

Wilhelm PETERSON-BERGER (1867-1942)

Symphony No. 1 in B flat major, "*Baneret*" (The Banner) (1889-1903) [38:40]

Symphony No. 5 in B minor, "Solitudo" (1932-33) [33:58]

Royal Opera Orchestra, Stockholm/Leif Segerstam

World Premiere Recordings, DDD

Notes Included.

rec. 2-4 June 1997, Antroposofernas Haus, Järna.

STERLING CDS-1006-2 [72:48]

Wilhelm Peterson-Berger is best known for his songs and piano music, evocative of nature and reminiscent of Swedish folk music. These same qualities are also preeminent in his five symphonies and in his other large-scale works. While the symphonies lack the structural cohesion and emotional heft of those of his contemporaries Stenhammar and Alfvén, their more intimate qualities have brought them many admirers.

Symphony No. 1 was begun in 1889, but not completed until 1903. Its sub-title *The Banner* and the titles of the individual movements derive from the struggles of the composer and his young colleagues to obtain a hearing in the conservative musical climate of Sweden at the end of the 19th century. The entire symphony is based on two themes, the Banner theme itself and a secondary motif that is developed into the Defiant theme and a second, gentler theme. But the opening section of the first movement is quite serene and occasionally almost jolly, with plenty of Peterson-Berger's typical folk-style. The central section, based on the Defiant theme, is more serious and the succeeding music, based on the Banner theme, is the most energetic of the movements, leading to a folk-like coda. The following scherzo movement may remind listeners of Mendelssohn or Svendsen in its charm and provides a good contrast to the opening movement

The Andante is a different matter. Here the two main themes are used to construct an impressive elegy, with stirring use of brass and percussion. The music eventually becomes more gentle, but no less elegiac, somewhat in the manner of Alfvén's *Drapa*. The final movement begins *allegro* and features some excellent orchestration. It gradually slows to a largo with the return of the *Banner* theme before ending energetically.

Thirty years after *The Banner*, Peterson-Berger wrote his last completed symphony. This was begun not long after the composer had left his activities in Stockholm for a rustic retreat on the isle of Frösön. Although titled *Solitudo* (Solitude), Peterson-Berger claimed that this did not refer to his withdrawal from Stockholm. Whether this is true or not, the music definitely breathes the feelings of nature evoked by the composer's new place of residence. The feeling of peace and quietude is further emphasized by the symphony's tempo markings – "tranquillo" for three of the four movements.

The first movement is genial and quickly breaks into several related motifs – all typical of the composer. They finally coalesce in a quiet ending. The scherzo was described by the composer as a conversation among friends and this is evident in the alternation of its three themes. The *Andante* is a sort of hymn to nature and becomes steadily more serious – quite the most impressive music in the symphony. It dies away into the last movement – a series of vigorous dances which too die away into a tranquil ending.

Leif Segerstam possesses great understanding of Peterson-Berger's unique mix of love for the natural beauty and for the folk-culture of Northern Sweden. In this sense his versions of these works are slightly more moving than the comparable ones by Michail Jurowski CPO. The Royal Opera Orchestra in Stockholm also shows greater feeling for the music than those of Saarbrücken Radio and Norrköping. But Jurowski's recordings are part of his complete set of the composer's orchestral music ([see link](#)), which most admirers of Peterson-Berger will probably wish to have.

William Kreindler

Aida Garifullina (soprano)

ORF Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien/Cornelius Meister

Osipov State Russian Folk Orchestra/Vitaly Gnutov (track 15)

rec. 24/25 February, 17/19 March 2015, 20/21 May 2016 ORF Großen Sendesaal, Vienna, Austria

Full sung texts with English translations

DECCA 478 8305 [58.53]

For her debut album released on Decca soprano Aida Garifullina has selected a collection of fifteen predominately Russian songs and arias that have been paired together with two French arias. At first sight this might seem a rather curious mix; however, the French arias are signature works of the soprano.

Garifullina is Russian born in the Republic of Tatarstan. She has already appeared at a number of prestigious venues including Wiener Staatsoper, Mariinsky Theatre, Semperoper Dresden, Wigmore Hall and Vienna Musikverein. Certainly 2013 was a landmark year for Garifullina coming to international attention as winner of the Plácido Domingo Operalia international singing competition in Verona. Having come to the attention of Valery Gergiev, Garifullina debuted at Mariinsky Theatre in 2013 playing Susanna (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) and subsequently Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*), Gilda (*Rigoletto*), Natasha (*War and Peace*) and Queen of Shemakha (*The Golden Cockerel*).

Garifullina is in superb voice. She has real intensity, buoyancy and freshness in the two French arias. In *Ah! Je veux vivre* from Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* the soprano soars effortlessly to the high register. In the *Bell Song* from Delibes' *Lakmé*, such a splendid vehicle for coloratura display, she is sultry, dark tinged and atmospheric. In fact it was Garifullina playing celebrated French-American soprano Lily Pons (1898-1976) who sang the *Bell Song* in the Stephen Frears 2016 film *Florence Foster Jenkins*. There are eight popular songs and ballads on the set. The best known is the Rachmaninov wordless *Vocalise* from Op. 34 set of songs quite gloriously. My particular favourite is *Alliiki* a much loved folk song reflecting the soloist's Tatar heritage and language conveyed with such aching tenderness. Deeply satisfying is Rimsky-Korsakov's *Oriental Romance (The Rose and the Nightingale)* from the Op. 2 set of four songs in an alluring performance heavy with exotic perfume. Queen of Shemakha's arias from Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* make the greatest impression. Both the Queen's *Entrance Aria* the *Hymn to the Sun* and *Seduction Aria* display Garifullina's smooth and assured singing with such attractive coloratura and effortlessly controlled power. The final track is a novelty, although one that is extremely worthy. Garifullina's voice is laid over a recording of *Midnight in Moscow* played by a Balalaika orchestra taken from a 1962 Mercury Living Presence LP *Balalaika Favourites*.

