Richard WAGNER (1813-83)
Parsifal (1882) [258.57]
Lars Cleveman, tenor (Parsifal): Katarina Dalayman, soprano (Kundry): Sir John Tomlinson, bass (Gurnemanz): Detlef Roth, baritone (Amfortas): Tom Fox, baritone (Klingsor): Reinhard Hagen, bass (Titurel): Robert Murray, baritone (First Knight): Andrew Greenan, tenor (Second Knight): Sarah Castle, mezzo-soprano (First Squire, Flower maiden): Madaleine Shaw, contralto (Second Squire, Flower maiden, Voice from above): Joshua Ellicott and Andrew Rees, tenors (Third and Fourth Squires): Elizabeth Cragg, Anita Watson, Ana James and Anna Devin, sopranos (Flower maidens): Hallé Youth Choir: Royal Opera Chorus: Trinity Boys Choir: Hallé Orchestra/Sir Mark Elder
rec. Royal Albert Hall, London, 25 August 2013 (BBC Prom broadcast)
HALLÉ CDHLD7539 [4 CDs: 258:57]

Although before 1973 all the recordings of *Parsifal* in the catalogues came directly from live performances, these were also all compendia drawn from a number of different takes made over the course of several evenings and edited together. To issue on CD a complete performance of the work, deriving entirely from one single concert performance, without any opportunities for editing or patches, might seem like a recipe for disaster in the case of an extended score like *Parsifal*¸ and that it succeeds in a performance like this is in itself a major cause for congratulation, even when some individual elements call for adverse comment. In the first place, the audience is commendably silent, far less obtrusive than the Bayreuth coughers in Knappersbusch's 1962 recording for example (where one offender actually interrupts the final bar of Act Two, completely ruining the effect of the timpani *diminuendo*). But that, of course, is what we expect at the Proms most of the time. Secondly, the acoustic of the Royal Albert Hall lends itself to the Temple of the Grail more naturally than any studio or opera house, even the Bayreuth Festival Theatre. The choirs, with a strong admixture of boys' voices, sound exactly right in their disembodied and distant delivery than the unsteadily feminine opera choruses, which sometimes introduce a female element in Montsalvat's supposedly all-male environment (but then where did the Grail Knights recruit their boys from?). Thirdly, every effort is made to accommodate the effects that Wagner asks for – less demanding than in the *Ring*, but nonetheless important – even the thunder indicated in the score at the moment of the earthquake at the end of Act Two, exactly as Wagner specifies and as so many performances simply omit or relegate to the background (CD3, track 13). And best of all, bells in the right octave, something which even conductors keen to point out the manner, in which they adhere to the instructions in Wagner's score persist in getting wrong. I am not sure what sort of bells are used here – they do not sound like the electronic ones employed at Bayreuth and on Goodall's studio recording during the period 1975-85 or so – but they have the proper deep tone although perhaps they could have been more forward in the orchestral mix (as indeed they are during the funeral march in Act Three, CD4 track 12).

Indeed it is the internal balance of the sound, which raises the most immediate queries with this issue. Sir Mark Elder gets a pretty well ideal balance internally within the orchestra (one might have liked slightly more string tone in the opening prelude to Act Two), but the BBC engineers have clearly opted to keep their microphones quite close to the solo singing voices – not to the extent of providing a false balance against the orchestra, since the give-and-take is generally excellently managed – but at a cost in the loss of the ideal resonance on the tone of the individual singers. This might not be so serious a problem, were the solo singers able to withstand such close observation, but although the Flower Maidens and those taking minor roles – the Knights and the Squires – leave little to be desired, unfortunately many of the principal singers fall short in various different degrees and ways.

Wieland Wagner once observed that in *Parsifal* his grandfather had shown himself to be more sympathetic to the problems of singers than in his other mature music dramas, but that by no means implies that the roles are any less problematic to cast. The longest single part, that of Gurnemanz, is often undertaken by retired Wotans, who one would imagine would have become accustomed to pacing themselves through the course of a long evening; but here the distinguished ex-King of the Gods Sir John Tomlinson, responsive as he is to every nuance of the text and action, simply no longer can command the steadiness of tone that the upper reaches of the role demand. Towards the end of the evening, indeed, it appears that his conductor, in a rare lapse of judgement, allows himself to accelerate the speed of the final peroration in the Good Friday music, clearly seeking to minimise the vocal difficulties, which Tomlinson is experiencing. Two of the other principals also give evidence of problems with steadiness or pitching; Lars Cleveman in the title role at times allows himself to sit on the flat side of notes, distressingly so in places during his final *Nur eine Waffe taugt* (CD4, track 14), where again tiredness may have been a factor at the end of a long evening. On the other hand Detlef Roth lacks the sense of baritonal depth which the singer of Amfortas should ideally command, and pushes himself sharp in the opening of his Act One lament (CD2, track 5), although he avoids the sense of strain that can enter into deeper voices during the high-lying closing stages of this passage. Tom Fox as Klingsor has plenty of solid tone at his command, but he fails to make much of the character. Admittedly Wagner gives him a limited amount to work with, but moments of introspection like *Furchtbäre Noth!* (CD3, track 3) pass without the sense of inner reflection that other singers can summon here. The firm-toned Reinhard Hagen as Titurel simply sounds too young and too healthy, and Wagner's instruction that his voice should resonate "as if from within a tomb" does not appear to have troubled the BBC engineers too much. Of the solo singers the most impressive is Katarina Dalayman as Kundry, a role that over the years has caused immeasurable difficulties for sopranos – to the extent that Karajan in the theatre actually assigned the part to two different individual singers in Act One and Act Two. For some thirty years the ideal exponent of the "wild woman" was Waltraud Meier, a mezzo-soprano with rock-solid upper reaches to her voice; she was preceded by Christa Ludwig, who had a similar kind of approach but sung the role all too rarely. But in general I have preferred the sound of a soprano who can command the lower passages and at the same rise to the climax of *Ich sah' das Kind* (CD 3, track 8) as the best-fitted kind of voice – a sort of Brünnhilde, in fact, as Dalayman is. Her guttural utterances at the beginning of Act Two don't come across too solidly here (probably the lack of the stage dimension) but otherwise she comes close to the ideal, and for once she justifies the interpolation of a high B-flat at the end of her curse (CD3, track 13).

