my initial impression was that he's become more intimate in his mid-70s. Then I compared his performance of the F-sharp-minor Pavane with one from 1980 (German Harmonia Mundi 77058); the two performances aren't much different. The instruments he plays (one by Skowroneck, one by Jobin) sound lighter, more delicate. Alpha's engineering is crystalline. But Leonhardt also plays with a lighter, more arpeggiated style in the little Couperin suites in D and E minor, and there's an easy, almost ingratiating virtuosity in the Frescobaldi toccatas (2 and 8 from Book I, No. 7 from Book 2); for the rest—canzonas and other contrapuntal pieces—Leonhardt demonstrates once more his unbelievable control over articulation, which is so essential for good performances of polyphonic music. I look forward to more from this legendary harpsichordist.

HASKINS

GERSHWIN: *American in Paris; 3 Famous Tunes;*
BONNEAU: *A Frenchman in New York*
Paris Light Symphonic Orchestra/ Paul Bonneau
Bella Musica 31.2380—43 minutes

Based on the evidence presented here, Paul Bonneau (1918-95) was a capable if not always inspired interpreter of Gershwin's music, a clever arranger, and a horrible composer. His unexpectedly witty and charming medley of 'Fascinating Rhythm', 'The Man I Love', and 'Someone to Watch Over Me' (with a tantalizing hint of *Rhapsody in Blue* thrown in for good measure) would be a delightful addition to any pops concert. It also offers Bonneau a welcome opportunity to show off the virtuosity and beauty of his fine Paris ensemble—especially its lush strings and personable winds.

Gershwin's familiar tone poem, *An American in Paris,* gets off to a most promising start,

owing to the confidence and swagger of the rhythm in the opening bars and the wistful, nostalgic oboe and English horn solos around 3:30. Unfortunately, the trumpeter hams up his big blues number unashamedly, sounding for all the world like a refugee from a second-rate 1940s big band. Perhaps embarrassed by this tasteless outburst, Bonneau refuses to allow the strings to soar (as Bernstein does so memorably) in the episode that follows. The rest of the performance is ordinary—even cautious—where it needs to be bold and bracing.

Even more disappointing, though, is Bonneau's 1949 "tribute" to Gershwin, titled *A Frenchman in New York*. It is described in the poorly-translated booklet essay—quite appropriately as it turns out—as "a marter-piece (sic) of some 20 minutes, in a symphonic jazz style, for 101 musicians and a 4-mixed-voice choir". Bonneau's themes are inane and cloying. He repeats them endlessly with little, if any variation. His attempt to write a bluesy trumpet melody falls embarrassingly flat. Gershwin's orchestration of *An American in Paris* has been criticized as clumsy and overwritten, but it's a model of transparency and color next to Bonneau's heavy-handed and utterly unremarkable effort.

The recorded sound, by contrast, is stunning—alive, vibrant, and vividly detailed. I assumed that this was a new digital recording; only after reading the booklet did I realize that these recordings were made in 1968! (That also explains the short playing time, as this program was no doubt originally intended for release on LP.) If this is an example of the kind of sound restoration that's being done in France these days, the entire musical world needs to begin paying attention to the work of these wizardly technicians.

GODELL

GERSHWIN: *Preludes; Rhapsody in Blue; American in Paris; Lullaby; Songs*

Vesko Eschkenazy, v; Ludmil Angelov, p; more
Pentatone 5186 021 [SACD] 72 minutes

Gershwin's works can take almost anything arrangers throw at them, so these violin-and-piano transcriptions do not fail to please. *An American in Paris* (an elaboration of an unfinished Heifetz arrangement) is slimmed down in length as well: it clocks in at just over five minutes. *Rhapsody in Blue* is about twice that length, with clarinet and cello joining the duo. *Lullaby* omits the piano and completes the composer's string quartet setting, and some songs include a few additional instrumentalists from the Concertgebouw Orchestra. But the one piece Gershwin composed for violin and piano, 'Short Story', is not included.

The performers sound like they are having fun, and listeners will find that spirit contagious. Bob Zimmerman's transcriptions are clever but not pretentious, and Pentatone's engineers make it all sound lifelike and natural. Five-channel playback keeps the players up front, with natural ambience in the surrounds.

KOLDYS

GERSHWIN: *Transcriptions*

Eric Himy, p—Centaur 2705—73 minutes

This is a strange issue, and one that at first appears redundant. Seven of the nine tracks are arrangements by Earl Wild, who has recorded them himself with considerable success. The *Rhapsody in Blue* and *American in Paris* are transcriptions made by Himy. The latter is more of a paraphrase than a direct transcription. This is also true of all the Wild arrangements.

Eric Himy, who has his own web site, is a young pianist who has garnered many awards and has performed extensively in the US and abroad. His Ravel recording has been favorably reviewed in ARG (Jan/Feb 2003) and according to Earl Wild (quoted on the web site) he "plays my Gershwin transcriptions with great flair and style!" It's true. Apart from Wild's own performances (Chesky), Himy makes an excellent understudy and has no need to hide his head in shame. The technique, the interpretive flair, and the joy of recreativity are all there.

Himy's own take on *American in Paris* uses Gershwin's original as its point of departure. He tightens things up a little and gets through the piece in just under 11 minutes. The *Rhapsody in Blue*, on the other hand, takes over 17 minutes and restores 88 bars to this solo piano version "...that you will have never heard before!" Before jumping up and down for joy on discovering some hitherto uncharted Gershwin, it is only fair to warn the listener that much of this new territory is sequences that add nothing but length to the piece. The ramshackle sprawling structure needs to be contained. Himy does especially well with the composer's harmonic clashes and whips up a spicy stew for us to digest.

BECKER

GILLIS: *Symphony 4; Piano Concerto 2*

Sinfonia Varsovia/ Ian Hobson
Albany 729—65 minutes

Frivolity is not joy. Real joy is a serious business.

— Donald R Vroon

Surely there was not a serious bone in Don Gillis's body. The patented hoedowns of the

Dance Symphony and *Shindig*, the exhilarating snare drum fusillades and whooping horns that are Gillis's calling cards, the rhythms that resound from every corner of Americana, from bread-basket to Broadway—all this is frivolity writ large, and there's nothing else like it anywhere in American music, or at least nothing that stuffy Academe would dare admit. Yet there is also, running all through Gillis's music, a vein of richly soulful reflection—passages of great poignancy and affection for the America Gillis loved so much. We hear it in the evocative 'Prairie Sunset' from his *Portrait of a Frontier Town*, the 'Prayer and Hymn for a Solemn Occasion' from the *Star-Spangled Symphony* (Mar/Apr 2004) that immortalizes the men and women who gave their lives in defense of our nation's freedom. Perhaps Gillis did approach the joyous events in American life in frivolous manner—in a sense, we could say music tumbled out of him as unabashedly as it did for Mendelssohn (our Editor's frame of reference)—yet no one loved the wondrous vista that is America as much as Don Gillis, and there is no more heartfelt tribute to those intrepid, yet hopeful souls who ventured across the vast prairie in search of a future they could call their own than Gillis's symphony *The Pioneers* set forth so treasurably here.

Gillis himself tells us almost nothing about his Fourth Symphony, dating from around the time he began working with Arturo Toscanini at NBC. We know he started to write it in 1943, yet set it aside, unfinished, until the premiere of his Fifth Symphony, honoring musicians slain in the War. That experience gave him the impetus to rewrite the Fourth and copy out the parts. But he found it hard to stay with any one project for very long; he interrupted work on the string parts of the Fifth to begin the Sixth, then set *it* aside for his celebrated *Symphony 5-1/2* (a favorite of Toscanini's), and so the Fourth lay forgotten until his widow Barbara Gillis brought it to the attention of Ian Hobson, who at once saw to completing the orchestral parts and led the premiere performance for this recording.

The title *The Pioneers* is a clear indication of the composer's affection for the trailblazers who settled our land—in the words of annotator Ray Bono, "decent, salt-of-the-earth folk trusting in themselves, their families and the Good Book" who saw in the great untraveled expanse of a young nation a manifest destiny. In the first movement, pastoral writing for the winds alternates with terse outbursts from brass and percussion that cannot sway the pioneers from their resolute forward stride, a determined and measured trek that summons images of ox-drawn covered wagons laboriously making their way West. Nostalgic strings give way to a hymn that wells up in the horns, sounding fleetingly like 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot'; and though the music often has a restless, unsettled quality, the hymn quietly returns to close out the scene.

Much of the II paints an expansive vista, the vast unknown that stretches to the horizon and beyond; yet there is a sudden change of mood, a great march that bursts forth in brass and snare drum and then subsides before the soothing strings restore calm. But it took more than just spunk to settle the West, it also took "high-spirited carousing" (the notes); and in the boisterous finale Gillis is in his element, first setting a rather aggressive theme in the strings against some highfalutin winds and then launching into an exhilarating train ride across the open countryside much like *Amarillo* and *Land of Wheat*, chugging rhythms and insistent snare drum spurring everyone on while the cars sway recklessly from side to side. I wonder if the designation "with energy and drive" calls for more sheer manic abandon than we hear in the opening pages; still, Hobson leads a good sturdy account, and his bemused affection for that wonderfully pixilated train ride is conveyed both to the expert Polish players and the delighted listener.

We heard Gillis's First Piano Concerto on the initial installment from Albany (Jan/Feb 2001); that brief example, *Encore*—he later lamented that some felt it wasn't nearly brief enough (!)—was soon set aside, all thoughts of the Great American Concerto abandoned until ten years later when he was stirred by a commission from the Flint (MI) Junior Symphony to write a new work. But after working with the best and brightest for three years at Interlochen, Gillis may have set his standards too high: the Flint orchestra couldn't manage the new concerto and it lay forgotten until NBC pianist Joseph Kahn, who gave the premiere of the *Encore* Concerto, performed it with the Grand Prairie (TX) Symphony with Gillis himself on the podium.

This too is a much more serious affair than one might expect. The honky-tonk flavor of the earlier concerto is entirely absent, replaced in the opening pages by a great chorale in the brass—a hymn perhaps—that flows through the orchestra and in turn informs the solemn, even reverent entry of the soloist. The soloist waxes eloquent at some length, the elegiac mood supported by the horns and reinforced by the sonorous chimes. Rachmaninoff with just a whiff of Gershwin. The middle movement is a waltz, yet quite unlike anything from Johann Strauss—Dohnanyi, perhaps—and the piano is often called upon to imitate a zither. Midway through there's a sudden change of pace, a brisk bluesy rhythm in the manner of

Gershwin; but the waltz has the last word. If *The Pioneers* closes out with a cross-country train ride, then in the exuberant finale we can imagine a carnival breezing into town, with all manner of acrobats and tumblers jostling for attention. Here Gillis himself serves as barker, playing the crowd, exhorting them to "Step right up, step right up, ladies and gentlemen"—but the audience easily gets its money's worth and a good time is had by all. Right into the middle of all this hoo-hah Gillis unexpectedly insinuates a sultry *Habañera*-style episode that turns into a great clatter of bongos and trombone slides—*Carmen* meets the *Latin-American Symphonette*—before with a piercing whistle the carnival troupe gets it all together for one last flourish. I pulled down my tape of the Grand Prairie premiere, and Joseph Kahn really gives it all he's got; but Hobson brings a wealth of buoyant rhythm and catchy tune-spinning to this music, and the Poles are clearly having a ball. Frivolous, joyous, or what you will: the music of Don Gillis is very special.

HALLER

GLASS: *Reflections*
Cello Octet Conjunto Iberico/ Elias Arizcuren
Etcetera 1258—57 minutes

Oh, my! Just under an hour of Philip Glass arranged with loving care by Arizcuren and Niko Ravenstijn for an orchestra of cellos. Oompah, oompah, doodledee doodledee, waah, waah! Sorry, couldn't stay awake!

D MOORE

GLASS: *Symphonies 2+3*
Bournemouth Symphony/ Marin Alsop
Naxos 559202—67 minutes

Music from Undertow
Orange Mountain 16—46 minutes

I have always believed that it's difficult to understand and appreciate classical music in the absence of multiple recordings. This lack has affected Philip Glass's music in particular, since he wrote much of it for a specialized ensemble of amplified winds, keyboards, and voice. Up to now, he hasn't allowed other musicians to perform these works. But his recent forays into conventional symphonic and chamber music have resulted in a body of works that are often performed by other ensembles. So far as I know, the Naxos release of his second and third symphonies marks the first time the works have been recorded without his professional supervision: long-time Glass artists Michael Riesman and Kurt Munkacsi produced the only other recordings of these works on Nonesuch (Sept/Oct 1998 & 2000).

Here is a chance to experience a more conventional recording of these works with a different orchestra and conductor. The Bournemouth Symphony sounds a little less polished than the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra or the Vienna Radio Symphony on Nonesuch; but the conductor, Marin Alsop, has a good sense of these pieces, and the orchestra delivers the goods with a lot of enthusiasm. I disagree with her somewhat plodding approach to Symphony 3 (especially III), but in 2 Alsop and the Bournemouth offer a reasonable alternative to the Viennese. I takes on an effective, menacing quality midway through that tempers the movement's overall mood of elegiac grandeur. II seems more plaintive, more lyrical. And in III the orchestra's somewhat raw sound projects the music's raucous good humor quite nicely. Even the quizzical end of III—a sudden ending on an unexpected unison B—makes good sense, possibly owing to Alsop's approach to the phrasing. More and more, I think Glass's second is the best of his seven symphonies, so it's good to have a fresh perspective on it.

Undertow is a film about a widower and his two sons whose lives are altered by the sudden appearance of the man's older brother, an ex-convict. As part of his preparation for composing the film's soundtrack, Glass visited the set in rural Georgia. The soundtrack's 15 cues have a striking orchestration that includes strings, percussion, children's chorus, and a rather unlikely didgeridoo, all led by Michael Riesman with his usual perfection. Glass's music seems more transparent than usual, reminding me of the simplicity of his chilling score for the thriller *Secret Window*. Two tracks, 'The Argument' and 'Running Away', contain more dissonance than Glass's usual fare; the rest probably works best in its original context as a dramatic accompaniment. Recommended for Glass completists and students of his film music.

HASKINS

GLAZOUNOV: *Violin Concerto;*
see KHACHATURIAN

GOLOVIN: *Plain Songs; Elegy; Music for Strings; Distant Past*
Natalia Burnasheva, s; Mikhail Svetlov, b; Alexander Rubin, vc; New Moscow Chamber Orchestra/ Igor Zhukov—Melodiya 10 00853—75 minutes

Andrei Golovin is a Russian composer and pianist born in 1950. His music is tonal, melodic, backwards-looking, infused with Slavic melancholy. The first movement of his Music for Strings is marked 'Con tristezza', but this marking would be appropriate for almost everything on this program of mostly slow

movements, not one of them faster than a slow moderato.

Golovin's muse is happiest in song-like music, so it's no wonder he's included a cantata—really a 40-minute cycle of eight songs (each given a separate track)—for mezzo-soprano, bass, piano, and chamber orchestra. This is titled, somewhat disingenuously, *Plain Songs*, based on poems by the Russian poet N. Rubtsov. They are straightforward (that is, "plain") in their melodic appeal and lovely harmonies, but nuanced and delicate in their instrumental details and emotions. The music is touching and memorable from beginning to end, its wonderfully imaginative scorings trembling with pantheistic awe at the limitless beauty of the natural world. I wish I could tell you more about the specific poetic associations of this most poetic of cantatas but, alas, the texts are printed in Russian only. I kept asking myself, "Where are the sur-caps?" Perhaps the composer will read my review and send me a translation in care of ARG. Spasibo, Andrei.

Golovin's 6-minute Elegy for Solo Cello (the same performance was on Boheme 308272—Mar/Apr 2004, p 193) is autumnal, nostalgic, and like all his music, built of lovingly shaped melodic phrases. *Distant Past* is an elegy also, in all but name, this for solo piano. Its spare, wide-spaced intertwined themes and plangent harmonies over a steady heartbeat pulse are so beautiful the music makes you ache, and, like Arvo Pärt's *For Alina*, it seems to exist in a timeless realm of pure loveliness, conveying far more emotional import than its short duration would seem to make possible.

Music for Strings, an arrangement of a string quartet, is the only work that failed to hold me. This triptych of three long, consecutive spans of unrelieved and unvaried dirge just didn't have the same magic, sounding more like background music to the final shots of a tragic film as the camera pans over the forlorn graveyard and up to the mournful, cloud-heavy sky. Half an hour of this goes from sorrowful to lugubrious. Fans of Gorecki's Third, on the other hand, will like it better.

The two solo pieces are wonderfully well done, and the singers are very good indeed; the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, though good enough, isn't quite as secure, playing with rather more feeling than polished tonal luster. Sonics are very good—best in the solo pieces.

Music lovers who can't find this Melodiya release through their favorite import sources can write to the Boris Tchaikovsky Society, Valovaja, 8/18-47, 115054 Moscow. It's worth the effort.

LEHMAN

GOOSSENS: *4 Sketches; 3 Pictures; 5 Impressions of a Holiday; Suite; Pastorale et Arlequinade*

Susan Milan, fl; London Chamber Music Group
Chandos 10259—69 minutes

Eugene Goossens (1893-1962) is a fascinating figure. He earned his fame in the United States as the conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony from 1931 to 1947. During this tenure, he developed a reputation as both a champion of new works and an exceptional leader of colossal concerts with massive orchestras and choruses. He left Cincinnati for Sydney, where he later found himself entangled in scandal, perhaps one of the reasons his career came to a semi-halt. Goossens was also a prolific composer, earning a contract with Chester to publish his works shortly after WW I. His conducting career started when he organized concerts dedicated to new music (he conducted the English premiere of *Le Sacre*), a short-lived venture that quickly drove him into bankruptcy but helped establish his reputation.

His music, especially the early works heard on this recording, shows the indelible influence of Debussy and other French composers. Long, languid melodies unfold, balanced by lush harmony and a slowly shifting sense of color. But this is not mere imitation; Goossens developed his own sense of balance and harmony, especially in *Three Pictures,* a later work heard here.

This is a delightful recording. Susan Milan and the London Chamber Music Group play with fine balance and close attention to the constant shift of color and dynamic. Milan's beautiful tone—sometimes powerful, sometimes delicate—is exactly what this dapper music needs. Anyone looking for exciting changes from the usual chamber music fare will enjoy this.

CHAFFEE

GOULD: *Birchfield Gallery;* see SIBELIUS

GRAUPNER: *Overture in F; Trio in C minor; Sinfonia in F*

Nova Stravaganza/ Siegbert Rampe
MDG 341 1252—55 minutes

I reviewed Volume I of Graupner's orchestral music performed by this same group (Jan/Feb 2003), and almost all of my comments then can be applied here. Graupner was a minor German composer who lived from 1683 to 1760, almost the same years as JS Bach and Telemann. His orchestral writing is a bit quirkier, almost as though he was of the same mind-set as Zelenka. The Overture is the longest and most interesting work here. His scoring is very imaginative and will attract anyone who likes the baroque style.

The performances are outstanding. The group Nova Stravaganza uses period instruments and plays them brilliantly. The recording is superb, and, while sometimes awkwardly translated, the annotations are detailed.

BAUMAN

GRIEG: *Lyric Pieces, sel*
Heidi Kommerell, fp—MDG 6041271—58:27

Why should any pianist choose to perform these pieces on a fortepiano built in 1829? They were all written several decades later, and Grieg performed his compositions on a modern Steinway.

That is a paragraph in the notes, and after listening to this I still have no answer. It's not ugly; it's a pleasant sound. But why? I suspect the only real reason is to pick up some business from people who are taken in by the fad of "period instruments". Never mind that this instrument is a lot older than the composer and that he never played it or anything like it, so it is not of his period at all.

Don't be taken in.

VROON

GRIEG: *Piano Concerto; Piano Sonata; Notturno*
James Dick, Texas Festival Orchestra/ JoAnn Falletta—Round Top 11—52 minutes

If your interest is in the concerto, look elsewhere. This is a distended, earthbound reading that tries to milk every drop of sentimentality from the score, but instead robs the music of its nobility and spirit. James Dick produces a lovely tone, but that only accentuates the undernourished, rough sound of the smallish orchestra. A few audible fluffs from both soloist and ensemble do not help. Recommendation: Andsnes (or other choices in Jan/Feb 2004).

Grieg's Piano Sonata sounds more Lisztian than Norwegian; Mr Dick does better here but still does not give full rein to the music's virtuosic elements. (Compare Steen-Nokleberg on Naxos 550881 or Pletnev—July/Aug 2000.) The *Notturno* is lovely.

Sonics in the concerto are natural, but too distant; in the solo works the piano is much closer and sounds at least twice as loud.

KOLDYS

GUBAIDULINA; *Rejoice; Offertorium*
Oleg Kagan, v; Natalia Gutman, vc; Ministry of Culture Orchestra/ Gennady Rozhdestvensky
Live Classics 111—60 minutes

The fans of violinist Oleg Kagan may rejoice at this latest, the 31st offering in the Edition. He was indeed a remarkable performer, as was his wife Natalia Gutman. Hearing them play this odd music of Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931) with its insistent, moody dissonances and sound effects mingled with meditative beauties demands a bit from the listener. These are particularly fine performances.

Rejoice is a huge half-hour duo for violin and cello, performed in Helsinki in 1989, Kagan's last year of performances. One would not guess that he was ill; this is a technically assured and emotionally moving performance recorded well. Then we have a violin concerto, based on and around the tune Frederick the Great offered to Bach for his Musical Offering. Although Offertorium was written for Gidon Kremer, Kagan gave its first performance in 1982 (this one). Both of these works have been recorded by Kremer and by Oleg Krysa. These readings do not supplant those, but if you haven't tried it before, there is a certain intensity here that offers even greater follow-through in this rather ambiguously-shaped music.

Offertorium suffers somewhat from volume twiddle, but the orchestra isn't written to sound like an orchestra, and the effects are massive enough to blow you away, even when scaled back. If you like Gubaidulina or Kagan, you'll appreciate this.

D MOORE

GUNNING: *Piano Concerto; Storm; Symphony 1*
Olga Dudnik, p; Slovak Radio Symphony/ Christopher Gunning—Albany 686—66 minutes

Here are three very recent orchestral pieces by Christopher Gunning, an English composer born in 1944 who's devoted much of his time to writing for films and television. Given Gunning's accomplished musicianship and easily approachable language, thrilling performances by pianist Olga Dudnik and the Slovak Radio Symphony led by the composer, and Albany's vivid, voluptuous sonics, this will serve as an admirable introduction to his concert music.

Things start off swimmingly with the three-movement Piano Concerto, scored with lucid, almost Mozartean clarity and elegance. I spins itself out from the opening idea, a fluid clarinet arabesque, and nicely sustains a mood that's half playful and half bittersweet. Notice with what limpid, unforced naturalness Gunning elaborates his long-lined tendrils and silvery piano flourishes, especially in the movement's endearing and lovingly expressive antiphony of motive and echo.

II is mistier, a modern-impressionist nocturne of the sort that Gunning's teacher Richard Rodney Bennett so excels at. This movement persuasively evokes the washes of shrouded but luminous colors of "Waves Breaking Against the Wind", the glowing William Turner canvas reproduced on the

cover. (And, by the way, anyone who responds to Gunning's concerto should certainly seek out the grander and more powerful one by Bennett himself, available on an import, Decca 470371, and played with magisterial aplomb by Stephen Kovacevich.)

Gunning's concerto is splendidly topped off by a moto perpetuo finale where rapid, harmoniously diatonic scales fleetly ripple under and over a stately, expansive, soaring melody. The effect is at once fresh, invigorating, and majestic.

Storm is a 12-minute pictorial tone-poem, its quiet opening and conclusion enclosing a tempestuous (but never angular or acerbic) middle. The avatar here is no doubt the storm in Britten's *Peter Grimes*. Gunning's First Symphony is in one long (25-minute) movement, and is the most varied piece of the three, employing jazzy-sounding riffs and rhythms for climactic sections, sometimes achieving a relaxed, verdant lyricism, but eventuating in a welling-up into a dreamy but sonorous orchestral concord. The Symphony is less persuasive in its more eclectic mix of materials and large-scale structural layout, but still quite pleasurable to listen to. But Gunning's Piano Concerto is an unqualified delight and the compelling reason to get this.

LEHMAN

HANDEL, D: *Orpheus Left His Heart; Orpheus Oracle;* **SAMUEL:** *Remembering Orpheus; Hyacinth from Apollo; Requiem for Survivors*

Oronoque Trio; Masala Quartet; Suzanne Handel, hp; Wataru Sato, sax; Matthew DiBattista, t; C Braxton Ballew, db; Stuart Gerber, Brady Harrison, perc; Stacy Simpson, tpt; José Mangual, trb; Cincinnati Philharmonia/ Gerhard Samuel, Jindong Cai

Vienna Modern Masters 3046—73 minutes

More pieces on the Orpheus legend, from two composers associated with the College-Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati. The American Darrell Handel (b. 1933) contributes two pieces; *Orpheus Oracle* is an arrangement of *Orpheus Left His Heart* for piano trio. Each is a quiet, atmospheric work saturated with a three-note motive associated with the harp (Orpheus's own instrument, of course) in the orchestral version, which is essentially a one-movement harp concerto. This presents interesting challenges in the arrangement, naturally, and Handel rises to the challenge nicely.

His German-American colleague Gerhard Samuel (b 1924) contributes a single-movement, nondescript saxophone concerto (*Remembering Orpheus*), a long orchestral song or short solo cantata (*Hyacinth from Apollo*), and the oldest and most interesting piece, the *Requiem for Survivors* of 1974, a quietly intense 20-minute meditation on the opening of the Lacrimosa of the Mozart Requiem.

QUINN

HANDEL: *Arias*

Sarah Connolly, mz; Symphony of Harmony & Invention/ Harry Christophers

Coro 16025—63:38

with *Royal Fireworks Music; Due Cori Concertos (3)*

Ann Murray, mz; Age of Enlightenment, English Chamber Orchestra/ Charles Mackerras

Novalis 150.705 [2CD] 148 minutes

While there are certainly some good Handelian sopranos out there (Renée Fleming just crashing the gates!), we are particularly blessed with a large and growing crop of superlative Handel mezzos these days. These two releases show off one established example of the species against one of the newer ones.

The veteran, Ann Murray, is represented in a very strange double-disc release from Novalis. There is no logical reason to combine two utterly different Handel programs into one album. The leaflet it contains offers only a tiny squib on the *RFM*, with no data or information at all. But the Murray is very clearly the program of 12 Italian opera arias previously released by Forlane (16738), recorded in 1994, and reviewed by Mr Loomis (M/A 1996).

I quite agree with his cordial comments, and I am delighted anew by Murray's art in this very welcome reissue. Hers is not a large voice, and in hindsight one can now perceive, in the selections here that require some bravura fireworks, a degree of straining whose effects have since run their course. In her 2000 recorded performance in Munich of the complete *Ariodante* (Farao 108 030, below), one can recognize how much the voice has spread and become wobbly—the control weakened—in the intervening six years. Listen to the two arias from that opera in this recital program. Indeed, such problems were already evident in 1997, when Murray sang the title role in *Serse* in Munich (Farao 108 010): compare the three excerpts from that opera here with the forced and even squalling counterparts recorded just three years later. (Of course, in fairness, Murray was under much more stress in Munich, trying to project in a large auditorium, and against conductor Ivor Bolton's rather fast tempos, by comparison with the more relaxed studio conditions here.)

But it is in this program that we can remember her as a Handelian at her best. Hers is a voice of warmth and expressive subtlety. For example, taking one of Cleopatra's arias from *Giulio Cesare*, 'Piangero', she wrenches our

heart with a picture of terror and grief. Her mastery of inflections and her command of intelligent embellishment constantly impress in the 12 selections. And in Mackerras she had a sympathetic supporter.

Sarah Connolly is an alumna of The Sixteen who has moved on to a lively solo career in recent years, with triumphs around the world in operatic roles, Handelian and otherwise, while her recorded appearances have been in music of Vivaldi, Rameau, and Bach. So it is as a seasoned artist that she comes to us in this carefully chosen showcase of Handel excerpts, called *Heroes and Heroines*.

The program is designed to present artfully crafted vignettes of character and mood, from two Italian operas, *Alcina* and *Ariodante*, and from two English oratorios, *Hercules* and *Solomon*. There are eight arias (three with preceding recitatives), and in five instances Christophers inserts sinfonias from the source works (the longest is the famous Entry of the Queen of Sheba). In a hardly crowded disc, they simply waste space that should have been devoted to more arias.

As it happens, all five of the Italian arias Connolly sings are also in Murray's program, so one can compare. Both are superb artists, but Connolly has a larger, stronger, darker voice than Murray's, and she can stride through Ruggiero's forceful arias from *Alcina* with more confidence—though both are very moving in 'Verdi prati'. Connolly opposes Murray's projection of youthful joy with a more powerful vitality in 'Doppo notte' from *Ariodante*, but each has her own eloquence in 'Scherza infida': Murray is heartbreaking in her unfolding of anguish and pain, Connolly more broadly probes depths of tragedy. I should hate to miss either.

It is in the English items, however, that Connolly achieves her most striking results. In Sheba's air 'Will the sun forget to streak' she imparts layers of introspection and meaning that go beyond the usual image of this superficial character. And, in two segments from *Hercules*, especially Dejanira's mad scene, she is simply chilling. I simply cannot understand why opera companies and recording bosses have not by now recognized *Hercules* as one of Handel's truly great English operas, and given it as much treatment as the other one—*Semele*—has had. Dejanira is a role mezzos ought to kill for!

So, this Connolly program joins Murray's in a place of honor among so many fine Handel aria programs. And it makes you appreciate Handel the more when you realize how much his arias attract and challenge both singers and listeners, as vehicles as much for dramatic expression as for virtuosic display. Christophers offers predictably enthusiastic period-style backing.

That leaves us with the other half of the Novalis set. This is not to be confused with an old Handel LP from Angel, involving the London Symphony and offering only the *RFM* (though in its original form for winds) and the first of the double concertos. This generous disc has actually been issued already by Novalis as 150102. It contains the full-orchestra form of the *RFM*, even adding an alternate version of the Overture, in a rendition that meets the best standards in this familiar music. The three concertos with double wind bands are not recorded enough, so Mackerras's full rendition of them is welcome. He is a bit stolid, by comparison with the lean and deft Leppard (Philips) or the fruity period style of Pinnock (Archiv), but there is a nice flow and elegance to the work of this well-practiced Handelian, and the playing is lovely.

For all its quirks, I urge you to get this Novalis set while it lasts. The Murray program is just too treasurable to be consigned to oblivion, even though, in this format, it comes without any texts or translations. And if you like you can do as I plan: move the discs to separate jewel boxes so you can file them in separate places on your Handel shelves.

BARKER

HANDEL: *German Arias (9)*;
TELEMANN: *Quartets in G+E minor*
Dorothea Röschmann, s; Berlin Academy
Harmonia Mundi 901689—78:36

In the 1720s Handel made settings of nine spiritual poems by Barthold Heinrich Brockes, an amateur poet and old schoolmate in Halle, whose Passion text he had already set in full. These nine short German poems (apparently his last settings of the German language) reflect a kind of spiritual pantheism of distinct Enlightenment character that must have struck chords in the composer, but exactly why Handel set them is really not known. He did not compose them all at once, and he never meant them to be a cycle or set. They filtered their way into German anthologies over many years, brought together for latter-day circulation only in 1921. They are cast in typical *da capo* form, scored for soprano voice with melody instrument (no particular one specified) and basso continuo. Without a blush, Handel wove into a number of these arias music that already had appeared in some of his operas—and, over in Germany, who would know?

Though these arias stand apart as curiosities in Handel's output, they have attracted a number of singers over the years. I have six recordings of LP vintage, including the likes of

Emma Kirkby and Edith Mathis, and I know of five more on CD; there may well be more I have missed. Elisabeth Speiser made two different recordings of the set, one each for LP and CD. I am not sure if even the CD predecessors are still in print, though you might find floating about the two leading representatives: Arleen Augér on the Berlin label (9050; J/A 1996) and Anna Monoyios for Capriccio (10 767; N/D 1998).

Now we have the acclaimed new German star soprano Röschmann, who delivers a very strong challenge to the aforementioned ladies. Monoyios has a light and flexible voice, whereas Augér (recorded in her prime in 1980) has a fuller, riper, more mature sound—though Mr Loomis had some reservations about her singing. There is certainly great richness in Röschmann's voice, along with darker qualities she can draw out. Röschmann follows Augér and Monoyios in the introduction of *da capo* embellishments—though the Capriccio players, period instrumentalists all, add a dimension by embellishing on their own. But the key is that, while her predecessors sound rather cool and detached in their treatment of each aria, Röschmann responds to the texts individually, bringing their meaning alive in vividly varied inflection, coloring, and spirit.

Most recordings of these arias add additional material, usually by Handel. (The Berlin release, issued as a posthumous tribute two years after Augér's premature death in 1993, lacks such supplements, though it does include texts and translations, which Capriccio does not!) Here, the arias are divided into two blocs, alternated with two of the Quartets for mixed ensembles taken from the First and Third Productions of Telemann's much recorded *Tafelmusik*. They are familiar and amiable pieces, played with style here. Nevertheless, the instrumental work surprises me. I am used to the Berlin Academy's period-instrument playing as intense and driving. Here the eight musicians involved give more thoughtful but also darker readings than one usually gets in these pieces. Their moody playing also contributes to the meatier quality of Röschmann's treatment of the arias.

Altogether, then, a very rewarding and stimulating release. If you have never heard the German Arias before, this is a wonderful way to discover them. Full texts and translations, with fine notes.

BARKER

A culture is doomed if it does not produce stubborn non-conformists.

HANDEL: *Lotario*

Sara Mingardo (Lotario), Simone Kermes (Adelaide), Sonia Prina (Matilde), Hilary Summers (Idelberto), Steve Davislim (Berengario), Vito Priante (Clodomiro), Il Complesso Barocco/ Alan Curtis

German Harmonia Mundi 58797 [2CD] 156:39

Oreste

Mary-Ellen Nesi (Oreste), Maria Mitsopoulou (Ermione), Mata Katsuli (Ifigenia), Nicholas Spanos (Filotete), Antonis Koroneos (Pilade), Petros Magoulas (Toante), Camerata Stuttgart/ George Petrou—MDG 6091273 [2CD] 155:30

Ariodante

Ann Murray (Ariodante), Joan Rodgers (Ginevra), Julie Kaufmann (Dalinda), Christopher Robson (Polinesso), Paul Nilon (Lurcanio), Umberto Chiumno (Rè), James Anderson (Odoardo), Bavarian Opera/ Ivor Bolton—Farao 108 030 [3CD] 180:38

Serse

Anne Sofie von Otter (Serse), Elizabeth Norberg-Schulz (Romilda), Sandrine Piau (Atalanta), Silvia Tro Santafé (Amastre), Lawrence Zazzo (Arsamene), Giovanni Furlanetto (Ariodate), Antonio Abete (Elviro), Les Arts Florissants/ William Christie—Virgin 45711 [3CD] 165 min

Deidamia

Simone Kermes (Deidamia), Dominique Labelle (Nerea), Anna Bonitatibus (Ulisses), Anna Maria Panzarella (Achilles), Furio Zanasi (Fenice), Antonio Abete (Licomede), Il Complesso Barocco/ Alan Curtis—Virgin 45669 [3CD] 180:46

If anything should demonstrate the very real surge of attention to Handel's Italian operas these days, it is such a deluge of new releases as this one just dropped on us. (And, by the way, I list them in order of first-production dates: 1729, 1734, 1734, 1738, 1741.)

Amid the splatters, one might also detect one of those portentous rolls of drums and flourishes of trumpets. For *Lotario* is the very last of Handel's operas to be recorded—a landmark in discographic annals. To those rolls and flourishes might be added a triangle's tinkle for the launching of a new sub-category.

Since Alan Curtis has captained both the capstone release and the latest recording of Handel's last-composed opera, let us consider those two more or less together.

Lotario and his *Partenope* represented Handel's new operas for the first season (1729-30) of his newly-organized Royal Academy of Music, the one an old-fashioned heroic drama, the other a racy love-tangle with comic overtones. Both were failures with the London public, whose perspectives had been jolted by the new triumph of John Gay's satiric *Beggar's Opera*. *Lotario* had the burden of a shopworn

libretto involving the overworked theme of love and lust among the medieval Lombards: its plot echoed what Handel had already worked over in *Flavio* (1723) and *Rodelinda* (1725), the latter's title character all but cloned in the new opera's long-suffering Adelaide; the character of Lotario himself (a German monarch rushing to Italy to claim his rightful bride) was really the historical Emperor Otto I—the parallel exploits of his grandson Otto III had been depicted in *Ottone* (1723). The failure of *Lotario* with its opening-run public doomed the score to almost total obscurity thereafter, despite the fact that it offers some sharply drawn characters in a lot of very effective and lovely music.

By contrast, *Deidamia* shows Handel still experimenting in the very last Italian opera he composed before he concluded that his future lay with the new genre of English oratorio. It treats rather casually a minor incident in the mythology surrounding the Trojan War. Because of a prediction that Achilles would die if he joined the Greek campaign against Troy, he had been sent, disguised as a girl, to the court of Lycomedes (Licomede), King of Skyros, where the latter's daughter had fallen in love with him (and would later bear him his son, Neoptolemus). Since the Greeks have been told they cannot win the war without Achilles, Odysseus (Ulisses) goes to Skyros and tricks the young hero into revealing his true identity. Since most of the characters are of a light-hearted nature, the prevailing mood of the opera is cheerful, making all the more contrast with the darker music of the unhappy Deidamia herself.

Alan Curtis is by now a seasoned champion of Handel's operas and the guiding spirit of a number of their recordings, using the vocal and instrumental forces of his Complesso Barocco. His period-instrument players give a good approximation of how Handel and his crack pit band must have sounded, and he has assembled some really impressive casts for *Deidamia* (recorded in Siena in July 2002) and *Lotario* (recorded in Ravello in June 2004 in connection with that year's Göttingen Festival). Clearly dominating both of these recordings is Simone Kermes. She has already caught my attention as star of Curtis's recent Handel confection, *La Maga Abbandonata* (German Harmonia Mundi 95644: S/O 2004). In these two recordings, her clear voice and intense singing bring to life the anguish of the suffering heroines, the captive Adelaide and the cruelly deceived Deidamia. I'd love to hear now what she could do with the title role in *Rodelinda*.

Her two sets of partners are fully worthy of her. In *Lotario*, Mingardo brings her rich contralto voice to the title role: but the character is so stolid, gullible, and uninteresting—he gets to express directly his love for Adelaide at the very end in their only duet—that there is not much she can make of him. On the other hand, the passionately bitter and vindictive Matilde is revealed here as one of Handel truly extraordinary creations—a veritable show-stealer. Prina's lean voice is almost too thin to be commanding, but its very astringency conveys the desperation of ageing, and she delivers a genuinely compelling portrayal. The role of the waffling Idelberto was composed for a female contralto, and Summers sings beautifully, though—such are the ironies of vocal typings nowadays—her voice at first suggests one of the finer young countertenors. The Australian Davislim is sturdy as the ambitious Berengario, pointing up what Handel was willing to venture with the then-unfashionable tenor voice in a major role, in the wake of his *Tamerlano* (1724).

Whereas Curtis delivers the recorded premiere of *Lotario*, in *Deidamia* he has the competition of a predecessor: one of John Ostendorf's last and best Handel opera recordings, released by Albany (460, 3CD; never submitted for review). Conducted by Rudolph Palmer, it has a cast of fine singers who, nevertheless, are outshone by Curtis's team. The point is most clearly made in the title role: Julianne Baird does some of her meatiest singing but just does not convey the passion and intensity that Kermes brings to Deidamia.

This opera has the recurrent castrato problem. Giovanni Andreoni of that tribe was Handel's original Ulisses. Both our recordings respond with female mezzo-sopranos. These invest the great Homeric hero with a disconcertingly feminine color: Palmer's Brenda Harris has a slightly darker quality than Bonitatibus here, but Bonitatibus offers more flair; together with her handsome singing, that would probably have pleased Handel's audiences. (It's Ulisses, after all, not the preppie Achilles, who gets to sing the final duet with Deidamia!) To stress the great youth of Achilles, Handel cast him with a female soprano who specialized in comic parts. For Palmer the admirable D'Anna Fortunato applies a darker mezzo quality in an effort to invest the punk super-hero with some degree of seriousness, but Curtis's Panzarella conveys a girlish quality that Handel surely intended—after all, Achilles was disguised as a girl at the time. Rounding out this soprano-heavy female roster is the role of Nerea, whose sensual character is meant to contrast with Deidamia's more urgent tone. For Palmer, Maire O'Brian sings admirably, but Labelle brings so much more nuance and inflection to her singing here, while her warm

and creamy voice achieves particularly well a vocal and personality contrast with the keener-toned Kermes. In the two low-voiced male roles, Palmer's John Cheek does make a more pompous Licomede than the nevertheless deft Abete, but Peter Castaldi cannot match the suavity of Zanasi as Fenice (Phoinix), Ulisses' pleasure-seeking sidekick. In all, Palmer's cast just does not make coherent personalities out of their characters the way Curtis's singers do. And, while intelligent and with some good ideas on details, Palmer's direction lacks the broader, more shapely pacing of Curtis.

Unlike some Handel exponents, Curtis is quite frank and up-front about the performing scores he has prepared. He clarifies the choices he has made among variant numbers for the role of Nerea in *Deidamia* and ventures small (very well-advised) trimmings in an aria and in the final duet, while filling in himself a couple of missing instrumental flourishes. (Palmer, by contrast, does not make such cuts, but he drops a recitative and aria for Deidamia in Act I.) Of more concern is Curtis's decision (entirely for commercial rather than artistic concerns) to make the opera fit onto two discs rather than risk spilling onto a third. This was done by some cutting of recitatives, by reducing the *da capo* reprises in two arias and a duet, and by reducing a number of other arias to their opening (or "A") sections. Such very cautious abbreviation does not do great damage to either the score or the drama—some would argue that it improves it!—though it does leave us with a slightly less than "complete" recording, strictly speaking. (This policy also deprives us of some of the expert embellishments Curtis draws from his singers, particularly notable in *Deidamia*.) It would be nice to have the score absolutely complete, with a third disc's extra space used for more music.

When we turn to *Ariodante*, of course, we are dealing with one of Handel's major operas, familiar through a number of recordings. This one has, in fact, been around for a couple of years and is only now available for review. Made in January 2000, it is the second release by the German Farao label of a Handel opera recorded in actual performance in Munich under the baton of Ivor Bolton. It contains the complete score, save for a slight trimming of the ballet movements that end each act. Its star, in the castrato title role, is Ann Murray, a singer I have long admired, and one celebrated for her Handel, both on the concert and the operatic stage. Unfortunately, by the time she could record this role in full, her voice had become rather shopworn, losing its former warmth. She manages her way through the *fioratura* demands, but the strain tells as the opera progresses. Still, her genuine stylistic feeling survives, in powerful dramatic outpouring. Just how much better she could do in her prime, a mere six years earlier, can be heard in a reissue of Handel arias discussed above.

Of the other singers, Joan Rodgers is the standout for her deeply felt and beautifully sung Ginevra (another of Handel's long-suffering ladies). But the others are capable in their roles, save for Robson, whose woolly countertenor is a needless substitution for the female contralto voice that Handel used for the villainous Polinesso. In all, this is a recording we should be content to have were there no others. But, of four earlier recordings three are still around, and all offer superior musical value.

The most recent (1997) captures a public performance—concert, not theatrical—a little shy of the full dramatic tension of Bolton's performance. Released by DG Archiv (457 271, 3CD; J/A 2000) it is a rich period-style rendition led by Mark Minkowski with a superlative cast, headed by Anne Sofie von Otter as Ariodante, Lynne Dawson as Ginevra, and Ewa Podles as Polinesso. Captured just two years before, in conjunction with the 1995 Göttingen Festival, was another fine period-instrument recording, issued by Harmonia Mundi (907146, 3CD; J/A 1996). With Lorraine Hunt as Ariodante and Jennifer Lane as Polinesso, Juliana Gondek and Lisa Saffer do particularly well in contrasting the characters of Ginevra and Dalinda. Conductor Christopher McGegan prefers a leaner, crisper sound; and space is found to add five variant numbers (three vocal, two dance) for Act II—rarities not available elsewhere. And there is the remarkable 1978 recording led by Raymond Leppard, first issued on LP by Philips, then reissued on CD by MHS (534426; J/F 1998) and lately by Philips (473 955), both on three discs but the latter without libretto. This glowing modern-instrument performance offers the superlative Janet Baker as Ariodante, with Edith Mathis playing Ginevra against Norma Burrowes's Dalinda; the only blemish is the weak James Bowman as the ill-advised countertenor substitute for Polinesso; but Samuel Ramey blows away any competitor as the King of Scotland. Against these choices, Bolton and Murray really have no chance.

Still higher up in present-day standing among Handel's operas is, of course, the quasi-comic *Serse* (Xerxes). The more curious, then, that recordings have had such tenuous histories. Of seven earlier recordings I can trace, only one seems to be officially available now—the earliest and least worthy: a 1962 concert recording in Milan (with Alva, Freni, Cossotto, Panerai, etc.) under Piero Ballugi, a

brutally truncated and totally unstylish travesty that should not have been revived. Still floating about on either the Verona (270312) or Orfeo (476983) labels may be another heavily cut and turgid relic of 1962, led by Kubelik and with only Fritz Wunderlich as the tenorized Serse to give it much interest. A miscalculated Polish recording from Koch is mercifully deleted.

That leaves in uncertain status three 3-CD sets. One of them is the earlier of Ivor Bolton's Munich Handel productions, recorded in-house in 1997. Ann Murray appears in earlier, somewhat better estate than in 2000, with Yvonne Kenny joining in the best levels of work; Kaufmann and the hapless Robson are also on hand. Least competitive among latter-day recordings, its current circulation on the Farao label (108010) is unclear. Apparently on the way out is the CD reissue of the 1979 studio recording for Sony (36941) under Jean-Claude Malgoire, as may also be the case with another from 1997, one more Göttingen by-product under Nicholas McGegan, issued by Conifer (51312; S/O 1999) both with period instruments, and both 3CD. But lurking in undeserved limbo is the pioneering recording of 1965, made for Westminster under Brian Priestman with a cast of full-throated singers. That should be revived.

This newest recording thus has a clear field at entry, even though its ringing merits would put it at the head of any list. Having moved from French Baroque masters through Purcell to Handel, William Christie has apparently committed himself to continuing exploration of these Italian operas. This recording was made in public performances in Paris in November 2003 (photos suggest a charming staging). The direction is suave but with the propulsion of actual stage theatrics. While some better individual portrayals might be found elsewhere, this cast is as even and satisfying as any.

A pair of strange gender-bending conventions haunts the roles of Serse and his brother Arsamene. The former was written for a mezzo-soprano castrato (Caffarelli): experiments with tenor substitutes (e.g., Alva, Wunderlich) have been disastrous. Eschewing (mercifully?) the possibilities of a countertenor replacement, all recordings otherwise have cast Serse with a mezzo-soprano or contralto. Judith Malafronte was a thoroughly convincing choice by McGegan, much lighter than the very weighty Maureen Forrester for Priestman; but Malgoire's Carolyn Watkinson has been my favorite, at least until Von Otter, who is simply irresistible—lovely singing, compelling serio-comic acting. Arsamene was written for a contralto (Marchesini) who specialized in *travesti* roles. Kubelik and the Polish recording honored that choice, as did the wise Priestman (with Maureen Lehane); while Bellugi perversely used a baritone (Rolando Panerai). All other recordings have resorted to the arbitrary and totally unnecessary substitution of a countertenor. Bolton's Robson was the weakest case in point, and Malgoire's Esswood was not too much better; McGegan's Brian Asawa shows that a countertenor can make a highly convincing and artistic thing out of the role; Zazzo comes close as another countertenor with a genuinely attractive voice.

Against the light-voiced Romildas of Malgoire's Lucia Popp and Malgoire's Barbara Hendricks, Norberg-Schulz here joins Bolton's Kenny and McGegan's Jennifer Smith as character-portrayers of some substance, all with full-bodied voices that suggest a strong personality. Of all the singers to represent Atalanta, I have to say that Piau here gives the best impression of a scheming coquette. As the disguised Amastre, I think I still prefer Priestman's Mildred Miller in vocal terms, though the rather edgy-voiced Santafé does conjure up a very urgent lover indeed. The role of Ariodate does not demand much, and Furlanetti is just fine among his fellows. But the comic servant Elviro is one of the most fascinating elements in this work, a bridge between such comic types in 17th Century Venetian opera and Mozart's Leporello. Priestman's Owen Brannigan has not been surpassed in the role, though McGegan's David Thomas came close; if not effacing their memory, Abete here certainly has, and offers, a lot of fun in the part.

Even if any or all of the older recordings float back on the scene—somebody, please, give us Priestman!—Christie's new recording must now take critical first-place for this opera. It wins on points, and for Von Otter it is not to be missed.

Well-informed Handelians will know that *Oreste* is not an original opera by the composer. It is, instead, a *pasticcio*, that is, a score created from bits and pieces of other, pre-existing works. The genre was quite readily accepted by both performers and public in Handel's day. For his series of opera companies he was not only composer but also impresario, and when time pressed on him he took the short cut of assembling such ephemeral confections, held together through some pragmatically adjusted libretto. The interesting thing about *Oreste*, however, is that the music is entirely Handel's, and that he himself devised it—one of three.

Handel's use of the King's Theater Haymarket ended with his productions of the first of his "Ariosto Trilogy", *Orlando,* in January 1733—and then *Arianna in Creta* in January 1734. In financial constraints, and with his company moved into the new Covent Garden

Theater, Handel revived *Arianna* in November 1734, while readying what were to be his next great achievements—the remainder of the "Ariosto Trilogy"—in the following year: *Ariodante* in January 1735 and *Alcina* in April. For something quick in between, and unable to produce something original, Handel and his team worked over a libretto by a Roman author, Giovanni Gualberto Barlocci, that dated back to 1723. Its recitative texts were salvaged, if in reduced form, along with six aria texts that could be fitted to existing Handel arias. For the rest, aria texts were adapted or written anew to fit other Handel arias. For the arias, Handel turned to his scores for *Rodrigo* (1707), *Agrippina* (1709), *Radamisto* (1720), *Floridante* (1721), *Ottone* (1723), *Tamerlano* (1724), *Riccardo Primo* (1727), *Siroe* (1728), *Lotario* (1729), and *Sosarme* (1732), and pillaged away. The overture was adapted from an Italian cantata of 1707; dance numbers came from *Terpsichore* (1734) and *Arianna in Creta*, the latter also contributing the final chorus. His only new music was for the recitatives (including a few *accompagnato* passages) and a couple of new dance movements. (He took care to include in this pastiche the contributions of Marie Sallé's dance troupe, then in his company, soon to be used in the two new operas of 1735.)

All of this sounds specious to us, if not downright silly. But, in the perspectives of the day it was perfectly plausible. The result is, after all, a full opera with a coherent plot and a score that is, without question, music by Handel. As such, it is predictably satisfying and even enjoyable.

The plot, from Barlocci's libretto, is actually a forerunner to Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, based on the Euripides play, *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Extra-mythological elements are added: Hermione, the wife of Orestes, follows the tormented matricide to Tauris, so that rescuing her takes over much of the action, overshadowing Iphigenia's efforts on Orestes's behalf; and Iphigenia herself is given a lover, Filotete (Philoctetes), a turncoat officer of the Taurian king.

This performance, though recorded in Germany, is essentially a product of Athens, Greece, demonstrating that early-music enterprise has taken root even there. Though the string players are all German, the three woodwind players and the theorbo player are Greek, as are the singers. They are all really quite good: bright, young voices used with precision, clarity, and good feeling for the vocal style. It is welcome news that the Greek countertenor Aris Christofelis has a student who is so much better than his unbearable teacher: Spanos is another of the new breed whose voice is really quite attractive. Yet his presence here is another case of arbitrary imposition: the role of Filotete was written for a *travesti* female contralto, not a castrato. But the standout singer in the cast is Nesi, who handles the heroic role of Oreste with fine flair. The instrumental work is highly accomplished, and this is a quite attractive recording. My only quibble is with the booklet: its inadequate matching of numbers to tracks is not convenient, and there is no systematic listing of the source for each of the score's components. Otherwise, things are fine.

The realm of Handel pastiches has already been opened to us in the Naxos recordings of two of John Christopher Smith's creation of posthumous "new" oratorios out of pieces of Handel's real ones (M/J 2003; N/D 2004). While the present litter of recordings brings us the final original opera of Handel to come to records, at the same time it opens access to Handel's self-pastiches. He concocted two more of them: *Alessandro Severo* (1738) and *Giove in Argo*. Perhaps soon we will have them, too, allowing the triangle's tinkle this time to end in a brave cymbal crash.

BARKER

HANDEL: *Messiah*

Judith Raskin, Florence Kopleff, Richard Lewis, Thomas Paul; Robert Shaw Chorale & Orchestra/ Robert Shaw—RCA 62317 [2CD] 149 minutes

I find myself so often crying out for the reissue of fine recordings of the past that have been cruelly dropped from circulation, so it is gratifying when at least one of my cravings is satisfied.

For years I have been calling for RCA to revive the first recording that Robert Shaw made of *Messiah*, in 1966. His second recording, made in 1983 for Telarc (80093), was burdened by a conservative approach, with inconsistent soloists and a generally bloodless spirit. By contrast, the 1966 recording showed Shaw open to fresh perspectives and critical thinking as well as at a higher level of artistic perception. Using Handel's original scoring, Shaw was one of the conductors of the day who was willing to bypass the old Prout sequence and explore some of the variant numbers, deciding essentially to follow what Handel used in his own revival of 1752. The 1966 solo lineup was solid and reliable, with discreet use of embellishments; and his forces were of reasonable Handelian proportions. The interpretation overall was reverent but not stuffy, and altogether musical.

And so, here it is again, at last. Listening to it anew, I am more impressed than ever with the fine shaping, vitality, and flow that Shaw brought to the choral sections. He applied

what old-timers will recognize readily: a hand-picked choir drilled into beautifully rounded tone with matchless discipline, utter clarity of parts, and lucid (quite American) diction—a sound that once was Shaw's trademark. The sonics are rather dry and tight, lacking the depth and spaciousness you might find in some other recordings. The performance lacks the excitement of, say, the Solti recording (London 414 396); but it is a more responsible treatment, one that invites repeated listening. I continue to give my first choice, among comparable competitors, to the slightly more buoyant (and more British) Mackerras recording (also of 1966) for EMI (69449); and I also encourage investigation of another RCA release, under Richard Westenberg (63317). But, now that it is restored to us, I can renew more confidently my endorsement of this first Shaw recording as among the best available "compromise" treatments (Handel's scoring and scale, modern instruments, balance of artistic and stylistic values).

The notes are inadequate, but the full text is supplied.

BARKER

HANDEL: *Violin Sonatas;* **BACH:** *Chaconne*

Alfredo Campoli; George Malcolm, hpsi
Testament 1358—75 minutes

Alfredo Campoli (1906-91) had an extremely sweet singing violin voice. His father was a violinist and his mother a singer. Campoli and his parents moved to London in 1912, and he made his living by playing various kinds of music, including "light music". He led a salon orchestra, an old fashioned waltz orchestra, and even a "marimba tango orchestra". He also performed with Carl Flesch and Joseph Szigeti and had a tremendous career as a soloist.

There is a complete lack of tension in Campoli's playing. He plays a modernized violin with the kind of flexibility and buoyancy that is sometimes achieved only by the best baroque violinists. He plays with a glorious and very natural sounding vocal vibrato and gives a rhythmic lilt to his phrases. He also has an extremely large dynamic range and superimposes dynamics on these pieces very tastefully. Sometimes the musical color is a bit odd, as in III of the E-major Sonata, but some of the choices these musicians made were a result of the times and unusual harpsichord stops.

In 1953 when Campoli and Malcolm made these recordings the HIP movement was in its very early stages, but his natural approach to Handel would be enlightening to any musician, especially people devoted to the study of baroque performance.

Campoli plays the Bach Chaconne quite slowly, and he arpeggiates the chords clearly. He allows everything to sing and takes lots of time to smell the daisies (and all sorts of other flowers) that he finds on his way. His is one of the most enjoyable Bach Chaconnes I have heard because it sounds so easy for him to play, and his expression is so heartfelt. He never forces anything and he lets the most glorious sounds come out of his violin.

FINE

HARBISON: *Quartet 4;* see Collections

HARTMANN, JE: *Symphonies 1-4*

Concerto Copenhagen/ Lars Ulrik Mortensen
CPO 777 060—51 minutes

These are the first recordings of Johann Ernst Hartmann's (1726-93) symphonies. Concerto Copenhagen is a 14-instrument group, including the continuo-playing conductor. Hartmann moved from the North German duchy of Plön to Copenhagen in 1762 because his employer, the Duke Karl Friedrich, died and was replaced by the Danish king. He held several positions in Denmark and became music director of the Royal Orchestra in 1767. He was responsible for all phases of music connected with the court.

Hartmann was connected with several musical societies and composed widely for all of them. Unfortunately, most of his instrumental scores were destroyed in a fire in 1794. Only the first symphony was published—during his stay in Amsterdam in 1770—and the other three exist in copies from 1769-70 at Oslo University. The first is in four movements and the other three are in three movements. His symphonic output was surely much larger and probably more developed than these early works may suggest. If one considers that the Haydn and Mozart symphonies written around 1770 were much simpler than their later output, then, in comparison with those, Hartmann may well have been as important a symphonic composer.

The performances are alert and well played. The recording is superb and the notes are helpful.

Recommended if you have an interest in early symphonies.

BAUMAN

HOFFMEISTER: *Viola Concertos; 12 Studies*

Ashan Pillai, Gulbenkian Orchestra/ Christopher Hogwood—Oehms 334—76 minutes

I must say that I could not work up any enthusiasm for this release. Franz Anton Hoffmeister (1754-1812) was best known as a music pub-

lisher. He also composed, and his Viola Concerto in D is often heard today. I find that I do not enjoy his music, and the viola concertos and 12 studies for solo viola assembled here do not rise above the level of the mediocre.

I also do not think Ashan Pillai is fit for a solo career. A soloist must not be merely technically adequate; he must be able to play with sizzle. Pillai's technique is rudimentary—he is barely capable of trilling. I've known amateur violists who play better.

MAGIL

HONEGGER: *songs;* LEGUERNEY: *songs*

Rachel Joselson, s; Réne Lecuona, p
Albany 691 —66 minutes

Arthur Honegger (1892-1955) is one the better-remembered members of *Les Six*, the disciples of Eric Satie who were so *not* avant-garde as to be...well, avant-garde. Yet Honegger's ties to the group were slight, a fact that is borne out in his music. One seldom encounters the good humor and the whimsy of Poulenc or Satie. His music is own. But his stature seems to be slipping. Jeff Dunn, writing in the *San Francisco Classical Voice* speculated that he may yet become "the Raff of the 20th Century, a former 'top 10' composer becoming relegated to obscurity". Best known for his several symphonies and his oratorios *King David* and *Joan of Arc*, Honegger also wrote around 50 songs. Only one recording has passed our way (Mar/Apr 1993). This one includes 29 songs spanning most of his career. The early songs suggest Debussy; the later ones hint at Poulenc (as befits Honegger's membership in *Les Six*). All of them are thoroughly French.

Jacques Leguerney (1906-97), a largely self-taught composer, is much less known. Though he explored all forms, his focus was on songs, composing about 60; 12 are heard here. Only one other recording of his music, also of songs, has been reviewed by us (Sept/Oct 1996). Like Honegger, he has his own style, immediately identifiable as capable and French.

The performers, both faculty members at the University of Iowa, make a very persuasive case for both composers. Soprano Rachel Joselson is a solid and smooth singer, consistently satisfying and several cuts above average. Réne Lecuona's contributions on the piano are faithfully captured by the engineers, who record the proceedings in tolerably reverberant sound. Texts and translations are included.

If Honegger is the next Raff, so be it. History's judgement may yet be harsh, but this attractive new recording suggests that he deserves a kinder fate.

BOYER

HOVHANESS: *Mysterious Mountain;*
see VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

HUMMEL: *Te Deum; Quod in Orbe; Mass in E-flat*

Susan Gritton, Ann Murray, James Gilchrist, Stephen Varcoe; Collegium Musicum 90/ Richard Hickox—Chandos 712—62 minutes

Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837) was just eight years younger than Beethoven. Born in Bratislava, he studied with Mozart in Vienna, then toured Europe in his teens as a *wunderkind*. By 1804 he settled in Esterhaza as *Konzertmeister* for seven years on Haydn's recommendation. He then moved to Stuttgart and by 1819 he had settled in Weimar for his last 18 years.

While at Esterhaza he wrote five masses for the September celebrations of the name day of Princess Marie Esterhazy. The Mass in E-flat was the first of these, written in 1804. Hummel was clearly trying to move in place as Haydn's successor, even though another composer, Johann Nepomuk Fuchs, was in charge of church music. Haydn clearly liked Hummel and gave him liberal advice. The result is a mass that is modeled on Haydn's efforts. It is a grand and glorious work with some military underpinnings, like several of Haydn's late masses.

Hummel wrote his *Te Deum* in just a few days following Napoleon's humiliating defeat at Pressburg on December 26, 1805. Its first performance came on January 1, 1806. It is also of a celebratory nature, reflecting the Austrian pleasure at Napoleon's defeat. The *Quod in Orbe* was written sometime while Hummel was serving the Esterhazys, but the exact circumstances are unknown. It is a setting of unusual texts between the readings and prayers that normally separate the Gloria and Credo of a mass. Hummel scores it for four-part chorus and orchestra with the male voices leading. It includes dramatic use of the timpani.

This is only the second recording that I know of this mass and the *Quod in Orbe*. The other, on Koch-Schwann, appears to be with modern instruments, while this one is one of the best period-instruments performances I have heard. The brass are especially glorious, and the other sections are smoothly played and contribute to the celebratory nature of the performance. The soloists are all very good. The Collegium 90 choral ensemble is very well trained by Richard Hickox. Chandos offers good notes and a superbly balanced recording that is not too distant but has a pleasant airiness.

In short, this is one of my favorite recordings of the year.

BAUMAN

IBERT: *Cello Concerto;* see DVORAK

IRELAND: *Violin Sonata 1; Cello Sonata; Trio 2*
Daniel Hope, v; Julian Lloyd Webber, vc; John McCabe, p—ASV 4009—69 minutes

There have been recordings of all three of these works along the road. John Ireland (1879-1962) is one of the relatively unsung heroes of the English 20th Century. We know his name, but except for a general feeling that he is a healthy romantic voice, we tend not to know his works well. Therefore it is a pleasure to hear playing by such fine musicians. This is the shortest of the three piano trios—an intense wartime piece in one movement—preceded by the gorgeously romantic Violin Sonata of 1908-9 and followed by the moving Cello Sonata of 1923. All this music is basically warm and romantic, but there are strong undercurrents of the loneliness induced by the tragedy of war.

All three musicians do their work well. Lloyd Webber is perhaps most impressive, his basic smoothness rising to more passionate outbursts than usual, while the redoubtable McCabe shows his impeccable timing and supports each player with power and sensitivity. I have not heard Hope before, but his bright sound and alert performance are excellent for this music. We need a follow-up disc with the other violin sonata and the other two trios, please.

D MOORE

JACKSON: *Organ Works*
Francis Jackson—Priory 930 [4CD] 4:51

A four-disc set with a noted organist-composer playing a comprehensive (but not exhaustive) traversal of his own works cannot help but call to mind *Messiaen par lui-même* (EMI 67400). Francis Jackson (b 1917) succeeded his mentor Edward C Bairstow in 1946 as Master of the Music at York Minster, remaining there until his retirement in 1982. He is, therefore, a significant link between Bairstow's generation and the present day. While Jackson's importance as a composer may not be of the same order as Messiaen, neither should he be treated lightly as just another English organist-composer. This compilation brings us shorter pieces and lengthier works of considerable substance, including four of his five organ sonatas. He displays a facility in turning out works to order without ever falling below a distinguished level of quality but also a thoughtfulness and breadth of conception in the production of larger-scale works. They may not be technically ground-breaking works in the manner of Messiaen, but they do make good their claim to be taken seriously. His style is strongly tonal, often with piquant dissonance and angular melodies. It might be regarded as securely in the British 20th Century mainstream, showing the influence of composers like Vaughan Williams, Bridge, and Walton.

As a composer for the organ, Jackson shares with Herbert Howells and a handful of other English composers a keen awareness of how to write effectively for a large instrument in a large space where the organ may not speak as directly to the listener as it would, say, from a west gallery. In much of his work there is a restrained passion and loftiness so much in keeping with the atmosphere of the English cathedral, and it never reduces down to mere sentiment or facade. This cannot be said of many of his cathedral organist colleagues.

These recordings were made from 1993 to 1996 on three important instruments in the north of England. Two of the discs were recorded at York Minster, where Jackson presided for so many years. The youngest organ here is the 1969 JW Walker at Blackburn Cathedral. Jackson was a consultant on the design of that instrument and played its dedicatory recital in 1970. He composed his Sonata 1 in G minor, Opus 35, especially for that occasion and here it is recorded on that instrument. The third organ is the 1898 Father Willis (restored and slightly enlarged in 1960 by Harrison & Harrison) at Lincoln Cathedral.

The sonatas occupy a central place in Jackson's output of solo organ works. The fourth is especially substantial, built around an extended set of variations. A solo work that deserves to be ranked with the sonatas is the Toccata, Chorale, and Fugue, Opus 16, written for the 75th birthday of Healey Willan. There are some notable works for organ with other instruments. The Recitative and Allegro, Opus 76 is for trombone and organ. It was written for a conference of trombonists at Eton College in 1989. It is a fairly extended and serious work, beautifully played here by an unidentified trombonist with Jackson at the Blackburn organ. The *Eclogue,* Opus 71, for piano and organ was written for the 1987 congress of the Incorporated Association of Organists at Cambridge. It is a hauntingly wistful and mysterious-sounding work played here at York Minster with the present Master of the Music, Philip Moore, at the piano. It is a pity that a better sounding piano could not have been found.

Two of the works performed at Lincoln Cathedral are organ duets. The *Suite Montrealaise*, Opus 93, was commissioned by the husband-and-wife team of Philip Crozier and Sylvie Poirier for the 1993 International Congress of Organists. It is a suite of stylized

dances. The quieter and slower inner movements—Habanera, Forlane, and Mazurka—are effective enough, but the quicker Rigaudon and Polonaise that open and close the suite seem rather sluggish here. I should think it almost impossible to bring off lively dance music on a large cathedral organ. More effective is the Ballade, Opus 97, written in the same year for William McVicker and Jeremy Barham. It is a ruminative work that builds to a stunning climax. For the duets Jackson is joined by Lincoln Cathedral organist Colin Walsh. Space does not permit discussion of the many smaller works here. There are many musical delights among them.

It is clear that the producers at Priory take an almost encyclopedic approach to the recording of English organ and choral music. The composer offers brief but informative program notes. This set of recordings is clearly not for the casual listener but will undoubtedly be regarded by those who care about this repertory as a document of permanent importance by one of the great cathedral musicians of our time.

GATENS

JACOBI: *Cello Concerto; Hagiographa; Sabbath Evening Service (excerpts); Afavat Olam; 2 Pieces in Sabbath Mood*

Naxos 559434—70 minutes

Frederick Jacobi (1891-1952) writes in a straightforward romantic style that went out of favor in the roaring 20s. He has gone from "one of America's most representative composers" in 1923 to having only one disc of his music available. That is CRI 703, and it contains lively performances of the two major works included here, the Cello Concerto of 1932 and the three-movement piano quintet, *Hagiographa* of 1938, to which it adds a considerable Ballade for violin and piano and the Quartet 3. This one gives us instead four short excerpts from the 1930 Sabbath Evening Service sung with variable intonation by the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields Chorus with baritone Patrick Mason. Then there is a further 3-minute work for choir and organ, 'Ahavat Olam', sung with fervor and polish by the New York Cantorial Choir with cantor Robert Bloch and Aaron Miller at the organ.

The liturgical side of Jacobi's output is not presented here at its best. Perhaps these little excerpts were stuck in purely to point up Jacobi's Jewish credentials for the Milken Archive. Also, the instrumental performances sound rather heavy and inactive compared with the cruder but livelier treatment on CRI. Finally, the two Sabbath orchestral pieces of 1946 are full of warmth and feeling, if still somewhat heavily played by the Slovak Radio Orchestra under Samuel Adler. Unusual and pleasant music variably performed.

D MOORE

JENKINS: *Consort Music*

Ensemble Jerome Hantai—Naive 8895—60 min

The long career of John Jenkins (1592-1678) stretched from the end of the reign of Elizabeth, through the tumultuous period of the Civil War and Commonwealth, to the reign of Charles II. Little is known of his early life, but he was not recruited as a boy into a choral foundation. It seems likely that he was attached to the household of Anne Russell, Lady Warwick, in Hertfordshire, where he would have studied music with the resident master. He gained a reputation as a teacher as well as a performer. He spent some time in London during the reigns of James I and Charles I, where he became acquainted with the leading court musicians and performed before royalty. Later in life, he enjoyed the patronage of the great families of East Anglia.

Jenkins's art is securely anchored in the techniques of the Elizabethan-Jacobean viol consort repertory, itself derived largely from vocal-polyphonic models. In Jenkins we find a more explicitly instrumental idiom (no longer "apt for voices or viols"), a more tonal than modal pitch language, and in many places the introduction of continuo or an obbligato organ part. His is a distinctly English approach to the baroque idiom, one destined to be overwhelmed even in his lifetime by more fashionable influences from Italy and France.

According to program annotator Carolyn Coxon, author of an important monograph on the sources of Jenkins's music, about 800 instrumental works are attributed to him. There was certainly a lively market for domestic chamber music, and Jenkins would have written a good deal of music in connection with his teaching. The present recording gives a varied cross-section of his consort works. Most of the music here is in six parts, including three fantasias, two In Nomines (a cantus firmus genre that traces its history to the setting of the words "In Nomine Domini" from the Benedictus of John Taverner's Mass *Gloria Tibi Trinitas*), and a stately pavane. Among the more lightly-scored works are two suites, sometimes called "English Sonatas", that open with a fantasia followed by lighter dance pieces. A set of lively divisions (variations) for two viols and continuo; the programmatic 'Newark Siege' for two violins, two viols, and organ; and a sprightly galliard round out the program.

This recording is part of a series in connection with the Ambronay International Festival

of Early Music. This is my first acquaintance with the Ensemble Jerome Hantai, and it is entirely favorable. The tone of the viols and period violins is rich and luscious. With tight ensemble and unanimity of musical gesture, this is consort playing at its best. These are such sensitive and attractive performances, I would not hesitate to recommend this to listeners wishing to make a first acquaintance with Jenkins or the English consort repertory in general. At the same time, there is much to delight the connoisseur.

Those wishing to explore Jenkins further may note favorable reviews by Paul Laird of recordings by Jordi Savall and Hesperion XX (Astrée 8724; Sept/Oct 1992) and by Peter Holman and the Parley of Instruments (Hyperion 66604; March/April 1993). Laird was less impressed with a recording of four-part fantasias by the Viol Consort of Cologne (Thorofon 2042; Jan/Feb 1992). More recently, Ardella Crawford had good things to say about a recording of Jenkins suites by the Locke Consort (Channel 17698; Nov/Dec 2002).

GATENS

JOHNSON,DB: *Vocal & Chamber Works*
Zimbel 105—56 minutes

There is a wide range of style and sensibility in this program of vocal and chamber music from the 1990s by California composer Douglas Bruce Johnson. *Songs of Time, of Love, of Wonder*, settings of poems by Ann Sarton and Emily Dickinson, are full of sensuous vocal lines and delicate, Debussian piano writing. They were commissioned by contralto Elizabeth Anker, who sings them here. Attractive new romanticism.

The other works are more stark and expressionist: *Il Terzodecimo Canto*, a somber meditation on the experience of having a father who committed suicide, evokes the 13th canto of Dante's Inferno; *At Evening in the Shadow of the Volcano, They are Dancing* is a brilliant toccata-like piano solo, played by Anthony de Bedts, for whom it was written. After making a considerable racket, it gradually winds down into serenity, as does the second of Two Essays for String Quartet, a Vivaldi-inspired depiction of Venice in winter and spring light. Call 585-671-0364 or go to www.zimbel.com.

SULLIVAN

JONGEN: *Organ Pieces, all*
John Scott Whiteley—Priory 731 [2CD] 146 min

Whiteley, well known concert and recording organist from England, puts 20 years of research into Jongen's life and compositions to good use in this admirable survey of his organ works. Joseph Jongen (1873-1953), Belgian by birth like Franck, studied with Strauss and D'Indy. He was trained as a pianist, and many of his pieces for organ reflect keyboard techniques and characteristics (e.g. arpeggios) more appropriate for the piano than the organ. Today, Jongen may be known only for his lush *Symphonie Concertante* for organ and orchestra, but he wrote a body of music for smaller chamber ensembles.

As he spend time in England during the First World War, his travels may have taken him to York to hear the music there. Whiteley has recorded some of the pieces on that instrument—mostly the early works. Further, to record the remainder of the pieces on instruments closely matching those Jongen knew or used himself, Whiteley also plays the 3-66 Merklin (1912) in Notre-Dame de Laeken, Brussels and the 3-73 Pilzecker (1989) in St Jude's, Detroit.

In addition to 37 pieces for harmonium, there are 30 works for organ, heard here. Most of them are subdued and introspective musings that are well crafted but plumb no depths. Several other pieces are included to fill the gaps left by omitting some that were judged unimportant or unfinished. Organists will doubtless know the Toccata—a moto perpetuo styled in the manner of Dupré's conclusion to his Noel Variations—Piece for Grand Organ, Prelude & Fugue, and perhaps even *Petite Piece,* written as a sight-reading test at the Conservatoire. Except for the last, these are all sizable works requiring ample technique, but none is more demanding than the lengthy *Sonata Eroica*, Op. 94. This may well be Jongen's best effort for solo organ. Whiteley does a splendid job with it and is every bit as convincing as Wilson (Delos 3123). I'm certain this will be a benchmark recording, a standard for organists to study. Listeners who want to know more about the composer can consult *Joseph Jongen & His Organ Music* by Whiteley, available through the Organ Historical Society (Book PPJJ-3823).

METZ

KACZMAREK: *Finding Neverland*
Leszek Mozdzer, p; Brompton Oratory School Choir & Orchestra/ Nick Ingman
Decca 3429—58 minutes

Finding Neverland is the fictionalized story of *Peter Pan* author James Barrie. As might be expected, the music by Jan AP Kaczmarek is full of childlike whimsy and delicate textures. The use of a boys' choir adds to the charm, and it's all expertly assembled. What it lacks is melodic inspiration; the themes are engaging but forgettable. For this recording, the orchestral score has been augmented with several

piano improvisations that seem to inhabit a neverland of their own—somewhere between the keyboard stylings of Frederic Chopin and John Tesh. If you're willing to fall into its mood, *Finding Neverland* is pleasant, if not substantial, listening.

KOLDYS

KAGEL: *Rrrrrrr...; Anagrama; Mitternachtsstük*
SW German Radio Vocal Ensemble/ Mauricio Kagel—Hänssler 93054—54 minutes

Among the canonical weirdos of the European avant-garde, Mauricio Kagel (b. 1931) may be one of the greatest, and he is certainly the foremost living graybeard among the weirdos. Kagel has always had a theatrical streak, and this collection of vocal works sung by the phenomenal Stuttgart Radio Vocal Ensemble (the Tallis Scholars of the post-Darmstadt circle) is an essential document of the utopian, seriously ridiculous world Kagel helped to create.