ORF Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien under the baton of Cornelius Meister proves to be a wonderful partner for Garifullina, providing striking playing of focus and warm colour. The various orchestral arrangements that tend to be on the syrupy side are entirely toothsome. Both the soprano's voice and the orchestra have been vividly caught by the engineering team at the ORF Großen Sendesaal, Vienna, with first class clarity, presence and balance. In the booklet there is an uncredited essay that is helpful and mentions most of the chosen repertoire. At less than sixty minutes the release is rather short measure. How I would relish another aria or two.

This ravishingly sung album of soprano songs and arias is even more remarkable as this is Aida Garifullina's debut release.

Michael Cookson

Track listing

Charles GOUNOD (1818-1893)

1. 'Ah! Je veux vivre' from Roméo et Juliette [3.53]

Léo DELIBES (1836-1891)

2. 'Où va la jeune Indoue?' (Bell Song) from Lakmé [8.38]

Nikolai RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908)

3. Song of India [3.20] arranged Paul Bateman

4. 'The Snow Maiden's Aria' from Prologue to The Snow Maiden [4.09]

Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY

5. Serenada, No. 6 from 6 Romances, Op. 63 [3.48] arranged Chris Hazel

Sergei RACHMANINOV (1873-1943)

6. Lilacs (Siren), No. 5 from 12 Romances, Op. 21 [2.32] arranged Michael Rot

Traditional

7. Allüki [3.42] traditional Tatar folk song arranged Paul Campbell

Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

8. 'Maria's Lullaby' from Mazeppa [2.55]

Nikolai RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

9. Queen of Shemakha's Entrance aria 'Hymn to the Sun' from The Golden Cockerel [4.38]

10. 'Queen of Shemakha's Seduction Aria' from The Golden Cockerel [2.06]

Sergei RACHMANINOV

11. 'Zdes' khoroso' (How beautiful it is here), No. 7 from 12 Romances, Op. 21 [2.19] arranged Michael Rot

Nikolai RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

12. Oriental Romance (The Rose and the Nightingale)' Op. 2, No. 2 [3.01]

arranged Andreas N. Tarkmann

Sergei RACHMANINOV

13. Vocalise, No. 14 from 14 Songs, Op. 34 [8.00]

Traditional

14. Cossack Lullaby [3.38] traditional, arranged Texu Kim

Vasily SOLOVYOV-SEDOY (1907-1979)

15. Midnight in Moscow [2.16]

(Orchestral track by Osipov State Russian Folk Orchestra/Vitaly Gnutov - Recorded June 1962 Bolshoi Hall, Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Moscow - Mercury Living Presence LP *Balalaika Favourites*.)

Fritz Wunderlich (tenor)

Leo FALL (1873-1925)

O Rose von Stambul (from *Die Rose von Stambul*) [4.02]

Eduard KÜNNEKE (1885-1953)

Ich träume mit offenen Augen (from *Die lockende Flamme*) [2.42]

Das Lied vom Leben des Schrenk (from *Die Grosse Sünderin*) [4.29]

Franz, LEHÁR (1870-1948)

Schön ist die Welt (from *Schön ist die Welt*) [3.58]

Albert LORTZING (1801-1851)

Lebe wohl, mein flandrisch Mädchen (from *Zar und Zimmermann*) [4.59]

Lied des Veit: Vater, Mutter, Schwestern, Bruder (from *Undine*) [3.11]

Man wird ja einmal nur geboren (from *Der Waffenschmied*) 3.35]

Willy MATTES (1916-2002)

Melodia con passione [3.47]

Carl MILLÖCKER (1842-1899)

Wie schön ist alles (from *Die Dubarry*) [3.56]

Mein Weg führt immer mich zu Dir zurück (from *Die Dubarry*) [3.27]

Mischa SPOLIANSKY (1898-1985)

Heute Nacht oder nie (from *Das Lied einer Nacht*) [3.08]

Robert STOLZ (1880-1975)

Ob blond, ob braun, Ich liebe die Frau'n [2.30]

Johann STRAUSS II (1825-1899)

Treu sein, das liegt mir nicht (from *Eine Nacht in Venedig*) [2.05]

Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks & Münchner Rundfunkorchester, Kurt Eichhorn, Siegfried Köhler, Willy Mattes, Hans Moltkau & Meinhard von Zallinger

rec. various venues, Munich, Germany, 1959-1966. Mono

BR KLASSIK 900315 Vinyl LP [45.49]

This album consists of previously unreleased material from the archives of Bayerischer Rundfunk. It is not stated as such but all the tracks sound like mono recordings, proved by the fact that it all apparently emanated from my front-centre speaker which was, of course, not even turned on or indeed connected! Though the back of the sleeve uses the subtitle 'Great Singers Live' it seems doubtful if many of these were live. Obviously Wunderlich, as a highly successful tenor, made many concert appearances singing this material, some of which was for films as well as for the stage. The whole LP falls firmly into the category which one has to describe as 'very good if you like this sort of thing.' Had the 'Three Tenors' been a 1960s phenomenon then Wunderlich would have been present for he has all the panache and sheer heft to wow the audiences. His mostly accurate high notes vary from impressive to breathtaking. The quality of his voice was truly magnificent and it does help to have this rather lightweight material sung as well as this. The problem that is bound to lurk behind the disc is that one is listening to the same sort of thing throughout nearly 46 minutes. Listening to the two sides on separate occasions might keep it all sounding fresher.