Nonetheless it must be observed that despite a superlative overall performance, it is the contributions of the chorus and orchestra under the inspired direction of Sir Mark Elder, which remain the touchstone of the excellence in this concert performance. I have observed with approval in the past Sir Mark's willingness to allow a composer's directions for extremely slow tempos to make their full effect – for example, in Elgar's *The Apostles* – and although Wagner eschewed the use of metronome marks in his later scores, the pacing allows the long pauses and pregnant *ritardandi* to make their full effect – for example, in the transition to the voices in the dome at the beginning of the Temple Scene of Act One (CD2, track 4). Elder's conducting is definitely in the honourable tradition of Goodall rather than Boulez (I think of the Goodall live performance from Covent Garden, now on CD, rather than his studio recording with Welsh National Opera), and is all the more effective for that. He never allows himself, as some conductors in the 'Goodall tradition' have done, to equate simple slowness with profundity, but allocates full weight to the orchestral sound as required – and his players respond to him magnificently.

The cover of the set gives due credit to the Hallé and Elder without mentioning the singers, as indeed would seem to be appropriate, given my reservations expressed earlier. But the performance, despite those reservations and the unflattering balance given to the voices by the BBC engineers, remains one which one would be extremely happy to encounter live, when incidental flaws could be easily forgiven in the heat of the moment. Whether the listener could tolerate the waywardness of some of the vocal pitching on repeated hearings is a matter for the individual listener to decide, and those anxious to hear these particular voices will need no recommendation to purchase this set. The booklet indicates that texts and translations are available on line, but the synopsis provided by Barry Millington perpetrates one slip, when it describes Gurnemanz as an "elderly squire" instructing "two young knights" rather than the other way about (oddly enough the German and French translations get it right); and the outline fails to explain the reason for Klingsor's hatred of the Grail Knights in his original desire for holiness. Nonetheless the cheers of the audience at the end find a ready echo in this listener, even though when I want to spend an evening in the company of *Parsifal* ,I will probably turn to the Bayreuth DVD conducted by Giuseppe Sinopoli, which I reviewed with such enthusiasm a couple of years ago. Archiv currently lists 53 alternative recordings (some of which are duplicates of each other), so we are hardly spoilt for distinct choices, among which can be found further performances by Dalayman, Fox and Tomlinson.

Paul Corfield Godfrey

Previous review: Simon Thompson

Anton BRUCKNER (1824-1896)
Symphony No.3 in D minor, WAB103 (1889 version, ed. Nowak) [60:40]
Richard WAGNER (1813-1883)
Tannhäuser: Overture [15:11]
Gewandhaus Orchester, Leipzig/Andris Nelsons
rec. live June 2016, Leipzig Gewandhaus. DDD
DG 479 7208 [75:51]

Only recently I heard Andris Nelsons in a Brahms symphony cycle with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Now along comes his first recording with what is to be his "other" orchestra: the Gewandhaus Orchester, Leipzig. In fact, I don't think he formally takes up his appointment as *Gewandhauskapellmeister* until the 2017/18 season so this live recording was made in advance of that but it seems there's already a good relationship between Nelsons and the orchestra. I believe it is intended that they will record a complete Bruckner cycle for DG.

To the best of my knowledge this is the first commercial recording of a Bruckner symphony by Nelsons but, in fact, one Bruckner recording by him has previously been issued and, as it happens, it's a recording of the Third Symphony. Back in 2011, I think, Vol 19, No 12 of the *BBC Music Magazine* was accompanied by a covermount CD on which Nelsons conducted the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in this work. The performance was given in Symphony Hall, Birmingham on 25 November 2009 and it's a BBC recording.

Then, as now, Nelsons used the 1889 version of the score in the Leopold Nowak edition. The Third is one of the Bruckner symphonies where the question of which version to use rears its head. The issue is an important one and it's entirely glossed over in the DG booklet which merely mentions, almost in passing, that there are three versions. The question is covered more fully in Michael Tanner's note accompanying the BBC release: in comparison Jessica Duchen's note for DG, which essentially stitches together a number of fairly general comments by Nelsons, is disappointingly superficial.

The first version of the score dates from 1873. As Michael Tanner points out, the score then went through some pretty drastic pruning. The 1873 score was 280 pages long; the 1877 version was reduced to 262 pages and the 1889 version, after radical revision, shrank to a 'mere' 202 pages. In making his revisions Bruckner took counsel from a number of well-meaning friends, especially after the symphony's disastrous premiere in Vienna in 1877. Michael Tanner puts it well when he comments that these friends "were not musical geniuses, and hence thought of as 'mistakes' what were often Bruckner's most striking ideas about structure, harmony and orchestration." I think it is likely, therefore, that the Bruckner aficionado will be drawn to the original version of the score. One snag with the original version, though, is that, as Tanner's page count indicates, there's an awful lot of music. Georg Tintner's recording of the 1873 score, also edited by Nowak, plays for 77:32 and his traversal of the first movement alone takes 30:34. Tintner, it has to be said, adopts a fairly measured approach. Simone Young takes 68:38 to play the 1873 score and shaves a full five minutes off Tintner's timing for the first movement. Her approach, which doesn't short change the spacious aspect of the music, is more to my taste.

If the length of the original version is daunting, the 1877 revision may be more digestible. Bernard Haitink's fine recording of the Third uses the 1877 score in the edition by Fritz Oeser. That, being a shorter version of the symphony, plays for rather less time than Tintner or Young. Haitink takes 61:46 and though he has quite a bit more music to get through than Nelsons his overall timing is not much longer, which suggests a rather tauter approach. That, in fact, is the case. As in his Brahms cycle, there are times, particularly in the first movement, when Nelsons is inclined to linger over slow music in his traversal of this symphony. However, I didn't find that unduly distracting in this performance.

Before leaving the question of which edition to use I should say that in choosing the 1889 version of the score Nelsons is in good company. Among the conductors who have used this version are Eugen

Jochum in both of his recordings - though I haven't heard the second of these with the Staatskapelle Dresden - Karajan and Stanisław Skrowaczewski. These conductors, and others, may well have taken the view that the 1889 version is the one that is best suited to presentation to the general listener and I think it's arguable that that is so.