Rrrrrrr... began with Kagel's image of the Enlightenment encyclopédiste Jean le Rond d'Alembert falling asleep in the midst of writing entries beginning with R (Requiem, Rêverie, Romanze, etc.), and consists of 41 small character pieces for various ensembles that can be performed in any order and combination. We get 7 here, and wish for more, though we're happy to have room for other pieces too. Like all the works on this release, *Rrrrrrr...* calls for a huge array of vocal techniques—shouting, declaiming, harmonizing, noisemaking, and plain old lyric singing—all of which the performers execute imaginatively, studiously, and (most impressively) together.

Anagrama is one of Kagel's best-known works, though not one of his most accessible; its text is made from phonemic anagrams in German, French, Italian, and Spanish of one of the Latin passages from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The chorus presents Kagel's anagrams in highly stylized and noisy, often syllabic outbursts, accompanied by just as unsettled and cacophonous excrescences from a chamber ensemble.

Mitternachtsstük sets excerpts from Schumann's diaries written from 1827 to 1838. Kagel chose rather lengthy fragments and set them in a declamatory fashion, usually with a soloist glossed by the rest of the chorus and the instrumental ensemble. Here the vocal ensemble really gets to show off its singers, who not only have impressive range of technique, but also can act like there's no tomorrow. Listening to their vivid performance you have the sense that you're listening to a recording of a staged production, but the work was indeed meant for concert performance.

Kagel directed these recordings in 1981 and 1984, but they had not been released—let's be glad we have them now!

QUINN

KHACHATURIAN: *Piano Concerto; Sonatina; Toccata*
Alberto Portugheis, London Symphony/ Loris Tjeknavorian
Resonance 3037—50 minutes

When this record first appeared on ASV, we found the performances perfunctory and lacking panache (July/Aug 1988): "Our recommendation remains Orbelian/Jarvi on Chandos, or Katin/Rignold on Everest, if an original pressing can be found". Little has changed since then. Constantine Orbelian's virtuosic rendition (Jan/Feb 1988) has not been outranked by newcomers, and instead of looking for an early vinyl pressing of Peter Katin's tour-de-force, collectors can search for a copy of the Everest CD (Jan/Feb 1998), already deleted.

KOLDYS

KHACHATURIAN: *Violin Concerto*
with Cello Concerto
Arabella Steinbacher, v; Daniel Muller-Schott, vc; Birmingham Symphony/ Sakari Oramo
Orfeo 623 041—70 minutes

with **PROKOFIEFF:** *Violin Concerto 1;*
GLAZOUNOV: *Concerto*
Julia Fischer; Russian National Orchestra/ Yakov Kreizberg—Pentatone 5186 059 [SACD] 79 min

Khachaturian's music is sometimes derided as cheap and obvious; I disagree, particularly when it comes to his two most popular concertos (piano and violin). They are showy display pieces for the soloists—that was the intent—but Khachaturian gives us more: gorgeous, heartfelt Armenian melodies, dazzling orchestrations, and proliferative excitement.

So it's a bit frustrating when performers don't seem to "get it". Ms Steinbacher and Ms Fischer both play the work as if they are trying to reveal some deeply hidden inner meaning. It isn't there! The seductive Andante sostenuto glows as it should, but the outer movements don't have the ebullience and pizzazz that the composer surely intended. Of the two, I prefer the Pentatone, if only because the Russian ensemble summons more energy than the reserved Brits. But the real solution is to dispense with these pretenders and stick with the breathtaking Kogan/Monteux (Jan/Feb 2001).

Couplings: Orfeo includes the composer's cello concerto; without adequate intensity it can tend to meander, as it does here. Pentatone offers two more violin concertos; the Prokofieff is an amiable reading, but again it is as though someone had filed off the sharp edges. The Glazounov suits Ms Fischer's style;

this is a warm, romantic performance and compares favorably with Marcovici/Stokowski and Milstein/Steinberg (Mar/Apr 2000).

It is difficult to criticize Orfeo's handsome sonics. Pentatone recorded its program in an acoustically dry Russian studio—five-channel playback helps a little, but not much.

KOLDYS

KORNGOLD: *Piano Sonatas; Little Caricatures for Children; Tales of Strauss*
Michael Schäfer, p—Profil 4083—79 minutes

We usually think of Erich W Korngold (1897-1957) as a composer of film music. And well we should.

Probably the most startling revelation in the liner notes is that Korngold was a child prodigy, as both pianist and composer, who composed the first of his three piano sonatas at age 11, and the second at age 12. Following that surprise is that the second was premiered by none other than Artur Schnabel.

The third came 20 years after the second. The third surprise is that his father was "the feared Viennese music critic", Dr Julius Korngold. For those of you who fear music critics, ponder whose of the two names is remembered, and for what. In any case, his father's position managed to open some doors for him. His talent and work were known by Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler.

It is good to keep in mind that Korngold grew up in Vienna but ended up in the United States and died in Hollywood.

Korngold intended to be taken seriously, as will be heard in the first few bars of his two early sonatas. The first, in three movements, is in the very serious D minor; while the second, in four movements, is in E major. He thought in big gestures for the piano and wrote rather thick textures—often technically demanding octave and chordal passages—a combination of Liszt, Brahms, and Richard Strauss. So for his time, he wasn't an innovator. He did what his elders had, only on a bigger, grander scale. Perhaps this "cinematic scale" is what Hollywood found appealing in his work.

Once into his sound world, one can explore the range of his expression. Perhaps the most remarkable movement is the dark slow movement of his second sonata. Harmonically rich, lugubrious in tone, even full of angst, it is hard to believe it came from a 12-year-old. Perhaps he had an "ancient soul".

By the third sonata, when he was 32, Korngold's harmony is somewhat more adventurous, and one begins to hear some of the cliched gestures one associates with movie music. His writing is still on a large scale. The introverted II (Andante religioso) has a Lisztian grandeur, with its free contrapuntal textures. Quite beautiful! Although III is marked in the tempo of a minuet, in a comfortable tempo, and IV is to be jocular, the thick writing and heavy gestures bring out more of Michael Schäfer's drive than his lyricism.

The miniatures, the *Caricatures for Children,* are an adult sensibility (he was 29) speaking to children in an adult musical language, though the textures are thinner.

'The Tales of Strauss' is a charming, playful waltz on the grand scale. One can imagine this as one of Jorge Bolet's encores.

One doesn't often run across performances or recordings of Korngold's piano music. Another to compare is Alexander Frey's on the Koch label. But this is spirited, if not the most refined playing. Take advantage!

BARELA

KREBS: *Flute Sonatas*
Andrew Bolotowsky; Rebecca Pechefsky, hpsi
Quill 1003—73 minutes

Johann Ludwig Krebs (1713-80) was a pupil of JS Bach, known for his skills as an organist and composer. He composed six sonatas for flute (or violin) and harpsichord later in his life while he was serving as court organist in Altenburg. The flute and harpsichord are equal partners in these pieces, trading turns with melodic material. Hints of the gallant and folk influence from central Europe also abound.

This recital of four sonatas, the E and A minor and the C and E major, is enjoyable. Bolotowsky, a New York-based baroque flutist with a long career of solo and chamber recitals to his credit, plays each sonata with precision and polish. Rebecca Pechefsky is an equal partner in this enterprise. I especially enjoyed hearing the unfiltered sounds of pages turned, benches squeaking, and collaborative breathing that fill the background of this recording.

CHAFFEE

LARSEN: *The Cowboy Songs; Sonnets from the Portuguese; Try Me, Good King*
with lute songs by Dowland, Praetorius, Campion
Eileen Strempel, s; Sylvie Beaudette, p; Alexander Raykov, l—Centaur 2666—56 minutes

This is titled *Love Lies Bleeding* and is a companion to the fascinating recording by the same soprano and pianist called *With All My Soul* (The Orchard 6003). The earlier release, unreviewed in ARG or perhaps anywhere else, presented songs by three important French women from the 19th and early 20th centuries—Pauline Viardot-Garcia, Marie vicomtesse de Grandval, and Lili Boulanger—and was remarkable in at least three respects: the Viardot songs handled their German texts persuasively, the Grandval songs (world pre-

miere recordings) proved to be consistently interesting if a bit conventional, and the Lili Boulanger cycle is one of the major statements by that important composer, who died all too young at age 24.

The present program is devoted almost entirely to a single composer, and a living one at that: Libby Larsen (1950-). The works—including one that is new to records—prove to be just as fascinating and nearly as diverse as the contents of the previous program, as might well be predicted by those who know her song cycle for mezzo-soprano *Love after 1950* (Koch 7506), which shows her use of what New Grove calls "liberated tonality without harsh dissonance, and pervading lyricism".

The first of the three *Cowboy Songs* of 1994, 'Bucking Bronco', has a seductive, tango-like lilt for a poem (by Belle Star) of a Western gal who was courted and then abandoned by her rider beau. 'Lift Me into Heaven Slowly' is a powerful four lines of verse (by Robert Creeley) made truly gripping by Larsen's decisions about which words to repeat and when to have the vocal line pause for rhetorical effect; Larsen also gives the piano a sweet-sad "cowboy" tinge through a loping rhythm. 'Billy the Kid', makes a fascinating contrast to other, better-known works about that varmint, namely Aaron Copland's ballet (1938) and Andre Previn's recent *Sally Chisum Remembers Billy the Kid* (London 455 511). In those works, Billy comes across as something of a doomed charmer, but here the bustling, ferocious music bans all melancholy, as befits an anonymous folk text that spares no regret: "One day he met a man/ A whole lot badder/ And now he's dead/ And we ain't none the sadder."

The *Sonnets from the Portuguese* are based on poems from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's famous collection (1846) written a few years after she married fellow poet Robert Browning; they recall their courtship, which had been carried out in secret because of violent opposition from Elizabeth's father. Larsen's cycle, originally for soprano and chamber orchestra, was written at the request of, and with the close cooperation of, the wonderful soprano Arleen Augér. (See David Greene's review of her recording: Koch 7248, M/A 1994). The present disc is the recorded premiere of the remarkably effective piano version.

Sonnets is a major work and a deeply earnest one, about the joys and fears inherent in a close but sometimes unequal loving relationship. The poems' meter is unvaried iambic pentameter; the rhyme pattern, though different from Shakespeare's sonnets, is tightly repetitive and interlocking (ABBA ABBA CDC DED). Larsen lets both (verse-)meter and rhyme work at a subliminal level, focussing instead of the text's shifts in emotion and gestural energy.

Particularly striking, and not at all dated, is the poet's worry that she is giving herself to someone who may not be willing or able to sacrifice as much in return—a worry that is made all the more poignant by recurrent expressions of her need: "If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange/ And be all to me? . . .I have grieved so I am hard to love/ Yet love—wilt thou? Open thy heart wide/ And fold in [it] the wet wings of thy dove." Larsen reflects the poet's vulnerability at that final phrase with a soft high note. Eloquent also is the composer's decision to emphasize musically through near-Tchaikovskian rising sequences the words of the man the poet is beseeching. At these moments, the cycle almost becomes a mini-opera played out in the mind of one of the characters. Augér, from the beginning, had asked Larsen for a cycle that "spoke about the finding of mature love, as opposed to the young girl's feeling for the promise of love in [Schumann's] *Frauenliebe und Leben*".

The program concludes with the world premiere recording of Larsen's *Try Me, Good King: Last Words of the Wives of Henry VIII* (2001). She decided not to set any words of the sixth wife, Katherine Parr, who outlived the monarch. Instead, she focussed on letters and gallows speeches of the remaining (or non-remaining!) five, ranging from Anne Boleyn's "Let me have a lawful trial, and let not my enemies sit as my accusers and judges" to Katherine Howard's frank words at her execution, as transcribed by an unknown Spaniard: "Long before the King took me, I loved Thomas Culpeper. I die a Queen, but I would rather die the wife of Culpeper."

The songs contrast sharply in tone and make occasional and effective use of melismatic singing and virtuosic leaps that never feel superficially "archaic" but rather responsive to the particular woman and her specific anguish, such as the sarcastic leap up an octave and then down again at the end of Anne of Cleves's declaration: "I neither can nor will repute myself for your grace's wife. Yet it will please your highness to take me for your sister." Larsen also subtly worked musical phrases from four 16th Century lute songs into the *Try Me* cycle. These four songs—Dowland's 'In Darkness Let Me Dwell' and 'If My Complaints Could Passions Move', Michael Praetorius's 'Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming', and Thomas Campion's 'I Care Not for Those Ladies That Must be Wooed'—are performed here just before the *Try Me* cycle. Strempel sings them in the gorgeous mid and lower end of her

range and is artfully accompanied by Russian-born lutenist Alexander Raykov.

In the Larsen works themselves, Strempel handles the vocal lines with confident communicative thrust, including subtle use of portamento, speech-like inflections, and so on. (Larsen coached the duo, attended the recording sessions, and even adjusted the vocal line of one song for greater depth of characterization.) One suspects that Strempel would be able to cope handily with the additional challenge of the orchestral version of the Sonnets: she performs often in oratorios and has scored a hit as Violetta with the Bolshoi Opera. The voice comes across, through speakers or earphones, as rich and brilliant, with a few particularly vivid full-voiced high notes and a few exquisite "floated" ones; this is not the thin, artsy type of "recitalist's" voice whose notes nearly vanish after a consonantal puff of air.

Richness of voice, of course, can carry its own disadvantages, especially when vividly recorded: here the vibrato can become a touch obtrusive, and pitch is sometimes a shade flat on held notes. Nonetheless, the warmth of the voice is a plus overall. Her readings feel not laboratory-perfect, like so many recordings these days, but alert and alive.

In the piano-accompanied songs, the soprano is brilliantly supported by Québec-born Sylvie Beaudette, who brings immense oomph and ease to her part, which the engineers have balanced very satisfyingly with the voice. Her playing in the Cowboy Songs is enchanting, drawing one right into Larsen's mind-world from the start. (Beaudette recorded this short cycle once before, with Nanette McGuinness, on Centaur 2461. Yet another Cowboy performance, by soprano Louise Toppin and John B O'Brien, is on Albany 385. Both of these are anthologies of music by various women composers.) in the Sonnets, it is to Beaudette's great credit that one rarely finds oneself trying to guess what the colors might be in the orchestral version. And in 'Try Me' one is carried along by her responsiveness to the ebb and flow of feeling and drama in this portrait gallery come to life.

RALPH LOCKE

LEFANU: *Quartet 2; Clarinet Concertino; Cancion de la Luna; Catena*
Fiona Cross, cl; Nicholas Clapton, ct; Goldberg Ensemble/ Malcolm Layfield
Naxos 557389—63 minutes

Nicola Lefanu (b. 1947) is the daughter of composer Elizabeth Maconchy. Her music stands up quite well on its own. It is on the abstract side, moving from one idea to another in a quest for beauty that has something birdlike or catlike about its movements, capable of instantaneous activity followed by quiet mystery and immobility. Her sensitivity to the effect of sound is great.

The quartet was written in memory of her parents, who died within a year of each other in 1994 and 1995. The Clarinet Concertino is a reworking for string orchestra of an earlier quintet. The curious *Song of the Moon* is a 13-minute setting of a work by Garcia Lorca, where the poetic effect of the countertenor is somewhat offset by a certain vocal resemblance to Vera Galupe-Borszkh. The program ends with a 21-minute movement for 11 solo strings evoking the scenery outside Lefanu's studio in the Pyrenees. All together, this is a well-played program of imaginative music.

D MOORE

LE FLEM: *Violin Sonata; Piano Quintet*
Philippe Koch, v; Alain Jacquon, p; Louvigny Quartet—Timpani 1077—66 minutes

Remember those old Vox recordings with the dreadfully shrill engineering of the Radio Orchestra of Luxembourg? In 1996 the orchestra changed its name to the Luxembourg Philharmonic, beefed up its personnel, and linked up with the Timpani label, which knows how to produce recorded sound at its ripest. Philippe Koch is both the orchestra's concertmaster and leader of the Louvigny Quartet, whose other three players are also orchestra members. Together with pianist Alain Jacquon and deeply rich, smooth, balanced, natural engineering, they turn in two performances here with perfect ensemble and non-stop musicality.

These two works by Frenchman Paul Le Flem (1881-1984), each in three movements, were written in the decade just before World War I. They're impressionist through and through; the Sonata is the more overtly lyrical. I kept saying, "Le Flem must have been a very lovely person who came from the last time in the 20th Century when the world ethos could be one of unhurried peace."

I marveled in the Sonata how Koch and Jacquon could very subtly stretch a retard over 20 or 30 seconds without ever stagnating and then move right into the next extended phrase or section as if they never paused at all. They truly weave a whole cloth out of each movement. Despite Koch's one limitation (little use of tone color), the opening of II is touchingly warm and sweet. And in III the 5/4 rhythm is so easy and light that its lyricism leaves you filled with soul, life, and joy.

The fact that the Quintet begins with two *lento* movements (the first 17 minutes long) gives you a feel for its different style. And although its lyricism is more motivic than the Sonata's, it's certainly not the amorphous kind

I associate with a number of British composers from the same era, whose music I never seem to be able to carry in my head. To like this work you have to be able to take off your watch, turns all clocks toward the wall, settle in, and allow someone else to work his pace of living on you, as the players weave their languishing tempos, slow liquid triplets, and slight retards around forms that gradually build more than once into finely sustained intensity and recede again to quiet yet more developed places.

In both works, the final movements are animated with folk melodies and irregular rhythms. In the Sonata it's the 5/4 rhythm I already mentioned. In the Quintet Le Flem uses an inventive mix of what sounds like 7/8 (3-2-2) followed by 3/4, back to 3-2-2 followed by 6/4, all integrated into one steady flow. In both cases they're the perfect finishing touch.

Over it all is Le Flem's exquisite writing for these instrumental combinations. The textures are such that you can appreciate each instrument's function in expressing texture and harmonic movement. The piano writing is amazing. In addition to its range and clarity, it's not only an equal partner with the strings, but by following its fascinating bass line you can easily get a feel for Le Flem's inventive harmony, especially given such exquisite engineering that allows you to focus on it if you wish.

Here's the perfect gift for someone who has everything.

FRENCH

LEGRENZI: *Trio Sonatas 1655*

Parnassi Musici—CPO 777 030—65 minutes

Parnassi Musici is a period instrument ensemble that came from the second violin section of the Southwest German Radio Orchestra in Freiburg. They have recorded such oddities as the cello sonatas and trio sonatas of Antonio Caldara (CPO 999 871) and the trio sonatas of Giovanni Tibaldi (CPO 999 633), but their interests in such antiquities stems from their love of and love for performance of modern music. For example, their recording of Domenico Gallo's trio sonatas (CPO 999 717) is a result of their search for the roots of Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*—not Pergolesi, they claim, but Gallo. They have also performed novelty transcriptions of pieces like Bach's *Goldberg Variations* but not yet recorded them. Here they have the trio sonatas of Giovanni Legrenzi with two violins, cello, bassoon, theorbo, and organ.

Giovanni Legrenzi (1626-90) was a young organist when he moved to Venice, and in order to secure some patrons he gave most of these sonatas the family names of Venetian nobility (Cornara, Spilimberga, Torriana). But whether the sonatas are actually portraits of those families is not known. Stretching the interpretation of these sonatas much past a tonal or thematic analysis requires a bit of imagination. That does not mean that these sonatas are lacking any character; on the contrary, the character and theme from the C-minor Sonata here is claimed by one musicologist, Robert Hill, as the origin for Bach's *Thema Legrenzianum.* Unfortunately, the liner notes do not indicate the keys of the sonatas, but since the ensemble is performing on period instruments, which are tuned about a half pitch lower than modern instruments, after careful listening, it can be determined that track 15, *La Torriana,* is that C-minor Sonata. But the debate over this sonata as the origin of Bach's theme is still unresolved.

It is a delight to hear Parnassi Musici perform. They bring the music to life with elegance and brilliance.

SCHWARTZ

LEGUERNEY: *Songs;* see HONEGGER

LE JEUNE: *Airs; Psalms*

Corvina Consort/ Zoltan Kalmanovits
Hungaroton 32189—68:41

Claude Le Jeune (c 1530-1600) was two things: a devout Huguenot Protestant and the greatest French composer of his generation. His large output—still only barely dealt with on records—reflects both these identities. In two publications printed in his lifetime, and then in five collections issued posthumously, he set or adapted the melodies of the Calvinist Psalm repertoire. (The first posthumous publication, actually prepared by him before he died, contained settings of all 150 Psalms.) Two publications in his last years and four issued after his died contain extensive treatments of secular texts, with dribblings across these lines in several other publications.

The two strands were eventually joined in one unifying feature of his art, his commitment to the concept of *vers mesuré à l'antique* or *vers mesurez*. This was the artificial but highly sophisticated idea that French vowels could be assigned lengths—long or short (the latter half the length or pulse of the former)—in accord with the Humanists' understanding of ancient Greek and Latin precepts, and with the goal of recreating in French the quantitative meters of ancient poetry. The high priest of this doctrine, in poetic and musical composition, was Jean-Antoine Baïf, and Le Jeune was the most gifted of the musicians who put his ideas into practice, carrying it on long after Baïf's death (1589).

Aside from fulfilling Humanistic goals of aligning French with ancient poetry, the use of "measured" verse posed challenges for musicians. One challenge required the shift from freely polyphonic to tight, simpler, quasi-homophonic textures. The other challenge involved disrupting the flow of melodic lines: the application of compound meters could lead to a jerky feeling, whereas the use of consistently repeated metrical patterns could risk monotony. Perhaps alone of the French composers who took up this technique, Le Jeune was able to triumph over those challenges through his creative imagination. A further Humanistic influence on Le Jeune was the ancient and ecclesiastical modes, as expounded by the theorists Glareanus and Zarlino.

The present release samples two of Le Jeune's posthumous publications, one of secular music, the other spiritual, but both cast in *vers mesuré*. The major part of the program offers 13 items from the 68 *Airs à 3, 4, 5, et 6 parties* published in 1608. Then there are five selections from the *Pseaumes en vers mesurez mis en musique* for two to eight voices, published in 1606.

Though there have been recorded samples of Le Jeune's output, and though at least two of his major collections (*Le Printans* and the *Octonaires*) have been given plenty of attention, the 1606 Psalms—and other psalm treatments—have been slighted; and only one serious address has been made to the 1608 Airs—a disc from the Symphonia label reviewed very sympathetically by Mr Loewen (99174, N/D 2000). In it soprano Claudine Ansermet offers 15 selections from this 1608 publication, alternated with 12 instrumental pieces by other composers, played by her partner, lutenist Paolo Cherici. As it happens, two of the 1608 pieces are Psalms (hence her album title of "Airs et Psaumes mesurés a l"Antique").

As the 1608 title suggests, the collection's compositions are polyphonic, for three to six voices. The Symphonia annotations argue that they really should be considered as lute songs, belonging to the emerging idiom of the *air du cour*—of which, as it happens, this singer has been a particular champion. It is argued that the 1608 material was not published for voice and lute "because such printed editions were not yet in vogue at that time"—a very shaky claim indeed. Nevertheless, Ansermet commits herself to this approach, singing one musical line and leaving the others to lute reduction. And she sings them very handsomely.

By contrast, the Corvina Consort addresses its 12 1608 selections much more flexibly. Consisting of five singers backed by five instrumentalists, it strives to avoid monotony by varying the scoring: some for voices only, some for solo voices with instruments on the other parts. The singing is clear and attractive, the playing is expert. The character of the pieces is quite diverse, from sentimental to occasional, from philosophical or spiritual to silly: there is even, in the form of a drinking song, one of those spoofs of German linguistic clumsiness—the Italians weren't the only ones who loved such ethnic humor! My preferences are for the all-vocal renditions, where the metric play comes through with fullest emphasis, but all of these performances are well done. With due respect to Mme Ansermet, I think they fit the music better than her approach, however enjoyable.

In the Psalms, the Corvina performances are entirely vocal, which seems proper. Actually, only two of these 1606 selections involve Psalm texts, while the other three are supplemental items appended to the publication. Two are short *graces* or mealtime prayers, but the third is a remarkable setting for six voices, in French a *vers mesuré* translation, of the *Te Deum Laudamus*. Baïf's practices (which Le Jeune followed in his secular writing) had cast poetic texts in a form alternating verses (*chant*) with refrain (*rechant*). Accordingly, in this translation, the text is broken up into artificial divisions, in an approximation of *chants*, while the early lines of the Cherubim and Seraphim, "Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth, Pleni sunt caeli et terra majestatis gloriae tuae" are brought back (in French, of course) as a recurrent *rechant*. It is a fascinating work, whose only earlier recording I can recall goes back to the ancient Anthologie Sonore series, on an LP I still cherish in the old Haydn Society reissue series (AS-41). A Paris chorus under Marc Honegger gave it a robust performance that, for all its roughness and dated sound, still seems to bring out more of the inner parts than we hear from the Corvinas. Nevertheless, they do it well, and it is wonderful to have the piece available on records again at long last.

Fine notes; full texts and translations. An important contribution to the discography of early French music.

BARKER

LISZT: *Piano Pieces*

Concert Etudes; Wagner operatic paraphrases; Hungarian Rhapsodies 11+12; Schumann Lieder transcriptions; Funerailles; others
Valerie Tryon—APR 7039 [2CD] 155 minutes

Pianist Valerie Tryon displays a range of expression in the present collection. There is a sampling of Liszt's transcriptions, and original works for solo piano are mixed in. Without knowing which is original, which is transcrip-

tion, the listener can begin to deduce that distinction from Tryon's treatment—no small feat. Her lyrical sense is just right for this incessantly singing music, but her sense of scale doesn't always fit the grand gestures.

Both of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies give ample opportunity for showing off in their slow-fast two-section format. One can't help thinking of Vladimir Horowitz's imagination, wit, playfulness, and daring.

Listening particularly with that comparison in mind, one can't help noticing a certain caution in Tryon's playing. Her playing leaves the general impression of being emotionally measured, not hot-blooded.

What is missing in risk-taking in her playing is compensated for in her sincerity and a lovely lyrical sense that shows quite beautifully in the slower 'Gondoliers' from the *Italian Years of Pilgrimage 2*. The transcriptions of Schumann's 'Widmung' and five transcriptions from original songs from Liszt's second volume just soar. Especially in the transcriptions of original songs, the technical demands offer plenty of room for showmanship.

As if to see the trees and leaves rather than the forest, Tryon's 'Waldenrauchen' opens with almost no pedal and then later introduces the thinnest veil of pedal. Quite lovely. The same admirable clarity marks 'Gnomenreigen' and 'Au Bord d'une Source', but sometimes to the detriment of the larger gestures. 'Les Jeux d'eau a la Villa d'Este' is another, more satisfying story, with its shimmering evocation of natural fountains.

Tryon shifts gears to a dramatic storytelling mode in the Wagner operatic paraphrases. 'Isolde's Liebestod' stands out. One hears both intimacy and imitation of orchestral gestures.

As one listens with Horowitz's imaginative approach to drama and timing in mind, one begins to wish Tryon would take more liberties. Since she has ample technique to handle Liszt's many demands, and she could afford less temperamental and emotional safety.

Funerailles is a case in point, where there is a wide range of intensities. Both the introspective sections and the accelerating marches seem somewhat held back. They would benefit from more contrast, more intensity. With almost a whole ballroom, the operatic paraphrase of a waltz from Gounod's *Faust* seems to stay in a small area. Tyron emphasizes the down-ness of each downbeat (and thus confines any shaping to what happens in the measure) and thus doesn't always shape the larger phrase. This happens, as well, in the 'Tarantella' from the *Italian Years of Pilgrimage 2*.

One doesn't often run into recordings of smaller works such as excerpts from Liszt's *Albumblätter* or his transcriptions of original songs. But it is hard to beat Jorge Bolet's recordings of the composer's transcriptions and operatic paraphrases.

BARELA

LISZT: *Les Preludes; Tasso; Hungarian Rhapsody 2; Piano Concerto 1*

Hooshik Hwang, Russian Federal Orchestra/ Vakhtang Jordania—Angelok1 7752—61 minutes

Often we remark on how an orchestra has improved under its current conductor. This one has gotten worse. Much worse. In fact I can't understand how anyone might think they could get away with such wretched playing in a crowded field like this. String ensemble in the Tchaikovsky *Manfred* I reviewed a year ago (Mar/Apr 2004) was a bit scrappy but nothing like *this*, sawing away fitfully in *Les Preludes* and falling apart entirely in the *friska* section of the *Hungarian Rhapsody*. In *Tasso*, where so much depends on the lower strings, they come off well enough in the evocative opening pages, but the thin sound of the solo cello around five minutes in doesn't help matters, and he sounds positively disembodied at the Ferrara court. Even with strong support from the low brass *Les Preludes* offers no particular interpretive distinction—though Jordania at least works up the central "Lone Ranger" episode effectively enough—and the quavery solo horn doesn't get any better on repeated hearings.

The orchestra is on their best behavior for soloist Hooshik Hwang in the concerto, which is a waste of time: he barely manages to stumble through the opening measures and seems little more than competent thereafter, stiffly phrased in his duet with the triangle and spewing handfuls of notes right and left in the slapdash final pages.

Adding to the unintentional humor is the crude drawing on the cover, seemingly depicting Liszt as a zombie with a dozen arms and what appears to be a truly prodigious phallus. I've already given this pitiful release far more space than it deserves. Don't make the mistake of adding it to your cart, whatever the cost.

HALLER

LITHANDER: *Piano Pieces*

Tuija Hakkila, fp—Alba 179—77 minutes

The Lithander brothers were born in Estonia to Finnish parents between 1773 and 1780. All five were pianists, though Carl Ludwig (1773-1843) and Frederik Emanuel (1777-1823) were the best known in their lifetimes. Their father, Johan, was a minister. In his training he would have also studied some music for church use. It is recorded that he even had a clavier in his

house, which indicates the background that all 11 of his children had. The father gave the boys their basic musical training. A year after the father died (1789), they and their clavier went to live with relatives in Turku in Finland. The four brothers represented here, plus a fifth one, were taken in on an island near Turku by an aunt and a cousin who were well off.

Carl Ludwig Lithander had a military career but also studied music, which was a major subject at the Karlberg Military Academy, where he spent some years beginning in 1804. He evidently spent a lot of time composing as well as performing on both the piano and violin. His exact output is unknown; his works never were assigned opus numbers, and most of his manuscripts are now lost. In 1814, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, he went to London and remained there for four years composing, teaching, and performing. He also pursued a friendship with Clementi, to whom he dedicated his elaborately written Sonata in C. By 1821 he went to Sweden and eventually traveled to Germany and Bohemia to try to improve his health. He also performed widely during his travels. His compositions are in the style of Haydn and Mozart but show, in his later works, some influences by Beethoven. His four works here show him to be a composer of considerable talent.

Ernst Gabriel Lithander, the fifth brother, studied music in Turku and became proficient on the piano, violin, and organ. Only one work by him has been preserved, a Polonaise for violin, not recorded here.

Frederik Emanuel Lithander and Chrystophylus Samuel Lithander studied in Turku beginning in 1796. Frederik became a pianist in a music society orchestra. He evidently was good, because he accompanied a clarinet recital in Helsinki by Bernhard Henrik Crusell. Early in the 19th Century he moved to St Petersburg, where he taught and composed. Little of his music has survived, but he is clearly a good musician.

Chrystophylus became an attorney in Sweden but continued musical activities. One Polonaise has survived.

David Wilhelm Lithander also studied piano in Turku and eventually settled in St Petersburg, where he died of tuberculosis at age 26. He also has only one surviving work.

The Lithander brothers were clearly a talented and interesting group of musicians. One wishes after hearing this recording that more of their music survived—particularly Carl Ludwig's.

The booklet gives seven pages of English background on the family. Tuija Hakkila is an experienced Finnish pianist who teaches at the Sibelius Academy. Although I haven't heard of her previously, she performs widely all over Europe, the USA, Japan, Indonesia, Africa, and South America. She studied with György Sebök and Malcolm Bilson. Most of the works are played on an 1830 Conrad Graf instrument, but the last two are played on a copy of Mozart's piano. The result is very fine, the sound quality acceptable to all but those who rabidly dislike early pianos. The sound is first class.

Wonderful for those who wish to broaden their musical knowledge.

BAUMAN

LLORCA: *Concierto Italiano; The Dark Side; 3 Academic Pieces*

Nancy Herrera, mz; Mac Maclure, Raimon Garriga, p; Alex Garrobe, g; Pedro Bonet, beak fl; Belen Gonzalez, continuo; Liceu Chamber Orchestra/ Guerrasim Voronkov—Columna 126—66 minutes

Ricardo Llorca (b. 1962) is a Spanish composer who now teaches at Juilliard. He writes music that returns to earlier times, sort of a neo-neoclassicism, In his *Concierto Italiano* he takes three relatively obscure Handel operatic arias, treating them like a concerto grosso for guitar, beak flute (don't ask!), and harpsichord continuo, backed up by a string orchestra. The treatment is moderately kooky and vaguely unsettling, since one never knows when he is going to move off into parts unknown, and one wonders if he will find his way back, or to a new world or what. It reminds me a little of the technique Ellen Taaffe Zwilich used in her Concerto Grosso, also based on Handel. Hers showed a clearer personality, stressing both a blend of styles and a clear dichotomy between them. Llorca is approaching the problem in a less clear-cut fashion, but then styles have become less clear today than they were even 20 years ago when Zwilich wrote her piece.

The problem is stated in another way in *The Dark Side,* a piece for voice and piano alternating spoken monolog and song. The text is by the composer and states America's present problems more clearly than I have heard it done before. The music is secondary to the text. I recommend it to anyone who finds our present state as disturbing as I and many musicians do. Some of the charm of this performance lies in the singer's foreign accent and the curious errors and omissions in the printed text.

The program ends with three piano pieces, also based on earlier styles, basically baroque, including a chorale and an extended fugue. This is a strangely refreshing program, not so much for the music itself as for the open mind of the composer.

D MOORE

LOCKLAIR: *Reynolda Reflections; In the Almost Evening; Music of Quince; The Moon Commands; Dream Steps; Constellations*

Janeanne Houston, s; Melissa Suhr, Anna Ludwig Wilson, Klaus Liebetanz, fl; George Rine, Kelly Burke, cl; Hsiao-Mei Ku, v; Jonathan Bagg, va; Steve Estes, vc; David Robbins, Albert Romero, perc; Jacquelyn Bartlett, hp; George Ritchie, org; Robert Brewer, Robert Jorgensen, Thomas Warburton, p/ Joseph Pollard White

Albany 701 [2CD] 1:47

Two discs of chamber music by Wake Forest professor Dan Locklair (b 1949). I reviewed a program of his orchestral works before (N/D 2002).

Mr Locklair's music is relatively undemanding and audience-friendly. He enjoys using familiar materials, and indeed much of his work appears to have pedagogical intentions. For example, *Reynolda Reflections* (2000), a trio for flute, cello, and piano, offers a nice introduction to the 20th Century use of scales. The first movement is a fantasy on a theme of Thomas Tallis (*The* theme). After that lesson in Phrygian mode, we get an octatonic passacaglia, a Lydian-whole tone water color, a pentatonic machine fantasy, and a finale with lush Wagnerian chromaticism. Inspired by 19th and 20th Century American paintings on view at Winston-Salem's Reynolda House, this is an effective concert work for conservative audiences and players. Three of the paintings used for the piece are reproduced in the booklet.

To go along with Locklair's interest in painting, most of the remaining works have their basis in poetry. *In the Almost Evening* (1982) is a lovely setting of three poems by Canadian Joy Kogawa. *Music of Quince* (1981) is a "tone poem" for flute, clarinet, violin, and piano, inspired by Wallace Stevens's 'Peter Quince at the Clavier'. The poem's vivid imagery is nicely (if obviously) captured in the music. *The Moon Commands* (1985), a "nocturne" for soprano, flute, percussion, and piano, uses poetry by Locklair's Wake Forest colleague DR Fosso. And *Dream Steps* (1993), a lush dance suite for flute, viola, and harp (thanks, Claude), is inspired by Langston Hughes's 'Lenox Avenue Moral'. Here we get a heavy dose of postmodern Diversity. The Meistersinger's sturdy bar form collides with spirituals, the blues, *Wachet Auf*, the sarabande, and even some hairy dissonance, with Debussy's elegant ensemble doing its best at carrying the heavy load. Again, this would make a pleasant and instructive concert work, if you can find the harpist (and Locklair has found an excellent one here in Jacquelyn Bartlett).

The program concludes with *Constellations* (1980), a "concerto" for organ and percussion. (Locklair is an organist). The opening three short movements—a pounding and jazzy intro, a passacaglia for organ and vibes, and a cute waltz—are combined and developed in the relatively lengthy finale. The piece might be of interest mostly to organists with percussionist friends.

Performances are for the most part on a high level. I particularly recommend the *Reynolda Reflections* for classroom use.

GIMBEL

LONG: *Poems from Tang; Rhyme of Taigu; Da Qu; Future of Fire*

Jonathan Fox, perc; Shanghai Quartet; Singapore Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Singapore Symphony/ Lan Shui—BIS 1322—70 minutes

Zhou Long (b 1953) is yet another Chinese expatriate living in the West (see Kui Dong, above). Mr Long, like conductor Shui, attended Beijing's Central Conservatory along with so many other Chinese musicians emerging from the post-Mao cultural thaw. Like most of his compatriots, Long studied at Columbia in the 80s with modernists Chou Wen-Chung, Mario Davidovsky, and George Edwards; and, like Chen Yi, he has taken up residence at the University of Missouri in Kansas City.

Poems from Tang (1995) is a concerto for string quartet and orchestra based on 8th Century poetry from the Tang Dynasty. This piece is in stream-of-consciousness mode, materialized with disconnected gestures of clearly Chinese origin. These four atmospheric tone poems express conventional topics in abstract modernist manner. I depicts a hut in the woods with quiet twangs and plunks representing the "sounds of the forest", with occasional pentatonic fragments representing the "singing of the poet". II opens with a sad pentatonic melody, opening out eventually into a poignant impressionist glow. Some faster dance fragments move the music along, but these soon dissolve. III imitates the sound of the *qin*, the Chinese zither encountered for real on Kui Dong's program. The church bells are actually Italian, encountered by the composer during a stay in Bellagio on a Rockefeller Grant. I don't quite get the dramatic doings that unfold over the course of this movement (the uncharacteristically sketchy notes don't clue us in). Finally, IV is a humorous 'Song of 8 Unruly Tipsy Poets', who are drunk to the gills by the end. Bright Sheng's Quartet 4 on BIS 1138 (J/A 2003), also with the Shanghai Quartet, makes for an interesting supplement. You'll find the poems buried back on page 30 of the booklet.

The Rhyme of Taigu (2003), the most recent piece on the program, deals with the metamorphosis of ancient Chinese "taigu" drum-

ming into what later became Japanese "taiko" drumming. I'm not sure the BIS folk can assume that their listeners have the knowledge to differentiate between the two drumming styles (I can't), but the piece makes for an exciting primitivist display. This is sort of a Chinese *Estancia* (Ginastera), and listeners who enjoy that sort of rhythmic thrust will enjoy this, too, though the Singapore orchestra sounds a bit too scrawny to bring the piece off completely convincingly.

Da Qu (1991), an early Chinese form of what later became the Japanese *gagaku* court music, forms the basis for this three-section percussion concerto. The first movement alternates mystical sounds with more Ginasterian savagery. II deals with quiet pentatonic bell melodies, while III moves to pulsating wood. Stravinsky is not the only recollection, but some good old American syncopation and even some rock drumming float by. This piece unfortunately veers out of control and doesn't seem as well crafted as the later works.

The program closes with *The Future of Fire* (2001, rev. 2003), a vocalise for chorus and orchestra recalling farmers losing control of the burning of dry grass while preparing the land for planting (Mr Long, condemned as a "hated intellectual" because of his early musical efforts, hurt his back working in the fields, and was declared useless by Mao's regime. He later joined a song and dance troupe and became its arranger, until the Revolution folded.) This piece sounds like it belongs to a larger work—a cantata, maybe—and, though it whips up a decent fury, it seems like it's missing its torso.

Overall, something of a mixed bag, with *The Rhyme of Taigu* taking first prize. Stay tuned, though.

GIMBEL

MAHLER: *Wayfarer Songs; Rückert Songs; Kindertotenlieder; 7 others*

Stephan Genz, bar; Roger Vignoles, p

Hyperion 67392—73 minutes

It is very convenient and sensible to have these three collections of Mahler songs on one disc, along with the other songs: 'Frühlingsmorgen', 'Hans und Grete', 'Phantasie', 'Ablösung im Sommer', 'Zu Strassburg auf der Schanz', 'Nicht Wiedersehen!' and 'Scheiden und Meiden'. Stephan Genz is an excellent light baritone whose timbre reminds me sometimes of one of his teachers, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and whose interpretations are like Fischer-Dieskau's earlier ones, before he began to over-interpret. Note how Genz softly whispers the last word of the *Wayfarer* songs, "Traum", much as Fischer-Dieskau did. Highly recommended.

FOX

MAHLER: *Symphony 2*

with **DEBUSSY:** *La Mer*

Eteri Gvazava, s; Anna Larsson, a; Orfeon Donostiarre; Lucerne Festival Orchestra/ Claudio Abbado—DG 3397 [2CD] 106 minutes

Isabel Bayrakdarian, s; Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, mz; San Francisco Symphony & Chorus/ Michael Tilson Thomas—SFO 6—88 minutes

Combining *La Mer* with Mahler's Symphony 2 is certainly curious and probably unique. But I do not think listeners who have other recordings of *La Mer* will turn very often to this one. The program notes are effusive in praising the orchestra's "infectious verve", "wonderful inwardness", "tone color", "ecstasy", etc. Maybe so, but the muddy sonics and occasional overload distortion work against hearing these allegedly noteworthy facets. The most egregious passages are the codas of Parts 1 and 3. The Part 1 coda lacks power, and the instruments sound like a smeary blur. The Part 3 coda is worse; plenty of power, but such a hodgepodge that, between the smeared playing and blurred sonics, I cannot really tell what the music is about! To get the bad taste out of my ears (figuratively speaking, of course!), I played the same passages from the *mono*, 1950 Toscanini NBC Symphony recording. Power, clarity, and justice to the music were manifest. Then I turned to the *mono*, 1935 Toscanini BBC Symphony recording, and it, too, was far superior to this *stereo*, *digital* recording from the Lucerne Festival of August 14, 2003!

But before you dismiss the album, I am pleased to report that the Abbado Mahler Second, recorded five days later, is another story. The sonics are still not great, but are considerably better. I, which is of the fast persuasion (20:33), is very good, though tender passages are not tender enough, and more could have been done with the exciting, dramatic pages at cue 15 (with the high and low tam-tams) and the following 11 or 12 bars. Still, the important cellos and basses play very cleanly and are well defined, the *caesuras* a few bars after cue 18 are observed and *portamentos* are done but not overdone. II is a bit fast, but that is certainly better than the stodgy tempos some conductors prefer that take the dance "feel" out of the ländlers. Some balances are a little off (cellos drown out violins) but that reminds us that this is a concert performance and microphones may not have been optimally placed. III is good, with very effective portamentos, but the timpani are blurred, and it is difficult to hear individual strokes (Hall acoustics?).

Contralto Anna Larsson has a beautiful voice for 'Urlicht' (IV), with her dynamic shadings and understanding of the religiosity of the

text. Praise also to the solo violinist, who plays with great expression and with terrific portamentos. Abbado observes Mahler's instruction that 'Urlicht' follow III "without interruption" (a direction also observed between IV and V).

Most of V is fine: off-stage instruments have the desired effect of vastness and, in The Great Roll-Call, of seeming to come from heaven. Mahler's note at the bottom of the page at cue 6 to hold some horn notes longer, is observed; and the same direction is on the bottom of the page at cue 11, which Abbado also observes. At the entry of the chorus, the basses in the lower octave can be heard to excellent effect (they usually are not). The fine soprano, Eteri Gvazova, emerges magically from the choral texture, as Mahler intended. The organ, if it is there, is all but inaudible; the timpani sound weak and blurred. But the chorus seems to be large and is excellent. All in all, a fine *Resurrection!*

We all know the nursery rhyme about the girl who "When she was good, she was very, very good, but when she was bad, she was horrid." This is a perfect description of MTT's Mahler Second. Its opening pages are very dramatic, with basses and cellos slashing impressively, if not quite as the score has it. The first climax (at 2:20) is particularly powerful and thrilling, and the tender theme in the violins (starting at 2:46) is expressive and poignant (much as Gilbert Kaplan has taught us to expect). Overall, it is a very good I, though the caesuras (just following cue 18) are not observed, and, more seriously, the strings come in too early—about one second after the end of the development. This may seem like a small point, but the score is clear. Following the powerful *(fff)* two-note figure Mahler inserts what is practically a dead bar (No. 330): only the bass drum and violas continue softly. This atmospheric bar normally lasts 4 to 6 seconds, but here it lasts just 1 second. With the premature entry of the strings the effect of the tremolo bass drum and violas is lost. Can it be an editing error? Still, all told, a very good I.

For some reason II is not as engaging as it usually is, perhaps because, at 11:28, it is slower than most. Only Bernstein is considerably slower (and heavier), and that is consistently the worst movement in his performances of this symphony. The net result is not disastrous, merely a bit lacking in charm. III is fine, with an arresting outburst at 8:07—powerful but not overdone. From 9:19 to 9:36 there is a gross, tasteless, outrageous slowdown. Not only does it sound dreadful, but there is not the slightest justification for it in the score. MTT gives new meaning to the word "gratuitous". Mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberson is a splendid singer, but I prefer the darker, more velvety voice of a true contralto in this work. Also, in IV, I like more religious ardor in the delivery. Still, she is a great artist. V is excellent—dramatic, majestic, and with plenty of religious fervor. Soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian is outstanding and arises magically from the texture of the chorus, as Mahler intended. The "tearing open of the graves" percussion crescendos are among the most terrifying on records. The bells in the final pages are struck *ad libitum*, which works beautifully. Unfortunately, they are all but inaudible in their brief moment in the march section (starting 11 bars after cue 16) following the percussion crescendos. The ending of the symphony is simply glorious!

Sonics are outstanding, as are the orchestra and chorus, but with that "horrid" slowdown in III, I can give the recording only a conditional recommendation.

FOX

MAHLER: *Symphony 9*

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra/Riccardo Chailly
Decca 4756310 [2CD] 90 minutes

Regular readers may remember that I thought little of Chailly's Mahler 3 when I got to write about it recently. I found it detached and lifeless. This new release is made of different stuff or, to be more precise, some of the same stuff more appropriately applied. I can't imagine it as anyone's first choice for this symphony, but on its own terms it's a fine reading and probably the best new recording of the work since the Karajan concert performance came out in the late 1980s.

In order to understand why this is so, it is necessary to take a look at the structure of the symphony. The Ninth is one of Mahler's four four-movement symphonies and, like the First and Sixth, has two large outer movements and relatively lighter inner movements. Like the Sixth, the outer movements of the Ninth are closely linked. In the Sixth, the link is done thematically; in the Ninth, it is done structurally. The Ninth's first movement builds up to a devastating catastrophic climax about two-thirds of the way through and cannot come back from it, fading away on the wisps of the unresolved challenge. The middle movements can't resolve the crisis underlying the first movement and deal with the negative energy through different forms of re[or mis-]direction: the mindless dances of II and the useless anger of III.

It's only in the fourth movement that the question of the first movement is taken up again in a useful way. Here, as in I, Mahler explores light and dark, finds them both elusive and builds up to a crisis-climax. This time

the answer is a different one. Instead of annihilation and dissolution, there is transfiguration and release, a gradual letting go of energy. What is it? Merging into the universe? Enlightenment? You get to answer that one.

Performances of the Ninth that don't work almost invariably run aground on the last movement. Mahler's climax and resolution are built into a few measures: bars 122-132: the huge dissonant chord followed by the sustained string notes leading back and through the recap. What Mahler does with the recap is instructive: he takes the chorale-like main theme of the movement, transforms the turn figure that had accompanied it earlier into a lovely countermelody in the horns and low strings, and gives the violins and violas a descant to soar above it. As one conductor wrote in private correspondence recently, "the most beautiful music in the world".

Mahler also marks the tempo: "Tempo I. Molto Adagio"—the tempo of the opening—and then qualifies it: "even more broadly than in the opening". If you do what Mahler said to, the energy of the whole movement—of the whole symphony—is gathered and released here, in a blaze of heavenly D-flat major. Of course, to carry this off, you need rock-solid rhythm and control of the orchestra and its voices.

Bruno Walter, who conducted the first performance of the Ninth, rushed this climax. He set too fast a tempo for the finale and then raced through the climax as if he had wild animals chasing him. As we know from Walter's Bruckner, among other things, he had trouble with slow tempos and sustaining things; he probably simply didn't have the technical skill to play what Mahler had written. Schoenberg denounced him as a coward for skimming the surface of the finale. His Vienna Philharmonic recording from 1938 took 18:20 for the finale, and his Columbia Symphony remake in 1961 took 21:08—not much better. But, since Walter was widely publicized as Mahler's disciple, his distorted reading of the symphony took root as a performance tradition, and alternatives like Mengelberg's reading, which was never recorded and took 26 minutes, were forgotten.

Then came the modernists, who adored Mahler, especially the Ninth, because his music led to the Second Viennese School. They weren't, by and large, interested in emotion or transfiguration, only in structure and grimness. So we had Mahler 9s with abbreviated finales from Hans Zender, Michael Gielen, and Pierre Boulez, who rushed through the fourth movement climax because, for them, the meat of the movement was in the disintegration that followed. It's not what Mahler wrote and can hardly have been what he meant, but they found what they were looking for.

The result of the ministrations of Walter and his followers and the modernists was a distortion of the shape of the symphony. From the structure I described above—two symmetrical outer movements with the second responding to and transcending the first (a finale symphony)—it became a first-movement symphony like the Shostakovich Sixth, with a powerful first movement followed by three light movements.

Chailly, to his credit, resists this pull. He has the technique to conduct the last movement as Mahler wrote it, including the climax, and the vision to understand how the last movement fits as the capstone of the symphony as a whole. So he starts off ahead of perhaps 60% of recordings of this symphony. Then what?

His first movement, at 30:29, is one of the slowest on records. Mahler marked the first tempo in the movement *Andante comodo* "a comfortable andante" and the second tempo *allegro moderato* and built considerable flexibility into the movement. Chailly's main tempo feels slow and heavy, not comfortable, and the andante is very broad. From the opening harp notes on, the feel is one of moving in a kind of stately procession. With that is a kind of emotional distance or detachment, as if the movement were a narrative of events from a distance or in retrospect instead of a real-time experience of them. His approach brings good and less good results. The best result is that he has enough space to deal with the movement's dense contrapuntal writing. Time and time again multiple voices can speak clearly and the lines in the score spring to life. He also has time to observe Mahler's carefully indicated dynamics. A timpani roll will continue to crescendo while the chord it underlies peaks and dies away; the low woodwinds will continue their crescendo while the higher pitched instruments have stopped theirs. On the other hand, the distance from Mahler's musical struggle takes a toll in immediacy. When Mahler writes "leidenshaftlich" (passionately) over a knotty string line followed at a distance by the horns, Chailly's cool persona keeps its distance. The dynamics and tone are fine, but the grit simply isn't there. And the big climax, when Death marches in and takes over, about 20:30 here, is not so much experienced as observed; and the ecstatic writing at 23:30 or so leading up to the cadenza for flute, horn, and low strings lacks passion. Chailly's slow basic tempo also restricts his options a bit. He has no room for a slowdown into the ghostly music at 15:13 and is so slow at the shadowy music at 16:17 that the creepy sounds and atmosphere can't really register.

The big slowdown at the end of the move-

ment can't have the impact it could, since the main tempo is too slow for there to be the sense of time slowing down and standing still that happens in the best performances. Still, Chailly manages to create a mood of hesitation and suspense.

II starts off a little too sophisticated-sounding for Mahler's mock-country music, though the bassoons and violas buzz nicely. The waltz second subject is light and not so obviously ironic as Karajan or Maazel or as grim as Klemperer. It flows smoothly but doesn't dig in. The l@@ndler that follows, though, is delicious: complacent and sentimental and a little ridiculous all at once. The recap of the waltz isn't manic or dizzy enough, nor is the cycling through the different dances in various stages of dementia. The climax builds up nicely but without the fury that Mahler built into it. I like the poker-faced ending.

III is amazingly well played, though it lacks malice and fury and, at 14:01, the extra edge of speed and danger. Chailly slows down considerably for the D-major trio, which Mahler marked "somewhat held back". It sounds lovely to me. The end of the movement doesn't sound like the race to the abyss that it has elsewhere (Vienna/Abbado, Berlin/Karajan). It's too controlled. Even the expertly recorded percussion, explosive sounding in the rival versions, doesn't add excitement.

IV is slow, 28:24, and beautifully voiced, though Chailly doesn't allow his bass accents to tug on the notes (and the heart) or create the contrast between the "living" and the "dead" sections of the movement the way Karajan does. Yet, in its comparatively understated way, this reading builds up a considerable emotional charge. As Horenstein and Karajan realized, this movement needs space and focus to speak. I miss things from the Karajan reading: the sheer power of the expression at 8:31 and after, where the Berlin violins seemed to have infinite bows and the amazingly articulate bass lines of that orchestra spoke eloquently—or the following section when the light started to shine through the music. I also miss Karajan's passion after the long wandering interlude with the woodwinds over the bass when the movement builds up to its and the symphony's climax, not to mention the liquid fire of his strings in the bridge to the climax. Without these or the death-or-glory grittiness of Horenstein, there's something missing in this movement.

Still, Chailly handles the build-up and wind-down of the movement well, and the end is touching and devastating, as it is in the best performances.

Decca's recorded sound is lovely. No harshness, no trace of artifice. The orchestra plays well, though I miss the weight and transparency of other string sections and find the first horn's tone in lyrical passages a trial: it's soft-centered and vibrato-ey (like a Czech or East German player).

I would notreplace the Karajan or the Horenstein LSO performances, but this is a good supplement if you want a cooler, more distanced look at this endlessly fascinating symphony or are collecting the Chailly cycle. Donald Mitchell's notes are useful and informative.

CHAKWIN

MARTINU: *Madrigals;* see BACH

MATSUMURA: *Achime; Lullabies to Greece; Karu Poems; The Poor Faithful; Pilgrimage*

Yumi Aikawa, s; Sumire Yoshihara, Mutsuko Taneya, Yasuo Kotani, perc; Teizo Matusumura, Yoshio Tsukada, Kaori Nakajima, p; Makoto Tanaka, t; New Philharmony Orchestra/ Hiroyuki Takeda—Camerata 28031—65 minutes

Camerata continues its excellent releases of new music by Japanese composers. Teizo Matsumura was born in 1929. After finishing school he built a career as a composer in Japan, winning most of the major prizes and landing a position at Tokyo National University. This program includes works from 1957 to 1999.

He wrote the first piece when he was just 28. Although his mature voice had not yet emerged, his skill comes out clearly. There are several inspired moments in the piece, especially at the very beginning, a Varese-like orgy of drums, winds, and operatic soprano. The *Two Lullabies to Greece* are simple pieces Matsumura intended for children, but apparently several professionals have included them on their programs. Even though simple, there is a fresh approach to the melodies and subtle dynamic shading that prevents them from being puerile. *The Poor Faithful* is a serious song cycle for tenor and piano. These are dramatic pieces in a post-romantic vein, expertly performed. I enjoyed all of the songs very much, but especially liked the second one, with a resonant ending that stuck in my mind.

MACDONALD

MAXWELL DAVIES: *Naxos Quartets 1+2*

Maggini Quartet
Naxos 557396—73 minutes

These are the first two installments of a projected series of 10 Maxwell Davies quartets commissioned by Naxos expressly for this British group. The quartets are to be premiered in concert and then recorded and released by this ever-ambitious label. I'm

stunned that a project of this seriousness and magnitude can still take off in this day and age. But here it is, and it will likely turn out to be the most important modern quartet cycle since Elliott Carter's.

Maxwell Davies has taken a firm stance in the classical tradition, confronting Beethoven head on with structural self-consciousness, seriousness of purpose, and unrepentant individuality (I guess he's confronting or embracing Britten and Tippett as well). These are by no means "easy" works; they demand intense commitment from listeners and performers alike. They are definitely rewarding, though, as can be seen with even minimal study, and they will repay close attention.

The First Quartet (2002) opens with a little tune that has the character of a motto. It turns out to be a quotation from the middle section of Maxwell Davies's Third *Strathclyde Concerto* (1989) and is said to be a generative source for much of what is to come: specifically, this material is "subjected to a process of transformation through a 12-unit 'most perfect pandiagonal magic square'", a compositional procedure that has supplied the composer with much of his technical facility over the course of his prolific career (he has written over 200 works to this point). This process is also the source of his complex, knotty harmonic language, which is the basic mode of expression at work here.

After that brief but pregnant intro, the movement goes on to present a sonata form-like exposition, with a robust, dotted first theme, contrasting secondary theme(s), and a choked, cadential closing. This exposition is given a highly varied repetition, and then it is very freely developed until a series of quiet unisons bring the movement to a close. No recap, of course—the work (that is, the entire ten-quartet cycle) has just begun.

II is an opaque passacaglia, eventually undergoing attacks from first movement material. The conflict is temporarily resolved with more quiet unisons. The finale takes its cue from the last movement of Chopin's Second Piano Sonata, which resolves its death-infested tensions with a wild dance of the devil, over before it has effectively begun. That's exactly what happens here, leading the listener into the next quartet (or, actually, the Third Quartet, according to the composer).

Quartet 2 (2003) also has a slow introduction and a sonata form like the preceding quartet. This first theme is also dotted, this time in Scotch Snap fashion (this rhythm seems to be this work's motto); an involved development dispenses again with a recapitulation and brings back a reminiscence of the previous quartet's last movement whirlwind instead. II is a disjunct "recitative", followed by a tortured arioso. III is a moderate intermezzo with mysterious interruptions, ending with a brief remembrance of II's recitative. The weighty finale is a sober slow movement based on the now resigned Scotch, dot-dash rhythm. More than a little Mahlerian in atmosphere, it made me wonder what a string orchestra rendition might sound like.

As it is, I wonder what another quartet might bring to these tough but fascinating pieces. The Maggini Quartet has won awards for their Naxos recordings of Vaughan Williams (555300), Elgar (553737), and Britten (553883); but the playing here was a chore to listen to. Nervous bowing, insecure ensemble, questionable intonation—I haven't heard their other releases, but they seem an odd choice for this project. Was the Arditti unavailable?

GIMBEL

MENDELSSOHN: *Athalia*

Letizia Scherrer, Katalin Halmai, s; Daniela Sindram, a; Ulrike Goetz, Rudolf Guckelsberger, narr; Gächinger Cantorei, Stuttgart; SW German Radio/ Helmuth Rilling

Hänssler 98486—76 minutes

Just ten days after I submitted my last review of a rarely performed oratorio by Felix Mendelssohn another has arrived! The sound may not be quite as large and bold as the one by Spering that I reviewed in the last issue, but it is well spread and satisfying. Helmuth Rilling has long specialized in major choral works. I question his choices of tempos in this case. I knew that something must be different here: the total performance is almost 76 minutes. Spering is closer to 63 minutes. What's the difference? At first I thought that Rilling might have included more spoken dialog, but that does not seem to be so. By the time I was near the end of the overture I realized that tempos are more stately here. Rilling takes 8:21 for the overture compared to Spering's 6:45! Spering is NOT too quick, but Rilling seems to drag, especially towards the end. One wonders if he was trying to build drama, but he borders on boredom sometimes.

A as the oratorio progresses the tempos generally seem more satisfying. When we get to the one famous excerpt, 'The War March of the Priests', Rilling actually is a bit quicker than Spering. This is ironic, for I prefer that part somewhat statelier.

Rilling uses modern instruments rather than period ones, which will better satisfy some listeners. Also, Rilling has three impressive soloists and two narrators, whereas Spering uses only one narrator. His soloists are good but not the same quality as Rilling's. The

contrast between male and female voices is more satisfying here.

Mendelssohn based his composition on Racine's French play. He originally scored it for female chorus (in French) and piano. But for Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm IV he had to orchestrate it, translate it into German, and supply a mixed chorus. It is this form that is generally performed now. The text is based on several obscure portions of the Old Testament and deals with the murderous Queen Athalia, wife of the king of Judah in the 10th Century BC. Finally she is overcome by the craft of the high priest, Joad, and his wife.

The notes are thorough. Texts are in German and English. I think Spering's English translations are somewhat preferable to Rilling's. I must warn you that my copy was difficult to get to play. Only by pressing the fast forward button on my player briefly could I get it to start. The regular start button didn't work—something I have not experienced before. But then it plays normally.

You must decide which of the two newer recordings you prefer.

BAUMAN

MENDELSSOHN: *Trios*

Claremont Trio
Arabesque 6786—56 minutes

These are very pastel performances, for the most part without the high-strung nervous energy of all other recordings I know that make you wonder how human beings can play so many notes so fast so accurately for so long. In Trio 1, while there are louds and softs, the players (violinist Emily Bruskin, cellist Julia Bruskin—her twin—and pianist Donna Kwong) only give a passing nod to the sudden dynamic changes Mendelssohn calls for. What's not melody is left as pure background, as if you're hearing only half of what's really going on. For example, in the first movement the sheer tonnage of piano notes is rarely projected. I hasten to add that this is one instance where it seems the problem is not the engineering but purely the choice (or temperament) of the performers. III and IV are served up reasonably well but without snap.

In Trio 2 the piano is more audible, and because there's more definition in I and II, the additional punch and articulation enables you to hear how each player's lines function not just melodically but harmonically and decoratively. Also, they sustain long phrases very well. III here also lacks snap (Scotch snap, judging by the character of the melody). And in IV, while overall the playing is vigorous, the opening phrase needs more shape and style, and the Bach chorale is played so pastorally that it's almost faint. Also, the violinist is just an edge sour sometimes, especially toward the end.

While the warm, resonant engineering superbly balances the three instruments, the sound seems to have been passed through one of those processors that makes soft passages whisper and then pumps up the loud passages so that they practically shout at you. Also, the print in the liner notes is best read with a microscope, and the cover makes these ladies look like an ad for Clairol (or is it, "Which twin has the Toni?"). This is a performance that can't begin to compare with the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio on Vox.

FRENCH

MERCADANTE: *Flute Concertos*

Mario Carbotta; Solisti Aquilani/ Vittorio Parisi
Dynamic 446 [2CD] 108 minutes

Giuseppe Saverio Mercadante (c.1795-1870) was a prolific Italian composer. His best-known work today is probably the Flute Concerto in E minor, written when he was an 18-or 19-year old conservatory student. Political upheaval wreaked havoc on his career, and he bounced around Italy and Europe, often competing with Donizetti and Rossini for positions or commissions. He wrote 50+ operas, 60+ orchestral works, sacred music, and a number of chamber works with flute, an instrument he studied as a conservatory student.

The most popular recording of the E-minor Concerto is probably Rampal's. Stick with him for that concerto. The other four concertos heard on this recital by Mario Carbotta, while charming sometimes, are simply not the same quality. In addition, Carbotta's performance is a curious balance of good and bad. His slow, bel-canto second movements have some lovely, arresting moments; but the fast movements sound labored, especially in the E-minor. The final piece on the recital, a set of theme and variations that lasts nearly 20 minutes, should be relegated to whatever dusty shelf it came from: it's poorly written and rather boring.

CHAFFEE

MESSIAEN: Organ Pieces

Prelude; Transports de Joie; Joie et Clarte; Le Banquet Celeste; Apparition de l'Eglise Eternelle; Chants d'Oiseaux; Le Fils, Verbe et Lumiere; Les Anges; Les Enfants de Dieu; Dieu parmi Nous; Offrande au Saint Sacrement

Jonathan Dimmock
Gothic 49221—79 minutes

Dimmock, a graduate of Oberlin and Yale, is currently organist at St John's Episcopal in Ross, California. The instrument heard is the 3-53 stop Cavaillé-Coll (1885)/Gloton-Debierre

(1937) organ in Notre-Dame de Auteuil, Paris where Frederic Blanc is titulaire organist. The bulk of this program is a collection of familiar movements or separate pieces known to most organists, but the surprise is the discovery by Messiaen's widow in 1997 of two hitherto unknown compositions: the opening Prelude (now available by Leduc) and *Offrande* . Dimmock's program notes suggests the Prelude was probably written in the late 1920s, contemporary with *Le Banquet Celeste*. Yet this is far more involved and complex than the gentle wanderings of *Banquet*. Closer to that comparison would be the *Offrande*, with its smoothly moving chords that support a fluid but extremely quiet flute melody above. This is eminently listenable, and I hope that Leduc publishes it. If you like *Banquet,* you'll enjoy this. The Prelude, while still clearly in the composer's pre-dissonant era, begins quietly and slowly, then builds into a crescendo that culminates in a wonderful sprint to a series of tutti chords that slow the tempo. This musical idea just meanders a while, as the "theme" continues over widely separated block chords in the left hand. A major chord cadence signals the end of the lengthy middle section, and the piece returns to the original lingering quiet. Listeners will never guess this is by Messiaen.

All the other selections, including a very neatly done 'Transports' and sensibly paced *Apparition*, are performed with proper registration and an awareness of traditional interpretations. This would make an ideal sampler for anyone wishing to explore Messiaen's organ music without investing in "complete works" boxes. Dimmock plays accurately and the instrument is comparable to Messiaen's at La Trinité. The interpretations may be characterized as conservative, and might profit from a dash more panache.

METZ

MESSIAEN: *Petites Liturgies de la Presence Divine;* **WEBERN:** *6 Pieces; 5 Pieces; Cantata 1;* **FORTNER:** *Oboe Aulodie*
Tiny Wirtz, p; Monique Matagne-Cavailles, ondes martinet; Anita Westhoff, s; Lothar Faber, ob; Bavarian Radio/ Gunter Wand
Profil 4057—69 minutes

Legendary conductor Gunter Wand (1912-2002) won his first position in Detmold, Germany, in 1938 and then became principal conductor of Cologne Opera a year later—just in time for World War II. Following a stint as director of the Mozarteum Orchestra in Salzburg, he returned to Cologne in late 1945 to rebuild the city's cultural institutions. One of Wand's goals was to open the ears of the German public to the music the Nazi regime had outlawed. In so doing, he befriended Olivier Messiaen and championed his music.

Wand presented *Three Small Liturgies on the Omnipresence of God* (1944) seven times in his career, despite the furor that erupted every time. This reading from January 1966 makes me understand why—it is a very challenging listening experience. When intonation and balance are not flawless, it's even more of a challenge, and such perfection would be very difficult for the orchestra, piano, women's chorus, and ondes martinet (the early electronic instrument). It is often but not always good here, and at the shaky moments the piece just seems weird. Much of the time, though, it is strangely beautiful. Texts not included.

The Bavarian Radio Symphony plays Webern with the precision, sureness, and sensitivity it needs. In *Aulogie* (1960), by Wolfgang Fortner (1907-87), oboe soloist Lothar Faber gives a strong and confident account of a truly gnarly piece of music.

KILPATRICK

MESSIAEN: *20 Regards Sur L'Enfant Jesus*
Peter Serkin, p—RCA 62316 [2CD] 113 minutes

It's gratifying to have Peter Serkin's pioneering 1973 recording of Messiaen's monumental piano work finally on CD. I remember it well as my introduction to *Vingt Regards*, along with Serkin's mesmerizing performance (with Tashi) of the piano part in Messiaen's *Quartet For the End of Time*. That Serkin's reading still holds up astonishingly well, despite formidable recent competition from Paul Kim (Centaur), Steven Osborne (Hyperion), and many others, should not be surprising. He has always been as authoritative an interpreter of contemporary music as Rudolf was of the standard German repertory. What is surprising is the quality of the recorded sound, given that this was the era when RCA made very thin records (remember those?), often with sound to match. The depth and sharpness of this recording make me think that perhaps the quality of the plastic (which eventually led to the CD revolution) was the real culprit, both in those and other LPs from the 70s.

In this reading, Messiaen's quiet "gazes" have a silken poetry and subtle nuance, the faster ones an austere violence. Overall structures and balances seem carefully thought out and calculated, yet there is a constant sense of surprise and unpredictability. This does not seem like the playing of a promising young virtuoso (emphasized in the 70s by RCA's marketing of Serkin's counter-culture costuming), but the seasoned ruminations of an artist who has lived with this music a very long time. Listen, for example, to the bell-like voicing of the

melody in XI, with the accompaniment flitting about in the upper reaches of the keyboard like ghostly shadows.

Alberto Rosado's new performance of the same piece (reviewed under Collections) is crisp and rhythmic, but not as suggestive or mysterious. Whether or not one assents to Messiaen's Catholic mysticism, this interpretation of his 20-piece meditation has a strong sense of religious rapture. For Messiaen lovers, this release is a must.

SULLIVAN

MESSIAEN: *Visions de l'Amen; Tombeau de Paul Dukas; Fantasie Burlesque; Rondeau*
Steven Osborne, Martin Roscoe, p
Hyperion 67366—62 minutes

Knowing that French composer Olivier Messiaen (1908-92) was a Catholic mystic goes a long way toward understanding and appreciating the power in his music. Any one of three ideas are threaded into the fabric of his works: his Catholic mysticism, bird song, and an interest in time—both cosmic (extended into timelessness) and measured time.

Visions de l'Amen for two pianos (roughly translated Visions of Truth—with the added religious nuance) is a large-scale work conceived for his 19-year-old student and eventually his second wife, the spectacular young pianist Yvonne Loriod. He played the second piano in the premiere. Needless to say, the seven movements make considerable physical, technical, and musical demands on the performers.

Much in the same vein as his *Vingt Regards de L'Enfant Jesus* (20 Contemplations on the Infant Jesus), the titled seven movements suggest a deeper look, beyond human understanding, at the truth of creation; of stars, planets and planetary rings; of the agony of Christ; of Desire; of the angels, saints, and bird songs; of judgement; and of consummation or the end of time.

There is something luminous about Messiaen's textures, no matter which piano register is used. This is music that transports the listener into another paradigm, beyond everyday time and concerns. While Messiaen employs melodic fragments, his special harmonies are his signature. He is unusually effective using the monochromatic piano, because he is able to evoke colors and timbres one takes for granted in an orchestral setting.

Those familiar with Messiaen's other works will find stock gestures and thematic fragments used repeatedly. He likes chord progressions in second inversions for their suspended, floating quality. He likes irregular rhythms formed by adding beats to repeated figures. It removes predictability and leads the ear forward. As elsewhere, there is a movement (mostly) in unison (or a single line doubled at the octave). His textures are often thick and clangorous. He uses the outer extremes of the piano and often exploits the piano's percussive qualities. Think of metallic chimes. The ending of 'Amen of the Consummation'—and of the set is thrilling.

Three shorter solo piano pieces performed by Steven Osborne round out this program: a piece in memory of Paul Dukas, 'Rondeau', and 'Fantaisie Burlesque'. The last reveals Messiaen in a rare moment of humor.

Osborne and Roscoe lovingly deliver the listener to these other-worldly domains with performances that are full of power. One senses the "terrible" in the Amen of the Judgement, and the Amen of Consummation. Perhaps the only island of serenity to be found is the centerpiece, the Amen of Desire, where time seems suspended. The duo's sense of sound seems perfect for these pieces. Messiaen's harmonies are given a granitic treatment: great marble walls of sound. Yet the rich compounds still shine through. For those who are mesmerized by the music of Messiaen, this recording is highly recommended.

BARELA

MESSIAEN: *Visions de l'Amen; 4 Etudes de Rhythme; Canteyodjaya*
Paul Kim, Matthew Kim, p
Centaur 2668—73 minutes

This is the third release in Paul Kim's complete Messiaen cycle, which is shaping up to be the new reference recording. In addition to being a terrific pianist, Kim is a true Messiaen scholar, having earned a PhD in musicology from New York University. The research has clearly paid off for these performances: the quality of his sound and gesture is, as the composer's widow and pianist Yvonne Loriod avers, "perfect in every way".

The pieces collected here are not for the newcomer to Messiaen: they include two difficult works from the late 1940s, one of which (*Quatre Etudes de Rhythme*) is generally credited with—or blamed for—inspiring the spread of serialism after World War II. The other (*Canteyodjaya*) is a fast but static collage made from a small handful of quirky musical ideas, which Messiaen has identified with fanciful names of Hindu origin.

For the big piece here, the bombastic yet austere *Visions de l'Amen* of 1943, Kim's son Matthew, a prodigious young talent, joins him at a second piano. The two play with remarkable single-mindedness, idiosyncratic (and wonderful) voicings, terrific control over a dynamic range from butterfly-wing pianissimo to thundering sforzando, and just enough

expression to light up Messiaen's slabs of sound without diminishing their abstract, mystical power.

QUINN

MIASKOVSKY: *Cello Sonatas & Concerto*
Alexander Rudin; Victor Ginsburg, p; Musica Viva Orchestra/ Andrei Golovin
Cello Classics 1012—70 minutes

There is something about the music of Nikolai Miaskovsky (1881-1950) that appeals to me greatly. I see the panoramic landscapes of Brahms translated into 20th Century Russia: eternal Nature with man's disturbances presented as temporary disruptions, important only in the short term, solvable if we can only hang on longer.

I would not have chosen Rudin as a prime candidate for this music. He has a tendency to get carried away with the horror of it all and to make it horrible for the rest of us sometimes. I am happy to report that he seems to be exercising better control over his tone than he sometimes does. He obviously revels in the peace and quiet that Miaskovsky is striving for, doing full justice to the horrors without losing his intonational cool, as he tends to do with Schnittke. This violent tendency makes these more up-front readings than the gorgeous ones by Rostropovich over the years. I wouldn't be without those classic accounts, but I am happy to have these dramatic interpretations, to which pianist Ginsburg contributes a great deal.

There is something twangy about the upper register of the piano, but that blends with the way Rudin feels about some of Miaskovsky's upper-register screams, so it almost contributes to the effect. The concerto is also recorded more up-front than usual, making it sound less pastoral but more powerful. This composer can take it, much as Brahms can take on the no-nonsense conducting of Toscanini and tell us something through it. And it is good to have all of Miaskovsky's cello music in one place. There speaks the collector!

D MOORE

MITTLER: *Lieder; Trio; Characteristic Pieces*
Wolfgang Holzmair, bar; Diana Mittler, Russell Ryan, p; Anton Miller, v; Lawrence Zoernig, vc
Preiser 90567—71 minutes

Franz Mittler (1893-1970) was an Austrian composer of lieder and chamber works, and he was also a highly regarded song accompanist in the Vienna of his day. According to the notes in this release, he gave his first public performance as a violinist at the age of nine; his accompanist was Clara Haskil who was only seven at the time. Among his teachers were Leschetitzky (himself a pupil of Carl Czerny) and Clara Schumann's pupil Carl Friedberg. Mittler wrote more than 200 songs with texts by, among others, Rilke, Möricke, the German humorist Wilhelm Busch, and the Viennese critic and solo performer Karl Kraus. In 1939 he immigrated to the US, where he worked in music publishing and continued to compose popular songs and light piano pieces that sometimes included jazz elements. He joined the First Piano Quartet in their weekly radio programs on WNBC. He is said to have made more than 30 recordings for RCA and Decca as well as two short movies for 20th Century Fox.