The gatefold sleeve prints, in German and English, a short appreciation of Wunderlich's career. It was cut short by an accident in 1966 when he was not quite 36 years old. His discography reflects a very wide range of repertoire covering all the genres from solo lieder to opera to oratorio. My personal favourite is Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* where he joined Christa Ludwig and Otto Klemperer to make, perhaps, the best recording of the stereo era of that masterwork. Here he is strictly in popular mode singing tuneful extracts, mostly from operetta. Singing of this quality is always a pleasure, however much one might wish for more meat on the bone.

The LP has been produced with extremely quiet surfaces and was hyperclean when I opened the sleeve. Static soon coated it with dust particles proving that BR-Klassik did not pack it in an anti-static sleeve. A few minutes cleaning and a new inner-sleeve soon solved that problem. The heavy, (180 grams+ on my kitchen scales) and very flat pressing is well centred, if not absolutely perfect and it will certainly satisfy the vinyl collector. The mono masters from which this issue was made reproduce the voice cleanly but the orchestra is always rather backward and sounds frankly a bit primitive compared to the excellent stereo sound being produced at this time by such as EMI, Decca and Deutsche Grammophon.

Dave Billinge

Claudio MONTEVERDI (1567-1643)

I 7 Peccati Capitali (Seven Deadly Sins)

Mariana Flores; Francesca Aspromonte (soprano); Christopher Lowrey (countertenor); Emiliano Gonzalez-Toro; Mathias Vidal (tenor); Gianluca Buratto (bass)

Cappella Mediterranea/Leonardo García Alarcón

rec. Temple de Le Sentier, Vallée De Joux (Switzerland), during le Cadre des Rencontres Musicales de la Vallée de Joux, April 2016.

Texts and translations included

ALPHA 249 [72:24]

Cappella Mediterranea has already made several distinguished recordings, including a Monteverdi *Vespers* for the Ambronay label ([review](#)), and their *Carmina Latina* album for the Ricercar label ([review](#)). This is the first of Leonardo García Alarcón's recordings for Alpha Classics, and it marks the 450th anniversary of Monteverdi's birth.

This is both an original programme of music by one of Alarcón's favourite composers and a kind of sampler of Monteverdi's music - both the placing of arias and madrigals in a new context, and providing an introduction that can and should lead to further exploration. Monteverdi never wrote a work called *I 7 Peccati Capitali*, but this anthology alternates between sins and virtues, resulting in fourteen superbly performed and recorded tracks of pieces from *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse*, *Orfeo*, the madrigals, and including an excerpt from the *Selva morale e Spirituale*.

The booklet notes, presented in a gorgeously illustrated hardback cover, start with Alarcón's own comments on 'Monteverdi or the Garden of Delights.' He sums up *L'incoronazione di Poppea* as "perhaps the most amoral opera in the history of music," while "offering a moral remedy to vice, in the madrigals of the *Selva morale*."

Beyond concerns of vice and sanctity, this is the kind of album which you can kick off your shoes, sit back and revel in: following the texts in translation so you know what's going on if that has priority. With both excellent singing and acting, the vocal performances are second to none, and it's certainly worth being made aware of the emotional depth, irony and wit in both Monteverdi's settings and the performances themselves. Each track runs with a logical progression to the next, each cleverly chosen to suit the tonality of the last and to provide both contrast and continuity.

Purists may sniff a little at such a compilation of music from disparate sources, but they will be missing out on a real treat if they avoid this release. More than just a collection of highlights, this is a well-judged programme that creates its own narrative, from the opening 'Hope' to a finale that champions 'Courage' via Nero's lustful desires and designs on Poppea. There are plenty of other dramas and virtues along the way. This is a delectable box of musical treasures that you will certainly want to open more than once.

Dominy Clements

Franz LISZT (1811-1886)

15 Songs

Tre sonetti di Petrarca, S.270/1 (1842-46; first version) [19:30]

Angiolin dal biondo crin (Marchese Cesare Boccella), S.269/2 (1839; second version ?1849) [5:38]

Comment, disaient-ils (Victor Hugo), S.276/2 (1842; second version 1849-1859) [1:56]

Oh! Quand je dors (Victor Hugo), S.282/2 (1842; second version 1849) [5:15]

Enfant, si j'étais roi (Victor Hugo), S.283/2 (1844; second version 1849) [2:56]

S'il est un charmant gazon (Victor Hugo), S.284/2 (1844; second version 1849-1859) [2:27]

Go not, happy day (Alfred, Lord Tennyson), S.335 (1879) [3:06]

Kling leise, mein Lied (Johann Nordmann), S.301/2 (1848; second version, 1849-1860) [5:06]

Jugendglück (Richard Pohl), S.323 (?1860) [1:48]

Drei Lieder aus Schillers Wilhelm Tell, S.292/1 (1845; first version) [13:04]

Ihr Glocken von Marling (Emil Kuh), S.328 (1874) [3:23]

Timothy Fallon (tenor)

Ammiel Bushakevitz (piano)

rec. July 2015, Jerusalem Music Centre, Mishkenot Sha'ananim, Jerusalem, Israel

Sung texts with English translations enclosed

BIS BIS-2272 [65:56]

Liszt composed a considerable number of songs, from the late 1830s and throughout his life. Many of them he returned to for revisions, sometimes quite extensive, and in many cases more than once. Recently I reviewed a disc titled "Forgotten Liszt", with Benjamin Brecher, tenor, and Robert Koenig, piano. They focused primarily on the first versions—the "originals"—for the simple reason that they have been difficult to come by, many of them long since out of print, and thus forgotten. No fewer than six of the songs were premiere recordings. On the present disc Timothy Fallon and Ammiel Bushakevitz have instead mostly concentrated on second versions, where Liszt very often has honed the originals, sometimes softened the virtuosity, given them a more mature shape. The good thing is that we now have several versions available and can compare, can enjoy their various aspects. Simply expressed: we can enthuse about youthful freshness one minute and savour mature perfection the next. When the ongoing Hyperion project is finished—hopefully within a couple of years—we will have all the circa 129 versions available in first-class readings, but that will not exclude other recordings, provided that they are good.

