

Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

Symphony No. 1 in G minor, Op. 13, "Winter Daydreams" (1868, rev 1874) [44:10]

Symphony No. 2 in C minor, Op. 17, "Little Russian" (1873) [33:38]

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36 (1878) [41:34]

The Nutcracker Suite, Op. 71a (1892) [22:54]

Boston Symphony Orchestra / Michael Tilson Thomas (1)

New Philharmonia Orchestra (2), Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (4)/Claudio Abbado

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra/Ferdinand Leitner (suite)

rec. Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Berlin, May 26-27, 1959 (suite); Wembley Town Hall, London, February 20-22, 1968 (2), Symphony Hall, Boston, March 23, 1970 (1), Grosser Musikvereinsaal, Vienna, August 12-13, 1975 (3)

ELOQUENCE 482 6168 [2 CDs: 142:34]

A wonderful selection of Tchaikovsky performances here, not all first choices by any means, but there is much enchantment at work nevertheless.

The performance of the First Symphony was issued in 1970. There is delicious clarity to the bass in Tilson Thomas's recording; a pity some of the upper frequencies in the woodwind feel rather recessed and overly reverbed, and the high strings can occasionally feel rather glassy at higher dynamics. The enchantment noted in the opening paragraph of this review is there in abundance, though; there is a real freshness to this performance. The first movement was subtitled "Daydreams on a winter journey"; the second, a flowing *Adagio cantabile ma non tanto*, "Land of gloom, land of mists". There is no missing the fact that only Tchaikovsky could have written the long cello melody. In this movement, sadly, there is some blurring of lower string pizzicato, a pity because Tilson Thomas paces it well, and the brass statement of the big, Slavic theme has great power.

The material from the third movement, derived from Tchaikovsky's student piano sonata, includes a suave dance theme, beautifully moulded by Tilson Thomas. The Bostonians clearly deliver crisp articulation and staccato throughout, but it gets slightly tarnished by the recording. Tilson Thomas paces the opening *Andante lugubre* of the finale beautifully, though, inspiring his Boston orchestra to real beauties of phrasing. Tilson Thomas also finds more strength and integrity of structure in the finale than most of his rivals; this lovely performance presents Tchaikovsky's counterpoint unapologetically.

Interestingly, we have an Abbado recording here, the "Little Russian". It also is Abbado who provided a fine First with the Chicagoans. Muti also has his way with the First, not one to dwell and sightsee but nevertheless compelling. Abbado's recording of the Second Symphony with the New Philharmonia is actually the one I grew up with. I got to know the piece from back in the late 1970s, when it was already reissued: the coupling on the DG LP in question (Accolade 2542 113) was Abbado's Boston *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture that appears elsewhere in the Eloquence series (with the Sixth, and reviewed by Rob Barnett [here](#)).

Abbado's "Little Russian" remains top of the pile. It would be amazing to know who the first horn player is. The opening solo is impeccable, as is the second horn's contribution later when we hear it in octaves just before the *Allegro vivo* kicks in. And what a kick: Abbado galvanises the players to maximal intensity. As is typical of Abbado, articulation is perfectly judged and together, yet here he finds the sweep of the movement in tandem. Mystery, drama and structural integrity go hand in hand. The second movement is an *Allegretto marziale*, perfectly performed by all departments. The woodwinds in particular are a delight, nowhere more so than in the cheeky off-beats of the final bars. The sheer grandeur of the opening of the finale is beautifully conveyed in Chris Bernauer's remastering (far better than anything my LP player was ever capable of). The sprightly yet intense rhythms of the strings reveal terrific levels of discipline. The drama of the finale's lead-up to its scampering coda is wonderfully done by all concerned; the orchestral blaze of that coda itself now shines forth resplendently in this remastering.

With the Fourth Symphony, we enter territory that is, to put it mildly, overcrowded. And yet Abbado in August 1975 and the Vienna Philharmonic still hold their heads high. There is a propulsive thrust running through the reading, a sense of excitement that never fully lets go, that leads one to realise that the freneticism of the finale is the only way through and out. On the way, Abbado persuades the Vienna strings to phrase most persuasively the sighing, downward phrases so characteristic of Tchaikovsky. It is as if the music seeks to move inwards but externalities keep on preventing it doing so. The oboe phrasing at the outset of the *Andantino in modo di canzone* is glorious; but it is the way the recording of the Scherzo's pizzicato has held up that is so impressive. The finale has less sheer velocity and fervour than the famous Szell/Cleveland performance, but it remains an exciting and highly polished experience.