These songs are all from his days in Austria (they are all in German), and so are the instrumental works. The Piano Trio in G and the *Character Pieces* for piano were recorded and issued privately by Diana Mittler-Battipaglia, the composer's daughter, and that release was reviewed by David Moore (J/F 1999). From his comments, I would judge that Preiser has improved the sound a bit. The performances sound fine and polished.

Many of the songs, including those to the couplets of Johann Nestroy, a Viennese playwright, are written in a cabaret style that recalls Kurt Weill's music, though Mittler's melodies are not as trenchant and memorable as Weill's; a few are more nostalgic or folksy. Some of the Kraus songs allude to then current events (Kraus was politically engaged and a strong anti-Nazi). Mittler also updated many of Nestroy's satirical couplets; and while the allusions to Viennese events and personalities will escape most of today's listeners, their irony and humor can be appreciated, as can the composer's melodic gifts, the latter thanks to Holzmair's excellent performances. Indeed, I can't think of anyone who could have done better with this material. Holzmair's diction is perfect and wonderfully expressive of the poems' nuances. He never exaggerates, nor does he miss any subtlety in these songs. And his beautiful, smooth voice is a great asset here.

Preiser has supplied all the German texts; most but not all have been translated. (Why not all?) I thoroughly enjoyed listening to these works.

MOSES

MOLIQUE: *Flute Concerto;* see Collections

MONDONVILLE: *6 Violin Sonatas*
Cristofori Trio
Hungaroton 32257 [2CD] 112 minutes

I have long known of Jean-Joseph Cassanea de Mondonville, but this is the first time I have heard any of his music. I hope it is the last

time. It drones on and on in the stilted style of French baroque. Anyone who dislikes period instruments will be driven to distraction by the thin sound of the violin. The three instrumentalists all seem to play very well. I am glad that the bassoon continuo varies between harpsichord and organ. But 16 minutes (the shortest of these six sonatas) is too much at a time, let alone the whole two-disc set. For your information this is labeled "World Premiere Recording".

The whole production is really estimable: good performances, good notes, and a very clean recording.

BAUMAN

MONTEVERDI: *Vocal Works*

Consort of Musicke/ Anthony Rooley, Concerto Italiano/ Rinaldo Alessandrini, Ensemble Concerto/ Roberto Gini, Ensemble Arte-Musica/ Francisco Cera—Brilliant 99710 [6CD] 6 hours

Who can this set have been intended for? Four fine ensembles with six discs of widely varied Monteverdi pieces presented with no notes, no translations, only Italian texts. What a shame.

Disc 1 is *Madrigali Erotici e Spirituali* presented in gorgeously sung but slightly inhibited performances by Anthony Rooley's Consort of Musicke. All that's missing is the relish of the text that native speakers would bring to it.

Disc 2 is madrigals based on texts by Tasso with Rinaldo Alessandrini and his Concerto Italiano, the most impressive ensemble here. The settings are from the first four books of madrigals and are sung with obvious relish of the texts and vocal prowess comparable to Rooley's group but with richer voices. Alessandrini developed a freer style with this music after these 1989 recordings, but there's nothing to complain about here.

Discs 3 and 4 contain the seventh book of madrigals. The voices here are even more operatic and there is abundant decoration. Compared with the technical perfection on Disc 1 and the near equivalent of Disc 2, these are fallible performances with sometimes suspect intonation. These pieces are mostly duets and trios.

Disc 5 contains two lovely laments—the lament of Arianna and the lament of Poppea—and the *Scherzi Musicali,* 11 solo and duet pieces. These are sung by soprano Rosita Frisani and mezzo Manuela Custer (who sings both laments). Custer has a rich operatic voice that she uses well. Frisani's soprano is also on the dark side. They combine memorably in the duets, especially in the endlessly lovely *Zefiro Torna.*

Disc 6 offers a dry-eyed *Lamento della Ninfa*—clearly this nymph is going to get over her distress in short order—and just as matter-of-fact readings of *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* and *Il Ballo delle Ingrate.*

With translations and notes, at the Brilliant Classics low price, this set could have been a

Meet the Critic

Stephen Chakwin

Stephen Chakwin has been writing for ARG since at least 1980 and loves doing it because it makes him listen to and think about composers from Schütz to Glass and a lot of others in between. In the last few years he has written mostly about Haydn, Wagner, Bruckner, Mahler, and Schoenberg, which doesn't trouble him at all.

In his musical life he has played (with varying degrees of proficiency) every instrument in the orchestra except percussion, oboe, and flute and a few not found in orchestras, including viola da gamba and clavichord. His main instrument was French horn, which he studied with notable players in New York including the solo horn of the Met's orchestra; viola and keyboard were also major focusses of attention. He has studied many other musical subjects including theory, analysis (including Schenker analysis), orchestration, and music history.

Stephen's performing days are long behind him, but the other members of his family are all performers (three singers, one bass and guitar player) and he is frequently called on to help with practice.

He lives in Norwalk, CT, with his indulgent wife and three children, one in college, one about to be, and one in seventh grade. The Chakwins share their house with a Great Dane and two cats, none of whom has any discernable interest in music.

When he isn't listening and writing for ARG, Stephen represents clients in complex legal cases in New York City and the surrounding area, writes on musical and non-musical subjects, dabbles in local politics, explores the intricacies of Mac software, and serves as a Justice of the Peace, which enables him to perform marriages and witness official signatures.

His most interesting current non-ARG writing project is an article for the British Haydn Society on the nicknames of Haydn's compositions, which should be published in the latter part of this year.

fine introduction to the riches of Monteverdi's music. As matters stand now, those who know these pieces will almost certainly have performances that they prefer to these, and those who don't know the music or the Italian language will find this set impenetrable. Brain-dead marketing.

CHAKWIN

MONTSALVATGE: *Songs*

Marisa Martins, mz; Mac McClure, p
Columna 80—55 minutes

Listening to this album is the equivalent of spending an intimate evening with a few friends in someone's living room, as two splendid artists surround you with stunning poetry, love songs, and lullabies. There's no need to project to a big hall.

Let me just quote from two of the five Negro Songs to let you savor the perfume. The 'Habanera' says, "Your body encloses the evening with the murmur of an opening dahlia. Your body is fruit sleeping on the embroidered breeze." And the 'Cradle Song' describes the child as a "coffee bean with pretty freckles, with eyes wide open like two windows overlooking the sea". Gorgeous poetry with a substratum of nostalgia has inspired gorgeous music. And lovely as the melodies are, the piano part is even more remarkable. It illuminates and floats the imagery, as Mac McClure's slow liquid triplets, lingering harmonies, and exquisite rubato embroiders all the bugs, snails, Chinamen, the cold, children, drunken dancing Congolese, and people in love that Marisa Martins sings about.

At first I thought Martins wouldn't wear well. Her basically mellow voice can have just a slight edge sometimes, and she really doesn't play much with tone color. But her wide range of sensitive expression and the way she shapes and aims phrases with sustained lines and gentle portamentos fits the intimate atmosphere perfectly. Above all, she and McClure together generate magic atmosphere with their perfectly matched musical flow and pacing.

The album, listed as Volume 1 of the complete songs of Montsalvatge, contains six Children's Songs, 'Nana', a Love Song, 'Bergerette', five Negro Songs, 'I Will Not Leave You, My Love', Four Poems by Josep Carner, 'Alehi', and 'The Shepherd Toward the Harbor'. A final cut contains what's called a multimedia video file, which plays as a CD-ROM and includes two McClure interviews with Montsalvatge (who died in 2002) and Martins. The translations of the Spanish, Catalan, and French poems have several spelling errors, the English for Cut 18 is missing, and the translations are printed only after all 21 original texts are presented (a minor inconvenience). But I didn't mind at all with beauty like this.

FRENCH

MORALES: *Music for Charles V*

Chapelle du Roi/ Alistair Dixon
Signum 19—75:42

This is one of those releases that, by rights, belongs in the Collections section. Six composers (plus Anonymous and Gregorian Chant) are involved. Nevertheless, the music of Cristobal Morales constitutes exactly half the program.

The premise of the program is to assemble music that is explicitly or plausibly identified with the court life of the great Hapsburg Emperor. With a range of justifications, this brings us ceremonial motets by Josquin Desprez, Nicolas Gombert, Thomas Crecquillon, Orlando di Lasso, and the courtier Don Fernando de las Infantas. They are wonderful compositions, the most famous being the long-popular four-voice *Ave Maria* by Josquin. Two of them were written to celebrate peace treaties Charles signed. One of these commemorated the Truce of Nice, managed by Pope Paul III between Charles and King Francis I of France. That grandiose six-voice setting of a topically troped *Jubilate Deo* was composed by Morales. Having admired it in a recording of many decades past by John McCarthy's Carmelite Priory Choir, I am happy to have it at hand once more.

But the Big Event of the program, the 800-pound gorilla in the yard, is a Mass over half an hour long by Morales. It is based on the tune 'L'homme Armé' and is one of many in that period that used the tune as a germinal motive. (I am convinced that, just as there must have been a Composers' Union rule in the baroque era requiring the writing of a set of variations on *La Folia* to qualify for membership, so in the Renaissance there must have been a corresponding requirement for composition of a *L'homme Armé* Mass!) Morales's mass is a very rich and intricate affair, mostly for five voices and then six at the end.

This fine debut recording of the Mass is treated somewhat at cross-purposes, I think. It is appropriately prefaced by the 'L'homme Armé' tune itself, sung by male voices in the most swinging rendition I have ever heard. But it only convinces me the more that it was not a real song in itself but a strain contrived precisely so that it could be polyphonically rhapsodized on. But then, almost in contradiction, Dixon mingles the Mass movements with the four Plainchant propers for the Feast of the Holy Trinity, as part of a rather flimsy effort to connect it with a wedding of Charles in 1526. Now, it is true that we hear Renaissance Mass-

es artificially nowadays, their five movements sung as an integral entity, whereas they were, indeed, meant to be incorporated into the liturgical context of chant, as here. Nevertheless, by thus swathing these particular movements by Morales, Dixon immediately isolates them from the echoes of the proceeding 'L'homme Armé' tune, hindering us from trying to follow how Morales uses it in his polyphonic textures. Well, you may be able to program it differently.

Dixon's Chapelle du Roi is familiar from their superb Tallis series for Signum and other ventures. Photographs show 8 and 9 members, while the booklet lists 14 names, so it is not clear (nor is it specified) who or how many are singing when. I assume one singer per part much of the time, but even with some apparent doublings the full and sonorous yet lucid sound they make would do a much larger group proud. At least two female singers are included, but they blend admirably, and all the performances are simply gorgeous. I might almost say that anyone who has never explored Renaissance polyphony before could find this a perfect introductory experience. Certainly no fan of Renaissance music should miss it.

Excellent notes, with full texts and translations.

BARKER

MOUSSORGSKY: *Pictures;* see TCHAIKOVSKY

MOZART: *Arias*

Soile Isokoski, s; Tapiola Sinfonietta/ Peter Schreier—Ondine 1043—61 minutes

The Finnish soprano Soile Isokoski has always been something of a connoisseurs' singer. At the very least, she brings a radiant competence to everything she does. She's always stylistically alert, and she always sounds involved and sensitive. Her vocal purity is well suited to Mozart. She dispatches the difficulties of Fiordiligi's two arias with serene assurance, and her probing earnestness enlivens the concert numbers. 'Ruhe Sanft' floats buoyantly over its lovely accompaniment, and in 'Ch'io mi Scordi di Te', she strikes the notes as cleanly as the obbligato piano.

What's missing, perhaps, is a certain excitement. The voice itself is appealing rather than beautiful, and its cool clarity can become monotonous. There's accuracy rather than exultation in her coloratura, more determination than passion in her vocal acting. I'm grateful all the same for her expertise, but I still wouldn't put her in the top class of Mozart sopranos.

Schreier, who has plenty of Mozart experience himself, is a good conductor; Marita Vitasalo offers elegant pianism in 'Ch'io mi Scordi'; texts and translations are supplied.

LUCANO

MOZART: *Flute & Harp Concerto; Flute Concertos; Andante*

Wolfgang Schulz; Naoko Yoshino, hp; Camerata Schulz—Camerata 28029—74 minutes

Austrian flutist Wolfgang Schulz enjoys an illustrious career. Since 1970 he has been solo flutist with the Vienna Philharmonic. He records widely and collaborates with some of the world's finest performers in chamber music. For this venture he organized a chamber orchestra of friends and family to record all of Mozart's works for flute and orchestra.

Since there are numerous recordings of the Mozart concertos in circulation, selecting one or two for a decent record collection can be a daunting task. To put this performance in perspective, here is my advice: If you do not have any recordings of Mozart flute concertos, start with the biggest names possible, especially Galway, Rampal, Zoon (below) and Nicolet. Nit-picking nabobs will probably not agree with that judgement, but you will not be disappointed. If you already own one or two (or several) that you enjoy and want to add one more that is well-played, if a bit insipid sometimes, this would be a pleasant addition to your collection.

CHAFFEE

MOZART: *Flute Concertos; Symphony 41*

Jacques Zoon; Boston Baroque/ Martin Pearlman
Telarc 80624—78 minutes

Debating Mozart's true feelings about the flute has become a cliche. Some say he hated the instrument but wrote beautifully for it anyway, some say that he only hated the patron who never finished paying him the commission to write the concertos, etc. I am inclined to agree with Martin Pearlman, who argues in the notes that Mozart may have angered his patron by writing virtuoso flute concertos instead of "short, simple" ones. As anyone who has heard either the G or D major concerto butchered by less than competent players can attest, both works are actually a supreme test of technical and musical skill.

This is an enjoyable recital. If you are asking yourself why you would want yet another recording of Mozart in your collection, the answer is simple. Jacques Zoon and Boston Baroque, performing on period instruments, play Mozart with a great deal of refinement, style, and grace. Zoon makes each piece sound easy—not a small feat given the complicated nature of period instruments. In addition, the cadenzas he composed are delightful, display-

ing great sensitivity to historical style while still dazzling.

The performance of the Symphony 41 is amusing as well. Without the lush, heavier sound of modern instruments, the first movement truly sounds like dance music. Pearlman achieves an excellent balance of colors and textures. I hear voices and interior lines usually obliterated by louder, fuller-sounding instruments.

CHAFFEE

MOZART: *Horn Concertos*

David Jolley; Israel Sinfonietta/ Uri Mayer
Arabesque 6780—59 minutes

These readings by David Jolley are elegant, sometimes a little on the prim side, but energetic in the fast movements and well shaped at appropriate moments. Uri Mayer's Israel Sinfonietta accompanies tastefully.

Of the many fine accounts of the Mozart horn concertos, my favorite is by James Sommerville (July/Aug 1997: 145) whose tone is full and creamy, and whose readings are elegant, nuanced, beautifully phrased, and full of surprises. Other outstanding ones I've heard in recent years are by Frank Lloyd (Nov/Dec 1993: 154), Radovan Vlatkovic (July/Aug 1994: 139), and Michael Thompson (Sept/Oct 1998: 196).

KILPATRICK

MOZART: *Piano Concertos 9+18*

Leif Ove Andsnes, Norwegian Chamber Orchestra
EMI 57803—60 minutes

Expressionless playing, with helter-skelter fast movements that make no sense musically, and with no vibrato in the violins, which makes them sound tinny. The lovely Andante in 18 flies by with no feeling at all—and makes a big thing out of those horrible scraping sounds in the violins.

I'm sure Mr Andsnes thinks he is Doing the Right Thing, but this is totally misconceived and will strike almost anybody unprejudiced by fads as ugly and arid.

VROON

MOZART: *Piano Concerto 13; Opera Suites*

Andreas Frölich, p; Ensemble Cameleon Amsterdam—Signum 127—47 minutes

Andreas Frolich has just the right touch for this concerto, here in an arrangement for two violins, viola, cello, and string bass. He's facile and buoyant. He articulates notes with a touch midway between staccato and romantic, with a joyous upturn. Phrases are intelligently shaped, with just enough flexibility to keep the forward impulse moving. And II is practically a study in how he creates expression by weighting just the right few notes in a phrase and by giving his triplets a liquid but unhurried grace (a technique that underlies what you hear in the two faster movements).

In III the ensemble between soloist and strings gives ideal uplift to the music—so much so that I was almost tempted to ignore the inferior tone of the strings (is it the instruments themselves, the players, the engineering, or some or all of the above?). I wondered just how good they are or if Frolich enticed them in the course of the performance to rise above themselves. Certainly, in the string introduction to the first movement, it's clear that, if this were an orchestra, the sheer tone would tell you they were amateurs.

But they're not, as is clear in the short arrangements (for the same five strings) of overtures and famous arias from three operas. Whether in the brisk Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* or nicely nuanced 'Voi Che Sapete', where the melody is seamlessly passed from one instrument to another, the young players (who've been together just a few years) have excellent technique and tight ensemble. While two of the arias from *The Magic Flute* offer nothing memorable here, in the third, 'Ein Madchen Oder Weibchen', they have plenty of (even sly) fun as the changing character slithers from one variation to the next. In the two arias from *Don Giovanni*, they start with a really lilting 'La Ci Darem la Mano' and make you physically bob right along with a furiously light 'Finch'hai dal Vino'. Yes, they've got style. Now for some decent instruments (or whatever will fix the shrill, sour tone they produce).

FRENCH

MOZART: *Piano Sonatas 3, 8, 15, 16*

Evgeni Koroliov—Hänssler 98468—76 minutes

Born in Moscow in 1949, Koroliov, having given us some fine Bach and Prokofieff, turns his attention to Mozart and proves himself adept at playing the master with character and romantic warmth. Warmth, you say? Romantic? This means a willingness to use rubato liberally and seal his interpretations with genuine creativity without distortion.

Since this is not labeled Volume 1, and the sonatas range from early to late, I suspect this is not the beginning of a cycle. Considered for a supplement to several fine cycles, this gets a resounding thumbs up from me, though many may feel the pianist departs a little too much from traditional ideas of classicism.

In all of these sonatas Koroliov carefully observes the embellishment niceties without giving the impression of being too rigid. The music is given a natural lift that enhances rather than detracts from what Mozart has written. In Sonata 15 in F Koroliov follows his

moving performance of the 'Andante' with the often appended 'Rondo' K 494 as final movement. Why this 'Rondo' appears in the printed listing as 'Andante' instead of 'Allegretto' is puzzling. Several scores I have consulted show 'Allegretto', and that is the tempo used by Koroliov. All in all, very attractive.

BECKER

MOZART: *Quartets 20,22,23*

Hagen Quartet—DG 3454—78 minutes

The Hagen Quartet, whose recordings pass through the catalog all too swiftly, is a wonderful ensemble. Their playing is technically immaculate, musically acute, and tonally lovely. Like all great ensembles and interpreters, they have the ability to find the individual sound-world that each work occupies and bring it to life.

Mozart's last quartets have been sniffed at by commentators dazzled by the beauty and ingenuity of the six *Haydn* quartets that preceded them. Mozart was not a natural quartet writer and was taken aback when he encountered Haydn's masterpieces in the medium. He did his best to master Haydn's idiom and eventually, with uncharacteristic effort and difficulty, produced six masterworks of his own dedicated to his mentor.

These later works show that the lessons of Haydn's music were becoming internalized and that Mozart felt less of a need to show his erudition. The simplistic writing of the early quartets was forgotten, the hard-won erudition of the *Haydn* set was behind him, and now Mozart could allow his natural gift of melody to blend with his new powers of contrapuntal writing and structural layout.

K 499, No. 20—called the *Hoffmeister* after its publisher—is a treasury of suave tunes and clever structural tricks.

Three years after the *Hoffmeister*, Mozart began a series of six quartets dedicated to Friedrich Wilhelm II, the cello-playing King of Prussia. He completed only three: 21 (not included here), 22, and 23. He wrote these works with prominent (and not too difficult) cello parts and managed to make them musically accessible (they are much easier to understand and play than 20) and technically sophisticated (Haydn's influence appears in the harmonic adventures and subtle musical jokes). Mozart never completed this set of quartets (he was bad at getting things done) and probably never got paid for them, but the ones he completed are lovely.

Performance and sound are lovely, and the notes are more than adequate. This is outstanding; you should buy it before it goes away.

CHAKWIN

MOZART: *Symphonies 1, 4-9, 11, 43, 55, K 45a*

Concentus Musicus/ Nikolaus Harnoncourt

German Harmonia Mundi 63970 [2CD] 141 min

The numbering of early Mozart symphonies is hopelessly confusing, to the point that, in identifying the works played in this set, Harnoncourt and his editor listed Köchel numbers (there were sometimes two), Breitkopf catalog numbers (the source of our standard numbers), and (in case all else failed) volumes and page numbers in the New Mozart Edition for each piece. I won't go that far but the Köchel numbers for the 11 symphonies here are 16, 19, 19a (Appendix 223), 22, 45a (Appendix 221), 43, 45, 42a (76), 45b (Appendix 214), 48, and 73 (75a).

I spent a great deal of my listening life believing with many others that it took Mozart at least 20-something tries to get a symphony that anyone would want to listen to now. Perhaps you still believe this. If so, this is a set worth exploring. The symphonies were written from 1764 (when Mozart was 8!) to 1772 (when he was 16). All but one of them were written between 1764 and 1768 (ages 8 to 12).

There's no point in going through all 11 symphonies movement by movement, but let me offer two starting propositions. If you played any of these symphonies to a musically literate friend who did not know them, it's much more likely than not that they'd be identified as works of a major composer: JC Bach, early Haydn, Michael Haydn, or Mozart himself. Second, nobody would guess that these were written by a child.

To me they sound astonishingly like the later Mozart. The seeds of the musical language are there and the strengths and weaknesses of the later music already established. The musical themes are strongly vocal, the harmonies daring (listen to the first movement of the first symphony on this set with its series of odd chords), the orchestrations eerily apt, the developments short and superficial. Also, the last movements tend to be boisterous and lively, rondos or nascent rondos with prominent horn parts.

Harnoncourt's performances are a mixed blessing. On the one hand, he is admirably alert to the harmonic daring and the eerily sophisticated textures of the music. On the other, he pushes the music very hard. The finales are often coarsely played and sound harsh and driven. I would not want to give up the life of these performances, so preferable to the prim Böhm or the surfacy Marriner readings, but I wish that Harnoncourt had found a way toward a less manic, less aggressive performance style.

Despite my reservations, I recommend this

release to all Mozart lovers, particularly those skeptical of his early works. Revelations await discovery here.

The notes consist of an essay by Harnoncourt about how astonishing these pieces are (a case his performances make quite well) and another by Monica Mentl about Mozart and his father. The latter is a welcome reminder of what a shock it must have been to Leopold to realize how gifted his son was.

The Concentus plays with more spirit than polish, which seems to have been what was asked of it. The string-wind balance favors the latter, not always to the music's benefit. The recorded sound is immediate and natural.

CHAKWIN

MOZART: *Symphonie Concertante for Winds; Symphonies 25+29*
Carlo Romano, ob; Franco Ferranti, cl; Stefano Aprile, hn; Marco Costantini, bn; RAI Rome/ Peter Maag—Arts 43032—70 minutes

This is another of the Arts series of Peter Maag recordings from the archives of RAI, though 1987 to 1990 is hardly in the dim, dark past. But the sound quality is less good than the Ravel discs, which were recorded more than 30 years earlier. They are stereo, but just somewhat, for the sound is rather amorphous in the Sinfonia Concertante. It is brighter and better distributed in the symphonies, though hardly of demonstration quality. Strange.

The symphonies are a bit rushed and are not noteworthy examples of performance. The Sinfonia Concertante is gentler and almost seems romantic. It is well conducted but hardly up to the reputation Maag had achieved in his earlier Mozart recordings for Decca (London).

Good notes are supplied for those interested in the history of the conductor. This recording will appeal only to Maag enthusiasts.

BAUMAN

MOZART: *Violin Sonatas, K 304, 378, 526*
Werner Hink; Keiko Toyama, p
Camerata 28020—56 minutes

I'm sorry to have to say this, but I've heard this duo before and I really think that, while Toyama is an adequate pianist, Hink, an erstwhile concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic, is over the hill. His playing lacks accents and his vibrato is wobbly. These are not the witty, alert performances these scores deserve.

MAGIL

MOZART: *Wind Concertos*
English Chamber Orchestra
Avie 35 [2CD] 113 minutes

For $16.99, this set of Mozart Wind Concertos with the English Chamber Orchestra (ECO) is a good buy. The ECO in the last few months has released, either by itself or with another orchestra, four discs of Mozart's works. In November/December Mr McClain reviewed the ECO's recording of the Divertimento for 2 horns (Vanguard 1510); Mr Althouse reviewed its *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (Novalis 150 711) as possessing phrasing "without faux sophistication"; Mr Mark reviewed its Overtures in a rerelease from 1989 (Novalis 150 731); and Mr Lucano reviewed the EMI Gemini Series of *Figaro* (EMI 85520), which seem to have arbitrarily deleted several important recitatives in order to fit the opera onto two discs.

The liner notes speak clearly to the volume of work this orchestra has done in its 43 years; it boasts of playing in more countries than any other orchestra in the world, recording over 1,200 works and playing with the world's greatest soloists. The five soloists on this recording are certainly among them.

The Clarinet Concerto is performed by Anthony Pike on basset clarinet. The Oboe Concerto in C is performed by John Anderson, the Bassoon Concerto by Julie Price, the Horn Concerto No. 4 by Richard Berry. We are also given the Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat for winds.

I would suggest starting with any of the concertos, working your way through the rest, and saving the Sinfonia Concertante for last. That way you get to know the playing style of each of the soloists before hearing them together.

From the Sinfonia, I enjoy the Andantino the best. It's light, jovial, and enjoyable to listen to and perform. Theme-and-variations is a great musical-intellectual exercise in capitalizing on one melody. It shows off the technique of the performers and displays rather neatly the instruments separately and paired. Mozart writes a suitable variation for a particular instrument, endowing that line with a character not to be played convincingly by another instrument, and then pairs the instruments for variations. All in all, the Sinfonia is a great complement to the four concertos.

Anthony Pike, the clarinetist, studied politics, philosophy, and economics in London. He is playing the basset clarinet, whose range is several notes more (lower) than the regular clarinet. The last recording of the Mozart Clarinet Concerto was reviewed in March/April by Mr Chakwin (BIS 1263), and Martin Fröst also used the basset clarinet. The "modern" clarinet was only just invented when Mozart was writing this work. There might be a bit more warmth in the modern clarinet, but the basset clarinet handles the frolicking in the low register with much greater ease. The listener can hear that.

John Anderson's Oboe Concerto is the best example of classical solo playing here. His timbre and musical attitude shine clearly through his instrument. The balance between the orchestra and the soloist is perfect. All the concertos except the clarinet concerto were recorded at St Paul's in London. The reverberation in that church is ideal. The resonance of the oboe against the orchestra in that space is wonderful; the solo is always stratified above the orchestra.

Julie Price plays a very good Bassoon Concerto; and the tutti, after Price's very impressive and stylized cadenza, comes in spot on. Notes at the ends of her phrases sometimes have a bit of a crescendo and sound more like the crescendo of a cello or other stringed instrument. I don't care for it, but you may think differently when you hear it. Nevertheless, her playing is great, and her very sensuous II is rewarding to hear next to the sturdy architecture of the closing Minuet.

Finally, Richard Berry performs the Horn Concerto No. 4 on the modern French horn—not the valveless one played in Mozart's time. I find it refreshing that the ECO and its soloists have not been caught up in the race to make recordings with period instruments. Though the French horn of the day was not easily capable of playing scalar passages, as Berry does in his cadenza, given the number of scalar passages in Mozart's other concertos, I think he would have written them in the horn concertos had the horn been able to do them then. There are beautiful moments like one in II, where, at the end of a phrase where the horn is above the orchestra, the oboes cut through the harmonic texture with a great suspension and then retard. That is to say, there are many moments in this concerto where the clarity of music comes through thanks to this fine collaboration of musicians.

I would recommend this set for anyone who is only vaguely familiar with these four instruments or the four concertos or the Sinfonia Concertante. I would more highly recommend, though, hearing this music in concert. There is no substitute for the energy in concert performances.

SCHWARTZ

MUMFORD: *Wending; Promise of the Far Horizon; Landscape of Interior Resonances; Window of Resonant Light; Milliner's Fancy*
Rhonda Taylor, sax; Wendy Richman, va; Margaret Kampmeier, p; Corigliano Quartet; CORE Ensemble—Albany 698—58 minutes

Jeffrey Mumford (b 1955) is a member of the relatively insubstantial ranks of Black composers of serious, composed Western art music. A native of Washington DC, he studied at the University of California-San Diego and currently teaches at Oberlin. A previous collection of his work may be found on CRI 650, and the Bang on a Can All-Stars included one of his pieces on an early anthology (CRI 646).

Wending (2001), for solo viola, is named for its dedicatee, Wendy Richman, who performs it well here. (All of Mumford's titles are in Cummings-esque lower case letters, incidentally.) Predominantly lyrical and elegant, the piece, based on diatonic material drawn from the performer's last name, makes a stately impression.

The Promise of the Far Horizon (2002) was written for the Corigliano Quartet. The piece moves in shifting clusters of diatonic versus chromatic blocks, its gentle harmonies overlaid, violently conflicted, energized, and then evaporated as they take their course.

Next is *A Landscape of Interior Resonances* (also 2002), a three-movement work for piano solo. This abstract landscape consists of violent attacks with leftover harmonics, gentle wafting chords, wild figuration, spasmodic dramatic gestures, and some quiet mystical drifting. II briefly adds repeated notes, but most of this movement consists of an "echo" of the opening movement's material (the repeated notes are designed to underline the "echo" effect, I imagine). The wild figuration dominates the finale, a rather brusque conclusion to an interesting conception. Ms Kampmaier gives it her all.

A Window of Resonant Light (1997), for cello, piano, and percussion, is a set of "character" variations on a theme consisting of a gleaming, near-modal progression and accompanying running figuration. Again, the conception is arresting and is executed with skill. The names of the CORE Ensemble's members are buried without fanfare in the notes: Tahirah Whittington (cello), Hugh Hinton (piano), and Michael Parola (percussion).

'The Milliner's Fancy' (2003), an angular little encore piece for alto sax solo, closes the program. Saxophonist Rhonda Taylor plays it with apparent ease. Overall, this is an impressive program—listeners interested in challenging but rewarding new music should take note. Timings are off for some of the pieces.

GIMBEL

NOLAND: *Postludes, Vol. 1: 1-12*
Gary Noland, p—North Pacific 18—72 minutes

Gary Noland was born in Berkeley, studied music there, and got a PhD from Harvard in 1989. He nevertheless considers himself "self-taught" (as most composers inevitably are), but is careful to cite a number of distinguished names as teachers in his bio (18 of them,

alphabetized). He despises critics (as most composers do), but he offers a quote from *American Record Guide* on the back of the jewel box (something of a misquotation, by the way: the source of the quote seems to be a description of how Mr Noland sees himself, not a critical evaluation by Mr MacDonald—J/F 2003: 242).

Mr Noland's *Postludes* are a collection of wild and crazy pieces for computer-generated (or maybe computer-assisted) piano. These are essentially parodies of various styles, set in a dizzying harmonic language that loops uncontrollably through a wide-ranging gamut of possible and impossible tonalities. He applies this procedure to fugue, ragtime, German dances (Schubert), romantic waltzes (Richard Strauss seems to be a favorite), and virtuosic piano scherzos. There's a Chopinesque polonaise, a whiff of pentatonic Debussy; and, like most composers after Berlioz, he can't seem to keep his hands off the *Dies Irae* (though fortunately tongue is firmly in cheek). Both Peter Schickele and Conlon Nancarrow hover over the proceedings. I'd even throw in Mark Applebaum, another Californian (M/J 2004). The opening fugue is dedicated to the late David Lewin, the prominent Harvard theorist. Lukas Foss gets a dedication, also (maybe his *Baroque Variations* had some sort of influence on Noland at some point.)

The general effect is like watching wet paintings of 19th Century musical memorabilia drip into frazzled 21st Century oblivion. The comic-book grotesquerie that graces the jewel box pretty much says it all. Taken in small doses, these pieces are striking and entertaining. You indulge in more than that at your own risk. (Postlude12, an interminable exercise in blues montage, is the most daunting.) The pieces all have funny titles (maybe "juvenile" might be closer to the mark).

This is apparently Volume 1. Mustaches on the Mona Lisa, but those can be interesting if you're in the right frame of mind.

GIMBEL

NORGARD: *Nuit des Hommes*

Helene Gjerris, mz; Helge Roenning, t; Bodil Roerbech, Andreas Hagman, v; Markus Falkbring, va; Fredrik Lindstroem, vc; Gert Soerensen, perc, electronics/ Kaare Hansen

Dacapo 8226011—64 minutes

This is the fifth opera by the Danish composer Per Norgard (b 1932), though it's aptly called an "opera(torio)" in official publications. Norgard and the theatre director Jacob F Schokking fashioned the five-character libretto from Apollinaire texts.

The taut and abstract drama limns a threatened humanity at the nexus of love, sex, violence, and madness, emerging from the gradual transformation of a couple of ordinary young lovers (Wilhelm and Alice) into a mindless, nameless Soldier and a bloodthirsty, nymphomaniacally partisan war correspondent (Kali). Gjerris and Roenning play all of the characters (including a Greek chorus); each has an astounding technical and expressive range, and Norgard pushes them to the very edge of each at the climactic moments.

With very few resources—two singers, a string quartet, percussion, and very sparing electronics, all executed brilliantly here—Norgard crafts a searingly intense soundscape, wasting nary a note or a minute. Like many European composers of the last two decades, he is focussed very closely on the affective properties of individual sounds and gestures, and he achieves in this opera a masterly clarity of expression that is at once abstract and extremely direct. With consonance and dissonance, lyricism and grit, he paints pictures that even newcomers to the avant-garde can see clearly, though the images themselves are deeply disturbing.

QUINN

OBADIKE: *The Sour Thunder*

Mendi & Keith Obadike—Bridge 9158—46 min

Contemporary opera composers are always "pushing the envelope" and here to push it perhaps just a little too far are Mendi and Keith Obadike and their "Internet Opera and Sonic Book", *The Sour Thunder*. The Obadikes are interdisciplinary artists combining textual writing, electronic music-making, and conceptual art projects. *Sour Thunder* was designed as "an Internet opera and sonic book". The premiere performance was at Yale University in two spaces simultaneously. Two actors performed in the Yale Cabaret while two other actors performed in the adjacent Afro-American Cultural Center. In each performance venue a split screen projection showed the simultaneous performances. From these two spaces images and sounds were streamed to the web (that makes it an "Internet opera", get it?).

It is a curious combination of diverse elements: autobiography, science fiction, simplistic songs, pop music-tainted, all performed electronically then filtered and re-filtered through a mystic haze accompanying a ponderous spoken text (English and Spanish), here called "sound-text pieces" in an attempt to create a surreal, yet personal, tale of cultural and racial identity.

Two complex story strands are braided together. One is the story of Mendi Obadike's experience as a student and tourist in the Dominican Republic where she finds her self

an insider yet still an outsider. The second is the story of Solaika Dast, a world where smell is the primary means of communication—a real problem for communicating in operatic or even aural terms. *Sour Thunder* is each generation as a new invention, though it is no more than a scent to outsiders. Every generation releases the "Sour Thunder" in a formal ceremony of national bonding. By smelling the "Sour Thunder" the citizens of Solaika Dast identify with each other and feel loyalty to the state. The scent makes them feel timeless, living in a perfect world. A single Solaikan citizen, Sesom, is the heroine. She and Blue Jasper get wrapped up in a complex web of intrigue where single children are sacrificed to preserve twins in the family. In escaping her country Sesom ends the piece (quoted from the notes): "She departs from Solaika Dast with an aroma that could only be described as optimism. As soon as she crosses the border into this new territory, she is dizzied by her own odor of inadequacy."

Oh, come off it! This is just a bunch of pompous silliness expressed in the most boring—I repeat, boring—no, make that BORING—miasma of electronic sound effects: monochromatic colors interrupted by repetitive hyper-rhythmic elevator music. "I rest on a bed of sufferin" Mendi chants. So does this reviewer when listening to this.

The Obadikes come with impressive credentials via many commissions and awards. Well, they didn't make a grand impression with me and only convince me that in many a cultural organization there is a sucker with lots of money to waste.

PARSONS

OFFENBACH: *Concerto Militaire; Concerto Rondo; 4 Impressions*
David de Villiers & Gerard Oskamp; Guido Schiefen, Cologne Radio Orchestra/ Helmuth Froschauer—CPO 777 069—70 minutes

When Jakob Eberst the cantor's son left home to seek his fortune in the big city, he managed to eke out a living as a cellist with the Paris Opera-Comique before taking the name of his home town of Offenbach and building a reputation as cello virtuoso that would stand him in good stead, including tours with such luminaries as Joachim, Rubinstein, and Liszt. He wrote a number of pieces for his own use, including several duos for two cellos and even a handful of works for cello and orchestra that have never really attained the popularity they deserve among soloists preoccupied with weightier fare. Two of these, the tuneful *Concerto Rondo* and the more substantial *Concerto Militaire*, have been recorded before, most notably by Ofra Harnoy; and now we have both of them from the young German cellist Guido Schiefen in the company of four entirely unrelated pieces gathered together as *Four Impressions* for a varied and stimulating repast.

What is here termed *Concerto Militaire* was, according to the conductor Antonio de Almeida—perhaps the world's foremost authority on Offenbach—written around 1847. While no complete autograph score is known to exist, the parts have since been found and the concerto completed by the French cellist Jean-Max Clement, who also orchestrated the last two movements based on the piano score. The RCA annotator Richard Freed writes that the soubriquet *Militaire*—Offenbach's own designation—"is supported by nothing more than the somewhat martial gesture that opens the work", a connection made here as well by Eckhardt van den Hoogen. In point of fact, that little march with its curt underpinning in the timpani is no more "military" than its counterpart in Johann Strauss's *Indigo*; a far more likely source of the title is the outburst by cymbals, snare drum, and trumpet that intrudes on the vivacious final Rondo. Offenbach's little march soon builds to a bounteous orchestral outpouring quite in the manner of Paganini, and as with the Italian master's First Violin Concerto we may wonder how it happens that the opening tutti both here and on the Olympia with Catalin Ilea is but a shadow of the grand display offered by Almeida on RCA—that seems strange if, as the notes would imply, all three follow the same arrangement. There's also a lyrical strain very like Rossini. Ribbons of wind color festoon the solo line in the Andante, *cantabile* in all but name; while the final Rondo in its impish manner suggests that the soloist (meaning Offenbach) is pretty much making it up as he goes along, with the vivacious opening sally soon followed by a quasi-tarantella and then something closer to a polonaise.

The initial tempo marking, Allegro maestoso, is realized in sturdy fashion by Ofra Harnoy with Almeida (Nov/Dec 1996), and her burnished tone quite outshines Schiefen; yet his sturdy forward stride does much to enliven the occasion, and his soulful playing is balm to the ear. Even more is taht so in the Andante, where Harnoy draws out the solo line to tenuous effect against Schiefen's flowing account. Harnoy saws away energetically in the finale, but Schiefen imparts an insouciant good humor I find quite winning. Either one is preferable by a wide margin to Catalin Ilea's turgid run-through for Olympia, hampered further by the horrid atonal Vieru concerto you have to put up with to get it.

The highly engaging *Concerto Rondo* dates

from somewhere around 1850, the year Offenbach signed on as conductor of the Theatre Français, and we could with scant difficulty imagine the bracing snare drum tattoos and dance hall flourishes carrying over effortlessly to *La Grande Duchesse de Gerolstein*. Schiefen's aggressive, no-holds-barred treatment puts a bold face on the music that quite sets Harnoy's more laid-back approach for Vox in the shade (May/June 1985; Mar/Apr 1991), and conductor Kunzel downplays the crisp snare drum accents where Froschauer flaunts them. (Incidentally, the *Concerto Rondo* with Harnoy was also brought out by RCA in England; why they didn't reissue it combined with the Concerto I'll never know.)

The four pieces labeled here *Four Impressions* may be attributed at least in part to the far earlier partnership between the young and inexperienced Offenbach and the imperious Friedrich von Flotow (whose much-loved opera *Martha* was some ten years yet to come) who performed together in the best Paris salons. We may picture Flotow as improvising on the piano while Offenbach slumped over his cello, though he may scarcely have imagined that these trifles would surface today (in arrangements by one Heinz Geese). The elegy *Deux Ames au Ciel* may suggest the glorious painting *L'envol de l'Ame* by Louis Janmot that some of you may know from the Magnard Second with Plasson on EMI. There's a gentle yearning to the piece, quite in keeping with the prevailing atmosphere, here unfortunately distended to the point of *ennui* by Schiefen. The *Introduction et Valse Melancolique* seems better suited for Schiefen's expansive treatment; likewise the barcarolle *Reverie au Bord de la Mer*—a rather imaginative setting of his patriotic *Song of the Fatherland*, written on his return to Cologne after the Revolution of 1848—and he wheels quite adroitly through the final *Sleigh Ride*.

Several sessions from German Radio have apparently been brought together here, with David de Villiers on the podium for *Deux Ames au Ciel* and *Sleigh Ride* and Gerard Oskamp doing the honors in *Introduction et Valse Melancolique* and *Reverie au Bord de la Mer*. Perhaps the delay between sessions also explains why Schiefen sounds more astringent in the shorter pieces—though he's certainly expressive enough. I'd be happier with the *Dialogue Concertante* for 2 Cellos I have from Bavarian Radio (Hans Moltkau conducting) though that may not have been available to The Powers That Be. I really wish someone hadn't elected to cut out most of the opening tutti in the Concerto, but as good as Ofra Harnoy is in the main course, I think this handy survey from German Radio is worth the duplication.

HALLER

ONSLOW: *Symphonies 1+3*

North German Radio Philharmonic/ Johannes Goritzki—CPO 999 747—64 minutes

Of the sundry lesser lights who flitted like moths around the Beethovenian flame, all too many soon flickered and dimmed. Think of Ferdinand Ries, whose symphonies have been covered in these pages, and more recently Friedrich Ernst Fesca. To that roster we may now add George Onslow, his highly entertaining symphonies compellingly brought to life by Johannes Goritzki with his excellent NDR ensemble—first 2 and 4 (July/Aug 2002) and now 1 and 3.

André Georges Louis Onslow was the son of an English lord and a French noblewoman and spent most of his life in France. His first three symphonies, patterned after the accepted classical models, were dutifully performed at the Conservatoire but welcomed far more enthusiastically by English audiences. His fourth and last symphony, created for the Lower Rhine Music Festival in Cologne, was soon set aside. French audiences cared only for opera, and Onslow obliged with three *operas-comiques*—the fruits of his studies with Reicha—only to find that the fickle Paris public had already moved on to embrace a younger generation including Gounod, Thomas, and Halevy. He died a forgotten man in 1853 at the age of 69.

Whatever Onslow's fate with Paris audiences, they enjoyed his symphonies far more than the critics; one haughtily dismissed them as "quartets for orchestra". Indeed, Onslow derived his Third Symphony from an earlier (and greatly admired) quintet, and it will be immediately apparent that the string scoring in these pieces is equal in ensemble and counterpoint to the finest chamber music. Yet there is memorable and effective writing for the winds and horns as well.

In 1 an elegiac Largo is followed by a seeming contradiction, Allegro spirituoso, an "intelligent discourse" (to quote annotator Bert Hagels) scarcely recognizable from Goritzki's tempestuous reading. (The booklet says "spiritoso"; that sounds more like it.) There is at the outset a vague feeling of uncertainty harmonically suggesting Berlioz; then a bright Allegro pitting upper against lower strings, with plangent winds setting forth another strain of their own before the roiling strings foment further disorder and lead to an assured closeout. Lyrical elements struggle against the prevailing turbulence in the development, but it must be said that harmonic invention and sheer force of

energy far outweigh any mollifying impulses. As the notes suggest, the Andante espressivo is cut from the same cloth as the Allegretto of the Beethoven Seventh, though it is Berlioz who surfaces in the trombones. Both the Minuet and Finale are labeled Vivace, a clear direction for Maestro Goritzki; we may not appreciate a genteel court dance in the surging trumpet and drum of the Minuet (where the woodwind keys often prove distracting), while the whirlwind opening pages of the Finale immediately sweep the listener off his feet—though once again we're made far more aware of the sheer heady energy of the music than any themes as such.

Again in 3 we may be surprised by the tempo marking of Allegro espressivo (following an extended Largo introduction), once again handily belied by Goritzki's exhilarating approach. Nor does he linger over the yearning second subject, first heard in the oboe and then passed on to the bassoon, as the constant chugging rhythm urges everyone onward, with some striking writing for the trombones as we circle the closing bar. The scherzo is designated Allegro impetuoso, again taken to heart by Goritzki—all to the good, since it's not one of Onslow's most inspired displays, save for the brass chorale that leads into the trio—and it's a good idea to simply keep things moving smartly along. The clarinet introduces the Andante soave, a gently rocking melody rather in the manner of Rossini with an enchanting solo turn by the cello farther in. Onslow launches the Finale (Allegro agitato) with a swirling Catherine wheel effect—overlain by wind color seemingly quite oblivious to the churning strings—and this soon develops into an earnest Italian saltarello that handily supports Berlioz's praise, calling the symphony "brilliant".

If you've been eagerly snapping up the earlier symphonies by Ries, Farrenc, and Czerny as they came out, here's more of the same, most enthusiastically championed by Goritzki and his splendid ensemble, and as with the previous CPOs taken down in warm, yet crisply detailed sound. In fact you'll want both Onslow discs, especially if all you know is his chamber music.

HALLER

ORFF: *Orpheus*

Herman Prey (Orpheus), Lucia Popp (Eurydike), Rose Wagermann (Messenger), Karl Ridderbusch (Guardian of the Dead), Carl Orff (narr); Bavarian Radio/ Kurt Eichhorn

Arts 43003—66 minutes

Carl Orff first tinkered with Monteverdi's *Orfeo* in 1923. The 1940 arrangement, first heard in Dresden, is his third and final arrangement of the first masterpiece in operatic history, and it is a far cry from *Antigonae* and *Oedipus der Tyran*—works that require singers to make Orff-ul sounds that perfectly complement percussive, dissonant, screechy sounds form the orchestra. This *Orpheus* is definitely not 17th Century in style and feeling, but these 66 minutes reveal an attractive-sounding take on *Orfeo* with many of Monteverdi's melodies recognizable. Orff's orchestra of strings, basset horns, harps, and double-strung lutes creates some rich sonorities, yet is at the same time simple and sometimes understated, as is the vocal writing.

This performance was recorded in 1972 under the composer's supervision and can probably be considered definitive. Hermann Prey is eloquent and moving and sings beautifully. Popp's brief contributions are just as telling—I wish there were more of her. The cavernous sounds of Mr Ridderbusch and the touching Messenger of Rose Wagemann also command attention. The orchestral and choral forces under Kurt Eichhorn are persuasive, and Eichhorn's control of his forces really helps to put Orff's well-thought-out conception across with utmost clarity.

Orff is heard for nearly two minutes, but his comments (in German, of course) aren't particularly illuminating. No text or translation.

MARK

PONCE: *Guitar Concerto;* see RODRIGO
PROKOFIEFF: *Violin Concerto 1;*
see KHACHATURIAN & STRAVINSKY

PUCCINI: *Manon Lescaut*

Daniela Dessi (Manon), Fabio Armiliato (Des Grieux), Marcel Vanaud (Lescaut), Enzo Capuano (Geronte); Seville Symphony/ Steven Mercurio

RS 520114 [2CD] 134 minutes

While this performance of *Manon Lescaut*, recorded in May 2003 at Seville's Maestranza Theater, is unlikely to dislodge any of the established favorites, it's likable enough in its own way. The orchestra is on the thin side—string department especially—and some of the comprimarios are distressing. Vanaud's Lescaut is inappropriately buffo, especially next to the dignified, rich-voiced Geronte of Capuano. But the opera is about the young lovers, and neither of them disappoints. Dessi has become, perhaps, Italy's reigning prima donna, and she makes a vivid and touching Manon. She's at her best in the two arias, which are exquisitely sculpted, with deep feeling and fine dynamic gradations. Sometimes her tone can become a bit strident and unsteady, but we forgive her because she's so thoroughly involved in the drama. Armiliato has a slightly dry, well-focussed voice, and he

always maintains a firm, clean line, uncluttered by sobs or gasps or other self-indulgent accents. He moves credibly from the smitten lover of Act 1 to the tragic hero of Acts 3 and 4.

Mercurio is a strong conductor, the choral work is refreshingly animated (they sound like real people), and the sound is reasonably good. An Italian-only libretto is included. There have been better recordings of *Manon*: Albanese-Bjoerling on RCA, Callas-Di Stefano on EMI, Freni with Domingo on DG and Pavarotti on Decca. Despite much authentic flavor, Dessi and Armiliato are not in the same class.

LUCANO

PURCELL: *King Arthur*

Veronique Gens, Hanna Bayodi, s; Beatrice Jarrige, a; Cyril Auvity, ct; Joseph Cornwell, t; Peter Harvey, b; Le Concert Spirituel/ Hervé Niquet

Glossa 921608—76 minutes

This is the seventh full-length recording of the next-to-the-longest of Purcell's "semi-operas", this one consisting of musical episodes for John Dryden's epic play *King Arthur*.

Anthony Lewis was the pioneer with his 1959 2LP set on Oiseau-Lyre. If the period-instrument movement has left it behind on some counts, it remains a landmark of artistic excellence in quite vivid early stereo. It was long unavailable, but in the early 1990s it was reissued on CD (Decca 433 166, 2CD, with the Mackerras recording of *The Indian Queen*). Alfred Deller's 1978 recording for Harmonia Mundi (reissued on CD) was an amateurish affair by comparison. Period-style performance was initiated in 1983 by John Eliot Gardiner, in his vivacious and handsomely rendered recording for Erato (96552, 2CD).

The first venture by French performers was led by Jacques Grimbert for ADDA (581183, 2CD; N/D 1990), capable but not fully competitive, and perhaps no longer available. Another British presentation, of high vocal excellence, was Trevor Pinnock's for Archiv in 1991, originally a 2CD set (435 490), but now available only in a comprehensive assemblage of Pinnock's Purcell recordings (5 discs). On the basis of a much-praised production staged in Paris, William Christie made his recording for Erato (98535; N/D 1995) with a mix of French and American soloists, in a vivid and distinctive realization.

One is struck at the outset by the fact that this is the first recording to squeeze the score onto a single CD. The comparison of running times is startling: Lewis, 87:35; Gardiner, 91:39; Christie, 92:10; Pinnock, 93:31; Deller, 98:27; Grimbert, 101:56. How does Niquet get away with only 76:04? Well, there are one or two tiny cuts, notably the excision of the "St George" stanza in the finale—but then, the languorous Grimbert does that too! In the end, the differences boil down to a matter of pacing: little variations in length add up.

That is one clue to the character of Niquet's production. It is very straightforward, with only a tiny bit of the sound effects that Christie introduces. Niquet is a seasoned baroque stylist, and he runs a crisp show, with mostly brisk, no-nonsense tempos. He pulls back from the usual rustic rowdiness in the Act V Comus scene ("Your hay it is mow'd"), curiously omitting the third of its four stanzas. He relies more than some others on full orchestra, and he often doubles the violins with oboes, creating a sometimes heavy and even coarse sound. Christie's instrumental work is the model for suave delicacy. Niquet makes some other instrumental touch-ups here and there. (Like Gardiner and Christie, by the way, Niquet puts the Chaconne at the very end, where I think it does belong, while Pinnock keeps it at the beginning, and Grimbert arbitrarily sets it between Acts I and II.)

One hates to dwell on the point, but the key to comparisons in this very, veddy British work is English diction. Like Grimbert and Christie, Niquet uses a mix of French and British soloists, and the difference between the nationalities in clarity of their English is inescapable, even though the non-Brits are fine singers. Take Véronique Gens, who appears not only here but also in Christie's recording, in entirely different assignments—Niquet uses two singers where Christie employs four for the soprano roles. Christie reserves Gens for the famous solo of Venus, 'Fairest isle', in Act V, which Niquet gives instead to Bayodi. Gens sounds quite lovely, but the words are not clear; in this touchstone solo, while the boyish-sounding Gill Ross for Gardiner is crystal-clear, for vocal sheen I prefer Pinnock's Nancy Argenta. Gens's diction is no more clear than in her singing for Niquet of the "She" character in the ensuing love-debate; and her voice is rather heavy for Philadell's trickery in Act II. On the matter of accents in general, Christie's team comes through rather better.

There are, of course, merits in all the recordings. Christie and Gardiner are interesting contrasts in their very thoughtful approach to details and inflections. Both Gardiner and Pinnock offer highly idiomatic and stylish British performances that capture the intimacy of the theater forces Purcell would have had. Between them, I find Pinnock just a bit cool, whereas Gardiner seems to me to bring more imagination and vitality to his rendition: I would lean to his recording as first choice. Christie is fine for those who want robust musicality with a genuine feeling of theatricali-

ty. And, in the end, those who choose Niquet's single-disc economy and convenience will by no means get a bad deal. How nice to have all these choices!

BARKER

QUILTER: *Piano Pieces;* see SCOTT

RACHMANINOFF: *Piano Concertos; Paganini Rhapsody*
John Lill, BBC Orchestra of Wales/ Tadaaki Otaka; Jorge Luis Prats, Mexico City Philharmonic/ Enrique Batiz; Nikolai Lugansky, State Academy Orchestra of Russia/ Ivan Shpiller
Brilliant 6214—154 minutes

This budget-priced Rachmaninoff set is culled from the catalogs of ASV and Nimbus. John Lill's 1 is a dutiful reading that did not impress Mr Young (Nov/Dec 1997); I concur. Nikolai Lugansky's renditions of 3 and 4 are extroverted, with odd moments (such as the finale of 3) where the shifting of gears comes across as clumsy. There are more than a few rough edges, both from the soloist and the orchestra, in sound that is a tad distant and dim. (Lugansky takes the shorter cadenza in 3:I. Note that Lugansky has redone the concertos recently for Warner.)

This is no competition for the spectacular Weissenberg/Prêtre 3 on RCA 1014, at long last reissued (but only in Japan, and only from Tower Records). Prats and Batiz are straightforward in 2 and the Rhapsody, fully competent but unexceptional.

KOLDYS

RACHMANINOFF: *Paganini Rhapsody; Corelli & Chopin Variations*
Nikolai Lugansky, p; Birmingham Symphony/ Sakari Oramo—Warner 60613—73 minutes

Continuing his Rachmaninoff cycle, Lugansky turns to the three sets of variations. The *Paganini Rhapsody* is a crisply effective reading with excellent accompaniment by Sakari Oramo and his City of Birmingham forces. They too seem caught up in the brilliance of the music and are little inclined to dawdle or seek out inner meanings. It is all quite refreshing; the steely-fingered pianist approaches his Rachmaninoff with little sentimentality and much that recalls the composer's own approach.

In the *Corelli Variations* Lugansky continues to show his superior articulation and ability to create an interesting entity based on this non-Corelli tune. The *Chopin Variations* takes as its point of departure Prelude 20 in C minor. While dating from 1902-3, the composer's writing is assured, creative, technically challenging, and without frivolity. Both of these variation sets keep a safe distance from anything as sumptuous as the famous Paganini Variation 18. Still, for substance and beauty no one wanting these pieces together on one disc will be disappointed.

Warner offers 34 internal tracks. While not covering each individual variation, few can complain about the access points. Combining this with an excellent recording helps solidify the notable place for this release in the Rachmaninoff discography.

BECKER

RAFF: *Symphony 4; Overtures: Benedetto Marcello; Dame Kobold; Die Parole; Concert Overture*
Bamberg Symphony/ Hans Stadlmair
Tudor 7113—65 minutes

Cello Concertos 1+2; Cello Duo; Begegnung
Daniel Müller-Schott, vc; Robert Kulek, p; Bamberg Symphony/ Hans Stadlmair
Tudor 7121—76 minutes

Here are two more welcome entries in Tudor's survey of the orchestral music of Joachim Raff with Hans Stadlmair and his outstanding Bamberg players. Ahead are the four last symphonies depicting the seasons of the year, and that unfortunately means the older Tudor recordings will be phased out. We may hope that 9 will include the sizable section of the last movement finally reinstated by Werner Andreas Albert (Sept/Oct 2004); it was omitted by Jean-Marie Auberson on the earlier Tudor as well as the Marco Polo under Urs Schneider.

Unlike its immediate predecessor *Im Walde*, Raff's Fourth Symphony has scant programmatic implications, yet contains some of his freshest and most winning music, beginning with the opening theme whose "swinging pulse" (*vide* Robert Dearling) may remind the listener of Schubert's *Unfinished*. The Scherzo is unmistakably redolent of Mendelssohn—"a Mendelssohn weightier with middle age", writes the Marco Polo annotator Keith Anderson, which tells us far more about Urs Schneider's performance than it does about the music. Actually, if you added some appropriate nonsense it could pass for a Gilbert and Sullivan patter-song, quite bubbling over with effervescent writing for the winds. In contrast the Andante suggests a solemn processional, with an inexorable tread in the strings as the winds intertwine around the thematic material or waft overhead. Surely many listeners will be reminded of the Allegretto of the Beethoven Seventh—not least midway through, when upper and lower strings take turns proclaiming the main theme against a counterpoint in double time. Echoes of the opening movement set the finale in motion, and once again you can't help thinking of Gilbert and Sullivan as the

entire orchestra dances a hornpipe. It is hardly Raff's most profound creation, yet it makes for a rollicking workout. If you love Joachim's *Gastein* arrangement of the Schubert *Grand Duo* as much as I do, I'm sure you'll hear the coda echoed here in the winds at 3:06; perhaps Joachim heard it too.

I find it impossible to choose between Hilary Davan Wetton on Hyperion (Nov/Dec 1999) and this new one; both have an excellent band to work with (though Wetton's Milton Keynes ensemble is noticeably smaller) and both respond to the passionate writing and rich font of melody with a will, handily pulling ahead of the pioneering Marco Polo with Urs Schneider (May/June 1994) whose plucky Kosice forces cannot match the two front-runners. This is apparent most of all in the Andante, where Schneider's funereal trudge quite drags everyone down with it, whereas with Stadlmair's fresh and winning treatment the kinship with the Beethoven Allegretto is unmistakable. In the effervescent finale Schneider nudges too hard; hear how the Bamberg winds positively chortle! Wetton does wonderfully well with the symphony too, aided immeasurably by the plangent sound of the English winds; and if you already have that one—all the more desirable for his outstanding *Im Walde*—then you can see why I'm not about to part with either one.

Adding to the desirability of the Tudor are the four overtures, two of them never released commercially before. A direct translation of *Dame Kobold* as "Madame Goblin" would be handily belied by the soaring Rossinian horn at the outset, likewise the buoyant waltz rhythms and even more so the *echt* Suppe gallop that follows. Here I like Nicholas Carthy on Dynamic—he also offers the most stimulating *Lenore* around (Nov/Dec 2000)—yet I like Urs Schneider even more, coupled with perhaps the better of the two available Raff Sixths (May/June 1995; see comparison with Stadlmair, Sept/Oct 2003), as both conductors hold up on the reins a bit more in that bracing Suppe gallop, to good effect. Likewise Stadlmair plows straight ahead both in *Benedetto Marcello*—I also have it from a German broadcast of the opera by Grzegorz Nowak, who treats it much the same—and also the earlier *Die Parole*, which I have never encountered before in any way, shape or form. Mark Thomas, whose website (www.raff.org) is required reading for anyone with the slightest interest in Raff, demurs in matters of tempo, finding that these three theater overtures (thematically all quite interchangeable) respond well to such brisk treatment, and I'd agree up to a point; but I do think it helps to have a bit more space between the notes, as Schneider's *Dame Kobold* demonstrates. Certainly I commend all three as (in Thomas's words) "real whistling, arm-waving territory for the frustrated conductors amongst us", and Stadlmair at 75 can whistle up a storm with the best of them.

With its fleeting melodic similarity to Debussy's *Printemps* and its rather curious mixing of Brahmsian and Wagnerian influences, the *Concert Overture* is far less prolix than the *Fest-Ouvertüre* discussed last issue and boasts arresting writing for the brass. (Volker Tosta in his highly entertaining notes describes it as "one of three similar works written during that period and dedicated to whatever German prince reigned over Raff's workplace at the time".) There's a suitably pompous header followed by a bustling Allegro much like a tarantella—no doubt prompting Tosta's reference to Mendelssohn's *Italian* Symphony, though the prevailing descending dotted motif much more clearly recalls the overture *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*. (Or, turn it upside down and *voila*! you have the coda to the *Scotch* Symphony.) Stadlmair approaches the music in the same heady fashion as Schneider (with 7; July/Aug 1994), but Schneider *wishes* he had an ensemble this polished.

I realize that once you add up the Hyperion of 3 and 4 with Wetton, Schneider's Sixth with *Dame Kobold*, plus *this* one, that's a pretty hefty investment if you're not a huge Raff fan like me. (Plus, Stadlmair's Sixth includes the only available recording of the *Hungarian* Suite. Sorry.) Marco Polo could help out by adding the Schneider Sixth to their Naxos line, just as Hyperion has already reissued the Wetton 3 and 4 on Helios. But if it's the overtures you want, Stadlmair's the only game in town for two of them; and his buoyant Fourth is so beautifully done that any duplication seems quite beside the point. Certainly whether you prefer the overtures or *Im Walde* as coupling, the Fourth Symphony of Raff is one of his finest creations.

And you'll want the second disc too. Both Cello Concertos were composed soon after the *Lenore* Symphony and represent a valuable addition to the literature. Raff wrote his First Concerto at the urging of the cellist Friedrich Grützmacher, whom many will recognize as the constructor of the "Boccherini Concerto". Raff went out of his way to furnish a piece in every way worthy of the great cellist. There's a gorgeous opening melody that is born of the same romantic outpouring as the concertos of Schumann, Saint-Saens, and Lalo written around the same time. This soulful strain is joined by another, briefer motif that to these ears sounds remarkably like its counterpart in the opening movement of Anton Rubinstein's Fourth Piano Concerto completed ten years earlier. All

through the piece there is grateful writing for the woodwinds, best of all at the close. It leads directly into the Larghetto, "a melody of intoxicating beauty" in the words of the annotator here. After listening to the *Concerto Rondo* of Offenbach (above) I was amused to find much the same saucy music-hall feel to Raff's finale, though that may be due in part to Daniel Müller-Schott's bravura reading; I have another performance from the BBC with Murray Walsh whose impish humor would probably wear better, but it's hard to find fault with playing so fluent and accomplished.

Only two years separate the two concertos; yet the Second Concerto is more expansive and songful—even autumnal in the manner of Brahms. In turn I hear Dvořak in the nostalgic secondary strain, while the Andante is the sort of flowing, heartfelt melody that came so effortlessly to Raff and once again has a ripeness and warmth that Brahms surely would have appreciated. There's a *moto perpetuo* quality to much of the writing in the energetic finale, where Raff again gives the wind players an opportunity to take center stage, including some pert passagework very much like Mendelssohn. This movement does go on a bit, including a rather substantial cadenza.

We are told that Müller-Schott studied with both Heinrich Schiff and Steven Isserlis. Blessed with a remarkable sensitivity and warm, burnished tone, he seems entirely caught up in the richly lyrical writing, the sheer joy of this music. His expressive treatment of the little *Begegnung*—literally "meeting", clearly a romantic liaison that seems rather overheated for genteel salon audiences—is music-making of the highest order. Both here and in the marvelous Duo—*why* are pieces like this continually overlooked by big-name recitalists?—he's joined by Robert Kulek, an expert player in his own right, who fortunately for this impassioned music is no shrinking violet but a partner on equal footing. Those seeking romantic music well off the beaten path, not to mention cellists wishing to expand their repertory, will want to add this treasurable disc to their collection.

HALLER

RAKOWSKI: *Etudes, Vol. 2*

Amy Dissanayake, p—Bridge 9157—76 minutes

It was just last issue that I asked for more of David Rakowski's piano etudes. Well, like magic, here they are. Volume 1 was reviewed by David Moore (Bridge 9121; J/A 2003).

This is certainly the most formidable set of piano etudes since Ligeti's. Bridge now completes its survey of the 60 plus of them to date, all played by this fine pianist, a student of Ursula Oppens and 1999 graduate of Northwestern University. This release covers all of Volume 1 (1988-96) and most of volumes 4 and 5 (2000-2002).

I think one needs to keep in mind that these are etudes (studies) and are not especially intended for extended listening, though they are programmed in as musical a way as possible. Rakowski is assuredly an *American* composer, and his music has that brash and raucous side that can wear thin with overexposure. (I don't think the same issue comes up in the etudes of Chopin, Debussy, or, indeed, Ligeti, where there is such variety of color and expression in every single work.) And Rakowski is an *academic* American composer, with all the impressive (and perilous) trappings that go along with his Ivy League pedigree. You get at least a part of the picture. For all the sophistication and brilliance, I wish he would allow just a little more air into his work, which does have a tendency to get stuffy.

Many of his best moments are those that take jazz as their basis (stride in IV: 40, "free jazz" in I:8, boogie in IV:32, bop in V:41, swing in V:50). These pieces really catch fire and must be a blast in concert. That's not to say that Rakowski doesn't have a sensitive and lyrical side: that side comes out particularly well when he's sharing the rarefied air of the Great Composers of Europe (Wagner in I:3, Debussy in I:7, Schumann in V:48). They are never obviously or crassly quoted, to Rakowski's credit—only gently and lovingly suggested. (I particularly like V:43's fantasy on the figure of Bach's C-minor Prelude, WTC I.)

Sometimes that rarefied air comes directly from American academic halls (maybe not so rarefied there). We get inspiration from the likes of Mario Davidovsky (IV:6), Martin Boykan (IV:31), and George Edwards (I:4). Of course, those "in the know" will be amused by these little homages, but others might want to move on discreetly to other matters, like the many very effective "interval etudes", which compare well with Debussy's classic works in this genre. These make useful and welcome supplements to those Olympian pieces.

I particularly like etudes with mind-boggling virtuosity (that's mostly what etudes are for, aren't they?). I direct your attention to the dizzying scale etude (IV:33), the blistering repeated note etude (I:1), or the fiendishly tricky octave etude (1:5). (I would be remiss if I didn't mention Marilyn Nonken's incredible performance of IV:33 on Albany.) As you can tell from reading this, there's really something for everybody, and you should find your favorites and mix and match to your taste. It's a tremendous project, and if you're a pianist you are strongly advised to take note. All fans

of contemporary piano music will definitely want to add these to your collections.

Notes are tremendously detailed and helpful, though some of the congratulatory prose could have been edited out. I enjoy Mr Rakowski's sense of humor. Sonics are very up front and a bit jangly sometimes, but it's impossible to complain about Ms Dissanayake's amazing accomplishment.

GIMBEL

RANJBARAN: *Persian Trilogy*
London Symphony/ JoAnn Falletta
Delos 3336—78 minutes

Behzad Ranjbaran was born in Iran in 1955 and studied at Tehran's Conservatory. He came to the US in 1974, studied at Indiana University, and later earned a doctorate in composition from Juilliard, where he currently teaches.

His *Persian Trilogy* is a set of three tone poems based on legends from the pre-Islamic *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings), a vast 10th Century epic poem by the poet Ferdowsi (c. 940-1020). It is the Persian *Kalevala,* so to speak, and Ranjbaran has come up with three masterly contributions worthy of Sibelius.

Seven Passages (2000) refers to the hero Rostam's efforts at rescuing his king, Kavus, from imprisonment. The "seven passages" are seven "trials" that Rostam has to endure in order to save his king. All seven passages are telescoped into a colorful overture, with Rostam's galloping horse flying the hero to various adventures, and a brief central episode involving a sorceress providing contrast.

Seemorgh (1991) is named after the great magical bird that brings up Rostam's father, Zaal, after he is abandoned by *his* father, Saam, on Mt Alborz, in fear of an evil curse. This evocative three-movement piece takes its cue from the world of Rimsky and his brethren. I opens with a couple of motives that thread their way through the work in various guises. The energetic variants that follow bring to mind Liadov's *Babi Yar* and works of that ilk. After the music calms down, the gentle N*f*y is heard, followed by an echo of the opening's main motive. II's lush exoticism could be heard as a latter day *Scheherazade*—here, as there, the opening motive ties things together. Finally, III is a wild tarantella, easing into a beautiful, harp-swept passage eventually capped by an exciting coda.

The Blood of Seyavash (1994), the major entry in the Trilogy, is a complete ballet dealing with Rostam's paternal relationship to this legendary Prince, who was a great warrior in Iran's many wars against Central Asia. There are three main themes, depicting the work's three grand topics: Destiny (the powerful opening motive), Humanity, and Conspiracy (the slinkiest and most Persian-sounding of them all). All are introduced in the first large section of the seven-part piece. The ballet deals with Seyavash's many trials and tribulations—his attempted seduction by his stepmother, the resulting separation from his father, his adoption by his former enemy King, his marriage to said enemy's daughter, and his final unjust consummation (his blood is said to be the source of red tulips, a legend still heard to this day in Iran). Ranjbaran has composed a noble and brilliantly conceived score, spectacularly orchestrated and filled with memorable tunes, meticulous development, and impressive craftsmanship. This must have been an evening to remember in Nashville, for whose ballet the work was composed.

Listeners attracted to good old late 19th Century exotic romanticism will love this. Terrific performances by Ms Falletta and the LSO. Helpful and engaging notes by the composer.

GIMBEL

RAVEL: *L'Enfant et les Sortileges; Mother Goose Suite*
Andrée Aubrey Luchini (Enfant); Mady Mesple (Princess, Nightingale); Michel Senechal (Petit Vieillard, Théière, Rainette); RAI Rome/ Peter Maag
Arts 43039—62 minutes

L'Heure Espagnole; Valses Nobles et Sentimentales
Eric Tappy (Torquemada); Andrée Aubrey Luchini (Concepcion); Pierre Mollet (Ramiro); Michel Senechal (Gonzalve); RAI Turin & Milan/ Peter Maag—Arts 43040—63 minutes

These two stereo recordings are from RAI, the first made in 1963 and the second in 1962 and 1969. They are much superior to most German and Austrian tapings of the same period. Of course some of the results may be owing to the 24-bit, 96-kHz reprocessing. In any event, the stereo is well spread and extremely natural sounding, much more like recordings made 30 years later with the best equipment. The only flaw is that the last 90 seconds of the stereo tape of *L'Enfant* was lost, and the monaural tape is substituted. The two operas sound superior, but only by a small margin, to *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales,* recorded seven years later!

These are all the more remarkable as they are conducted by Peter Maag, a student of two great conductors, Wilhelm Furtwängler and Ernest Ansermet. He also studied philosophy in Basel and Zurich and retired to a Tibetan monastery for two years in the mid-1960s, abandoning a flourishing conducting career.

These were evidently the last performances he gave of the two operas. They show a great sympathy and understanding of Ravel's some-

times eccentric writing. Maazel and Previn recorded both works but without surpassing these performances in any way. One must remember that Ansermet was one of the greatest Ravel conductors, and he obviously imparted much of his insight to Maag. He chose a variety of singers that is almost unique. Michel Senechal, Colette Herzog, and Pierre Mollet were well established in Ravel's music. Mady Mesplé and Eric Tappy had recently risen as French opera stars, and Andrée Aubery also fitted her parts perfectly.

L'Enfant et les Sortilèges tells of a Paris child after World War I. Disillusioned by politics and war, Ravel delves into illusory childhood.

A child refuses to do his homework and so is locked in his room with dry bread and unsweetened tea. He has a tantrum, destroying most of the furniture in the room. At this point magic takes over and the destroyed objects come to life. A true fairy tale ensues, with the child tormented in an outside garden until it finally bandages its pet squirrel, which it had injured earlier. This leads the other objects to return the child to its room and call the mother to help him.

L'Heure Espagnole was first performed in Paris in 1911. The plot involves the clock maker Torquemada, who winds the clocks in the public buildings of Toledo at the same time of day. During this "Spanish Hour" his young wife, Concepcion, meets her lover, Gonzalve. There follows a comedy of different men arriving to share Concepcion's favors and hiding in grandfather clocks. She ends up fascinated with the handsome and strong Ramiro and takes up an affair with him. The plot evolves with great humor and is beautifully constructed by Ravel.

The two orchestral works are also well performed, ironically each for the last time in his life that Maag conducted them.

Good notes and librettos only in French. Lovers of Ravel, and Maag, can't afford to pass these up.

BAUMAN

Word Police: opinionated

The word is pejorative and cannot be a compliment. To be opinionated means "Don't confuse me with the facts. My mind is made up." That is never praiseworthy.

If we mean to say that someone has thought a lot about things and therefore has developed strong convictions, we should certainly not call him "opinionated".

RAVEL: Orchestral Pieces

Daphnis & Chloe; Rapsodie Espagnole; Alborada del Gracioso; Don Quichotte & Dulcinee; Tzigane; Pavane; Valses Nobles et Sentimentales; Tombeau de Couperin; Barque sur l'Ocean; Ma Mere l'Oye; Sheherazade Overture; Sheherazade; Introduction & Allegro; Eventail de Jeanne Fanfare; La Valse; Trio

Linda Finnie, mz; Stephen Roberts, bar; Yan Pascal Tortelier, v; Rachel Masters, hp; Renaissance Singers; Belfast Philharmonic; Ulster Orchestra/ Yan Pascal Tortelier

Chandos 10251 [4CD] 275 minutes

These recordings were originally issued in the 1990s in single discs, each coupled with works of Debussy. I never heard them back then and suspect they were not in circulation long. (Reviews March/April & July/Aug 1990, Jan/Feb & Sept/Oct 1991, Jan/Feb 1992, Sept/Oct 1993.)

How you feel about this compilation may come down to where you place Ravel as an impressionist. In Tortelier's hands, he is more of a neoclassical modernist than a blending, shimmering impressionist. Sometimes he's even a romantic. Tortelier's approach is direct, with clear textures and clearly defined solos and choirs. Tempos are on the fast side, and the lively rhythms are solid and sometimes slightly to the front of the beat in a way that really keeps the music moving. Articulations and note shapes are consistent and even. The soundstage is large, with considerable weight and powerful climaxes (for Ravel).

Much of this character emanates from the Ulster Orchestra, which plays with virtuosity, consistency, and panache. Its sound is bold and neutral in tone, and it speaks Ravel with an Irish (or English) accent. Chandos's typical large-scale recording accentuates these qualities and serves the interpretations well. That is not to say there are no quiet and exquisite moments. There are many—see the exquisite *Barque sur l'Ocean* for an example—but you won't find as many of the breathy pianissimos and supple, limpid phrasing that other French conductors have given this music in more (dare I say it) feminine interpretations.

In a way, *Pavane* distills the qualities of this series: it is beautifully played, lyrical, rich, very enjoyable—and a bit square, in both the geometric (mostly) and stylistic senses of the term. Tortelier's *Daphnis* is one of the more romantic, powerful, and dark performances I know (though not as dark as Gerard Schwarz's). Compare the fast tempos, keen balances, and the kaleidoscopic brilliance of *Tombeau de Couperin* with Martinon's blended, impressionist view. Both are wonderful. Tortelier's *Minuet Antique* has the same scin-

tillating quality as his *Tombeau*. *Rapsodie Espagnole* is steady and not as supple or atmospheric as some (the great Reiner, for example). This is particularly true of 'Haberna', but it is still very colorful. *Alborada* is a little lighter and more flexible, and just as colorful. *Valses Nobles* is at once exquisite and regal. Europe really does comes crashing to the ground in the frightening final moments of a muscular *La Valse*. In the more impressionist *Ma Mere* Tortelier yields somewhat to produce a nicely scaled performance, but a bit more shimmer and mist, if not essential, would be welcomed. Stephen Roberts is no Frenchman, but his light baritone and the lively accompaniment are very pleasant in *Quichotte*. Linda Finnie's mezzo is rather heavy in *Sheherazade*, but I got used to it. Tortelier's exciting conducting helps—both here and in the *Sheherazade Overture*.