There is much to admire in this new recording of the Third. Not the least of its virtues is the wonderfully burnished sound of the Leipzig orchestra. The *Klang* of the orchestra seems to me to be well-nigh ideal for Bruckner; it's as if the players have the music in their blood. Nelsons' core tempo for the first movement seems to me to be judiciously chosen. It's broadly similar to Haitink's speed and more forward-moving than Tintner's. I can imagine that Nelsons' expansive treatment of some of Bruckner's secondary material may seem too generous to some listeners but overall I found his account of the music persuasive. I'm sure that the superb playing of the orchestra helps enormously in this respect, not least in the way that climaxes open up majestically. It was interesting to make comparisons with Nelsons' earlier CBSO performance. I have a great admiration for the CBSO and they played to their usual extremely high standard in that performance. It has to be said, though, that the sound of the Leipzig orchestra has even greater lustre and I'm sure that the warm acoustic of the Gewandhaus has played a part here: for once the immediate and exceptionally clear acoustic of Symphony Hall, Birmingham is not ideally suited.

Nelson's new account of the slow movement is extremely fine. The opening is very hushed and from the outset the strings and the horn section of the LGO make a splendid impression. Nelsons phrases the music in a dedicated fashion and the LGO's playing throughout the movement is truly refined. Here, as elsewhere, it is evident that Nelsons has inherited from his predecessor, Riccardo Chailly, an orchestra that is in peak condition. The attention to detail in matters of dynamics that was evident in the first movement is even more on display in this Adagio – I think Nelsons is now even more daring in the matter of dynamic contrast than he was in his Birmingham performance. Haitink, using a different edition of the score, is masterly in this movement but I also find Nelsons very persuasive. His is an intense and deeply-felt approach to the music though I don't believe he's ever guilty of wearing his heart on his sleeve.

The scherzo is excitingly done, the rhythms strongly articulated. I like the way Nelsons brings out the rusticity of the waltz-like trio. The finale can seem rather disparate: for example, I've never quite understood how the tutti passage dominated by off beats fits in (4:14 - 5:41). All I can say is that Nelsons convinces me in the way he handles this movement. At times he drives the music hard but not in an excessive way. As the end approaches (just before 12:04) he pulls back the tempo very substantially in a rhetorical fashion – he did exactly the same in Birmingham. Arguably the effect is a little overdone but it does pave the way for a major-key restatement of the symphony's opening theme that is imbued with grandeur. In this final peroration the LGO's brass section is absolutely resplendent.

Throughout the symphony the Gewandhaus Orchester, Leipzig offers sovereign playing and overall Nelsons is a convincing guide to the symphony. You may wonder why I've drawn comparison with the CBSO recording when it is no longer generally available save through the back order service of the *BBC Music Magazine*. The reason is simple: if you already have that recording you may feel you don't need this new one but I would argue that despite the many merits of that earlier performance the new one represents a step up, not least in terms of playing quality and, especially, recorded sound.

By coincidence – or perhaps not – Nelsons' first recording with the Boston Symphony also included the *Tannhäuser* Overture (review). This Leipzig performance is a very good one indeed and I think that the sound of the LGO is once again royally suited to this music. In the booklet Nelsons comments on the Wagnerian links in Bruckner's symphony and says that he finds echoes of *Tannhäuser* in the finale. Therefore the coupling is a logical one, and much more logical than on the Boston disc. Perhaps his reference to the finale is the justification for placing the overture after the symphony on the CD but I would have thought it would have been much more logical to have it as the first track on the disc.

As I’ve indicated, the recorded sound on this CD is very good indeed. I couldn’t detect any extraneous audience noise and there’s no applause after either work.

As is so often the case nowadays with the major labels the documentation is rather superficial. Jessica Duchen does little more in her note than to provide a framework for a number of fairly general comments by the conductor about Bruckner and this symphony.

I enjoyed this disc and found it rewarding. Nelsons gives us an admirable account of Bruckner’s Third as an auspicious launch to his new cycle. I look forward to further instalments.

John Quinn

Previous review: Brian Wilson

Manuel de FALLA (1876-1946)
Fanfare pour une fête (Fanfare for a feast) (1921) [0.37]
El amor brujo (Love, the Magician) (edition based on 1925 version) [25.03]
El sombrero de tres picos (The Three-Cornered Hat) Suites No's 1 & 2 from the ballet, (1919, suites 1921) [26.50]
Esperanza Fernández (mezzo-soprano)
Orchestre national d'Île-de-France/Enrique Mazzola
rec. 2015 Maison de l'Orchestre national d'Île-de-France, Alfortville, France
NOMADMUSIC NMM041 [52.30]

Following their debut album which was devoted to *Bel canto* opera overtures (review) Enrique Mazzola and the Orchestre national d'Île-de-France now turn their attention to the ballets *El amor brujo* and *El sombrero de tres picos* by Manuel de Falla, a central figure in twentieth century Spanish music. Cádiz-born, Falla was drawn to the stage, writing over a dozen scores including six zarzuelas, ballets and operas notably *La vida breve*.

Commissioned in 1914 as a *gitanería* (gypsy piece) by Pastora Imperio, a renowned gypsy flamenco dancer, *El amor brujo* (*Love, the Magician*) is distinctively Andalusian in character with episodes of remarkable beauty and brilliant originality. Integrating spoken dialogue and a part for *cantaora* (a traditional flamenco singer/dancer) the text by G. Martinez Sierra, after a story by D. Pedro Antonio de Alarcon, relates the story of a dancer, Candela, who is haunted by the ghost of her former lover. Unsuccessfully premièred at Madrid in 1915, in the next year Falla revised the score by reducing its length, expanding the orchestration and arranging the spoken sections for a mezzo-soprano voice. In 1925 Falla reworked the score into a new one-act ballet allocating the sung part to orchestral soloists. Available in various arrangements the popular section *Danza Ritual Del Fuego* (Ritual Fire Dance) is often performed as a stand-alone piece. Enrique Mazzola has chosen to record here the 1925 version (based on an edition by Yvan Nommick at Chester Music) with the voice reinstated in four of the sections. Captivatingly sung with dark, smoky tones by Esperanza Fernández in the mezzo-soprano role of Candela, the music is convincingly imbued with an enchanting atmosphere of the flamenco.