The filler for the first disc is Ferdinand Leitner's splendid 1959 performance of the *Nutcracker Suite*. Studio recorded it might be, studio-bound it is not. There is plenty of life to the "Russian Dance", and plenty of rhythmic bounce to the "Arabian Dance". Perhaps most impressive is the long harp solo in the "Waltz of the Flowers," washes of golden sound perfectly caught by the DGG engineers (producer Wolfgang Lohse and engineer Werner Wolf); the impassioned cello melody later on in that movement is a thing of joy too, though. These flowers waltz with a light grace.

Raymond Tuttle's excellent booklet notes round off a sterling release. It offered this reviewer, at least, a trip down memory lane.

Colin Clarke

Louis PELOSI (b. 1947)

Thirteen Preludes and Fugues, with Epilogue, for Piano (2000-2003) [86:41]

Mateusz Borowiak (piano)

rec. 2011/12, Academy of Music, Katowice, Poland

KASP RECORDS 57731 [40:58 + 45:43]

This is my first encounter with the music of the New York-based composer Louis Pelosi. I was fascinated to read in the accompanying booklet that he hasn't followed the more traditional path of composers, but made his living as a self-employed piano technician. Having shunned academia and the commercial music world and not being a performer, he has foregone grants, commissions and premieres. The result: he has had to organize and self-fund performances of his music. He was born in New Haven, Connecticut, and studied at the University of Notre Dame, the Hartt College of Music and the Manhattan School of Music, where he could count Charles Wuorinen as a teacher.

The Thirteen Preludes and Fugues with Epilogue date from 2000-2003. Pelosi states that the 27 pieces should be regarded as one work, though they needn't necessarily be played as such. The cycle ascends through the circle of fifths from C to C. He divides the pieces into four groups, each offering a degree of diversity and contrast. Roughly speaking, the first are expansive, the second decorative and ornamented. Group three are described as 'stark or quixotic', with the fourth 'the longest and most demonstrative'. Across the groups there's a feeling of natural flow, where the music grows, intensifies, builds to a climax and subsides. At the end of the cycle there's a Grand Fugue in C for 2, 3, 4 and 5 voices, with the Epilogue acting as a detached coda. Pelosi is at pains to stress the importance of contrapuntal music, satisfying for its intellectual stimulation and its range and breadth of expression. These pieces have been a voyage of discovery for him.

Here's something of the vast scope of mood and expression you will find. In Prelude I in C the opening chords have a Scriabinesque flavour. The G major prelude, which follows, is impressionistic, and Borowiak's brush-stroke colouring of the diaphanous writing is captivating. The first thing that sprung to mind when I heard the Fugue III in D was the fugue in G minor, BWV 885 from the Well Tempered Clavier. Fugue V in E contrasts lightly textured luminosity with dramatic darker elements. Fugue VI in B has a virtuous simplicity. The jaunty, almost jazzy rhythms of Prelude IX in A flat are compelling, whilst Prelude XI in B flat is piquant and spicy.

Mateusz Borowiak's dazzling technique and intelligent musicianship are impressive on all counts. He has the full measure of this challenging music for which he is a persuasive advocate. I was won over by the astonishing array of colour he coaxes from his Steinway.

Beata Jankowska, the producer and recording engineer, deserves special praise. She has collected numerous awards and accolades along the way for her notable contributions to the recording industry. She here proves her worth in the sterling quality of the recording, where clarity of contrapuntal lines emerges with immaculate precision and definition, within an acoustic sympathetic to this end.

The recording is dedicated to the memory of the composer's late wife Rosemarie Koczy (1939-2007).

Stephen Greenbank

Claude BAKER (b. 1948)

Piano Concerto *From Noon to Starry Night* (2010) [30:00]

Aus Schwanengesang (2001) [20:00]

Marc-André Hamelin (piano)

Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra/Gilbert Varga (Concerto); Juanjo Mena

rec. live, 9-10 October 2009 (*Schwanengesang*); 7-8 January 2011 (Concerto), Hilbert Circle Theatre, Indianapolis.