Bolero is quite good, but at the risk of overstatement, Tortelier's lean to the front of the beat seems to make some of the Ulster soloists a bit uncomfortable with their triplets and the 3-against-2 phrases that must be spread through the beat. I'd also like a little more bite from those rhythmic "third beat to downbeat" chords.

Tortelier's intimate and affectionate performance of the orchestral version of Introduction and Allegro, abetted by harpist Rachel Masters, makes a far stronger case for the larger forces than Martinon's reading with the curtly unsympathetic Chicago Symphony. (He did not record this in his EMI set.) Tortelier's full, powerful orchestration of the Piano Trio comes off as a larger and grander work than anything Ravel actually wrote (unless you count his orchestration of Moussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*). I like it, though. It sounds like a romantic *Daphnis and Chloe*.

The competition among "complete" sets is formidable. Jean Martinon's ripe, authentically French (and impressionist) set from the 1970s (EMI) is probably my first choice. The sound is very good, and the playing of the Orchestra of Paris is fine and sometimes ravishing, if with a few lapses. Another great, but fruitier, French reading is Andre Cluytens's set from the 1960s (EMI) with the Paris Conservatory's insouciant woodwinds, wailing horns, and airy strings. The sound is decent, but not as good as Martinon's. Bernard Haitink's Concertgebouw recordings (Philips) lend a polished richness and warmth to Ravel (and Debussy) that I find appealing.

Stanislaw Skrowaczewski (Vox) is more romantic and a touch heavier, but neither he nor his Minnesota orchestra seems as comfortable or settled into Ravel's language as the first three sets do. You either love or hate the Pierre Boulez (Sony), as the Debussy and Ravel Overview put it. His readings, mostly with the New York Philharmonic, are luminous and beautifully played, but there is something about the often slow tempos and the image of Boulez turning and examining the music under the light in an ever-firm grip that eventually turns me to one of the more evocative sets. Still, Boulez is important in his way, and his *Daphnis* is stunning.

Claudio Abbado's set (DG) has been highly praised in some quarters. The playing of the London Symphony is incredibly detailed and possibly the best in this survey. The music moves along well, but color and emotion and are so reined in that the effect is rather desiccated (except for a good *Rapsodie Espagnole*). Charles Dutoit's slow, rather languid way of leaning back from the music (as opposed to Tortelier's forward style) makes him seem almost uncertain. There's a bit of Boulez to his readings, but if you want Boulez, get Boulez. The one Dutoit I like is his bold and colorful *Daphnis*. As for Seiji Ozawa, it was his astonishingly dull Ravel box that convinced me in the 1970s that the Boston Symphony made a big mistake in its choice of music director.

I can't begin to cover all the other recordings, but I wouldn't be without performances by Munch (especially his first *Daphnis*), Monteux (*Ma Mere*), Reiner (*Rapsodie*), Ansermet, and Paray, to name a very few. For more, see the *Overview* (Jan/Feb 2000—no mention of the Tortelier recordings).

"Completeness", by the way, is a matter of interpretation and availability. Tortelier gives you pretty much everything but the piano concertos, and he's the only one to include *Don Quichotte*, the *Sheherazade* vocal music, and Introduction and Allegro. Martinon's original LP collection contained the two concertos, but the last CD box I saw did not. Boulez, Dutoit, and Skrowaczewski include the concertos, but only Boulez adds the *Sheherazade Overture*. Cluytens's set contains all of the main orchestral works but his *Daphnis*. That, and the piano concertos, come on separate discs. Haitink sticks to the major orchestral pieces, but he plays the *Daphnis* Suites rather than the whole ballet (so does Skrowaczewski). For a complete *Daphnis* with Haitink, you must get his Boston recording.

The Chandos booklet notes are extensive and comprehensive enough to include Tortelier's thoughts on how he went about orchestrating the Trio. If you favor Tortelier's approach over the more traditional French styling, his set could be the basis of your Ravel collection. Otherwise it is a fine supplement to Martinon, Cluytens, and Haitink.

HECHT

REICH: *Different Trains; Triple Quartet; 4 Sections*
Lyon Orchestra/ David Robertson
Naïve 782167—65 minutes

Different Trains is at once abstract and highly personal, an account of the Holocaust and its time told through lapidary fragments of interviews Reich conducted with Americans and Germans. The piece is shot through with the image of the train—a symbol of how industrial transportation altered the shape of the world for better and for worse. Reich famously derived much of the melodic and harmonic material of the piece from the "found tunes" underlying his subjects' speech.

I have long held the unpopular view that *Different Trains* was a turn for the worse in Reich's output; with the piece's notes and tempos beholden to emergent structures in its oral libretto, there is little in the way of conventional musical logic, and the piece seems disjoint to the point of distraction. Reich's attempts to deal with this structural problem in the two works that have occupied most of his attention in the last 15 years (*The Cave* and *Three Tales*) have been less than effective.

But I can honestly say that the new version of *Different Trains* for string orchestra is a revelation, at least in David Robertson's hands. The piece was originally conceived for a string quartet playing with a multitrack tape containing Reich's samples of interviews and sound recordings, together with two layers of prerecorded quartet music. The new version begins with the possibility of performing the piece with three quartets, then doubles and redoubles the parts for a 48-piece string orchestra. Robertson has carefully thought through every nuance of phrasing and articulation, hiding the piece's seams and softening its rough edges with the buttery warmth of his strings. And while the rhythmic discipline of this large string orchestra is naturally less than perfect, it is precisely when they waver and dephase slightly in the incessant rhythmic machine of the prerecorded tape that they viscerally illustrate, far better than any libretto can, the composer's thematic anxiety about the mutual degradation of humanity and technology.

The performance of *The Four Sections* is also subtle and beautiful, and a definite improvement on the Nonesuch recording by Michael Tilson Thomas and the London Philharmonic, but there are some experiments with tempo here that fall flat. Aside from the awkward deviations from Reich's carefully worked-out proportional tempo modulations, there is a peculiar contradiction in the Vivace last movement (one of Reich's most rhythmically exciting) between the tremendous energy the orchestra achieves and their difficulty in holding it together at Robertson's slightly-too-frenetic tempo.

A new 36-player version of *Triple Quartet* fills out the time. It's just fine, but less necessary than the other recordings here—the original (with one player on a part) makes a bit more sense with the piece's Eastern European flavors.

Naive is establishing a terrific catalog of technically superb recordings. The detailed sound and vivid stereo imaging complement Robertson's excellent performances.

QUINN

REINTHALER: *Jephta & His Daughter*
Richard Salter (Jephta), Sabina Ritterbusch (Miriam), Jürgen Sacher (Ephraim), Oliver Zwarg (Prophet), Waltraud Hoffmann-Mucher (Maiden), Konstanze Maxsein (Maiden); Bremen Cathedral Choir & Chamber Symphony/ Wolfgang Helbich—CPO 999 938 [2CD] 126 minutes

Reinthaler's life span (1822-96) was almost the same as Bruckner's (1824-96), though as a conductor in Bremen he was more associated with Brahms (1833-97). In fact it was Reinthaler's chorus that gave the premiere of the early, six-movement version of Brahms's *German Requiem*. His compositions, almost all for voice, include operas, cantatas, and part songs, along with this oratorio, *Jephta*, based on texts from Judges, the Prophets, and the Psalms that Reinthaler himself arranged. This work, written fairly early in his career (1855), was his most popular, remaining in the active repertory until he died. Since then it gathered dust until 1979, when Helbich brought it back in a performance in Bremen Cathedral.

Even though the liner notes cite influences from Wagner and Brahms, the work is very much in the vein of Mendelssohn (whom Reinthaler met shortly before his death in 1847). The story, also told by Carissimi and Handel, deals with Jephta and his not-too-smart promise to the Lord. In exchange for military victory he agrees to sacrifice whoever first comes out of his house. This turns out to be his daughter, and you can guess the rest.

Reinthaler's music is, as I say, Mendelssohnian in spirit and competently done, but in general it sounds conventional and undercharacterized. You can hear a vigorous chorus and not be sure (without consulting the text) if it's an occasion for war or rejoicing. The best section is the dramatic confrontation between Jephta and his daughter, which is very convincing. The performers, including the chorus, which takes a major role, are all you could ask for in such a rare work. The main solo responsibilities fall to Salter, who is commanding in

tone, and Ritterbusch, who sings beautifully despite some slight intonation problems.

This is not an essential release for most collectors, but it is a fine representation of the oratorio in post-Mendelssohn Germany.

ALTHOUSE

REISE: *Sonata Rhythmikosmos; Yellowstone Rhythms; Satori; The Devil in the Flesh*
Jody Karin Applebaum, s; Charles Ullery, bn; Marc-Andre Hamelin, p—Albany 665—62 min

Jay Reise (b 1950) studied with George Crumb, George Rochberg, and Richard Wernick at Penn, but also credits jazz and South Indian music as major influences. He is currently the Robert Weiss Professor of Composition at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

This program of piano and chamber music opens with *Sonata Rhythmikosmos* (1993, rev. 2001), a neo-classical three-movement piano sonata in fast-slow-fast configuration. Reise's conceit was to string together three Scarlatti-like movement designs into a single sonata structure. The opaque but not unpleasant harmonic language would not have disturbed Hindemith.

Yellowstone Rhythms (1994) is an extended single movement tone poem for the difficult combination of bassoon and piano. The piece strives to express "a fictionalization, idealization, or dreamlike imagining" of Yellowstone's variegated natural habitat. It opens with a long lyrical line over a static minor triad accompaniment. A spastic scherzo follows, initiating all manner of unpredictable hijinks until more slow music returns to restore a sense of classical balance. The overall effect is pretty bizarre, and it's not something I would make a habit of listening to, though repertoire-starved bassoonists might want to check it out.

Satori (1995) is the Buddhist term for "the point of awakening or enlightenment when one can look simultaneously in two directions and behold such things as God and earth, and the finite and the infinite". These sentiments are expressed in a meditation on love dictated to Reise by his grand-uncle, "an Albanian mystical monk", and set here as a suitably cosmic song for soprano and piano. This piece, with its starlit rotations and seemingly suspended atmosphere, makes a striking impression, though it clearly places some vocal strain on Ms Applebaum.

The Devil in the Flesh was originally going to be an "opera-film" based on the novel by Raymond Radiguet. That project was abandoned, but mined for material that turned into piano pieces for Mr Hamelin. These Six Pictures (1998-2001) are the result. They are a fine group of virtuoso pieces. The first two are for the left hand alone, the first a dreamy romance, the second a gently jazzy character piece sporting an insistent dragonfly drone. The following pieces are for both hands: an evocative nocturne, a little virtuoso scherzo, a lush jazz-tinged improvisation, and a riotously sizzling finale. Hamelin plays these with his customary jaw-dropping technique and sumptuous tone. This collection will be of interest to all Hamelin fans and those looking for interesting new piano repertoire.

I wish the pianist could have been given less amateurish sonics. Guest performers are not on Mr Hamelin's level.

GIMBEL

RESPIGHI: *Belkis;* see RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF

REVUELTAS: *Sensemaya; 8 for Radio; Planos; Caminando; Once There Was a King; Time in June; Wandering Tadpole; Pieces for 12 Instruments; Homage to Lorca;* **POMAR:** *Prelude & Rhythmic Fugue*
Juan Carlos Tajes, narr; Ebony Band Amsterdam/ Werner Herbers—Channel 21104—66 minutes

By the time I was done listening to this album, I had the feeling that what I heard were more arrangements than originals. Sure enough, only *Ocho por Radio* and Pieces for 12 Instruments are in their original form. Herbers's own liner notes state that there are three versions of *The Wandering Tadpole*, but he doesn't quite say that he used any of them. All the rest are reductions from full orchestra. And why he included Jose Pomar's five-minute piece, other than that he was a friend of Revueltas and wrote in the same style, Herbers never explains. It's nifty and colorful but not soul-stirring.

I mention all this because almost the entire album didn't turn me on or make me tap a toe even lightly. I sat totally still in my chair like those orchestra players who, good as they are, to me curiously produce so much music without exhibiting even an ounce of body English. I say "curiously" because everything else about this album is superb: the players are exquisite, execution is absolutely precise, tempos are anything but dreary, and the rich, resonant engineering is also warm and balanced, allowing you to hear every detail in an integrated way.

Three of the performances did move me, or, rather, make me move. *Once There Was a King*, a six-minute suite cobbled together from music for a play and stylistically much like Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale*, is played with lots of sass, especially by the baritone sax. It's a crazy entertainment of the kind Milhaud could write. *A Time in June*, three poems by a friend of Revueltas, with two instrumental interludes and an epilogue, is filled with the melancholy and sense of loss both felt as they returned from the failed Spanish resistance movement

against Franco in the 1930s (the way I still feel after last November's election). Juan Carlos Tajes reads the poems with the broken voice of an old man defeated by life, as Revueltas's music accompanies and surrounded them with a nostalgic flood of discouragement. It's in this slow work that Herbers generates some real atmosphere. Also, in the short, abstract, Stravinsky-like Pieces for 12 Instruments, Herbers's exactness has a really crisp, lively edge.

But, other than that, *Sensemaya*, here in its chamber version, has all the interest of a mathematical formula (Salonen's recording with the full Los Angeles Philharmonic on Sony can make me feel as if writhing snakes are crawling up my legs). All the other performances I described variously in my notes as "never totally unbuttoned, like a woman who takes her clothes off only part way" (*Wandering Tadpole*) and "with all the insanity, parallel seconds, multiple counter-rhythms, and instruments screaming tunes all over the place, I sit stone still" (*Homage to Frederico Garcia Lorca*). I mean, even if you don't like Mexican music, there's something wrong if it doesn't make you want to sing along or dance. And, Lord knows, there are plenty of street tunes and folk rhythms in Revueltas's music.

FRENCH

RIDOUT: *Processions; Stations of the Cross; Easter Fanfare; Dance Suite; 5 Pieces from Canticle of the Rose*

Robert Crowley, organ—Lammas 161—73 min

Alan Ridout (1934-96) was a remarkably prolific English composer, whose output includes 15 operas (some of them for children), 8 symphonies, 25 concertos for a variety of instruments, 8 string quartets, and many shorter works. From 1960 to 1984 he was Professor of Theory and Composition at the Royal College of Music, where he had earlier been a student of Gordon Jacob and Herbert Howells. In the mid 1960s he lived in Canterbury, while holding various teaching positions in Cambridge, Birmingham, and the cathedral choir school. Around this time he began a creative partnership with the cathedral and its organist from 1961 to 1988, Allan Wicks, resulting in many new choral and organ works. Some of those organ works are heard in this recording by Robert Crowley at the organ of Canterbury Cathedral.

In his biographical sketch of the composer, Crowley notes that Ridout "was not an avant-garde composer", but his 'Psalm for Sine Wave Generators' (1959) was probably the earliest electronic work by a British composer, and he wrote some experimental music in a 31-tone temperament involving microtones. *Stations of the Cross* (1978, published 1994), 'Easter Fanfare' (1990), and *Dance Suite* (1969, published 1975) were written especially for Canterbury. Perhaps the most intense music in these works is in *Stations*, running the gambit from extreme dissonance to gentler harmonies. As one might expect, *Dance Suite* is lighter in spirit and more accessible to the listener, as is the brief 'Easter Fanfare'.

Processions (published in 1974) is a suite of four pieces for Margaret Phillips. *Canticle of the Rose* was written for the 1989 dedication of the Laporte Rose Window at St Alban's Cathedral. The complete work consists of eight movements: four representing the traditional elements of creation (Earth, Fire, Air, and Water), three representing the persons of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit), and a concluding Postlude. The work may be played complete, or in two shorter suites suggested by the composer: Elements plus Postlude (presented on this recording) or Trinity plus Postlude.

The cathedral organ comes across here sounding rather blatant and unsubtle, though many individual registers are rich and even luscious in tone. Perhaps this colors one's perception of the music, but it is worth remembering that much of it was conceived specifically for this instrument. Crowley's performances of this daunting repertory are solid, steady, and assured. I must confess that I do not find the music particularly appealing, though there are some moments I do find attractive, such as the plaintive conclusion to *Stations*, with its tierce solo over a quiet chordal accompaniment, or the Postlude from *Canticle of the Rose*, starting as a quiet and solemn processional with triadic but not conventionally functional harmonies and building to a majestic climax. Regardless of my personal predilections, this is clearly an important body of work that deserves to be made available. To my knowledge this is the only commercial recording devoted entirely to Ridout's organ works.

GATENS

RIHM: *Quartets 5+6*

Minguet Quartet—Col Legno 20212—77 minutes

Ooh, this is weird stuff! Quartet 5, *Without Title*, contains endless passages of sul ponticello tremolos in a high register while whatever instruments are at liberty make comments. It is angry stuff, about which the composer remarks that his sole purpose is "to move and be moved". This half-hour piece seldom lets up. The notes have nothing much to say about the music, but they present no fewer than six pictures of the composer, each sporting different hair.

Wolfgang Rihm was born in Karlsruhe in 1952. He was a student of such luminaries as

Humphrey Searle (12-tone), Karlheinz Stockhausen (points West) and others whose names are familiar but whose styles are less specific, like Klaus Huber and Wolfgang Fortner. About him Nicholas Slonimsky says: "His music thrives on calculated unpredictability; but he does not shrink from producing shockingly euphonious and startlingly pleasurable sounds." Yes, but the reason these sounds are shocking is because they occur so seldom.

The 47-minute Quartet 6, *Blue Book*, seems to have more non-irritating passages than 5, but I may just be growing acclimatized. Hey, after a quartet by Morton Feldman lasting six hours and up, one movement in three-quarters of an hour is nothing, right? You can't scare me now! Well, those of you out there who find this diatribe fascinating, go to it! The Minguet seems to be enjoying themselves, and I'm not paying for their extra cakes of rosin and to have their bows rehaired. Well, maybe I am, at that. I'm almost curious enough to invest in the earlier part of this series, since they're recording all eight of Rihm's quartets. I guess I'm a glutton for punishment.

D MOORE

RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF: *Scheherazade;*
RESPIGHI: *Belkis, Queen of Sheba Suite*

Württemberg Philharmonic/ Norichika Iimori
Genuin 4047—69 minutes

I bought this for the *Belkis* suite, but the young Japanese conductor Norichika Iimori does remarkably well with the far more familiar *Scheherazade*, if without the beguiling woodwind playing of Beecham, the heady passion of the young lovers heard from Stokowski, or the bracing 'Festival at Baghdad' offered by Reiner.

Following a rather tepid pronouncement by the Sultan, Sinbad sets sail at a measured pace, aided by the massive string sound of the Württemberg players, who conjure up some broadly swelling waves. He builds to a sturdy if not especially exciting climax, filled out nicely by the low brass. There is some wiry string tone, and the cello around six minutes in isn't as warm as some, though it's suitably expressive. Iimori draws out the sinuous narrative by bassoon and oboe that tells of the Kalender Prince, who saunters on his way; the dialog of low and high brass midway in comes off in terse fashion, and Iimori actually builds to a fairly healthy clip before the languorous close. In the third picture he's sensitive to the stirrings of newfound love, aided by the warm sound of the Reutlingen studio; certainly the strings could use more luster—not a patch on Stoky's wondrous London players—yet he's clearly sympathetic to the young lovers and spins out the melodic line in persuasive fashion. In the 'Festival of Baghdad' he's energetic, yet never rushed; and if some of the wind players seem like they're getting through it by the skin of their teeth, it makes for an exhilarating repast.

As the comely narrator Scheherazade, concertmaster Kazuhiro Takagi does a highly creditable job, limning the more seductive and coquettish moods of the young bride with alluring tone and admirable narrative skill; I was most impressed by his mastery of the sustained harmonics at the close, which I would imagine is for the violinist the most difficult part of the entire score. As a performance by an up-and-coming conductor and orchestra I'd put it way ahead of the Malaysian players under Kees Bakels (BIS, Jan/Feb 2004), and it makes an inspired pairing for the *Belkis* Suite.

Originally Respighi conceived his monumental ballet *Belkis, Queen of Sheba* as a full evening's entertainment, at its La Scala premiere calling on the talents of more than a thousand performers, including a massive orchestra filled out with sitars and other Eastern instruments as well as wind machines, a phalanx of offstage brass, a chorus, several vocal soloists, and even a narrator who relates the Biblical saga of Solomon and Sheba in verse. A DVD of the entire ballet would surely be something to see; yet even in the relatively brief suite offered here, we can hear that Respighi, then 53, was at the absolute peak of his form.

The ballet tells of the epic journey made by the Queen of Sheba across vast stretches of desert to meet with King Solomon at his request, for he has heard rumors that she loves him from afar. In the opening section, 'Solomon's Dream' it's a simple matter to hear first the yearning strain of Solomon, who drafts a letter to the Queen inviting her to his palace, and then the caravan of camels laden with treasure beyond compare that bears the Queen and her retinue. There are sinuous and haunting melodies in the winds to establish the exotic locale, then the ever-closer tread of the caravan with fanfares from the brass and the insistent jingling of the *campanelli*. This is followed by an expressive cello solo and lush string writing not unlike the 'October Festival' from *Feste Romane* that tells of the love of Solomon and Sheba, and finally a brief, yet evocative image of footsteps fading away, introduced by the celeste, that suggests the attendants discreetly taking their leave. 'The Dance of Belkis at Dawn' shows the Queen awakening from a most pleasant dream about the handsome young king and performing a languid dance in honor of the rising sun accompanied by Arabian *tambour*. The 'War Dance' actually combines two scenes from the ballet, with muscular young men dancing atop huge drums they have rolled onstage—Ray

Harryhausen fans will surely recall Bernard Herrmann's riveting introduction of the great bronze figure Talos from *Jason and the Argonauts*—and this is followed by the fearsome posturing of Solomon's African warriors in tribute to the Queen. The union of Solomon and Sheba is celebrated by great rejoicing, culminating in an 'Orgiastic Dance' where the massive drums are assaulted with maniacal fury. In the closing pages of the suite, the barbaric rhythms are slowed momentarily by a grand chorale in the brass before the final procession, like the Roman legions ascending the Capitoline Hill, advances inexorably to the great thrones of Solomon and his Queen now seated motionless as idols of gold.

In this suite Iimori comes up against formidable competition from Eiji Oue with the Minnesota Orchestra on Reference (Nov/Dec 2001) and before him Geoffrey Simon and the Philharmonia for Chandos. Like Simon, Iimori reverses the two middle movements for "a more balanced overall dramatic effect"; unlike Simon, but in company with Oue, he employs a solo tenor in the final movement rather than the trumpet sanctioned by the composer. Thus from a textual standpoint the clear front-runner is Oue, and that's borne out by a comparison of the three recordings. Both Iimori and Oue offer a highly atmospheric account of the opening scene in Solomon's boudoir, languorous and evocative where Simon seems more prosaic. But the Philharmonia cellist is far warmer and riper of tone than either Oue's or Iimori's, and that helps redeem Simon's matter-of-fact treatment of the opening scene. (Presumably Iimori's cellist is the same as in *Scheherazade*. He sounds better here.)

Once you program your player to put the middle movements back the way Respighi had them, Oue and Iimori again compare very well, whereas Simon is hampered by a more distant placement of the *tambour*; in particular the wash of sound Iimori summons from the Württemberg strings is every bit as seductive as Oue's Minnesota players, indeed in general Iimori here far more than in *Scheherazade* proves remarkably adept at bringing out splashes of color and languorous turns of phrase. But as forceful as Iimori's war drums are in the third scene—or Oue's for that matter—Simon's are even more impressive, filled out with a huge gong, a room-filling sound that with both Simon and Iimori is unfortunately undercut by the manic pace. Oue gets it just right, and that goes double for the final 'Orgiastic Dance' where Iimori spins out of control. Simon pulls up on the reins a bit but Oue is better still, and I like their grand treatment of the brass chorale at the end, where Iimori barely breaks step.

You probably have several recordings of *Scheherazade* in your collection already, and Eiji Oue is still the best *Belkis* around; but you probably have several other recordings of his coupling (*Pines of Rome*). If you can find this Genuin import (best chance is on-line; I obtained it from JPC, but you could contact Genuin directly at www.genuin.de or write to Königstrasse 14, D-32760, Detmold, Germany) the combination of *Scheherazade* with the even more exotic *Belkis* makes for a highly absorbing comparison.

HALLER

RODRIGO: *Concierto de Aranjuez;* **PONCE:** *Concierto del Sur;* **VILLA-LOBOS:** *Guitar Concerto*

Sharon Isbin, New York Philharmonic/ Jose Serebrier

Warner 60296—67 minutes

This is Sharon Isbin's second recording of the *Aranjuez* (the first, with the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra, was reviewed by Bill Ellis in May/June 1992). But it is the New York Philharmonic's *first* recording of the work; indeed, it is the orchestra's first-ever recording with a guitarist. For this, Isbin is to be commended. Not only has she spurred one of the country's great orchestras to record the Rodrigo, she also got them to stick around and play two of the best non-Rodrigo concertos in the literature: the Ponce and the Villa-Lobos. The Philharmonic's playing is truly wonderful: the winds in the Aranjuez are luminous, as is the soaring cello solo in I. The players lavish equal attention on the Ponce and Villa-Lobos—I especially noticed details in the latter, like the humorously chugging bassoons in I, that I'd never heard before. All this makes for one of the most lustrous orchestral performances in a guitar concerto in recent memory.

Isbin's playing is as incisive and colorful as ever. She especially shines in II of the Rodrigo, shaping the flamenco gestures with care and building to a fierce climax in the second cadenza. III is also very fine; Isbin tosses off its many tricky scales with lightness and ease, and the orchestra delivers a performance as refreshing as an Andalusian breeze. I is a bit more spotty, with a distracting punch-in edit and choppy scale playing from Isbin at the movement's climax.

Her performances of the Villa-Lobos and the Ponce are both technically solid and expressively generous. Though I find III of the Villa-Lobos a bit sluggish, this is nevertheless one of the best performances of the work on record (sharing top honors with John Williams's account with the English Chamber Orchestra on Sony 44791).

With the one striking exception of the bad

punch-in edit, the production is truly marvelous. The balance between orchestra and soloist is excellent. Isbin's tone, sometimes harsh on other recordings, is lush and full here. The instrumental choirs of the orchestra are both blended and yet well defined in the mix. The sheer beauty of sound for much of the record makes it a joy to hear.

RINGS

ROSSINI: Overtures

Gazza Ladra, Scala di Seta, Semiramide, Barber of Seville, Italiana in Algeri, William Tell
Kurpfalzisches State Orchestra/ Kurt Redel

arias from *Pagliacci, Boheme, William Tell, Barber, Lucrezia Borgia, Mefistofele, Nabucco, Attila, Don Carlo, Rigoletto*; **PUCCINI:** *E L'uccelino Ninna-Nanna*
Jose Van Dam; Loire Philharmonic/ Marc Soustrot—Novalis 150713 [2CD] 120 minutes

An odd pairing, and only two of the arias are from Rossini operas. The overtures are given pleasant but routine performances with no real tension in those great crescendos. Van Dam fans will want to invest in this mid-price set to hear him in items unusual for him from both the baritone and bass repertory. This is the only recorded opportunity I know of to hear him sing Philip's aria in Italian. It is a moving account but just misses the emotional power of a Christoff, Ghiaurov, or Siepi. Rigoletto's 'Cortiganni' is likewise touching but misses the vocal and emotional thrills and chills that the greatest baritones have brought to it. And the bass arias from *Nabucco* and *Attila* are also done with consummate artistry—Zaccaria's 'Tu sul Labro' is easily the best of the Verdi arias. The *Pagliacci* Prologue lacks the expected high notes, but is beautifully done if not especially gripping. Tell's plea to his son, Basilio's ode to slander, Duke Alfonso's aria from *Lucrezia Borgia*, and Colline's big moment from *Boheme* are the recital's finest moments. The singing and characterizations are excellent. He is as moving, comical, and menacing—all done through intelligent coloring, musicianship, and a vivid presence. A nice Puccini song and an unmenacing 'Ave, Signor' from *Mefistofele* complete the program. Jose van Dam in his very greatest roles (which include the *Hoffmann* villains, Golaud, and Mozart's Figaro) is a magnificent operatic presence, equal to his formidable talents as a song recitalist. If nothing here is on that level, at least everything is the work of a major artist, with the very best tracks well worth checking out. No texts or translations.

MARK

RUTTER: *Be Thou My Vision: hymn settings*
Cambridge Singers; City of London Sinfonia/ John Rutter
Collegium 514—75 minutes

Hymns should not be accompanied by simpering strings but by a big, imposing organ. I can only describe this as fluffy and soft. I like my hymns sturdy and masculine. It is conceivable that some listeners prefer them this way, but one reason men feel out of place in many churches is this kind of spineless fluff.

The music reminds me of paintings of kittens on velvet—or perhaps of Thomas Kincaid's paintings. It's cotton candy.

VROON

SAMUEL: *Remembering Orpheus;*
see HANDEL,D

SCHROEDER: *Piano Pieces*
Jeri-Mae Astolfi
Capstone 8742—61 minutes

Phillip Schroeder (b 1956) has degrees from University of Redlands, Butler University, and Kent State. He teaches at Henderson State University (Arkansas). "Among the many influences on his work", we read in the notes, "the most significant include Taoism, good food, the overtone series, and the love and patience of good friends". Worthy sentiments, all.

Here are samples of his piano music. There are no track numbers or timings. A letter from the composer informs the Editor that "tracks 13 and 15 are switched, the pieces are in the correct order", though it's unclear exactly what that means. Dates of composition are not given, nor the piece's circumstances or occasions.

Mr Schroeder has a good ear and an often compelling sense of the unassuming gesture. The 12 Pieces for Piano are brief studies on interesting, often contemplative musical events. *No Reason Why* (or is this *From the Shadows of Angels*?) is a beautiful eight-minute nocturne on the gleaming stars of the night sky, which nevertheless turn slowly in time. 'Floating' adds the quiet rumble of low piano string glissandos to Schroeder's timbral repertoire. It only lasts 2-1/2 minutes, and could have been added to the first set of pieces. *From the Shadows of Angels* (or is this *No Reason Why*?) again offers exquisitely nuanced sonorities, their components delicately positioned across the range of the instrument and allowed to ring suggestively in musical space. Finally, *Moons* arpeggiates octaves and forms lovely harmonies attached to them. "Questions are posed in all of Schroeder's works", the notes inform us. Here's one: what are tracks 17-19? They're attractive, like everything else, but we

can only guess what they are. Are they additional "Moons"?

Ms Astolfi has beautiful tone production and is very warmly recorded, but her piano is not well tuned. The production values of this label are absolutely ridiculous and don't help the causes of their composers.

GIMBEL

SCHUBERT: *Hungarian Duets*
Claire Aebersold, Ralph Neiweem, p
Summit 404—141 minutes

This is the second release in Aebersold and Neiweem's series of Schubert's four-hand music. Whereas the first release contained some of the more familiar Schubert duos, such as the Fantasy in F minor, this one sports some of the best compositions of the genre, such as Variations on an Original Theme, D 813, and the Six Grand Marches and Trios, D 819.

There is much to praise here. These are excruciatingly difficult works, and this seasoned duo raises the bar from their last release. The balance between the *primo* and *secondo* is just right, and there is plenty of the obligatory Schubertian charm to go around. They also have adequate techniques, as is evidenced by the third movement of *Divertissement a la Hongroise*. My only reservation is in their choice of tempos in the more brilliant works, such as the last movement of *Divertissement* or the finale of the *Grand Duo*, which sometimes feel stodgy compared to performances by, say, Uriarte and Mrongovius. They drive the tempo forward at opportune moments. Aebersold and Neiweem are considerably more reserved, but still convincing.

The piano sounds wonderful, and the liner notes are enlightening. With the abundance of Schubert piano duo releases in the last decade it is difficult to put these two on top, but it is a solid effort well worth hearing.

BOLEN

SCHUBERT: *Piano Sonata in A, D 959;*
SCHUMANN: *Faschingsschwank aus Wien; Fantasy Pictures, op 26*
Hisako Kawamura
Audite 92512 [SACD] 65 minutes

The sound is excellent and, in SACD mode, there is an added openness and clarity. Hisako Kawamura was born in Japan in 1981 and is now based in Germany. Her acquisition of prizes is especially notable for one so young. Were I not aware of her age and background I would have been thinking of a much more mature artist.

Schubert's late sonata is given a reading of great power and majesty. Kawamura achieves much depth of expression in the Andantino and has the technique and musicality to cope with the composer's many pianistic demands. The final Rondo sums up perfectly all that is right and pure in this masterpiece of Schubertian expression. It is never the sort of performance that makes a conscious effort to impress. Without any artifice, the pianist serves the composer perfectly and carves out a niche where comparison with other fine performances seems irrelevant. Those who must have everything slammed out for them should be forewarned.

Schumann's *Faschingsschwank...* is a set of character pieces that the composer originally referred to as a "great romantic sonata", though the five movements are a little too free in form to qualify for that designation. With imagination overflowing with fertile ideas the piece offers a severe test for interpreters. Kawamura embraces the Schumann idiom with natural abandon and fears not to tread in areas where many others have failed. If memories of Arrau, Perahia, Richter, and a few others are not entirely erased, there is always room at the top for one more.

BECKER

SCHUBERT: *String Quintet in C; Quartet movement*
Guarneri Quartet; Leonard Rose, vc
RCA 62310—55 minutes

This was recorded in 1975, and every time I listen to it I expect it to be better than it is. After all, it's the Guarneri, who did so well with Schubert quartets. And it's Leonard Rose playing the second cello. But the gentle flow I want in Schubert is missing. It's too assertive, too insistent. Why doesn't their Quartet 13 (A minor) sound that way? Are they trying to impress Mr Rose here? Or is it really just a matter of the sound? This is simply recorded too close-up; it's irritating and uncomfortable—it's even fierce. Yes, tempos are rather fast, too, but that goes with the sound. If you are not going to let the sound bloom into a natural space you have to keep tempos moving or it will sound boring.

There has never been anything to compare with the Alberni Quartet in this big, gorgeous quintet (on CRD). They take 20 minutes in I versus 14 for the Guarneri. It's positively mournful—but then I first heard this work at a funeral (Herman Newman of WNYC, played by the Manhattan Quartet). I think it is a tragic piece, and the Guarneri rather neutralizes that.

I guess this looked good on paper for a "classic library" reissue, but I'm not happy with it. The best thing here is the trio of the scherzo—a dark and wonderful contrast.

VROON

SCHUBERT: *Songs for Gretchen, Ellen, Suleika;* **SCHUMANN:** *Frauenliebe und Leben*

Elly Ameling, s; Dalton Baldwin
PentaTone 5186 131 [SACD] 65 minutes

I have many fond memories of Ameling, both in recital and on records, but I confess I haven't listened to her for quite a while. Although active these days with master classes, she hasn't done recitals since her farewell tour in 1995; these performances come from 1973 and 1975. Ameling had a voice of exceptional beauty and purity, coupled with excellent diction and a wonderful ability to balance the conflicting demands of music and text. She could penetrate the words without losing either beauty of tone or the integrity of the musical line. Hers was not a large voice, and she did almost no opera, confining herself primarily to oratorio and the German and French song repertories.

If you're old enough to remember Ameling, you probably also remember quadraphonic sound, a commercial venture that failed because of competing systems and various technical problems. These songs were recorded by Philips in four-channel sound, and now with the multi-channel SACD system available, they are being re-released in that format.

I always appreciated Ameling, but I did sometimes think of her as too pure, too much a porcelain figure. Well, the years modify and correct youthful impressions. There is a wealth of depth and passion in her singing, and every lover of this repertory should know her. I found myself in every song captivated by her beauty and riveted by her intensity. These are first-rate songs with performances to match.

ALTHOUSE

SCHUBERT: songs

Das Lied im Grünen; Der Schmetterling; An die Nachtigall (D497); An die Nachtigall (D 196); Der Wachtelschlag; Im Freien; Die Vögel; Fischerweise; Die Gebüsche; Im Haine; Im Abendrot; Die Sterne; Nacht un Träume; Der Liebliche Stern; Romanze aus Rosamunde; Der Einsame; Schlummerlied; An Sylvia; Das Mädchen; Minnelied; Die Liebe hat Gelogen; Du Liebst Mich Nicht; An die Laute; De Blumenbrief; Die Männer Sind Mechant; Seligkeit

Elly Ameling, s; Dalton Baldwin, p
Pentatone 518 6132 [SACD] 71 minutes

Philips was long a leader in recording technology. It was they who introduced the cassette tape and the compact disc (and now DVD). Some technology ideas were ahead of their time. Video laser discs, introduced in the early 1980s, died a quick death because the market then favored home recording rather than playback of pre-recorded material. Since the discs were not recordable, their fate was assured. Now, in a reduced size, they are conquering the world. Quadraphonic sound was another such technology. It was the first surround sound. The reason for its failure is harder to identify. For one thing, running wires to four separate loudspeakers that had to be carefully placed created problems in the living room. For another, audiophiles are often limited to those of the classical or jazz stripe. Lack of interest in multichannels in the world of pop recording helped to bury it. If fidelity is indeed the name of the game, we're lucky to have stereo. Anyone who has attended a performance of a band at a club can attest to the decidedly single-channel nature of the sound.

But for better or worse, multichannel sound is back and it's here to stay. I say "for worse" because engineers monkey with the sound enough as it is. Some of my friends, used to recordings, are shocked at concerts at how small a solo violin or voice sounds when competing with an orchestra. Some have even blamed the sound engineers at the concert (!), placing me in the embarrassing position of telling them that there are none. Just as with fake reverb, surround sound often creates a better-than-life situation. Not every hall is blessed with natural surround sound, like Carnegie or the Musikverein. For all too many, the sound stays stubbornly at the front of the hall. And speaking of dubious technology, then there is the damned sub-woofer, that hellish creation that can be heard for miles when installed in a car and defeats all known attempts at apartment sound insulation. One would think that all lovers of music would curse its creation, yet Ellen Taffe Zwilich feels that the demands of pop culture obligate its introduction to her music and our concert halls.

So forget your 5.1 sound and your sub-woofers. For sheer realism, you can't beat a well made stereo recording heard with a good pair of headphones.

Now on to Elly Ameling. There is a large body of quadraphonic recordings from the 1970s. Pentatone, created by engineers from the once mighty Philips company, have drawn from the Philips archives this 1973 recording, made at the Concertgebouw, of Ameling singing 26 Schubert songs. They have remastered it for SACD in its original four-channel sound, with the usual CD layer as well.

It's just lovely. Could it be otherwise? Ameling is captured in her salad days, singing Schubert in the Concertgebouw, recorded by a team of Philips engineers. Of course it's lovely. This is what lieder singing is all about. Delicacy, pure tone, thoughtful inflection—no one did it quite like Ameling. Dalton Baldwin is

recorded as the equal partner that he is. And the sound is nearly ideal—not the first time I've encountered evidence that the best analog sound easily surpasses the first decade of digital.

Texts with English translations are included. The notes focus on Schubert as a song writer in general, without specific reference to the program, which the attentive listener will note is grouped by theme: nature, birds, nature again, then stars, and finally love.

You can't go wrong.

BOYER

SCHUBERT: *Winterreise*

Jon Fredric West, t; Jerome Rose, p
Medici 30082—74 minutes

West is one of our leading dramatic tenors, a specialist in Wagner and big roles like Otello. His work with Wagner has certainly made him sensitive to the importance of text, but at the same time the demands of dramatic roles have left his voice without the flexibility or wide range of color that make lieder singing so rewarding. It is, of course, not easy to move between Wagnerian opera and song. Among the men only a few successes come to mind: Hotter certainly, and, if you're willing to go further back, Slezak. In this case there is no doubt that West has thought through the cycle thoroughly, and his intentions are noble. In the end, though, I don't feel drawn into his interpretation, and the voice leans toward unsteadiness.

This is not a bad recording, and I'm sure many listeners will enjoy West's recounting of Schubert's tragic tale. The catalog, though, is full of wonderful recordings that I would give precedence over this one. For starters, we have older recordings (lots of them) by Fischer-Dieskau; just as fascinating are the dark accounts of Hotter and, if you want a tenor, the anguished one of Pears. Among present-day performers I would suggest Goerne.

ALTHOUSE

SCHUBERT: *Symphony 8;* see Collections

SCHUMANN: *Dichterliebe;* **BEKKU:** *Chieko-sho*

Mineo Nagata, t; Anthony Spiri, p
Camerata 28026—61 minutes

Schumann's wonderful and much recorded *Dichterliebe* is here paired with a Japanese song cycle, *Chieko-sho* by the contemporary Japanese composer Sadao Bekku, which is based on what is called in the notes "a famous collection of poems" by Kotaro Takamura. Both works are sung by Mineo Nagata, a young Japanese lyric tenor who has spent much of his professional career in Germany. He has a clear, even voice of modest size, and he sings the Schumann cycle in a forthright manner without affectations or cuteness. His diction is quite good, and his voice is pleasant but not distinctive; it's rather thin and lacks expression and color. So his rendition won't displace your favorite *Dichterliebe*, whether it's by Prey, F-D, or Hampson.

Based on this work, Bekku, who was born in 1922, is a conservative composer trained in Western music. His songs are tonal, romantic, and not that different in sound from those written by some of his Western contemporaries (Ned Rorem comes to mind). But detailed comments on their textual settings require a knowledge of the Japanese language that I don't have. Some of the subjects of the poems are the usual ones, love and nature's beauties; but there is one song about a meal and a couple of others that baffled me as what they were trying to communicate. I can tell you that Nagata seems more emotionally involved and comfortable with these songs than with Schumann's lieder. The Japanese texts are included and so are translations into German.

MOSES

SCHUMANN: *Piano Sonata 2; Romance in F-sharp; Widmung; Fantasy in C*

Juana Zayas—Music & Arts 1148—62 minutes

On the heels of her superb Chopin and Schubert, Zayas here turns her attention to Schumann with impressive results. Her playing of the turbulent G-minor Sonata brims with ardor, fire, and sparkling virtuosity. One of the many elements I find so attractive in her recordings is her consistently pleasing, musical tone—she never pounds on the piano. Another is her admirable balance—there is never an excess of anything and she habitually avoids overstating the expressive, dramatic, and brilliant aspects of the music. And her technical equipment certainly ranks among the most formidable of today's leading pianists.

Her F-sharp Romanze and the 'Widmung' (arr. Liszt) are finely fashioned and glow with romantic feeling. But I miss the warmth and exquisite shading brought to these two pieces by Rubinstein.

The Fantasy is eloquently realized; Zayas unerringly captures its flickering, changeable moods—up until the last section, at least. This dreamy, intimate movement seems a trifle cool and impassive. Brendel, Fiorentino, Horowitz, and Rubinstein have made recordings that capture the essence of this last section.

Zayas recorded these four works on the

same Steinway used for her recent Schubert and in the same hall (American Academy of Arts & Letters, New York City) at the same time (November 22-25, 2002). If this information were not listed in the booklet, I might have easily assumed that a different piano had been used for the Schumann, since it has a more forward, less veiled tone than in the Schubert. There are surely several reasons for this difference, but I suspect one of them is that Zayas, scrupulous artist that she is, approaches the instrument differently for each composer.

Excellent sound and erudite notes by Bryce Morrison complement these appealing performances and make a release that would grace any record collection.

MULBURY

SCHUMANN: *Lieder*

Matthias Goerne, bar; Eric Schneider, p
Decca 4756012—77 minutes

Of these 25 songs, six are love songs to the composer's wife Clara from *Myrthen*, a collection of songs (not a cycle) he had given her as a wedding present. They include the opening 'Widmung' and the final 'Zum Schluss'. The program also includes other love songs such as 'Liebesbotschaft', 'Es Leuchtet meine Liebe', and 'Meine Rose', which are recorded less frequently. Goerne also sings several ballads, including Schumann's most famous, 'Die Beiden Grenadiere', 'Balsazar', and 'Die Löwenbraut'—the last a rather grisly tale that I don't recall having heard before. It tells of a maiden who keeps a lion as a pet but when she leaves its cage to go off with her intended husband, the enraged lion kills her and is then shot to death by the man. 'Balsazar', a setting of a well-known Heine poem, is the Biblical story of the drunk King of Babylon who mocks the Lord and is then slain by his vassals. Another seldom recorded ballad is 'Der Soldat'—poem by Hans Christian Andersen—which is so similar in style and message to Mahler's 'Tambourgesell' that it may have inspired that grim tale.

So this is a fine selection of songs, and Goerne is, as has been said before in this magazine, one of today's better lieder singers. He is in excellent voice here; his smooth, secure, and beautiful tone will please many listeners. Yet I have the same reservations that I wrote about in my review of Goerne's *Winterreise* (J/A 2004), namely, that his interpretations of the love songs are often mannered and artificial sounding. Much of the time, his tone is so soft and his words so lacking in inflection and, often, color, that they don't express the song's sentiment and leave the listener bored. He sings many endings pianissimo; this has become an affectation. Even a rapturous outburst like 'Widmung' lacks feeling, let alone passion; it, and other love songs, have been drained, intentionally or not, of their emotional strength. I know of no other well-received lieder singer who has recorded this "interpretation". Is Goerne just trying to be different?

The ballads come off better, but still 'Die Beiden Grenadiere' doesn't have the drama of the performance by Jose Van Dam or F-D, mainly because of Goerne's restricted dynamic range and fast tempos. In sum, if you liked Goerne's *Winterreise*, you might like this; if, like me, you didn't, pass this by. Texts and translations.

MOSES

SCHUMANN: *Faschingschwanks aus Wien; Frauenliebe;* see SCHUBERT

SCIARRINO: *La Bocca, I Piedi, Il Suono*

Lost Cloud Quartet—Col Legno 20701—39 min

La Bocca, I Piedi, Il Suono (1997) is a 40-minute saxophone "happening" by Italian avant-gardist Salvatore Sciarrino. "This composition may be considered an introduction to contemporary naturalism", he declares, and that's as good a way as any to describe it. The players of the Lost Cloud (saxophone) Quartet are seated surrounding the audience, later aided by 100 saxophonists lurking in the background (but they seem to be seated directly on the stage). The piece is an exploration of "musical" imitations of (mostly quiet) natural sounds—mysterious calls, bird sounds, wind, ghostly rattles—all executed with what used to be considered "advanced" avant-garde playing techniques. As the piece progresses, the "natural" repetitions become more patterned: irregularly recurring single bent notes become repeated notes, the rattles become a key slap march, then a key slap tune, eventually even a key slap waltz. An echo dialog ends with the formation of harmony—a cluster that ends the work like an authentic cadence. In the background, through most of the piece, the mass of saxophonists create the quiet murmur of nature, an ungodly pedal point that acts like a hum of life.

The modernist mission was to express nature at its most fundamental levels (hence "abstraction"), and this is a clear and instructive realization of that goal. This must have been a cool concert to attend. Sciarrino affirms his pride in heroic artistic isolation in a poetic modernist manifesto printed in the booklet. A duplicate disc is supplied in DVD audio format.

GIMBEL

SCOTT: *Piano Pieces;*
QUILTER: *Piano Pieces*
Clipper Erickson—DTR 2013—60 minutes

Cyril Scott and Roger Quilter were, with the better-known Percy Grainger, members of the "Frankfurt Gang" who studied at the Hoch Conservatory in the 1890s. (Scott was also a well known, controversial literary and philosophical figure.) Both have suffered from a cruel twist in musical history that has affected more than a few obscure composers: they rebelled against the Brahms-Wagner German tradition and embraced the revolutions of Debussy, Delius, and Scriabin, yet their music became dated after World War II because it never embraced the more dissonant language of slightly later movements such as expressionism, primitivism, and serialism. Nonetheless, these Studies, Impressions, children's pieces, and other miniatures, ranging in time from Quilter's 1901 Three Studies to Scott's 1935 Second Sonata, are colorful and inventive, even if a solid musical personality is sometimes difficult to find.

Scott's 'Rainbow Trout' exploits Scriabin's "mystic chord" to produce an otherworldly vision of sea life; Quilter's Three Pieces evoke the robust serenity of early Delius and his Three Studies the perfume of early Debussy. Scott was the more original and idiosyncratic, but Quilter's more modest charms are worth experiencing as well. The most extended work in this program is the most original, Scott's one-movement Second Sonata; dense with ideas, it has a free, rhapsodic structure and echoes of Scriabin, late Debussy, and even Berg, yet also a distinct personality. The piece fights its way through harmonic ambiguities, then soars to a shining resolution. Clipper Erickson plays it with heroic intensity; indeed, he brings all this unknown repertory to fresh, vivid life.

The recording, made in Bristol Chapel of Westminster Choir College of Rider University, is spacious and resonant. Listeners interested in enhancing their knowledge of British music should give this unusual album a try. The evocative pastel cover is a painting by Scott; the informative annotations are by Erickson.

SULLIVAN

SCULTHORPE: *Earth Cry; Memento Mori; Piano Concerto; From Oceania; Kakadu*
William Barton, didgeridoo; Tamara Anna Cislowska, p; New Zealand Symphony/ James Judd
Naxos 557382—71 minutes

Peter Sculthorpe (b 1929), one of Australia's preeminent composers, is driven by a conviction that his countrymen are destroying their continent and the cultures that once thrived there. His music reflects that. *Earth Cry* (1986) is an orchestral work that opens with a two-minute cadenza by William Barton on the didgeridoo, the aboriginal instrument that says "Australia" as immediately as sleigh bells say "Christmas" [not in Australia they don't—Ed]. The music is intense, percussion-rich, mournful, and includes much unison playing in instrumental sections. *Memento Mori* (1993) commemorates the devastation of Easter Island and its inhabitants in the 17th Century—by those inhabitants, not by the Europeans who arrived in 1722. Here Sculthorpe is not above invoking that most-invoked musical symbol of death, the *Dies Irae* chant, but he uses it not in a frightening way, as do most composers, but instead hauntingly.

'From Oceania' (1970, 2003), an excerpt from *Music for Japan*, was written for the Australian Youth Symphony's performance at Expo 70 in Osaka. Sculthorpe says he treated the orchestra as "a giant percussion instrument", and indeed, there is no melody in the 5-minute piece—just increasing cacophony, a couple of quiet major triads, and a trailing-off at the end. *Kakadu* (1988) is about a gigantic national park, a wilderness that was once home to a culture that has all but vanished. By now, the chant-like melodic material, wild percussion, sweeping sound, and melancholy mood are familiar but no less moving.

Finally, there is Sculthorpe's Piano Concerto (1983), where he says he felt the need to adhere more to "the European concert tradition than is [his] custom". In one continuous movement, the 22-minute work is notable for a woodwind section consisting only of double reeds and for frequent melodic use of low brass. As expected in a Sculthorpe work, the overall mood is one of foreboding. Pianist Tamara Anna Cislowska, ably accompanied by James Judd and the New Zealand Symphony, give it a committed performance.

KILPATRICK

SESSIONS: *Piano Concerto;* see Collections

SHAPORIN: *The Decembrists*
Bolshoi Theatre/ Melik-Pashayev
Preiser 90574 [2CD] 158 minutes

Opera of the 20th Century Soviet era is something of a specialized taste. Perhaps it is the overt patriotism of the stories, appropriate for the edification of the people, that affects the Western listener adversely. The music is always conservative, tuneful, with music "the people" could enjoy. Whatever the case, Soviet opera is practically never performed outside of Russia and rarely recorded even in the country of its birth. Yuri Shaporin's only opera, *The*

Decembrists, was recorded by Melodiya in 1956, a mere three years after its premiere at the Bolshoi Opera in Moscow.

Decembrists does not concern any kind of seasonal event like Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, but rather is the retelling of a notable incident in Russian history, the December 1825 uprising in St Petersburg against the tsar.

This was Shaporin's only opera and can truly be described as his life's work. The genesis of the opera goes back to the 1920s when Shaporin first approached the novelist Alexei Tolstoy to write a libretto. The first version concentrated only on a portion of the historical episode. The longer he worked on the opera (and Shaporin was always a slow composer anyway) the more he saw the possibility of setting the entire historical event. By then Tolstoy had died and a new libretto was written by VA Rozhdestvensky. Finally the opera was produced in 1953 after two years of rehearsal! It was the culmination of Shaporin's career and the opera was deemed a triumph, "a masterpiece of Soviet opera", "a magnificent vehicle for the art of Soviet singers, players, and producers", and "a worthy successor of the great works of the Russian classical masters".

It strikes contemporary ears as rather bland. It's all quite pleasant, with a sufficient number of "take-home tunes", but less than a really compelling drama. There is a certain indefinable distancing between Russian historical events and the conservative music heard here. But this is a good chance to hear something quite out of the ordinary.

The monaural sound has held up quite well, with a good balance between voices and orchestra. The extensive cast list reads like a veritable who's who of Soviet singers of the period: Alexander Pirogov, Georgyi Nelepp, Elena Verbitskaya, Vera Borisenko, Ivan Petrov, Alexander Ivanov—along with the magnificent Bolshoi chorus, all led by the redoubtable Melik-Pashayev.

A decent English plot synopsis is included, but no libretto.

PARSONS

SHIELDS: *Vegetable Karma; Dust; Shenandoah*
Albany 699—69 minutes

Computer-aided compositions by Alice Shields (b 1943), realized at Brooklyn College's Computer Music Center, where she has recently served as artist-in-residence. Ms Shields studied at Columbia with electronic music pioneer Vladimir Ussachevsky, and has been an associate director of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center.

Ms Shields has an active interest in the classical music of India, and much of this program employs that material as musical substance. *Vegetable Karma* (1999), for example, contrasts the sounds of North Indian raga with techno hip-hop samples, glued together into a neatly classical A-B-A form. An otherworldly male voice contributes a scary "Om" drone now and then. *Dust* (2001) also employs Indian sources, this time from the South. The opening section consists mostly of space age voices fading in and out of raga scales, interrupted sometimes by loud Tibetan trumpet flatulence. Mysterious descending celeste-like clouds enter about 6 minutes in. The central section is a sort of dance suite, with Indian rhythms bubbling along in science fiction fashion. A female Indian singer offers orgasmic counterpoint. The constant stopping and starting is not very effective musically. The final section is an extended drone producing colorful harmonic spectra. This was presented as a dance piece and might prove interesting in that context. It doesn't work too well as pure music.

The final piece on the program, *Shenandoah* (2002), is also a dance piece, put together in response to 9/11. It contrasts sections of spoken text with electronically-manipulated percussion rhythms. The ethnic participants plead for peace, recite their favorite foods, and sing a folk song or two. This makes for a pretty laid back text-sound piece, fairly sleepy but filled with good intentions and warm thoughts.

Ms Shields offers useful analytical commentary keyed to track timings, but those timings are way off.

GIMBEL

SHOSTAKOVICH: *The Gadfly; Hamlet; The Bolt; The Limpid Brook; The Age of Gold; Jazz Suites 1+2; Festive Overture; Overture on Russian & Kirghiz Themes; Novorossijsk Chimes*
Ukraine Symphony/ Theodore Kuchar
Brilliant 6735 [3CD] 3 hours

Brilliant it is, housed in a bright red box that may invoke the faded glories of the Soviet regime and the ironic legacy of court composer Shostakovich, with bold, passionate playing and vibrant, full-bodied sonics to match. We have here a lavish helping of the rich, colorful fare Shostakovich was compelled to churn out almost by rote after his "decadent" opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was hooted off the stage by Stalin and his toadies, dragging down with it the ballet *The Limpid Brook*—already highly popular among Russian audiences but dismissed by Stalin as bourgeois banality. Much of the ballet was recycled in the Suites (see last issue), not the same as the suite included here. *The Bolt* likewise resurfaced as

a suite, shorn of inflammatory subtitles like 'The Bureaucrat' in favor of more generic designations like 'Polka'. Most familiar to Western audiences is surely *The Golden Age*, especially the ubiquitous 'Polka', like Khachaturian's 'Sabre Dance' often called on to fill out programs of "Russian Favorites".

In the film music for *The Gadfly* and most of all *Hamlet* we have a very special case, with Shostakovich penetrating far beneath the surface to lay bare the emotional soul of the on-screen protagonists. These plus other examples of an uplifting nature make for a highly absorbing and often trenchant survey of the great composer that surely spread his reputation among the Russian people in a way the officially sanctioned symphonies and other "serious" works could not.

There's no need to go into great detail on these pieces. I've heard them all in other recordings, and pitting this firebrand Kuchar with his wholly committed players against Jarvi or Ashkenazy—especially at such a laughable price. I wish that Naxos had gone with Kuchar instead of Dmitri Yablonsky in the Suites, because Kuchar really blows the dust off this stuff. A couple of his tempos gave me pause—he doesn't find much dry wit in the famous 'Polka', for example—but even when he bursts out of the gate without looking back, as in the *Festive Overture*, you're swept right up by the sheer exhilaration of it. The *Kirghiz Overture* doesn't quite come off, but that's not Kuchar's fault; this is more serious stuff, Shostakovich as Copland, and it does get a bit dull sometimes.

Novorossijsk Chimes is a beautiful piece, based on the patriotic melody 'Fire of Eternal Glory'; previous recordings are rare. The wonderful Jazz Suites are the next best thing to sitting in the front row while the young Shostakovich cavorts at the keyboard improvising to a Chaplin film, bawdy and decadent (you bet!) and played to the absolute raucous hilt by the Ukraine band.

Kuchar redid the *Gadfly* suite for this set; he already had a perfectly fine Naxos recording (May/June 1997). But this one's even better, with warm, full sound and ripely romantic style in the familiar 'Romance', though I do prefer the Naxos cellist in the 'Nocturne'. *Hamlet* is also extremely potent and wonderfully evocative, fully on a par with Bernard Herrmann's juggernaut performance (he omits a couple sections), with a big brass sound and a *huge* gong when the Ghost appears on the ramparts.

I hope you like the 'Waltz' from the First Jazz Suite, because it shows up again in the *Second* Jazz Suite (slightly revised) and a *third* time in *Limpid Brook*. And 'Dance 1' from the Second Jazz Suite he basically reworked as 'Folk Festival' in *The Gadfly*. Here's a good three hours of top-of-the-line Shostakovich without a lot of tears, not too many notes to get in the way, and tunes that will have you marching around the room. What are you waiting for?

HALLER

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Preface to the Complete Edition of My Works; Blok Songs; Krokodil Songs; Satires; Lebiadkine Strophes; Preludes & Fugues, op 87: 1+4; Trio 2; Violin Sonata*

Nadja Smirnov, s; Petr Migunov, b; Graf Mourja, v; Marie Hallynck, vc; Arthur Schoonderwoerd, p

Alpha 55 [2CD] 136 minutes

Except for the two Preludes and Fugues, all of these works are from Shostakovich's final, bitter, bordering-on-hopeless years. This album is wisely laid out with vocal and instrumental works juxtaposed so that you don't max out on one song cycle after another.

Petr Migunov, soloist in the two-minute *Preface on the Complete Edition of My Works and Brief Reflections on This Preface*, the 11-minute *Five Romances on Texts from the Krokodil Review*, and the 13-minute *Four Strophes of Captain Lebiadkine on Words by Dostoevsky*, has a voice of such mellowness and versatility that I could gladly listen to him for hours. All three works, performed with piano accompaniment, are highly satirical. The texts for the journal *Krokodil* are from such impossibly absurd letters to the editor that the column was called, "You Couldn't Make It Up". The Dostoevsky texts I find not only satirical but downright bizarre. Given the subject matter, the music is typical late Shostakovich: part polytonal, calling for a wide variety of attacks, tone colors, and technical wizardry, and obviously satirical even to a neophyte who knows nothing about the composer or texts. All the songs are performed in Russian but with the texts printed only in French and English. So while I can't match exact text to expression heard, I'm confident enough to say that Migunov captures all the romantic, crazy, sincere, threatening, and absurd moods with his remarkable flexibility. While Schoonderwoerd could use a bit more projection in the *Krokodil* songs, the balance between bass and pianist is excellent, and both artists perform with total abandon in the *Strophes*.

When performing *mezzo forte* or softer, Nadja Smirnov reminds me immediately of Galina Vishnevskaya with her haunting open head tone, sharper-edged yet warm tone quality, her use and non-use of vibrato, and a presence without having to push at all. Comparisons are always odious to those on the losing end, and where Smirnov falls down is in louder

passages, where she almost completely lacks what Benjamin Britten once described as Vishnevskaya's "wild animal" quality. Relentless drive is often necessary in these songs. In the *Satires* (Pictures of the Past) on texts by Sacha Tchiorny, which are filled with themes and styles straight out of Symphony 13, Smirnov lacks the array of tonalities necessary to convey the sheer angst and dark bitterness of the texts. In the *Seven Romances on Texts of Alexander Blok* for soprano, violin, cello, and piano, she fills the opening 'Ophelia's Song' and the third (love) song with hushed loneliness. But in III the violinist doesn't phrase his line lyrically enough to encase the song with love-longing. In 'Gamayoun' and 'The Storm' neither she nor the instruments muster the necessary menace. Overall, though, there are enough splendid qualities in this performance that I'd feel guilty leaving a primarily negative impression, especially since this is the one set of songs here that replaces satire with elevated, contemplative, and lyrical thoughts, making this by far the most accessible cycle.

Shostakovich wrote Trio 2 in 1944 in memory of a close musicologist friend who had died. But he was also deeply disturbed and angered by Stalin's cruelties during World War II, judging by the Jewish themes and character of IV. In the opening Andante, the violinist lacks the necessary steadiness, thrust, and intensity to give the high-pitched enharmonics their full effect; nor is his pitch always exact. And, even though the closely recorded instruments are practically on top of you in loud passages, the pianist's basic style is too pastel to convey the composer's disgust. II is superbly articulated and rhythmically tight, with superb quickly-cut-off crescendos. In the Largo (III), once again the players are weakest when the music is slow. The strings' vibrato is always used in exactly the same way without expressive purpose; and shorter phrases, while almost too expressive, aren't threaded together with a long overarching emotional aim. In IV, for all their intensity (and very loud engineering), the players lack the ability to "throw a phrase", i.e., end with the panache of an upturned fingers-to-the-nose snotty inflection. For all the excitement, it wasn't until I went back to the Moscow Trio's excellent performance on Chant du Monde (M/A 1995) that I realized it was the atmosphere and lament of Jewish themes and styles that these players missed.

Where Mourja, Schoonderwoerd, and engineers are simply superb is in the Violin Sonata. Right from the opening steady whisper-soft passages, they keep the music alive with subtle expression. Their varied use of vibrato, short crescendos, upturns at the end of phrases, wide array of tone colors, and playing close to the bridge produce the superb stylistic flexibility the first movement requires. The piano here is especially moody and atmospheric. II is absolutely steady and acerbic, with powerful thrusts and emotions straight out of Symphonies 4, 8, and 10. As the liner notes say, this sonata is truly symphonic in conception. III is in effect a Theme and Variations, where the players shift moods most subtly and poignantly, with tempo changes so perfectly judged that you don't even notice them unless you're in an analytical frame of mind. Both players are superb with their solo cadenzas. After listening to a pristine Mobile Fidelity CD of the world premiere performance by David Oistrakh (for whom it was written) and Sviatoslav Richter, I found not only far superior engineering but more atmosphere, gripping dynamism, and emotional effect with Mourja and Schoonderwoerd.

The two sets of Preludes and Fugues are apparently used to give the album sufficient texture and relief to make listening to it straight through a varied experience. The first set I found rather pastel and without character, whereas No. 4 got better and better, ending with a four-part fugue where Schoonderwoerd sorts out the voices and delineates phrases so effectively that it's really an emotional experience by the end.

Whew! How to digest all that! Plusses and minusses, yes. Some loud moments but superbly balanced warm engineering overall. Some uneven performances from basically excellent instrumentalists. A good soprano. A superb bass. And music, even bizarre music, that is an acquired taste. There is so much that is excellent here.

FRENCH

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Symphony 4*

Kirov Orchestra/ Valery Gergiev
Philips 470842—64 minutes

Someday, perhaps, Shostakovich's symphonies will be assessed with less emphasis on Soviet politics. This wish may outrage "Shostaholics", but I really like to hear music on somewhat purer terms. The possibly bogus *Testimony* has not helped by coloring passages of music with specific programming. Neither have commentators who emphasize the *Pravda* attacks in shaping the composer's output. It's true that Symphony 4 was withdrawn on the eve of its premiere, probably under some political pressure—how much, we don't know. Hugh Ottaway, in his 1976 liner notes for Previn's Chicago LP, points out that the harsh criticism of Shostakovich's modernism came far before the symphony was finished, and it concerned the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*.

The composer didn't release the symphony until 1961, 25 years after it was written and long after Stalin's death. Shostakovich said, 18 months before his own death, "I came back to it several times; I revised it over a number of years, and even now I don't think I've got it quite right." He also may not have been happy with the rehearsals under Fritz Stiedry in 1936. With the Fifth, of course, the composer's public apology concerning "just criticism" clarified the pressures on him. But Ottaway suggests that he had already begun to depart from the avant-garde attitudes he'd developed at The Leningrad Conservatory, the idea being that Symphony 4 was somewhat transitional.

Whether or not 4 hints at a more conventional method, its astonishing unpredictability and remarkable emotional effects are infused with such creative brilliance and freely expressed motifs that the work's structural integrity is not always apparent.

"The form of the big opening movement is knowingly elusive. Any suggestion of a conventional sonata design is conscientiously avoided, but the sonata *principle* is actively embraced. Behind the appearance of a free, rhapsodic form, familiar processes may be found. There are, however, some deliberate disruptions and displacements that confuse the form-making issue. For example, in the somewhat compressed and delayed, but clearly-defined, recapitulation—complete with introductory flourish and restoration of the tonic key (C minor)—the three themes appear in reverse order. Moreover, the third theme, which now has a different, more masculine character, is combined with the motor-rhythm associated with the first."

Ottaway's technical description only hints at the powerful creative forces at work from beginning to end—particularly the contrasts of the humane and placid with the inhumane and mechanistic. These conflicting moods interrupt one another with shocking complexity and surprise.

But the matter at hand is Gergiev's new Kirov disc, a performance I had high expectations for, given my enthusiasm for the ensemble's *Rite of Spring* in March/April 2002. I was not entirely disappointed. The stiff, march-like opening in I is nicely weighted and accented, but as the movement continues, the instrumental textures take on a density that doesn't quite do justice to the harmonic and polyphonic crosscurrents. For one thing, the Philips sound here is a little dry, and some instruments are spotlit too generously—even the plucked strings at 5:53 and 5:59. Gergiev catches the ironic rhythm in the dance passages, but not the maximum fury in the big climaxes—though there's plenty of force and momentum.

The first movement is split into two tracks to coincide with the tempo markings. The second, the Presto, is the most effective. But starting at 4:52, I miss some of the terror engendered by Rostropovich, for example, and the solo passages that follow might be more telling. I can't deny the excitement, but there's a flatness or uniformity that drains the performance of its heightened expression and wild contrasts. Maybe it's partly the sound, but Rostropovich gets more out of the inner line and is full of character as well as eerily effective in quiet moments, where the Kirov just drives on through with the required skill. Previn falls between the two. His experience as a film composer brings all the tension and drama Shostakovich (who also composed films) might have desired. But it's Rostropovich who really gets that sensation that the universe is spinning out of control. Gergiev never does.

The short Scherzo has a nice, modernist feel, with its chirping woodwinds, the brass finds enough humor in it, and the strings grab the accents nicely. The finale is tense, but the orchestra isn't inspired. Here, neither the strings nor the brass seem to find anything that isn't strictly written down. At least the woodwinds (and the first trombone) find some of the humor and sarcasm. The pounding drums are recorded in a wash of sound, their sharp rhythms subtly obscured, though the brass deliver a spirited fortissimo. The bleak coda can hardly help being effective, but here it's literal, without much mystery.

It's a good performance, but not competitive with Rostropovich, Previn, Jarvi, or Ormandy at super-budget price.

HALDEMAN

SHOSTAKOVICH: *Symphonies 9+10*

Verdi Symphony of Milan/ Oleg Caetani

Arts 47675—81 minutes

It's easy to understand how the lightweight Symphony 9 might have been considered a bit scandalous in 1945, right after the close of World War II. Audiences were expecting something monumental and heavy-going, a statement of struggle and victory. Instead, they got what sounded like motor scooters zipping through rebuilt city streets. Brassy humor, too, with those honking trombones. Well, it was just too much—as if the composer were mocking history—and it garnered such harsh criticism that Shostakovich didn't write another symphony for eight years, after Stalin's death.

We now appreciate 9 for what it is, and this in-concert performance is in perfect sympathy with it. The first movement is jaunty, dashing,

rhythmic, and impulsive—with its own peripatetic personality. The shadowy Moderato of II is one of my favorite Shostakovich slow movements. Caetani shapes it well, even if the woodwinds don't have quite the moody irony Malcolm Sergeant gets from his London soloists on Everest. The strings have the more subtle expression, and they pull the music nicely back into the shadows where the movement lyrically resides.

The last three movements are played without a break, and Caetani gets a fine, clear-cut balance and sharp definition from the brass. He understands how to juggle the contrasts planted by the composer's *attacca* instructions, and the transition between IV and V brings a smile. These Italians get it right. The odd final movement is navigated without qualm. This is one of the better 9s. I like it as well as Bernstein's on DG.

Symphony 10 has a normal range of tempos. In I, the strings have a nicely emotive, wandering inflection that complements the anticipatory nuances of the woodwinds. The build to the first climax is well done. The orchestra delivers a big, powerful sound to the frenzy that follows, lacking only a little of the spontaneity that infuses the better-known renditions. Caetani keeps a firm grip, and the darker shadings are nicely clarified in the slow section.

In II the orchestra heats up a bit more. The swirling, rapidly shifting, cacophonous material is well played, but not like the planned chaos delivered by Jarvi or Skrowaczewski. Some of the irony is missing in III, where the conductor seems hesitant to allow a more mischievous spin in the first half. Later he produces a fine sense of spaciousness, with the woodwinds and horns getting plenty of room to breathe.

One of the clues I've noticed over the years, when comparing orchestras, is that a great orchestra—one in the top 20, say—can play with perfection, yet sound completely spontaneous. The level of skill is matched by the level of confidence. Other ensembles sound careful by varying degrees, however excellent they are. And that is the description I am reaching for here. Caetani seems to be working under some limitation. That, at least, is the impression. Or maybe the orchestra would just cut loose more under another conductor. There's no way to tell. But this missing spontaneity is the difference between a very good performance—which this is—and the best.

IV gives much the same impression, with little to complain about, but little to recommend when considering Jarvi, Karajan, Bernstein, Skrowaczewski, and a tempered but often profound Polyansky. For the full fury of the Scherzo, Mitropoulos's historic rendition is still hard to beat.

So, of the two symphonies performed here, 10 is acceptable, 9 is best, and the generous timing makes it a pretty good buy at mid-price. I should say that the notes recommend using "a DVD sound carrier and player" for the best sound. When Mr Chakwin reviewed 5 and 6 in this series, he saw a picture of the conductor on his video screen. No such presence appears on mine, but the sound is excellent on either a DVD or CD player.

HALDEMAN

SIBELIUS: *Symphony 2;* **GOULD:** *Burchfield Gallery*

Buffalo Philharmonic/ JoAnn Falletta

Beau Fleuve—68 minutes (800-699-3168)

On January 31, 2004, with a snowstorm freshly covering the New York Thruway, I decided at the last minute not to drive from Rochester to hear the BPO perform these works. In a way I was glad, because the last two times I heard the Sibelius in concert one performance was tediously heavy and the other utterly indifferent. Also, I still found that Morton Gould's own recording of *Burchfield Gallery* (on RCA with the American Symphony), which I had been boning up on, made me like it even less with each hearing.

Behold! Here they are, from recording sessions following the subscription concerts. JoAnn Falletta is one artist who knocks sideways that nonsense about needing an audience present to generate electricity. Right from the first note of the Sibelius, you're wide-eyed and alert. It's not that the pace is especially fast but rather that her articulation is clean, harmonic movement is clear and emotionally effective, balances are exquisite, and the superb engineering presents a rich, smooth palette, leaving all accents and dynamic effects in Falletta's hands. Her movement is supple, always conveying a forward energy even when allowing a tender fade to linger in concluding silence. Above all, she shapes the entire form of the first movement into one united whole, even in the movement's final section, where the music practically weeps.

The opening of II with its long solo line first for string basses and then for cellos is exquisite, even if the BPO's double basses aren't the most refined. Falletta's balances and nuances are second to none. Soon there are details of orchestration, counter-rhythms, dynamic contrasts, and Sibelius's subtle expression I've never noticed before. Her off-the-beat rhythms and dynamic flow confirm once again that Falletta's deepest strengths—tightly pulsed rhythm and the ability to shape and sustain long lyrical lines—are indeed the

very soul of "making music" instead of just executing a score. The finale of II is filled with loneliness and longing.

Then, bam! Right out of the box, the utterly awake, stimulating first theme of the Scherzo movement, followed by a supple solo oboe that introduces the second theme that will become the main theme of IV. And listen again to the rich full bass support.

Up to this point, this is a performance that sits at the top with the very best of them. But then, in IV, it's not that Falletta takes a tempo that is a bit broader than what her tempos in III lead you to expect. It's that the style of the strings is heavier, they bury much of the other detail, textures are no longer transparent, and there's not enough lift at the end of phrases. I kept saying, "Get out of the way. Don't be so controlling. Let it soar." I wonder too if this movement was recorded on a different day from the others. Even the volume level of IV seems lower than in I, while II seems at a higher level (something you can adjust, of course).

Don't get me wrong. The quality of engineering on this in-house BPO release at last returns to the superb sound on their first in-house album (later ones became progressively more distant and finally downright bad). It's a shame, though, that they don't number their Beau Fleuve releases and a double shame that this one isn't even up on their website (www.bpo.org) as I write this review. Make that a triple shame that they don't even mention the Sibelius on the cover!

The album is called *A Tribute to Charles Burchfield*, many of whose works were inspired by music (including Sibelius's) and are in a college museum 10 minutes from the orchestra's hall. Yes, Morton Gould says that, in turn, he was inspired by many of Burchfield's paintings, but I still find *Burchfield Gallery* a bizarre and unrewarding work, even given Falletta's far riper and atmospheric performance. Unlike Gould, she focusses the Prologue not on its passacaglia underpinning but on its lilting waltz character. In 'Spring' her rhythmic sharpness gives the constantly changing meter its vivacity, as the woodwinds twitter like birds and the violins supply a subtly romantic mood. Although she takes the 'Brookside Music' Interlude slower than indicated in the score, she fills its shifting meters with so much atmosphere that it really works. 'Summer' shimmers softly with nature sounds in the strings and light percussion. By the time 'Autumn' arrived I began yearning for more stimulation, more punch (whether from the composer or conductor I still can't figure out). Although Falletta gives 'Winter' some warmth, I was keenly aware that Gould offers not one single melody or singable motif in this strange work. True, in the concluding 'Four Seasons Fantasy' (especially the second time I listened without making any notes), I felt Falletta weaving a thread or direction through the entire work; but it still comes to no resolution or point at the end. Orchestral playing was excellent. But, even looking at the printed score, you can see how, even though the pages are sparsely filled, the work is highly complex; and I don't know whether to attribute the inaudibility of many details to Gould or Falletta, despite all the atmosphere and shimmering nuances she creates.