I knew Timothy Fallon from before, having heard him as the tenor soloist in Sven-David Sandström's *Messiah*, both in the [recording](#) and in a [live performance](#). I liked him a lot but thought him too weak in the concert hall. I was not prepared for the marvellous singing he delivers in this recital. The Petrarch Sonnets are among Liszt's greatest masterworks in this genre, and they demand a singer with beauty of tone, stamina and intelligence. They were originally conceived for high tenor and piano but later transcribed to piano pieces and included in the Italian *Années de Pèlerinage*. And the piano is of great importance in the songs as well. Ammiel Bushakevitz's delicious playing was the first thing that caught my attention in *Pace non trovo*. When Timothy Fallon enters, one feels that these two musicians are twin souls: their phrasing, their nuances mirror each other. Just listen to the beginning of the second stanza *Tal m'ha in prigion* where the pianist's soft phrases are followed by the most exquisite lyrical *mezza*

voce, bristling with strong feeling. Maybe Fallon's tone is slightly pinched at forte but his singing is constantly engaging and the end of the song is ravishing! In *Benedetto sia 'l giorno* his phrasing and timbre remind me of the young Pavarotti, before he adopted the mannerisms of his superstar years. His involvement is tangible and the way he builds up an intense crescendo is certainly Pavarottian, but most of all he impresses with his half-voice. *I' vidi in terra* is again marvellously sensitively performed by singer and pianist alike. I have heard and reviewed several highly recommendable recordings of these songs during the last few years. [Rebecca Evans](#) (Signum), [Matthew Polenzani](#) (Hyperion), [Gerald Finley](#) (Hyperion) and [Dmitri Hvorostovsky](#) (Ondine) are all masterly. Now I will add Timothy Fallon to that select group.

And the excellence is not limited to the Petrarch Sonnets. The first song Liszt ever wrote, *Angiolin dal biondo crin* from 1839, is here sung in the second version, probably made in 1849. He revised it three times which surely indicates that it was important to him. Written for his three-year-old daughter, this simple and utterly beautiful song is here sung with love and care.

Victor Hugo was Liszt's friend and idol—they also shared their political convictions—and Hugo was the poet he set most of all. Four of these settings, all from the early 1840s, form a little group, nicely contrasted and most exquisitely sung: the eager and humoristic *Comment, disaient-ils; Oh! Quand je dors*, one of the most well-known of his songs and here sung with hushed intensity at *mezza voce*; *Enfant, si j'étais roi*; and *S'il est un charmant gazon*, also exquisite. The only setting of an English poem was *Go not, happy day* from Tennyson's *Maud*. It is a late composition, from 1879, when Liszt was approaching 70, and here his harmonic language is pointing forward to impressionism.

The rest of the disc consists of excursions into the German poetry. *Klinge, leise, mein Lied* is rarely heard, but it is a beautiful song. It is sung with great feeling and an exquisite legato. *Jugendglück* is characterized by some virtuoso piano playing. And piano virtuosity is also part and parcel of the three songs from Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, here heard in the first version from 1845. *Der Fischerknabe* is outgoing and virtuoso, the vocal part less so, but requires dramatic strength and expressivity. *Der Hirt* is more melancholy. The herdsman must take leave of the pastures for summer is over. But he will return when the cuckoo calls. *Der Alpenjäger* is the most dramatic song here, with thundering accompaniment and intense declamation, but also warmth and feeling for nature. The final number, *Ihr Glocken von Marling*, is another rather late song. Liszt, as in the Tennyson piece, explores in it harmonies that will be central to impressionism, only a decade or two away.

This is a fine and well-balanced recital with three central groups of songs: The Petrarch Sonnets, the four Hugo settings and Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* trilogy, with some odd songs sandwiched in between, and the encore *Ihr Glocken von Marling* showing the way to the next generation. The BIS recording is all what one could wish, Ammiel Bushakevitz's liner notes informative—though I would prefer to have the comments of the individual songs in the same order as on the disc—and the playing and singing of the highest order. The interest in Liszt's songs is apparently on the increase this disc should win many new admirers of them.

Göran Forsling

Gabriel FAURÉ (1845-1924)/André MESSENGER (1853-1920)

Messe des pêcheurs de Villerville [16:26]

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750) after Giovanni Battista PERGOLESI (1710-1736)

Psalm 51 - *Tilge, Höchster, meine Sünden*, BWV1083 [37:20]

Fauré-Ensemble (Messe)

Ania Vegry (soprano), Mareike Morr (alto), Arte Ensemble (Psalm)

Mädchenchor Hannover/Gudrun Schröfel

rec. October 2015 (Messe), February 2016 (Psalm), St Paul's Church, Hanover, Germany

RONDEAU ROP6119 [53:46]

The logic of this pairing of works on a single disc might not be immediately apparent; one is a cheerful, summery celebration of French peasant life in an almost rustic mass setting, the other a highly sophisticated setting of one of the most searingly powerful of all Psalm texts. But the concealed narrative lies in the duality of composers for each work.

Gabriel Fauré and his pupil André Messager shared the task of writing a Mass for the fishermen of the idyllic Normandy fishing village of Villerville where it was first performed in the local church by a choir of 10 female voices, one harmonium and a violin in the Summer of 1881. Giovanni Battista Pergolesi wrote his *Stabat Mater* in 1735, and while it used to be believed it was written for a performance in the church of San Luigi di Palazzohe in Naples in 1736, recent scholarship seems to think it may have been first performed in September 1735 at the church of San Nicolo alla Carita with which Pergolesi himself was affiliated. Irrespective of its origins, the work rapidly spread across Europe and a copy reached Dresden which Johann Sebastian Bach saw and copied, replacing the Roman Catholic text with the Protestant German version of Psalm 51. This Bach version was first presented in St Thomas's Leipzig in either 1746 or 1747.