Reviewed as a 16-Bit download.

NAXOS AMERICAN CLASSICS 8.559804 [50:00]

This is Naxos's second recording of the orchestral music of Claude Baker and as such presents something of a coup: a concerto recording by Marc-André Hamelin away from his Hyperion comfort zone – and a live one at that. Baker has a formidable reputation as an educator – indeed in a long tenure as composer-in residence to the St Louis Symphony Orchestra (1991-9) he made a name for himself through his involvement in a range of community projects, long before such activities became fashionable.

The orchestral works that featured on the earlier Naxos release included pieces inspired by the writers Hermann Hesse (*The Glass-Bead Game*) and Walt Whitman (*The Mystic Trumpeter* – apparently this work is incorporated into the concerto included here). I haven't heard this disc but was most interested to read Paul Corfield Godfrey's [review](#) on this site, which expressed concern with Baker's compulsive use of quotation, despite broadly welcoming the music. Referring to the notes I made during two listens to the new issue I can only echo my colleague's remarks about Baker's 'collage' technique. The fragmented nature of much of the content and the liberal use of quotation detracts from this listener's ability to perceive any individual stylistic fingerprint. I have nothing against quotation *per se* (or collage-type structures), but in both works here I feel the structure is often so elusive that listening becomes a game of 'spot the quotation/allusion'.

In his Piano Concerto '*From Noon to Starry Night*' Baker again takes Whitman as a starting point. While the five sections of this work are each named after particular poems '*From noon...*', it is effectively a three movement work, the first and fourth sections effectively constituting brief 'prefaces' to the second and fifth panels respectively. The work commences ominously with the *Drum Taps* of the title, alternating with cascading piano, rapid repeating chords, Varèsian brass and ringing percussion. This morphs into the more reflective *Silent Sun*, a more reflective episode characterised by allusions to *Thoreau* from Ives' *Concord Sonata*, prior to repetitive, rippled motifs that to my ears recall Valentin Silvestrov. In the third movement, *Lilacs*, the orchestral gestures are more brassy and assertive; the piano provides a more restrained commentary. As the movement continues, the ghostly presences of Richard Strauss and Messiaen emerge from the mist, prior to its enigmatic, fragmented conclusion. And it's with these dislocated references that I begin to struggle - they undermine what appears (to me at least) to be a rather fragile structure. Hamelin is called upon to do his virtuosic thing in the tiny toccata *Dalliances*, evoking eagles 'taloning' in mid-air; this leads immediately to the finale, a twelve-minute panel called *Ecstatic Ghost*, where muted trumpets make less-than-subtle allusions to Ives again, this time *The Unanswered Question*. It might be evocative and suggestive on the surface but as a dedicated Ivesian of 40 years I find it *faux* –transcendental and just too obvious. These references are made repeatedly with slight modifications. At some point, Ives becomes Messiaen, the collage material now from the *Vingt Régards* and *Turangalîla*. Hamelin here produces some garish colours from the lowest register of the piano. I happily admit to being a huge admirer of the soloist, whose taste and judgement regarding repertoire is pretty reliable, but I'm afraid this work has eluded me. Baker produces some teasing and tantalising sounds for sure, but they led me, alas, into a cul-de-sac. In this live recording, the orchestra's sound image is truthful, but I found a drier sound from the top notes of the piano. (Perhaps this was just the download?) The audience applause for this piece certainly seems enthusiastic, so what do I know anyway?