FRENCH

SIBELIUS: *Symphonies 3+5*

Helsinki Philharmonic/ Leif Segerstam
Ondine 1035—64 minutes

Leif Segerstam is now recording a second complete edition of Sibelius symphonies. The first, for Chandos with the Danish Radio Orchestra, was generally well played and well recorded, though there were problems in individual entries, most obviously with No. 2, which never managed to get off the ground. The works considered here were better, if not totally first rate. Even so, these new accounts are more impressive, and not substantially excelled by any other recordings currently available. The Helsinki Philharmonic plays Sibelius's works exceptionally well, with obvious conviction and depth of feeling as well as brilliance of execution, beauty of tone, and delicacy of articulation.

Symphony 3 is not an easy work to perform. Unlike its predecessors, it is cool and withdrawn, its pale colors and delicate contours difficult to present effectively and to integrate into a coherent framework. It is in tripartite form, two allegro outer movements and a central slower section with the ambiguous tempo suggestion *Andantino con moto, quasi allegretto*. Did Sibelius have andante or allegretto in mind? The matter was never been clearly resolved by the composer, who hardly ever made negative comments about anyone willing to perform his works. His friend and early advocate Robert Kajanus chose a decidedly slow andante tempo in his 1932 EMI recording with the LSO (now preserved on Finlandia), a tempo that yielded a movement timing of 11 minutes. That has been adopted by nearly all the Scandinavian conductors who have recorded it. Others like Maazel and Kurt Sanderling have tried the faster tempo, running about 8:15. Segerstam's timing is 10:15, a little faster than Kajanus. Kajanus tiptoes through the movement, pointing its rhythms with great delicacy and painting its subtle pastel colors with clarity and discrimination. So

does Segerstam, perhaps a little less effectively. Segerstam's accounts of the outer movements are earthy and vigorous, offering an impressive setting for the darker and more reflective central section. Ondine's sonics are very clear and superbly detailed. They offer a natural and unexaggerated sonic image, giving the illusion of an actual performance most impressively.

Sibelius 5 is generally well performed also, perhaps a little less convincingly than the Third, particularly in the finale, where Segerstam indulges in some tempo instabilities that, though not excessive, accomplish nothing. Even so, and particularly in view of the splendid orchestral execution and recording, this is a generally commendable performance.

This same program has recently been released by the LSO conducted by Colin Davis (Nov/Dec 2004); I found it much to my liking. It is a strong competitor, but the Ondine's sonic excellence inclines me slightly in its favor.

This is a well-annotated and illustrated production, except for one minor but irritating matter. The disc label employs white print on a cream-colored background. The printing is therefore almost invisible unless closely inspected under very strong illumination.

MCKELVEY

SIBELIUS: *Violin Concerto;* see SINDING

SILVESTROV: *Silent Songs*

Sergei Yakovenko, bar; Ilya Scheps, p
ECM 3446 [2CD] 199 minutes

A powerful sense of deja vu hangs over this two-hour song cycle by Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov: ghostly echoes of Beethoven, Mahler, Shostakovich, even Tchaikovsky. The other feeling that takes hold is that we are hearing sections of one extremely lengthy nocturne: "All the songs", says the composer, "must be sung very calmly, with a light, transparent, bright sound, restrained in expression, without psychological exaggeration." That is precisely the way baritone Sergei Yakovenko performs them; this is a heroic exercise in restraint aided by the soft accompaniment of Ilya Scheps. Indeed, "sung" is perhaps too strong a word: Yakovenko intones these texts by Pushkin, Keats, Shelley, Mandelstom, and others in a kind of whispered vocalise that seems to come, as Silvestrov requests, from inside the piano, creating a dreamlike atmosphere enhanced by the resonant but somewhat distant acoustic in this celebrated Moscow performance from 1986. (Four Songs After Osip Mandelstom, which appears at the end as a bonus, sounds almost shocking after *Silent Songs*: it actually has fortissimos!)

Silent Songs were written from 1974 to 1977, though the cycle was not sung in its entirety until 1985. To understand how firmly Silvestrov renounced the avant-garde tendencies of his colleagues such as Denisov, Gubaidulina, and Schnittke, listen to any few minutes of this two-disc set—absolutely any, given the astonishing consistency of the material. A few unusual modulations creep in, but the melodic line is consistently tuneful, the harmony resolutely tonal and romantic. Silvestrov insists that the avant-garde element is still there, "in the realm of the invisible and inaudible". Inaudible indeed: most listeners, I suspect, will regard this work as a gentle, affectionate monument to 19th Century lullabies. Nothing wrong with that.

SULLIVAN

SINDING: *Violin Concerto 1; Romance in D;* SIBELIUS: *Concerto; Serenade in G minor*

Henning Kraggerud; Bournemouth Symphony/ Bjarte Engeset
Naxos 6.110056 [SACD] 557266 [CD] 71 minutes

The Sibelius is one of the three or four greatest violin concertos ever written. It is also one of the most difficult to play, yet there have been a good many outstanding performances. I have about 18 recordings, and at least half of them qualify as great or nearly so: Heifetz/Beecham and Stern/Beecham, Kavakos/Vänskä, Oistrakh/Rozhdestvensky, Accardo/Davis, and Sitkovetsky/Anosov are in this category. This new Naxos is not one of that group. Tempos are a trifle slow, and the overall impression is stodginess. Only in III do things pick up somewhat, and even there the pulse doesn't drive in the no-holds-barred way that is common to great performances.

Where the competition is less strong, these would be very satisfactory performances. The Sibelius Serenade is a delight that should be heard more often. Sinding's Concerto, which I had not heard before, is typically elegiac and driving by turns. His Romance, labeled a first recording, is a pleasant piece, though not terribly inspired. Sinding's best music is in far smaller forms.

Comparing the two discs on my regular CD player yielded little difference. The sound is rather low level but very spacious. On my SACD-DVD player there is somewhat more presence on the SACD. Good notes are supplied. Both conductor and soloist are evidently Norwegians whose roles in world music are growing rapidly.

BAUMAN

SOLER: *Organ Quintets (6)*

Paul Parsons, org; Razoumovsky Quartet
Guild 7280 [2CD] 2:39 minutes

Antonio Soler (1729-83) was a member of the religious community of the Escorial near Madrid, where the Spanish royal family had a residence. His best-known piece is a rather flashy fandango for harpsichord. After that, he is noted for his solo keyboard sonatas (some for harpsichord, some for organ, some for either instrument) and his six concertos for two organs. Prince Gabriel, son of King Ferdinand VI and Queen Maria Barbara, was an organ student of Soler. The concertos were composed for him, as were the six quintets on this recording. They date from 1776.

Program annotator Christopher Wellington, who is also the violist in the quartet, points out that the quintets call for a G compass organ. This may help to explain why they are so rarely performed, as most modern organs go down only to C. G compass organs were not the norm in Spain, but there was one at the Escorial around the time these pieces were written. The instrument used in this recording is a G compass chamber organ in the English style build in 2003 by Martin Goetze and Dominic Gwynn for Leeds University. Wellington writes that English and Spanish organs of the 18th Century were quite similar in their voicing, with light and somewhat stringy principals that adapt well to chamber music. G compass was standard in 18th-Century English organs. A separate instrument supplies the regal that Soler calls for in certain movements.

The music combines elements of baroque diction with the predominant personality of the galant style. It is not profound music, but thoroughly delightful and elegant. I do wish I could say that these performances are just as delightful, but I knew there would be trouble ahead when the first organ entrance in the first movement of the first quintet was at a decidedly slower tempo than the preceding string passage. There had already been some spots of dodgy string intonation, especially in the cascades of trills that are a stylistic fingerprint in this music. The string playing is ponderous. The organ playing is sluggish and not sufficiently articulate. All of the players seem to be struggling with the technical demands of the music. Granted, it may be difficult to play, but it should never *sound* like hard work. On the contrary, it is music that demands a feel of effortless lift and flight, and these performances just don't have it.

Some years ago, David Schrader recorded these quintets on two separately issued discs using a harpsichord (where the G compass is not an issue) and some period string players from Chicago (Cedille 13; Sept/Oct 1993 & 30; May/June 1997). In his reviews, Robert Haskins praised Schrader for his "great affection and verve", but panned the string players. In Alexander Morin's *Listener's Companion*, Christopher Brodersen praises the recordings by harpsichordist Patrice Brosse and Concerto Rococo (Pierre Verany 792111 and 799041), but I confess that I have not heard them. If Parsons with the Razoumovsky is the only recording with organ, then I think we need to wait for someone else to have a go.

GATENS

STANFORD: *3 Motets, op 38; A Song of Peace & Pray That Jerusalem; Evening Service in A; For Lo, I Raise Up;* **ELGAR:** *Choruses from The Light of Life; The Spirit of the Lord; Give Unto the Lord*

Jeffrey Makinson, org; Manchester Cathedral Choir/ Christopher Stokes
Lammas 163—64 minutes

This program combines some relatively familiar sacred choral works by Sir Charles Villiers Stanford with pieces by Sir Edward Elgar. Stanford's Opus 38 motets are early works dating from his years at Trinity College, Cambridge. 'A Song of Peace' is one of the six *Bible Songs*, Opus 113 (1909), originally for solo baritone and organ. They are often sung as unison choruses for trebles as here. A year later Stanford published *Six Hymns* as companion pieces for the *Bible Songs* with each pair linked musically. Today we would call them "hymn anthems", as each is based on a traditional hymn tune and lyric, in this case the psalm tune 'London New' with a portion of Psalm 122 from the Scottish Psalter. The pair is ideally suited for the season of Advent, with quotations of 'Veni Emmanuel' in both the song and hymn. The Magnificat & Nunc Dimittis in A (1880) was written for the Festival of the Sons of the Clergy and first performed at St Paul's Cathedral by a choir of 300 and an orchestra of 50. These days, of course, it is most often performed by an average-sized cathedral choir with organ. 'For Lo, I Raise Up' (1914) is possibly Stanford's greatest and most eloquent anthem. It was written at the onset of the First World War to a text from the prophet Habakkuk, and Stanford expresses both the horror of war and the promise of peace.

All of the Elgar works on this program were originally for large chorus and orchestra, beginning with three choruses from his short oratorio *The Light of Life*, written for the 1896 Three Choirs Festival at Worcester. 'The Spirit of the Lord' is the opening chorus from *The Apostles*, written for the Birmingham Festival of 1903. 'Give Unto the Lord' (1914) is another Festival of the Sons of the Clergy composition.

of 1903. 'Give Unto the Lord' (1914) is another Festival of the Sons of the Clergy composition.

The choir of Manchester Cathedral produces a very pleasant and well-disciplined sound, but it lacks the heft for most of this repertory. The balance is not ideal (17-3-3-3), and it is obviously impossible to obtain an even division for double choir pieces like 'Coelos Ascendit' from Stanford's Opus 38 or the Gloria Patri from his Service in A. The organ introduction to 'The Spirit of the Lord' is very effective on the instrument at Manchester Cathedral, but still a pale approximation of Elgar's orchestral concept; while the opening pianissimo choral entry absolutely demands a large body of voices singing very quietly to produce the intended effect. Here it sounds too much like vocal chamber music. The three tenors and three basses are spread too thin in 'Seek Him That Maketh the Seven Stars' from *The Light of Life*, though the trebles (a mixture of boys and girls) are more convincing in 'Doubt Not Thy Father's Care'. Tempos tend to be on the fast side, though that may be necessary given the size of the choir. Even so, I often felt that this spacious, turn-of-the-century music was unduly rushed.

There are many recordings of the Stanford works, but I have never heard anything to surpass the series by David Hill and the Winchester Cathedral Choir (Hyperion 66964, 66965, 66974; Sept/Oct 1998). Elgar's oratorios cannot help but be badly compromised when reduced to organ and small choir. A fine recording of his cathedral music, including 'Give Unto the Lord', by Donald Hunt and the Worcester Cathedral Choir (Hyperion 66313) appeared back in 1988.

GATENS

STANFORD: *Clarinet Concerto;* see Collections
Organ Pieces; see ELGAR

STRAUSS: *arias & songs*
Ariadne auf Naxos: Grossmachtige Prinzessin; Kindskopf! Merkt Auf; Seien Wir Wieder Cut; Brentano Lieder; *Arabella:* Aber der Richtige; *Rosenkavalier:* Presentation of the Rose; Trio; Duet
Natalie Dessay; Felicity Lott; Angelika Kirchschlager; Covent Garden/ Antonio Pappano
Virgin 45705—65 minutes

This recording shows off the multitalented Natalie Dessay, today's leading Zerbinetta and a phenomenal Straussian, superbly assisted by two of the finest young mezzos around and two accomplished veterans. Dessay's voice has recently grown in size, and there is a darkness to it not there a few years ago. She remains a technical wizard. The pyrotechnics in the Zerbinetta aria are breathtaking, and her understanding and communication of Hofmannsthal's text has deepened since her complete DG *Ariadne*. And in her scene with the Composer, sung by the radiant Sophie Koch, Dessay's haunting lyrical singing makes Zerbinetta a model of sincerity. Koch's performance of the Composer's aria, preceded by the brief exchange with the Music Master, rivals Von Otter on the DG set, with Allen creating a vivid cameo.

It could have been very easy for Dessay to adopt an affected, cutesy approach to her selections. But everything sounds so natural and intelligent. The Brentano songs are four miniature dramas as sung here. Such passion for music that could easily be treated as trifles! Here and in the operatic scenes Dessay has no trouble soaring over Strauss's lush orchestrations. No one hearing this with attentive, perceptive ears could possibly think this is a matter of engineering.

Dessay has never sung Zdenka and Sophie complete, but she could. Her voice blends beautifully with the veteran Lott, whose voice has lost freshness and who sings with some effort but is still a commanding Straussian who knows her music inside and out. Her soft singing and silvery top notes are exquisite. I'm sure she got some inspiration from the passionate Octavian of Kirchschlager.

Pappano gives his singers topnotch support—conducting full of subtlety and understanding of Strauss's unique writing for female voices. The Royal Opera Orchestra gives its music director A-1 playing.

Dessay is close to perfect, and therefore an occasional spread note doesn't bother me. I'd love to hear her in complete *Arabella* and *Rosenkavalier* recordings, but the decline in the number of studio operas nowadays makes that a long shot. I can also picture her as a number of other Strauss ladies. What a brilliant Amanda *(Die Schweigsame Frau)* she'd make! Fine sound, texts, translations, and good notes.

MARK

STRAUSS: *Don Juan;* see BRAHMS
Flute Sonata; see Collections

STRAVINSKY: *Firebird & Pulcinella Suites;*
PROKOFIEFF: *Violin Concerto 1*
Edith Peinemann, v; Bavarian Radio Symphony/ Gunter Wand—Profil 4056—71 minutes

Volume 3 of the *Gunter Wand Edition* shows a side of the conductor quite different from his expansive Bruckner. Wolfgang Seifer's notes argue for Wand as an admirer and conductor of Stravinsky, and he certainly has his own way with the composer. As might be expected, it is Germanic, with a full orchestral sonority and

broad attacks; but his tempos are quick, with plenty of energy and even some roughness. Rhythm is strong and firm, but there isn't much dynamic contrast or soft playing. The muscular, down-to-earth quality of these performances is augmented by close recorded sound.

Wand's *Firebird Suite* (1945) is a long way from the Debussian impressionism that inspired the ballet. Wand and his orchestra have squeezed out the French influence. Gone are the lush sheen in the strings and the exquisite contours of the woodwind solos. These textures are rougher, bolder, and broader than anything I've heard in this piece. The opening quick dance is heavy—hardly the image of a Firebird. The Scherzo is more like a peasant dance. 'King Kashchai' sounds like battle music: note the resemblance to swordplay in the cut and thrust of the trumpets. The quiet moments are nicely phrased, but hardly subtle, though the slightly wild bassoon tone and cunning *portamento* in the Berceuse lend an interesting color.

Wand's *Pulcinella Suite* lies a long way from the baroque and in no way suggests the piquant, crystalline harmonies Stravinsky applied to Pergolesi. Instead I hear a blunt, fruity breadth that is not without its attractions. The woodwinds are bold and ripe, and I had to smile at the slight honk in the oboe's low register in the Serenata—a honk that I suspect is exactly what Wand wanted. The same goes for the dark trombone sound in a solo that usually calls for brightness. I once thought Klemperer's recording (BBC) was a little like this one, but Klemperer gets far more lift to his rhythm than the downbeat-conscious Wand. He is also more interesting than Wand, who gets a little oppressive toward the end.

Wand's Prokofieff is similar to his Stravinsky. It is beefy in the same way and continues his exorcism of spikiness and French influence. He and his orchestra are enthusiastically abetted by Peinemann, whose powerful attacks and dark, rich sound never come undone even when she clearly is slashing. As strong as Wand's leadership is, Peinemann dominates many aspects of this performance. Sometimes her attacks are heavy enough to change the phrasing on her own (as in her downward passages in the opening music), and she doesn't stop being a soloist even in accompanying *pizzicatos* or swirling arabesques. The romantic opening sounds more like Korngold than Prokofieff, with orchestral tone riper and more complex and leaps broader and heavier than usual. Even the lean, nocturnal sensuousness of the end of I is broadly treated. In a furious II, Wand and the orchestra apply the weight, and Peinemann goes to the whip in a big way. Nor does III let up in intensity. Of the two other recordings of this piece I know, the cool, French reading with Jean-Pierre Wallez (Erato) and the darker, more lyrical Vengerov (Teldec), this one sits on an extreme wing. I suspect it retains that honor even when matched with recordings noted in the Prokofieff Overview (Jan/Feb 1997) and the one of Favorite Violin Concertos (Sept/Oct 1996).

Despite my reservations, I enjoyed this. I wouldn't call it beautiful in the conventional sense. "Primeval" is more like it. Still, there is thought and vision behind it, and the players' enthusiasm is palpable and irresistible. I suspect these concert performances were very powerful in the hall. As recordings, they're not for everyone. Nor are they "basic repertoire" material. I doubt even their admirers will play them often. But when the mood strikes...

HECHT

SZYMANOWSKI: Songs

Vol 1: *6 Songs; 3 Fragments from Poems by Jan Kasprowicz; The Swan; 4 Songs; Soldiers' Songs; Young Highlanders Descend, Singing; 5 Songs from Des Knaben Wunderhorn; 3 Songs*
Piotr Beczala, t
Vol 2: *Colorful Songs; Songs of the Infatuated Muezzin; 7 James Joyce Songs; Kurpian Songs; In the Flowering Meadows*
Juliana Gondek, s
Vol 3: *6 Songs; Love Songs of Hafiz; The Grave of Hafiz; 4 Tagore Songs; 12 Songs*
Urszula Kryger, mz
Vol 4: *Songs of the Fairy Princess; Slopiewie; 3 Lullabies; Children's Rhymes; Vocalise-Etude; Lonely Moon*
Ivona Sobotka, s
Reinild Mees, p
Channel 19398 [4CD] 244 minutes

I must admit that I approached this set with a degree of trepidation. After all, 4-1/2 hours of vocal Szymanowski seems a bit much. While one can usually split the listening up, a reviewer must take them more or less all together. It turns out that Szymanowski so varied the content of his song cycles that they almost never become tiresome. There are numerous Polish songs but also some in English (by James Joyce) as well as several cycles in German. Then there are his excursions into the Middle Eastern world with the *Love Songs of Hafiz*, the *Grave of Hafiz*, the *Songs of a Fair Princess*, and the *Songs of an Infatuated Muezzin*. These are all gorgeous, but that is also true of the *Colorful Songs*, the settings of Polish folk songs, and many others.

The four Polish soloists are all good to excellent, with the fourth disc, by Ivona Sobotka, especially fine. Juliana Gondek, one must be warned, is a typical Slavic soprano with a

pronounced wobble. Reinild Mees may be a Dutch pianist, but her playing exhibits a wonderful understanding of Szymanowski's music and its atmospheric indulgences, especially in the Middle Eastern songs.

The recording is first class. The notes are quite thorough. Texts are presented in the language of the song plus English translation. (The Joyce songs have the text in English and English!) I don't much care for the fact that, to save space and money, the four discs are in cardboard sleeves, which means that they are difficult to remove without getting one's fingers on the disc surface.

BAUMAN

TALLIS: *Vol. 8: Lamentations & Contrafacta*
Chapelle du Roi/ Alistair Dixon
Signum 36—63 minutes

This is the penultimate release in the nine-volume project by Alistair Dixon and Chapelle du Roi to record all of the surviving completed works of Thomas Tallis (c1510-85). Some fragmentary works are omitted. This recording opens with a well-known and much-recorded pair of pieces, the 'Lamentations of Jeremiah' (I+II), with texts that figure in the office of Tenebrae in Holy Week. Program annotator John Morehen conjectures that these settings date from the Elizabethan period of Tallis's career and were intended for the secret private devotions of Roman Catholics. All of the other works here are contrafacta—music originally written to Latin texts but later adapted to English words to supply anthems for the Anglican rite. In some cases the English words are closely based on the Latin original (for example, 'O Sacred and Holy Banquet', originally 'O Sacrum Convivium') while in others there is little or no relationship between the texts. Most of the contrafacta are adaptations of five-voice motets from *Cantiones Sacrae*, the volume produced in collaboration with William Byrd in 1575. As Morehen points out, few if any of the adaptations can be dated to Tallis's lifetime, and there is no evidence that he had anything to do with them.

The contrafactum that stands out from all the rest is 'Sing and Glorify', an adaptation of the great 40-voice motet 'Spem in Alium'. This English version was probably produced for the 1610 investiture of James I's eldest son Henry as Prince of Wales. Henry died in 1612, and the adaptation was performed again for the investiture of his brother Charles in 1616. While 'Spem in Alium' has been performed and recorded many times in recent years, this is only the second recording I have encountered of the English version. The other is by Harry Christophers and The 16 (Coro 16016; March/April 2004, p 246), where the anthem is accompanied by cornetts, sackbuts, dulcians, and organs, as would have been customary on such a festive occasion. Dixon and Chapelle du Roi present it unaccompanied.

I have reviewed several of the other releases in this series, including Volume 7, which includes the Latin originals of the contrafacta heard on the present issue (Signum 29; Nov/Dec 2004). The technical performance standard is always very high, but my chief complaint in the past has been that the performances suffer from a certain inflexibility of phrasing that can make the music sound almost perfunctory sometimes. I find this true of several of the contrafacta from the present recording, but not of the 'Lamentations', where there is more a character of eloquent understatement. Of course, the sheer sonority of 'Sing and Glorify' carries all before it.

GATENS

TARANU: *Symphonies (4)*
Cluj-Napoca Symphony/ Mircea Cristescu, Emil Simon, Christian Mandeal; Romanian Radio Symphony/ Ludovic Bacs—Electrecord 470—70 min

Cornel Taranu is a Romanian composer and conductor born in 1934. These four symphonies are the first of his music, or of him, that I've heard.

Symphony 1 dates from 1962. The language is rugged and atonal, though with occasional incursions of modal, folk song-like tunes. There are two movements; I is mostly slow, forlorn keening, while II is faster, with episodes of harsh, *Rite-of-Spring*-style pastoralism fluted out by solo woodwinds. The scoring is simple and stark to the point of primitive: mostly just strings with the winds presented in strong, unblended contrast. The composer mentions that the work is dedicated to Enesco, and indeed it does have a distant kinship to Enesco's (magical!) Third Orchestral Suite, though Taranu is, intentionally I assume, far plainer and more uncompromising.

The remaining symphonies are each cast in a single long movement. Symphony 2 is from 1976, 3 from 1984, and 4 from 1987. These are more complex, more strictly atonal, and more conventionally avant-garde in scoring, with much whooping brass, skirling string tone-clusters, piercing woodwinds, rattling percussion, and so on. The notes mention Taranu's studies with Messiaen and at Darmstadt, and they're apparent in the music. Still I can't help feeling that despite its crudity Symphony 1 has the most memorable and individual character of the four, though all of them display admirable consistency and integrity—no post-modern irony for Taranu—and all are

enlivened by many engaging and unusual timbral combinations.

Symphony 1 sounds thin and scratchy. The later symphonies are somewhat better performed and recorded, but don't expect much polish in either area. Adventurous ears may enjoy this music, as I sometimes did, but I wouldn't recommend trying to listen to all four symphonies in a row.

LEHMAN

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Piano Concerto 1;* **MOUSSORGSKY:** *Pictures at an Exhibition;* **CHERKASSKY:** *Prelude Pathetique;* **RIMSKY-KORSAKOFF:** *Flight of the Bumble Bee*
Shura Cherkassky, p; London Symphony/ Georg Solti—BBC 4160—72 minutes

The Tchaikovsky, from a Royal Festival Hall concert, is a terrific performance that suffers from bad broadcast-level engineering typical of the late 1960s. Because there's a serious lack of overtones, the tuning sounds sour, particularly the woodwinds and even the piano. But the string basses have a full sound, and the balance between piano and orchestra is generally very good. Any drawbacks are actually quite secondary to the extraordinary teamwork between the artists (whom the liner notes portray as having very different temperaments). The pace is bracing not because of excessive tempos but because Cherkassky and Solti mesh perfectly and give a flexible inevitability to the music's pulse from beginning to end. Not only are dynamic contrasts sharp, but they play their triplets and counter-rhythms against one another with a really tight clarity. In I, the orchestra cadenza leading to the piano cadenza is terribly exciting and perfectly dovetailed.

Cherkassky's poetry takes a different turn in II, where he has a touch different from any other soloist I've ever heard. He brings out different details, contrasts, and thematic lines. The scherzo really sparkles with light swirls of accents and articulations. And he uses the loveliest retards and rubatos without interfering with the flow. III is taken a hair slower than what you'd anticipate here, but the movement is of a whole, and Cherkassky's octaves leading to the coda are absolutely fabulous.

The performance is totally musical, with not a moment of either artist getting in the way of the composer. Sure, there are a few wrong notes and a rare lack of ensemble, but who cares?

What a disappointment Cherkassky is in *Pictures at an Exhibition*, from a 1982 Wigmore Hall recital. I followed with the score, and it felt absolutely literal, as if he were reading it for the first time. The performance is certainly precise (except for one firmly changed note at the end of a later Promenade). True, engineering is full, and Cherkassky conveys a genuine *pesante* heaviness in 'Bydlo'. But 'Gnomus' is so precise he actually winds up de-emphasizing accents, 'Tuileries' lacks all sparkle, 'Market Place at Limoges' is so unscherzo-like that it's utterly pedantic, 'Baba Yaga' is even more pedantic and totally void of thrill, and 'The Great Gate at Kiev' has such weak grace notes in the bass that Cherkassky takes the thunder right out of it.

Prelude Pathetique is a three-minute minor key encore that starts quietly and works itself into a froth; but I was surprised, especially with the composer at the piano, how much detail seemed to be smothered. The other encore, 'Flight of the Bumble Bee', isn't gossamer enough. The left hand is a bit tubby, and there are a few missed notes.

I'm not sure I'll keep this even for the Tchaikovsky—not with Argerich, Kondrashin, and the Bavarian Radio Symphony (Philips) on my shelf, and certainly not with Pletnev's solo version of *Pictures* (Virgin), which is hardly a literal reading but certainly as electrifying as any I've ever heard.

FRENCH

TELEMANN: *Tafelmusik Excerpts*
Musica Amphion/ Pieter-Jan Belder
Brilliant 92213 [SACD] 61 minutes

The Dutch Brilliant label is rather quirkily distributed here, but collectors who have followed it have come to appreciate its ambitious projects, offered at modest prices. One of its latest is a four-disc boxed set (92177) of all three "Productions" of Telemann's *Musique de table* or *Tafelmusik* performed by Pieter-Jan Belder's period-instrument Musica Amphion (17 string players, ten on winds, two harpsichordists). The release at hand is a single-disc sampling of that integral set—one of the first ventures by Brilliant into the SACD market—but suggesting that no more of the set will be put into this format.

Each of the three Productions in the series contains six items: an "orchestral" *ouverture* or suite, a chamber quartet, a concerto for soloists and orchestra, a chamber trio, a solo sonata, and a *Conclusio* that returns to the scoring of the opening suite.

Over the years there have been seven complete recordings. Of three from LP days, the genial pioneering venture for DG Archiv under August Wenzinger is long gone but—you never know—could come back any time. The quirkier one led by Frans Brüggen for Teldec was around for a while on CD (95519, 4CD); a crude and short-lived Austrian recording under Dietfried Bernet for Musical Heritage Society is best forgotten. Unusually exciting is the set that

Reinhard Goebel and his Musica Antiqua Köln recorded for DG Archiv (427 619; S/O 1990); while another excellent German recording was made by the Camerata of the 18th Century for MDG (3472-75, four single discs; then 311 0580, 4CD; J/F 1997). Both of those sets were exemplars of period-style playing.

Most recently, we have period-instrument recordings by the Orchestra of the Golden Age for Naxos (504022, 4CD; or 553724-25 & 553731-32, four single CDs; N/D 1998, S/O 1999, M/A 2000). Partial recordings have also come and gone: a 3LP set from Erato via MHS, with JF Paillard doing only the orchestral and concerted works from all three Productions, disappeared long ago; but a 2LP series from Vanguard, where Nikolaus Harnoncourt and his Vienna crew gleaned all but the solo sonata from Production III, is now reissued by Vanguard (1275, 2CD). And all six components of the full Production III are offered by Paul Dombrecht's Il Fondamento on a single disc from Accent (78643). One may quibble over details here and there, but any of these CD issues can be commended for thoughtful and stylish playing.

Samplings of the three Productions are not unusual on records, and this one is a good example. Presented here are the suite, the quartet, and the concerto from Production II and the "conclusion" from Production I. These are some of the most familiar and often-recorded items in the cycle. The playing under Belder, as in the full set, is intelligent and colorful, so this single SACD is a nice prospect for those who just want a single-disc introduction to the whole cycle.

Aside from the Dombrecht, one might keep in mind a Hyperion disc (66278) that offers the same orchestral suite from Production II that is given here plus its counterpart in Production III, in zesty performances under Robert King. Or investigate a release from Channel (19198, or 19102 for SACD; M/J 2003), where the Florilegium ensemble plays four "orchestral" and chamber items from Production I and a quartet from II, in chamber-style, one player per part.

BARKER

TESTI: *Saul*

Vincent Le Texier (Saul), Fabrice Mantegna (Jonathan), Daniel Galvez-Vallejo (David), Hanna Schaer (The Witch), Annie Vavrille (The Queen), Renaud Delaigue (High Priest), Richard Rittelmann (The Barber), Thierry Felix (Ghost of Samuel); Radio France/ Massimo Zanetti

Naive 4988 [2CD] 93 minutes

Flavio Testi (born Florence, Italy, January 4, 1923) has composed eight operas. All but one have a libretto by the composer and all have distinguished literary sources: *Il Furore di Oreste* (1956, after Aeschylus), *La Celestina* (1963, after de Rojas), *L'Albergo dei Poveri* (1966, after Gorky), *Il Sosia* (1981, after Dostoevsky), *Le Chat* (1982, after Baudelaire), *Riccardo III* (1987, after Shakespeare), *La Brocca Rotta* (1997, after von Kleist). *Saul* was composed in 1991, but was not performed until 2003.

Testi has taken as his libretto the 1922 play by André Gide. It is a most worthy text, though Gide has an agenda that is not necessarily biblical. The love triangle between King Saul, Jonathan, and David can be inferred; and taking the text on its own grounds it is a marvelously dramatic, psychological play with clearly delineated characters and motivations. The composer (via Gide) sees Saul as "a king shorn of all heroic accent, the victim of his own inner destructiveness, for he has given himself over to every instinct, every pleasure". It is passion that motivates all the characters.

Clarity seems to have been the goal for Testi in composing his music: terse, melodic speech over a colorful, acidic, pointillistic, often minimal accompaniment, saving the big outbursts for the more dramatic moments. Even those are not overdone. The opera could easily be termed operatic chamber music. There is no real motive development or repetition. Casting Saul's three demons as boy and girl trebles is a brilliant touch. They sound so innocent, yet what they propose to and inspire in Saul is so evil. This is a most impressive achievement.

The recording preserves the premiere, a broadcast of Radio France, October 25, 2003. The performance is technically sound and dramatically involving, presumably as good as the composer wanted. Le Texier (Saul) is particularly imposing. A few quibbles on my part: Galvez-Vallejo (David) sounds almost too macho, enough to scare off the delicate Jonathan of Mantegna. Vavrille (The Queen) tends to shriek too often, but that may be the fault of the musical line.

A French and English libretto is included.

PARSONS

THALBERG: *Opera Fantasias*

Monika Egri & Attila Pertis, p

Hungaroton 32154 —63 minutes

As a pianist in the 19th Century, Sigismund Thalberg had few rivals (Liszt the foremost). As was customary in his day, the performing artist was also a composer. And, as was popular among composers of his period, Thalberg thrived on the art of the transcription. Of his many paraphrases for the piano (more than 60), Thalberg (like Liszt) often took opera as his point of departure, and several of his transcriptions are for two pianos or, as on this

recording, for four-hand duets. (Only *Felice Donzella,* Op. 36:5 and *La Romanesca* Op. 36:4 don't originate with opera.)

It is difficult to listen to something like this and not ask why it is Liszt and not Thalberg that we are most familiar with today. Thalberg was also among the immortals of his day. Perhaps it is the less adventurous harmonic palette Thalberg chose, often sticking with more or less literal or otherwise conventional interpretations of the core material. (The humorously misplaced tritone of Liszt's famed *Rigoletto* transcription comes to mind.)

Apart from the quality of the music, this is a fine performance by two able pianists. From the opening of Thalberg's Op. 1 Fantasy on themes from Weber's *Euryanthe* this husband and wife team establishes that they are a formidable duo. (They were prize winners at the 1990 Finale Ligure, Italy Two-Piano Competition.) Their ensemble is tight, their technique brilliant, and their taste impeccable.

The sound of this recording is just right, with just enough breadth but without the overwhelming brilliance that sometimes plagues two-piano recordings. The liner notes do an adequate job of introducing this obscure material. For those already familiar with the works of Weber, Rossini, and Bellini this will be particularly enjoyable.

BOLEN

TURINA: *Mujeres Españolas opp 17+73; Mujeres de Sevilla; Danzas Andaluzas; Bailete*
Sara Davis Buechner, p—Koch 7590—67 minutes

Pianist Sara Davis Buechner certainly has technique to spare, but her readings are so driven as to bleed these lovely works of any convincing warmth. She does not have a feel for the Spanish soul of this music.

Dotted rhythms are a little too dotted. Tempos are often too fast to let the melody be a melody and sing. They rob the line of its natural play. It's too high-energy much too often, and with little repose. We witness plenty of virtuosity, but not nearly enough of the music.

Placement of the microphones seems far from the piano. The effect is a splattering, tinny sound—highly unflattering.

Much of this music has a lot of repetition. It begs for imagination, care, and personality in its interpreter. I would look elsewhere for more satisfying performances—perhaps Alma Petchersky's recording (CBC 1123, Jan/Feb 2001).

BARELA

TVEITT: *Piano Concertos 1+4; Turtle*
Sveinung Bjelland, Hakon Austbo, p; Ingeborg Kosmo, mz; Stavanger Symphony/ Ole Kristian Ruud—BIS 1397—81 minutes

Geirr Tveitt's (1908-81) First Piano Concerto (1928) is a ruminative and introspective work, where the orchestra carries more melodic argument than in most concertos. Its materials are folk-like, sometimes sounding like children's tunes, and there is impressionism in the piano writing (see Nov/Dec 2001). In my March/April 2003 review of the Naxos recording of Tveitt's more brilliant Fourth Concerto (*Aurora Borealis*, 1949), I described that work as replete with clamor and contrast, full of great light effects: high polytonal string chords, glittery piano passages against longer-lined orchestral lines, along with images of snow-covered fields and other Northern phenomena.

Those Naxos recordings were fine ones. I am not so enthusiastic about the BIS newcomers. Ole Ruud's tempos are too slow and his pacing too languid. He seems far less sold on these concertos than the Naxos conductor, Bjarte Engeset, who sounds more assured about what they are saying and where the music is going. Engeset's faster tempos help, but more important is his boldness and color, as well as his tauter grip. In the same way, the Stavanger Symphony sounds thinner and more distant than the more spirited and polished Scottish National Orchestra. BIS pianists Sveinung Bjelland (in the First) and Hakon Austbo (the Fourth) sound technically competent, but they lack the power, presence, and sparkle of Naxos's Havard Grimse. A great deal of this reflects the difference between the conductors. The recorded sound maintains the parallel, with the BIS more distant and dimmer than the more immediate Naxos acoustic.

As a result, the BIS First is pleasant and listenable but soporific when compared to the more lively, engaging, and twinkling Naxos. The BIS Fourth is comfortable enough, but one minute into the Naxos tells you that the older recording takes the piece from comfortable to gripping, bold, startling, and dramatic. It also makes a much better case for the piece.

It would be nice to say, "just buy the two Naxos discs". Alas, what about *The Turtle*? For a composer so fascinated with Nordic texts, it is surprising to find that Tveitt set a long passage about a turtle crossing a highway from John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*—in English, no less. Reidar Storaas's notes posit that the turtle's drive to survive conjured up memories of Tveitt's career difficulties after World War II. Tveitt wrote the work for Kirsten Flagstad, but at the end of her career she probably found the

piece too difficult and never performed it. (I cannot find the date of the work, but Flagstad died in 1962.)

The Turtle is a dramatic narrative from a novel, so there is no literal sense of poetry in the music. The soprano sings Steinbeck's entire text, making for a work of almost half an hour. *The Turtle* could be mistaken for a neoromantic American work like Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* or something from the dry side of Menotti, but it's darker and less lush and colorful. It is also more animated and etched, as the orchestra uses clever resources to describe the fits and starts of the turtle's journey, as well as its lumbering gait. Tveitt is also good at capturing the strain, uncertainty, loneliness, and finally, the reptile's determination. The trek is hazardous enough to include two near misses, including one by a truck bent on running the turtle over. This is visually and psychologically effective music that involved me in the turtle's plight. Even without reading the text, I found myself rooting for him. I'm not sure the music captures a hot, bleak California afternoon—it could be heard as a journey across a frozen Norwegian landscape—but then I know the composer is Norwegian. The music sounds mostly tonal, but it pushes the boundaries. It is certainly approachable, with its description, tension, and drama. It is also melodic, if rather motivic and angular in the vocal writing.

It is hard to believe this performance is by the same conductor and orchestra that recorded the concertos. I have read two positive reviews of Tveitt's music played by these forces (May/June 1999 & Nov/Dec 2001): apparently, when inspired, they can produce good results, as they do here. Even the sound is better. Ingeborg Kosmo sings her difficult music very well, and her English is clear enough if you have the text in front of you. (Naxos supplies it.) *The Turtle* might justify purchasing this full-priced disc, though that's probably pushing it. BIS could make things easy by reissuing *The Turtle* with other music.

HECHT

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: *Symphony 9;* **RIEGGER:** *New Dance;* **HOVHANESS:** *Mysterious Mountain;* **CRESTON:** *Stokowski Toccata*

Stokowski conducting—Cala 539—73 minutes

Berlin 1930: a photograph. Five great conductors gaze with commanding authority into the camera: Toscanini, Walter, Klemperer, Furtwängler, and Erich Kleiber. An impressive assemblage, certainly. Yet this legendary group could have easily been extended by Koussevitzky, Stokowski, and Beecham—even the venerable Weingartner. A dozen more of only slightly less stature could have been added, starting with Reiner and Monteux. Could such a photo be taken today? Alas, no. The giants have fled. When in 1969 Klemperer was asked which of the younger conductors might take over the Philharmonic, he was unable to make a suggestion. The New York Philharmonic recently gave 74-year-old Lorin Maazel a long-term contract and are clearly glad to have him. It is also evident that some very pale talents have been put in charge of major orchestras. But were the giants really that great or is it merely the play of the imagination on a mythological past? Fortunately, all these conductors left a considerable recorded legacy. Listen to Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra in the Brahms Symphony No. 1 or *Scheherazade* recorded in the late 20s. The electricity of such performances speak for themselves.

Stokowski was the first of the great showman conductors; Leonard Bernstein in a completely different style followed in his wake. Both were able to infuse their performances with the vitalizing power of a unique personality. This resulted in occasional shipwrecks, but more often performances of dramatic sweep and passion. Stokowski was particularly famous for the sound he could draw from his orchestras. The late Carlos Kleiber on encountering one of his players asked at once "how did he get that marvelous string tone?" When Stokowski first guest conducted the Cleveland Orchestra, Louis Lane, long Szell's right-hand man, attended the rehearsal. Stokowski hardly spoke; yet, according to Lane, after 15 minutes it sounded as if the Philadelphia Orchestra of 1936 was on stage. By some telepathy the players sensed what he wanted and gave it to him. I saw him in concert only once—a fine performance of Vaughan William's *Sinfonia Antartica* and the most magically beautifully Debussy *Nocturnes* I've ever heard. Of course he could be guilty of appalling lapses. A particularly gruesome bit is the extended A-major chord for chorus he adds to the end of his 1970 recording of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe* Second Suite. At times his music-making can seem like a wavering line moving between genius and charlatanism. Yet he was greatly admired by Szell and Klemperer—conductors not inclined to put up with any shenanigans. A spotted genius, then—but a genius!

This is the complete concert given at Carnegie Hall on September 25, 1958 in celebration of his 50th Year as a conductor. Stokowski, like Koussevitzky, was tireless in giving modern music a hearing. Riegger's 'New Dance' with its jazz-inflected rhythms and colorful orchestration makes for an ideal concert opener, sounding like a rugged Lenny Bernstein overture. A new recording of his powerful

Third Symphony is badly needed. Paul Creston's Toccata, with his typical combining of song and dance, is given an exciting outing, particularly fetching in the Mediterranean warmth of its lyrical middle section.

The sweet-singing polymodalism of Hovhaness's *Mysterious Mountain* finds its ideal interpreter here. Hovhaness's long-breathing lyrical melodies and soft-glowing orchestral textures find a serene buoyancy in Stokowski's celebrated hands. In stereo both Reiner and Schwarz have the measure of this graceful score, Reiner especially fine in II's vivacious presto portion.

Stokowski had originally programed Shostakovich's Symphony No. 11, but when Vaughan Williams died the month before, the great English composer's last symphony was substituted. The symphony was given something of a mauling by the critics at the premiere six months earlier, some calling it "the mixture as before", which is exactly what it is not. Vaughan Williams, like Sibelius, was able to bring to each of his symphonies a fresh conceptual profile and atmosphere. In the Ninth, the adventurous sonorities of the *Sinfonia Antartica* and the Eighth are mingled with the roiled tranquility of the *Pastoral* and transformed into something new and strange. The overriding mood is one of tension-fraught disquiet, the night-shrouded landscape pervaded by an eerie premonitory unease lit by the unearthly luminous sounds of a trio of saxophones and brief glints from celeste and bells. There is everywhere a dire imminence, the sense of some impending event that will resolve the veiled questioning of the music. But it never occurs. The towering E-major climax of the final pages rear up forebodingly, only to fade away in enigmatic mystery.

As might be expected Stokowski brings his own insights to the contemplative tension of this extraordinary symphony. While Previn is meditative and mysterious, giving a sense of distance and far boundaries, Stokowski brings a forward-pressing intensity that makes his interpretation seem much faster. (The timings are very close; this is 35:58, not 38:58 as indicated on the box.) Sometimes Stokowski imparts a new vibrancy and coloring, almost cinematic—the dark iridescence of the strings at 6:24 in II.

The sonics and balance are good, the only disappointment being the barely audible harp sweeps of the closing pages. My current choices are Handley and Slatkin, with Stokowski's special flair a strong complement. I don't know Haitink, who gets an enthusiastic nod from Roger Hecht (Sept/Oct 2001). Cala has also released Stokowski's amazing 1944 broadcast of Vaughan William's rampageous Fourth, now my favorite despite stiff competition. (The Naxos Fourth will be reviewed in the next issue.)

TIEDMAN

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: *Oboe Concerto;* see Collections

VERDI: *A Masked Ball*

Dennis O'Neill (Gustavus), Susan Patterson (Amelia), Anthony Michaels-Moore (Anckarstrom), Jill Grove (Ulrica), Linda Richardson (Oscar); Geoffrey Mitchell Choir, London Philharmonic/ David Parry

Chandos 3116 [2CD] 126 minutes

This is another release in Chandos's Opera in English project, which, at a recent count, now numbers almost 40 operas, including eight by Verdi. They are underwritten by the Peter Moores Foundation, so it's not clear that this project is commercially viable; still, there must be a respectable audience for these discs. There should be. As I mentioned in earlier reviews, the most valuable of these releases are of operas composed in unfamiliar languages like Czech, Russian, or Scandinavian languages rather than the standard repertory operas in Italian, French, and German. But *A Masked Ball* is part of the standard repertory, usually cast with singers of many nationalities who have learned it and perform it in Italian.

So to assemble an English-speaking cast who are willing to learn (or re-learn) the work in English restricts one's choice of singers. That's been the problem with other releases in this series, too. These principal singers are just not as good as those you'll find on any of the four Italian *Ballo* recordings in our Overview (May/June 2000). This is not to say that they are less than competent; but their voices are not as rich and beautiful, as smooth and pure, and their interpretations are not as compelling.

Susan Patterson's soprano takes on an edge when it is pressured, notably in the high register; nor is it always pure. The veteran tenor Dennis O'Neill is quite weak in his low register and not even through his range. Anthony Michaels-Moore has the freshest voice of the three, but he doesn't make much of his theatrical opportunities; 'Eri tu' is much too bland. Oscar's voice is pretty but thin, and Ulrica's lacks presence and power, though she sings well.

If all this doesn't negate for you the advantage of hearing the opera in English, I can assure you that this performance has very good sound, is led by a dynamic, high-strung conductor and played by a fine orchestra, and that the text can be clearly understood. The

last is not always an advantage; it's full of couplets like "is he so ill-fated to be assassinated" and "Can I admit suspicion in my august position?" That would do for a comedy—which this opera is not. English text supplied.

MOSES

VICTORIA: *Ave Regina Caelorum; Mass, Ave Regina Caelorum; Ave Maria (a 4 & a 8); Dixit Dominus; Laudate Pueri Dominum; Laudate Dominum Omnes Gentes; Laetatus Sum; Nisi Dominus; Magnificat, seventh tone*

Robert Quinney, org; Westminster Cathedral Choir/ Martin Baker—Hyperion 67479—68 min

The principal work on this program of liturgical music by Tomas Luis de Victoria is the double-choir mass *Ave Regina Caelorum*. It is a parody mass based on the double-choir motet sung before it here. Given the sonorous possibilities of double-choir writing, one might expect this to be an expansive mass setting, but in fact it is remarkably concise. The object was evidently to make a glorious impression in tight liturgical dimensions. Apart from the two 'Ave Maria' settings, the rest of the music on the program is for Vespers: four psalm settings for eight voices, one setting for 12 voices ('Laetatus Sum') and the Magnificat. The psalms are through-composed. The four-part Magnificat is set alternatim, and in this performance framed by the proper plainsong antiphon for the Annunciation.

Not many years ago, music of this kind would automatically have been performed without accompaniment. In reality, the much-vaunted *a cappella* ideal is probably a romanticized backward projection from the 19th Century. For these performances, most of the music is supported with a very unobtrusive organ continuo that helps to bind the textures without calling undue attention to itself. It is worth noting in this respect a recording of Victoria motets performed by Victoria Voices and Viols under the direction of Andrew Hope (Gaudeamus 338; July/Aug 2004), where the motets are treated as accompanied chamber music. The effect of the organ in the present recording is not nearly so drastic.

For many years the choir of Westminster Cathedral (RC) has had what I would call a more "continental" sound, with a keener vocal edge and brighter tone than the choirs of most Anglican foundations. Martin Baker, who has been Master of Music there since 2000, is evidently continuing that choral tradition—perhaps to excess, judging from the sound of this recording. The tone is so brilliant and intense that it swamps any fine points the performance might have. The sound is undoubtedly glorious, but lacking in subtlety and nuance, and it becomes very wearying over the long haul. This, of course, is a highly personal reaction. There may be listeners who revel in this kind of sound and cannot get enough of it.

GATENS

VIERNE: *Organ Symphonies*

Martin Jean—Loft 1071 [4CD] 4:15

Martin Jean, associate organist at Yale and recipient of numerous national and international awards, performs this Vierne cycle on an instrument he is quite familiar with: the mammoth 4-197 rank, 166 stop Woolsey Hall organ at Yale (1902 Hutchings/1915 Steele/1929 Skinner enlargement). Among other complete sets of these symphonies the outstanding ones are by Cochereau (FY, Nov/Dec 1989), Van Oosten (MDG 3160732) and Kaunzinger (Koch 315000, J/F 1989). Each of the six symphonies has been recorded by countless organists (see our index).

Jean has all the technique required, and these pieces do require substantial manual and Pedal dexterity. His timings are generally mainstream, but may be extended on some movements with his penchant for holding final cadences longer than seems appropriate.

Every other recording I have heard from Woolsey Hall includes in the liner notes endless raves about the instrument, its history, its specifications, and the wonderful acoustics. I know that my comments will fall on mostly deaf ears, but I cannot get excited about the sound. Except for the portions that call for solo stops, the tone color here changes very little; the quiet sections are almost imperceptible, and the tutti moments are rarely thrilling. There is little brilliance to the sound, compared not merely to countless Cavaillé-Coll organs but to plenty of American installations. Beyond that, I just don't feel that there's much personality in these interpretations, though his Fifth is quite good. The notes are there, and that is about it. Perhaps closer miking would improve the presence, but it won't add any of the flair that is missing.

METZ

VILLA-LOBOS: *Quartets (all)*

Latin American Quartet

Brilliant 6634 [6CD] 392 minutes

I still remember the first time I heard a Villa-Lobos quartet. It was 1968, and Quartet 17 had just been issued on an Odyssey LP. I was bowled over by the joyous vitality of the music—and after all these years I'm still astonished and delighted by its vivacity and melodic appeal. No, these 17 quartets—written over a 42-year span (1915 to 1957)—don't exhibit the searching evolution of Bartok's six or Schoenberg's four. But they are consistently gorgeous

creations, not a dud in the lot, and they have the effortless spontaneity and rightness given only to those few composers—Schubert, Dvořak, Martinŭ—who seem to write music as naturally as an apple tree bears fruit.

The Latin American Quartet's recordings were originally issued on individual discs by Dorian (Jan/Feb 1996, Sept/Oct 1997, Nov/Dec 1999) and are now reissued in a six-CD box (less than an inch wide) by Brilliant. The performances are sensuous, high-spirited, and polished and the sonics ideal, and I'd rate them as good as the also-excellent competing cycles by the Danubius Quartet on Marco Polo and the Bessler-Reis Quartet on Chant Du Monde. (See the reviews for more detailed comparisons.) If you love beautiful string quartets you should hear at least one of these sets.

LEHMAN

VILLA-LOBOS: *Guitar Concerto;* see PONCE

VIVALDI: *Andromeda Liberata*

Simone Kermes (Andromeda), Max Emanuel Cencic (Perseo), Katerina Beranova (Cassiope), Anna Bonitatibus (Melisa), Mark Tucker (Daliso), Le Stagione Armonica, Venice Baroque Orchestra/ Andrea Marcon

DG Archiv 3456 [2CD] 98 minutes

A flurry of debate on the Vivaldi front has suddenly been generated by the new "discovery" of a manuscript containing an anonymous *serenata* of 1726, a quasi-dramatic cantata presenting a fanciful picture of the aftermath of the rescue of the princess Andromeda by the hero Perseus. The musicologist Olivier Fourés and the conductor Andrea Marcon have advanced it as a work associated with Vivaldi.

The key is that one of its arias also survives in an authentic Vivaldi manuscript. The serenata's manuscript carries the date of September 18, 1726, which would fall into the period of a visit to Venice by Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, when it is known that a number of musical events were held in honor of this Venetian-born patron of music. Aspects of the serenata's subject matter, symbolism, and textual imagery can plausibly be related to Ottoboni and his visit.

There is no evidence to associate Vivaldi explicitly with any of the events in Ottoboni's honor. And, short of any new documentation appearing, any effort to link such association with this serenata must be entirely a matter of speculation, arguing from circumstances and stylistic judgements. But Fourés and Marcon have concluded that Vivaldi could be the composer of the entire score, or at least the compiler of music by various composers into a *pasticcio*. Around these proposals a number of Vivaldi specialists have taken strong stands pro or con (especially the latter), and no consensus seems near.

The more to make their case, Fourés and Marcon have prepared this premiere recording of the work. Augmented by a 20-member chorus, Marcon has his Venice Baroque Orchestra (here 29 players) that he has been developing into a very able period-instrument group. His cast includes at least two singers of importance. As your local philosophical shepherd, Bonitatibus does some of the loveliest singing I have heard from her. Nevertheless, it is Simone Kermes, suddenly everywhere as the new queen of baroque opera, who dominates things here. Her keenly focussed voice and sure dramatic instincts draw the title character into something like real human personality, while musically she copes brilliantly with the widest ranges of mood and degrees of virtuosity her role entails.

Beranova's light voice and style hardly have the maternal qualities appropriate to Andromeda's mother. Still, countertenor Cencic has a good voice and makes what he can of the hero, who is mostly left baffled by Andromeda's emotional instability. Tenor Tucker is a direct singer, appropriately colorless as the "young foreigner" over whom Andromeda is romantically distracted.

In all, this is an attractive performance, not likely to be challenged soon, of a pleasant but not terribly distinctive score. The bottom line, of course, is what connection Vivaldi has with it. I am not an authority, but I cannot accept the argument that Vivaldi could be the composer of the entire work. The one authenticated aria of his in it (with its characteristic harmonies and personalized violin solo) does sound like him. But that makes it stand apart all the more from the rest. So much of this music, in shape of lines and instrumentation, does not betray his stylistic fingerprints at all. At best, I suspect, this is just a *pasticcio*, probably of music by elder contemporaries. That Vivaldi could have been its compiler is possible, but we may never know.

BARKER

VIVALDI: *Solo Motets*

Laudate Pueri, R 600; In Furore Giustissimae Irae, R 626; In Turbato Mare Irato, R 627; O Qui Coeli Terraeque Serenitas, R 631

Patrizia Ciofi, s; Europa Galante/ Fabio Biondi

Virgin 45704—62 minutes

The solo motets by Antonio Vivaldi on this recording fall into two categories. 'Laudate Pueri Dominum' is a setting of Vulgate Psalm 112 intended to be sung at Vespers. It is in ten movements taking over 20 minutes in perfor-

mance. The other three are examples of works sometimes called "introduzione", because they were intended to be performed immediately before a musical setting of a portion of the liturgy. Their sometimes fanciful Latin texts are not from the liturgy but usually the work of local clergy or church patrons, often in faulty Latin. These pieces are cast in a format similar to the secular cantata, with two *da capo* arias linked with a recitative (a form considered inappropriate for settings of liturgical texts). The two arias are generally of contrasting character: the first often lively and virtuosic, the second usually in slower tempo and more reflective. Each work concludes with a lively Alleluia. If this description rings a bell, you are probably thinking of Mozart's 'Exsultate, Jubilate', a later example of the genre.

Soprano Patrizia Ciofi has a flexible voice more than equal to Vivaldi's athletic writing. At the same time, the tone has a dark cast, almost the quality of a mezzo soprano, sometimes displaying a chest tone more attractive than most. There are places where *In Furore* and *O Qui Coeli* sound a trifle labored, as if the writing is uncomfortably high, but *Laudate Pueri* and *In Turbato* seem to fit the singer's voice like a glove.

In recent years I have reviewed several other recordings by Fabio Biondi and Europa Galante, including Antonio Caldara's oratorio *La Passione* (Virgin 45325; Sept/Oct 1999) and a program of JS Bach solo cantatas and arias sung by Ian Bostridge (Virgin 45420; May/June 2001). They are quite impressive. Biondi is a highly talented early-music violinist, and his period-instrument ensemble can claim a place with the finest in Europe. This disc makes a pleasant companion to an earlier one of sacred solo works by Vivaldi sung by countertenor David Daniels (Virgin 45474; May/June 2002). My only complaint about the playing there was Biondi's occasional tendency to allow vehemence to cross the elusive line between incisiveness and ugliness, with hard tone and violent attacks. There are one or two instances of that here, but on the whole the playing is elegant and stylish. Listeners desiring a more comprehensive recording of Vivaldi's sacred music will turn to the ten-disc compilation by Robert King (Hyperion). These works are found on King's volumes 2, 5, and 8.

GATENS

VIVALDI: *Solo Motets*

Catherine Bott, Purcell Quartet
Chandos 714—56 minutes

A rerelease of Chandos 613, *In Furore* (J/A 1998). The original release is titled *Vivaldi in Furore*. Since this one has been digitally remastered, I listened to see if it is worth getting, especially if you have the older one. I would say no. There is a slight, almost indefinable, greater depth and clarity to the sound, especially Miss Bott's voice, but the difference is not noticeable enough to require a new investment.

If you're looking at these works and considering picking them up for the first time, there are a couple of things to consider. On the one hand, do you want a complete set of Vivaldi's sacred choral works? If so, consider getting the matchless Hyperion series. I like the Hyperion renditions better, partly because they're played with a full orchestra rather than a quartet, as here. But I also like Deborah York's voice better on Hyperion for the title piece, *In Furore Iustissimae Irae*.

CRAWFORD

VIVALDI: *Violin Concertos*

Salvatore Accardo, I Musici
Pentatone 5186130 [SACD] 74 minutes

This is from the famous Philips set, recorded mostly in the 70s, that was produced by Vittorio Negri. It is especially for audiophiles—and who among us isn't, at least on some level?—and is part of a new RQR (Remastered Quadro Recordings) series made for SACD. This is, of course, a hybrid that sounds perfectly wonderful on a regular CD player.

Salvatore Accardo is at his warm, romantic best here. The eight concertos are from the 12 rarely recorded Opus 7 concertos—some of which are believed to be spurious, and two of which (1+7) are oboe concertos. The number of mistakes and inaccuracies in the Op. 7 collection (and Op. 6) leads Michael Stegemann to believe that Vivaldi's publisher, Roger in Amsterdam, may have published them without permission. In addition, neither opus has a collective title or dedication, which is unusual for Vivaldi's time. Taken together, these vagaries help us to understand why these concertos are not often recorded. Some people find them "boiler plate"; I would agree that they do not necessarily display the originality that one finds in Vivaldi's most notable concertos. Yet they are vintage Vivaldi—very romantically performed—and thus are charming, each having its exciting moments. I would not want to be without them, and, given the rarity of Opus 7 releases, this disc might fill a gap in your collection.

I did a quick Internet search to see if I could still turn up the original Philips set anywhere, since it was rereleased in the 1990s as a boxed, multi-disc set. It appears to be deleted. Nor was I able to turn up the Denon Opus 7 concertos (M/J 1994).

CRAWFORD

WAGNER: *The Flying Dutchman*

John Tomlinson (Dutchman), Nina Stemme (Senta), Eric Halfvarson (Daland), Kim Begley (Erik), Peter Wedd (Steersman); Geoffrey Mitchell Choir, London Philharmonic/ David Parry

Chandos 3119 [2CD] 142 minutes

This is the first Wagner in English we've had since Goodall's mid-70s *Ring*, and Chandos promises more to come. I like Wagner in English because it spares me many of the composer's forced, convoluted rhymes, and because it helps to clarify the story in moments when not much is happening. Musical interest may sag between the Dutchman's monolog and Senta's appearance, but at least we can clearly understand what's said. The tiresome characters—Daland and Erik—are more vivid, and the English language doesn't do much harm to the choruses, the Senta-Dutchman duet, or the great final scene. Translator Christopher Cowell has done a remarkable job, matching vowel sounds and even casting Wagner's rhymes into English ones. Sometimes it's too tritely colloquial ("What fate has in store") and sometimes it's hopeless ("Verloren, ach verloren" can't be rendered accurately into English syllables of the same length so Cowell tries "It's hopeless, ah, it's hopeless").

The performance is excellent—one of the best I've encountered in the whole Chandos Opera in English series. Conductor Parry gets off to a slow, patient start, drawing deep, rich playing out of his orchestra. He's absolutely sizzling by the time he gets to the part of the opera sometimes called Act 3. The singers are grand enough to suit his conception—no reticent Britishness here! Aside from the sweet-toned Peter Wedd as the Steersman, the men all have a slight case of the wobbles; but Kim Begley's ringing tenor and superb diction do justice to Erik, and Halfvarson is a sturdy, opportunistic Daland. Tomlinson has the style and bearing for the title role. His voice, though on the dry side and somewhat the worse for wear, is of the proper bass-baritone weight, and he knows how to act with it. He's always alive and sympathetic, and he colors his words with feeling but without exaggeration. Senta is the Swedish soprano Nina Stemme, who sings excellent English. Her voice is warm in the middle and blazes on top. I wish the engineers hadn't moved her away from the microphones for her final utterance—we really want to hear this at full volume.

That one quibble aside, the Chandos sound is spacious and natural, if just a bit diffuse. There really isn't an outstanding German-language *Dutchman*—at least we've never agreed on one in our overviews—but Parry can stand comparison with the best of them. A libretto is supplied. On to *Mastersingers*!

LUCANO

WAGNER: Overtures

Flying Dutchman; Rienzi; Meistersinger; Tannhäuser; Lohengrin III; Tristan: Prelude & Liebestod

Netherlands Philharmonic/ Yakov Kreizberg

PentaTone 5186 041 [SACD] 75 minutes

There used to be an ad that said "This is not your father's Oldsmobile". Unfortunately, this is definitely your father's Wagner. Maybe even your grandfather's. This turgid, bloated mess embodies all that is stereotypically derided in Wagnerian performance: all we need now is a fat lady in a Viking helmet, and probably that's included on the DVD. I have recordings of the *Prelude and Liebestod* in my collection that don't last much longer than the Prelude all by itself does here: total is 20:16 if you can believe that. Of course our Editor surely realized when he assigned me this one that I'm coming to the table as a Mercury fanatic, which in the case of Wagner means Paray and Dorati; yet even setting aside Paray's wonderfully virile *Dutchman* Overture, I pulled out Bruno Walter (our Editor's favorite) and there's a thrust and sinew to it that quite elude Kreizberg. Walter delivers a sturdy *Meistersinger* too, even better than Kreizberg, though that is probably the best thing here. (*Lohengrin* III is pretty good too, but that's only three minutes. At least Kreizberg doesn't tack on two measures of the 'Wedding Chorus' at the end like Dorati.) As for *Rienzi*, if you don't like Paray there's always the far heftier Solti, who certainly doesn't inch along like Kreizberg.

In fact, Kreizberg takes every opportunity to slow to a crawl, especially in the melodic tissue that separates one theme from the next; that produces a roller coaster effect that had me pretty queasy after a while. The close of the *Tristan* Prelude drags on so long, it's like the last notes were all in different time zones. And as for *Tannhäuser*, I don't know where the pilgrims are headed in the opera, but here they seem bound for Lourdes—wheelchairs, walkers and all. Kreizberg actually works up the central Bacchanale to something approaching a respectable orgy before the pilgrims finally trudge back home. All through this tedious exercise I got the impression that Kreizberg was far more concerned with puffing himself up at Wagner's expense; that may work if you have as much charisma as Karajan, but certainly not with an orchestra that's struggling to stay afloat. The slapdash string playing in the *Tannhäuser* Bacchanale suggests maybe Kreizberg knew what he was doing all along. In

stereo (over four channels) it sounded reverberant even for Wagner, with a damped midrange and some muddying of inner detail; my colleague Mark Koldys, who suffered through the same disc as an SACD, reported back that while it sounded better than the CD that wasn't saying very much: it was dull either way—just like the performances.

HALLER

WALLACE: *Guitar Pieces*

Frank Wallace—Gyre 10052—71 minutes

I'll begin with a passage from my review of Frank Wallace's last release (Sept/Oct 2001):

"Frank Wallace is an accomplished lutenist and vihuelist, a specialist in medieval and Renaissance music, a self-accompanying singer, and a fine guitarist. As though this weren't versatility enough, he is also a composer, as this release of his solo guitar works demonstrates. The breadth of his musical activity recalls an earlier age of practical music, when a complete musician engaged in a broad range of creative activities as a matter of course."

As on the last record, Wallace's compositions here are rhythmically taut and stylistically eclectic. Several of them have a distinctly Eastern modal quality, while others show their debt to Western vernacular traditions. Wallace plays his Fleta guitar with a confident, full-bodied tone and an emphasis on metric clarity and accent. On the downside, he does not play with enough variation in dynamics and tone color. This, along with the insistently driving quality of most of the works, leads to some monotony. The pieces here are all miniatures—there are 49 tracks in all—arranged into suites. Wallace's brief overview of the pieces is a helpful guide, covering the circumstances of their composition and their basic musical characteristics. The packaging—a thin cardboard booklet with the disc attached to a spindle inside—is both attractive and ingenious.

RINGS

WEBER: *Die Drei Pintos*

Barbara Zechmeister, Sinead Campbell, s; Sophie Marilley, mz; Peter Furlong, Eric Shaw, t; Ales Jenis, bar; Robert Holzer, Alessandro Svab, Stewart Kempster, b; Wexford Festival/ Paulo Arrivabeni—Naxos 660142 [2CD] 114 minutes

As Carl Maria von Weber was putting the finishing touches on *Der Freischütz*, the thought of a full-length comic opera as a follow-up appealed to him. He had purchased a three-act libretto by Theodor Hell, the pseudonym for Gottfried Theodor Winkler, who would later work on the German text of Weber's *Oberon*. Hell used Carl Seidel's novella, *Der Brautkampf* (*The Battle for the Bride*), which Weber changed to *Die Drei Pintos*. As soon as he started its composition, Weber had many interruptions, and had written very little when the Kärntnertor Theatre in Vienna requested an opera for the 1822-23 season. He dropped work on *Pintos* in favor of *Euryanthe*, and when the latter failed, he fell into a profound depression. When Weber died in 1826, he left sketches for only six numbers in Act I and a fragmentary score for the opening of Act II. The Weber family, hoping for another composer to complete *Pintos*, gave the sketches to Meyerbeer, who kept them for 20 years and eventually gave up the project, returning the sketches to the family.

Meanwhile, Mahler was making a name for himself as an opera conductor; he was second conductor under Nikisch at Leipzig, where plans were underway in 1886 for him to conduct a Weber cycle at the Leipzig Opera in celebration of the centenary of the composer's birth. The house's stage director introduced the 26-year-old conductor to Weber's grandson, Captain Karl von Weber, to discuss a means of staging *Pintos*. Mahler was able to decipher Weber's sketches (the chore that had defeated Meyerbeer), and by rummaging through Weber's music, mostly little-known pieces, he was able to fit tunes to the rest of the libretto, adapting and orchestrating where necessary. There is almost no original Mahler music here. The most tangible link to Mahler is the Entr'acte that he put together as the Prelude to Act II. Although its musical ideas can be traced to Weber, the structure belongs to Mahler.

Mahler was 26 years old when he arrived in Leipzig from a post in Prague to assume duties as Nikisch's assistant. He was hardly known as a composer, but did have a reputation as an opera conductor. He had composed very little: he had composed but not performed or published *Das Klagende Lied*, and had produced a few songs with piano. Even so, Captain Weber took to Mahler immediately and gave him the *Pintos* assignment. The complete score was ready in October 1887. (Before the end of that year, Mahler had an affair with Captain Weber's wife, fortunately aborted before any serious damage was done.) Eduard Hanslick, a very important critic of his time, thought little of Weber's arias but credited Mahler with choosing the supplementary pieces with considerable musical taste and an expert sense of theatre.

Mahler conducted the premiere of *Die Drei Pintos* on January 20, 1888 in Leipzig. It was an immediate success. Mahler had so seamlessly combined Weber's music with his own invention that critics were unable to tell which was

whose. Those who guessed, guessed wrong. Hans von Bülow hated the opera, considering the libretto to be "unadulterated trash". Bülow also objected to Mahler blending his work so seamlessly with Weber's.

I disagree with Bülow on both counts. The libretto is no worse than many other light operas. *Pintos* has the same type of farcical plot as some of Mozart's comic operas. Mahler's work in completing the opera and conducting its world premiere gained him an international reputation and brought him a small fortune. Although *Pintos* is seldom performed today, it was popular until about the turn of the 19th Century.

This second recording of *Die Drei Pintos* follows the first by 29 years. The first (on RCA) is splendid in every way: excellent sonics, a world-class orchestra (Munich Philharmonic), a fine conductor (Gary Bertini) and a stellar cast, including Lucia Popp, Werner Hollweg, Hermann Prey, and Kurt Moll. Unfortunately, it is not available on CD in this country, though it is in Germany. The Naxos recording does not approach the RCA in any respect. Sonics are OK, but that's about it. It's an actual performance in October 2003 at the Wexford Festival in Ireland, and there is lots of stage and audience noise, but one gets used to it and mentally wipes it out. The members of the cast are completely unknown to me (and to my opera-loving friends), as are the Belarus Philharmonic, the Wexford Festival Chorus, and conductor Paulo Arrivabeni. There is no libretto, and one cannot deny some rough edges in the performance. Nevertheless, this is a fine, lively, enthusiastic performance of a delightful opera. The singers range from excellent to no-less-than good, and at the Naxos price, the set is a bargain.

FOX

WEINBERGER: *Schwanda the Bagpiper*

Matjaz Robavs (Schwanda), Tatiana Monogarova (Dorota), Ivan Choupenitch (Babinsky); Wexford Festival/ Julian Reynolds

Naxos 660146 [2CD] 134 minutes

Svanda Dudek, to give it its Czech title, was first performed in Prague in 1927 and came to the Met (in German, with Müller and Schorr) in 1931. Its popularity quickly diminished, and it's now remembered only for its famous Polka and Fugue. But with its infectious, folklike tunes and orchestral dances, it's musically very much like *Bartered Bride* all over again. There's even some similarity in the characters: *Schwanda* has an intelligent tenor hero, a wilting, jealous soprano, and a rollicking tenor-bass duet.

The libretto bears no resemblance to Smetana's masterpiece. The chief mover of events is not the title character but Babinsky (a tenor), a Czech Robin Hood who one day appears at the rustic home of Schwanda and his wife Dorota. Schwanda accompanies Babinsky to the court of the Ice Queen, where he dispels the local gloom by playing the famous polka. Dorota arrives, worried that Schwanda might have fallen for the Queen. Husband and wife, joined by Babinsky, argue in a remarkable trio set in the form of a Furiant, a Bohemian dance. Schwanda swears that the Devil might take him if he ever kissed the Queen, and the Devil does.

Act 2 begins in Hell, where a bored Satan cannot get Schwanda to play his pipes. Babinsky drops in, plays cards with the Devil (who always cheats), and finally wins Schwanda's freedom. Though in love with Dorota himself, Babinsky nobly brings Schwanda back home, and the story ends happily.

If there is a problem with the opera, aside from the language, it's that the characters aren't all that interesting. The Devil, oddly enough, is the most sympathetic of them, and Babinsky's self-sacrifice is at least admirable; but the vain, stubborn Schwanda and his petulant wife are almost as difficult to care about as the sullen Queen and her attendant evil Magician.

The music is a joy from beginning to end. The ebullient dances, the duet for Babinsky and Satan, the cozy love song of Schwanda and Dorota (thematically related to the Polka and heard several times), the Furiant—all these and much more should not be consigned to operatic limbo.

At least we've had, for 20 years now, a good Sony recording led by Heinz Wallberg but sung in German. The cast is appealing: Popp, Prey, Jerusalem, Siegmund Nimsgern as the Devil and Gwendolyn Killebrew as the Queen. The new Naxos was recorded at the Wexford Festival in Ireland, with an Irish chorus, an orchestra from Belarus, and singers from eastern Europe (mostly Russia). It is sung in Czech, and that alone should please anyone who insists on fidelity to the printed score. Unfortunately for linguistic purists, Wallberg's performance is much the better. (Weinberger, who spent much of his life in America, would probably not have been bothered by the translation.) The Belarus orchestra is always enthusiastic but sometimes scrappy.

Prey was a lightweight Schwanda 20 years ago, but Matjaz Robavs is lighter still, though generally pleasing in timbre. Soprano Tatiana Monogarova is feisty and earthy but less radiant than Lucia Popp, and Ivan Choupenitch's strident Babinsky has none of Siegfried Jerusalem's charm. Larisa Kostyuk's Queen matches the potent low notes of Killebrew, and Alexander

Teliga's Devil is just a bit more imposing than Nimsgern's; but the older recording still has the advantage. Naxos supplies a track-by-track synopsis, but a libretto is sorely needed. A commendable effort all the same, and it's good to have *Svanda Dudek* in the right language, and offered at so low a price.

LUCANO

WHITLOCK: *Organ Sonata in C minor*
with *5 Short Pieces; Fantasy Chorale 1*
John Scott—Hyperion 67470—72 minutes

with **BAIRSTOW:** *Sonata in E-flat;* **HARRIS:** *Flourish for an Occasion*
Colm Carey—Signum 508—64 minutes

Recent years have brought a renewed interest on the organ works of Percy Whitlock, organist at St Stephen's in Bournemouth (we have reviewed four such releases). These had lain neglected (except in England) since his death in 1946. The Sonata (1937) is considered his masterpiece in a catalog that is not very extensive. In style, the music breathes a neoromantic rather than a modern air; it is homophonic and tonal, with echoes of Rachmaninoff, Delius, and Elgar. Dramatic and lyrical ideas predominate. The ambitious opening movement of the sonata (in sonata form) and the even longer closing movement are rambling and discursive. They frame two lighter interior movements, a canzona and a scherzo.

John Scott, formerly Director of Music at St Paul's Cathedral, London, and newly appointed Director at St Thomas, New York City, plays the sonata propulsively in symphonic style, with fine dynamic flexibility in the grand English manner. His instrument is the immense organ at St Paul's. Hyperion does not appear to have solved the problems engendered by the acoustics in the Cathedral and the diffusion of sound from this instrument. A lot of musical detail is blurred or lost, and the overall effect is distant. Still, this is an ideal organ for Whitlock.

The charming Five Short Pieces (1927) fare better than the more complex sonata, and Scott plays them perfectly in the best English style. The fifth number, 'Paean', includes the magnificent Tubas of the Solo Organ. Scott performs the attractive Fantasy Chorale No. 1 (1931) peerlessly, giving it all the plasticity and color the music requires. The recorded sound is clearer here than in the sonata, capturing the multiplicity of this organ effectively.

The Irish organist Colm Carey is currently Master of the Music at the Chapels Royal in the Tower of London. With a foray into the United States, he has chosen to play the new three-manual Létourneau organ in the Church of the Ascension and St Agnes, Washington, DC. His performance of the Whitlock sonata, also very much in the English manner, is transparent, intense, idiomatic, and defined by his highly developed rhythmic sense. He uses this organ expertly, unhampered by reverberant acoustics. We are never in doubt for an instant that a master organist is at the console. A bright star among younger organists, his talent is one of the most striking I have encountered in some time.

Sir Edward C Bairstow and Percy Whitlock both died on May 1, 1946, though Bairstow was some years older. His Sonata in E-flat also dates from 1937, but in style it belongs to an earlier, more traditional era than Whitlock's. Carey's performance is an exemplary one. The middle movement, a toccata, blazes with brilliance and virtuosity.

Signum's recording of this organ is particularly splendid—absolutely clear and well balanced. It captures the low pitches of the pedal organ exceptionally well. The instrument is especially well suited to the English repertoire, though only an English cathedral organ could be considered ideal, and it is in excellent tune.