The Fauré/Messager work rarely appears on CD – at the moment I can only find three available recordings of it, although there have been others – which may be down to the fact that many of Fauré's contributions were subsequently turned into his *Messe Basse*. The 'Qui tollis' here – rather awkwardly inserted into a jaunty Gloria - is better known as the *Messe Basse's* Benedictus, with Nikolaus Kolb's charming oboe descant lending it an endearingly innocent feel and putting a very large smile on its face, while the first part of the Sanctus was lifted directly into the later work, and the Agnus Dei is a simplified version of what Fauré put into the *Messe Basse*. The version recorded here is not the 1881 original but Messager's subsequent orchestration of it for eight instruments and organ and his division of the vocal line into three female voice parts, which was professionally performed in Villerville the following year. It nevertheless retains a lovely intimacy on this disc, and if the voices sometimes feel a little too exposed and fragile, this only heightens that sense of charming rusticity which pervades the work.

Gudrun Schröfel shapes the lines beautifully and the Hannover women's choir responds enthusiastically, give or take the odd wobble and strangulated vowel. As for the instrumental playing, that is simply idyllic. The charming flute of Eva Ludwig and a lovely violin solo from Birte Päplow add distinction to the otherwise unexceptional setting of *O Salutaris hostia* which Messager inserted in the place of a Benedictus, while underpinning it all, the organ, played by Ulfert Smidt, has an uncannily harmonium-esque quality which seems utterly appropriate.

Warning. If you play the disc straight through, the lack of any noticeable gap between the end of the *Messe* and the opening of the Psalm setting is, not to put too fine a point on it, seriously disturbing. That apart, this is a fine recording of the Bach Pergolesi parody, and among the best of a large number which are currently available in the catalogue. From the very outset, Schröfel moves the music along with a

purposeful tread and clearly has no intention of wallowing in the pathos of Pergolesi's original. If anything this is a performance which underlines the Bach element at the expense of the Pergolesi, tracing the flowing lines and inner textural detail with great clarity and adding some pleasing (if not always successfully negotiated) north-Germanic ornaments. The choir is on more sure and solid ground than they had been in the *Messe* and the larger ensemble – ten strings and organ – gives much greater weight and substance to the performance while never other than subtly supportive of the voices.

The 14 brief sections are divided between the chorus and the two solo voices. Crisply articulated violins pave the way for the gloriously pure and bell-like tones of Ania Vegry as she sings with surprising relish of the guilt she feels for her past “sinful actions” (second section - “Ist mein Herz in Missentaten”), and Mareike Morr positively bubbles along as she proclaims that her sins have made her weak (section four – “Dich erzürnt mein Tun und Lassen”). There is almost breathless spirit as the choir confess that they have been “in sin conceived” (section six – “Sieh, ich bin Sünd empfangen”). One thing Bach cannot be accused of doing here is of reflecting the text in the music; the desire to preserve Pergolesi's music as accurately as possible often leads to some seemingly incongruous matching of texts with music.

Marc Rochester

Mily BALAKIREV (1837-1910)

Piano Sonata in B flat minor (1900-05) [24:08]

Rêverie (c. 1900) [4.50]

Mazurka No. 6 in A flat major (1902) [4.39]

Islamey (Oriental Fantasy) (1869 rev 1902) [9:05]

Franz LISZT (1811-1886)

[Piano Sonata](#) in B minor S178 (1852-53) [27.57]

Sergei LYAPUNOV (1859-1924)

Études, Op. 11 no. 1: Berceuse Andantino (pub 1900-05) [4.27]

12 Études d'exécution transcendante, Op. 11 (pub 1900-05) (67.52)

Louis Kentner (piano)

rec. Studio 3, Abbey Road, London, 1939-1949

APR 6020 [70:41 + 72:19]

This twofer charts a decade's worth of recordings made by the Hungarian-born Louis Kentner. He was at his considerable peak at this time and all the works were recorded for British Columbia at Studio 3 at Abbey Road: the Lyapunov sessions were supervised by the supremo tyrant, Walter Legge.

The first disc contains his pioneering recording of Balakirev's Piano Sonata in B flat minor, a performance of dexterous colour, deft marshalling of fugal material and limpid treble tracery. Kentner has few equals in his cultivation of unforced lyricism in this repertoire and in the thoughtful exploration of the Russian melancholy encoded in the slow movement that follows the Mazurka, rather casually yoked into the structure: this Mazurka was actually composed five years before the rest of the sonata. The finale is notable for its vivid excitement as well as this splendidly calibrated rubati. The same composer's *Rêverie* is refined and full of luminous delicacy whilst that piledriver *Islamey*, which requires an outsize exponent such as Barere for a full survey of its more incendiary qualities, nevertheless receives a reading of vivid, if not incandescent qualities. The high take numbers, as in the Liszt Sonata that he recorded in 1948 and which closes the first disc, tell their own story of a striving for perfection before the days of cut-and-splice.

Controlled but not explosive, leonine but not hyper-virtuosically fast like Horowitz, the Liszt is a splendid example of Kentner's art. It was preceded by only a few recordings of the sonata: Cortot, Horowitz, Cor de Groot and György Sandor. Though Kentner originally recorded it in 1948 before Sandor, he went back to basics and re-recorded the whole work, which didn't appear in public until 1951. This is its first CD restoration. Lyapunov's Transcendental Études is still a desperately rare piece to find in the catalogue, even today. For 1949 it must have seemed like one of those society editions or ones underwritten and sponsored by the Maharajah of Mysore – though in fact neither is true. This set was originally reissued (for the first time) in 2002 by APR but its reappearance here, in the context of some of Kentner's very greatest recordings, is no less welcome. Kentner's sense of character study building is exemplary, whether it's in the Lisztian finger exercising of the second étude, the noble bell rings of the exultant third étude, the truly poetic traversal of the fifth étude, sub-titled *Nuit d'été*, or the Aeolian harp evocations of étude nine. Rather like *Islamey* there's virtuosity and folkloric vigour in étude ten, another Liszt-evoking étude 11 and then the final étude itself, one in memory of Liszt, the man whose musicianship and compositions had so informed Lyapunov's own work. An earlier 1939 recording of just the first étude, the Berceuse, is also usefully included as an aperitif for the whole 1949 reading.

