

HYPERION AT 40
By Brian Wilson

It seems no time at all since I wrote about thirty of Hyperion's best recordings in advance of their Thirtieth Birthday – [article](#) and again to celebrate the event in [October 2010](#). For December 2020, they have given us their own selection. Some of these were included in my two lists in 2009 and 2010, but there are many other fine recordings listed there which are not on the new list.

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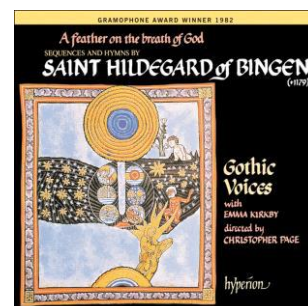
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Saint Hildegard of BINGEN (1098-1179)

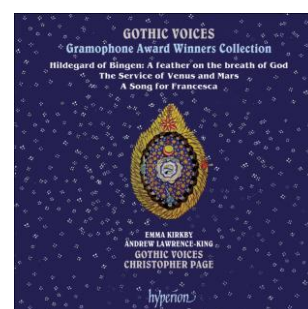
A feather on the Breath of God

Emma Kirkby (soprano), Gothic Voices

CDA66039 from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet)[Review](#) by Rob Barnett: 'if you have an interest in this era ... this disc will need to be in your collection'.

Briefly available as CDA30009 this was top of my list in [October 2010](#) and it's top of the Hyperion list now. This recording brought the ethereal music of Hildegard and the voice of Emma Kirkby to our attention, and it remains very desirable, especially now that the download costs only £5.99.

Those wishing to investigate further the many very fine recordings which Gothic Voices made for Hyperion, should also consider the Hildegard of Bingen recording in a 3-CD set of Gramophone Winners (CDS44251-3 – [review](#)): in addition to *A feather on the breath of God*, that includes *The Service of Venus and Mars* (also on [CDH55290](#): Bargain of the Month – [review](#) – [review](#)) and *A Song for Francesca* (also on [CDH55291](#) – [review](#) – [September 2011/1](#)).



The 3-CD set costs £10.50 on disc or as a lossless download with booklet from hyperion-records.co.uk.

Souvenirs de Venise

Anthony Rolfe Johnson (tenor), Graham Johnson (piano)

CDH55217 from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet)

[Review](#) by John Quinn: 'This is a most enjoyable disc and its return to the catalogue ... is to be welcomed most warmly'. Though the Hyperion Helios reissues are no longer at budget price, this album can be downloaded for £5.99. (CD around £8.50).

**Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)**

Clarinet Concerto and Clarinet Quintet

Dame Thea King (basset clarinet), English Chamber Orchestra, Jeffrey Tate

CDA66199 from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet)

This was reissued at mid-price with the number CDA30010 – [October 2010](#) – but has now reverted to its original catalogue number. The download is available for £7.99, the CD for just a penny more.



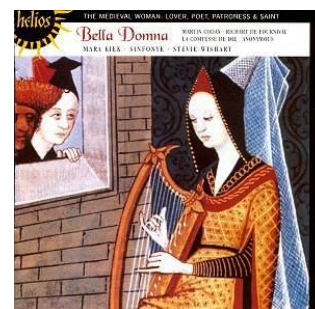
The main recommendation for this recording concerns Thea King's use of the basset clarinet, which allows the solo part to be played without transcription on the instrument for which Mozart wrote these works, though now obsolete. That would be just an historical novelty were it not for the quality of the playing: that, for all my love of versions by Jack Brymer and Gervase de Peyer, makes this recording still one of the best available.

Don't overlook Thea King's many other fine recordings for Hyperion – [list](#) – not least the Finzi and Stanford clarinet concertos (CDH55101 – [review](#) – [September 2010](#) – [December 2009](#) – from [hyperion-records.co.uk](#).)

Bella Donna - The medieval woman: Lover, poet, patroness and saint
Sinfonye

CDH55207 from [hyperion-records.co.uk](#) (CD and lossless download with booklet)

Bargain of the Month [review](#) by Glyn Pursglove: [this] 'belongs in every collection of medieval song'.



The original release of this recording (CDA66283) sits with a group of recordings of medieval music in a cubby-hole in my computer desk, ready to hand, when too many CDs are apt to get lost. The pile mostly come from Hyperion's many very fine recordings with Gothic Voices and the all too small recorded repertoire which David Munrow and his Early Music Consort left us, but Sinfonye prove themselves the equal of both here.

Gothic Voices are already represented in this survey by the Hildegard of Bingen recording, singly and in the 3-CD set (above) but I do recommend investigating the many other recordings which they made for Hyperion – list [here](#).

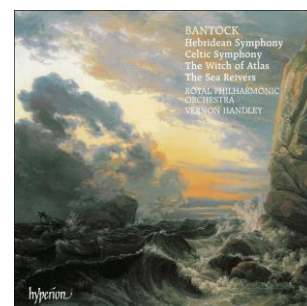
Sir Granville BANTOCK (1868-1946)

Hebridean and Celtic Symphonies

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Vernon Handley

CDA66450 from [hyperion-records.co.uk](#) (CD and lossless download with booklet)

Also included in 6-CD set CDS44281-6 – [review](#) by Rob Barnett: 'What an achievement this is!'