MULBURY

WUORINEN: *Genesis; A Solis Ortu; Mass*
Curtis Macomber, v; James E Pugh, Joseph Alessi, David Taylor, trb; Harold Chaney, org; New York Virtuoso Singers/ Charles Wuorinen; Minnesota Orchestra & Chorale/ Edo de Waart
Albany 678—74 minutes

Golden Dance; 5; Violin Concerto
Fred Sherry, vc; Paul Zukofsky, v; Orchestra of St Luke's/ Charles Wuorinen; San Francisco Symphony/ Herbert Blomstedt; Frankfurt Radio/ Eliahu Inbal—Albany 711—66 minutes

The latest two entries in Albany's Charles Wuorinen series present mostly large-scale works by the reigning high priest of modernism. One (*Genesis*) samples the composer's sacred music and the other (*The Golden Dance*) his secular works. Many of these recordings appeared previously on Koch and Nonesuch, though they have been remastered. As I sat down to write that *Genesis* (the piece) is a curiously violent work, an often discordant, cacophonous, thickly orchestrated setting of prayers and creation texts, I was surprised to read in the liner notes that it is in fact "a non-explosive, non-violent work". Silly me. But explosive or not, Edo de Waart gives an impressively committed and exhilarating performance of this challenging work; the Minnesota Chorale is particularly to be admired for its undaunted energy and musicality.

The sacred works that follow *Genesis* are much more intimate, and while they are thorny, the choral parts are resonant, sonorous, and quite lyrical. The *Mass* was writ-

ten for the New York City Church of St Luke in the Fields on the occasion of its rebuilding in 1982 following a fire. Its odd ensemble (violin, three trombones, organ, and chamber chorus) is very well suited for the atmospheres of collective triumph, transcendental spirituality, and personal reflection that saturate the piece. I do wonder if the New York Virtuoso Singers would have turned in a more detailed, linear performance in the hands of a director other than the composer. Also questionable is Wuorinen's decision to include a piano arrangement (which he plays) of part of Josquin's motet 'Ave Christe'—the piano is ill-suited to the glorious vocal counterpoint of the Renaissance master, and the juxtaposition of the arrangement with Wuorinen's small a cappella 'A Solis Ortu' seems like a cheap way for the composer to claim the mantle of his august predecessor.

The eponymous piece on *The Golden Dance* is the only purely orchestral work on either disc. Performed here by the San Francisco Symphony under Blomstedt (who commissioned *Genesis*), the piece is in two movements, only the second of which resembles dance music traditionally conceived—though it makes Stravinsky's sacrificial dance seem like a *bourrée*. Blomstedt knows Wuorinen's music very well and understands its demands.

The other two pieces are concertos for amplified string instruments and large orchestra. The amplification allows Wuorinen to situate the soloist and orchestra on entirely different footing than is customary; details of quiet passages come through clearly over mild orchestral accompaniment, and the soloist can even stab loud chords right through a tutti, as Wuorinen has the violinist do at the beginning of each movement.

The cello concerto *Five* was written 15 years after the violin concerto of 1972, and it shows the composer's fanciful side. Lush melodies bump up against jostling boogies and eerie microtonal explorations in a rambling but tightly constructed series of five shortish movements; it is a less overtly thorny and opaque work than the violin concerto, which is the one new recording here.

QUINN

ZEMLINSKY: *A Florentine Tragedy*

Iris Vermillion (Bianca), Viktor Lutsiuk (Guido), Albert Dohmen (Simone); French Radio Philharmonic/ Armin Jordan—Naive 4987—60 minutes

This is the third recording of what has become Zemlinsky's most effective opera to come my way, but it doesn't change my preference for Decca's 1997 release (M/A 1998). This short work depends for its effectiveness primarily on the three singers. In this release, two of the roles are taken by the same artists heard on the Decca, Albert Dohmen and Iris Vermillion. Dohmen's voice has become a bit thicker and more burly, and there's now some strain in the loud passages. His interpretation hasn't changed. Bianca is a small role, and Vermillion fills it more than adequately, but her voice isn't as smooth and secure as in the earlier release. Lutsiuk's tenor seems tight, his voice is not ingratiating, and he delivers the German text with an annoying accent. In addition, the French orchestra doesn't play as well as the Concertgebouw, whose sound is plusher and more beautiful in the lyrical passages. It also benefitted from Decca's clearer and warmer sound. In addition, the Decca CD included six songs by Alma Mahler, sung by Vermillion, and they are worth having. Texts and translations.

In the Decca booklet Dohmen was listed as Guido and Kruse as Simone. I didn't catch the error, not having heard either singer at the time. I have since heard Dohmen on stage, as Jochanaan, and I can confirm that he is a baritone, not a tenor.

MOSES

ZEMLINSKY: *King Candaules*

Robert Brubaker (Candaules), Wolfgang Schöne (Gyges), Nina Stemme (Nyssia); Mozarteum Salzburg & German Symphony Berlin/ Kent Nagano—Andante 3070 [2CD] 131 minutes

This was recorded at the 2002 Salzburg Festival by the Austrian Radio. It's the second recording of Zemlinsky's last, and perhaps greatest, opera to appear. I reviewed Capriccio's premiere recording by the Hamburg opera (J/F 1998). Since this work will be unfamiliar to many readers, I'll repeat its background and a brief summary of its plot.

It's based on the drama *Le Roi Candaule* by André Gide; the composer also wrote the libretto. Gide's work is based on Herodotus, who tells us, in his *Persian Wars*, how Gyges, a Lydian fisherman, usurped that country's throne by killing its King Candaules, the last of the Heraclid dynasty.

Candaules's wife Nyssia had become irate when her husband invited Gyges to their bed-chamber in order to show off his wife's (naked) beauty. (Women went veiled in Lydia at that time, as they still do in some Muslim countries.) In the opera, Gyges is a poor fisherman whom Candaules invites into

his house so that he can show him his huge wealth as well as his beautiful wife. Also, he lets Gyges have the ring that was found in one of his fishes; it makes its wearer invisible. Gyges takes advantage of that to sleep with Nyssia, who then calls this the most thrilling night of her life. But when she finds out that it was Gyges, not her husband, who was responsible for her pleasure, she demands that her new and better lover kill her husband. He does, and Nyssia proclaims him her king and husband.

Zemlinsky finished only the short score and two-thirds of the orchestration for Act 1. The British scholar Antony Beaumont completed the work, using the composer's many indications of tempo markings, stage instructions, and indications for the orchestration. This was the score used in the Hamburg premiere in 1996 and on the Capriccio recording. The Andante set doesn't mention Beaumont's contribution, but in the absence of evidence to the contrary, I assume that his work was also used in Salzburg. This orchestration is quite colorful and more interesting than the vocal lines, which are often expressive but not melodic and include much parlando and even a few spoken lines. The music is what one would expect from this composer: late romantic, with Strauss and, sometimes, Mahler as its god-parents. It is serviceable and quite erotic in the bedroom scene—which, if properly staged, might be the sexiest scene in opera.

The Salzburg cast is considerably better than Hamburg's. Robert Brubaker's tenor is firmer, smoother, and has more body than James O'Neill's, who sometimes wobbles. Also, Brubaker colors his words better. Nina Stemme's voice is much more secure than Nina Warren's, which had a real bad wobble; it's also more beautiful and ingratiating. Wolfgang Schöne and Monte Peterson have similar voices, but Schöne sings more expressively. The minor roles are performed well in both sets.

There's little difference in sound quality, though Capriccio's is more up-front, as is typical of a studio recording, and Andante's reflects what you would hear in a large auditorium. Both sets include librettos with translation and good notes. In sum, Andante's release is preferable because it is better cast and Nagano's account of the score is more compelling.

MOSES

ZIMMERLI: *Trios (2)*

Scott Yoo, v; Michael Mermagen, vc; John Novacek, p—Arabesque 6785—63 minutes

The annotations tell us nothing about Patrick Zimmerli, but these two brand-new piano trios, played here with commanding authority and recorded in Arabesque's superlative sonics, reveal that he's a very clever fellow, with lots of technical cunning and a powerful desire to please his audience. Both trios are staunchly tonal works in standard four-movement form, with an opening fast sonata-form, ardent slow movement, zippy scherzo, and finale topped off by a big, exciting finish. Into these classic outlines Zimmerli pours richly harmonized neoromantic music that borrows from various vernacular idioms—airbrushed cool jazz, flamenco, Hebraic cantation, orientalisms, Broadway ballads, pop songs—blending the whole mixture with suave assurance and apportioning it among the three instruments in highly effective textural combinations. He even imports a handful of "avant-garde" effects into Trio 2's Andante without in the slightest displacing his tonal, melodic style. Allegros are exciting, powered along by churning ostinatos and dance rhythms; andantes are passionate, with dreamier moments tinted by pastel impressionist harmonies and delicately articulated string entries.

Despite Zimmerli's sophistication, these trios inescapably recall the crowd-pleasing "crossover" concoctions of Claude Bolling. Zimmerli's popular elements are more highly distilled, and sometimes—as in the rapturous slow movement of the first trio—he transcends their commercial and cliched associations by sheer confidence and imagination. But still I can't help feeling that his warmth and zestful tunefulness are too often prefabricated, sham. Less critical listeners will just sit back and enjoy the luxurious upholstery.

LEHMAN

ZIPOLI: *Suites, Book 2*

Susan Alexander-Max, fp
Albany 669—68 min

The best thing this release offers is an opportunity to hear the 1720 Cristofori from the Metropolitan Museum of Art; it's the oldest of the Cristofori fortepianos that still exist. I've heard copies of Cristoforis that sound marvelous, and while I'm fascinated to hear an original, this one has a labored, fuzzy tone that wears out its welcome very quickly.

Alexander-Max plays the music well, but it's just not interesting enough to sustain my interest. There's competition by Sergio Vartolo, who performs on harpsichord (Tactus 682602). Luca Guglielmi performs the first of the suites (in B minor) on a collection for Stradivarius (33608, also not reviewed in ARG).

HASKINS

Collections

Tribute to Carlos Kleiber

BRAHMS: *Symphony 4;* **SCHUBERT:** *Symphony 8;* **WAGNER:** *Tristan & Isolde (conclusion)*
Vienna Philharmonic, Dresden Staatskapelle/ Carlos Kleiber
DG 477 5324—80 minutes

Kleiber's death last summer brought forth a reassessment of the elusive conductor's career. As we know, he made very few recordings and seldom conducted in public. Recently he had restricted his public appearances to about one a year, and he often cancelled. He had been the first choice to replace Karajan at Berlin, but turned it down, and he didn't give interviews. I guess I warmed to him a little when I learned he was terribly shy. I wonder how difficult it must have been to be in a profession filled with extroverted celebrities.

It has also been instructive for me to re-evaluate these recordings. Years ago the Brahms Fourth (1980) had struck me as wonderfully played, but driven and unyielding. Now, hearing it after several years, the playing seems just as fine, but it does not feel pushed at all. It does adhere to tempos fairly strictly (thus leading to the sense of rigidity), but small details and inner parts are gently shaped and given their due. The scherzo is the best movement because Kleiber admits a spontaneity that is lacking elsewhere. This is a very fine performance—indeed, the recording is something of a legend—but I find it too much from the head, too little from the heart. It has a level of careful planning and perfect execution that are impressive (follow with a score to see what I mean), but emotionally it strikes me as bland. As I've said before, I like to use the goose-bump index, and I don't get them here, except at the end of the first movement and in parts of the scherzo.

The Schubert, which I reviewed nearly 25 years ago, is played with the same skill and assurance as the Brahms. Kleiber addresses primarily the dramatic side of the piece—the muscular, Beethovenian side with vigorous string playing and sharp dynamic contrasts. Left to fend for itself, unfortunately, is the vulnerable, sweet side of Schubert, where a spirit of regret seems to coexist with confidence. A dramatic opening movement is a defensible option, but Kleiber's slow movement, already fairly quick, is governed too much by the metronome. He doesn't seem to realize that for much of Schubert you don't have to do anything except get out of the way and give the flowers some space to blossom.

The 15-minute Wagner excerpt comes from the complete recording (1982), beginning in Act III with Kurwenal's 'Tod und Hölle' and continuing through the 'Liebestod' to the end of the opera. The conducting is vital and exciting, with Margaret Price bringing great beauty and a human scale to her great aria. This is an attractive appetizer to the opera, though I should note in fairness that Kleiber's *Tristan* has not met with great acclaim.

This, then, is an interesting sampling of Kleiber's art. His meticulous preparation and nearly flawless execution may elevate him to someone's Hall of Fame, but not to mine.

ALTHOUSE

My England: concertos

ARNOLD: *Clarinet Concertos;* **BLAKE:** *Violin Concerto;* **FINZI:** *Clarinet Concerto;* **FOGG:** *Bassoon Concerto;* **GARDNER:** *Flute Concerto; Oboe Concerto;* **GUNNING:** *Saxophone Concerto;* **HOLST:** *Fugal Concerto;* **HOPE:** *Bassoon Concerto;* **HOROWITZ:** *Clarinet Concertante; Trumpet Concerto;* **JACOB:** *Oboe Concerto;* **LAMBERT:** *Piano Concerto;* **LEIGHTON:** *Recorder & Harpsichord Concerto; Oboe Concerto;* **RAWSTHORNE:** *Concerto for 10 Instruments;* **STANFORD:** *Clarinet Concerto;* **VAUGHAN WILLIAMS:** *Oboe Concerto*
David Owen Norris, p; Christiane Edinger, v; Jennifer Stinton, fl; Emma Johnson, Ian Scott, cl; Ruth Bolister, Jill Crowther, ob; Graham Salvage, bn; John Harle, sax; James Watson, tpt
Resonance 505 [5CD] 352 minutes

As much as I love English music, I was not excited by this assignment. I am not generally fond of concertos. Too many sound like showpieces or circus acts, designed to satisfy the egos of soloists, aficionados of a given instrument, or audiences who view concerts as athletic events and star turns.

Well, was I in for a surprise—though maybe I shouldn't have been so startled. These are all 20th Century works, and the relationship between soloist and orchestra tends to be more balanced in 20th Century concertos, particularly the ones for winds. Whatever the case, there is not a real dud in the lot. Every piece is accessible and all are tonal or nearly so. Several are of recent vintage, lending encouragement to the notion that some good music is being written nowadays. A few are fairly well established—the rich, Elgarian Finzi Clarinet Concerto (the rich, eerie slow movement is worth the price of the box), the typically lush Vaughan Williams, the contrasting Arnold concertos, the Brahmsian Stanford Clarinet Con-

certo, and the delightful neobaroque Holst. The renown of the others is more limited, so I'll focus on them.

John Gardner's (1917-) attractive Oboe Concerto (1990) is both simple and complex, with quartal harmony and fetching turns of phrase that evolve into engaging long phrases. I is a delightful combination of Handel and Tippett. The songful slow movement is wistful, and the finale is jaunty, yet refined and charming. The Flute Concerto (1995) retains the Oboe Concerto's baroque character, but I is darker and a little thornier, while the moody slow movement sounds like a Verdi aria with a strong mid-20th Century English accent. Things brighten in III, a piping blend of baroque gavotte and concerto grosso, while the sprightly, dexterous finale suggests a baroque Benjamin Britten.

While Gordon Jacob (1895-1984) worked in Vaughan Williams's English pastoral school, he did not have VW's strong musical personality. He turned less often to VW's folk idiom, modality, and lushness, and he was less of an impressionist. Even so, his tuneful Oboe Concerto (1934) is a fine work (especially the moody, evocative slow movement) that can sometimes be mistaken for VW, especially the lilting, folk-like III.

Howard Blake's (1938-) Violin Concerto (1992) begins with a bow to the Sibelius Concerto, pays a nod to Prokofieff, and settles down in the angular, sweeping symphonic world of Samuel Barber and the rugged Scottish terrain of Arnold Bax and John McEwen. Homage to Elgar's Violin Concerto is paid with the long (though unaccompanied) cadenza in I. The beautiful slow movement begins in the quiet world of Barber and becomes more sweeping and open before returning to quiet, contemplative lyricism. The finale blends swirling violin passages with American Western sounds in the brass, like Elmer Bernstein and Eric Ewazen.

The haunting opening of Christopher Gunning's (1944-) Saxophone Concerto (1998), with the solo instrument wailing in its high register, evokes ancient Celtic tribesmen calling over rocky Scottish highlands. Even when it turns virtuosic, the saxophone, still mainly in its high register, maintains a bardic presence, replete with primitiveness and mystery and augmented by Bartok's quartal harmony, melody, and wildness. The work turns sweeping and lyrical toward the end, as though the bard has completed his journey and is settling down for the night.

Constant Lambert's (1905-51) youthful Piano Concerto (1924) is one of the jazzier and more French-style works in this collection. It is also one of the most striking. The insistently rhythmic I, III, and IV, with the orchestra alternating percussively with a sometimes darting, sometimes furious piano is very arresting—so much so that the long Andante, quiet while still percussive but eventually musing to the point of sounding improvisatory, is a riveting contrast.

Another jazz-influenced work is Peter Hope's (1930-) Bassoon Concerto (2000). I is an enticing, sometimes spooky, combination of yearning bassoon and string lines, rhythmic string writing, harp arpeggios, and tom-toms. Hope writes for the cinema, and it is easy to conjure a musty black-and-white montage from this movement. In the outer sections of the even jazzier slow movement, the bassoon takes on the character of a dark, speakeasy saxophone wailing against bluesy strings. With the entrance of a jazz string bass and xylophone, the bassoon goes on what sounds like an improvisatory journey in the movement's midsection—only the contrapuntal treatment of the bluesy string lines keeps this interlude in the classical realm. I'm less fond of the lively *El Salon Mexico*-meets-'America'-from-*West Side Story* finale. Though fun, it doesn't sound like part of the same piece.

Alan Rawsthorne's (1905-71) Stravinskyish Concert for 10 Instruments is in the composer's drier, more serialist style. Rawsthorne was never a "by the numbers" atonalist, so it is melodic and colorful enough in its icy way to appeal to traditionalists. The slow movement shows the influence of Stravinsky's Symphonies for Wind Instruments.

The first two movements of Kenneth Leighton's (1929-88) Concerto for Recorder, Harpsichord, and Strings (1982) have a lot of the cinematic haunted house about them, with hurried lyrical strings and the persistent, heavily rhythmic harpsichord pursuing the poor recorder. The somber Elegy takes the piece into deeper and more mysterious waters. Leighton's Oboe Concerto (1953) is less quirky, with its dark, brooding I, a more wintry (at least at the beginning) yearning Lento with a wandering line suggesting a path on an open heath, and a darting, busy Vivace that manages to dance and pine at the same time (mainly because of the minor tonality and dominance of a dropping minor third).

I'm less excited over Joseph Horovitz's (1926-) Trumpet Concerto and his Concertante for Clarinet and Strings. The trumpet work seems more of a "workout" in the nature of an etude. The Concertante is a throwback to the style of Weber's clarinet pieces. It's pleasant enough, and I may come to like it more. Eric Fogg's (1903-39) fluffy Bassoon Concerto (1931) seems rather thin despite a nice singing slow movement.

With so many outstanding soloists, it seems unfair to single anyone out except where I know of recorded competition. Suffice it to say that the estimable dark tone and phrasing of Emma Johnson in the Finzi and Arnold Clarinet Concertos and Ruth Bolister's playing in the VW place them among the elite for these works, so don't worry about duplication. The only soloist I am not so fond of is the rather heavy-tongued trumpeter James Watson. The orchestras (English Chamber Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic, etc.) and conductors (Charles Groves, Gavin Sutherland, Barry Wordsworth, etc.) are first rate. The sound is terrific, with wonderful string tone and exceptionally good balances. The only flaw of this outstanding issue is a booklet that doesn't tell us enough about the more unfamiliar composers.

HECHT

James Levine: Munich Years 2

CARTER: *Variations;* **WUORINEN:** *Grand Bamboula;* **SESSIONS:** *Piano Concerto;* **DIDOMENICA:** *Symphony*

Robert Taub, p; Munich Philharmonic
Oehms 502—72 minutes

Recorded in separate concerts in Levine's last two seasons at the helm of the Munich Philharmonic, these four sensitive and richly colored performances make a strong case that the dense, thorny music of America's oldest living generation of modernists has its feet firmly planted in the 19th Century. Levine's secret, like Mitropoulos or Reiner before him, is to treat the music of his time no differently than any other music—simply to rely on the integrity of his craftsmanship and get to work playing the music. This is, of course, just what Boulez does, if to very different ends. But when Levine upholsters this music in leather and silk damask the result is no less spectacular or revelatory than the high-tech steel-and-glass readings Boulez delights in giving to older music.

Levine's repertoire helps him here, since each piece has a hook from outside the hermetic (and somewhat fictional) world of pure academic modernism. The hook is most explicit in the least known piece, the symphony by Robert DiDomenica (b 1927). This is a 12-tone piece whose row (well, 92 percent of it) was written by Mozart. Nor is this DiDomenica's secret message to musicological posterity—the first movement climaxes in a quote of the famously bizarre tutti that opens the development section of the last movement of Mozart's second G-minor Symphony, resolving the oblique familiarity of the *lento* introduction, which had started out with the same notes in slow motion. The three movements of DiDomenica's symphony closely follow classical models and familiar orchestral rhetoric, yielding a refreshingly postmodern (and low-anxiety) enactment of Schoenberg's classical dodecaphonic ideal.

Carter and Sessions, of course, are writing in classical genres too, but their overtly modern surfaces can be unpleasantly dry and crackly; Levine soothes and conditions them like an expensive emollient. Robert Taub seems to be trying only half-heartedly to help Levine in this project. With his hard edges toned down, his performance ends up somewhat dull.

Wuorinen's *Grand Bamboula* is a perfect piece for Levine; by limiting himself to string orchestra, Wuorinen not only avoids the unpleasant cacophony that easily emerges from the brass and percussion sections in his music, but also gives Levine the opportunity to let his big string sound shine. The piece is exciting from the start, but by the end it works itself up into a frenzied *moto perpetuo* that gets your toes tapping more than most 12-tone music does.

QUINN

New American Romanticism

SOUTHERS: *Symphony;* **McQUILLAN:** *Romanza;* **DENISCH:** *Golden Fanfare;* **JARRETT:** *Symphony 1*

Petr Zdvihal, v; Dvořak Symphony/ Julius Williams—Albany 704—65 minutes

Orchestral pieces by four well-credentialed Americans remind us how hard it is to write even respectable music. (I speak from long and hard-earned experience.)

Leroy Southers (1941-2003) was an oboist and teacher as well as a prolific composer. His three-movement Symphony for Chamber Orchestra dates from 1967 when he was 26. It is much indebted to the pungent diatonic neoclassicism of mid-period Stravinsky, and has something of the clarity, spare textures, and ceremonious poise of, say, *Orpheus*. There are also obvious family resemblances to the music of his teacher, Ingolf Dahl, and to Harold Shapero—both much beholden to Stravinsky themselves. The central slow movement, which begins with stately harp chords accompanying a string aria, adds another element when, halfway through, an antic woodwind march is superimposed on slow-moving, elegiac string melodies; the effect is curiously reminiscent of Nielsen.

But Southers doesn't really have the craft and resourcefulness to pull off his conception, and the result is listenable but too often clum-

sy and heavily stylized music without a strong individual profile.

Lee McQuillan's recent 12-minute Romance for violin and orchestra also has some difficulty establishing its identity. There are vague echoes of Barber, Hanson, et al, but this mostly lyrical piece drifts and lurches by without anything especially memorable taking place. Beth Denisch's 1998 *Golden Fanfare*, on the other hand, has lots of personality and drive. Its dancey, minimalist ostinatos and canonic fanfares on a Bulgarian folk-tune have a distinct faux-exotic flavor and I suppose also a certain nationalist pride, but the repetitive rhythmic figures and eccentric orchestration are naive and clunky.

Finally there's Jack Jarrett's four-movement First Symphony, from 1996. This is an attempt at emulating 19th Century models, mainly (to my ears) Tchaikovsky, Sibelius, and Mendelssohn. There are some nice moments, as in the swarming-bugs scherzo, and some less nice ones, as in the portentous and leaden slow movement. But music like this inevitably prompts the question: why settle for debased imitation when you can easily have the far-better originals instead?

Performances, like the music, might best be described as sincere. Nothing here is really bad, but all of it, to be candid, is amateurish.

LEHMAN

Viennese Chamber Music

APOSTEL: *Sonatina;* **BERG:** *Chamber Concerto (excerpt); 4 Clarinet Pieces;* **EISLER:** *Klavierstücke für Kinder;* **HAUER:** *4 Violin Pieces;* **SCHOENBERG:** *Violin Phantasy;* **SPINNER:** *Clarinet Suite;* **WEBERN:** *4 Violin Pieces*

Ensemble Avantgarde—MDG 613 1217—71 min

This record's two concepts are solid: place the music of the Second Viennese School masters in the context of their kleinmeisters, and select the pieces on the basis of the instruments at hand—in this case clarinet, violin, and piano. The music is also mostly good, and aside from the Schoenberg *Phantasy* comes from the dustier corners of this repertoire. I had not previously heard much of it, including the Apostel (a set of three intricate movements for solo clarinet) or the Spinner (a laconic 12-tone work in the style of Webern).

Two of the pieces stretch the concept slightly. Hauer was not exactly a member of the Schoenberg circle; indeed, he is better known for getting into a dust-up with Schoenberg over who invented the 12-tone system than he is for his music. Fortunately, the piece presented here is not a dodecaphonic work (Hauer's are pretty bad), but it's still not much: a suite of facile tonal pieces that whiff faintly of Brahms and Schumann without the big guys' structural integrity. The Eisler is also insignificant, but it's good children's music that doesn't have an ax to grind like Bartok's *Mikrokosmos* or Hindemith's *Ludus Tonalis*. Were it not for the performer's inclusive goals, they could have cut the Hauer and Eisler in favor of a complete performance of Berg's delightful trio arrangement of his *Chamber Concerto*; as it is, they only have room for the second movement.

The performances are quite good, especially in the Berg—the thoughtful writing and the ensemble's thoughtful musicianship are a natural match.

QUINN

Kremerland

LISZT: *Après une Lecture de Dante;* **CHIZHIK:** *Mozart Variations;* **VUSTIN:** *Tango Homage a Gidon;* **KANCHELI:** *Rag-Gidon-Time;* **BAKSHI:** *The Unanswered Call;* **PELECIS:** *Meeting with a Friend;* **DUNAYEVSKY:** *Circus Fantasy*

Gidon Kremer, v; Leonid Chizhik, p; Kremerata Baltica—DG 3392—79 minutes

The benevolent iconoclastic ideology of Kremerata Baltica celebrates the thumbing of noses at the sacred cows of high musical art and the blurring of cultural boundaries—or at least as much a classical orchestra led by one of the world's great violinists can do either of these things. The group of musicians from the three Baltic republics seems to be game for anything that might give them a good time, and they play phenomenally.

Except for the Liszt, which is transcribed here as—what else?—a violin concerto, the album is mostly light music. Chizhik's *Fantasy Variations* is a fabulous set of 11 variations and two cadenzas (some think it's too long, but I take guilty pleasure in disagreeing) for string orchestra with jazz drum-set and the composer on piano; Chizhik added an obbligato part for Kremer to play on this record. Chizhik's got real talent as a jazz arranger and composer, with a stylistic range from swing to samba, modal jazz to out-there avant-garde madness a la Rzewski. In his hands, the variation theme of Mozart's A-major Piano Sonata puts on all these clothes without ever really disappearing. It's not high art, but Chizhik's smooth writing and wicked chops are a pleasure to hear, and his spirit is what Kremer's band is all about.

Neither the alleged tango by the Russian Alexander Vustin (b 1943) nor the alleged ragtime by the Georgian Giya Kancheli (b 1935) is what you'd expect; each sounds like it's going to launch any second into a genre piece, but neither ever does. The understated Kancheli,

which is about two-thirds silence, is particularly nice in this respect.

Alexander Bakshi's (b 1952) *Unanswered Call* is scored for violin, string orchestra, and eight cell-phones. Written all the way back in 1999, before ring tones were limited to beeps, chirps, and the blasted Nokia Song, the piece calls for the phones to ring and make dialing noises at (in)appropriate times, incorporating the sounds into its own spare and chirpy texture. It's a gimmick piece that will shortly be even more dated than it is already, but it's still a cathartic listening experience for anybody who's been annoyed by ringing telephones in the concert hall.

The slick kitchiness of the music is matched by exceptionally clean recording (you can barely hear the wind whistling in Kremer's nose hair) and a vivid stereo image.

QUINN

United Instruments of Lucelin

FRANCESCONI: *Plot II;* **MARESZ:** *Eclipse;* **LENNERS:** *Vol de Nuit;* **FAFCHAMPS:** *Lettre Soufie: D;* **VINAO:** *Cuaderno del Ritmo;* **ZINSSTAG:** *Racine Homage*

Mireille Deguy, mz; Jean-Marc Foltz, cl; Olivier Sliepen, sax/ Mark Foster

Fuga Libera 501 [2CD] 87 minutes

A collection of contemporary works, most of them unreservedly modernist. Luca Francesconi gives soloist Olivier Sliepen virtuoso things to do in *Plot II* (1993), scored for saxophone and 15 instruments. Clarinetist Jean-Marc Foltz is accompanied by 14 instruments in *Eclipse* (1999) by Yan Maresz, by turns eerie and shrill. Claude Lenners's *Vol de Nuit* (1995) has flute, clarinet, piano, double bass, and percussion fluttering, shimmering, and interacting intricately.

In *Lettre Soufie: D* (2002), Jean-Luc Fafchamps assigns starkly contrasting materials to clarinet, string trio, piano, and percussion. Inspired by Sufi paintings, the work has Middle-Eastern flavors, otherworldly dreaminess, and startling, percussive moments. In *Cuaderno del Ritmo* (2001), Argentinean composer Alejandro Vinao has flute, clarinet, percussion, and string quintet playing dance-inspired material. The 23-minute, three-movement work speaks a varied harmonic language that is more tonal than not and is quite enthralling.

Finally, Gerard Zinsstag's *Homage to Charles Racine* (1997) is scored for mezzo-soprano, flute, clarinet, horn, percussion, harp, and string trio. Written after the death of the poet, a friend of the composer, the work uses 'The subject is the clearing of the body' as its poetic inspiration. The very strange piece has mezzo-soprano Mirielle Deguy engaging in all manner of vocal production: singing, speaking, hissing, and shouting. The instruments accompany with appropriate weird sounds. French text included without translation.

It isn't often that we hear music from Luxembourg. That's where Lucelin is, and that's where this group is based. Led by percussionist Guy Frisch and Australian conductor Mark Foster, United Instruments of Lucelin plays with passion and great skill.

KILPATRICK

Santa Fe Chamber Music

ARENSKY: *Quartet 2;* **HARBISON:** *Quartet 4;* **SCHNITTKE:** *Moz-Art*

Alexander Kerr, v; Kirsten Johnson, va; Eric Kim, vc; Orion Quartet—Koch 7551—55 minutes

From the 2002 Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival.

The unusually-scored Arensky quartet (violin, viola, two cellos) was written in 1894 in homage to Tchaikovsky, who had just died. The first movement opens with funeral music that threads its way through the whole quartet. II is a set of variations on Tchaikovsky's children's song, 'When Jesus Was but a Little Child' ('Legend', Op. 54:5), and III includes the 'Slava' tune used by Beethoven in the second *Razoumovsky* (and, of course, Moussorgsky in *Boris*). The piece is a music festival favorite, and it gets a committed performance here.

John Harbison's Fourth Quartet (2001) offers a theatrical confrontation between an inconsolable cellist and a somewhat more optimistic violinist. This abstractly "extramusical" approach is consistent with Harbison's recent work in this medium (see Quartet 3, J/F 2002). Though somewhat Carter-esque in atmosphere, many listeners might find Harbison's scenarios more approachable owing to his more frequent allusions to classical practice. Interested listeners should try to find that outstanding Musica Omnia disc (110) if it's still around. The Orions give this important contribution all they've got.

The program closes with Schnittke's *Moz-Art* (1976), a surrealistic fantasy on music Mozart wrote for a Pierrot pantomime in 1783. Fragmentary parts for 5 of the 15 movements survive (as K 416d). Schnittke took some of the first violin part and used it as material for this grotesque little fantasy for two violins. Daniel and Todd Phillips (of the Orion Quartet) play it with appropriate festal fun.

GIMBEL

Fine Arts Quartet

BEETHOVEN: *Quartets 1, 7, 8, 9, 15;* **HAYDN:** *Quartets (8)* **MOZART:** *Quartets 3+7; Piano Quartet; Adagio & Fugue; Horn Quintet;* **BRAHMS:** *Quartet 2; Horn Trio;* **HUSA:** *Quartet 3;* **SHIFRIN:** *Quartet 4;* **BARTOK:** *Quartet 3;* **HINDEMITH:** *Quartet 3;* **MARTINON:** *Quartet 2*
with Barry Tuckwell, hn; John Browning, Naomi Zaslav, p—Music & Arts 1154 [8CD] 555 minutes

From 1946 until 1979 The Fine Arts Quartet was one of the finest American string quartets. In addition to a great deal of international touring and making more than 50 records (many that have not yet been reissued on CD), the Quartet played radio concerts for WFMT in Chicago. Much of the music on this eight-disc set comes from archival tapes of radio programs from 1967 to 1973, and the rest of it comes from concert recordings.

It is fortunate that Music & Arts is issuing these recordings, otherwise the wonderful playing of the Fine Arts Quartet could be lost for future generations of music lovers. When Boston Skyline, a small company dedicated to reissuing recordings by important musicians of the 1950s and 1960s, went out of business I lost hope of hearing more of the Fine Arts Quartet. The material on this set has never before been available.

One of my favorite discs in this set is what appears to be a recording of an entire concert from January of 1971 that includes an excellent performance of Beethoven's First Quartet, the Brahms Horn Trio, and the Mozart Horn Quintet with Barry Tuckwell. The balance and the blend in the Mozart makes the recording sound like it was made in a studio, and the Beethoven picks up on aspects of his musical personality that I have never heard before in this quartet.

All the performances of the Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn quartets are wonderful, but there is something extra special about their reading of Beethoven's 7th Quartet, with its long sense of line, and something extraordinary about the freedom in the opening of the Haydn *Sunrise* Quartet.

There is a close-knit reading of the Bartok Third Quartet, a lean, clean Hindemith Third Quartet, and a rather friendly and engaging reading of the 12-tone Second Quartet by Jean Martinon. Their readings of these as well as the Brahms quartet, the Beethoven 9th and 15th quartets, the Mozart Adagio and Fugue, and the 7th Quartet are from 1967, when Gerald Stanick was the quartet's violist.

In addition to playing the standard literature, the Fine Arts Quartet commissioned and performed new works. The recording of Karel Husa's Third Quartet (1969) is exceptional. I especially like the solo playing (particularly Bernard Zaslav's viola solos) and admire the focussed emotional intensity of the ensemble. The reading of Seymour Shifrin's Fourth Quartet (1966), a piece that uses rather abstract material, is extremely expressive and moving. These musicians strive for beauty of sound and organization of musical thought, and they search for what is beautiful in the music. They make an excellent case for the validity of the musical "abstract expressionism" that came to light in the 1960s.

This recording is the perfect companion to the book *How to Succeed in an Ensemble* (Amadeus Press) by the Fine Arts Quartet's second violinist Abram Loft. Loft discusses just about every imaginable aspect of quartet playing while giving a "bow-by-bow" history of his 25 years with the Fine Arts Quartet. I recommend the book to anyone interested in string quartets and how they work, and I recommend this set of recordings without reservation to anyone who loves to hear great music played extremely well.

FINE

The Playful Pachyderm

Laurence Perkins, bn; New London Orchestra/ Ronald Corp—Hyperion 67453—68 minutes

This is a compilation of some tunes written for or arranged for the bassoon and orchestrated by Laurence Perkins. Some are serious and some comical. The inspiration behind this recording lies in the enthusiasm that Hyperion's founder, Ted Perry, held for music for the bassoon. In 1982, Laurence Perkins, with pianist Michael Hancock and the imagination of Mr Perry, released *L'apres-midi d'un Dinosaur*. It was definitely a time when not many record labels were investing in bassoon recitals. Hence this disc is dedicated to Mr Perry.

People who play the instrument are most familiar with its potential, but those who are not may not realize that this instrument, the "clown of the orchestra", is much more than that. Mr Perkins has written some fantastic arrangements and excellent orchestrations for tunes that display just what bassoonists want to play but audiences rarely hear. His arrangement of a Swedish folk tune, dedicated to his wife Susan, is haunting and beautiful—so beautiful that it is not possible to continue right away with the next piece.

No bassoon program would be complete, of course, without some things humorous. The disc's namesake, 'The Playful Pachyderm' (by Vinter), is a delight; the bassoon's timbre is ideal for conjuring an image of a slumbering and waking elephant that then begins to

prance around. Godfrey's 'Lucy Long' is a tune whose melody seems, after the first note, to be going just where you might expect—it's one of those inexplicably familiar tunes. And Gounod's 'March of the Marionette', which on the clarinet has a certain essential feeling of being suspended, on the bassoon is quite a novelty, though it seems to lose some of its character. Aside from other light-hearted pieces, Perkins has included many folk tunes: there are Scottish, Swedish, English, and Northumbrian melodies, all gorgeous and played with feeling. Elgar's Romance, Fauré's Pièce, and Ravel's 'Pièce en Forme de Habanera' are here, too.

Perkins closes the program with J Quenton Ashlyn's 'The Bassoon', which might be by Peter Schickele or Monty Python. It is subtitled a "humorous song": a baritone, Richard Suart, sings a song about his favorite instrument of the orchestra—the bassoon—and describes why it is such. There are hilarious moments when the bassoon is used as an innuendo in the song, and the sound of the instrument fills in the occasional blanks in the lyrics.

This is great disc; it is well arranged, well designed, well played, a little high-priced at $19.98, but well worth it.

SCHWARTZ

Pierre Fournier

BOCCHERINI: *Cello Concerto in B-flat;* **VIVALDI:** *Sonata in E minor;* **COUPERIN:** *Pieces en Concert;* **HAYDN:** *Concerto in D*

Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra/ Karl Münchinger
Testament 1359—73 minutes

Pierre Fournier (1906-86) was a fine cellist, but I have never been turned on by his playing. He was highly musical but lacked something in both emotional intensity and technical polish that leaves me wishing for more. This disc of Decca recordings from 1952 and 1953 is a case in point. Putting aside the fact that everything on it is arrangements, the Boccherini (Grutzmacher) Concerto lacks the polish and intensity of Casals's recording, and the Haydn lacks follow-through in places. The Haydn claims to be the original, but Fournier hangs on to much of Gevaert's figuration while removing his cuts. If you want an exciting early recording of this piece, go for Feuermann's from the late 30s.

The Vivaldi is played in D'Indy's scoring with string orchestra. That and Bazelaire's Couperin arrangements don't strain Fournier's technique as do the others, but the damage has been done already. The sound is early London LP, with a somewhat ersatz high frequency in the violins overlaying a somewhat muddy basic sound. For Fournier fanciers only.

D MOORE

Cello & Opera

BEETHOVEN: *Magic Flute Variations;* **WEBER:** *Sonata in A minor;* **SAINT-SAENS:** *My Heart at thy Sweet Voice;* **GRANADOS:** *Intermezzo from Goyescas;* **FELDER:** *Traviata Fantasy;* **DOTZAUER:** *Paisiello Variations;* **WAGNER:** *Death of Isolde;* **CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO:** *Figaro Fantasy*

Daniel Grosgurin; June Kanno, p
Gallo 1133—60 minutes

Here's an unusual program based on opera tunes. It runs the gamut from soupy arrangements of Saint-Saens and Granados to a highly modernistic event based very loosely on the opening violin passage of Verdi's *La Traviata* that becomes the famous Brindisi after a lot of fooling around in a semi-humorous manner. This is the work of Swiss composer Alfred Felder and was concocted in 2000. It lasts 11 minutes, making it the longest piece on the disc, though not the best. If it's a spoof you want, I think Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's version of Rossini's famous Figaro aria is more to the point. These two works are both played with real vigor and involvement by both performers, an impression I don't always get from the rest of the program.

In between these two guffaws are solo pieces for each protagonist. The solo cello variations by cellist Friedrich Dotzauer are technically demanding and fun to listen to. Then pianist Kanno plays a Liszt transcription of the Love-Death, emphasizing the contrapuntal lines more than usual.

So what does Weber's sonata have to do with opera? It's a transcription of a little two-movement violin sonata, and the second movement is variations on a tune from his opera *Silvana.* And then there are the Beethoven Variations, the ones on 'Ein Madchen oder Weibchen' played complete, while the last three of 'Bei Mannern' are stuck on the end of the program as a sort of encore.

This is a rather miscellaneous program that becomes more convincing the more modern the music gets.

D MOORE

Kalin Ivanov, cello

BARBER: *Sonata;* **VIVALDI:** *Sonata in E minor;* **SCHUMANN:** *Fantasy Pieces;* **BRAHMS:** *Sonata 1*

with Emily White, p
Gega 285—69 minutes

Despite a bio that looks good on paper, this cellist gives us Barber that fails to maintain intensity, Vivaldi with an ersatz piano accompaniment, and Brahms that breaks off phrases abruptly and unmusically. Save your money.

D MOORE

Le Grand Tango

NIN: *Suite Espagnole;* **PIAZZOLLA:** *Le Grand Tango;* **FALLA:** *Spanish Folk Suite;* **VILLA-LOBOS:** *Sonata 2*

Yvonne Timoianu, vc; Alexander Preda, p

Preiser 90599—60 minutes

I find myself increasingly impressed with this disc as it continues. Joaquin Nin y Castellanos's Suite is a little 9-minute job that sounds a bit generic without making any great demands on listener or players, but Astor Piazzolla's 12-minute movement works up a great deal of energy, to which these players respond with vigor and obvious enjoyment. After that, the well-known transcriptions of Falla's popular Spanish songs show a lot of individuality and an effective treatment of the vocal lines by Timoianu, while Preda participates to the full.

The final number is a killer. Villa-Lobos's little-known Sonata 2 of 1916 is a 26-minute blockbuster, full of energy and lyricism. This has been recorded before, primarily on programs of Villa-Lobos's cello music, but I have not heard it played as well as this. It is good to have a mostly South American disc played by musicians that show a solid technique and tone. This material demands great personality and a fearless attitude that must be shared by both parties and must come from a position of technical strength to be convincing. It is.

D MOORE

Inspired by

BEETHOVEN: *Handel Variations; Magic Flute Variations;* **MARTINU:** *Rossini Variations; Slovak Variations;* **HINDEMITH:** *I saw a Frog a Courting*

Quirine Viersen, vc; Silke Avenhaus, p

Etcetera 1253—53 minutes

This rather short but interestingly programmed disc contains the complete Beethoven variation sets for cello and piano as well as both of Martinŭ's and Hindemith's single example. The liner notes are written by the performers. They explain the title of the disc, which refers not only to the fact that the composers inspired them but that the composers were inspired in their turn by the music they wrote the variations on. It is a clever concept, resulting in a lively and well-played program of variations, neatly played. If this program appeals to your imagination, you won't find it duplicated elsewhere, and these two ladies are good guides to the terrain,

D MOORE

Panorama

HUE: *Fantasie;* **GRIFFES:** *Poem;* **SAINT-SAENS:** *Romance; Ascanio Odelette sel;* **CHAMINADE:** *Concertino* **FOOTE:** *A Night Piece;* **BERNSTEIN:** *Halil;* **BOULEZ:** *Memoriale*

Michel Debost, fl; Miskolc Symphony/ Fran‡ois-Xavier Roth—Skarbo 3042—66 minutes

French Flutist Michel Debost won several international competitions in his youth and served as principal flute in the Orchestre de Paris for 30 years. He is now on the faculty at Oberlin Conservatory in the USA. This recording is a slightly eclectic mix of French and American flute music of the 20th Century. At first glance, I must admit I was skeptical. Why do we want to hear even more recordings of standard repertoire?

But the more I listened, the more I enjoyed it. The Hue and Griffes are good examples of the hodgepodge mix of impressionism, primitivism, and exoticism that is a hallmark of early 20th Century music. Debost does an excellent job of underlining the unique characteristics of these works. His Griffes has a dance-like quality that I particularly enjoy.

The rest of the recital is an interesting mix of light-hearted and heavy pieces. The breezy style of the three Saint-Saens works is balanced well by the haunting 'Night Piece' by Arthur Foote. The only performance I do not care for is the Chaminade Concertino. There is nothing to this piece but technical flash and trite lyricism, and the stodgy tempos and uninspired playing make this performance seem twice as long as it should be.

The recital ends with Bernstein's strange but wonderful 'Halil' and Boulez's 'Memoriale', both written in memory of flutists, both well played.

CHAFFEE

Flute Concertos

by Molique, Cimarosa, Moscheles

Mathieu Dufour, fl; Alex Klein, ob; Czech National Symphony/ Paul Freeman

Cedille 80—71 minutes

There is a long-standing stereotype that great orchestral musicians do not excel when they step in front of the orchestra as soloists. This recording defies that notion. Alex Klein and Mathieu Dufour, relatively young musicians recently elevated to superstar status as principal members of the Chicago Symphony (Klein has since departed) play with great technical skill, remarkably pure and beautiful tone, and musical panache.

The first work, the Cimarosa Concerto for two flutes, played here on flute and oboe, is a familiar standard for flutists. A contemporary of Mozart, Cimarosa was a prolific composer

of vocal works, including operas, and the writing in the concerto is lyrical and accessible. Dufour and Klein achieve superb balance in this performance, blending the timbres of their instruments so well that it is hard to discern a difference sometimes.

The second work is a rather long romantic concerto for flute by Molique. While the first movement is a bit bombastic sometimes, divulging Molique's fondness for the music of Louis Spohr, II and III are a treat. Dufour's playing in III is extraordinarily clean and tasteful.

This is followed by a performance of Molique's Oboe Concertino. More romantic bombast, but Alex Klein's performance is simply amazing. The disc ends with a charming duo by Moscheles, played here with elegance and humor.

Paul Freeman and the Czech National Symphony are fine support. The program notes also deserve praise. Andrea Lamoreaux offers a well-crafted and thoughtful essay about the concerto that avoids the bland biographical style blended with hyperbole that tarnishes most program notes.

CHAFFEE

Apparitions & Whimsies

HEISS: *Apparitions; Whimsies;* **FELD:** *Sonatine Americaine;* **TAKEMITSU:** *Air;* **KOECHLIN:** *2-Flute Sonata*

Andrea Kapell Loewy, Leone Buyse, Susanna Loewy, fl; Yuling Huang, p

Centaur 2689—64 minutes

This is an outstanding recording. Andrea Kapell Loewy plays every piece with unblemished technique, beautiful tone, and precise intonation. Renowned flutist Leone Buyse joins her on the Muczynski, a remarkable combination of talent. Loewy's gifted young daughter Susanna joins her on the Koechlin.

This program is an effective blend of familiar and unfamiliar works. I enjoyed listening to this several times from beginning to end. There is enough variety to hold the interest of flutists and non-flutists alike. The disc begins and ends with fascinating recent works by John Heiss, a distinguished American composer (b 1938). 'Apparitions' is a haunting work that convincingly conveys the idea suggested by the title. The use of electronic sounds in counterpoint with the ethereal sounds of flute and piano adds emotional depth. *Whimsies* is a collection of eight short movements, each exploring both a compositional idea (Diatonic, Octatonic) and different timbres for flute and piano.

Robert Muczynski's Duos and Koechlin's Sonata supply a tonal, melodic balance to the other works. Muczynski writes well for flute, and his Duos and Sonata are both standard repertoire. Koechlin is perhaps better known as the teacher of Poulenc and Milhaud, but there is a recent swell of interest in his flute music.

The Feld and Takemitsu performances are stunning. Czech composer Jindrich Feld (b 1925) has written several demanding, cerebral, dense, yet enjoyable pieces for flute. Listeners familiar with his music will hear familiar contours and gestures, including clusters of sounds reminiscent of Bartok and Stravinsky and long, flowing perpetual-motion phrases. Loewy and Huang give us a truly virtuoso performance.

Takemitsu's Air, one of his last compositions, is calm and tonal compared to some of his more adventurous flute writing.

Flutists looking for great works to program will enjoy this, and anyone who appreciates great musicianship and compelling music should own this recording. I hope to hear more from these performers in the near future.

CHAFFEE

Emmanuel Pahud

STRAUSS: *Sonata;* **WIDOR:** *Suite;* **FRANCK:** *Sonata*

with Eric le Sage, p—EMI 57813—75 minutes

The 19th Century was a time of many changes to the design and construction of the flute. While modern flutists generally credit Theobald Boehm as the "inventor" of the modern instrument, many others in Europe were also trying to improve its acoustical and mechanical properties, notably the Swiss Captain Gordon who later accused Boehm of stealing his ideas. One byproduct of the innovations was a repertoire of dazzling showpieces meant to display the new chromatic capabilities of the instrument. In the middle and late romantic era, most new compositions for flute were variations on opera or popular themes and music designed for a salon setting. With only a few exceptions, (the Schubert Variations) there is a dearth of flute compositions by the great composers of the romantic era.

To fill this void, flutists have traditionally turned to transcriptions of violin sonatas. Two of these are on this recording, the famous Strauss and Frank sonatas. Widor's Suite, the third work on this recital, is an example of a piece seeking to buck the trend of fluffy flute music. It is a rich, compelling work full of long lyrical lines now associated with the singing style of the French flute school, especially in its first and third movements.

This is a magnificent recording. Violin transcriptions are deceptively difficult. In

order to match the depth of sound and the broad range of colors available on the violin, a flutist must play with a balance of power and finesse, with scrupulous attention to beautiful phrasing. Pahud brilliantly meets this challenge. Flutists everywhere should take note of this recording, as it is a prime example of how tone projection and depth are not only found in sheer volume of sound; it is also a matter of control and beauty. There are rare moments where Pahud dances on the edge of forcing the sound, especially in the Franck, but they are not significant enough to detract from the overall beauty of this recital.

CHAFFEE

Nowhere Left to Go

ENGEL: *Minstrels; Sonata; Danse Bulgare;* **SCHMIDT-KOWALSKI:** *Variations;* **MEYER-METZENTHIN:** *Sphinx;* **RUPERT:** *Nowhere Left to Go;* **HARRINGTON:** *Erg;* **SHEKOV:** *Suite Mediteran*

Daniel Ahlert, mand; Birgit Schwab, g

Antes 19195—58 minutes

This is the second collection from the Ahlert-Schwab duo that I have reviewed. The first program (Sept/Oct 2001) was very similar to this one: conservative but attractive works written for the duo. The unusual pairing of mandolin and guitar is remarkably appealing; though both are plucked string instruments, the contrast in timbres is considerable: the mandolin's crisp ping is set off clearly from the more resonant mid-range of the guitar. I especially like Ahlert's wonderful ringing and clear tone (Schwab has less opportunity to emerge into the foreground in these works).

The works are by an international group of composers, hailing from Germany (Thomas Schmidt-Kowalski and Jürgen Meyer-Metzenthin), France (Claude Engel), the United States (Jeffrey Harrington), Canada (Chris Rupert), and Bulgaria (Ivan Shekov). Meyer-Metzenthin's *Sphinx* makes the strongest initial impression. The work often treats the guitar and mandolin as one extended instrument, the mandolin's high register picking up where the guitar leaves off. It is the most tonally adventurous of the pieces here, few of which venture very far from safe triadic territory. Claude Engel's set of three pieces is among the most conservative in this respect, but their deliberately archaic modality has an appealing directness.

The works from the two North Americans are harder to pin down. Rupert's composition is trance-like and meandering, while Harrington's *Erg* is a prickly mixture of East and West (written partly in response to the events of September 11th, which the composer witnessed first hand). The works by Schmidt-Kowalski and Shekov are blandly tonal and don't make a very strong initial impression.

The sound is excellent and the notes include comments from the composers on their works.

RINGS

Baroque Moments

HANDEL: *Chaconne;* **VIVALDI:** *Concerto, R 93;* **FRANCK:** *Prelude, Fugue, & Variation;* **BACH:** *Italian Concerto;* **HASSLER:** *Choral*

Amadeus Guitar Duo

Hänssler 98485—44 minutes

This is a great program from the Amadeus Guitar Duo (the husband and wife team Dale Kavanagh and Thomas Kirchhoff). With the exception of the Handel Chaconne—long a favorite of guitar duos, beginning with the most famous husband-wife team of all, Presti and Lagoya—these are novel transcriptions. (The Castellani-Andriaccio Duo also plays the chaconne [below]; the Amadeus reading is both more fleet and more in line with current performance trends.) The Franck and the Bach are especially welcome additions to the catalog. I only wish the duo had picked a less familiar Vivaldi concerto to transcribe—there are, after all, 500 of them to choose from! Why give us yet another reading of the D-major Lute Concerto, played by every guitarist (and their students)?

Franck is, of course, the only non-baroque figure here. But, as an organist, he was a baroque musician at heart and often adopted an antiquarian pose. His lovely Prelude, Fugue, and Variation is ideally suited to the two-guitar medium. It is introspective and thin in texture, lacking the bombast of the more extroverted Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue, for example. The duo gives it a beautifully singing and expressively direct performance.

The Bach concerto is also a treat, though its more intricate polyphony presents more of a challenge to the arranger. In order to get both parts into guitar range there are some unsettling shifts of register and voice crossings. This wouldn't be much of a problem if one didn't know the work so well, but in such a familiar piece every deviation from the original stands out. It is, all the same, a spirited and expert performance.

The program concludes in poetic understatement with a simple transcription of the chorale by Hans-Leo Hassler that would later become Bach's "Passion Chorale".

The sound is full-bodied and clear, and Hänssler's packaging is attractive, as usual. The notes are a disappointment: the German original is fine, if slight, but the English translation is awkward.

RINGS

Classical Symphony

BIZET: *Symphony;* **PROKOFIEFF:** *Classical Symphony;* **FALLA:** *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*

Amsterdam Guitar Trio

Columns 99178—54 minutes

The Amsterdam Guitar Trio's highly imaginative arrangements of works from Vivaldi to Debussy have garnered considerable praise over the last two decades (the group formed in 1978). All but one of their earlier recordings now seem to be deleted. So, snap up the present release while you can. It includes virtuosic and mischievous arrangements of orchestral chestnuts by Bizet, Prokofieff, and Falla. This was recorded over ten years ago, so I can't be sure it wasn't released before. Furthermore, I don't believe the lineup here (Olga Franssen, Edith Leerkes, Helenus de Rijke) is the current one. (It is hard to find current information about the group.)

But who cares? The record is marvelous. The Bizet is all lightness and elegance, a perfect balance to the shadowy, enigmatic Falla that closes the program. The latter includes some of the most haunting and powerful music-making I've heard from the group. In the middle is Prokofieff's much loved Classical Symphony, which sits on three guitars as though it was written for them. The famous "wrong note" Gavotte is especially delightful; instead of the detached articulation that one usually hears in orchestral performances, the group plays the melodic leaps with syrupy portamentos, to hilarious effect.

The packaging may be almost non-existent and the recording a decade old, but this is still a release that all guitar collectors should have. Grab it before it too disappears into the ether.

RINGS

The Early Recordings

BACH: *English Suite 3; Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring;* **GALLES:** *Sonata;* **HANDEL:** *Little Fugue; Air & Variations; Chaconne;* **SCARLATTI:** *4 Sonatas;* **TURINA:** *Danses Gitanes;* **CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO:** *Well-Tempered Guitars;* **BROUWER:** *Micro Piezas;* **RODRIGUEZ:** *La Cumparsita;* **PIAZZOLLA:** *Tango Suite*

Michael Andriaccio & Joanne Castellani, g

Fleur de Son 57966 [2CD] 123 minutes

This is a re-release of the Castellani-Andriaccio Duo's first two records: *1685—A Glorious Trilogy* and *Danzas and More*. The two programs bring us the two corners of the repertory most beloved by guitarists: the baroque and Spanish-Latin American music. The recordings, now about 15 years old (see Sept/Oct 1991), have worn quite well, though they do represent an older style of guitar playing. Castellani and Andriaccio's interpretive approach reminds me of another husband-and-wife guitar duo: Ida Presti and Alexander Lagoya, active in the 50s and 60s (until Presti's tragic death in 1967). Like Presti and Lagoya, Castellani and Andriaccio deliver carefully considered, thoughtful interpretations, eschewing all capriciousness in favor of meticulously shaped phrases and deliberately calibrated shifts in tone color. Their interpretive choices, like those of the earlier duo, are hard to miss: a very bright *sul ponticello* the first time through a phrase might be followed with a shift to the darkest *sul tasto* when the phrase repeats. This sort of extreme exploitation of the instrument's timbral capabilities is somewhat out of fashion these days, but it makes for very engaging listening.

To be sure, neither Castellani nor Andriaccio possess Presti's supernatural technique (neither did Lagoya, for that matter). Nor do they seem to have the kind of telepathic connection that allows the Assad brothers to deliver such incredibly spontaneous, seemingly improvised performances. At times the duo's care in planning their interpretations leads to slightly stiff results—I would especially like more metric flexibility in the baroque repertory. Castellani and Andriaccio nevertheless remain one of the most thoughtful and musically satisfying duos on records. This re-release, with its delightfully contrasting programs, will serve as a fine introduction to anyone who has not yet heard them.

RINGS

Jeremy Jouve, guitar

RODRIGO: *Sonata Giocosa;* **TURINA:** *Sonata;* **FRANCESCO DA MILANO:** *4 Ricercares;* **BRITTEN:** *Nocturnal;* **ARCAS:** *Traviata Fantasy*

Naxos 557597—59 minutes

This program from 2003 Guitar Foundation of America Competition winner Jeremy Jouve veers between Iberian whimsy and learned introspection, with few stops in between. In the former category are the two quirky sonatas of Rodrigo and Turina (not their best works, but not without charm) and the lighter-than-air Verdi potpourri of Julian Arcas. In the learned category are the ricercares of Francesco Da Milano and Britten's ubiquitous *Nocturnal*, among the most respected works for plucked strings of the last century.

French guitarist Jouve is at home in both idioms, appropriately hamming it up in the Iberian works and showing respectful restraint and clarity when navigating the contrapuntal intricacies of Francesco and Britten. Jouve's expressive range is especially evident when one contrasts the Britten and the Arcas (the

last two works on the program). Jouve plays the Britten with an extraordinary meditative stillness, beginning *very* slowly, and—after the string of surreal variations—ending in a hush. The *Traviata* fantasy by Arcas, on the other hand, is pure kitsch. Jouve finds just the right tone of mock seriousness and knowing silliness to make it palatable.

Jouve's technique is, of course, brilliant. His tone is full but a bit unpredictable—"naily" treble notes sometimes jump out unexpectedly. Naxos's sound is good as always, and the packaging is the same functional mix of brief composer notes and performer biography that has become the boilerplate for these laureate releases.

RINGS

Mirrors of Fire

EDWARDS: *Blackwattle Caprices;* **KOEHNE:** *A Closed World of Fine Feelings;* **CHARLTON:** *Surface Tension;* **DAVIDSON:** *Junction Rd;* **WESLEY-SMITH:** *Kolele Mai;* **VELLA:** *Mirrors of Fire;* **WESTLAKE:** *Hinchinbrook Riffs; Antarctica*
Timothy Kain, g; Tasmanian Symphony/ David Porcelijn—Tall Poppies 169—64 minutes

Australian guitarist Timothy Kain is perhaps best known as John Williams's duet partner (see *The Mantis and the Moon* in July/Aug 1997). Of course, to become John Williams's duet partner one has to be a superb guitarist, and Kain is certainly that. His technique is excellent, his tone is robust, and his interpretations are vivid and gripping. He is, in fact, a much more extroverted player than Williams, not worried about pushing his instrument if the situation demands and willing to stick his neck out for a bold interpretive choice. In addition to his considerable activities as a solo and chamber performer, he has also devoted much energy to enlarging the guitar's repertory with works by his fellow Australians, as the present release attests.

These works, with only one exception, were all written or arranged for Kain. The exception is Nigel Westlake's *Antarctica*, the most ambitious piece here—a four-movement, 22-minute work for guitar and orchestra adapted from an IMAX film score that Westlake wrote and dedicated to John Williams and John Weiley (the latter is the filmmaker). The work is riveting from start to finish, with bold gestures, extreme dynamics, and compelling interaction between soloist and orchestra. Westlake's other work here, *Hinchinbrook Riffs* is much more modest, a hypnotic piece for guitar and digital delay (a "tape loop" effect used by electric guitarists). The title piece of the record, Richard Vella's *Mirrors of Fire*, is also repetitive and hypnotic, though much more sinister than Westlake's piece: it is underpinned by a menacing bass ostinato that relentlessly traces out octatonic scale fragments (the octatonic scale is made up entirely of alternating whole and half steps—a favorite of Stravinsky, Bartok, and Debussy).

The two *Blackwattle Caprices* by Ross Edwards that open the program are endearing miniatures, mostly tonal but with some nice biting dissonances. (The works are named after the bay the composer lives on.) Graham Koehne's *Closed World of Fine Feelings* shows the influence of his teacher Virgil Thomson in its tonal simplicity and expressive directness. The next two works, Richard Charlton's *Surface Tension* and Robert Davidson's *Junction Rd* are also unself-consciously tonal, both composers creating interest through bold rhythmic gestures and virtuoso flourishes. Martin Wesley-Smith's *Kolele Mai* is a primitive, somewhat brutish meditation on an East Timorese folk song. Kain plays its insistent power chords with a sense of dark portent.

The sound is transparent and natural; Kain's two Smallman guitars—instruments that sound great in person but often come off strangely rubbery on records—sound full-bodied and rich. The notes include comments from the composers on their works and brief remarks from Kain himself.

RINGS

España la Musa

SCARLATTI: *8 Sonatas;* **GRANADOS:** *2 Spanish Dances;* **ROSSINI:** *Barber of Seville Overture;* **ALBENIZ:** *Aragon; Castilla*
Susanne Mebes & Joaquim Freire, g
Leman 4125401—56 minutes

Susanne Mebes and Joaquim Freire are both highly accomplished soloists and not as well known as they should be. Both have released acclaimed solo recordings, and as a duo they have one previous release (May/June 1993). This superbly played record shows that all of the praise is justified: they are wonderfully flexible interpreters and fine technicians. Their playing reminds me immediately of the Assads in its elastic tempos and constant use of rubato, even if they do not reach the same stratospheric levels of technical derring-do. The Assad comparison is also strengthened with all of the Scarlatti transcriptions here, recalling the Brazilian duo's 1993 release of baroque works (Nov/Dec 1993). In addition to the Scarlatti sonatas are some lovely Granados and Albeniz transcriptions (including the former's wonderful 'Zambra') and a lively dash through Rossini's overture to the *Barber of Seville*.

The sound is very transparent and natural, and Mebes's notes are extensive and full of

colorful anecdotes. I only wish the cover looked more professional. The picture of the two soloists is blurry, and the gold lettering gives the whole thing a decidedly "budget release" look. It gives record bin browsers no indication of the record's world-class contents.

RINGS

Spanish Legends

SAINZ DE LA MAZA: *Zapateado; Rondena;* **LLOBET:** *10 Catalan Folksongs; Scherzo-Waltz;* **SEGOVIA:** *Estudio sin Luz; 2 Anecdotas; Remembranza;* **PUJOL:** *9 Pieces*

David Russell, g—Telarc 80633—65 minutes

26 Spanish bonbons played by one of our greatest guitarists. The title at first seems hyperbolic: these are surely far from the most "legendary" Spanish guitar works in the literature. There's no Rodrigo, no Albeniz, no Falla. But the title refers not to the works per se, but to the great *performers* who composed or arranged them: Regino Sainz de la Maza, Miguel Llobet, Andres Segovia, and Emilio Pujol. Segovia will of course be the most familiar name to readers of these pages, but the others—all rough contemporaries of Segovia—were also players of great stature and accomplishment. They have been overshadowed in the history books by the force of nature, and of ego, that was Segovia.

Of the four figures, Segovia composed the least, but his miniatures are delightful: full of character and mildly impressionist harmonies. Russell plays two of his studies here: the 'Estudio sin Luz'—composed while Segovia was recovering from an eye operation—and the Sor-like 'Remembranza'. There are also two of his charming *Anecdotas*, works that have only recently come to light (all five have been recorded by Pablo Sainz Villegas—Jan/Feb 2005).

Llobet is far better known than Segovia as a composer and arranger; his evocative and often haunting Catalan folksong arrangements are among the most beloved Iberian miniatures for the instrument. Russell also plays one of Llobet's own compositions here: the flashy Scherzo-Waltz. Regino Sainz de la Maza is best remembered as the guitarist who premiered Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*. He was a player of considerable technical gifts, but of limited compositional abilities, as his showy but often generic works demonstrate. The same can be said for Emilio Pujol, a pupil of Tarrega and one of the great guitar pedagogues and musicologists of the 20th Century, but not one of its most memorable composers.

Russell's playing is, of course, immaculate: extraordinarily polished and expressively rich, but never indulgent. Telarc's production is first rate, and the notes by Richard Rodda offer ample background on each performer-composer.

RINGS

4 Centuries of Lute & Guitar

ANONYMOUS: *Vaghe Belleze; Se Io M'accorgo;* **NEGRI:** *Bianco Fiore;* **GARSI:** *Galliarda;* **BACH:** *Lute Suite 1;* **SANZ:** *Pavanas; Canarios; Clarin de los Mosqueteros;* **GIULIANI:** *Sonatina;* **LLOBET:** *3 Catalan Folk Songs;* **GERSHWIN:** *Swanee; Summertime; I Got Rhythm*

Jerry Willard—Lyrichord 8051—63 minutes

Plucked string specialist Jerry Willard presents here a recital of works from four centuries and employing four instruments. The program begins with an archlute section that includes a familiar selection of Italian miniatures followed by Bach's Lute Suite 1, S 996. These works are followed by three of Gaspar Sanz's colorful dances, played on baroque guitar. Willard then plays one of Giuliani's sonatinas on an 1820 instrument by Lacote before concluding on a modern guitar with three of Miguel Llobet's well-loved Catalan folksong arrangements and Gershwin's 'Swanee', 'Summertime', and 'I Got Rhythm'. This is eclecticism indeed, both of repertory and of instrumental technique.

Willard is a solid player: his performances are clean, clear, and always nicely controlled. To be sure, he is not a virtuoso, but he makes up for the lack of technical display with a warm, winning musicality. He seems fully at home on each of his instruments (all of them, I presume, played with the nails of his right hand—not the norm for early instrument technique). It is especially a pleasure to hear the gradual transformation of the instruments' tones as the program proceeds. The production is very good (though some of Willard's breathing is a bit too audible) and the booklet includes attractive photos of each instrument.

RINGS

Harp of Wild & Dreamlike Strain

Victorian Fairy Harp Music

Elizabeth Jane Baldry—Campion 2025—65:42

I don't know about fairies.

In Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe* there is a man who says he is a fairy from the waist down. I was never sure what that meant. Fairies are certainly a little "light in their loafers". And they are by definition "fey", as this harpist claims to be in her notes. What was it with Victorians and fairies? It was practically a love affair. But one can hardly picture a fairy ripping bodices.

I suppose the harp is a fairy instrument. It floats rather ethereally above the ground; its runs dissolve into clouds. Here we are treated to music by composers named Felix Godefroid, Charles Oberthür, and John Balsir Chatterton. Maybe the best piece is the ten-minute *Dance of the Spirits* by Angelo Bovio—whoever he was (no information on the composers—the notes are rather airy and insubstantial, which I guess is appropriate).

The recording was made in a Victorian ballroom in Devon, where the reverberation is especially dreamlike. The music may not be substantial, but that would never do, would it? The harp was made to play wispy melodies like this.

VROON

In Dialog 2

Bach, Krebs, JC Bach, Soler, Piazza, Terreni, Giussani

Jordi Verges, org; Fabio Ciofini, hpsi
Loft 1059—60 minutes

Music scholars who spend much time trying to find the precise instrument that suits various compositions must remember that the players of the time often chose the instruments that they had available and adapted their playing style accordingly; they gave little thought to an ideal instrument. The artists on this little collection of duets for organ and harpsichord adopt this liberal principle with good results. A high point is a perky Sonata in F by Gaetano Piazza—the two instruments rarely play together, allowing the timbral differences between the keyboards to outline the piece's design. The music is an entertaining mixture of fanfares and scintillating passagework; Verges unexpectedly adds a bird whistle stop to cap off the festivities near the work's conclusion, which initially made me think that there was a fire in my apartment.

Bach's two-harpsichord adaptation of one of the mirror fugues in his *Art of Fugue* strikes me as a little odd, but it's attractively played. A performance of the Krebs concerto in A minor for two harpsichords showed up a few years ago in a Harmonia Mundi release by harpsichordists Attilio Cremonesi and Alessandro de Marchi (May/June 1998). I find that the combination of organ and harpsichord improves my response to the piece. And the use of organ and harpsichord for Soler's Concerto 3 is not duplicated in the two competitors in my collection (Centaur, Nov/Dec 2002 & Vanguard, Jan/Feb 2001). This performance also has more buoyancy and joy.

The collection also includes a sonata in C by JC Bach, a sonata in D by Bonaventura Terreni, and the *Sonata Concertata* by Severo Giussani. The sound is so-so.

HASKINS

Harpsichord Alive

Bach, Sibirsky, Lauten, Bunch, Susser, Coid, Baksa, Kemp

Queen's Chamber Band; Elaine Comparone, hpsi
Capstone 8733—70 minutes

New works for harpsichord championed by Elaine Comparone. Charles Sibirsky's *Mood Food* is a jazzy confection for solo harpsichord, full of tasty harmonies and some lyrical solos in a quasi-recitative style. Elodie Lauten's setting of a text by Carl Karas, *The Architect*, is scored for countertenor, flute, oboe, two violins, viola, cello, and harpsichord. Her music is rather minimalist, with one reference triadic sonority that constantly alternates with others. The syllabic setting of the text often ignores the standard stresses for the words; this effect makes the words sound a bit like the individual bricks that form great buildings, but I remain unpleasantly puzzled.

Kenji Bunch's *Hobgoblinry*, for viola and harpsichord, pays tribute to the eccentric supernatural images of the artist Henry Fuselli; it's light, uncomplicated fare of particular interest for its viola writing. In Peter M Susser's *Stanzas*, the oboe d'amore takes center stage in five expressive miniatures with harpsichord accompaniment. Few solo wind instruments can equal the oboe d'amore's haunting beauty, and Susser—an exquisite melodist with a real gift—takes full advantage of the best that both instruments offer.

Two further duos with solo instrument and harpsichord (Marshall Coid's *Duo Fantasia* and Robert Baksa's *Duo Concertante*) demonstrate the keyboard's versatility in chamber music: in Cold's work it supports the dramatic violin flourishes with incisive chords and sweeping passages; Baksa's work marries the natural plucked sounds of guitar and harpsichord with finely-wrought melodies and beautiful triadic harmonies.

The disc ends in grand fun with Stephen Kemp's *Octet*, by far the longest work. Kemp, like the other composers, is more or less conservative in his style—but he also brings to his work an urbane wit that repays attention.

The performances match the music's demands and expression in every respect; although only Susser's music remains in my memory after I hear the release, I can recommend the collection for that work and for readers who relish new music composed for older instruments.

HASKINS

More Trio Sonatas

Distler, Reger, Langlais, Telemann, Bach
Shawn Leopard & John Paul, lautenwerke
Lyrichord 8052—62 minutes

This release follows up the duo's traversal of Bach's trio sonatas on Lyrichord (Sept/Oct 2000). I praised their musicianship and the beauty of the instruments on the earlier recording (though I also lamented the loss of Bach trio sonata recordings with registrations in multiple octaves). Now that I don't have that particular axe to grind, I can recommend the new release with unabashed enthusiasm. It contains transcriptions of three organ compositions in trio texture by Distler (Opus 18:2), Reger (Opus 47), and Langlais, as well as Bach's trio sonata from *The Musical Offering* and an A-minor sonata from Telemann's *Essercizii Musici*. Since my enthusiasm for organ music does not venture far past 1791, I can't compare Paul's and Leonard's transcriptions with some of the original organ works; but the more intimate timbres of the lautenwerke make a difference! Fast pieces with complex textures, like the first movements of Distler and Langlais, sound just right—every detail is clear, and the slight ring of the instruments fill out the harmonies without obscuring adjacent chords. I don't think of Distler or Reger as composers who wrote humorous, even cheeky pieces, but that's how I feel after listening to these performances.

These performers sound like they have been playing together for many years: they make short work of all the most difficult writing in the Langlais and Reger and phrase beautifully together. In the much more familiar Trio Sonata from *The Musical Offering*, I miss the tonal variety of flute and violin and find that what I once called the super-banjo effect of two lautenwerke doesn't compensate for the loss.

Excellent notes by Leonard and Paul and by the instrument builder, Anden Houben.

HASKINS

New Nectar

NEWBY: *Dreams he is a Ball of Fire;* **MILLER:** *Thinly, Roundly;* **O'NEILL:** *Lessons of the Garden;* **PARLETT:** *Intimate Distance;* **PLIMLEY:** *Born Again Needle Dancers*

Gamelan Madu Sari—Songlines 2404—64 min

It is difficult to compose meaningful music that draws from different classical traditions. Most often the result is a little of this, a little of that, and not much of anything. Nevertheless, it can be done; and this release is ample proof. All of the composers here write music for a traditional Javanese Gamelan, and some of the pieces include instruments from other parts of the world, including Vietnam. I enjoyed every track, though I was especially taken with Michael O'Neill's *Lessons of the Garden*. The first movement includes an otherworldly performance by O'Neill and Matthew Welch on the aulos, a reed instrument. I also liked Chris Miller's *thinly, roundly*, for a small ensemble of Vietnamese and Javanese instruments. This is a subtle and sensitive piece with gorgeous melodic writing. The pitch bends, melts, and glides like liquid silver.

The recording quality is fantastic and the performances are wonderful. This is also an excellent representation of what is likely one of the primary stylistic movements of the 21st Century.

MACDONALD

New Music, New York 1979

Orange Mountain 15 [2CD] 129 minutes

Timed for the 25th anniversary of the New Music, New York festival sponsored in 1979 by the Kitchen, the landmark performance space where Downtown music grew up, this dazzling release on Philip Glass's label presents 19 gems from that scene's heyday in the 70s. The recordings were made for the Kitchen's archives and have been gathering dust until now. You don't hear the dust much, though: Looking Glass Studios, which did the remastering, has for the most part pulled vivid and brilliant sound from the archival tapes.

The pieces include early works by many composers who have gone on to become big names. The set opens with Glass's blazing, in-your-face *Dance No. 4* for electric organ, played by the composer at a million miles an hour on a terrifically harsh instrument, a time machine that takes us right back to the good old days before Glass got all pretty on us. On the other end of the album is Steve Reich's *Drumming, Part I*, a piece that was eight years old at the time of recording and that still hasn't lost its edge.

Between the bookends we've got a piece by Michael Nyman called *Five Orchestral Pieces for Opus Tree* (Nyman never had a pre-pretty period, evidently, but unfortunately this recording was badly miked in the first place, and somebody's singing badly) and instantly identifiable pieces by Meredith Monk (*Do You Be*) and Pauline Oliveros (*The Tuning Meditation*). Oliveros's piece is meant for the audience to perform—she asks people to hum, and to sing any note they like and to match the pitch of someone they hear. After some laughter from the audience (Oliveros says she's going to do her best to disappear), they launch into it with gusto, creating a sound that is

touching and lushly beautiful, however cheesy the idea seems a quarter-century later.