The Balakirev was reissued on Naxos 8.111223 coupled with a swathe of Kentner's Liszt. This APR is much the better transfer – much less bedeviled by a stubborn echo. Indeed, the transfers throughout are fine and so are the most helpful notes.

Jonathan Woolf

Previous review: [Stephen Greenbank](#)

Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

24 Preludes and Fugues for Piano, Op.87 (1950-51)

Craig Sheppard (piano)

rec. live April 2015, Meany Theater, Seattle. DDD

ROMÉO RECORDS 7315-16 [63:34 + 78:01]

Shostakovich wrote some important piano music, but perhaps his most significant work for solo piano was the Op 87 set of Preludes and Fugues. The spur to composition came in 1950, the year of the bicentenary of Bach's death. In that year Shostakovich went to Leipzig to be a member of the jury at the first Bach International Piano Competition. I think I'm right in saying that during his visit he also took part in a performance of Bach's Concerto for Three Keyboards, BWV 1063. Craig Sheppard reminds us in his booklet notes that Shostakovich was particularly impressed by hearing Tatiana Nikolayeva playing *Das wohltemperierte Klavier* in Leipzig and while I don't believe he wrote Op 87 expressly for her, she was to become one of the work's most notable interpreters. She recorded the work at least twice ([review](#)).

Back home in the Soviet Union after his trip to Leipzig, Shostakovich set to work and the complete set of preludes and fugues was composed between 25 September 1950 and 25 February 1951. The notes tell us that he organised the pieces in the circle of fifths rather than chromatically as Bach had done. Though he may not have followed Bach's example in that respect, quite a number of the individual pieces within Op 87 display a pronounced Bachian influence, albeit refracted through Shostakovich's own style.

In fact, although I referred to the composer's style, what is striking when one listens to these pieces as a sequence, is how varied they are. So, for instance, the F sharp minor prelude has Shostakovich's trademark perkiness, while later the B flat minor prelude is melancholic, while the fugue that follows is often haunting. The G sharp minor prelude is an imposing passacaglia, while the succeeding fugue is energetically angular for much of its duration.

The spirit of Bach hovers over much of the set. Shostakovich starts with a Sarabande (prelude in C major) and Craig Sheppard's thoughtful performance impresses. He brings clarity and self-possession to the fugue that follows. I think he's right to say in his notes that the E minor prelude is similar to an organ prelude. His playing here is intense, as it is in the following fugue, much of which is slow and pensive. The light, dexterous fugue in E major is very Bachian, both in concept and performance, and the extended, Bachian fugue in B major is unfolded with admirable patience and structural sense by Sheppard.

The D flat major prelude is a vigorous, dancing piece, superbly articulated by Sheppard. In my notes I scribbled that the opening figure, which returns several times, reminded me of *We wish you a merry Christmas*. I then read in Sheppard's notes that the piece was finished on 30 December: the similarity to an English Christmas carol must be coincidental - mustn't it?

I've commented only on a few individual pieces. However, I can assure readers that Craig Sheppard's account of every constituent part of Op 87 is stimulating, thoroughly convincing and, in the best sense of the word, entertaining. He brings out the humour that's a frequent feature of the music – in the aforementioned D flat major prelude, for example, or in the perky F sharp minor prelude. He's just as successful in the many serious parts of the set, such as the complex web of voices in the B minor fugue or the mysterious, dark-hued C minor prelude. Clarity is a consistent virtue of his playing, so he's ideally equipped to bring out the transparency of Shostakovich's writing in the F minor fugue, and he's equally convincing in his sparkling account of the bouyant A major fugue. It's perfectly acceptable to perform or listen to parts of Op 87, but if you listen to Craig Sheppard's performance from start to finish I think you'll feel, as I did, that you're being taken on a journey of exploration.

I've heard Craig Sheppard in recorded performances of Bach ([review](#) ~ [review](#)), Schubert ([review](#)), Debussy ([review](#) ~ [review](#)) and, above all, in his highly distinguished Beethoven sonata cycle ([review](#)). I've always admired not just his great technical accomplishment, but also the evident deep thought that goes into his performances. Both of those traits are very much in evidence in this set, too. Sheppard seems to get right under the skin of the music and you can tell from the notes that he's written to accompany the discs the extent to which he's pondered the music. His notes, like his playing, are full of insights. He suggests scenarios or characterisations for a good number of the pieces. You may not always concur with the extra-musical images that he proposes, but if nothing else he gets you thinking about the music. I love, for example, his idea that the E flat minor fugue suggests that three monks are dancing gently, almost light-heartedly.

Like all Craig Sheppard's recordings for Roméo this set is taken from live performances at the Meany Theater, Seattle, in this case from two concerts. The Steinway, on which he plays, is recorded fairly closely but by no means too closely. The audience is conspicuously silent except for the vociferous applause, quickly faded, at the end of the concluding D minor Fugue.

This is a rewarding and very fine set which I enjoyed very much.