A prestigious piece commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev, the two-act ballet *El sombrero de tres picos* (The Three-Cornered Hat) has a conspicuously Spanish setting. Premièred in 1919 in London, the ballet was choreographed by Léonide Massine employing modified Spanish dance techniques rather than classical ballet, with sets and costumes designed by Pablo Picasso. In 1921 two ballet suites were drawn from the score, which Enrique Mazzola has recorded here. Highly popular is the brilliantly scored second suite that contains three of the four dances that are directly based on traditional Spanish folk rhythms.

Also recorded on the album is a very short work lasting thirty-seven seconds the *Fanfare pour une fête* (Fanfare for a feast). It was English music critic and composer Leigh Henry who in 1921 commissioned Falla to write a fanfare to be integrated into *Fanfare*: *A Musical Causerie,* a music periodical Henry had recently founded in London. The score is a novelty but in truth doesn't amount to much. Owing to the time left available on the release I would have preferred something much more substantial from Falla.

Under Enrique Mazzola there is magnificent playing by Orchestre national d'Île-de-France, shimmering convincingly with the brilliant, heady colours of Spain. Mazzola adopts fairly brisk speeds drawing invigorating playing that is light and vibrant. Noteworthy are the delicious woodwind solos and the first-rate intonation from the glowing strings. Recorded at Maison de l'Orchestre national d'Île-de-France at Alfortville, the pleasingly clear and well balanced sound quality adds to the appeal of the release. In the booklet there is a note from conductor Mazzola, a readable essay written by Corinne Schneider and (I am pleased to report) sung texts with English translations. Brilliantly played this is an impressive release featuring two of Falla's finest works on NoMadMusic.

Michael Cookson

Nikolai RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908)
The Golden Cockerel (1908) [122:48]
Tsar Dodon – Vladimir Feliauer (bass)
Queen of Shamakha – Aida Garifullina (soprano)
Astrologer – Andrei Popov (tenor altino)
Tsarevitch Gvidon – Andrei Ilyushinov (tenor)
Tsarevitch Afron – Vladimir Sulimsky (baritone)
General Polkan – Andrei Serov (bass)
Amelfa – Elena Vitman (contralto)
Anna Matison (stage director & costume designer)
Mariinsky Orchestra and Chorus/Valery Gergiev
Filmed live at Mariinsky-II, St Petersburg, 27 December 2014
Region Code: 0; Aspect Ratio 16:9; PCM Stereo
Content identical on each disc
MARIINSKY MAR0596 DVD/Blu-ray [119 mins]

I'm a big fan of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas. They come from a different universe to that of Verdi, Wagner and even most Tchaikovsky, but they're valid on their own terms; more than that, they're bursting with melodies and the composer's famously brilliant orchestration. However, the fantastical elements of them mean that often they work better in the mind's eye than on the stage, and that's something that really hits this film, which feels half-baked.

The Golden Cockerel is a fantastical tale of sorcery, magical ornaments and a Tsar whose brain becomes fuddled with love. It contains Gilbertian levels of satire, directed towards the Russian ruling class (Rimsky began it shortly after the failed 1905 revolution), and it's crying out for someone to reveal its contemporary resonances. Anna Matison's production begins promisingly with a spangly curtain (captured on the disc's cover) that evokes the world of the mysterious astrologer, and a toytown skyline of onion domes that anchors you safely in the world of Russian legend and the mysterious past. Once the curtain rises, the outer acts take place in a giant toybox (or jewel box) to represent the Tsar's court, and the second takes place in a beautifully evoked mystery landscape, together with magical trees, sticky mist, and a serpentine emblem that wouldn't look out of place in Slytherin House. However, she has gone for a cartoonish, caricatured interpretation of the story and characters, demonstrated by, for example, the oversized head-dresses given to the Tsar and his sons, and every character over-hams their acting to a slightly embarrassing degree. It reminded me of the approach often taken by the French director Laurent Pelly, specifically his *Robert le Diable* at Covent Garden (review), and it suffers from similar effects of bathos and deflation.

It also doesn't help that the camera work is poorly thought through and suffers from maddening cuts and swooshes that suggest a lack of adequate rehearsal time. The second act, in particular, has an infuriating series of extreme close-ups that serve no purpose other than to break the dramatic flow, and it made me wonder whether this had come from a live cinema relay that they hadn't had time to run through effectively in advance. The sound set-up is rubbish, too: all you get is limited 2.0 stereo, which really won't do in this day and age.

The singing is better, thankfully. Vladimir Feliauer makes a bluff, daft-as-a-brush Tsar Dodon, and Andrei Serov does a good job of depicting his general's infuriated helplessness at the Tsar's inept decisions. Andrei Popov does a good job with the Astrologer's stratospheric (and, frankly, ridiculous) tessitura, while Elena Vitman makes a bluff characterful Amelfa. Rising star Aida Garifullina steals the show, however, as the Queen of Shamakha. Her voice is easily the most alluring on stage, and she uses it to great effect, sliding in and out of the queen's sensuous melismas with all the assurances of a high-order temptress. She's wonderful to look at and to listen to.

Orchestral and choral support is good, though half the time the chorus look baffled at what they're required to do. Gergiev conducts in a straight-as-a-die way, though I find it difficult to hear him nowadays and not conclude that half of his mind is on something else.

So this *Golden Cockerel* will do but, then, you're not exactly spoilt for choice if you want to explore this opera beyond the concert suite. Gergiev unaccountably left it out of his earlier Mariinsky/Kirov Rimsky-Korsakov series for Philips, and all the other recordings appear on niche Russian labels that can be hard to track down. The best I've heard is Dmitri Kitaenko's Moscow recording for Melodiya (review) which on balance, probably sounds better. However, it has no libretto, so if you really need to know what's going on then this BD will help with its subtitles. It's only a shame you have to look at the staging at the same time!