With the complete set available to download for £30 and on CD for £33, why not follow RB's advice and go for the whole thing, from [hyperion-records.co.uk](#)? See also my [review](#) of the Bantock *Pagan* Symphony, another work included in the complete set.

The Romantic Piano Concerto: 11

Emil von SAUER (1862-1942) and Franz Xaver SCHARWENKA (1850-1924): Piano Concertos

(first recordings)

Stephen Hough (piano)

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Lawrence Foster

CDA66790 - from [hyperion-records.co.uk](#) (CD and lossless download with booklet)

[Review](#) by Rob Barnett: 'Stephen Hough accords to these obscure war-

horses a seriousness and dedication that transforms the exercise into a really rewarding musical experience. I had higher hopes of the Scharwenka but in fact the Sauer is a sheerly delightful piece with a touch or two of Chopin about it'.



The Romantic Piano Concerto and the Romantic Violin Concerto series are among the glories of the Hyperion catalogue, often bringing us records of material previously available only in rough-and-ready performances from Vox and others, or not at all.

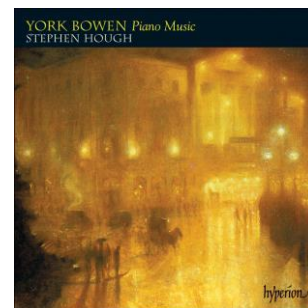
York BOWEN (1884-1961)

Piano Music

Stephen Hough (piano)

CDA66838 from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet)[Review](#) by Rob Barnett: 'A warm recommendation for this Hyperion disc'.

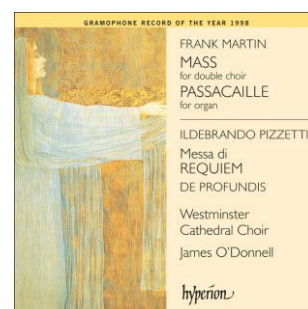
This is only one of a number of Hyperion recordings which have helped bring York Bowen's music to our attention – [list](#). The Viola Concerto (CDA67546, with Forsyth Viola Concerto – [review](#)) has dropped into the Archive Service, but can still be downloaded in 16- and 20-bit formats, with pdf booklet from hyperion-records.co.uk. His two piano concertos (Nos. 3 and 4) were a Recording of the Month (CDA67659 – [review](#) – [June 2012/2](#)).

**Frank MARTIN (1890-1974)** Mass for double choir**Ildebrando PIZZETTI (1880-1968)** *Messa di Requiem*

Westminster Cathedral Choir/James O'Donnell

CDA67017 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet)

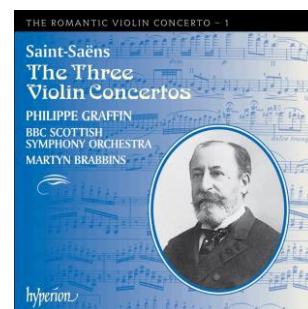
We haven't reviewed this in its own right, but I mentioned it favourably in connection with a Delphian recording of the Martin – [review](#). Of three recordings of that work, the Hyperion comes closest to persuading me of its value, but it still leaves me not wholly convinced.

**The Romantic Violin Concerto: 1****Camille SAINT-SAËNS (1835-1921)**

Violin Concertos Nos. 1-3

Philippe Graffin (violin)

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/Martyn Brabbins

CDA67074 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet)Reviews by [Rob Barnett](#) (4-star: 'Recommended in every respect') and [Gerald Fenech](#) (5-star: 'such alive performances').

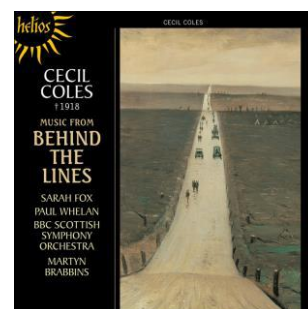
Reviewing an Analekta recording of these three concertos, I felt that the Hyperion – my benchmark recording – had a slight advantage: [DL News 2016/2](#). This was the first in what was to become a successful series of Romantic Violin Concertos.

Cecil COLES (1888-1918)

Music from Behind the Lines

Sarah Fox (soprano); Paul Whelan (tenor);

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/Martyn Brabbins

HYPERION HELIOS CDH55464 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet)Recording of the Month when first released on CDA67293 – [review](#) – [review](#).

Coles was one of the most talented of the composers who lost their lives in the First World War, yet few remember him now – or did until Hyperion brought us this recording. Much of the music here was composed after Coles was sent to the front in 1915 but no allowance has to be made for the circumstances. Widely hailed on its first appearance, its reissue in 2014 was very welcome and it remains so, even though it's now more expensive than when the Hyperion Helios label was at budget price – [DL News 2014/9](#).