[John Quinn](#)

Previous review: [Jonathan Woolf](#)

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Paul HINDEMITH (1895-1963)

Complete String Quartets

String Quartet No. 2 in F minor, op.10 (1918) [33:13]

String Quartet No. 3 in C, op.16 (1920) [31:26]

String Quartet No. 5, op.32 (1923) [30:17]

String Quartet No. 6 in E flat (1943) [24:34]

String Quartet No. 7 in E flat (1944-1945) [16:22]

String Quartet No. 1 in C Major, Op. 2 (1914-1915) [41:25]

String Quartet No. 4, Op. 22 (1921) [25:58]

Amar Quartet (Anna Brunner (violin), Igor Keller (violin), Hannes Bärtschi (viola), Péter Somodari (cello))
rec. Grosser Saal, Radiostudio Swiss Radio, Zurich, Switzerland, February 2009 (Nos. 3, 6, 7), December
2009 (Nos. 1, 4), April 2010 (Nos. 2, 5). DDD

Originally released separately as 8.572163-65

NAXOS 8.503290 [64:39 + 71:13 + 67:23]

The seven string quartets of Paul Hindemith can hardly be described as mainstream, both in recordings and live concerts. That is despite them being one of the most significant bodies of work in the genre of the twentieth century. Yes, they may not be up there with the Shostakovich and Bartók, but they are not far behind. They were composed in three stages, the first during Hindemith's time as a student, numbers two to five during the 1910s and 1920s. In that period he also wrote some fine chamber works for the violin, viola and cello, linked to his own performing career. Numbers six and seven were composed during his productive period for chamber music known as "Sonatenwerk", when he wrote sonatas for all the recognised standard instruments of the orchestra.

This is my third recording of the complete string quartets, although my first encounter with these varied and gripping works by the Kocian Quartet on Praga Digital (PRD 350113/14) cannot really be considered complete. It was recorded before the opus 2 quartet was rediscovered and only presents numbers 2 to 7. On a separate disc (PRD 350036) they do, however, provide convincing performances of Hindemith's two other parody works for string quartet, the humorous *Overture to the Flying Dutchman as Played at Sight by a Second-rate Concert Orchestra at the Village Well at 7 O'clock in the Morning* and the *Minimax (Militärminimax): Repertoire for Military Orchestra*. They are both worth hearing, but have received far less attention than the numbered quartets. My other set is the excellent recording by the Danish Quartet on CPO (999 287-2), who along with the Kocian Quartet tend to offer swifter tempos than the "new" Amar Quartet.

The *String Quartet No. 1 in C Major, Op. 2* was completed in 1915 whilst Hindemith was still a student at the Hoch'sche Konservatorium in Frankfurt. Despite that, it shows great maturity and expertise. This probably came from the fact that he had to play in various theatre ensembles to support himself through college. Indeed at the time of composition he was deputy leader of the Frankfurt Opera Orchestra, becoming its leader in 1917. He also performed as second violin in the Rebner String quartet. That gave him insight into quartet form and practice, and undoubtedly aided in the composition of this, his first quartet. The quartet harks back to the romantic tradition of quartet writing. It only shows glimpses of Hindemith's more distinctive and mature styles. It was lost until the early 1990s and only published in 1994. It is sometimes regarded as his No. 0.

The *String Quartet No. 2 in F minor, op.10* from 1918 was composed whilst Hindemith served on the western front. Despite that, the work shows very little of the angst or horrors Hindemith must have

experienced on the front line. This is something of a transitional work. His experiences on the front and in a military band helped him to develop his more personal musical voice. Like all his music, it is based on tonal structure, but it leaps and bounds ahead of his Op. 2. Its central movement *Thema mit Variationen* shows just how far the composer had moved on since his student days. Its complex harmonies lead to a more complex and technical structure.

Probably the most important of his string quartets is the op. 16 No.3 in C. It was composed in 1920 and gave Hindemith his first real success when it was performed the following year at the first Donaueschingen Chamber Music Days. It was this work that announced him to the world. Possibly even more important was the fact that to save the premiere Hindemith himself played the viola part with a group of musicians which in 1922 would become the original Amar Quartet, after whom the present quartet take their name. Of all his earlier quartets, this is the one that points the way—from the romanticism of the First, through the expressionism of the Second, to the complex contrapuntalism of his subsequent works—and that he would be most remembered for.

The most popular of his quartets, the *String Quartet No. 4, Op. 22*, composed in 1921, is the only one of his quartets to achieve a regular airing. The work is in the form of a suite that opens with a slow *Fugato* which leads into a more agitated and expressive section. Here the present Amar Quartet come into their own, with their slower tempo, nearly a minute over their rivals, bringing out every nuance of this music, with the heavy bowed cords of the second movement also being in stronger contrast. The melancholic third movement is described in the booklet notes as “one of the most beautiful movements which Hindemith ever wrote.” The final two movements actually form a single movement, with the *Mäßig schnelle Viertel* leading straight into the final *Rondo*.

The second stage of Hindemith’s quartet writing comes to an end with his *String Quartet No. 5, Op.32* of 1923, the same year when *Minimax* was composed. This quartet is the culmination of Hindemith’s goal for clarity of structure in his music, something he carried over into his *String Trio* of the following year. In this quartet he returns to a four movement format for the first time since the first quartet, although the Danish Quartet in their recording have the third movement *Kliner Marsch* and the final *Passacaglia* banded together as a single movement. The work opens with a pulsating double fugue *Lebhafte Halbe* before moving on, once again, to a more melancholic slow movement. The *Kliner Marsch* is, as the name suggests, very brief, whilst the *Passacaglia* leads in to a series of 28 variations based upon the fugal theme of the first movement.

There were some twenty years between the fifth and sixth quartets, in which time a lot had happened. Hindemith had been denounced by Joseph Goebbels as being an “atonal noisemaker”, his music was included in the Nazi exhibition of *Entartete* or degenerate music and he emigrated to Switzerland in 1938, partly due to his wife’s Jewish ancestry, from where he emigrated to the USA in 1940. It was in light of these developments that Hindemith composed his *String Quartet No. 6 in E flat* in 1943 for the Budapest String Quartet. An example of his mature style, here the music is more intimate. The opening *Sehr ruhig und ausdrucksvoll* is unlike the opening of any of his other quartets, one which is not slow, very quiet and expressive, but one in which he clearly lays out his new musical language, one in which “He now works out freely the harmonic and tonal relationships, rigorously organized; at the centre of the tonal relationships in the fundamental note E flat, and the harmony becomes considerably more relaxed.”