Simon Thompson

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)
Violin Concerto No. 2 in E Major, BWV 1042 [16:50]*
Partita No.1 in B minor, BWV 1002 - *Sarabande* [3:39]
Georg Philipp TELEMANN (1681 - 1767)
Sonata for Violin and Harpsichord in A minor [7:59]
Sonata for Violin and Harpsichord in G minor [6:16]
Giuseppe TARTINI (1692-1770)
Sonata for Violin and Harpsichord in B flat major [11:17]
Johann MATTHESON (1681-1764)
Sonata for Violin and Harpsichord in E minor [9:15]
Louis Kaufman (violin)
Bach Chamber Symphony Group/Jacques Rachmilovich*
Antoine Geoffroy-Dechaume (harpsichord)
rec. 1950-1952
FORGOTTEN RECORDS FR1234 [55:20]

This recent release from Forgotten Records collates four recordings featuring the American violinist Louis Kaufman (1905-1994) in music by Baroque composers, three German and one Venetian. They've been sourced from Tempo, Lyrichord and Eurochord LPs - good, clean copies by the sound of these transfers. The recording dates given are 1950 for the Bach and 1952 for the works with harpsichord. I wondered if these dates were correct, as the Kaufman discography, included as a supplement in the violinist's own autobiography *A Fiddler's Tale,* gives 1945 for the Bach and 1955 for the rest.

Kaufman was a prolific recording artist, and in addition to his classical discography he can be heard on the soundtracks of numerous films. His sound, richly-coloured and intoxicatingly opulent, coupled with sensuous, expressive portamenti, seems to have attracted the Hollywood moguls. Stylistically, he resides in the same pen as Kreisler and Heifetz. In the Baroque arena, his 1947 Vivaldi Four Seasons won a Grand Prix du Disque in 1950.

I'm afraid the Bach Second Concerto doesn't work for me. The outer movements are relentlessly driven, leaving one to wonder whether he had a bus to catch. Things don't improve in the slow movement either. It's a classic case of over-gilding the lily, with Kaufman's over generous portamentos excessively cloying. That said, the Sarabande from the Partita No. 1 in B minor is an improvement. Eloquently delivered, the double stops are vibrant and potent.

The sonatas with harpsichord are a different kettle of fish. Kaufman is very fortunate to be partnered by Antoine Geoffroy-Dechaume (1905-2000). I say fortunate, as Geoffroy-Dechaume, musicologist, organist and harpsichordist, happened to hold the distinction of being the leading pioneer in France in the field of early music; respect for the original score being his byword. To an extent he acts as a counterbalance to some of Kaufman's romantic excesses. Whilst Telemann and Tartini are familiar figures I, for one, have never heard any music by Johann Mattheson before.

The performances are nicely paced, and notable for their grace, elegance and refinement. Careful matching of phrases and dynamics bears testimony to ample rehearsal. Both instruments are ideally balanced in the mix, fortunately. Sometimes the keyboard is relegated to the shadows in these enterprises.

There are no accompanying annotations, but the listener is pointed in the direction of websites of relevance.

Stephen Greenbank

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)
Violin Concerto in D, Op. 61 [46:51]
Max BRUCH (1838-1920)
Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26 [24:18]
Salvatore Accardo (violin)
Gewandhausorchester Leipzig/Kurt Masur
rec. Paul-Gerhardt Kirche, Leipzig, Germany, June 1977
Reviewed in stereo and surround
Booklet notes in English and German
PENTATONE PTC5186237 SACD [71:22]

In recent times Kurt Masur, possibly more than any other conductor, personified the central European tradition. Masur, who died in 2015, built a reputation on solid if not inspirational interpretations of the works of Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Mahler and Bruckner. His forays into 20th century repertoire rarely went beyond Strauss and Prokofiev. As Kapellmeister of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra from 1970 to 1996, Masur gave the orchestra a “lush, string-saturated, dark brown sound”, to quote from his obituary in the New York Times. His latter years were spent at the helm of the New York Philharmonic, which he transformed “from a sullen, lacklustre ensemble into one of luminous renown”, but without personally setting the world alight. If anything, Masur’s greatest achievements were in the field of diplomacy during the breakdown of communist rule in East Germany, when he became a unifying point for all sides, potentially averting violence. He was subsequently considered for nomination as the pre-unification country’s first president, but with an offer also on the table from New York, he opted for music.

My personal regard for Kurt Masur has always been one of respect rather than admiration. Flipping through my collection, all I have that he conducts, without the drawcard of a Jessye Norman or Anne-Sophie Mutter, are CDs of Beethoven overtures (Philips) and Liszt tone poems (EMI), and those were out of a bargain bin. The Beethoven overtures and symphonies were recorded by Masur with the Leipzig orchestra in the Lukaskirche, Dresden, in the early 1970s, under an apparent arrangement between Philips and VEB Deutshe Schallplatten (Eterna). All, it appears, were recorded quadraphonically, as they have now appeared on Pentatone as multichannel hybrid SACDs. The Beethoven and Bruch violin concertos were recorded somewhat later, in 1977, under the same arrangement it seems, the only notable difference being a change of venue to the Paul-Gerhardt Kirche, Leipzig. Another location perhaps, but the sonic, and interpretive, signatures are still there; dark, dense and resonant sound – weightily impressive, if that appeals - together with Masur’s “strong motivation and lack of mannerism”, as the Penguin Guide then characterised it. Certainly nothing HIP there, and even the less HIP-inclined may now find Masur’s approach ponderous, prosaic and unimaginative. Likewise myself, and perhaps why I have been so little drawn to his work.