The Philip Glass Ensemble's saxophonist Jon Gibson has a jazzy take on the Glass style in his own music; his solo *Criss Cross* is excerpted here. There are also some composers from the Once Festival on the album: Gordon Mumma, Phil Niblock, Charlemagne Palestine, and David Behrman, who contributes a piece for electric drill and various other devices and gizmos. Unlike the Once music, recently released in a box set (Jan/Feb 2004), these pieces are invariably as worth listening to—even the drill piece—as they are thinking about.

The Kitchen hopes that this will be the first of many releases from their archives. I do too.

QUINN

20th Century Catalan Organ

FERRER: *Genesi;* **PAGES:** *Pastoral;* **SEGARRA:** *Nit de Vetlla;* **ALCARAZ:** *Retablo;* **MOMPOU:** *Pastoral;* **GEIS:** *Fantasia Cromatica; Rosa Mistica; Turris Davidica;* **DE LA RIBA:** *Museta;* **MASSANA:** *Coral*

Joan Casals—Ars Harmonica 134—61 minutes

Most likely, the only familiar name here is Frederic Mompou (1893-1987). Lest you think this is a collection of extremely remote or uninteresting music, be advised that these pieces, written by Catalan organists and composers, are tuneful and couched in quite conservative harmony. All are performed by Joan Casals (Joan as in Joan Miro) on the 2-25 Teppati (1896; restored by Grenzing 1989) in the Parochial Church of Berga. The instrument is thin on foundations, but its ample reeds and mutations coupled with resonant acoustics and remote miking make it sound much larger.

Some of the compositions are in two-part form, while others are somewhat amorphous, choosing instead to explore sonorities. Now and then a bit of polytonality appears, but only briefly. Some of these go on beyond where they should, such as Enric Ferrer's 'Genesi'—at over 15 minutes, it develops no apparent pattern or direction save perhaps attempting some variations on *Adeste Fideles*; the rest of the works are between two and seven minutes and often resemble quiet, musing improvisations on a melody—Pages's 'Pastorale', Mompou's 'Pastorale', and De La Riba's 'Museta'. These would make attractive Christmas preludes.

Casals, professor at Barcelona University and titular organist at the Basilica of the Saint Esperit in Terrassa, plays these pieces with assurance and familiarity. None of them is a knuckle-buster, and organists seeking different repertoire might investigate them. Pleasant listening.

METZ

A Musical Feast

WARLOCK: *Basse-Danse;* **BEAUVARLET-CHARPENTIER:** *Offertoire;* **KODALY:** *6 Epigrams;* **BACH:** *Dies Sind die Heil'gen; O Mensch; Kommst du Nun;* **BEDARD:** *Suite du 1 Ton;* **WIDOR:** *Andante Sostenuto;* **VIERNE:** *Scherzetto;* **FRANCK:** *Chorale 3;* **ALBRIGHT:** *Sweet Sixteenths;* **BOVET:** *Toccata Planyavska*

Grant Edwards, organ
Pro Organo 7181—73 minutes

Edwards, a student of Lee Garrett (Lewis & Clark College), is currently organist at First Congregational United Church, Portland. This program is played on the 2-47 Bond (1994) organ in St Stephen's Episcopal, Portland. With pieces selected (in some way) to accompany an imaginary feast, this tongue-in-cheek production opens with a heavy handed interpretation of the Danse from the familiar Warlock *Capriol Suite* . Edwards suggests that this instrument has many "herbs and spices" and doesn't spare the listener from additional bass drum thumps and the sound of a bird whistle performed by the organist himself in the Offertoire. This theatricality gives the listener a hint that all this need not be taken too seriously.

Kodaly's extremely brief miniatures are pleasant as a collection, some quiet some boisterous. We are informed that the "salad" course is the set of Bach chorales. Edwards presents us with respectable interpretations of these chorale preludes, though some might cavil at his indulgence in embellishments. Bedard's Suite is refreshingly conservative in harmonic language.

The popular Andante from Widor's *Symphonie Gothique* suffers here with too many slight hesitations and rubatos that almost suggest Edwards feels ill at ease with it. Not so with Vierne's Scherzetto, which seems much more comfortable in pace and style. The Franck staple is adequate but lacks the ease or flair that distinguishes outstanding interpretations. But the instrument is quite convincing in its resources as the volume increases. The concluding bonbons are appropriate for this, shall we say, unusual "feast". The Albright would have been sufficient, as Bovet's work is tedious and endlessly repetitive.

METZ

Never judge anything by what you pay for it. The most expensive things are all overpriced, and they sell to people who are under the delusion that price means quality.

The Aeolian-Skinner Sound

VIERNE: *Westminster Carillon;* **BACH:** *Toccata & Fugue in D minor;* **HANDEL:** *Concerto in F, op 4:5;* **DAQUIN:** *The Cuckoo;* **LEMMENS:** *Solo de Flute;* **FROST:** *A Fancy Sketch;* **HOLLINS:** *Grand Choeur 2;* **FRANCK:** *Chorale in A minor;* **REGER:** *Benedictus;* **CALLAHAN:** *Aria;* **DUPRE:** *Deux Esquisses;* **WIDOR:** *Toccata fr Sym 5*

Lorenz Maycher—Raven 710—69 minutes

The young organist's polished technique and rhythmic elan capture one's attention forthwith in this recording emphasizing French repertoire. We also hear a striking example of how an enterprising organist can make artistic use of a rather limited instrument so that it sounds to its optimum effect and seems larger than it actually is.

The Vierne Carillon is taken at a brisk clip and is clean, disciplined, and exciting. Bach's well-known Toccata in D minor loses some of its architectural integrity from the incursions of the crescendo and swell pedals, which detract from the terraced baroque style inherent in the piece. The Fugue is clear, sparkling, and spirited, if sometimes a little overheated. Handel's Concerto, Op. 4:5, appears in a latter-day arrangement for organ solo. In past years it was common to hear these concertos played this way but today one can wait a long time for such a transcription-like realization. Maycher's choice of stops and use of the swell pedal produce quite an orchestral, even romantic effect here and there.

Four lightweight bonbons lead us to the swan song from the pen of C,sar Franck, his Third Chorale of 1890. For this great and spacious organ work, a larger room and more sonorous organ are de rigueur. Moreover, several details are not to my liking, such as the incorrect use of 16' manual tone at the outset, Maycher's brusque and abrupt manner with the opening and the "chorale" theme, the annoying surge of the swell shades at the ends of pianissimo phrases, and the wrong rhythms in the pedal just before the final section. But the cantilena in the middle of the piece is lovely and expressive, and there is fire and intensity in this performance.

Reger's tender and evocative Benedictus is given a beautiful performance, where the most attractive sounds of this instrument are exploited with color and taste. The recital closes with a somewhat frenzied gallop through Widor's famous and monumental Toccata, tempering, temporarily, my very high opinion of this artist.

The "American Classic organ" in Trinity Episcopal, Bethlehem, PA, is a fairly typical, if small, three-manual from the time of the legendary G Donald Harrison, tonal director of the Aeolian-Skinner Company. It was installed in 1955, and later work to brighten the instrument was done in the early 70s by Arthur Birchall. The acoustics are dry, but the organ tone is consistently musical, and the organ is versatile, as can be heard in this program. Because the mixtures must be coupled at 4' pitch, there is a certain glassiness to the full ensemble, though that is not unpleasant. The string and flute combinations and the celestes are remarkable.

Recorded sound is first-rate. Notes by the eminent Charles Callahan are excellent. Unfortunately, there is no information about the artist, one of the most admirable exponents of this style of organ playing in America today. His registrations are not listed.

MULBURY

Riga Cathedral Organ

REGER: *Heil dir im Siegerkranz; Melodia; Siegesfeier, Passion, Ostern (fr op 147);* **KARG-ELERT:** *Nun Danket; Nearer, my God, to Thee;* **REUBKE:** *Trio in E-flat; 94th Psalm*

Dominikus Trautner—Motette 13121—69 min

Father Dominikus Trautner, OSB, music director for the Abbey at Münsterschwarzach, plays here the historic Walcker organ in the Cathedral of Riga (Latvia). This vast organ of four manuals and 124 stops was completed in 1883, one of only two Walcker instruments from that era still preserved in their original state (the other is in the Votivkirche, Vienna). Although every voice of the Riga instrument is not quite in perfect tune, its tone is majestic and sonorous, with a special sort of integrity embodying the late 19th Century tonal concept that we rarely hear nowadays.

The opening composition by Reger was based on the tune known to us as 'America', and each of his ensuing works and the ones by Karg-Elert can be found to incorporate a chorale or hymn-tune. These selections by Reger and Karg-Elert may not count among their most notable organ pieces, but they have a charm and interest all their own. Karg-Elert's Improvisation on the Titanic disaster, composed in 1913, when he composed some of his best organ pieces, suits this organ ideally. Motette claims this as the world premiere recording of it.

Trautner performs all of these impeccably, at the same time exhibiting the rich palette of color this organ offers. Although there is considerable reverberation in this spacious building, he manages to preserve splendid clarity in this music, despite the remarkable dynamic range—*pppp* up to *ffff*—this organ is capable of.

Julius Reubke's Sonata, composed in 1857,

shows its indebtedness to Liszt in its "program" format, thematic transformation, and many parallels to Liszt's B-minor Piano Sonata. It is, of course, one of the great organ works of the 19th Century, but it is also an early example of the "new German style", pioneered by Liszt and his pupils. Trautner plays it with romantic fervor, beautifully projecting its changing moods, and his technique is more than adequate for its substantial virtuoso challenges. Yet all is not as it should be. There is altogether too much reliance on the organ's swell pedal for dynamic effects (even new German organs of Reubke's time were not equipped with swell pedals) as well as what might be called unwelcome rhythmic license at several spots, where whole beats of measures have been simply left out.

For top recordings of Reubke's Sonata, look to the magnificent one by E Power Biggs at Methuen, Massachusetts, on the old Boston Music Hall organ originally built by Walcker (not yet issued on CD) and the brilliant accounts by Martin Sander (MDG) and Catharine Crozier (Delos). Still, this is an historically ideal match of organ and music for the Reubke.

Superlative sound fidelity. It seems obvious that much thought and planning were lavished on optimum microphone placement, thereby solving many of the difficulties of recording an organ like this. A wealth of information and numerous vivid photos are supplied, as well, in this handsome and admirable production. Father Trautner is a master of the art of registration, so it is too bad that his registrations were not listed in the booklet.

MULBURY

Perspectives 1

MOZART: *Piano Sonata 17;* **BEETHOVEN:** *Sonata 32;* **SCHUBERT:** *Sonata in A minor, D 537;* **ADES:** *Darknesse Visible*

Andreas Haefliger—Avie 41—71 minutes

From "Perspectives 1" on the cover I can only conclude that this is the first of possibly several recitals on this label. While I was not thrilled with the pianist's Mozart Sonata recital (Jan/Feb 2004), I was interested to see what he could do with Beethoven and Schubert. The Mozart, not the same performance that was issued previously, is a puzzlement, since the pianist's ideas have not changed appreciably.

From a resonant middle-of-the-hall perspective, Haefliger plays Schubert in a respectful, technically controlled, and no-nonsense manner. If it does not exactly have you jumping up and down, it is enjoyable to hear an untroubled performance that makes few demands on the listener. The Allegretto quasi andantino movement is especially lovely in Haefliger's hands.

Beethoven's Sonata 32 is hardly an untroubled work. This last of the great sonata cycle is a very demanding composition where structure, emotion, and creativity must go hand in hand in performance. Following an effectively turbulent first movement, the succeeding variations grow naturally out of the 'Arietta' theme and reach an effective conclusion almost 20 minutes later in the composer's final reflective pages.

Thomas Ades is considered by many to be among the most brilliant of the world's young artists. I can second this opinion with respect to his performing ability, but not with respect to his compositions that I have heard. The seven-minute *Darknesse Visible* is, according to the notes, the most popular of his piano works. It is based on a lute song by John Dowland and is fortunately short and would not be the major reason for purchasing this recording. Since the disc is a keeper for me, I can now claim to have added an Ades composition to my collection; but in the company of these other composers, Ades pales miserably.

BECKER

Motions & Emotions

Piano Sonatas by **COULTHARD, WEINZWEIG, KENINS, KULESHA**

Mary Kenedi—Echiquier 8—74 minutes

Here are four piano sonatas by four highly-regarded 20th Century Canadian composers. Jean Coulthard (1908-2000) wrote her three-movement contribution in 1948. Its bitonal harmonic vocabulary and long-lined melodies over chords and arpeggios break no new ground but make for an effective modern-romantic composition long on lyricism that the liner notes aptly compare to Rachmaninoff and Vaughan Williams (though they don't spell that Englishman's name correctly!). To this I'd add an even closer kinship to the piano music of Arnold Bax; both Coulthard and Bax delve into a tonal "Celtic Twilight" derived from Scriabin's chromatic mysticism, heightened here by Mary Kenedi's languid playing. This performance takes more than 21 minutes, while the brisker rendition by Elaine Keillor on Carleton 1002 (Sept/Oct 1996, p 279) takes only 15 and is recorded in closer and more vivid sound. Coulthard's sonata is worth hearing, strong enough to come off pretty well in both these very different interpretations, though the more coherent and exciting Keillor is my preference.

The 1950 sonata by John Weinzweig (born 1913) is stripped down, bouncy, vaguely Stravinskian, and so relentlessly insouciant as

to seem more detached than playful. It didn't do much for me, though Diederik De Jong liked other pieces by this composer on Centrediscs 5295 (Jan/Feb 1996). Talivaldis Kenins's Third Sonata, from 1985 and cast in one 18-minute span, is fully chromatic and feels more like a fantasy than a conventional sonata. Kenins, who was born in Latvia in 1919 but immigrated to Canada in the 1950s, has undergone a fairly extensive evolution over his long career, his earlier works more traditional. His First Piano Sonata, a personal favorite of mine, has been recorded several times, and there's an anthology of his chamber music on Centrediscs 5997 (Mar/Apr 1998), also distributed by the Canadian Music Centre. I can't say that the Third Sonata makes a strong impression; it's inoffensive moment by moment, in a sort of 12-tone-pastoral way, but on a larger timescale feels like aimless wandering.

Finally, Gary Kulesha's Sonata 2, from 1984, described as "all in one movement" but in fact in three quite distinct but connected movements in the standard fast-slow-fast sequence. This rather grand 22-minute-long opus, in a mainstream modern idiom, has the biggest gestures, most interesting ideas, and most variety of anything on the program and like everything I've heard by Kulesha shows a gift for imaginative and engaging sonorities. I enjoyed and admired this sonata, but it's definitely hurt, if not ruined, despite Kenedi's go-for-broke performance, by the tinny-sounding and out-of-tune upper registers in the piano. Believe me, this isn't the way the composer wants his music to sound. For more about Kulesha, including a list of his other works on CD, see January/February 2004, page 203.

LEHMAN

Waltz Project Revisited

22 Waltzes
Eric Moe, p—Albany 689—72 minutes

30 years ago Robert Helps and Robert Moran asked a group of contemporary American composers to write short piano waltzes for an anthology to be published by Peters. Soon after, 17 of these waltzes (from the total 25) were recorded on a Nonesuch LP called *The Waltz Project*. This wasn't the first time Helps had been involved in such an undertaking. A decade earlier (in 1966) he'd recorded a similar anthology of short piano pieces by contemporary Americans titled *New Music for the Piano* (RCA). The CD reissue was CRI 874 (Sept/Oct 2001, p 264). In both cases the *raison d'etre* (or at least one them) was to present a representative conspectus "in miniature" of American music at a particular point in time.

These endeavors have by now attained classic-of-modern-music status. But instead of simply reissuing the original Nonesuch disc, as CRI did with *New Music for the Piano*, Albany has now released an updated assemblage conceived and performed by Eric Moe. It includes 11 waltzes from the original Peters anthology (in new performances) along with 11 new waltzes commissioned for what Moe calls "The Waltz Project Revisited".

The composers represented range from recognized masters like Milton Babbitt, Roger Sessions, Andrew Imbrie, Virgil Thomson, Charles Wuorinen, Joan Tower, Philip Glass, and Lou Harrison—all waltzes written for the original project—to such (mostly) younger, less-known composers as Hayes Biggs, Wayne Peterson, Louis Karchin, Akin Euba, Ronald Caltabiano, Lee Hyla, Mathew Rosenblum, Anthony Cornicello, Ricky Ian Gordon, and Eric Moe himself.

The music is all over the map stylistically, as you'd expect, but all these pieces float on the waltz's peculiar gravity-defying lilt, whether obvious or subliminal. Anyone interested in piano music of the past four decades will find many gems here. Enlivening the older waltzes are the elegant airiness of Imbrie (his waltz in a premiere recording—it didn't appear on the Nonesuch LP), the knotty muscularity of Sessions, the anfractuous wit of Babbitt, the ornate Chopinesque tracery of Robert Helps, the music-box naivete of Zygmunt Krause, and the winsome modal simplicity of Harrison. High points among the new waltzes include Peterson's Schoenberg-on-holiday gaiety, Moe's crunchy south-of-the-border jazziness, Euba's gracious melodiousness, Gordon's Satie-like quietude, Hyla's balletic quirkiness.

Eric Moe plays with sensitive musicianship and evident satisfaction in the music, if not quite the remarkable clarity and cut-glass precision that Robert Helps brought to *New Music for the Piano*. Sonics are full-bodied and realistic.

LEHMAN

Sviatoslav Richter In Concert

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Sonatas 3,4,17,18,27,28,30,-31,32;* **LISZT:** *Sonata;* **SCHUBERT:** *Sonatas D 566, 575, 894, 960*

Brilliant 92229 [5CD] 366 minutes

All of these recordings derive from Russian sources dating from 1961-78, all are in at least acceptable sound, and all have been released before. Although the sound does vary between venues, some of the recordings are better than higher priced equivalents.

The only thing to fear in purchasing this set is duplication. For that reason I give the fol-

lowing dates as a guide so that you may go back to your holdings, compare, and decide if this is a necessary acquisition for you:

Beethoven: Op. 90 (1-10-65); Opp. 31:2+3,101,110 (10-10-65); Opp. 2:3,7,111 (1-12-75); Op.109 (1-22-72); Liszt (10-12-65); Schubert: D 566+894 (5-3-78), D 575 (10-12-65), D 960 (11-31-61)

Needless to say, Richter plays with mastery and great character. While some of his tempos and inflections might be difficult for non-aficionados to digest, his interpretations are of legendary status and can only be compared with his other performances of the same works. Be prepared for some clunkers, audience noise, and severely cut-off applause. It would have been better if the latter had been extended a few seconds longer and the volume faded.

At the attractive price for Brilliant boxes, this is a hard bargain to resist unless you already have these specific performances. If you have other Richter recordings of these same pieces and wish to collect all his golden moments captured on disc, hesitate not one second. You will have the added bonus of slimline packaging that takes less than half an inch of space.

BECKER

Musica Ricercata

Ligeti, Messiaen, Cage, Takemitsu
Alberto Rosado, p—Verso 2006—77 minutes

This inventive, well recorded collection explores the cultural moment following World War II when a number of composers began a search for new paths. Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata*, the title work, has echoes of Bartok and Kodaly but begins to map out territory the great Hungarian modernist would thoroughly explore later in *Continuum*, Atmospheres, and other more characteristic pieces. Most remarkable is VII, with its minimalist left hand oscillating constantly against a bouncy independent melody in the right. The seven "gazes" from Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur L'Enfant Jesus* show that this visionary set can work well in excerpts, especially when played with the crispness and momentum displayed by Alberto Rosado, who chooses to play mostly the faster, crunchier pieces. Rosado's clarity and pointed attack clear away the vagueness often associated with Toru Takemitsu in the early but thoroughly characteristic *Uninterrupted Rests*, which explores the relationship between sound and silence.

The program concludes with two Cage pieces from the 40s, 'A Room', and 'In a Landscape', which reveal Cage as a daring innovator from the beginning whose early work was accessible and charming. The first piece is an amazing forecast of minimalism, the second a lovely bit of oriental impressionism that picks up where Debussy's 'Pagodas' left off. Rosado plays Cage with great freedom and lots of color and pedal, but also with a shining lucidity. No note obscures or crowds out any other. "Let the sounds be themselves!" Cage was fond of saying. Here they certainly are.

SULLIVAN

Music of Tribute

FAURE: *Improvisation in C-sharp minor; Impromptu 2; Fugue in A minor; Mazurka in B-flat; 3 Romances sans Paroles; Preludes 1+5; Valse-Caprice 1;* **AUBERT:** *Moderato;* **LADMIRAULT:** *Allegro Moderato;* **ENESCO:** *Molto Moderato e Cantabile;* **SCHMITT:** *Rapide;* **RAVEL:** *Berceuse;* **DUCASSE:** *D'une Extr,me Lenteur;* **KOECHLIN:** *Andante, Calme e Très Espressif*
Vladimir Valjarevic, Ivailo Nanev, p; Svetla Kaltcheva, v—Labor 7043—60 minutes

On first hearing, this tribute strikes the ear as intimate French salon music, with a stylistic similarity among the various composers. That could suggest a certain artifice, a superficiality. But the music holds some treasures and is played sympathetically by pianist Vladimir Valjarevic.

Part of the tribute to Faur, calls for the other composers to employ musical notes spelling out his name. Several used the notes F-A-G-D-E. (The liner notes explain how G and D are arrived at as substitutes for U and R.)

French music of this vintage demands of its interpreter great subtlety. If one could wish for anything, it would be for a little more imagination to bring out the subtleties and stylistic differences of the composers. After a while, it all begins to sound pretty much the same. And that can be deadly with French salon music.

Case in point: Florent Schmitt's thorny little piece scampers through considerable dissonance and anguished melodies with less ease and French fragrance than Faur, and his compatriots. The lone Schmitt piece seems longer than its three minutes.

Violinist Svetla Kaltcheva has a lovely tone in Ravel's 'Berceuse'. But it sounds muted and almost like a viola, not a violin.

The somewhat lugubrious two-piano work by Roger Ducasse displays an intricate contrapuntal texture. The result is somewhat anguished, introverted music spanning nine minutes. The slow pace allows for the complexities to unfold, and it's easy to follow. Pianists Caljarevic and Ivailo Nanev use varying articulations to keep the lines untangled.

The lovely little piece by Charles Koechlin sounds like a hybrid of German harmony and French sentimentality.

This release will be most appreciated by Francophiles. I am one, but I'd prefer a little more profile, a little more definition in the renderings.

BARELA

Margaret Wacyk

Romeo 7229—64 minutes

As the notes tell us, Wacyk is a composer as well as performer. It is in the latter capacity that we encounter her in this recording. As usual, the notes do not tell us her birth date, though a photograph, if recent, reveals a young woman perhaps in her 20s. Her New York debut took place in Carnegie Recital Hall in 2000, and she is currently on the faculty of the Diller Quaile School of Music in Manhattan.

Clementi's Sonata in F-sharp minor, Op. 26:2, is very clear headed and gentle. Without the histrionics Horowitz brought to these works we encounter something very much of its times. It is well executed, expressive, and presented in a manner that makes no attempt to impress.

Schumann's *Fantasiestucke* is given one of those performances that you would applaud with modest enthusiasm at a recital. Nothing is terribly wrong, as long as you do not expect the imagination of a Richter or an Arrau—or for that matter a dozen other pianists who have embraced this music. 'Aufschwung' (Soaring) is but one example of the notes played but the music failing to soar when essential contrasts are downplayed. A more forceful downbeat would supply some of the necessary lift.

Scriabin's Sonata 4 packs a world of the composer's philosophy into a time span of slightly more than 10 minutes. The soul's yearning towards the Divine is summarized in the composers brief poem included in the notes. Wacyk is fully in her element here. The opening Andante is moving as the pianist emphasizes its perfumed, lyrical elements. If this continues a little too much in the ensuing Prestissimo volando, we can forgive the pianist for not wishing to enter the composer's manic-depressive state of mind. This is safe and sane Scriabin, but something important may be lost.

Concluding with the well known Chopin Scherzo No. 2, Wacyk eschews strong contrasts. Like the rest of her program, it is nicely conceived and played. If nothing earthshaking happens, on a kinder planet there would be room for performances that refuse to do more than gently caress the ear.

BECKER

Children's Corner

Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Debussy, Satie

Various pianists—Brilliant 92304 [2CD] 115 min

This generous collection of piano music for children by Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, Brahms, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Debussy, and Satie is an ideal introduction to the classical piano literature. Given the quality of the performances, it is a good bet for adults as well. We get the great composers pared down to their essence, with colorful, unpretentious performances by eight talented but relatively unknown players.

Karin Lechner, who performs all of disc 1, captures the austere loveliness in Tchaikovsky's *Album for the Young* and gives straightforward, vigorous renderings of Schumann's *Scenes From Childhood* and Debussy's *Children's Corner*. Having grown up with Horowitz's extreme rubato and teasing nuances (still imprinted in my subconscious), I found this approach refreshing.

Kara Wurtz's Mozart is limpid and lyrical; Hacon Austbo's Grieg and Satie are strongly articulated, never vague or fussy. (Grieg's 'March of the Dwarfs', for example, is genuinely menacing.) Alwin Barr, Frank Van De Laar, Gordon Fergus-Thompson, Martijn Van Den Hoek, and Alexander Warenberg are all also persuasive. Each has his or her own style, of course, but the approach seems consistent: to enter into a child's sensibility by playing with imagination, color, and forcefulness. The round, plummy recorded sound completes a happy picture.

SULLIVAN

Born to be Mild

BROUGHTON: *Oliver's Birthday; Folksong;* **STEPHENSON:** *Trumpet Sonata;* **EWAZEN:** *Ballade; Pastorale; Prayer & Praise; Grand Valley Fanfare;* **STEWART:** *Folk Music;* **TURRIN:** *Intrada*

Richard Stoelzel, tpt; Tianshu Wang, p; Randall Hawes, trb; Avatar Brass—Albany 700—55 min

This program of unfailingly attractive music opens with 'Oliver's Birthday' (1998), by Bruce Broughton. Although the notes don't say so, my guess is that the lively piece of urbane wit is probably about composer-conductor Oliver Knussen, since people seem to write music in honor of his birthdays (Sept/Oct 2004: 230). Also by Broughton is a 'Folksong' that fits the broad, hymn-like character of much of this program. The works by Eric Ewazen do, too—think along the lines of music from *Dances With Wolves*. He writes either in a lively, rhythmically adventurous style (as in 'Grand Valley Fanfare', given a robust reading by Avatar

Brass) or a cloying, sentimental vein (as in 'Ballade', 'Prayer and Praise', and 'Pastorale'). The readings by trumpeter Richard Stoelzel, pianist Tianshu Wang, and bass trombonist Randall Hawes (in 'Pastorale') are excellent.

Louis Stewart's 'Folk Music' (1998) is in the same vein but includes a livelier middle section.

The best pieces are Joseph Turrin's spiky 'Intrada' (given an excellent reading by Philip Smith with the composer on piano, Sept/Oct 1998: 285) and James Stephenson's Trumpet Sonata (2001). The latter, composed for trumpeter Stoelzel, is a full-blown, 16-minute work that should become a recital standard.

Fine readings by Stoelzel (trumpet professor at Grand Valley State University, near Grand Rapids, MI) and Ms Wang (piano professor at Capitol University and Shenyang University, China).

KILPATRICK

Trumpeter's Heritage

Concertos by Böhme, Bach, Tomasi, Fasch, Neruda
George Vosburgh; Czech Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, Musica Anima/ Arnie Roth
Four Winds 3024—68 minutes

A few years ago, I heard a concert by the Pittsburgh Symphony that included a warm and beautifully shaped trumpet solo in Stravinsky's *Fairy's Kiss*. The trumpeter was George Vosburgh, and since then I've heard him in a Christmas album and a lively, almost theatrical *Art of Fugue* by the Pittsburgh Symphony Brass.

The best reading on this program of trumpet concertos is the one by Henri Tomasi, where Vosburgh shows spectacular technique, fearlessness, variety of approach, and complete control. I have always ranked Eric Aubier's account (May/June 1991: 150) the best available, but Vosburgh's is just as good.

Listening to the trumpet concerto by 19th-Century composer Oskar Böhme is a rare experience (the notes say this is a premiere orchestral recording, but Armando Ghitalla did it with the Slovak Philharmonic some years ago). Those familiar with Böhme's Brass Sextet will know that the trumpet concerto is tuneful, more simple than profound, and technically challenging.

The rest of the program is attractive but lackluster. JF Fasch's Concerto for trumpet, oboe, strings, and continuo is taken at staid tempos and given a rather tepid reading. In Bach's Brandenburg Concerto 2, the tempo is conservative in I but lively in III. The unidentified recorder player is first rate.

When it comes to Jan Neruda's Trumpet Concerto, my favorite accounts are by John Wallace (Nov/Dec 1994: 237) and Niklas Eklund (Nov/Dec 2003: 231). Vosburgh's is very good but not as interesting, and there are strange ensemble errors at 1:34 in II.

KILPATRICK

Violin Magic

Fibich, Vackar, Ravel, Debussy, Bach, Handel, Fauré Dvořak, Friml, Strauss, Suk
Gabriela Demeterova, v; Jana Bouskova, hp; Tereza Matlova, s; Czech Philharmonic Collegium/ Jan Chalupecky
Supraphon 3792—55 minutes

This disc is full of tasteless arrangements of often mediocre compositions performed by a lackluster soloist.

MAGIL

Nathan Milstein

BEETHOVEN: *Violin Concerto;* **BACH:** *Partita 3:I;* **PAGANINI:** *Caprices 5+11;* **FALLA:** *Jota; Asturiana;* **NOVACEK:** *Perpetual Motion*
with Ernest Lush, p; London Philharmonic/ Adrian Boult—BBC 4151—72 minutes

This is one of the more satisfying programs by Milstein that I have heard, having a major concerto followed by some short, virtuoso pieces. These performances of the short pieces, by the way, are the same as the ones on the EMI DVD of Milstein (July/Aug 2004). My favorite is the Paganini Caprice 5, which he dispatches in a mere 2:09.

The important work on this disc is the Beethoven, recorded in concert on September 29, 1968. This is a more mature interpretation than the one on his EMI CD recorded with the Pittsburgh Symphony under William Steinberg in 1955. Part of the credit goes to Adrian Boult, who was a better conductor than Steinberg, and the rest of the credit goes to Milstein's keener understanding of Beethoven's musical discourse. Everywhere, phrases are shaped in a more conversational manner, with more forceful accents. The immaculate, mellifluous bowing of his earlier recording is less in evidence here, but that is alien to the classical idiom anyway. Along with greater sympathy with Beethoven's idiom comes greater depth of feeling, and that is most evident, naturally, in the sublime slow movement. This is one of the most satisfying recordings of the Beethoven Concerto I have heard.

MAGIL

Medieval Pilgrimage to Santiago

Augsburg Ensemble for Early Music
Christophorus 77264—53:15

There have been a number of recordings that have selected compositions related to the great

pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Many of those programs focus on material from the so-called Codex Calixtinus, an extensive 12th Century manuscript that, in addition to monophonic and polyphonic music in honor of St James, includes legendary histories, sermons, music, and even a "tourist's guide" to the pilgrim's route. This is perhaps the first recording that presents music related to pilgrimage from a German point of view. While the Ensemble für Frühe Musik of Augsburg includes two works from the Codex Calixtinus, three Latin songs from Aquitania, one 13th Century French chanson by Gautier de Coinci in honor of the Virgin Mary, the repertory is expanded to also include three short German songs. When the four men sing as an all-vocal ensemble, they produce a richness of sound quite similar to Sequentia's "Sons of Thunder" (German Harmonia Mundi 77199) or the female groups of Discantus (Jan/Feb 1995: 233) and Anonymous 4 (Sept/Oct 1996: 255), though those recordings include only works from the Codex Calixtinus.

Like these other groups, these works are separated from their original context, and in the case of the Augsburg group, they even divide up the anonymous pilgrim song 'Wer das elent bawen wel' into three separate tracks. For the curious, an effective reconstruction of a full mass for Saint James according to the Codex Calixtinus was recorded in 1992 (McGill 750037). But this is still a very good recording. The only difficulty is that though the basic booklet description is translated, the lyrics appear only in Latin, medieval French, and Middle-High German—no English—so it will be a somewhat difficult pilgrimage for the dedicated listener.

BREWER

Istampitta

Henri Agnel, cistre, ceterina, oud; Michael Nick, quinton; Henri Tournier, fl; Djamchid Chemirani, zarb; Idriss Agnel, oudou—Alpha 510—57 min

This is a recording I wish I could recommend more highly because the interpretation is very creative and free in ways that I feel would enhance the appreciation of these 14th Century Italian *istanpitte*, but let the listener beware. As in the recent release of similar works by the Capella de Ministrers (Nov/Dec 2004: 239), these interpretations often severely truncate the clear formal patterns found in these imaginative dances. Henri Agnel, the artistic director of this recording and a superior performer on the cittern, *ceterina*, and oud, attempts to justify this practice in his annotations, but it still appears to me an attempt to shorten what would be long, involved, and certainly repetitive dances. The only exception to this practice of formal simplification are the shorter *saltarelli*.

In the more pedestrian interpretations of these works (among which I include those by the New York Ensemble for Early Music, Nov/Dec 1995: 259 & Nov/Dec 1996: 262), a complete performance does become tedious. But to quote Agnel, "I cannot resign myself to practicing medieval music only as historical reconstitution, which rigidifies it." In many respects, Agnel, who was raised in Morocco, in collaboration with Henri Tournier playing various Indian bamboo flutes, Michael Nick using a five-stringed violin (the *quinton*) as a substitute for a medieval vielle, and two percussionists, Djamchid Chemirani on a traditional Iranian drum, the *zarb*, and Idriss Agnel on *oudou*, create a multi-cultural musical approach to these monophonic works. In contrast to the "Moroccan" approach advocated by Thomas Binkley and the Studio for Early Music, these performers are more deeply imbedded in their traditions, so that rather than a quaint attempt at being "ethnic" these performances reveal the performers as true virtuosos in their musical styles. They can create a convincing blend of these diverse musical influences. This is my deepest disappointment about this recording; these musicians seem to me much more perceptive than many others about what makes these dances effective in performance—I would love to listen to them for hours.

BREWER

Eton Choirbook 3: The Pillars of Eternity

DAVY: *O Domine Caeli Terraeque Creator; Ah, Mine Heart, Remember Thee Well; Ah, Blessed Jesu, How Fortuned This?;* **CORNYSH:** *Ave Maria, Mater Dei;* **LAMBE:** *Stella Caeli;* **WYLKYNSON:** *Jesu Autem Transiens/Credo in Deum; Salve Regina*

The 16/ Harry Christophers
Coro 16022—61 minutes

This is a reissue on the Coro label of one of a series of distinguished recordings dating from the 1990s of repertory from the Eton Choirbook performed by The Sixteen. It does not appear that the original issue was reviewed in ARG, though I wrote reviews of two other discs in the series: Vol. 2, *The Crown of Thorns* (Collins 1316; Sept/Oct 1993, p 250), and Vol. 5, *The Voices of Angels* (Collins 1462; May/June 1996, p 251; reissue Coro 16002; Sept/Oct 2002, p 217).

Christophers and his singers have established a dominance in this repertory, largely as a result of this series of recordings. Of all the

things they have done over the years, I still find them most impressive in this school of pre-Reformation polyphony with its distinctively English sonority coupled with a late medieval spirituality and approach to text setting. This is not like the more humanistic music of the later Renaissance, where texts are delineated to make them clearly perceptible to the listener. It is rather an idiom of ecstatic flights of melody on single syllables and intricate webs of non-imitative counterpoint. It is eloquently expressive of the general spirit of a text rather than a detailed projection of its individual clauses.

The Eton repertory falls into three main categories: music for the standard liturgy, music for the devotions peculiar to the foundation, and music for occasions outside the chapel. The present recording includes no music from the first category. Most of the music in the Choirbook itself falls into the second category and consists of music for Marian devotions, as the college itself is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. The two vernacular devotional songs by Richard Davy (c1465-c1507) come from sources other than the Choirbook and represent the third category. The works on this program contrast the eternal glory of heaven with the mutability of our earthly life, including poignant supplications for deliverance from the plague, as in 'Stella Caeli' by Walter Lambe (c1450-c1500).

The two works by Robert Wylkynson (c1450-c1515) deserve special comment. Program annotator John Milsom describes 'Jesus Autem Transiens/Credo in Deum' as "the most bizarre work in the Eton Choirbook". It is a setting of the Apostles' Creed, preceded by an introductory line of text meaning "Jesus then passing through their midst". The work is a 13-part canon notated as a single melodic line. The structure is highly symbolic. The first voice begins with the introductory text, and each following voice begins with it, so that it is a constant presence: the 12 Apostles with Jesus in their midst. Milsom describes the sound of the 13 voices, once they have all entered, as "a harmonious chaos".

If I had to choose one work of the Eton repertory to represent the idiom at its most gloriously ecstatic, it would be Wylkynson's nine-part 'Salve Regina'. Here again, the format is symbolic, as the nine voice parts represent the nine orders of angels. They are even designated as such in the manuscript. The work was evidently intended for the Feast of the Assumption, as the tenor cantus firmus is based on a plainsong antiphon for that day.

Anyone interested in this splendid repertory, and who missed the original issue of this recording, will certainly want to acquire this reissue. The performances are exemplary.

GATENS

Venezia Stravagantissima

Capriccio Stravagante/ Skip Sempe
Alpha 49—54 minutes

Another excellent Alpha release (see Avison, this issue). The painting that accompanies this vigorous Renaissance music is artist Vittore Carpaccio's *The Healing of a Man Possessed* or *Miracle of the Relic of the True Cross*, painted circa 1496. The booklet contains a good essay about the painting by Professor Denis Grenier from Laval University in Quebec.

I have a few favorite Renaissance recordings: Tielman Susato's *Dansereye 1551* from the New London Consort, led by Philip Pickett (no longer in print); Claude Gervaise *Danceries* on Claves (N/D 1997); and just about anything that the Renaissance band Piffaro does (M/J 1996: 248; M/A 1997: 291; J/A 2000: 243; M/J 2001: 230; J/F 2003: 218). These elite ensembles are now joined by Capriccio Stravagante led by Skip Sempe.

This is "da bomb"—really hot! the best! for those of you who aren't familiar with Gen X slang, as I wasn't until someone explained it to me a few years ago. The performances are lively, the improvisation utterly fresh and spontaneous. I am particularly impressed by the brass. I have listened to early instrument brass recordings that are positively painful because of imprecise intonation, but this is bright and beautiful—a delight. The combined instrumental sound is warm and intimate, yet powerful when it needs to be.

If you collect Renaissance music, you'll recognize many of the tunes. But, because these tunes are so versatile, you will probably have heard them in some other medium. For example, one of the tunes here appears on Dorian's *Le Rocque and Roll*, another of my oft-heard favorites; but on that release, it is sung, whereas here it is purely instrumental.

CRAWFORD

English Fancy

Masques/ Olivier Fortin
Analekta 9905—59 minutes

There seems to be a lot of vital early music ensembles springing up just in the past five years or so. One of these is Masques, a group of young Canadians based in Montreal, dedicated to performing 17th and 18th Century vocal and instrumental music. Here they present us with a program that they refer to as "English blossomes of the 17th Century". It's a nice mixture of songs from Henry Purcell and Thomas Campion, interspersed with fantasias,

suites, and sonatas by Purcell and John Jenkins.

I am especially impressed with the youthfulness of Masques and other new ensembles, such as the New Dutch Academy. These young people appear to be in their 20s and early 30s, or perhaps even younger, willing to give their immense talent and youthful energy to a "useless" enterprise: keeping the classical tradition alive. Now that I am in middle age—or at least in the youth thereof—I appreciate more and more the beauty of the young, with their idealism and their willingness to throw themselves in the maw of the utilitarian beast for a cause that's worth living—and dying—for. More power to them, I say: they're making a bright spot in a world that's otherwise difficult to live in. Nor are they satisfied with mediocrity: Masques and others like it are producing top-notch work and tapping some top-drawer talent. On this program, I especially enjoy Shannon Mercer's voice. A native of Ottawa, she is continuing her training this year in Vienna.

Buy this release; you'll enjoy it, and in your own small way you'll be rewarding virtue—a rare enough occurrence these days.

CRAWFORD

Piva: Renaissance Italy & Spain

Nancy Knowles, s; Frank Wallace, bar, lute, vihuela—Gyre 10032—64 minutes

If you like to encourage small labels and explore unusual repertoire, try this release, and visit the Website at duoliveoak.com. Here the two artists try to recreate for modern listeners a common musical phenomenon from the Renaissance: solo voice accompanied by lute or vihuela. The notes give good detail on where these songs are found and who the composers are; suffice it to say here that not many of them are familiar tunes that one hears on programs of standard Renaissance fare. This program emphasizes the musical ties between Italy and Spain in the 15th and 16th centuries. There is a nice selection, with solos by either of the two artists or both of them together, and the occasional instrumental solo thrown in for variety.

The program has a nice home-grown feel, but with polish. The songs themselves are quite folksy and almost completely secular. Many of them are melancholy, dwelling on the suffering inherent in being human and alive. I find this interesting, since many of the lyrics seem to prefigure the romantic movement.

The bi-fold booklet gives some good information about the music and the artists. Inside is a listing of the songs with a notation that the complete texts and translations are available at a Web address. I groaned inwardly—with some sympathy, since I was quite sure that Gyre is small label with limited funds. (Gyre is, indeed, an artist-owned small company founded in 2000, distributed by Forte.) I checked out the link—it didn't work. But I did land at the Website recommended above and left a message via the "Contact Us" button, describing my problem. The same day, I received a gracious response from Frank Wallace, thanking me for revealing the problem and promising to have it fixed—which he promptly did. He sent me the correct link as follows: www.gyremusic.com-/catalog/MusicPages/pivatextstranslations.pdf. But he also indicated that they would try to fix the link given in the booklet so that it works. It's great to find a customer-oriented Website with a real person who actually answers when one has a problem. And the texts are formatted like a CD booklet, so it is relatively easy to trim the pages and fit them into the CD cover. Mr Wallace confirmed my suspicion about the expense of a CD booklet, saying that a proper booklet adds about 50% to the production cost of the disc.

The sound is good, with a nice balance between voice and instruments, though on some tracks it seems a bit hollow, especially in relation to Miss Knowles's voice.

Even if this release doesn't interest you, check the Gyre music catalog out, as the repertoire is not limited to Renaissance songs.

CRAWFORD

La Tarantella

L'Arpeggiata/ Christina Pluhar
Alpha 503—51:22

This recording parallels an earlier anthology of historic tarantellas recorded in 1977 by the Atrium Musicae de Madrid (Harmonia Mundi 190379). While that collection concentrated on examples from the 17th and 18th centuries, this new anthology by the ensemble L'Arpeggiata mixes some of the same pieces with others derived from the oral traditions of southern Italy, ancestral home of these musical-therapeutic dances and songs. While the earlier performance was perhaps best termed "earnest", this new collection is much more subtle and the performers sound much more adept on their (mostly plucked) instruments, led by Christina Pluhar, who plays baroque harp, theorbo, baroque guitar, and a small percussive *chitarra battente*.

Particularly effective is the performance of the traditional 'Tarantella dell'Avena' by tenor Marco Beasley, who effectively evokes the almost hypnotic quality associated with this dance in the 17th Century. These performances lack the edge found in recordings of traditional performers, such as those recorded

in Calabria in 1954 by Alan Lomax and Diego Carpitella for Rounder, and they approach the examples from Athanasius Kircher (first published in the 17th Century) with too much care. But like a good Italian wine, the quality of these performances will draw you into the mysterious and intoxicating world of the tarantella.

BREWER

Miserere

ALLEGRI: *Miserere;* **PALESTRINA:** *Stabat Mater;* **WEELKES:** *When David Heard;* **RAMSEY:** *How Are the Mighty Fallen;* **PURCELL:** *Lord, How Long Wilt Thou Be Angry; Remember Not, Lord, Our Offences; Hear My Prayer, O Lord; Funeral Music for Queen Mary*

Clare College Choir/ Timothy Brown
Brilliant 99287—58 minutes

This program, recorded in 1995, consists of music on the themes of penitence and the contemplation of death, both the Passion of Christ and the deaths of ordinary (or perhaps not-so-ordinary) mortals. The opening work is the familiar 'Miserere' of Gregorio Allegri (1582-1652), a setting of Psalm 51 for use in Holy Week liturgies sung by the papal choir in Rome. The version sung here seems to be based on the corrupt but now standard edition of Sir Ivor Atkins, but sung in Latin. It is followed by the also familiar double-choir 'Stabat Mater' by Palestrina.

The next two works are by English composers of the early 17th Century, and both are laments of King David. 'When David Heard' by Thomas Weelkes (1576-1623) is about the death of the king's son Absalom, while 'How Are the Mighty Fallen' by Robert Ramsey (d 1644) is on the death of his friend Jonathan, the son of King Saul. Both works owe much to the expressive diction of the English madrigal of that period.

The remainder of the recording consists of music by Henry Purcell, beginning with three penitential anthems, including the fragmentary 'Hear My Prayer, O Lord' (Z 15). The music that concludes the program is designated *Funeral Sentences for Queen Mary*, though that title needs a good deal of qualification. The instrumental march and canzona that form part of the *Funeral Music for Queen Mary* are included here, played by the Baroque Brass of London, but the sentences themselves are sung in the version dating from the early 1680s. The 1695 setting of 'Thou Knowest, Lord', probably composed especially for the queen's funeral, is not given here at all.

The choir of Clare College, Cambridge enjoys a well-deserved reputation as one of the finest mixed choirs of its kind, from its pioneer days under John Rutter to its more recent work (since 1979) under Timothy Brown. The performances here are highly polished and certainly more than merely competent, but I do not find them especially memorable or particularly moving or authoritative. They sound to me very much like British choral business as usual. There is no reason to prefer Brown's Purcell to Robert King's (Hyperion). Of the many recordings of the Allegri 'Miserere', I am repeatedly drawn to the one by Edward Higginbottom and the choir of New College Oxford (from the collection 'Agnus Dei'; Erato 14634; July/Aug 1997, p 231—again the Atkins version). Listeners seriously interested in this work will want the recording by Martin Neary and the Westminster Abbey Choir (from a collection also called 'Miserere'; Sony 66615; March/April 1997, p 292). It includes both the Atkins version and the 1714 version by Tommaso Bai, together with some informative historical notes on the incarnations and mystique of this music.

The Clare College recording appears to be a British issue, though no country of origin appears in print. All of the incidental material is in English, but the program notes are in German only. Go figure.

GATENS

Catalan Baroque

Diatessaron/ Josep Benet—LMG 2056—48 min

My first thought was that this program is rather short, but perhaps it's because Catalan baroque composers aren't exactly plentiful. The notes give very good short biographies of the composers included, so I will only name them with their approximate dates: Josep Pradas (1698-1757), Joan (1720-70?) and Josep Pla (1728-62), Joan Barter (1648-1706), Salvador Reixac (1725-80) and Joaquim Garcia (1710-79).

Works included are both sacred and secular; the program opens with the Pradas cantata for a solo voice, two violins, and bass. In the two songs from Barter, it is interesting to see a form of "inculturation", as these are religious songs, yet composed in familiar Catalan folk forms, so that the first, 'Respirad, flores, fragancias', seems like a dance. The last two songs by Garcia are samples of his Latin motets, markedly different in character from the songs of Barter.

This is not an exceptional program, except as a musical curiosity, but it is well done. Josep Benet has a good voice, and the instrumental work is good. The sound is just a little bit harsh. The notes are thorough, if a bit opaque because of translation problems.

CRAWFORD

Forunderligt: 20th Century Danish Choral

Aarhus Academic Choir/ Uffe Most
Danacord 621—62 minutes

I last covered this very fine Danish choir in a program of Shakespeare songs (M/A 2004, p 241); I'm pleased to hear them now in this lovely collection of modern a cappella material from their homeland.

Svend S. Schultz (1913-98) directed the choir for nearly half of his long life and created some of his nation's most beloved choral compositions. Dreamy and uncomplicated tunefulness pervades his Four Choral Songs in Danish Lyrical Style.

Greater sophistication, more pronounced choral effect, and French flavors characterize the Three Romantic Choral Songs of Jorgen Jersild (1913-2004), a student of Albert Roussel. His imaginative, fantasy-ridden style and harmonic formulas place considerable demands on the choir.

Ib Norholm (b 1931) was a student of the great Danish master Vagn Holmboe, and joins his distinguished colleagues Per Norgard and Poul Ruders among Denmark's most prominent living composers. *Americana*, his five-movement choral suite, sets poetry from Walt Whitman and other Americans—but has no other discernible Yankee forms or flavors. His modern idiom and quasi-tonal approach remain quite accessible and appealing, while posing real challenges to his singers.

We revert to more elemental and straightforward Danish folk-spirit with Nine Songs for Mixed Choir, arranged by John Hoybye from strophic songs by Carl Nielsen, Denmark's greatest composer. While the rest of the world knows Nielsen best for his symphonies and concertos, Danish children have all grown up with his beloved songs for nearly a century now. I've spent some magical summer days in Denmark, and this music captures the nation's coolly sweet essence as does no other. But don't expect the depth or intensity that we find in his three stunning motets (S/O 2002, p 224).

This choir is predominantly amateur, but director Uffe Most gets mostly professional-quality work from them, including smooth and transparent sound. They are beautifully recorded in a rich, yet literal church acoustic that would be any choir's dream. Excellent notes plus full texts and translations.

My only mini-gripe: this is the third Danish choral collection I've covered in as many years from native artists, and I've found none of the remarkable choral creations of Vagn Holmboe (after Nielsen, Denmark's greatest modern master) in any of them. BIS, the Swedish label, seems to have beaten the Danes to that composer.

KOOB

Paradisi Gloria

Psalms by Zemlinsky, Markevitch, Korngold, Bloch
soloists; Munich Radio & Berlin Radio Choirs
Profil 4036—54 minutes

Paradisi Gloria is also the title of a Munich-based concert series founded in 2000 for the purpose of exploring significant but seldom-heard 20th-Century sacred music. Don't confuse the "Munich Radio Orchestra" (Münchner Rundfunkorchester) with Munich's well-known "Bavarian Radio Orchestra". I hope that this interesting and important release, devoted to settings for large chorus (and/or soloists) plus orchestra is but the initial recorded fruit of this series.

Alexander Zemlinsky's rich and massive setting of Psalm 13 in German (Op. 24) sets the album's prevailing tone and reflects (partly by his use of the vernacular text) his ecumenical convictions. Composed in 1935, it is a dense and flowing neoromantic piece for large chorus that certainly impresses, especially on repeated listening. But it did not impress the Nazi regime and was not performed until 1971. It is glowingly conducted by Peter Ruzicka, and choral duties fall here to the excellent Berlin Radio singers. Its only other recording is from James Conlon and Cologne forces (EMI 56783—S/O 1999).

The second selection, Igor Markevitch's *Psaume* (1933) sets a pastiche of psalm texts for mezzo-soprano and orchestra. It is a disturbing and driven atonal work in three movements. Its final section is especially manic, reflecting the composer's inner turmoil resulting from his recently overcome opium addiction. But it blossoms here and there into a wild and headlong paean of thankful praise. Peter Rundel conducts this pile-driver with absolute conviction, and Elena Prokina's huge mezzo is most effective—though you could drive a truck through her wide vibrato at top volume. Her diction could be better, too—I couldn't tell what language she was singing (see below). Another account can be heard on Marco Polo 8223882.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold's Op. 30 *Passover Psalm* (1941)—for soprano, chorus, and orchestra—is far more even-tempered and tonally conventional. This is one of only two sacred works from Korngold. He had already been composing for Hollywood since 1934, and the work's lush radiance and celebratory dramatics were no doubt by-products of his film experience. The piece—apparently setting

psalm fragments plus bits of the *Haggadah*, a book of Jewish sacred lore—was written to conclude the Passover Seder meal. The text sounds like English, though I can't be sure. Series director and principal conductor Marcello Viotti leads an impassioned reading, graced by the smooth and burnished soprano of Emily Magee. The Bavarian Radio Choir sings splendidly. This is the only recording I know of this.

Viotti also conducts the final work, Ernest Bloch's idiomatically Jewish *Psalm 22*, from 1913, for baritone and chamber orchestra. It was originally scored for a very large orchestra, but what we hear here is a transcription for chamber orchestra by Yaov Talmi. The piece is a nakedly emotional and spiritually sincere evocation of the "Jewish Soul", a concept that long interested the composer and certainly flavors much of his music. Vincent Le Texier's lustrous baritone suits the music well. He apparently sings in French, and he's recorded it before, with the Luxembourg Philharmonic on Timpani 1052.

While both the music and the nicely-recorded performances are well worth hearing, my enjoyment and understanding of the program was seriously degraded by the complete lack of texts. Choral fans want—and need—their texts. Literature is a vital component of choral art. But other recordings of this music are hard to find. The stature of its creators and the overall quality of the performances command our attention.

KOOB

Cor: Traditional Irish Songs

Celtic Ayres, Irish Radio Choir/ Blanaid Murphy
Arsis 140—62 minutes

Here is a very pleasant and nostalgia-inducing collection of traditional Irish songs, in winning new arrangements for both mixed chorus and children's choir by David Mooney.

The 20 selections are anchored in well-known and beloved territory—like 'Derry Air' (Danny Boy), 'Down by the Salley Gardens', 'The Coulin', and 'Wexford Carol'. Quite a few pieces have Gaelic titles and texts. We get a pleasing mix of searing laments, lovely ballads, and lively dances. Most are accompanied by harp, flute, violin, bodhran (traditional Irish drum), or piano—though there's an a cappella piece or two. Sure an' begorrah, it's all just as Irish as can be. Mooney's attractive arrangements never bury the original material in needless choral novelty or effect.

Blanaid Murphy, one of Ireland's best-known choirmasters, is the former director of the excellent children's choir heard here. Her sweet-toned and exuberant kids offer mostly unison singing, but they impress with their crisp delivery and accurate traversal of overlapping tunes. The bulk of the program is sung by Celtic Ayres, an excellent mixed chamber choir that leaves nothing to be desired.

Recorded sound is fine; notes are brief, but adequate. Gaelic texts are duly translated. This charming release will be of particular interest to Celtic devotees, but it'll bring out the Irish in just about any choral fan with a weakness for traditional fare.

KOOB

A Land of Pure Delight

Grace Episcopal Church, Charleston/ J Scott Bennett—Pro Organo 7173—75 minutes

Please forgive my play on the title of this excellent release, but Charleston, SC—where I am privileged to live and work and sing—is truly "a land of pure (musical) delight". In just over a quarter-century, since the Spoleto festival put Charleston on the cultural map, this former sleepy southern artistic backwater has regained its colonial-era stature as a significant American performing arts center. In the process, it has attracted quite a number of world-class musicians and institutions. David Stahl and his accomplished Charleston Symphony (plus Chorus) are but the tip of the iceberg.

The many beautiful and historic churches (and organs) of Charleston have attracted quite a few organist-choirmasters of true distinction, including Dr Bennett. I'd wager that no other American community of its size can boast as many truly excellent sacred music programs. That's one of the reasons I live here. About a half-dozen of the city's churches (predominantly Episcopalian) can claim choirs capable of at least intermittent professional-level performance. Not a season passes nowadays without profuse offerings of well-done sacred choral riches to an increasingly sophisticated musical public.

I must presume that my editor, knowing that I am an active participant in the Charleston choral scene, knew what he was doing when he sent me this release. Musicians get to know each other in a town of Charleston's size. I've sung for Dr Bennett myself, and I count many of his regular singers among my personal friends and colleagues. So I will at least partly dispel any notion you may be forming about conflict-of-interest by naming Grace Episcopal's music program the best of its kind in town. Despite my pride and joy in the choir I sing with (St Michael's), I'm forced to admit that no other local church ensemble can match Grace's range and depth of quality singers. Bennett's skill and stature as a leg-

endary organist and choirmaster—not to mention his magnificent and recently renovated Reuters organ—seals the package. These musicians are capable of giving any American church some stiff competition.

High points here include the 'Kyrie' from Louis Vierne's *Messe Solennelle*, the *Collegium Regale* mag-and-nunc set by Herbert Howells, and Herbert Sumsion's 'They that Go Down to the Sea in Ships'. The otherwise organ-accompanied adult singers show off their smooth a cappella skills in a lovely arrangement of the spiritual 'Steal Away' by Nicholas White. A hard-hitting missa brevis setting from William Mathias is a particular treat. The St Nicholas Choir, their sweet-sounding and expressive children's ensemble, gets to shine in 'Light of the World' by John Dankworth. And the organ sounds altogether magnificent, as usual.

We get choice sound from Grace's juicy acoustics and full texts from Pro Organo. With this rich collection, you will experience the considerable state of the choral art among Charleston's churches.

KOOB

Evensong & Vespers at King's

James Vivian, Robert Quinney, org; King's College Choir/ Stephen Cleobury

Columns 144—78 minutes

These peaceful and meditative evening liturgical sequences reflect the continuing King's College Choir tradition of music ministry beyond the confines of their community through the recording and broadcast of complete services. The services are here recorded without their spoken parts (lessons and prayers).

We first hear an all-Latin Vespers for the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Following a short anonymous organ prelude, the music begins with plainchant antiphons and psalm-sequences sung by the men, later alternating with polyphonic settings including the trebles. Hans Leo Hassler's 'Ave Maris Stella' and 'Magnificat Octavi Toni' by Sebastian de Vivanco employ both chant and florid polyphony, while the concluding 'Salve Regina' by Francesco Cavalli is purely polyphonic. Mood and effect are hypnotically spiritual.

The second service, an Evensong for Advent, is typical of modern Anglican evensong services. The language is English, and the music—from more modern times—still contains unaccompanied chant-and-choral-response sequences, beginning with ones by Philip Radcliffe. Most of the remaining music is with organ. A lengthy setting of Psalm 50 from Thomas Attwood, chanted strophically and in harmony, precedes a fine Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis set by George Dyson. The Anthem is Edward Bairstow's ecstatic 'Lord, Thou hast Been our Refuge'. The service ends triumphantly with an Advent hymn: 'Hark, a Herald Voice is Calling', followed by an organ voluntary from Herbert Howells.

Some may find the smooth and somewhat affected sonorities of this quintessentially English cathedral choir "sexless" and unappealing, but I find them utterly beautiful and entirely suited to the sacred tasks at hand. I'll grant that I'm favorably predisposed to this tradition, having grown up in it. But, after all, the innocent purity of prepubescent boys' voices is precisely what has inspired their liturgical use over the centuries, and their older colleagues have been obliged to cultivate a contrived sort of vocal clarity in order to match their sound.

Very nicely recorded, this inspiring release includes brief but adequate notes and full texts—though the Latin ones are not translated.

KOOB

Shakespeare in Song

Phoenix Bach Choir/ Charles Bruffy

Chandos 5031—56 minutes

Shakespeare settings have never gone out of choral fashion. What greater poesy doth the language offer? This utterly beguiling collection of the finest a cappella Shakespeare settings is sung to perfection by a leading American choir.

Several of the composers honored are new or only somewhat familiar to me. Major Alan Murray (1890-1952) is unknown, save for the few pieces he left us, including the basic but lovely 'O Mistress Mine' heard here. Steven Sametz (b 1954) is not quite a stranger, having composed for several leading domestic choirs, including Chanticleer—whose late founder Louis Botto he memorialized in an enchanting treatment of Juliet's 'When He shall Die' soliloquy.

The Bard thrives even in non-traditional idioms. William Harris (b 1956) offers seven striking settings from his *Shakespeare Songs* that leave no doubt as to his American heritage. His style recalls his primal rock, blues, and jazz influences—but in an overall context of skillful harmonic invention and classical sophistication. Shakespeare sings the blues? It works! Nils Lindberg (b 1933) contributes a sultry, subtly jazzy illumination of the sonnet, 'Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?'.

Choral tributes to 9-11 continue to appear, including the coincidental one here from American master Dominick Argento. He found prescient meaning in the "lofty towers I see

down-raz'd" of Sonnet LXIV, inspiring him to craft a dark and somber setting that reflects our collective grief and helpless fear in the face of new and unseen enemies.

I've covered several of contemporary Finnish composer Jaako Mäntyjärvi's ingenious works, like the *Four Shakespeare Songs* included here. This is a composer with a sense of humor—as proved in his wacky yet eerie treatment of 'Double, Double, Toil and Trouble' (*Macbeth's* witches). His 'Full Fathom Five' is an evocative marvel.

The finest works are by Frank Martin (*Songs of Ariel*) and Ralph Vaughan Williams (Three Shakespeare Songs). Martin's five evocations of Ariel's "Airy Spirit"—from *The Tempest*—are surely among the greatest and most delightfully fantasy-ridden Shakespeare settings we have. Sheer choral magic pervades the English master's pieces—especially as heard from this choir. His matchless realization of 'Full Fathom Five' (one of four versions heard here) is outshone only by the puckish delight of 'Over Hill, Over Dale' from *A Midsummer's Night Dream*.

Where has this fabulous choir been all my life? I've heard several outstanding efforts from Robert Shaw protege Charles Bruffy with his Kansas City Chorale, but I've never heard him at the helm of this brilliant Arizona group before. No choral strength you can name eludes them. They easily surpass the last Shakespeare collection I reviewed (M/A 2004, p 241—many of the same pieces).

Chandos's usual lucid and unaffected notes, full texts, and resplendent SACD-hybrid sound conspire with irresistible choral wizardry to make this an absolute must.

KOOB

Come, Holy Spirit

Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity
FINZI: *God Is Gone Up;* **VICTORIA:** *Ascendens Christus;* **BYRD:** *Alleluia. Ascendit Deus;* **LOBO:** *Regina Caeli Laetare;* **PALESTRINA:** *Veni Sancte Spiritus; Spiritus Sanctus;* **TALLIS:** *If Ye Love Me; O Lord, Send Thy Holy Spirit; Loquebantur Variis Linguis;* **HARVEY:** *Come, Holy Ghost;* **LASSUS:** *Tibi Laus, Tibi Gloria;* **TAVENER:** *Prayer to the Holy Trinity;* **GUERRERO:** *Duo Seraphim;* **LEIGHTON:** *Let All the World*
George Parsons, org; Queen's College Choir/ Owen Rees—Guild 7276—58 minutes

This recording by the choir of The Queen's College, Oxford, is a sequel to their program of music for Holy Week and Easter (*Christ Rising*; Guild 7222; March/April 2002, p 217). I noted that the pieces on the earlier recording "come from two rather narrow chronological and stylistic bands", the late Renaissance and the 20th Century. The same is true of the present program. The earliest composer is Tallis. The program includes no choral music written in the more than 300 years between Duarte Lobo (d 1646) and Gerald Finzi's 'God Is Gone Up' (1951). This is not necessarily a fault. Despite the differences in musical language, there can be a remarkable aesthetic affinity between Renaissance and 20th-Century music. The only pieces here that fall in the 300-year gap are three organ chorales for Pentecost by JS Bach, taken from the 18 Leipzig Chorales and *Clavierübung III*.

All but two of the choral works are unaccompanied. The exceptions are the anthems by Finzi and Leighton that open and close the program. The organ of The Queen's College is an exquisite instrument dating from 1965 by the Danish builder Frobenius. No one would describe its tone as hefty. One of my Oxford contemporaries remarked that full organ at Queen's is like full swell anywhere else. The difficulty here is that all the organ accompaniments and solo pieces really do require more heft than the Frobenius has to offer. Apart from that, the Finzi and Leighton performances are highly persuasive. (It is worth noting that Leighton was an undergraduate of The Queen's College starting in 1947.)

Two works are worthy of special note. The first is a rarity: the double-choir 'Regina Caeli' by Portuguese composer Duarte Lobo, who was master of music at Lisbon Cathedral from the 1590s until the 1640s. As a musicologist, Owen Rees is a specialist in Spanish and Portuguese music of this period, and here he conducts the choir in an unpublished edition of this music that he prepared in collaboration with Jos, Abreu. The second is Sir John Tavener's 'Prayer to the Holy Trinity', a work commissioned in 1996 by Owen Rees and the Cambridge Taverner Choir, another ensemble he directs. According to the program notes, this is the first recording of this music. As one might expect, the piece is redolent of the composer's Orthodox spirituality. A semi-chorus sings a chordal litany in various modes, while the main choir declaims a series of supplications, sometimes in unison against a vocal drone, sometimes in thirds.

The choir is a mixed ensemble (7-7-8-8) with female sopranos and male and female altos. Their technical standard is very high: a smooth and refined straight tone with good blend and excellent choral discipline. Here and there (for example, in Tallis's 'If Ye Love Me') I thought them a trifle dispassionate, but that is a matter of taste.

GATENS

Gloria

choirs/ Helmuth Rilling
Hänssler 98475—75 minutes

This is essentially an ear-teasing musical catalog for the many outstanding recordings from German choral patriarch Helmuth Rilling on the Hänssler label. Each selection is a movement from a large-scale choral masterpiece with orchestra. Most are from the great German(ic) composers: Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, and Bruckner. The only two outsiders are Dvořak and Cherubini. Simply recall the best choral works from these composers, and you'll probably have the contents of this one covered.

Rilling leads his usual assortment of top choirs with the hallmark Teutonic clarity, vigor, and spiritual punch that have made him one of the world's best-known choral specialists. We hear him at the helm of his own Gächinger Kantorei and Bach Collegium of Stuttgart, as well as the Prague Chamber Choir and Oregon Bach Festival forces.

Sound is variable, but always excellent. Hänssler knows how to record choirs. There are no notes or texts, only references to the excerpted recordings. Warning: if it affects you as it did me, this one could end up costing you some money.

KOOB

Genesis Suite

Schoenberg, Shilkret, Tansman, Milhaud, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Toch, Stravinsky
Ernst Senff Choir, Berlin Radio Orchestra/ Gerard Schwarz—Naxos 559442—55 minutes

All of the above composers, save Hollywood composer-arranger Nathaniel Shilkret, were pre-WW II immigrants to America. All but Stravinsky were Jewish. By the late 1930s all had settled in California, where several of them were employed as film composers. Shilkret had long envisioned writing a series of "musical frescoes" based on the Old Testament and had even begun work on his attempt at the Creation story. As he felt incapable of completing the project on his own, he asked Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (who also wrote "symphonic illustrations" of the Bible, like *Naomi and Ruth*, J/F 2004) to undertake the story of the Flood, as well as to help him recruit further participants.

From there, networking in the immigrant community soon brought Alexandre Tansman, Darius Milhaud, and Ernst Toch into the fold. Shilkret himself got both Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky to contribute, despite their long-standing mutual animosity. Bartok, Hindemith, and Prokofieff were also asked—in vain.

The finished work was premiered in Los Angeles in November 1945 to mixed public and critical acclaim and was recorded shortly thereafter. The full score and orchestral parts were later destroyed in a fire, leaving only the separately published movements by Schoenberg and Stravinsky apparently extant. Later sleuthing at the behest of the Milken Archive turned up the unpublished scores of Milhaud and C-T. The missing three movements were then carefully restored by Hollywood orchestrator Pat Russ from condensed score-sketches found on file at the US Copyright Office and from the original recording.

It all adds up to a fascinating and incredibly diverse musical pastiche that is well worth the effort that went into rescuing it. After Schoenberg's Prelude for orchestra and wordless choir, there are six narrated movements for chorus and orchestra: Shilkret's 'Creation', Tansman's 'Adam and Eve', Milhaud's 'Cain and Abel', 'The Flood' by Castelnuovo-Tedesco, 'The Covenant' by Toch, and Stravinsky's 'Babel'. The suite contains predictable stylistic extremes, as the various composers worked independently. But their shared mission—to musically illustrate the foundations of Judeo-Christian beliefs—led to grand, cinematically conceived music from most of them.

Schoenberg's skillfully manipulated tone rows make for an eerie, but musically orderly evocation of primordial chaos, while setting an expectant and reverent tone. Shilkret, in perhaps the most cinematic-sounding music here, begins with his own rather atonal mini-prelude before underscoring the narrators' storytelling with dramatic and richly diatonic musical fabric. Wonder and suspense infuse Tansman's densely atmospheric and mostly tonal epic of Adam and Eve. The narrative declamation of the Creator's dire lines after the fall is especially true to his rhythmic design, adding weight and severity. Milhaud's short and punchy Cain-and-Abel episode is the angriest and most startling music here. Like Tansman, he writes episodically, also calling for precise rhythmic synchronization of narrations and music at emphatic moments.

With its creation-related stories covered, the suite takes something of a new turn with Castelnuovo-Tedesco's treatment of Noah's Ark. His striking and melodramatic treatment of the Flood story is highly illustrative, in keeping with the best Hollywood style.

Perhaps the suite's most radiant and comforting music comes from Toch. After a somber introductory fugue, the composer does a superb job of realizing the Lord's promise of a better future. Stravinsky finished

the work with the compact, but skillfully assembled Babel movement—though, as Schoenberg pointed out, it ends rather abruptly. The music is cast as a meaty passacaglia, including an intense fugal variation that mirrors the episode's linguistic and cultural confusion. Save for his characteristic musical economy and primitive aura, there's rather little here to suggest his signature musical styles and devices. He refused to profane the Creator by assigning His words to a narrator, presenting them instead as choral quotes.

Performances are outstanding and nicely recorded. While the work was originally performed with a single male narrator, it was decided that the texts would be divided for this effort among five distinguished actors: Tovah Feldshuh, Barbara Feldon, David Margulies, Fritz Weaver, and Isaiah Sheffer. Their readings were added after the music had been separately recorded.

As Naxos's usual excellent notes point out, this was an early instance of what we now call crossover music: a tenuous mix (in its day) of gaudy Hollywood kitsch and the sophisticated musical excellence that descended on southern California in the prewar years. I'm hardly surprised that its early critics were nonplussed. But such unlikely musical amalgams tend to ring less jarringly in the ears now. And it could only have happened in America. Try it—I think you'll really like it.

KOOB

La Jeune France

Jolivet, Messiaen, Daniel-Lesur
The 16/ Harry Christophers
Coro 16023—60 minutes

This release's title recalls the name of a movement or "school" of French composition that coalesced in the mid-1930s to promote the values of sincere emotional and spiritual expression. Messiaen was the apparent guiding spirit. It was a backlash in the face of "Les Six", whose flippant and hedonistic neoclassicism had ruled the roost in Paris since WW I.

The three striking a cappella works here were commissioned by Marcel Couraud for performance by his crack Paris vocal ensemble. His instructions were that the music should be in 12 parts, about 20 minutes long, and on the subject of love.

Andre Jolivet (1905-74) wrote *Epithalame* in 1953 for his wife on their 20th anniversary. Influenced by the avant-garde music of Schoenberg and Varese, he sought to develop here an exotic idiom, colored by the heavily percussive and ritualistic devices of music from Africa and Asia. The texts are of Hindu, Egyptian, Chinese, and Greek origins. I had some trouble making musical sense of the atonally craggy and driven first movement, but finally gave up on trying to analyze it and simply let it wash over me, with considerable effect. The lovely and erotically charged central slow movement gives way to a manic final episode. As verified by director Harry Christophers in his introduction to the program notes, this incredibly complex piece sounds like "almost an impossibility" to sing. There's but one other available recording: Rupert Huber with SW German Radio Chorus on Hänssler 93055.

I covered Olivier Messiaen's *Cinq Rechants* (1948) quite recently (Martin, N/D 2004—RIAS Chamber Choir). This account is just as spellbinding, but I was able to follow it better here—as an attempt was made to translate its confusing text. It is a jumble of French and various exotic and ancient languages. It's the most blatantly erotic work of the lot. You'd be hard-pressed to find a more realistic musical evocation of a shattering orgasm—complete with frantic buildup and afterglow—than its third movement.

Jean Yves Daniel-Lesur (1908-2002) did not share his colleagues' penchant for foreign exoticism, being influenced more by the French folk-tradition and Charles Tournemire, his teacher. *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, his setting of the biblical *Song of Songs*, bridges the gap between the erotic and the divine very effectively. The piece is richly harmonic and spiced with whiffs of ancient modalities, but it's neither as tonally adventurous nor as highly charged (nor as difficult) as the preceding works. The only other account of it I can find is on ASV 900 (J/F 1995).

Hats off and bend the knee before Mr Christophers and his sizzling Sixteen, as this disc is a truly stupendous choral achievement. May the saints keep me from ever having to sing such infernally abstruse and difficult music! Small wonder that these pieces are so seldom performed. Christophers, with good reason, calls this his proudest moment with these singers. While I've enjoyed other releases from them more, this is still a choral adventure worth embarking on. But you may well need patience and tolerance to get through some of it—especially the Jolivet.

KOOB

A Fool's Gold

Songfellows—MSR 1102—58 minutes

The Songfellows is an exuberant and highly musical male vocal quartet drawn from the Metropolitan Opera Men's Chorus. They obviously had great fun putting together this light-

hearted and often amusing program for the times when we need a break from heavier fare.

The album begins with pieces from the great masters, the first being a zany a cappella version of Mozart's *Magic Flute* overture arranged by Albert Lortzing in 1833 for the male chorus he belonged to. But Haydn contributes the genuine article: 'An die Frauen' (with piano), one of the part-songs for three or four voices that he wrote quite late in life (1899).

The still-thriving Germanic male chorus tradition was especially strong in the 19th Century, and most of the prominent Germanic composers fed it with unaccompanied part-songs. From that tradition we hear three lively little pieces from Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Schumann, including two drinking songs. The level of sophistication (and difficulty) rises abruptly with 'Das Verfluchte Geld' (accursed money), a folk-influenced piece from 1939 by Hindemith.

Barbershop quartet style and spirit emerge with Irving Berlin's most enjoyable and humorous *Four Vaudeville Songs*. But my funny bone was hit the hardest by Arthur Frackenpohl's irreverent *Essays on Women*, setting seven of Ogden Nash's wacky verses with deadpan Ivesian wit. I laughed out loud, though perhaps some feminists wouldn't. The program comes to a toe-tapping close with Arthur Cunningham's 'Honey Brown', a delightfully sensual tribute to the Black street-quartet tradition. These gents have both the soul and the swing to bring it off beautifully.

These four fine singers have been performing together since 1992. Their blend is quite smooth for such a small ensemble, but it seems a bit dominated by their top-end tenor and bass—distinctive voices that your ears can invariably pick out of the vocal fabric. The inner voices are always there, but sound more neutral—more like disembodied points of harmony. But that's a small gripe, as their sound still pleases, and their infectious spirit captivates.

Sound is fine, notes are brief but useful, and texts are English-only, even for the numbers sung in German. This is singing for the sheer and simple joy of it.

KOOB

Anthems from Cambridge

Trinity College Choir/ Richard Marlow
Griffin 4045—74 minutes

This is an attractive collection of 22 choral items, many fairly unfamiliar. It is a reissue of music recorded in 1984 (12 items) and 1986 (10), so you might want to check if you already have them.

There are also five lesser known pieces from Benjamin Britten, including both of his settings of the *Jubilate Deo* (1934 & 1961). Like the earlier *Jubilate* Britten's setting of the *Venite* had not been published when he died. Two less familiar pieces are excerpts from longer works: 'Deus in Adjutorium Meum' (Psalm 70) is from the 1945 incidental music to Ronald Duncan's play *This Way to the Tomb* and 'Carry Her Over the Water' is from *Paul Bunyan* and heard here in an arrangement by Colin Matthews.

Britten's teacher, Frank Bridge, is represented by six quite short songs, each one charmingly unaffected, skillfully crafted. More familiar choral territory is represented by William Walton's 'Set Me as a Seal' and Ralph Vaughan Williams's 'O Clap Your Hands' and *O Taste and See*.