It was the Budapest String Quartet who were to give the full premiere of his *String Quartet No. 7 in E flat* two years later in 1946. The first three movements have had a private performance by a quartet that included the composer on viola, his wife Gertrude on cello and two of his students on violins. The quartet follows the same musical thinking as No. 6, although this is shortest of his quartets, lasting around sixteen

minute. Like its predecessor, it is cast in four movements. Although the work is based on strict contrapuntal ideas, it has a lighter and less complicated feel than some of the other quartets.

I found the performance of the Amar Quartet first rate; they certainly live up to the reputation of their namesakes. They manage to bring out the best in this wonderful music. Yes they are the slowest overall, but this is not a bad thing. It gives them time to give voice to every little phrase and section of the music. Yes, I will always like the Kocian Quartet's playing, but it now sounds a little dated. The excellent Danish Quartet hold their own in comparison to this new set, but for me it is the Amar Quartet, with their greater sense of clarity, which will now be my go-to recording. This is the recording that Hindemith's string quartets have waited for and deserved. They have an ability to excite, charm and entertain. It is the characteristics that the Amar Quartet manage to effortlessly bring out. It proves that there is a lot more than counterpoint to this composer's music. This is a recording which should bring new admirers to Paul Hindemith and his music. I only wish that the Amar Quartet are given chance to record the other works for string quartet, the *Minimax* and the *Overture to the Flying Dutchman*. On their own this would make a short disc, thirty minutes or so, but there are plenty of fine chamber works that could be included with them, for example the *Eight Pieces for 2 violins, viola, cello and double-bass*, which I think have not been recorded yet, or even the songs with string quartet.

Stuart Sillitoe

Previous reviews (original release): [Volume 1](#) ~ [Volume 2](#) (Byzantion)

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Symphony No. 3 in E flat major, Op. 55 'Eroica' [53:54]

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67 [32:25]

Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92 [36:48]

Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Symphony No. 5 in B flat major, D485 [24:13]

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (Schubert)/Sir Georg Solti
rec. Mann Auditorium, Tel Aviv May 1958 (Schubert), Sofiensaal, Vienna September 1958 (Symphony
No.5), October 1958 (Symphony No.7) and May 1959 (Symphony No.3)

DECCA ELOQUENCE 4806596 [78:11 + 69:25]

Erich Kleiber was one of Georg Solti's idols and it was a Kleiber performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony that was, by his own admission, the catalyst in his decision to become a conductor. Solti was one of the Decca label's star conductors and he recorded two complete Beethoven symphony cycles with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in analogue (1974) and digital (1986–90) formats. These earlier recordings with the Vienna Philharmonic are from 1958–9. It seems fashionable these days to decry the work of some conductors such as Solti from earlier eras and I find this quite ridiculous. I'm no big Solti fan to be frank but he deserves more gratitude and respect for the archive of recordings he left behind, many of them pioneering in their day. These Beethoven gems from Solti's early career have two major things going for them. Firstly the magnificent playing of the Vienna Philharmonic and secondly the production values of the legendary John Culshaw.

Those who resist Solti's highly polished, hard driven Chicago performances will be pleasantly surprised by the conductor's earlier Beethoven recordings. There is still a characteristic dynamic drive in the interpretations with an emphasis on rhythmic energy but Solti is somehow more relaxed and humane in Vienna. The *Eroica* sets off with a propulsive opening movement and a funeral march that is dignified, hushed and free flowing. The scherzo is fast and excitingly light footed with an unusually relaxed tempo for the central trio that suits the horns perfectly. The finale is certainly heroic and the Vienna horns sing out gloriously. This is a fine *Eroica* and is musically more satisfying than the conductor's later versions. The DGG CD coupling of Carlos Kleiber's Beethoven 5th and 7th symphonies is the bargain of all bargains but Solti is still worth hearing and his 5th has always been highly regarded. The opening *Allegro con brio* is dramatic, tense and bordering on being hard driven. Horns and low strings are fruity and full toned but the backward balance of the timps is disappointing. This lack of presence also diminishes the magic of the dramatic bridge passage between the last two movements. My main criticisms are an *Allegro con brio* that drags and isn't at all *con brio* and the omission of the repeat in the finale. It's still a very hefty reading though, full of nervous energy and finely executed. The 7th shows the orchestra and conductor in equally good form. In the outer movements Solti creates a marvellous sense of energy and forward momentum. This is closer to the Solti we would become accustomed to in his later career. The last movement was described by Beecham as "sounding like a lot of yaks jumping about" (not the *Presto* as the CD booklet claims) and I see his point. The playing here is superlative with the Vienna strings creating quite a storm in their incessant rhythmic motif. The articulation in this movement and the preceding *Presto* is top class. The Schubert 5th symphony comes from one of only two recording sessions with the Israel Philharmonic in May 1958. Orchestral playing is good but somewhat outclassed by the Viennese in the Beethoven couplings. The Mann auditorium isn't a very flattering acoustic compared to the Sofiensaal either. As a performance it is gentle and Mozartian. You wouldn't particularly recognise it as being the work of Solti.

The recording, especially from Vienna, is classic Decca sound. It's bright, beefy and sparkling with terrific bite and a tangible sense of presence. The stereo soundstage is realistic with well-balanced woodwind, soaring horns and a string sound that puts many a modern digital recording to shame. For those younger readers who might suspiciously look at the 1950s recording dates, I would urge them not to be put off. This is highly recommended.

John Whitmore