So what might leaven this resolute mould of the central European tradition? Why, a little southern sunshine, of course, in the form of Salvatore Accardo, an artist not only of impeccable technique and insight, but flair, passion and luminous tone. It wasn’t all a smashing success, though - the Beethoven concerto, originally issued in 1977/78, doesn’t seem to have resurfaced often, its most recent outing in a set of Accardo’s recordings on Decca (5006218). The Penguin Guide’s summation was “a wholly dedicated and faithful account of the concerto, lacking only the last once of *Innigkeit*”, but not among the best, either of Beethoven concerto or Accardo recordings. I second that, with further reservations. Accardo’s first movement cadenza, unattributed in the liner notes, seems a little home-spun and starts to wear thin after its nearly four minutes. He is also miked very closely in the resonant surroundings, which not only separates him physically and acoustically from the orchestra, but musically as well. He sounds rather flightier than the stolid support he receives from Masur and the Leipzigers. When initially released on LP, the shrillness of Accardo’s tone drew adverse comment; now, I’m pleased to report, it’s more of a heightened brilliance which, albeit not entirely natural, adds at times a welcome bite to and relief from the over-stuffed orchestral backdrop.

The Bruch concerto has been more of a permanent fixture in the catalogue, as a companion to the complete Bruch works for violin and orchestra recorded by Accardo and Masur, the three concertos with the *Scottish Fantasy* currently on a Philips Duo (4621672). While the sonic balance is consistent with the Beethoven, Accardo sounds musically better integrated with his accompanists, in a reading of measured passion and tonal opulence. Again, the original shrillness is now just an additional gleam. My impression of the Bruch concerto has long been that given performers of sufficient quality, it essentially plays itself, and there's no exception here, with the added bonuses of Accardo's lustre, and the sonorous splendour of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

In the final analysis it should perhaps be asked whether the Beethoven concerto in particular was worth resurrecting for this reissue, given that its only additional virtues are surround sound (if you are suitably equipped) and, conceivably, a fresher transfer from the original mastertapes. My answer is a qualified 'yes', as the Accardo/Masur account can now be heard at its very best, but in the almost certain knowledge that its modest ranking among Beethoven concerto recordings will not change. The Bruch performance is a somewhat different matter, having already established itself a permanent place in the catalogue, and now having it sounding better than ever is welcome indeed.

Des Hutchinson

Charles IVES (1874-1954)
Orchestral Set No. 1: Three Places in New England (1912-1916, rev. 1929) [19:32]
Orchestral Set No. 2 (1915-1919) [16:23]
A Symphony: New England Holidays (1904-1913) [42:08]
Seattle Symphony Chorale
Seattle Symphony/Ludovic Morlot
rec. 2016/2017, S. Mark Taper Auditorium, Benaroya Hall, Seattle, Washington, USA
Reviewed as a 24/96 download from eClassical
Pdf booklet included
SEATTLE SYMPHONY MEDIA SSM1015 [78:03]

Huzzah! At last, the third instalment in Ludovic Morlot's Ives cycle. In a double review I praised the first two albums, and would have made them Recordings of the Year if our canny Webmaster hadn't noticed that I was trying to sneak in two nominations for the price of one. Levity aside, this has proved to be an impressive series thus far; insightful, idiomatic and always engaging, those readings seem more consistent than Sir Andrew Davis's Melbourne ones (Chandos). The latter improved as they progressed, though: I was lukewarm about Volume 1, more enthusiastic about Volume 2, and very taken with Volume 3.

Which brings me to Davis's 'Ives Weekend', broadcast from the Barbican in January 1996. I've repeatedly referred to this – I possess an off-air recording of the entire event – as it so emphatically confirms this conductor's Ivesian credentials. Almost without exception, these are powerful, pithy performances that leap off the page in a way that his Melbourne remakes rarely do. Even the BBC Radio 3 sound is excellent, making this an indispensable addition to the Ives archive. Faint hope, I know, but it would be good if the Beeb made these recordings available to a wider audience, perhaps as cover-mounted CDs on their music magazine.

In the meantime, we owe much to James B. Sinclair and Michael Tilson Thomas, who have done much to advance the cause of this musical maverick. My preferred recording of the two *Orchestral Sets* is Sinclair's, made with the Malmö Symphony in 2006/7 (Naxos). As for the *New England Holidays*, I've chosen as my comparative version MTT's Chicago one, recorded for CBS-Sony in 1986. I'll probably dip into the two Davises along the way.

The three parts of the first set, composed between 1912 and 1916, weren't conceived as a single work; in any event, the consolidated piece only gained traction much later, when Ives was persuaded to rework it for reduced forces; the revised score was published in 1935. The version played by Morlot and Sinclair is the latter's realisation for large orchestra (listed as Version 4 in *The Descriptive Catalogue*); those who want to hear the pared-down one should investigate Sinclair's recording with Orchestra New England on Koch 3-7025-2. As I've pointed out before, these three 'scenes' are very specific, the images preserved - fixed, if you will – in the darkroom of the composer's musical imagination. Indeed, all the pieces played here are taken from the family album.

Morlot captures the brooding character of the opening movement in the first set very well indeed; he may seem a little measured at times, but the upside is that there's a decent pulse and details are crisply rendered. He doesn't shrink from those sudden dissonances either, the sound full and fearless. This piece is a gallimaufry of popular and hymn tunes, not to mention marching bands, the collisions of the second movement a veritable riot of sound. And although Morlot has his players on a tight rein, he manages to balance discipline with dash and daring. But it's the finale, underpinned by a thrilling organ pedal, that sets the seal on this terrific performance.

In terms of colour and tempo, Morlot is closer to Sinclair than either of the Davises, but in the first movement at least Sinclair finds a telling degree of transparency as well. The Malmö band aren't quite as polished as their Seattle counterparts, but they more than make up for that with their wonderfully idiomatic and spontaneous playing. Then again, Sinclair has an authority in this music that's unmistakable, and that manifests itself in a naturally shaped and perfectly coherent performance. He's also more refined than Morlot, yet he never blunts that all-important Ivesian edge.

As I discovered in my recent review of Leonard Slatkin's new account of Aaron Copland's Third Symphony, listening to rival recordings in close proximity can be very instructive. I stand by my positive response to Morlot's reading of the first set, but listening to Sinclair's soon afterwards I was struck by how quintessentially *American* he and his sensational Swedes make this music sound, and how startlingly original. And that's why this is still the most *complete* account of the piece I know; indeed, I'd say it's not likely to be bettered – let alone equalled – any time soon. That also goes for the warm, spacious Naxos recording, which I prefer to SSM's closer, cooler one.