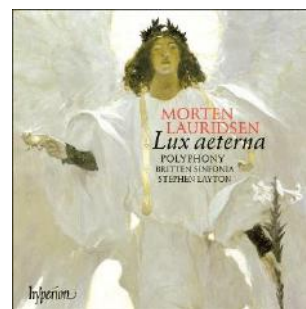
Morten LAURIDSEN (b.1943)*Lux æterna* and other choral works

Polyphony

Britten Sinfonia/Stephen Layton

CDA67449 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet). Some dealers may still have a copy of the SACD release (SACDA67449).

Recording of the Month – [review](#): ‘This Hyperion release is superb and the disc is a must. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have’ (John Phillips).



I seem to have missed this recording, though I know two very fine recordings of *Lux æterna* – from King’s College Choir, Cambridge, and Stephen Cleobury (*The Music of King’s* KGS0034 – [Spring 2019/2](#)), and from St John’s, Cambridge, College Choir and David Hill (*Christmas at St John’s*, Hyperion CDA67576: Recording of the Month – [review](#) – [December 2011/1](#)). Fine as those recordings are, I’m pleased now to have this all-Lauridsen Hyperion recording.

Sergei RACHMANINOV (1873-1943)

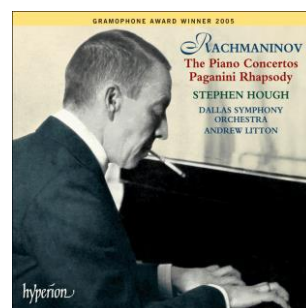
The Piano Concertos

Stephen Hough (piano)

Dallas Symphony Orchestra/Andrew Litton

CDA67501/2 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (2CDs and lossless download with booklet)

[Review](#) by Colin Clarke: ‘A truly superb set’.



These recordings, originally CD only for copyright reasons, can now also be downloaded. Christopher Howell was in a minority in having some reservations – [review](#). I don’t share them. If you haven’t already chosen this recording, it really is very good. The catalogue number listed in [October 2010](#) has now reverted to the original, as above.

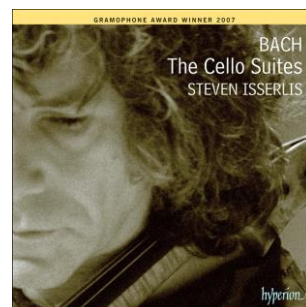
Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)

The Cello Suites

Steven Isserlis (cello)

CDA67541/2 from hyperion-records.co.uk (2 CDs, lossless and 24-bit download with booklet)

Recording of the Month – [review](#): ‘As a set of the complete cello suites by J.S. Bach this, to me, represents the best of the best in this most personal of all possible worlds’ (Dominy Clements).



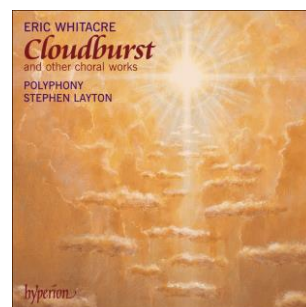
Briefly available as CDA30001 at mid-price – [October 2010](#) – this now reverts to its original catalogue number. It remains my benchmark for these suites – not my favourite Bach, but Isserlis makes the music less cerebral than most.

Eric WHITACRE (b.1970)*Cloudburst* and other choral works

Polyphony/Stephen Layton

CDA67543 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet)

Recording of the Month [review](#) – John Quinn: ‘This is a very fine disc indeed. I’ve enjoyed it greatly and now that I’ve had the chance to sample more of Eric Whitacre’s music I believe that he’s a highly significant composer with a very genuine gift for choral writing and one, moreover, with that priceless ability to communicate strongly and effectively with his audience. I hope that this



disc will be widely heard; it deserves to be. I have absolutely no hesitation in recommending it’.

I came close to making this my Discovery of the Month in [October 2010](#).

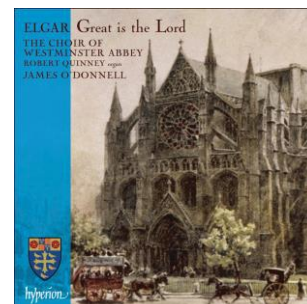
Sir Edward ELGAR (1857-1934)

Great is the Lord and other works

Westminster Abbey Choir, Robert Quinney (organ)/James O'Donnell

CDA67593 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet)

[Review](#) – John Quinn: ‘I have to warn, even though I am a great enthusiast for this composer, that this programme contains some music that is decidedly “B” list Elgar but there’s also a good deal of noble music to enjoy in very good performances and the disc is a fine offering as part of the 150th anniversary’ celebrations’.



Released and reviewed slightly before I started contributing to MusicWeb, this is one of those Hyperion recordings that I have been meaning for some time to catch up with. As an added encouragement for readers to do the same, the download and the CD cost only £6.50 from [Hyperion](#) when I checked. And second-rate Elgar is better than many other composers’ best, so everything here is worth hearing – Anglican and Roman Catholic works alike – as performed by the Abbey choir.