Aus Schwanengesang from 9 years earlier inevitably refers to the Schubert song-cycle, and specifically to the six Heine settings that feature therein. I'm afraid I found this work even more diffuse than the concerto. It was composed as a memorial to Peter Worsley, a scion behind the scenes of the North Carolina Symphony Orchestra – and Baker saw in Heine's words a reflection of Worsley's lifelong love of the sea as well as the melancholy of lost love. In his note Baker also discusses Worsley's ready wit and explains how he has tried to incorporate elements of Haydn's quirky humour into the score as a *hommage*. In the first of the five short movements, sylvan rustlings and flutterings compete with fragments of (Schubert's) *Das Fischermädchen*; the following panel combines references to both *An Meer* and *Die Stadt* with threatening drum tattoos, while *Der Doppelgänger* presents a melodic sequence that uncannily resembles the theme from Anton von Webern's *Passacaglia*, Op 1. *Ihr Bild* depicts the traumatic realisation of the beloved's absence in sound form, while in the concluding *Der Atlas* defiant wisps of quirky orchestration lighten the texture – presumably this is the spirit of Haydn. Again there are some attractive sonics in the work (along with some more jagged effects). For me, alas, the whole just doesn't cohere – the form of the work may look good on paper but personally I found the work rather laboured and ultimately too fractured. There are myriad allusions in the work, but have Baker's influences been fully absorbed? It's a moot point, but ultimately it's a question the composer's other listeners need to answer.

The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra perform both works with tangible enthusiasm under Gilbert Varga (in the Concerto) and Juanjo Mena; there are certainly some spirited solo contributions from individual players, most obviously the trumpets in the Piano Concerto. Marc-André Hamelin's presence will certainly raise the profile of this disc and his contribution to the first work is characteristically bold, unfazed and virtuosic. Recording standards are very high, notwithstanding my earlier caveats about the piano sound. I feel sure there will be some collectors out there, who derive more satisfaction from this issue than I did.

Richard Hanlon

Previous review: [Rob Barnett](#)

Morton FELDMAN (1926-1987)

Trio (1980) [76:04]

Ives Ensemble

rec. 1996, Sandesaal, Hessischer Rundfunk

HAT[NOW]ART 155 [76:04]

This is a reissue of a recording made in 1996 and released the following year. The typography of that earlier disc, hat ART CD 6195, was rather more stark and insistent than this one, and took up the whole cover with its detailing of the three players from the Ives Ensemble, Josje Ter Haar, Job Ter Haar and John Snijders. Thirty years have wrought few colour changes – this label sticks to its Stendhalian red and black – but the impression has softened. Fortunately, the performance enshrined within is equally impressive.

If one listens to it alongside that of, say, the ensemble of Marc Sabat (violin), Rohan de Saram (cello) and Aki Takahashi (piano) on Mode 216, one will immediately detect that the concept of Feldmanian time is very different. Where the Mode trio is capable of unruffled horizontality, there is a strong sense of forward motion in the Ives reading; in Feldman's case one is tempted to call time relative, but the fact of the matter is that the Ives team take 76 minutes and the Mode run to 105 and thus to another CD.

The effect is almost wholly dissimilar as the Ives performance evinces an active sense of dissolution, the rigorous tempi allowing the Trio to reassign and realign its fragmentary material, and the refractive silences encountered emerge all the more strongly because of the relatively athletic tempo relationships chosen. Feldman's mosaic-like structure is composed of fragmentary elements that yield shape in time as a consequence of being transmuted and translated in a non-linear and non-traditional way. Consumed by the idea of change, but a change predicated on dissonance, the work fares well whether elongated beyond its already long length, as in the Mode recording, or subjected to a more dramatic, juxtaposed intensity, as here.

Marc-André Hamelin's very recent recording of *For Bunita Marcus* (see [review](#)) shows that questions of latitude in Feldman are not always as important as matters of verticality. One can admire a variety of approaches. The members of the Ives Ensemble give the listener a splendidly recorded and annotated recording – the notes are courtesy of Art Lange – that continues to impress.

Jonathan Woolf

Franz SCHUBERT (1797 – 1828)

Schwanengesang (1828) D.957

Bo Skovhus (baritone)

Stefan Vladar (piano)

rec. Liszthalle, Raiding, 2016

Sung texts with English translations enclosed

CAPRICCIO C5292 [62.39]

Schwanengesang differs from *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise* insofar as it is not a song cycle in the conventional sense of the word. Whether Schubert had intended it as a cycle we don't know, but anyway he hadn't got the time to arrange them in any cyclical order. He might even have had plans to complete further songs but death intervened. Most writers on the subject agree that there are no logic connections between the existing songs. The publisher, Tobias Haslinger, a year after Schubert's demise, simply published them in the order Schubert had left them: seven settings of poems by Rellstab, followed by six Heine settings and then threw in Seidl's *Die Taubenpost* for good measure – this is generally regarded as Schubert's very last song. This is also the order in which they have been performed. But some singers at least have found it an unsatisfactory order and tried to do something about it. About a handful years ago Dutch baritone Thomas Oliemans with Malcolm Martineau at the piano released a disc where they stuck to the traditional order but between the Rellstab and the Heine groups he inserted four songs to texts by Ernst Konrad Friedrich Schulze. They are late songs too, dark in character and make a suitable bridge between the two groups. It worked well and I have returned to that disc a couple of times and still find it satisfying.