If anything, Sinclair widens the gap in the second set, which he presents with all the clarity, care and expressive power that makes his Ives so special. The first movement has the solemn, processional weight it needs, and the second, with its contrasting metres and distinctive piano part, is superbly articulated. As always, he brings out the sheer audacity of Ives's writing. That said, conductor and composer are at their most inspired in the third movement, in which New York rail commuters and a panoply of 'voices' – including an offstage choir – respond to news about the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Indeed, Sinclair creates a deep, gathering swell of emotion here that's profoundly moving.

Can Morlot hope to match that? No, is the short answer. For a start, he brings an almost metronomic precision to his performance that underplays the music's innate warmth and character. Moreover, the second movement, usually so bright and breezy, sounds slightly contrived when heard alongside Sinclair or Davis. All of which conspires to leach that astonishing finale of its essential feeling. In mitigation, the virtuosity and focus of the Seattle players is pretty impressive. I did wonder whether this unexpected fall-off in quality has something to do with the fact that, unlike the first set, the recording of the second isn't derived from concerts alone.

As for *New England Holidays*, it's a collage of childhood memories framed in the composer's inimitable style; often spare, with snippets of popular music and other borrowings, it's a thoroughly original and engaging piece. Davis really underlines the stark modernity of Ives's writing here; he also finds a modicum of refinement behind those unruly notes. As for those jaunty tunes, they emerge with a vigour and vitality that I don't always hear with Morlot. Factor in a wonderful, chamber-like transparency to the Chandos recording and you have a very fine performance

To be fair, the Frenchman is reasonably convincing in his blend of leanness and lyricism – especially in the first movement – but for all that his reading is too unyielding for me, his colours curiously muted. Yes, Morlot *does* loosen up a little in that marvellous medley – *De Camptown Races* prominent in the mix – but, alas, it doesn't last. Davis and MTT seem to have a much surer grasp of the symphony's architecture, not to mention a lighter touch when it comes to its defiant – and defining – quirks and quiddities. As with that second set, Morlot has the letter of the piece, but misses its irrepressible spirit. (Incidentally, this recording isn't derived solely from concerts either.)

I'd hoped for another cracker from Seattle, and while this is by no means a damp squib it's still very disappointing. Even SSM's up-to-the minute recording must yield to its older, more atmospheric rivals, MTT's in particular. Indeed, in terms of both performance and sound the latter's *New England Holidays* – admittedly, I've yet to hear his San Francisco remake – remains my benchmark for this extraordinary work. The Seattle album has decent liner-notes by Larry Starr and, most gratifying, a footnote pointing listeners to Scott Mortensen's excellent Ives survey for MusicWeb.

Not at all what I expected; something of a let-down after such a promising start.

Dan Morgan

Serge PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)
Four Etudes, Op. 2 (1909) [10:10]
Gavriil POPOV (1904-1972)
Grosse Klaviersuite, Op. 6 (1927) [16:30]
Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)
Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 12 (1926) [11:31]
Vladimir REBIKOV (1866-1920)
On the Other Side, seven pieces for piano, Op. 47 (1913) [13:13]
Samuil FEINBERG (1890-1962)
Piano Sonata No. 6, Op. 13 (1923) [15:30]
Yuri Favorin (piano)
rec. 2016
MELODIYA MELCD1002459 [67:04]

Yuri Favorin explores Russian piano works composed between 1909 and 1927. Instead of focusing on the abrupt political marker of the 1917 revolution, Favorin encourages us to consider a longer period of great cultural and political experimentation, before Soviet arts policy congealed around the concept of socialist realism.

This imaginative program invites us to re-evaluate youthful works by two famous composers, Prokofiev and Shostakovich, by placing them alongside exploratory efforts by the lesser-known Popov, Feinberg, and Rebikov.

Prokofiev's Four Etudes, Op. 2 include a lot of fierce and propulsive music. The second piece, a furtive but intense moderato provides moments of delicacy, but the concluding Presto energetico ends with more pounding rhythms. This marvelously furious little work is over in ten minutes.

Favorin takes a breakneck pace in Shostakovitch's First Piano Sonata, written in the same year as his Symphony No. 1. The effect is exhilarating.

A much calmer kind of experiment is found in Vladimir Rebikov's 'On the Other Side', dedicated to the memory of Francesco Goya. The first of seven tiny movements is spare, almost proto-minimalist. A quiet, serene chorale follows. The required savage dance seems rather tame, and the remaining pieces continue with a hypnotic cast. Rebikov died in 1920, a bitter and forgotten man who apparently believed that composers such as Debussy and Stravinsky had stolen his best ideas.

The great pianist Samuil Feinberg was also a composer. Favorin plays his Sixth and most popular sonata, from 1923. This rather chaotic music is heir to Scriabin, with dynamic extremes, jagged rhythms, harmonic boldness, and a fevered air.

The longest and latest work on the disc is Gavriil Popov's *Large Suite*, Op. 6, of 1927. Its four movements have a neoclassical tinge, beginning with an invention that is full of poise at one moment, then explodes with passion. The Chorale and Lied continue the neoclassical repose, but the concluding fugue is energetic and intense, a showpiece for the pianist. The piece reminds one of Stravinsky's 1925 Serenade for piano, except that Popov keeps pushing neoclassicism to admit unexpected elements of passion and virtuosity. This is a heftier neoclassicism than Stravinsky's, sometimes hinting at pieces Hindemith had yet to write. It has much in common with Popov's fine Chamber Symphony for Flute, Clarinet, Trumpet, Bassoon, Violin, Cello, and Bass, written in the same year.

Favorin's outstanding pianism allows him to show us how these five composers approached an era of aesthetic uncertainty and relative openness, while retaining their individual voices. This venture deserves praise for being both intellectual and musical. Yuri Favorin is one of six young Russian pianists participating in a comparable recording of the arresting twenty-four Preludes and Fugues by

Vsevolod Zaderatsky, which may be one of the greatest unknown works of the mid-twentieth century.

This Melodiya recording sounds good, in what was likely a difficult recording assignment, given the tempestuous nature of much of the music. The program notes are not very helpful in helping the listener with five challenging and mostly unfamiliar pieces.