Domenico SCARLATTI (1685-1757)

Sonatas, Vol. 1

Angela Hewitt (piano)

CDA67613 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit lossless download with booklet)

[Review](#) – Curtis Rogers: ‘[Hewitt demonstrates] a lifetime of sensitive reflection and performance of this music, and that personality shines through in every track’.



Having just written that even second-rate Elgar is pretty good by me, I have to say that Scarlatti on the piano – or any composer who expected to hear his music on the harpsichord – is second-rate in my book, with the honourable exception of Angela Hewitt’s Bach. To which, having listened to the 24-bit download, I must now add her Scarlatti; somehow, she has the knack of over-riding just about all my objections even when, as she admits, repeated notes sound awkward on the piano.

William BYRD (1539/40-1623)

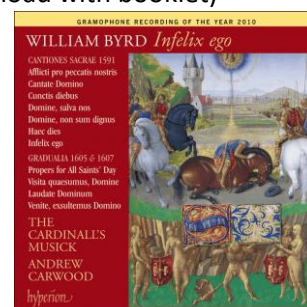
Infelix ego and other sacred music

The Cardinal’s Musick/Andrew Carwood

CDA67779 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit lossless download with booklet)

Recording of the Month – [review](#) – Michael Greenhalgh: performances ... of palpable commitment and exceptional quality, clarifying Byrd’s emotional range and power’.

Download of the Month – [February 2010](#): ‘*Finis coronat opus* – the end crowns the work. This is the final volume in the Cardinal’s Musick series of recordings of Byrd’s Latin music, commenced by ASV and concluded by Hyperion. It sums up in excellent fashion the qualities of the whole series’. The 16-bit sounds very fine – I’m not sure why I didn’t choose the 24-bit, perhaps because downloading was a lot slower ten years ago: now, with fibre, a whole album has downloaded sometimes before I expect.



Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Violin Concertos in e minor and d minor; *The Hebrides (Fingal's Cave)*

Alina Ibragimova (violin)

Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment/Vladimir Jurowski

CDA67795 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit lossless download with booklet)

[Review](#) – David A McConnell: ‘This is a thoughtful and beautifully prepared performance that nevertheless fails to displace my favorite recordings... I am glad to have heard [Ibragimova’s] interpretation, and you may feel differently about her concept of the E minor concerto than I do. Rarely will you hear it played more beautifully than it is here’.



‘The Hyperion is a very fine release, recommended and well-worth hearing, but there are so many excellent recordings of this fine work’ – Geoffrey Molyneux, [DL News 2012/21](#).

Joseph HAYDN (1732-1809)

String Quartets Op.20 (performed from the Artaria edition published in Vienna in 1801)

The London Haydn Quartet

CDA67877 2 CDs for the price of one – from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet)

[Review](#) – Dominy Clements: ‘Hyperion’s excellent sound quality is the topping on a very refined and highly enjoyable listening experience, and given the generous pricing for this two disc set I easily find myself very much in the warmly supportive camp when it comes to giving a recommendation’.



‘The London Haydn Quartet, who play with gut strings and classical bows, have already recorded the earlier Op.9 and Op.17 sets, each also available as a 2-for-1 offer, and made good cases for at least some of the works included there, but Op.20 brings us onto more mature territory, with performances to match’. [DL Roundup September 2011/2](#).

Ernest BLOCH (1880-1959)

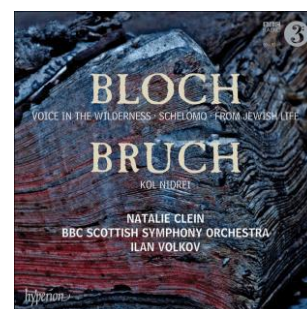
Schelomo and *Voice in the Wilderness*;

Max BRUCH: Kol Nidrei

Natalie Clein (cello), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Ilan Volkov

CDA67910 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit lossless download with booklet)

Recording of the Month – [review](#) – Hugh Culott: ‘a magnificent release’.



‘I can’t un-know the fact that this recording has already received some enthusiastic reviews. I don’t think I’ve been unduly influenced, however, in awarding it high status’ – [DL Roundup September 2012/1](#).

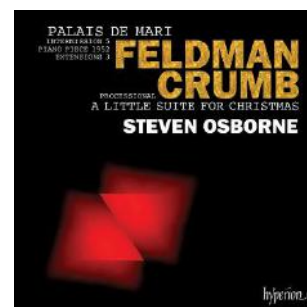
Morton FELDMAN: Palais de Mari;

CRUMB: A Little Suite for Christmas

Steven Osborne (piano)

CDA68108 from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit lossless download with booklet)

[Review](#) by Dan Morgan: ‘It’s hard to imagine ... anything ... in this collection being more sensitively and authoritatively executed. [Other pianists] have the requisite technique but little of Osborne’s spirit-impelling poetry. And ... the Hyperion sound is in another league entirely.’