On the present disc Bo Skovhus and Stefan Vladar go a step further and restow the order quite drastically. They also add four songs by Seidl and put them first together with *Die Taubenpost*. This Seidl group is followed by the six Heine songs and finally the Rellstab songs, with the addition of *Herbst* as the penultimate song and *Abschied*, logically, as the finale. And who can state that this is less authentic than Haslinger's 'original'? I admit that when first listening to the reordered 'cycle' it was a bit confusing, but playing it again it felt rational. Is it gimmicky? No, I don't think so. There is a lot of serious and careful consideration behind this decision.

The readings of the individual songs are also deeply considered. Skovhus is an intelligent interpreter and here, even more than in *Die schöne Müllerin*, he adopts a lightness of tone in many of the Seidl songs that make them very intimate. Take *Die Taubenpost*, here placed as number three, so light and airy and, sort of hovering over the ground – helped also by the transparent accompaniment. *Wiegenlied* is warm and tender with flexible tempo shifts, while *Bei dir allein* is bouncy and forward-moving and powerfully leads over to a mighty *Der Atlas*. *Ihr Bild* is mild and inward – like a whisper – then grows to an intense final climax. *Die Stadt* is lugubrious, grey, forbidding, in *Am Meer* the twilight mood is conveyed with great warmth and sadness. He catches the shifting moods so well in songs like *Kriegers Ahnung* and *Frühlingssehnsucht* and the popular *Ständchen*, often heard separately in recitals, is wonderfully soft and inward. *Aufenthalt* is full of pain, *In der Ferne* touching and the two concluding songs brings the cycle to a much more satisfactory end than the traditional *Die Taubenpost*.

Bo Skovhus's voice is still in mint condition and the interplay between singer and pianist is admirable. Whether one likes this restructuring and amendments is of course up to the individual listener. My personal reaction is wholly positive and I know I will listen to this disc again – for the novelty but even more important: for the music-making! Now I'm looking forward to the last disc in Bo Skovhus's and Stefan Vladar's Schubert trilogy: *Winterreise* which is already in my review pile!

Göran Forsling

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John BLOW (1649 - 1708)

An Ode on the Death of Mr Henry Purcell

Begin the Song! [22:13]

Chaconne a 4 in G Major [5:08]

Ode on the Death of Mr Henry Purcell [19:53]

Ground in G minor [4:14]

The Nymphs of the wells [10:29]

Sonata in A Major [5:44]

Dread Sir, the Prince of Light [8:53]

Zoë Brookshaw (soprano), Emma Walshe (soprano), David Allsop (countertenor), Samuel Boden (tenor), Nicholas Madden (tenor), Thomas Walker (tenor), William Gaunt (bass), Callum Thorpe (bass)

Arcangelo/Jonathan Cohen

rec. 2015, St. Jude-on-the-hill, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London DDD

HYPERION CDA68149 [1:16:36]

This is a spirited, exciting, idiomatic and by and large technically very persuasive collection of vocal and instrumental music by the near-contemporary (1649–1708) of Purcell, John Blow, by sopranos Zoë Brookshaw and Emma Walshe, countertenor David Allsop, tenors Samuel Boden, Nicholas Madden and Thomas Walker, basses William Gaunt and Callum Thorpe with the instrumental ensemble Arcangelo under their founder and director, Jonathan Cohen.

Blow was Purcell's teacher and an accomplished musician in a variety of ways – teacher, organist, Gentleman (adult singer) of the Chapel Royal – and someone who recognised Purcell's and Jeremiah Clarke's talents so readily that he relinquished his posts at Westminster Abbey and St Paul's respectively in favour of the younger men. With over 100 anthems, 10 services, 40 odes, more than 120 songs, a body of chamber and keyboard works and the earliest all-sung English opera, Blow was acknowledged during his own lifetime as the leading composer of the age. A CD like this one should go some way towards putting Blow into context. Only a couple of the works presented here are otherwise available in the current catalogue.