The rest of the collection represents the glorious conservative Anglican choral tradition as espoused by Sir Charles Villiers Stanford ('Ye Choirs of New Jerusalem'), Charles Wood ('Hail, Gladdening Light' and 'Expectans, Expectavi'), Gustav Holst ('Turn Back, O Man'), Sir Edward Bairstow ('Let All Mortal Flesh'), Sir William Harris ('Faire is the Heaven', John Ireland ('Greater Love Hath No Man') and, the almost obligatory selection from Herbert Howells ('O Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem').

The choir performs most felicitously and has a winning way with the music, particularly in the seductive, intimate, quieter passages. The recorded ambience of a fine ecclesiastical edifice is excellently captured. While the enclosed booklet has a beautiful color engraving of Cambridge on its cover, its contents are minimal: brief notes, no texts.

PARSONS

Elly Ameling

Opera & Concert Arias by Mozart & Schubert
English Chamber Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic/ Edo de Waart
Penta Tone 5186133 [SACD] 66 minutes

These opera and concert arias were recorded by the well-known Dutch soprano in 1972, at the height of her fame; this is apparently their first release on CD. Ameling avoided opera; her only operatic stage appearances, according to the notes, took place as Ilia in Mozart's *Idomeneo* in Amsterdam in 1973. On this release she sings Zerlina's two arias as well as Cherubino's, Susannah's 'Deh Vieni', and Fiordiligi's 'Come Scoglio', with their introductory recitatives, as well as four Mozart concert arias. The Schubert arias are from operas that are very rarely performed.

Ameling was known for the purity and

pretty timbre of her voice, her ability to sing softly without loss of vocal beauty, her excellent diction, and her charm. Zerlina's and Cherubino's arias profit from these qualities, and she sings them all very smoothly. Yet I found Cherubino's 'Non so Piu' lacking in the youthful, irresistible exuberance that it needs and that others—for example, Frederica Von Stade—have brought to it. Zerlina's 'Vedrai, Carino' lacks its saucy, almost erotic flavor; you wouldn't know, from listening to Ameling, that Zerlina is telling Masetto that she can cure his wounds by granting him sexual favors. And 'Come Scoglio' is a stretch for her; while her high notes are brilliant, the aria's important low notes are weak, and her presentation as a whole lacks dramatic effectiveness. That aria needs a larger and more colorful voice.

The four concert arias, two of which were composed for insertion into Martin y Soler's opera buffa *Il Burbero di Buon Core*, are well sung but without the theatrical flair that might make them memorable. Ameling's lack of theatrical experience may account for this.

Two of the Schubert arias are from his *singspiel Claudine von Villa Bella*; they are rather trivial. The others are from his operas and are more affecting. Lieschen's aria from *Die Zwillingsbrüder* (The Twin Brothers) expresses the feelings of a young woman whose father still thinks of her as a child, and Helene's Romance from *Die Verschworenen* (The Conspirators) portrays her fear for her husband. Both touch one's heart strings in the way that Schubert's songs often do. They are beautifully performed by this fine artist.

DeWaart offers good orchestral support. Texts, translations, and good sound.

MOSES

Jaume Aragall

Songs by Bassani, Durante, Tosti, Cardillo, Bellini, Puccini, De Curtis, Sorozabal, Freire, Di Capua, Pennino

with Amparo Garcia Cruells, p
Columna 84—52 minutes

Aragall (whose first name has been variously given as Giacomo, Jaime, and Jaume—Italian, Spanish, and Catalan) was a useful tenor in the 60s and 70s. He had something of the clean, straightforward style of Alfredo Kraus, but with a warmer, richer voice. His best recordings were made for Decca; among them are *Traviata* with Lorengar, and *Esclarmonde* and *Lucrezia Borgia* with Sutherland. He was most often criticized for his vagueness of intonation, but he was a fine singer when he had it under control. I thought he had retired some time ago, and after hearing this 1999 recital (given in Barcelona) I wish he had. The voice is rock-hard, bone-dry, and none too steady. He has retained his instincts for the Italian style, but he is past the point where he can carry out his good intentions.

LUCANO

Cleopatra

Isabel Bayrakdarian, s; Tafelmusik/ Jeanne Lamon—CBC 5233—66:16

Buy this disc!! Let me make clear from the outset—it is a gem!

This Canadian soprano of Armenian background has charged onto the international opera scene in the past five years or so and has establisher herself as an outstanding exponent of roles in the operas of Handel, Gluck, Mozart, and Rossini. In this and the previous season, for instance, she made a hit as Susanna and Zerlina at the Chicago Lyric Opera. She has made two previous recordings of ethnic material for CBC but herewith makes her operatic debut on discs. And it is a sensational one.

She has the fascinating idea of tracing the way four 18th Century composers—all Germans by birth, three of them writing in Italian—portrayed the same historical character in their operas. And that character is certainly one of the most fascinating women of all time.

Of the four operas, two are available in full elsewhere. Handel's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (1724) is, of course, one of the masterpieces of baroque opera, recorded with a frequency than needs no documentation here. Carl Heinrich Graun (c1703-59) composed his *Cleopatra e Cesare* for the opening of the Royal Opera House in Berlin in 1742, and Ren, Jacobs prepared a modern revival of it at the Berlin Staatsoper in 1992 to celebrate its 250th anniversary. That production was recorded for Harmonia Mundi (originally 901561, reissued as 2901561, 3CD); a different run of that production, with at least four of the same lead soloists, was captured in a 3-CD release from the obscure Serenissima label (oddly reversing the title to *Cesare e Cleopatra*).

I have been unable so far to trace any recording, in full or part, of *Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra* (1725) by Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783), which is technically a *serenata*, not a full opera. In its Naples premiere, the famous castrato Farinelli took the role not of Mark Antony but of Cleopatra[!], while Mark Antony was played by the female contralto Vittoria Tesso. (How's that for baroque in gender-bending?)

Perhaps the most fascinating music of all is the set of excerpts from *Cleopatra* (1704), composed for the Hamburg Opera by the versatile tenor, keyboardist, composer, theorist, and lexicographer, Johann Mattheson (1681-1764). Part of its interest is biographical. Mattheson

not only composed the opera but he sang the role of Mark Antony. At the premiere, when his character died on stage, Mattheson rushed into the pit, intending to direct the rest of the performance from the harpsichord. But his friend and associate, Handel, who had been directing to that point, refused to yield the leadership. The ensuing fight led to a duel where (according to Mattheson) Handel's life was spared because a button on his coat deflected Mattheson's sword. (They quickly reconciled, by the way.) But the interest also lies in the revelation of what music there is in this opera—especially in the extraordinary death scene in its Act III, with the orchestra depicting the serpent's flicking fangs and the coursing of its venom. Too little of Mattheson's music has made it to recordings; these excerpts make clear that it should be investigated. There were real German operas before Mozart.

I am a little puzzled by the way the selections have been organized in this really quite sophisticated program. As is, we have essentially bravura writing in the Graun and Hasse excerpts (three arias each), with sensuality and grieving in the two Handel items (the famous 'V'adoro Pupille', and "Piangerò, la Sorte mia' with its recitative), the Mattheson selections bringing in a whole spectrum of emotions in themselves. But, to make the selections correspond more closely to the unfolding of Cleopatra's career, it would have made sense to place the Handel excerpts either before or after Graun and before Hasse's. Moreover, in the Mattheson excerpts, placing an Act I aria between the two Act III segments, rather than ahead of them, is dramatically disruptive.

But the singing is simply stunning. Bayrakdarian is a marvel: technique to burn, a full-blooded soprano sound, bright at the top but sustained by a well-rounded body of tone. Just to check my reactions, I compared Bayrakdarian's singing of the three Graun selections with their counterparts in the Harmonia Mundi recording. Jacobs's clear-voiced and agile Janet Williams is quite fine, but Bayrakdarian adds ever so much vocal body, richness of color, personality, and just plain dash to her renditions. On the other hand, I compared her singing of 'Piangerò' from Handel's *Cesare* with Ann Murray's in the reissue of her program of Handel arias (this issue). Bayrakdarian portrays a strong personality in befuddled defiance, but she cannot approach the far more moving rendering of heart-breaking vulnerability that Murray achieves. Clearly, Bayrakdarian still has things to learn about inflection and embellishment from a veteran like Murray. Switching easily from Italian to German for Mattheson, Bayrakdarian creates a character of genuinely tragic proportions. Her death scene evokes serious comparison with the Berlioz cantata, *The Death of Cleopatra*.

Lamon contributes predictably secure and strong period-instrument support. The booklet gives not only texts and translations, but background information of unusual thoroughness, setting each excerpt in its context.

This is a singer who should have a brilliant future. Let us hope that she will soon be allowed to record a full role in a complete baroque opera, especially Handel, and develop her art still further.

Did I make myself clear? Nobody who loves great operatic singing and great baroque opera should miss this release.

BARKER

Mosaic

Angela M Brown, s; Joseph Joubert, p; Tyron Cooper, g—Albany 721—55 minutes

Because Angela Brown places most of these 16 spirituals in her mid-range, it took a while combing the liner notes to certify that she is indeed a soprano. The album starts slowly because, in the first six selections, she exhibits a mellow voice and a controlled vibrato but practically no style of any kind—certainly nothing from the Negro spiritual tradition. I finally concluded it's because of the arrangements, mostly by Brown and guitarist Cooper. Terrific as his playing is, the arrangements are part bluegrass and part nightclub, particularly the harmonies and progressions.

It's not until Brown gets to the seventh spiritual, 'O Glory', which she performs without accompaniment, that her clear articulation and the fuller substance of her operatic voice are unleashed and enriched with her own individual imprint that has "tradition" linked to it. There follow seven more spirituals, this time accompanied by pianist Joubert. Even though his instrument sounds like some beaten rehearsal piano that'll never be tuned well again, the arrangements allow Brown to ripen into a richer traditional style. And when she finally reaches her second solo without accompaniment, 'Lord, How Come Me Here' ("I wish I was never born" is practically the rest of the title), her wide-ranging melismas will sear your soul, especially when "they saw her chill'en away". The album ends with 'Ride Up in the Chariot' with all three artists letting loose in a veritable jam session, which ends in a corny manner with an artificial fade and the artists' "see how cute we are" comments dubbed over the fade.

On the whole, I doubt that I will keep this. I can think of several other such colllections that have far more soul, including Leontyne

Price's 1961 sessions with conductor Leonard de Paur and 1970 recordings with the Rust College Choir (on "The Essential Leontyne Price", RCA 68157), or a couple of spirituals on Kathleen Battle's Sony album ("Grace"). But there is one thing Brown's album has that most others don't: many unusual selections. Here are the ones not already named: Every Time I Feel the Spirit, Roun'about de Mountain, Lord I Just Can't Keep from Cryin', My Soul's Been Anchored, City Called Heaven, Give Me Jesus, Come Down Angels, He Never Said a Mumblin' Word, Watch and Pray, Walk Together Children, Deep River, This Little Light of Mine, He's Got the Whole World in His Hands. Engineering is balanced and warm except for that piano.

FRENCH

Denyce Graves

French Opera Arias
Monte Carlo Philharmonic/ Marc Soustrot
Virgin 62277—58 minutes

This 1993 recording (a reissue—Sept/Oct 1994: 260) finds Graves in good vocal estate, which means lots of rich, smoky, voluptuous tone—quite attractive for the most part. I've not always been enthusiastic about her performances because emotionally she has sometimes been rather generalized. For me her signature role of Carmen has never gone beneath the surface despite all that good singing. But on this recording she is by turns touching, seductive, tragic—whatever is needed.

The program has lots of variety. But it should have been longer. Why leave out Delilah's 'Amour, Veins Aider', Marguerites's King of Thule ballad, and Mignon's Act 2 aria? And I'd like to hear her in the other roles represented here, especially Marguerite and Charlotte. I hope Graves in 2005 sounds as good as she does here and that recent casting in roles such as Maddalena in *Rigoletto* doesn't indicate problems.

Texts and translations are supplied—a good thing given the unfamiliarity of some of the arias (how often does one hear the big *Favorite* scene in the original French?). One of Graves's best recordings. Maybe even her best.

MARK

Sueños de Amor

Heidi Grant Murphy, s; Aur,ole
Koch 7570—64 minutes

For a soprano of Heidi Grant Murphy's remarkable ability and solid reputation, this is a curiously low-key, even odd, release. *Sueños de Amor* is a collection of popular Latin American songs in attractive arrangements for the chamber ensemble Aureole (flute, viola, and harp) and several other musicians, including Mrs Murphy's husband at the piano. Several of the 16 songs, which include the well known 'Besame Mucho' and 'Tico-tico', are performed without Mrs Murphy's participation.

There are no texts, so what all the singing is about is anyone's guess, unless one speaks Spanish or Portuguese. Other than the biographies, there are no notes. This is a more serious problem, for we learn nothing about the program, the composers, or the motivation of the artists. Why was this album put together? What influenced the selection of the pieces?

The arrangements are always tasteful and often quite clever. Murphy sounds beautiful, as we would expect. On occasion, as in Eusebio Delfin's 'En el Tronco de un Arbol', one hears a bit of effort at the very top of the staff; but for the most part she's full voiced, with a penetrating top that does not thin out and a delightful agility that I praised so much in her Arabesque release, *Clearings in the Sky* (Sept/Oct 2001).

The recording does not exaggerate Murphy's contributions, a potential flaw one would have almost expected. The engineering, though, does have a slight artificial quality. One senses the musicians were mixed together in pop music fashion rather than recorded together, but then this *is* popular music.

While I would prefer to hear Murphy tackle more Strauss, as she did in *Clearings*, she at least acquits herself well in this popular Latin fare. And she sure beats Britney Spears.

BOYER

Men's Songs, Women's Voices

Harbison, Schubert, Saint-Saëns, Fauré Massenet, Korngold, Wilson
Georgine Resick, s; Warren Jones, p
Bridge 9152—70 minutes

When is a theme for an album so loose that it is not a theme at all? Perhaps *Men's Songs, Women's Voices* can serve as an example. Recorded are 22 songs by 7 composers from different backgrounds and periods, beginning with Schubert, born at the end of the 18th Century, and ending with Richard Wilson, born in 1941. Among them there is neither unity of style nor of artistic temperament. The only common thread in the fabric of this album is that the texts for all the songs were written by women. But among these women there is also nothing in common. They represent widely divergent origins, backgrounds, life spans, and styles. The only thing they have in common is their gender, which is the only thing the composers have in common too. The result is a collection that is more arbitrary than cohesive.

Of soprano Georgine Resick and pianist Warren Jones's last Bridge recording, a collection of Grechaninoff songs (Nov/Dec 2004), I wrote, Resick sings with a sweet but ample voice. Warren Jones handles the accompaniments with ease. The engineers have captured both realistically, with an especially satisfying presence to the piano." This time around things are less satisfying. The sound is not spacious enough. Worse, unless she is singing at full volume, Resick sounds as if she were standing several feet behind the piano. It's not merely a matter of volume, but of perceived spatial relation. The persistent sense of her voice trying to emerge *through* the piano is tiring on the ears. Resick and Jones both perform like the capable professionals that they are, but the engineering lets them down.

Original songs texts are not included, but English translations are supplied. The notes focus almost entirely on the poets. We learn nothing about Richard Wilson, for example, nor anything about Korngold's decision to compose his Op. 27 collection, *Unvergänglichkeit*. The inclusion of this last, one of the composer's least recorded works, is enough for me to keep this release for my own collection, but not quite enough to recommend it to others.

BOYER

Il Barbaro Dolore

18th Century Arias & Cantatas

Ruth Rosique, s; Capella de Ministrers/ Carles Magraner—Licanus 306—60:14

The aim of this program is to document the transition in Spanish musical life of the 18th Century from an emphasis on traditional Spanish sources to music heavily influenced by Italian styles. Though the change is perhaps overstated, and at least some of the music offered here was really for export rather than domestic consumption, the focus is stimulating, introducing us to composers we ordinarily hear little of.

Six composers are represented. From a collection published about 1706 by Frey Antonio Martin y Coll (c1680-ca.1735), we have six treatments of regional Spanish dances (including the *Folia*). Further on, there is a short three-movement *Concierto Favorito* for two flutes and strings by Joan Baptista Pla (c1730-c1785), chief member of a family of Catalan of wind virtuosos, who spent many of his years outside of Spain as a travelling virtuoso.

The four vocal pieces—three chamber cantatas (really recitative-and-aria combinations) and an opera aria—are perhaps even more interesting, though two of the composers involved pursued their careers outside of Spain. The aria is from the opera *La Merope* by Catalan composer Domingo Terradellas (1713-51), first performed in Rome (1743), where he operated before moving to Naples and then London. (I know of one record largely devoted to this composer's music: LMG 2028, July/Aug 1999.) And another discovery among female composers is Anna Maria Martinez (1744-1812), who spent most of her life in Naples and Vienna.

Of course, Italian had become the fashionable musical language in Spain, which welcomed the two immigrants who are our remaining composers, each represented by a two-movement Italian cantata. Neapolitan Nicola Conforto (1718-88) settled in Madrid in 1755 and became an associate of Carlo Broschi (1705-82), better known as the superstar castrato Farinelli. At the peak of his sensational performing career, Farinelli settled in Madrid and for the next 23 years held sway over the king and the court, dominating not only the Spanish musical scene but a lot of its government as well. While we remember him now for his vocal career, he was a gifted instrumentalist (harpsichord, viola da gamba) and a composer as well. Some seven vocal pieces survive from his hand, and this one, another recitative-and-aria, 'Ogni di Piu Molesto', we know was composed in 1753 for King Ferdinand VI. Written for castrato, it is a miniature digest of the vocal techniques that made Farinelli so famous. For that alone, this release will appeal to fans of baroque singing.

While none of these pieces offers any musical revelations, they are all tuneful and enjoyable, and together they do open up an area of neglected repertoire. The ensemble of nine instrumentalists is fully up to international standards, while Ruth Rosique (no biographical information) has a pleasing, mature voice, fully equal to any of the lyric or virtuosic demands of her selections.

In all, an enjoyable program, marred by only one flaw: another infernal case of the booklet bound inseparably into the gatefold album. Still, good notes and full texts with translations. But whose idea was the irrelevant cover art derived from a *16th* Century Virgil manuscript?

BARKER

Elisabeth Soderstrom

STRAUSS: *4 Last Songs; Capriccio Final Scene;* **RAVEL:** *Sheherazade;* **MOZART:** *Marriage of Figaro arias*

Royal Philharmonic/ Dorati; BBC Symphony/ Boulez; Liverpool Philharmonic/ Pritchard

BBC 4153—68 minutes

Alan Blyth's biographical essay in the booklet is titled "Souvenirs of a Much-Admired Artist",

which is how I have always felt about Soderstrom (I'd also add Much-Loved). She's always been one of the most versatile sopranos both on the opera stage and in concert. I was fortunate to hear her as Susanna and the Countess and as the Marschallin plus numerous times in concert, and her distinguished recordings of songs and such heroines as Melisande and three Janaček ladies under Mackerras are riveting.

The three BBC broadcasts represented on this disc cover a period of 16 years (Mozart 1960, Ravel 1971, Strauss 1976, the last in stereo) and display Soderstrom's voice and artistry in pristine condition despite the expected vocal aging. Soderstrom doesn't readily come to mind when I think of sopranos with opulent, soaring voices, yet she is both of these in the *Four Last Songs* and *Capriccio* scene. Her diction comes through despite a muffled acoustic—she completely understands what she is singing about—and she has the gleaming top and impeccable breath control needed by any self-respecting Strauss soprano. Moving performances, as are Soderstrom's accounts of the *Figaro* arias. Her understanding of Mozart is as strong as of Strauss (her Countess is one of the best elements of EMI's Klemperer *Figaro*).

I wish Soderstrom had performed more French music than she did in the flesh and on record. The *Sheherazade* is great. Ravel's heated, sensual, exotic music and Tristan Klingsor's words are vividly communicated and gorgeously sung.

I have no major complaints about the orchestras and conducting here. They're all excellent. Dorati could be a let's-get-on-with-it sort of maestro, but here he is a fine, expressive Straussian. Boulez, whom I often find too cold and analytical, gets a lot of color and warmth from the BBC forces. And I also like Pritchard, an underrated Mozartean who is more than a traffic cop in the *Figaro* standards. There are no texts and translations, but lovers of great, intelligent, charismatic singing, even if they are not proficient in the three languages, will definitely come away from this release feeling they have heard something quite distinguished.

MARK

Best of Tebaldi

Boheme, Tosca, Fanciulla, Butterfly, Turandot, Chenier, Adriana, Mefistofele

Decca 475 397—49 minutes

This latest addition to the Decca Classic Recitals series is a 1962 LP compilation from the late singer's completed opera sets, and its title is hard to dispute! Renata Tebaldi in her vocal prime means an incredibly moving, beautiful, magnificent vocal presence that many lovers of great singing cannot resist. Tebaldi always excelled in portraying the vulnerable ladies represented on this disc, and I would rank the complete performances as among the very best available.

Heard very briefly are Bergonzi, MacNeil, Del Monaco, and Siepi—a list of Tebaldi's colleagues reads like an operatic who's who—and the conductors include the venerable Serafin and Gavazzeni. Decca has not supplied texts and translations but has reprinted the original notes in hard-to-read mini-type. Tebaldi fanatics will already be thoroughly familiar with this material. Everyone else who thrills to a voice rich in humanity and warmth will surely enjoy these all-too-brief-tracks.

MARK

Julia Varady

from *Idomeneo, Tito, Arabella, Flying Dutchman, Meistersinger, Forza, Nabucco, Trovatore*

Orfeo 579041—76 minutes

Varady had the style and technique for Mozart and Strauss, the range and temperament for Verdi, and just enough voice for the lyric Wagner soprano roles. She was an intense, exciting singer, and we didn't hear enough of her in this country. (My recollections of her voice suggest that, for all its thrust and beauty, it was just a size too small for a house like the Met.) She had plenty to do in Europe, where her versatility kept her in high demand; but her home base was the Bavarian State Opera in Munich.

These excerpts from complete performances don't add much to her already large discography, but it's always a pleasure to hear her. I like the Verdi best. The voice soars excitingly in the upper range, and she acts passionately. The long Leonora-Guardiano duet from *Forza*, with the sonorous Kurt Moll, is the best thing on the disc, though Abigaille's 'Anch'io Dischiuso' and the arias from *Idomeneo* and *Tito* are also thrilling. I'm not quite sold on the German selections, where I find Varady's diction blurry, almost consonant-less. She brings a lovely glow to the *Meistersinger* quintet, to Senta's ballad, and to two excerpts from *Arabella* (where her Mandryka is her husband, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau), but I keep on wanting sharper words.

The recordings span the years 1975 to 1992, and Varady's voice shows no signs of aging. The conductors (Sawallisch, Klee, Sinopoli, Pinchas Steinberg) are expert, and the sound is consistently good.

LUCANO

Music for a While

Anne Sofie Von Otter, s; Jory Vinikour, hpsi & org; Jakob Lindberg, theorbo, lute, g; Anders Ericson, theorbo—DG Archiv 3460—69 minutes

As with some collections having somewhat nondescript titles, I thought this might be sort of boring and prosaic, but nothing could be further from the truth. I actually wish the artists had applied their title for the notes to the whole album: "Musical Virtuosity and Verbal Wit"—or some variation thereof. The entire album is much more operatic than I thought it would be, but it combines elements of opera with the intimacy of the art song, probably because of the influence of the rather intimate instruments chosen for accompaniment.

This is a very lively performance of a wide selection of baroque songs. Composers include Ferrari, Frescobaldi, Caccini, Kapsberger, Strozzi, Storace, and Johnson. Most have just one song, but there are three from Monteverdi, including a most gentle and moving rendition of 'Adagiati, Poppea' from *The Coronation of Poppea*. There are also five from Henry Purcell and four from John Dowland.

I recommend this for those who enjoy art song and who find many performances of songs from this time to be rather bland. Anne Sofie von Otter brings a good deal of flair to these pieces to make them entertaining listening and to bring out their essential humanity.

CRAWFORD

Novecento Italiano

Tosti, Cilea, Wolf-Ferrari, Respighi, Pizzetti, Refice, Cimara, Davico, Castelnuovo Tedesco, Petrassi, Menotti

Mara Zampieri, s; Bruno Volpato, p
Myto 43090—79 minutes

This interesting collection of Italian songs includes only one standard: Tosti's 'L'alba Separa dalla Luce l'ombra'. How often does one hear anything by Cilea other than *Adriana Lecouvreur* or vocal music by Wolf-Ferrari other than his opera buffas? And did you know that Menotti composed a song cycle for Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, the *Canti della Lontanza*? Pizzetti and Petrassi are not composers I associate with melodic Italian songs, yet their works here are pleasant discoveries. In fact all the songs on this program, though not masterpieces, are well worth getting to know.

Nevertheless, I have reservations about this record. The booklet first—texts in Italian only. Notes on the composers but nothing about the subject matter, and useless technical bits about the poetry, along with obligatory bios of Zampieri and her accompanist. Many people lacking a working knowledge of Italian will choose to avoid this.

Zampieri is not well known on its side of the Atlantic but has an enthusiastic following in Europe. A scheduled Met debut as Elisabetta di Valois was cancelled at the 11th hour (a source tells me she was fired). She was a huge voice with an edgy, sometimes very shrill top; it's very loud but capable of a wide dynamic range—she doesn't come to grief singing softly either. I grant that this is a very exciting voice sometimes. But it has always left me cold—the sound has no warmth. Maybe mine is a minority opinion. In these songs, recorded very close up (I had to do a lot of fiddling with the volume), Zampieri works hard to interpret the text and color her voice, and I wondered all the time what these songs would have sounded like sung by Tebaldi, Olivero, or Scotto.

MARK

A Night at the Opera

fr *Rigoletto, Tito, Faust, Boheme, Don Giovanni, Don Carlo, Hoffmann, Orlando, The Tempest, Trovatore, Pearl Fishers, Ariadne, Gianni Schicchi, Puritani*

Indra Thomas, Kristine Jepson, Matthew Polenzani, Mariusz Kwiechen, Valerian Ruminski; Royal Philharmonic/ Charles Rosekrans

Naxos 557309—71 minutes

The 45-minute solo aria disc was a staple of the LP era, but compact discs hold too much music. 70-minute recitals from new artists are seldom satisfactory, but collectors tend to feel cheated by shorter timings. Kudos to Naxos for coming up with a new idea: five young singers, one in each vocal category, share this disc. The variety of timbres and repertory forestalls boredom and also spares each individual singer the relentless glare of the solo spotlight.

I was previously acquainted only with the work of Polenzani, who has already established himself as a favorite with Met audiences. He has a pleasing, supple tenor voice with a strong upper range, and he's an alert, engaging performer, though not yet a fully polished one. The descent from the top C of Faust's aria is shapely and exquisite, but it's not matched by the somewhat clumsy approach on the other side. And that's characteristic of all these singers: fine, striking moments alternate with indifferent or unprepared ones. Bass Ruminski has difficulty with the divisions of 'Arise, Ye Subterranean Winds' from Purcell's *Tempest* when they move upward but not when they move downward. Mezzo Jepson is eager and spirited, and her coloratura is impressive in 'Parto, Parto'; but the voice sounds hard and stretched in 'Seien Wir Wieder Gut' from *Ariadne*. Soprano Thomas tackles, too ambitiously, both Zerlina and the *Trovatore* Leonora: how many sopra-

nos keep both roles in their repertories? She's a pretty Zerlina, but she can't control the high phrases of 'D'amor sull'ali Rosee'.

Polish baritone Kwiecien (he's the only non-American here) has an appealing, mellow voice, and he sings with unruffled aplomb. He addresses all his selections confidently and competently, and he's especially good in Rodrigo's paired arias from *Don Carlo*, where he shows great sensitivity to both words and musical line. The solos are interspersed with some surefire ensembles: the *Rigoletto* quartet, the final trio from *Faust*, the *Hoffmann* Barcarolle, the *Pearl Fishers* duet, and, to bring the program to a rousing conclusion, 'Suoni la Tromba' from *Puritani*.

The sound is excellent; Rosekrans is a strong, sympathetic conductor; texts and translations are supplied.

LUCANO

The Muse Surmounted

Homophone 1001 (VAI) 78:24

The German label Homophone was launched with a 78 rpm disc of Flemish tenor Ernst Van Dyck, recorded long past his prime in 1905. The label has been resurrected, and we have here 12 women singers, all well past their prime, including Florence Foster Jenkins. Gregor Benko is the producer, and he has come up with some amazing recordings. We sat here holding our sides to reduce the intensity after an evening of these—and we found it hard to decide which was the most remarkable. My vote was for Alice Gersti Duschak singing a Weber song. She was Marilyn Horne's teacher in Baltimore, and she made quite a few recordings well into the era of high fidelity—when she was old enough to have known better. (This one was in 1987.) But some of these women were famous for their vanity. She fought like a cat with another woman on the faculty, and she wore a striking black wig (picture in the fabulous booklet). The amazing thing about her singing is probably the enormous wobble—you could drive a truck thru it. Add in her very self-conscious, melodramatic "expressiveness" and you really have something.

Ray Hassard votes for Tryphosa Bates-Batcheller, who recorded for the same label as Florence Foster Jenkins in the mid-1940s. She sings a canzonetta from the opera *Margita* by Erik Meyer-Helmud, and the notes comment on her "staggering understanding of the murky depths of the aria". Indeed. David Schwartz, our bassoon reviewer, happened to be here and voted for Natalia de Andrade singing 'Je Marche' from Massenet's *Manon*. It's a 1960 recording with piano—quite good sound. By the time she had saved enough money to make a recording she was way over the hill, but so was everyone else on this record.

Rosalina Mello sings a Portuguese *fado*. Betty-Jo Schramm sings an aria by Graun ("an unsung pioneer of the early music movement...who was singing baroque music a half-tone flat long before it became fashionable to do so"). Olive Middleton sings Verdi's Miserere from *Trovatore*. She was at least 75 years old at the time. Norma-Jean Erdmann-Chadbourne gives us the tomb scene from Verdi's *Aida* with her husband supplying the tenor parts. This sounds like the same pair that gave us a glorious *Faust* duet on the other side of a Jenkins LP. Sylvia Sawyer is a mezzo who turned up on a few early LP operas. Like Norma-Jean, she came from Ohio. The notes tell us that her genius is all but imperceptible, even after frequent hearings.

Vassilka Petrova recorded a complete *Tosca* in 1951; here we hear a few hysterical excerpts. We are not surprised that she went thru six husbands. Marilyn Lyn sang on her own TV program and apparently thought she could sing opera. This is from 1984. This singer actually counterfeited four LPs of her singing, complete with the Philips logo, carefully copied. She sings 'Una Voce Poco Fa' "in all its ornamented, over-cadenzerized glory" (her words). Sara Bunchuk Wontner married a rich man who let her put on operas in the family theatre with herself as the star. We hear 'Sempre Libera' from *La Traviata*. She sounds like a movie star who couldn't sing but had to in the movies. After another song by Tryphosa Bates-Batcheller, Florence Foster Jenkins sings a piece written for her by Connie McMoon, who accompanies at the piano and then reminisces about her on the final track.

I suppose it is correct to describe this (as the album cover does) as "a celebration of the sincerity of the heart and transfixed dedication in singing that has otherwise gone unrecognized".

VROON

BAX: *Fanfare for a Cheerful Orchestra; Mater Ora Filium; Tintagel; Mediterranean; Overture to a Picaresque Comedy; Morning Song; Oliver Twist; Malta GC; Fanfare for the Wedding of Princess Elizabeth*
Harriet Cohen, p; Leeds Festival Choir; ensembles/ HE Adkins, Eugene Goossens, Hamilton Harty, Malcolm Sargent, Muir Mathieson, M Roberts—Symposium 1336—78 minutes

This anthology very usefully gathers up scarce material necessary to round out a collection of Arnold Bax's music. The various works, recorded between 1925 and 1947, necessarily come across as something of a rag-bag reflecting more the vagaries of what happened to be recorded than the general shape of the composer's oeuvre. As if in compensation, Symposium includes a substantial 1949 radio talk where the composer lays out his artistic credo with much bowing and scraping towards WB Yeats. The mystical and natural impulses the composer describes make but fleeting appearances in a set of performances that tend more towards brisk propriety than otherworldly yearnings.

This anthology is dominated by light music and occasional pieces, though it does include the important *Tintagel* recorded by Eugene Goossens with the New Symphony in 1928, coupled with the delightful *Mediterranean*. While Goossens was not a conductor inclined to meander about in the Celtic twilight, his sparkling performances delight in other ways. Hamilton Harty, Bax's ideal interpreter, is heard in a lively recording of the Overture to a Picaresque Comedy; would that he were heard in the tone poems. Bax's *Morning Song*, the piano part performed by the composer's longtime collaborator Harriet Cohen, is a late work and an instance of what Beecham once described as the "cow-pie" school of British music; it is certainly pleasing. The snippets of film music and ceremonial fanfares have, I suppose, at least a sort of documentary interest.

Symposium, while not given to elaborate restoration, has found good clean copies. Anglophiles will relish this generous collection.

RADCLIFFE

CORNELIUS: *The Barber of Baghdad*
Rudolf Schock (Nureddin), Gottlob Frick (Barber), Sena Jurinac (Margiana), Alfred Poell (Caliph), Hilde Rössl-Majdan (Bostana); Vienna Radio/ Heinrich Hollreiser

Preiser 20035 [2CD] 132 minutes

This is an Austrian Radio recording made in 1952 in conjunction with a revival of this comic opera by the Vienna State Opera and Volksoper. According to the notes, Schock and Frick were engaged for the recording in place of Anton Dermota and Otto Edelmann, who had sung the performances at the opera house. This is an excellent cast, almost as good as EMI's 1956 cast: Schwarzkopf, Gedda, and Oskar Czerwenka (M/A 1995).

This *Barber* is based on a story from the *Thousand and One Nights*. It was first presented in Weimar in 1858 under the baton of Franz Liszt. It still retains a minor place in the repertory of some German and Austrian opera houses, perhaps because it's a lighter and more lyric comedy than the ones by Lortzing and other 19th Century German composers. But it's not as light-hearted, scintillating or bubbly as Rossini's *Barber*.

The story deals with Nureddin's love for Margiana, the Cadi's beautiful daughter, who returns his affections but whom the Cadi wants to marry Selim, a rich merchant. Nureddin tries to improve his prospects by asking the barber Abul Hassan, a self-proclaimed genius and master of his craft, to give him a shave and a haircut. Abul does so, pontificating all the while on astrology, Nureddin's talents, and the fateful power of love; he's surely one of the most garrulous characters in opera. He even wants to accompany Nureddin to his rendezvous, but the young lover has him put to bed by his servants.

That doesn't stop the barber, who shows up at Margiana's house and, in order to protect Nureddin from imminent (he thinks) harm, summons a crowd to storm the Cadi's palace. Nureddin hides in a chest that Selim has sent, full of presents, to Margiana. After some complications, the Caliph arrives and forces the Cadi to give his daughter the "treasure" hidden in the chest. The lovers are happy, and the Caliph hires Abul to tell him fairy-tales.

It is enjoyable, though sometimes the humor is heavy-handed. This cast plays it fairly straight; in fact, Frick, as Abul, sometimes sounds Wagnerian in his declamations. But Schock is an impassioned, lyrical Nureddin, his attractive tenor in fine shape. He's better suited to this role than to the more dramatic ones he has recorded, like Stolzing and Bacchus. Jurinac doesn't have a big role, but she sings beautifully and partners Schock well in their duet. Poell is a resonant, impressive Caliph, but Erich Majkut bleats his way through the Cadi's brief part. Rössl-Majdan does as well as anyone as the busybody Bostana. Hollreiser's conducting is blander and less incisive than Leinsdorf's was on the EMI

set; I wished that he'd hurry up a bit when Abul sang his monologs.

A more serious problem is that Preiser, unlike EMI, doesn't include texts, only a synopsis of the plot. As a filler for CD 2, Preiser has extracted seven arias sung by Frick, from his Electrola recordings. He sings Osmin's three arias (from Mozart's *Abduction*) quite well; his solid low notes are a big asset here, but his lack of a sense of humor is not. The same applies to 'O sancta justicia' (from *Zar und Zimmermann*). Frick also sings King Philip's 'Ella giammai m'amo' (from *Don Carlo*) in German; but it's too perfunctory for such a complex piece. He does better with Falstaff's drinking song 'Als Büblein Klein' from Nicolai's *Merry Wives of Windsor*. The monaural sound is quite acceptable.

MOSES

DVORAK: *Carnival Overture; Symphony 9; Nocturne;* **BRAHMS:** *Hungarian Dances 5+6*
Halle Orchestra/ Hamilton Harty, Leslie Heward
Halle 8000 — 54 minutes

Hamilton Harty was born in 1879 and grew up in a culture where Dvorak's works were contemporary music. More than most composers, Dvorak gains from being heard in early performances where the rhythmic freedom and pronounced portamento corresponds to the lyrical sweep of melody the composer had in mind. Harty was given to fast and shifting tempos that make his performances of Dvorak memorable and exciting experiences, though musical purists had best have nothing to do with them. The tempos in his 1927 *Carnival Overture* are simply furious: fast, faster, fastest. The opening movement of the 1927 *New World Symphony* is likewise brisk, and the whole work seems to fly by, in part because of the absence of repeats, which in the early days of electrical recording were a luxury seldom indulged. The kinetic energy Harty generates is not simply a matter of speed; it derives from accelerations, pauses, and strongly-marked contrasts between sections. The orchestra does not play effortlessly but with an aroused effort that communicates excited delirium. As an interpreter of the symphony Harty lacks the depth and sensuous warmth found in Stokowski's early recordings; his was really a less stuffy, more out-of-doors manner calculated to please simple tastes.

By contrast, Leslie Heward's 1941 performance of the Nocturne is pretty tame stuff. The Hungarian Dances recorded by Harty in 1929 are as thunderous as one might expect. The engineers have done good work, making this a very attractive proposition to listeners in pursuit of new worlds of recorded sound.

RADCLIFFE

LISZT: *Piano Concertos 1+2; Hungarian Fantasy; Hungarian Rhapsodies 9+11*
Claudio Arrau, Frankfurt Radio Orchestra/ Rosbaud; New York Philharmonic/ Cantelli; Philadelphia Orchestra/ Ormandy
Archipel 260—75 minutes

Because of his association with Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, and Brahms, we may tend to forget that Arrau, a pupil of an important Liszt pupil (Martin Krause), was one of the preeminent Liszt interpreters of the 20th Century. This release of his remastered earlier recordings is therefore well worth looking into.

The full brilliance of the E-flat Concerto is diminished by the somewhat stodgy orchestral accompaniment—surprising when we see that the conductor was the excellent Hans Rosbaud. But Arrau's pianism in this 1935 recording (when he was 32) is electrifying. It also has an unusual improvisatory quality, which injects an ambience of spontaneity. The sound is, overall, not more than acceptable; and the ringing of the triangle in Liszt's percussion section (affectionately called by him his "rabble"), the earmark of this piece, is only faintly audible.

The A-major Concerto, much more expressive and a definite advancement over the E-flat, embodies the mature development of Liszt's ideas of thematic transformation and is one of the really great works in the concerto repertoire, though it is not often recognized as such. Sound is much improved in this 1953 recording, made in concert. Arrau's playing is impressive, and the New York Philharmonic sounds good, too. But coordination between the soloist and orchestra is sometimes less than ideal. The pianist and/or the conductor has miscalculated the tempos in sections 3 and 4, which are too slow and lend the music a heavy-footed character.

The *Hungarian Fantasia*, recorded in 1952 in similar sound, finds Arrau in similar form—magisterial, concentrated, and often buoyant. By some unknown miracle, he makes the opening passages of the solo instrument actually seem to be a cymbalom rather than a piano. Listeners who need a recommendation for more up-to-date and still more satisfying accounts of these works, should look for the wonderful recordings of Richter (Philips) and Zimerman (DG) of the concertos, and Oppitz in the *Hungarian Fantasia* (RCA).

The best comes last: Arrau's magnificent playing of the two Hungarian Rhapsodies, No. 9 "Carnival in Pest" and No. 13 in A minor (incorrectly listed as No. 11!). The latter proves to be a duplicate of No. 13 on VAI's celebrated release of all 19 Rhapsodies played by 19 different pianists. In VAI's booklet we learn that Arrau recorded several Hungarian Rhapsodies for Columbia that were never issued. These were

later "rescued" by the International Piano Archives. (They are Nos. 8, 9, 10, 11, and 13). VAI gives the date for Arrau's recording of No. 13 as Feb. 22, 1952, but Archipel lists Oct. 18, 1951.

MULBURY

RAVEL: *Trio;* **RACHMANINOFF:** *Trio 2*
David Oistrakh, v; Sviatoslav Knushevitzky, vc; Lev Oborin, p—Preiser 90596—72 minutes

This recording reminds me of just how fine a violinist David Oistrakh was, not only as a soloist, but as a chamber music player. His trio, named the Oistrakh Trio, began playing together in 1941 and continued until at least 1952. The great discovery for me in this recording is the cellist. Knushevitzky was born in 1907 and was the most important cellist in Russia before Rostropovich. He won the top cello prize in a national competition in 1933, played in the Bolshoi Orchestra, and was apparently the dedicatee of the Khachaturian and Gliere concertos.

Although this is a monaural recording and subject to some acoustic difficulties, it is still remarkable to hear the absolute sense of unison playing that Knushevitzky and Oistrakh have. Their intonation is impeccable, their sounds blend extremely well, and it seems that they have exactly the same approach to every phrase. It is also a pleasure to hear Lev Oborin as a chamber music player rather than as an accompanist.

There is no indication of when these pieces were recorded.

FINE

SCHUBERT: *Cello Concerto; Rosamunde Music*
Gaspar Cassado; Halle Orchestra/ Hamilton Harty—Halle 8003—60 minutes

This is part of a series produced by the Halle Concerts Society to celebrate the orchestra's achievements in the early days of recording. Sir Hamilton Harty, principal conductor of the orchestra from 1920 to 1933, was one of the leaders in orchestral recording in the 1920s, when much of the standard repertoire was appearing on record for the first time. His style was well suited to the limitations of the new medium—broadly rhetorical in ways that did not require much from the nuances of recorded sound. Yet sound is one of the chief attractions of a reissue whose careful restoration permits one to enjoy the nuances of orchestral tone better than such original Harty 78s as have come my way.

In these Schubert recordings, made in 1927 and 1928, portamento is less obtrusive than in many early electrics, but the playing is otherwise of the period. A noticeable absence of vibrato lends the proceedings an air of simplicity that accords well with Schubert by placing emphasis on the melodic line, where it belongs.

The "Cello Concerto" is in fact an arrangement by the soloist, Gaspar Cassado (1897-1966) of Schubert's *Arpeggione Sonata*. As one might expect, Cassado's playing much resembles Pablo Casals's, displaying clear articulation and strong emotional gusto. Thus it also resembles Harty's work at the podium, both in the concerto and in the charming incidental music. There is no moody wallowing about; these performances are all about lyrical directness. All of Harty's records are of interest since they afford opportunities to enjoy an unsullied 19th Century sensibility recorded with 20th Century technology. Few are more attractive than this.

RADCLIFFE

WAGNER: *Lohengrin*
Lorenz Fehrenberger (Lohengrin), Annelies Kopper (Elsa), Helena Braun (Ortrud), Ferdinand Frantz (Telramund); Bavarian Radio/ Eugen Jochum—Preiser 90603 [3CD] 202 minutes

This recording was originally produced in 1952 by DG; its copyright protection having now expired, it is fair game for historical reissue specialists. The DG sources were in excellent shape, and the sound, though mono, is smooth, clear, undistorted, and essentially noiseless, with a flat frequency response and good dynamic range. The singing is capable, and the orchestra and chorus are also good.

Eugen Jochum (1902-87) was an experienced opera conductor, though his work in this role is not widely preserved on records. As a Wagnerian, he is best known for his excellent stereo *Meistersinger* currently available from DG. This release offers additional useful documentation of his operatic leadership. The picture that emerges is not altogether clear, however. There are thrilling episodes, along with others where his nervous energy seemingly runs amok, giving rise to scrappy passages where notes are clipped and not given their full value. The prelude to Act III is an example—hasty and unfocussed, not at all a good show. On the other hand, the Act I prelude is hard to fault.

It has to be observed that *Lohengrin* is an uneven work. Its course oscillates unpredictably between the earlier sound world of *Tannh„user* and a more advanced Wagnerian paradigm not yet fully developed—the general direction of *Das Rheingold*. Moreover, it is too long, full of narratives of little musical interest, events that in conventional Franco-Italian opera would have been relegated to spoken dialog if not omitted altogether. The Music of the Future was not yet fully formed.

Jochum struggles with it valiantly, but not

well enough to sweep the problems it presents under the rug. Ferdinand Frantz and his real-world wife Helena Braun are not altogether world-class. Ms Kopper is effective as Elsa, her voice rich, smooth, and accurate in intonation. Lorenz Fehrenberger is less vocally endowed, and his portrayal of the title role is often stiff and histrionic, lacking freshness and spontaneity. This performance has some good scenes, but will probably be more appealing to admirers of the conductor than to a wider spectrum of listeners.

MCKELVEY

WAGNER: *Parsifal*
Ramon Vinay (Parsifal), Martha Mödl (Kundry), George London (Amfortas), Ludwig Weber (Gurnemanz); Bayreuth Festival/ Clemens Krauss
Archipel 171 [4CD] 237 minutes

Clemens Krauss (1893-1954) was one of a series of great 20th Century Austrian conductors, a line that began with Mahler (1857-1911), ran through Weingartner, Schalk, Matacic, Rosbaud, Böhm, Krips, Moralt, and finally Karajan (1908-90). He was one year older than Karl Böhm, who because of Krauss's early demise at age 61, outlived him by more than 27 years. Krauss's discography is also much smaller, and not only because of his short lifetime. Unlike Böhm, he was not much interested in recordings and found them tedious and time-consuming. He was a great conductor, about on the same plane as Böhm musically, though he never enjoyed that level of international recognition. I heard him conduct the first time I heard the Vienna Philharmonic, in 1951—a thrilling experience.

This was recorded at the 1953 Bayreuth Festival, in the last year of his life, and is a valuable testament to his genius. The monaural sound is somewhat coarse and hard-edged, but it is undistorted and its frequency response and dynamic range are pretty good. The performance itself is outstanding, with a strong cast. Krauss keeps the work moving forward smartly, particularly in the long narrative scenes, where the story is laid out in minute detail. His tempos are broadened in the great Act I transformation music and the Grail Scene and in other scenes of musical import. His shaping of the Preludes to Acts I and III is magical. The final time of just under four hours is about 15 minutes shorter than Knappertsbusch's 1962 Bayreuth performance on Philips and also less (by a smaller margin) than Karajan's DG production. Krauss as leader is not a bit less impressive than Knappertsbusch, and his handling of orchestral lines is more precise and polished than Knappertsbusch's more relaxed legato style allows. Indeed, Krauss's leadership isn't far off the high standard set by the legendary Karl Muck's 1927 recordings from Bayreuth and Berlin. He even manages to obtain somehow the deep sound of the temple bells associated with the huge Bayreuth set of instruments used by Muck—artifacts that disappeared during World War II. In summary, this performance is one of the finest available.

Archipel's production is careless, sloppy, and incomplete. Complete texts and translations are not to be expected in a historical issue, but Archipel does not even furnish a summary or any biographical material about the conductor and his singers. There is only a brief list of the tracks, without any timing information. Performances like this deserve better production.

MCKELVEY

Goossens at the Hollywood Bowl

DVORAK: *Carnival Overture;* **FALLA:** *Ritual Fire Dance;* **BERLIOZ:** *March to the Scaffold;* **BALAKIREV:** *Islamey;* **TCHAIKOVSKY:** *Sleeping Beauty Suite*
Hollywood Bowl Orchestra/ Eugene Goossens
Cambria 1147—54 minutes

This is a splendid program, transporting one to an exotic place at a particularly rich historical moment. Unlike his younger brother Leon, the oboe virtuoso, Eugene Goossens is not so well known as he should be. Readers of a certain age will recall some stereo LPs he made for Everest, and one sometimes encounters one of the fine Victor recordings made in Cincinnati, where in 1931 he succeeded Fritz Reiner. But the Goossens that excites me most is the younger man, the enfant terrible in a pin-stripe suit. This was a man who could admit that "my weaknesses are my London tailor and my Paris shirt-maker. The more decorative humanity happens to be the more partial I am towards it." Goossens was raised in Liverpool and was given his start by Sir Thomas Beecham, for whom he once played in the Queen's Hall Orchestra. Goossens made some fine acoustic records before decamping for America, becoming conductor of the Rochester Symphony in 1923. He was a regular guest conductor at the Hollywood Bowl, where in 1928 he made the recordings for Victor released here.

The first impressive thing about Cambria's reissue is the period photograph of Frank Lloyd Wright's music shell, looking for all the world like some fantastic blimp-hanger dropped into a desert lunar landscape. Hollywood in the 1920s was all about modernism, an ideal backdrop for Goossens's sleek and lovely way with the music. The *Carnival Overture* that opens the program calls to mind Toscanini in its sharp attacks and crisp delineation. Falla's 'Ritual Fire Dance' is a properly menacing piece of early modernism. The Berlioz, Balakirev, and Tchaikovsky pieces are as unromantic as

Goossens could manage, their melodic phrases cut loose from their accompaniment and floating in an aural isolation reminiscent of the hovering dome under which they were recorded. The outdoor recording may have something to do with this sonic effect, though I think the crisp linearity and lack of resonant shading was intentional—very radical stuff for 1928 when Alfred Hertz, with whom Goossens shared the podium, was still wallowing (gloriously) in 19th Century Wagnerism.

Lance Bowling, the producer of this reissue, supplies a fine set of notes sketching in some necessary social background on the Hollywood Bowl concerts. It is good to know that the heat was so intense that recordings had to made in the early morning (how many times did Goossens change his French shirts in the course of a session?) and that minions were hired to chase away songbirds with brooms. The third and most impressive thing is that the program is filled out with some fragments of rehearsal made while the Victor crew was testing microphone placement. These include Goossens rehearsing *The Rite of Spring,* about to be given its West-Coast premiere. It was his signature piece and, really, what could be more a fascinating document that a group of musicians in the 1920s encountering this modernist masterpiece for the first time? The woodwinds can be heard having rather a hard time of it, the conductor in the background chanting out the rhythms like one possessed by demons.

The final impressive thing about this issue is the back cover, sporting an oil portrait of the handsome Goossens in a natty grey suit with a purple silk tie that sets off his blue eyes to perfection. The transfers are excellent.

RADCLIFFE

Weimar Republic—Berlin 1929

MENDELSSOHN: *Hebrides Overture;* **BRUCKNER:** *Symphony 8 Adagio;* **BACH:** *Prelude & Fugue in E-flat;* **WAGNER:** *Lohengrin Prelude;* **VERDI:** *La Traviata Preludes*

Berlin Philharmonic, Berlin State Opera Orchestra, Lucerne Festival Orchestra, La Scala/ Bruno Walter, Otto Klemperer, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Arturo Toscanini—Symposium 1340—69 minutes

This is one of the oddest-titled anthologies I've come across. None of the five recordings was made in 1929 and only three in Berlin. The title refers to the famous group photograph of the five conductors (printed on the cover) and the notes make a half-hearted attempt to sketch the context for the photograph. The Walter, Furtwängler, and Toscanini recordings are familiar items; but the others deserve serious attention. Walter's acoustic recording of *Fingal's Cave* has never inspired me, though Furtwängler and Toscanini are heard at the top of their form in later recordings.

The news here is Klemperer's 1923-24 recording of the third movement of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony, a great rarity and so very fine one is surprised to encounter it for the first time. This was recorded acoustically with a much reduced orchestra. The result is a performance of great intimacy and stunning, hypnotic concentration. It begins very slowly, and sometimes the pulse, always variable, threatens to give way altogether. But it never does, and the flexible tempos and intermittent pauses lead toward a simple but fluid presentation of this spiritual music that is altogether winning. I can well imagine Mahler performing Bruckner something like this. The sound is really very acceptable.

Schonberg's orchestration of the Bach 'St Anne' Fugue as conducted by Erich Kleiber in 1930 is an altogether noisier affair, filled with barbed contrasts and dissonances, and yet also grand and stately. It is a fitting representation of sweet-and-sour Weimar Republic sensibilities. While the discs used for the transfer are worn, the Kleiber item is very desirable, since so few of the works he recorded suggest the modernist sensibility that made him famous.

The Klemperer recording alone justifies purchase of this odd-bins anthology. It is that unusual thing, a recording at once fabulously rare and musically compelling. Symposium's notes and back panel information leave much to be desired; it would be useful to have labels and timings and not to run recording dates into the side numbers in such an incomprehensible manner.

RADCLIFFE

Great Violinists XXI: Sarasate

Bach, Sarasate, Chopin, Paganini, Drdla, Paradies, Wieniawski, Mendelssohn, Daquin, Herold, Mozart

with Joan Manen, v; Hedwig Francillo-Kaufmann, s—Symposium 1328—67 minutes

Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908) was one of the supreme virtuosos of the 19th Century. He was one of the last musicians from an age when the great virtuosos were impossible to confuse, so dramatically different were they from each other. Sarasate had a style that was emotionally low-key, glib even, and that presented its extreme virtuosity to the listener as though it were nothing remarkable—no drama, no histrionics, but the fleetest fingers and bow arm in the history of recorded sound. These recordings were made in 1904, when a relatively new process for reproducing records from a master made recording, which had previously been extremely labor-intensive from the musician's point of view, attractive to star performers.

The main discovery here is Joan Manen (1883-1971). Manen was a transitional figure between Sarasate and the modern school of violin playing represented by Kreisler and Heifetz. He had a firmer tone than Sarasate, especially on the G string, but not nearly as scintillating a technique. He also used much more vibrato, though his didn't throb like modern violinists. He continued to use the *maniera languida* slides that Sarasate and his generation used as their staple expressive device.

These recordings were made in 1912 and 1915. It is interesting that he is accompanied by a small wind ensemble and not just a piano like the great Sarasate. His Paganini *Perpetual Motion* and Mendelssohn Violin Concerto III show that he had an adequate though not flaming technique. The last two tracks have him accompanying the soprano Hedwig Francillo-Kaufmann. Instrumental and vocal soloists often toured and recorded together at the time. This is an interesting document of a performer who was briefly a well-known figure on the concert stage before WW I. He probably faded into obscurity after the War because of his outdated style. Another excellent job of historical research by Symposium.

MAGIL

Leontyne Price & Samuel Barber

Songs by Poulenc, Barber, Sauguet, Fauré, Schumann; Folksongs

Leontyne Price, s; Samuel Barber, bar, p

Bridge 9156—80 minutes

This release presents two concert performances: Price's recital, with Barber at the piano, at the Library of Congress on October 30, 1953 and a broadcast from the Curtis Institute of Music of December 26, 1938 where Barber accompanies himself at the piano as he sings folksongs and six Schumann lieder. The Curtis concert is forgettable but Price's recital, at least part of which (the Barber songs) has been released commercially by RCA, is quite wonderful.

Price and Barber collaborated on many occasions; the best known is the composer's opera *Antony and Cleopatra*, which opened the Met's new home at Lincoln Center in 1966. The role of Cleopatra was composed with Price's voice in mind. In fact, in 1953, when Barber first heard the soprano's gorgeous voice, he asked her to sing the premiere of his *Hermit Songs*, which she did at this Library of Congress recital. (This can also be found on RCA 61983 and Sony 46727.) These ten songs are set to poems by monks and hermits of about the 10th Century, and they became one of Barber's most popular vocal compositions. They take less than 17 minutes in performance; no one has sung them better than Price. In 1953 she was only 26, and her voice was fresh, sweet, supple and beautiful. Her unaffected manner and effortless vocal production, as well as her evident joy in singing, all made this memorable. Her account of 'The Heavenly Banquet' captures its humor and 'The Crucifixion' that song's religious conviction as few singers have been able to do. The last song, 'The Desire for Hermitage', deals with the hermit's desire to be left alone; Price captures its poignancy very well. These songs in English—translations of the Latin texts are by Auden, Sean O'Faolain, and Howard Mumford Jones.

Price also sings four of Barber's early songs, including two love songs and a setting of James Joyce's 'Nuvoletta' (a humorous poem). The rest of her program is made up of French melodies by Poulenc and Henri Sauguet, with another Poulenc song and one by Fauré thrown in as encores. Price sings them in full voice, but her diction is less than incisive. In 'Tu Vois le Feu du Soir' (You See the Evening Fire) a spurned lover describes to his love a world that's much the same even without her devotion, and in 'Je Nommerai ton Font' (I Will Name Your Effrontery), he shows, in a malicious manner, an unrequited lover's annoyance at being rejected. 'Ce Doux Petit Visage' (That Gentle Little Face) was written in homage to one of the composer's childhood friends who died young. It's a beautiful valedictory, ravishingly sung.

Henri Sauguet (1901-89), a composer not known to me but for these songs, was mentored by Milhaud. He wrote works for ballet and the theater as well as songs. These five songs deal with card-reading, astrology, palmistry, omens as indicated by the stars, and weather prediction. Some were written for the Spanish mezzo Conchita Supervia. Price sings them all with panache and sly humor. What else can one do with such subject matter?

In his 1938 broadcast, less than 26 minutes long, Barber's slight baritone sounds nasal and not very appealing. He had studied voice at Curtis and at one time tried to support himself as a singer. Perhaps this grainy and not always clear recording doesn't do him justice, but I am not impressed by his way with the folksongs or the Schumann lieder. His singing lacks variety of expression as well as tonal beauty; no one should buy this for his vocal contributions. Indeed, if you own the *Hermit Songs* in one of its previous releases and are not a Price completist, you can skip this release. Only English texts are supplied, even for the French melodies. The sound of the 1953 concert is adequate, but Price seems too far from the piano.

MOSES

The Newest Music

Panoramicos

GRIEBLING-HAIGH: *La Bergere de Vallee; Hebert Variations; Bocadillos Panoramicos;* **MORGAN:** *Secret of the Golden Flower;* **SCHULHOFF:** *Concertino*
Mary Kay Ferguson, fl, picc; Lynne Ramsey, va; Danna Sundet, ob, eng hn; Kathryn Brown, p; Molly Fun-Dumm, Takako Masame, v; Brian Dumm, vc; Thomas Sperl, db
Panoramico—71 minutes
(Barnes & Noble; Borders)

BOYCE: *Dreams Within a Dream;* **VAUGHAN WILLIAMS:** *Lark Ascending*
Susan Swaney, s; Corey Cerovsek, v; Bloomington Chamber Singers/ Gerald Sousa
Aguava 20031—54 minutes (812-331-7116)

CHATMAN: *Proud Music of the Storm; Over Thorns to Stars; Tara's Dream; Pairie Dawn; Crimson Dream; Fanfare for Cold Land*
Matthew Stephenson, t; Gene Ramsbottom, cl; UBC Symphony; BBC Symphony; UBC Chamber Strings; Vancouver Bach Choir/ Bruce Pullan, Jesse Read, Stephen Chatman, Gunther Herbig, Eric Wilson—Centredisques 10304—62 minutes

GALBRAITH: *Missa Mysteriorum; Concerto*
Donna Amato, p; Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh; Carnegie Mellon Wind Ensemble/ Robert Page, Denis Colwell
Carnegie Mellon 30006—65 minutes
(5000 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh 15213)

Millenium Crossings

Capioppo, Arauco, Baratello, Hudson
Lisa Weiss, Curt Cacioppo, p
Capstone 8734—68 minutes

AMAR: *Musique de la Terre vue du Ciel*
Laurent Levesque, p; Roselyne Minassian, Pierre Sciama, Selima Al-Khalaf, Marie-Benedicte Souquet, John Bowsell, Christophe Malavoy, Christophe Malavoy, vocals; Jean-Paul Minali-Bella, va, apergina, viola d'amore; Henri Tournier, octobass flute; Didier Francois, nickel-harp; Mathias Desmier, g; Ali Wague, fl; Bohumil Kotmel, v; Taroun Teboul, vocals, nev, oud; City of Prague Philharmonic/ Mario Klemens
Naïve 4994—60 minutes

PAMELA Z: *A Delay is Better*
Pamela Z, vocals—Starkland 213—62 minutes

MORAN: *Open Veins; Arias, Interludes, & Inventions; 32 Cryptograms for Derek Jarman; Stimmen Des Letzten Siegels*
Jane West, s; Piano Circus Band; Sound Affairs Band; Ensemble Chrismos/ Alexander Hermann
Innova 627—76 minutes

MCPHERSON: *Detours; Maps & Diagrams of Our Pain; Born of Funk & the Fear of Failing*
Sue Frank, fl; Ruth Davies, ob; Matthew Hunt, cl; Ben Hudson, bn; Lindsay Stoker; hn; Richard Casey, p; Allen Neave, g; Tim Williams, Liz Gilliver, perc; David Routledge, Sarah Whittingham, v; Heather Wallington, va; Jennifer Langridge, vc/ Nicholas Kok—Metier 92073 [2CD] 89 minutes

Breath & Wings

Schou, Norgard, Norholm, Bentzon
Jens Schou, cl; Erik Kaltoft, p
Dacapo 8226507—75 minutes

In what tense is the music? That was the most common initial response I had to this month's new music releases. Is it music "of the past"? Music "of the present"? Or music of some indefinite time, neither past nor present?

What art would refuse that hard-won accolade: timeless. Yet, our sense of what's timeless may change, so I don't lean too heavily on timelessness as a value in itself. Music composed now that sounds 100 years old is unlikely to perk up our ears, but it may offer other rewards. And music composed now that sounds like no music before it may, in the future, become timeless. Most important: the tense of a piece of new music is only an initial response to superficial qualities. Sometimes other qualities (good, bad, or both) emerge after more listening, and the piece changes tense, or the tense becomes unimportant.

My experience with four of the releases started and remains in the past tense. *Millennium Crossings*, the program of piano works by Cacioppo, Arauco, Baratello, and Hudson, is so excellent that only the specificity of its past sources keeps it in the past tense for me.

The works by Griebling-Haigh and Morgan (on *Panoramicos*) started in the past tense. Though less ambitious and impressive than the works on *Millennium Crossings*, their looser stylistic roots free them from the past tense.

Too bad three of these "past tense" releases offer little more than a fond memory of past repertoire. From its first four notes, Boyce's oratorio *Dreams within a Dream* takes every opportunity to use cliched gestures, hackneyed harmonic progressions, formulaic pseudo drama. Its generic romantic melancholy flows in a Vaughan Williams vein, but is too simplistic, uniform, even clumsy. A stale aroma lingers. What's more, its feigned angelic qualities get on my nerves quick.

Chatman's music has a bit more variety and character but is uneven. *Crimson Dream*

shines Ravel's *La Valse* through a postmodern prism. *Tara's Dreams* is alternately delicate and heavy-handed. Its stark contrasts of style (Varese vs Beethoven vs Ragtime) are rhetorically overstuffed, not to mention overused in our current "postmodern era". The main work, *Proud Music* resuscitates Orff's *Carmina Burana* and seems to do little else.

Galbraith's *Missa Mysteriorum* does little for me as it hovers in Hovhaness-style hypnosis. Her piano concerto has a more distinct character; it combines the block-like melodic and harmonic gestures of Hindemith with the rhythmic and orchestral atmosphere of Lalo Shifrin's *Mission Impossible* theme. As with the Boyce and Chatman discs, my open ears have difficulty getting this music out of the past tense, which it hugs so close.

Hearing *Millennium Crossings* was strange at first. Did I read the dates wrong? No I didn't. This program of piano music by Cacioppo, Arauco, Baratello, and Hudson ought to have called itself "The Schoenberg Club"—better yet: "The Schoenberg 1907-11 Club". The resemblance between the works on this disc and Schoenberg's early atonal piano works, the Three Pieces Op.11 and Six Pieces Op.19, is uncanny. Often I hear near quotes and feel like I know exactly what's coming next. Like cashmere-lined leather gloves, this program will fit the ears of any listener intimately familiar with the Schoenberg pieces. The Schoenberg affinities do not detract. On the contrary, the sophisticated craftsmanship and nuanced imagination Schoenberg seems to have inspired in these present-day composers suggest that his is a past worth returning to. In this case, past tense makes sense.

The biggest bonus on *Panoramicos* is Lynne Ramsey's burnished viola tone in Griebling-Haigh's *Bocadilos Panoramicos*—a suavely romantic, sometimes spiky, Debussy-like rhapsody that swept me up just enough to stop me from thinking about its tense. That's a good thing. Generally though, there's not much in these compositions to challenge my curious ears. Quickly I tire of the lightweight oscillations between Ravel-like serenading and Prokofieff-like grotesque chord progressions in Griebling-Haigh's *Bergere* and *Hebert Variations*. The impressionist polish that starts Morgan's *Secret of the Golden Flower* is infectious—helped again by Ramsey's exquisite viola playing. But its contrasting section is too repetitive and derivative. Schulhoff's neoclassical Concertino (1925) sometimes verges on vapid, though it does breath a poignant lyricism here and there. Though the music on *Panoramicos* transcends (barely) the past tense, it rewards less than *Millennium Crossings*, which ruminates in a very specific past.

For several reasons, Armand Amar's *Musique de la Terre vue du Ciel* feels very present tense. It doesn't surprise me, because the music accompanies a film made from photographs by Yann Arthus-Bertrand. The photos (included in the long booklet that houses the disc) of masses of people and unusual landscapes from all over the world are stunning. I now want to see the film. The style of Amar's soundtrack reminds me of the new-agey, but slightly edgy, sound of Mychael Danna's film scores for Atom Egoyan's troubling but slightly comforting dramas such as *Felicia's Journey* (1999) and The Sweet Hereafter (1997). The Philip Glass minimalist film score style also looms (as it does in Bosso's soundtrack to the film *14 Dances for Children Around a Hole*, which I reviewed two issues ago). Sounds of singing and sedate talking sometimes peek through the immense orchestral wash that pervades the soundtrack.

Singer and composer Pamela Z makes attractive, light-hearted, but atmospheric and evocative music. Her newest release *A Delay is Better* ("than a disaster", as printed on the paper strip bursting from a fortune cookie on the back of the CD case) best compares to Joan La Barbara's *Sound Paintings* (1990) and Alan Licht's New York Minute (2003). She's nowhere near the virtuoso that La Barbara is, but like La Barbara and Licht, her music builds from found sounds and vocalizations layered and repeated through playback looping. The steady beat of pop music and pulse minimalism is her default mode. Z is less of a purist than La Barbara, so her palette is more diverse.

I can imagine a lot of classical music listeners getting annoyed by Pamela Z's artsy cheekiness, but her music charms me and I admire her creativity. The haunting vocal melody of her first track, 'Bone Music', enchants while loosely rhythmic drumming accompanies. The short vocal melody repeats at regular intervals. It has a world-music flavor of nebulous origin. 'Pop Titles You' is to pop song titles what Andy Warhol's silk-screened portraits are to photos of celebrities of the 50s, 60s, and 70s: a whimsical common thread ties them together. 'Questions' creates an ostinato from the four routine questions Z sings with candid spontaneity. Yet the questions—"How was your trip? Where are you going? What are you having? How is it ending?"—offer plenty of narrative possibilities. Some are explored in the text she sings melodically over the ostinato. The whole program is sonically stimulating, artfully amusing—and very present tense.

It's not enough to call Robert Moran a minimalist or even a romantic minimalist. He's a maverick. And he has had a long, diverse career. The cover art and title of his new

release, *Open Veins*, made me skeptical. As I learned from the liner notes, the title derives from the suicide of Petronius (author of *Satyricon*), which inspired Moran's concerto for amplified violin and "variable" chamber ensemble. Immediately its propulsive rhythm and its acerbic timbres and tonalities reminded me of Dresher's *Cage Machine* from his Concerto for violin & electro acoustic band (reviewed in the last column). It also reminded me of Lou Harrison's *Concerto in Slendro* but it made me think less of Harrison's piece than I had previously. I couldn't help feeling that Moran could achieve what Harrison couldn't—though I'd be hard pressed to put my finger on what that is. This is an unusual experience; of course even Harrison fans shouldn't hold it against Moran and his music. *32 Cryptograms* plays in the same ballpark as *Open Veins*. The other two works are syrupy sweet, airbrushed, lackluster, even limp—but purposely so. *Stimmen* evolves glacially into a simple but haunting harp ostinato over a sentimental wash of sonorous strings and choral consonance. (Unfortunately, moments of unpleasant audio distortion mar some of the chorus's melodic peaks.) *Arias, Interludes, and Inventions* is similar. It's hard to relax and wallow in these aimless journeys through the sugary tonal fields of *Appalachian Spring*. Yet there's an appealing novelty lurking in there, if you give it a chance.

A moody postmodern stylistic hodgepodge takes up the first disc of Gordon McPherson's new release *Detours*. The second disc interests me much more, so I'll tell you about that instead. His 25-minute *Maps and Diagrams of Our Pain* is an intricate but soaring passionate epic for violin and piano. When it takes a whole eight minutes for the violin to enter, you feel the weight of long-range architecture working. The rhythmic and pitch languages are angular and charged like Bartok's violin sonatas and Wuorinen's chamber music—plenty to sink your teeth into. *Born of Funk*, a guitar chamber concerto, launches a spiky perpetuum mobile that sparkles through perky polyrhythms, quirky quasi-tonality, and a colorful orchestration of winds, strings, vibraphone, and marimba. When I listen to McPherson's *Maps* and *Born*, I care not at all about tense. The plentiful surface draws me in; the mercurial flow engages my attention. And after it's over I'm left with an unusual distinct sense of how it all sounded.

The best parts of Jens Schou's program of Danish clarinet works also transcends time. You can tell in the first few seconds of Per Norgard's *Letters of Grass* that you're in for treat: a lone piano tones fades away almost to silence, then slowly comes back as a clarinet tone. The sensitivity that carves this detail bodes well: if a lone pitch holds such potential for subtlety in Norgard's imagination, what of the many pitches to come? Once the mood and the pace brighten up, a whimsical chromatic riff ricochets note-by-note between the piano and clarinet. Later a *Rhapsody in Blue*-like clarinet glissando opens up an expansive field of intoxicating harmonic poppies. But there's no nodding off here: the mercurial moods elevate one's alertness because they never settle into the predictable. The clarinet's smooth lyricism casts a romantic glow onto the mostly atonal chords. *Letters of Grass* simply astounds me with its simultaneous variety and coherence. While each moment attracts the alert ear, the long-range trajectory captivates the reflective mind. The music's "tense" doesn't even enter the equation.

Quality material fills the rest of Schou's program. The stately first and bouncy third movement of Bentzon's Sonata (1956) would work well anytime you need a fix to satisfy your Hindemith urge. The ethereal II seems inspired by Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*. The three movements together form a nice package I've enjoyed several times. Norholm's *Song of Breath and Wings* and Schou's own *Prelude to Mythic Morning* are both slow-paced meditations. The latter exploits the full spectrum of the clarinet's extended playing techniques—multiphonic trills, controlled squeaks, and other sound effects—in a reverberant acoustic.

MAILMAN

Videos

BERG: *Lulu*
Laura Aikin (Lulu), Cornelia Kallisch (Geschwitz), Alfred Muff (Dr Schön), Peter Straka (Alwa), Guido Götzen (Schigolch); Zurich Opera/ Franz Welser-Most—TDK OPLULU [DVD] 164 minutes

In the added attraction, "The Making of Lulu—A Lethal Victim", a film by Reiner E Moritz, conductor Welser-Most tries to make a case for performing the "unfinished" two-act version of *Lulu*. It is not very convincing, but the interviews with several of the principal singers and the stage director, and especially the production itself, are very convincing.

Lulu is stage director and actor Sven-Eric Bechtolf's first staging of an opera. It reveals many a deep psychological insight and clarifies relationships. The most striking concept is to have Lulu always accompanied by a mute 12-year-old girl, the young Lulu. As Lulu was taken up and abused by Dr Schön at age 12, so Lulu is always accompanied—burdened, if you will—by that abuse. It is her younger self that Lulu is always trying to protect. Her cries of "Nein! Nein!" as she is about to be slain by Jack the Ripper are not so much a defense of her grown self (who is consigned to a trash heap), but a defense of young Lulu, who is promptly dispatched by Jack, finally bring peace to Lulu.

The setting is quite plain, non-specific, a giant staircase and a few pieces of furniture, a naked female mannequin (another symbol of Lulu's broken life). The characters' psychological secrets are cleverly delineated.

This extraordinary production was recorded at the Zurich Opera in November 2002. The vocal performances are extraordinary—particularly Aiken's Lulu, so fearlessly sung there is plenty of time for her to act and react. The entire cast actively becomes their roles. Only the orchestra is a bit of a let-down, with little tension or sonic beauty. This is particularly noticeable in the 'Variations' and 'Adagio' from the *Lulu Suite* used to conclude the opera in lieu of the third act.

Subtitles in English, French, Spanish, and Italian.

PARSONS

PERGOLESI: *Stabat Mater*
Barabara Frittoli, s; Anna Catarina Antonacci, a; La Scala Philharmonic/ Riccardo Muti
EMI 99405 [DVD] 65 minutes

Don't be taken in by the playing time. The *Stabat Mater* takes about 44 minutes, there are two tracks of about another four minutes for titles and applause, and the rest is a ten-minute interview with Muti and a seven-minute lecture on Pergolesi.

That said, this is a lovely piece, lovingly presented. Pergolesi, in his short life (1710-36) wrote some 30 authenticated compositions, but has had about 300 attributed to him, turning "composed by Pergolesi" into the musical equivalent of "George Washington slept here".

This work appears to have been written for one of two organizations dedicated to Mary, perhaps as a replacement for an earlier setting by Alessandro Scarlatti that had become too familiar after some 20 years of being performed.

Stabat Mater is a regular-metered and somewhat preachy poem, tailor-made for the boring settings many composers have given it. Pergolesi, to his credit, is not one of them. His setting employs solo and duetting soprano and alto with strings and continuo and uses a musical language eerily prefiguring the Mozart Requiem, down even to mannerisms such as using the violins to double part of a vocal phrase. The predominantly flat-key minor tonality (the home key is C minor) and fugal Amen underline the similarity, as does the simplicity and starkness of the writing. The liner notes refer to his style as "pre-galant", which seems fair enough, though they spell it "gallant".

I can't imagine a better performance. The singers look and sound lovely, and Muti and his small band are attentive and alert. Phrasing in the voices gets echoed in the orchestra and vice-versa. Muti, who is notoriously committed to controlling every aspect of his performances, is probably responsible for everything down to the soloists' breathing spots, but his directions have been internalized to the point where they seem spontaneous and natural and work well with the music's ebb and flow.

The performance took place in the church of the Blessed Virgin of Miracles in Saranno, which is decorated with many statues and lovely frescoes by Gaudenzio Ferrari (1471-1546). The camera work is a bit flighty. I would have preferred to spend more time looking at the soloists, not (just) because they are attractive women, but because they are absorbed in the music and it is reflected in their facial expressions and body language. A few glimpses of pictures of Mary in agony are enough for me, but not for the videographers, who fly to the frescoes and the statutes frequently and seemingly at random.

EMI offers viewing options, including subtitles in English or Italian or a superimposition of a vocal-orchestral score as a transparency over the image of the performance. Both are well realized. The liner notes are sparse but adequate.

I never expected to enjoy this as much as I did, but it is visually and musically full of beauty, and I look forward to returning to it.

CHAKWIN

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