Epiphanies aplenty for newcomers and old hands alike; ravishing sound, too'; [review](#) by Dominy Clements 'one of the finest piano recordings I've encountered this year'.

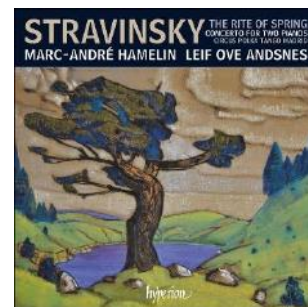
Igor STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)

The Rite of Spring and other works for two pianos four hands

Marc-André Hamelin (piano), Leif Ove Andsnes (piano)

CDA68189 from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD and lossless download with booklet)

Recording of the Month - [review](#) by Dan Morgan: 'Enough energy to launch a Saturn V; a stellar release'; [review](#) by Richard Hanlon: 'a truly wonderful disc. Even by Hyperion's exacting standards, I imagine it will be a tough ask for them to match this stupendous release in what remains of 2018'.



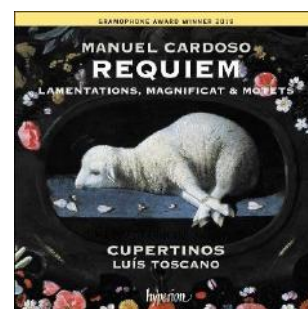
Manuel CARDOSO (1566-1650)

Requiem, Lamentations, Magnificat & motets

Cupertinos/Luís Toscano

CDA68252 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit lossless download with booklet)

[Review](#) – Richard Hanlon: 'a fine debut from this Portuguese group'.



[Winter 2018-19/2](#) page 6: '[Cupertinos is] a professional group dedicated to the performance of Portuguese polyphonic music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and this, their first available in the UK, proves to be very recommendable'. Don't overlook an earlier Hyperion recording of Portuguese music which includes several pieces by Cardoso (CDH55229 – also reviewed in [Winter 2018-19/2](#) page 10).

Most of the Hyperion list goes back a year or a few, though it's certainly not the case that they have ceased producing good stuff. Recent accolades on MusicWeb suggest some more recent additions, reviewed by us in the past year:

Sergei PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

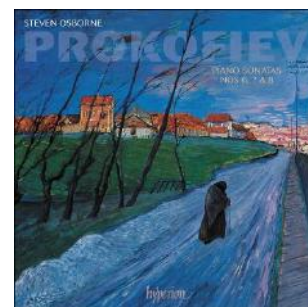
Piano Sonata Nos. 6 - 8

Steven Osborne (piano)

CDA68298 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD 16- and 24-bit download with booklet)

Recording of the Month – [review](#) by Dan Morgan: 'White-hot performances, straight from the forge; superlative sound, even by Hyperion's stellar standards'.

Recommended – [review](#) – [review](#).



These wartime sonatas may not be the easiest music to live with, even by Prokofiev's sometimes demanding standards, but Steven Osborne's are the recordings to go for.

Jēkabs JANČEVSKIS (b.1992)

Aeternum and other choral works

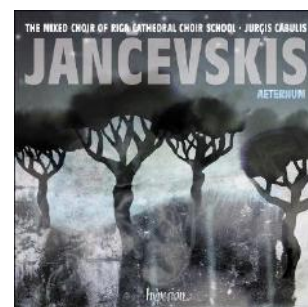
Riga Cathedral Choir School Mixed Choir/Jurgis Cābulis

Texts and translations included.

CDA68328 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD 16- and 24-bit download with booklet)

Recording of the Month – [review](#) by Marc Rochester

Recommended – [review](#) – [review](#)



One every valuable thing has arisen from compiling this survey: it made me realise that I had not even downloaded this recording, let alone reviewed it – I'm getting even more senile than I thought. Better late than never, I grabbed the 24-bit download, available for just £9. It's 'only' 24/44.1, but none the worse for that; in fact, I've just been reading an article suggesting that 24/96 and 24/192 downloads are not only unjustifiably expensive, but they actually distort the sound. I'll have to ponder that; meanwhile, these very fine performances of often beautiful, often challenging, often inspiring music are very well recorded.

With such unfamiliar music and words – not many of us can manage Latvian, though most of could manage to understand that *krab* (track 1) means 'crab' – it's important that the notes should ground us firmly; as usual, the Hyperion booklet is first-rate in that respect.

Samuil FEINBERG (1890-1962)

Piano Sonatas Nos 1-6

Marc-André Hamelin (piano)

CDA68233 - from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD 16- and 24-bit download with booklet)

Recording of the Month: Richard Hanlon – [review](#): 'dizziness and hyperbole [are] triggered in this critic by Volume One'.

[Review](#) by Jonathan Woolf: 'Hamelin powerfully resolves all the technical complications and dramatic conflicts embedded in these intense works. He has been served by a splendid Teldex studio recording and his formidable readings offer much both to disquiet and, more fugitively, to move'.



Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

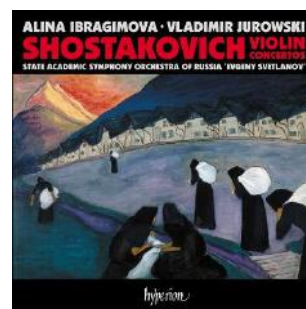
Violin Concertos

Alina Ibragimova (violin), State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia 'Evgeny Svetlanov'/Vladimir Jurowski

CDA68313 – from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit downloads)

Recording of the Month – [review](#).

A well-deserved Recording of the Month – [Retrospective Summer 2020](#), this almost became one of my Recordings of the Year, passed over reluctantly in favour of Vladimir Jurowski's recording of Shostakovich Symphony No.11 with the LPO on their own label – [review](#).



Sir James MacMILLAN (b.1959)

Symphony No 4 and Viola Concerto

Lawrence Power (viola), BBC Philharmonic/Martyn Brabbins

CDA68317 – from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit downloads)

Recommended – [review](#) – [review](#) – [review](#)

I forecast this release in [reviewing](#) a Coro recording of MacMillan's Symphony No.5 and *The Sun Danced*. In the event, three of my colleagues included everything I wanted to say, so I didn't add my two pennyworth.

My incomplete review included a reflection on the possible influences, which added to rather than detracted from my enjoyment: We are summoned by bells into the one-movement Symphony No.4. If this is a nod in the direction of Arvo Pärt, it's not overdone. If there is influence there, as so often with MacMillan's music, it hovers subtly on the verge of the listener's awareness and it's fully absorbed into his own voice. Later there are moments when I could have sworn a piece of renaissance music is making its influence but I couldn't quite place it – the booklet mentions the *Missa Dum sacrum mysterium* by the sixteenth-century composer Robert Carver, whose music, which deserves to be heard alongside his English contemporaries, MacMillan loves and promotes.

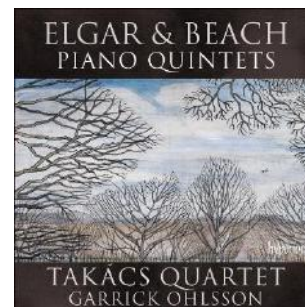


Sir Edward ELGAR (1857-1934) and Amy BEACH (1867-1944) Piano Quintets

Takács Quartet, Garrick Ohlsson (piano)

CDA68295 – from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit downloads)

Recommended – [review](#); [Retrospective Summer 2020](#).



I thought this recording of Elgar's wonderful Piano Quintet preferable even to a recent Chandos recording of the Violin Sonata – another work from the series of resurgent chamber music which the composer wrote at his Brinkwells retreat at the end of WWI.

As for the Beach, this is a work which divides opinion, some finding it passionate, others less than overwhelmed. I see that I noted one day that I was not very impressed; on another occasion, I found myself convinced. One to sample before buying.

Sir Hubert PARRY (1848-1918)

Songs of farewell and works

STANFORD Three Motets, *Magnificat*

GRAY *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*

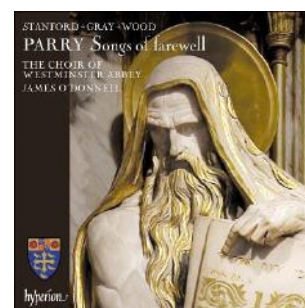
WOOD *Nunc Dimittis*

Westminster Abbey Choir/James O'Donnell

Texts and translations included

CDA68301 – from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit downloads)

[Review](#) – [review](#) – [review](#) – [Retrospective Summer 2020](#).



I'm not sure now why none of us – myself included – failed to give this the Recommended accolade. Only those who prefer the more intimate style of *Tenebrae* in *Songs of Farewell* (Signum – [review](#)) need look elsewhere.

Johannes de CLEVE (1528/9-1582)

Missa Rex Babylonis & other works

Jakob VAET (1529-1567) *Rex Babylonis*

Cinquecento

Texts and translations included

CDA68241 – from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit downloads)



This is another Hyperion Cinquecento recording to add to your shopping list. I said it briefly but decisively – [Spring 2020/3](#); my colleagues said it in greater detail – [review](#): Recommended – [review](#).

Edmund RUBBRA (1901-1986) Piano Concerto in G, Op.85

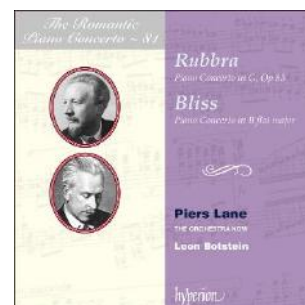
Arthur BLISS (1891-1975) Piano Concerto in B flat

Arnold BAX (1883-1953) Morning Song 'Maytime in Sussex'

Piers Lane (piano); The Orchestra Now/Leon Botstein

CDA68297 – from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit downloads with booklet)

[Review](#) – [review](#) – [review](#).