From the very first bars of *Begin the Song!* [tr. 1-9] we sense that not only are all the performers thoroughly immersed in the world of late Restoration Britain with its love of the gently rhetorical and self-aware references to Graeco-Roman culture. But also that they are enjoying the energy, verve, momentum and sense of purpose which infuses Blow's music, without a hint of stridency, insistence or spurious 'abandon' for effect.

Indeed, there is as much delicacy and fruity sensitivity in the *Ode on the Death of Mr Henry Purcell* [tr. 11-17] after the *G Major Chaconne* [tr. 10] as there is drive. While Blow's writing is not so inventive as that of Purcell himself, it has direction, purpose and as much restraint as amiability. Just listen to the solo, 'The power of harmony too well they know', in the *Ode* [tr. 15]. These qualities the performers on this CD have in almost every way. They are also aware of a drama which Blow holds in reserve in places; this creates a tension, in the resolution of which we cannot but delight.

Purcell's melancholy, by contrast, endures. The dirges in *Dread Sir, the Prince of Light* [tr. 26-29] are good examples; while never 'jolly', they suggest that hardships can be overcome, if there is an occasion to celebrate, as we do on New Year's Day here. Blow's melodic and harmonic inventions never go so far as to make us ache for 'satisfaction', as do Purcell's. Nor do they build and develop as do Purcell's. But they are genuine and heartfelt creations nevertheless. This is a tough balance to strike. It is desirable to avoid show for its own sake. But not to strip out all gesture for fear of being unnecessarily grandiloquent. The instrumental works also show how well the balance is achieved. Listen to the lovely tracery of the G minor *Ground* [tr. 18], for example: Cohen and Arcangelo pull us with them, rather than pointing a stick – however slim and short – at something already fixed in existence.

The soloists are for the most part excellent, although the timbre and phrasing of Walker may strike some listeners as a little histrionic, almost, and more suited to C19th opera than to the subdued charm of the C17th. Although the occasion of some of these Court works would these days be seen as sycophantic, such strained staginess is really unnecessary given the expression which the music and texts can convey without almost elevating some of the (higher) notes in places, as he tends to.

Both Zoë Brookshaw and Emma Walshe have sweet and airy, yet satisfyingly substantial, styles that are just right for the repertoire. Their duet, 'But here comes a Druid', in *The Nymphs of the wells* [tr. 20] is a delight. They pick out the contours and harmonies with just the right balance between precision and spontaneity. Indeed, spontaneity is an important quality in all this music: to many listeners it will appear strongly redolent of the more rounded and profound Purcell; so it may be hard not to make comparisons. Yet Cohen has made sure that the music here is offered in its own right.

The acoustic is resonant and sympathetic to the spirit of Blow's achievement. It focuses our attention on the music and performers, not on any sense of a 'mounted' performance. The booklet's notes set the scene for those new to Blow, examine each of the works performed, and offer brief bios of Boden, Walker and Cohen as well as reproducing the texts. If music from this evocative generation or two in late C17th England appeals, there is no real reason not to investigate a well-conceived, executed and produced CD from Hyperion.

Mark Sealey

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)

Secular Cantatas VIII: Celebratory Cantatas

Cantata BWV 206 "Schleicht, spielende Wellen und murmelt gelinden" [37:49]

Cantata BWV215 "Preise dein Glücke, gesegnetes Sachsen" [32:27]

Hana Blažíková (soprano), Hiroya Aoki (alto), Charles Daniels (tenor) & Roderick Williams (bass)

Bach Collegium Japan/Masaaki Suzuki

rec. 2016, Saitama Arts Theatre Concert Hall, Japan

BIS BIS2231 SACD [70:23]

Masaki Suzuki's marathon Bach cantatas series is now deep into the secular works, and with this eighth disc has reached these two splendid 'celebratory' cantatas. As that term implies, they are festive and fully scored, including three trumpets and timpani, as well as four vocal soloists in BWV206, and three in BWV 215. Each is termed a 'dramma per musica', runs for over half an hour, and the level of both music and execution (if not texts) is consistently high.