Richard Kraus

Wenzel Heinrich VEIT (1806-1864)
Complete String Quartets - Volume One
String Quartet No.1 in D minor, Op.3 (1834) [31:30]
String Quartet No.2 in E major, Op.5 (1835) [30:41]
Kertész Quartet (Katalin Kertész and Jean Paterson (violins); Nichola Blakey (viola), Cressida Nash (cello))
rec. May 2016, St Peter's, Evercreech, Somerset
TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0335 [62:23]

The Bohemian-born composer Wenzel Heinrich Veit (or Václav Jindřich Veit) is one of the forgotten men of the first half of the nineteenth-century. At a time when Prague venerated older Viennese classicists, Veit was looking at contemporary models such as Schumann as they closely spoke to his incipient compositional romanticism. The fact that Veit played the violin in an amateur string quartet gave him an insight into the repertoire and it wasn't long before the orchestra in Aachen sent for him to be their musical director. Despite personal plaudits he stayed only a few months returning to his native land where illness soon overtook him. He moved to his home town, Litoměřice, near Prague where he died in 1864.

This is the first of two volumes charting Veit's four string quartets. The Op.3 Quartet of 1834 has its share of Beethovenian elements though there's also a rather suave Gallic concertante role for the first violin, something that might perhaps also alert one to the pervasive influence of Spohr. There are some very attractive features in this work – galloping rhythmic figures and almost sepulchral viola and cello unisons – made more sepulchral through the use of original instruments and minimal vibrato. There are light dancing figures in the Minuet and the slow movement presents a series of attractive and contrastive variations on the Russian anthem, God Save the Tsar. The finale is stormy with a renewed role for the first violin and plenty of extrovert themes. As in the Minuet the finale ends almost brusquely.

The E major quartet was completed the following year. Its opening is chromatic and its slow movement is easeful and lyrical. Robert Schumann was perceptive when he suggested that this was a young man's music, one who though educated was 'as yet unaffected by deep and painful experiences'. There is in this quartet something tutored and genial, that's summed up in its enjoyable and melodically persuasive finale, one that detours to take in a fugato. Yet it's the earlier work that remains the more personable and idiosyncratic.

The Kertész Quartet takes its name from its first violinist. All four are members of leading period instrument ensembles. They play attractively though sometimes the church acoustic encourages a spread to the sound, one that, on occasion, exacerbates a booming quality to the lower strings. The notes are by two great specialists in Czech music, Markéta Kabelková and Aleš Březina.

These attractive works are heard in premiere recordings. I'm not expecting to find lost masterpieces in this series but the disc is valuable for shining light on the role of the string quartet in Bohemia in the years before Smetana and on the influence of Austrian and German contemporaries on native Czech composers.

Jonathan Woolf

Bohemia
Pavel HAAS (1899-1944)
Wind Quintet, Op. 10 (1929) [13:27]
Leoš JANÁČEK (1854-1928)
Mládí – Suite for Wind Sextet (1924) [17:00]
Josef Bohuslav FOERSTER (1859-1951)
Wind Quintet in D Major, Op. 95 (1909) [19:52]
Alexander von ZEMLINSKY (1871-1942)
Humoreske for Wind Quintet (1931) [4:20]
Acelga Quintett (Hanna Mangold (flute), Sebastian Poyault (oboe), Julius Kircher (clarinet), Amanda Kleinbart (horn), Antonia Zimmermann (bassoon))
Anne Scheffel (bass clarinet)
rec. SWR Studio Kaiserslautern, Studiosaal, Germany, October 2016
GENUIN GEN17460 [54:54]

When one thinks of music composed for the wind quintet, one automatically goes back to the masterpieces of the classical and early romantic periods. Yet here is a disc presenting music composed in the twentieth century, equally as mellifluous and masterful in construction and colouring.

The first work on the disc is one I got to know some years ago now. Pavel Haas, one of the doomed Czech generation of composers that would succumb to Nazi oppression, composed his Wind Quintet, Op. 10 in 1929 the year he became Chair of the Moravian Composers' Association, a position previously held by his teacher, Leoš Janáček. Janáček's influence can be felt in this music, and not just in the way that Haas employed "thematic and modal method on the basis of Moravian folk songs". Ingrid Theis suggests that it could be Haas's goodbye to his teacher who had died the previous year. What is clear is that there are similarities between master and pupil. My other recording of this work is by the Stuttgarter Blässerquintett on Orfeo (C 386 961 A). Both ensembles give impassioned performances, but the greater clarity of this recording wins over that of the Orfeo.

Leoš Janáček's *Mládí* is the most famous work on this disc. It often pops up on discs of twentieth century wind quintets, despite the fact that it calls for an extra bass clarinettist. It was a work Janáček composed in 1924 to celebrate his seventieth birthday. In it, he reminisces about his childhood. The title comes from a popular song that he quotes *Mládí, zláte mládí* (Youth, golden youth). It is a splendid work, one that deserves its popularity, and is typical of the composer's later style.

Probably the least known of the composers represented on this disc is the Czech Josef Bohuslav Foerster, although in recent years there have been some very fine recordings of his orchestral and chamber music, many of which I have. That being said, this Wind Quintet in D Major is totally new to me. The 1909 work is the earliest piece on the disc, and fits in well with Foerster's romantic style. Despite being born only five years after Janáček, he rejected the more modernist approach of his more illustrious compatriot. He preferred instead to develop his style based upon Dvořák's romanticism, something that can be felt in this piece.

The final composer represented on this disc, Alexander von Zemlinsky, is something of an outsider here. He was actually born in Vienna, although—as the Acelga Quintett point out in their introduction to this CD—he did spend a number of years living in Bohemia. I have long enjoyed his form of late romanticism and have many recording of his music. That being said, this piece was also new to me. Destined to be the composer's final work, it was composed shortly after he emigrated to America. Shortly after completing this charming work, he suffered a stroke from which he was to never recover. He died three years later.

This is a wonderful first disc by the Acelga Quintett, one which marks them out to be an ensemble to watch. Their playing and sense of ensemble are excellent. The recorded sound is well balanced . The booklet notes by Ingrid Theis are also excellent, making this a most enjoyable release.

Stuart Sillitoe