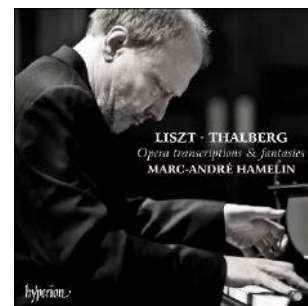


Though there are some very fine recordings of all three works – the Rubbra sounding elderly – this Hyperion release has become my version of choice – [Retrospective Summer 2020](#).

Franz LISZT and Sigismond THALBERG

Opera transcriptions and fantasies

Marc-André Hamelin (piano)

CDA68320 – from hyperion-records.co.uk (CD, 16- and 24-bit downloads with booklet)Recording of the Month: Dan Morgan – [review](#): ‘Remarkable repertoire, peerless pianism and exemplary engineering; this is sure to be high on my list of the year’s very best releases’.Recommended: Jonathan Welsh – [review](#): ‘Absolutely splendid stuff and top marks to Mr. Hamelin and to Hyperion for another winner’.**Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872-1958)**

Symphony No.5 in D (1938-1943) [40:04]

Scenes adapted from Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1906)* [26:46]

Emily Portman (folk voice), Kitty Whately (mezzo), Marcus Farnsworth (baritone)*

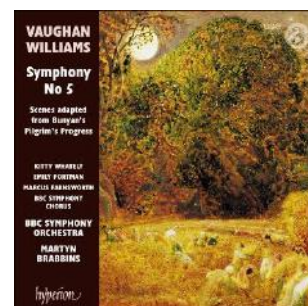
BBC Symphony Chorus; BBC Singers Quartet*

BBC Symphony Orchestra/Martyn Brabbins

rec. Watford Colosseum, 2 December 2018* and 4/5 November 2019.

DDD.

Texts included

Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from hyperion-records.co.uk.**HYPERION CDA68325** [66:59]

This latest in Hyperion’s recordings of Vaughan Williams’ symphonies may be late to the table, with Andrew Manze (Onyx 4184, & Symphony No.6 – [review](#) – [review](#)), Sir Mark Elder (Hallé CDHLL7533, & Symphony No.8 – [review](#) – [review](#)) already recently seated there, and Michael Collins heading the queue for a place (BIS-2367, & Finzi Clarinet Concerto: Recommended – [Retrospective Summer 2020](#)). The mono Decca Boult recordings retain their pace of honour at the high table. Both the recent recordings come with a very special coupling: Collins is the soloist in the Finzi, and with SACD sound.

The Hyperion is even more special, with the *Scenes from Pilgrim’s Progress*, hardly known, let alone performed or recorded, since their premiere in 1906 as incidental music for a dramatization at Reigate Priory. And, though there’s no SACD, the recording can be obtained in 24/96 hi-res sound from Hyperion, which is how I am reviewing it (link above).

Hyperion have already done VW and his interest in Bunyan proud by including *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (1922) on CDA66569 (download only – [November 2010](#) – also included in 4-CD set CDS44321/4 – [review](#) – [review](#)). They have also given us a recording of *The Pilgrim’s Progress - A Bunyan Sequence*, a Christopher Palmer adaptation of a 1942 radio broadcast (CDA66511, also on CDS44321/4). That later work hangs together more coherently than its 1906 predecessor, having become a sequence, not just scenes; Sir John Gielgud’s narration takes us by the hand, and the 4-CD set offers an inexpensive treasure trove of VW’s music – £20 from hyperion-records.co.uk, download only – but I enjoyed hearing the 1906 scenes as a side-order.

With the BBC considering the future of the Last Night of the Proms, VW’s setting of ‘Who would true valour see’ could be a good solution – but with Bunyan’s original words, please, not the bowdlerised version which appears in many hymn books. Changing the original opening to ‘He who would valiant be’, ‘Hobgoblin nor foul fiend’ to ‘No goblin or foul fiend’ – words omitted completely in some versions – and, worst of all, ‘He’ll fear not what men say’ to ‘He’ll not fear ...’. All these alter the rhythm of the words and, thus, of the music. And the pace should be not the doleful dirge, as often sung in church, but that adopted by Martyn Brabbins on the new recording.

The 'morality' which finally emerged from VW's labours is religiously neutral in that VW changed the name of the principal character from 'Christian' to 'Pilgrim', so the hymn could appeal also to Moslems, Buddhists, Sikhs and others. Unaccountably, 'Who would true valour see' was not set in the 1942 sequence, so that's even more reason to choose the new Hyperion recording.

I'm suspicious of the label 'agnostic' being applied to Vaughan Williams – it's too easily thought of as signifying atheism, whereas his beliefs seem really to have been much closer to the 'Christian agnosticism' of Thomas Hardy. I think he would approve of Price Charles' desire to become 'Defender of faiths' in the plural. For all his love of Bunyan's dream-vision, however, he deliberately omitted the more puritanical passages of the text. Puritans like Bunyan – and the Pilgrim Fathers – were all in favour of freedom of religion as long it met their definition. Ignorance, who prefers a more traditional form of belief and finds 'a way to Hell even from the Gates of Heaven' is omitted from VW's text.

Some of the music from 1906 and 1942 never found its way into the final *Pilgrim's Progress* and, though that has been well recorded by Sir Adrian Boult (Warner 7291262 or 7642122, both download only – [review](#) of 13-CD box set) and Richard Hickox (Chandos CHAN9625), there's still value in hearing the steps by which the composer got there. 'Who would true valour see' was restored in the morality, to accompany the stages of the arming of Pilgrim in II.i.

There's a strong link between that 1942 sequence and Symphony No.5. By the time that he was working on the symphony, VW had almost given up any hope of his complete music for *Pilgrim's Progress* being performed, let alone recorded, so he re-used much of the music in the symphony. Even now that we have recordings of the complete work.

If you buy this recording for the Bunyan, you are unlikely to be disappointed by the symphony, but if you already have recording of that work, the Bunyan scenes can be downloaded separately.

Scenes adapted from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: details

Prelude [1:56]

Dances: Sellinger's Round & The Lost Lady [1:38]

Flower-girl's song – 'Tis young men and maidens all [3:11]

Emily Portman (voice)

The arming of Christian - Who would true valour see [2:22]

BBC Symphony Chorus

Apollyon: Start of scene [0:24]

Apollyon: The fight [1:39]

The angel's song - Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High [4:06]

Kitty Whately (mezzo-soprano)

Down among the dead men - Let charming beauty's health go round [2:04]

Christopher Bowen (tenor), Tom Raskin (tenor), Andrew Rupp (bass), Jamie W Hall (bass)

Vanity Fair: End of scene [0:26]

The death of Faithful [2:07]

Shepherd's song - The Lord of life my shepherd is [1:57]

Marcus Farnsworth (baritone)

Final scene - Holy, holy, holy is the Lord [4:10]

BBC Symphony Chorus, Georgina Wheatley (soprano)

Epilogue [0:46]

Sacred Treasures of Spain

Sacred motets from the Golden Age of Spanish polyphony

The London Oratory Schola Cantorum/Charles Cole

rec. November 2017, St Alban's Church, Holborn, London

Texts and translations included

Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from hyperion-records.co.uk.

HYPERION CDA68359 [69:49]



This is one of two recordings from the London Oratory Schola Cantorum released by Hyperion in November 2020: the other, *Sacred Treasures of Christmas*, will be included in my survey of new and old recordings for Christmas 2020. It's been a while since I heard anything from the London Oratory, but the boys of the Schola, here augmented by lay clerks and alumni, are fully at home in the music of the Spanish Golden Age, roughly the reign of Philip II.

Some of the music included here is not otherwise available on record, a plus in itself for the recording, and even what is otherwise available is competitive. That includes Alonso Lobo's *Versa est in luctum*, on the penultimate track, of which there are several very fine accounts on record, from Tenebræ (Signum SIGCD248 – [review](#)), The Tallis Scholars (Gimell CDGIM205, 2 CDs for the price of one – [review](#)), The Sixteen (Coro COR16128 – [DL News 2015/3](#)) and Stile Antico (Harmonia Mundi HMU807595, download only – [review](#) – [DL News 2014/12](#)). The Schola's performance of this grief-laden music is slightly longer even than Stile Antico, themselves adopting one of the slowest tempos for this piece, but the music lends itself very well to the extended treatment. Only David Hill with Westminster Cathedral Choir – another group of singers well acquainted with this repertoire as part of the liturgy – dares to take even longer here and in the concluding *O quam suavis* (Hyperion CDH55430 – [review](#)).

The Gimell twofer is an almost mandatory purchase at its attractive price, but even those who have it or one of the other recordings mentioned should seriously consider the new London Oratory album, especially those who prefer the authenticity of an all-male choir to mixed professionals.

Francisco GUERRERO (1528-1599)

Regina cæli a 8 [4:23]

O Domine Jesu Christe [4:46]

Ave virgo sanctissima [5:02]

O sacrum convivium [5:10]

Bernardino de RIBERA (c.1520-?1580)

Dimitte me ergo [4:21]

Cristóbal de MORALES (c.1500-1553)

Peccantem me quotidie [3:51]

Melchor ROBLEDOS (c.1520-before 7 April 1587)

Salve regina [10:16]

Juan ESQUIVEL (c.1560-before 1630)

Ego sum panis vivus [3:05]

Sebastián de VIVANCO (c.1551-1622)

Dulcissima Maria [5:48]

Tomás Luis de VICTORIA (1548-1611)

Ave Maria a 4 [2:42]

Ave Maria a 8 [6:06]

O quam gloriosum [2:27]

Alonso LOBO (1555-1617)

Versa est in luctum [5:42]

O quam suavis est, Domine [6:00]