Cantata BWV 206 *Schleicht, spielende Wellen und murmelt gelinden*, ("Glide playful waves and murmur softly") plays with the conceit of four rivers with contending claims on their relationship to the Elector Augustus III, in honour of whose birthday it was first performed in Leipzig in 1736. The opening chorus makes great play with the river metaphor, so we hear murmuring ripples and raging waves in the music, which the Bach Collegium Japan deliver with all their accustomed firmness of tone, precise tuning and agility. In the third number, the bass aria 'Schleuß des Janustempels Türen' ('Close the doors of Janus's temple'), Roderick Williams sounds engaged with the text, even though he is impersonating the River Vistula, and sings with noble command, while the tenor Charles Daniels makes the most of his turn in 'Jede Woge meiner Wellen' ('Each surge of my waves').

The sequence of contending rivers continues up the registers with alto Hiroya Aoki as the Danube, delightfully pure sounding with little vibrato. With soprano Hana Blažíková we reach the peak, and not only in pitch. Her number 'Hört doch der sanften Flöten Chor' ('Listen the choir of gentle flutes') is duly accompanied by three flutes, murmuring away delightfully beneath Blažíková's exquisite singing. A joyful chorus hymns 'Die himmlische Vorsicht der ewigen Güte' ('The heavenly prudence of eternal goodness') in a conclusion which one hopes left the Elector delighted and proud with this riverine tribute to his many noble qualities.

The following cantata on the disc interrupted the composition of BWV 206. Cantata BWV 215 *Preise dein Glücke, gesegnetes Sachsen*, ('Praise your fortune, blessed Saxony') is another tribute to Augustus III, and the need to write this cantata arose from a suddenly announced imminent visit of the Elector, which meant that BWV 206 had to be put aside. So the similarities of these two pieces in scale, scoring and style are not surprising. Although the alto sits this one out, there is ample compensation in the wonderfully mellifluous delivery of the florid tenor aria 'Freilich trotz Augustus' Name' ('For sure, the name of Augustus'). Roderick Williams this time has a rage aria that plays to several of his strengths, not least, coloratura fluency, vocal attack and a snarl – a very musical snarl of course – when the text invites one. The soprano again has some flutes to colour her lovely recitative and ensuing aria in raise of Augustus's charity 'Durch die von Eifer entflammten Waffen' ('The use of weapons kindled with fervour'). The penultimate number involves all three soloists, and the framing choruses are again well up to the standards of JSB in this genre.

The SACD sound is near ideal for such music, needing as it does to balance the intimate with a sense of public rejoicing. It catches the colours of the distinctive solo voices on display, and has plenty of impact when all the forces are rejoicing away at the opening and close of each cantata. The booklet explains very clearly the slightly complicated genesis of each piece, and as always has full texts and translations. This is a superb issue in a superb series.

Roy Westbrook

Christmas at Westminster Abbey

Christopher Herrick (organ)
Choir of Westminster Abbey/Simon Preston
rec. 1984. DDD.

ELOQUENCE 4828564 [57:12]

Having just submitted my *Winter 2017/1 Second Thoughts and Short Reviews*, which should be online by the time that you read this review, I sat back and pondered which of the many Christmas recordings, new and reissued, contained there had made the greatest impression on me.

There was never any doubt that a Nimbus reissue of a 1988 recording, *Thys Yool*, on which Martin Best and his Ensemble offer a sprightly programme of medieval Christmas tunes, deserved special mention and I duly made that my Christmas Reissue of the Month. I've already written a more detailed review of that in 2008 under its original catalogue number – [review](#) – and Bruce McCollum has also reviewed the reissue (NI7103 – [review](#)).

Nor was there any doubt about this year's turkey, the umpteenth reissue of Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic sinking baroque Christmas concertos, including Corelli's Op.6/8, under the weight of their treatment: steer clear.

I'm sure to bring the original CD of *Thys Yool* out of the back of the cupboard this year, as every Christmas, but what else from among the new releases and reissues is most likely to join it?

Pretty certainly it will be this reissue of a Westminster Cathedral recording dating from 1984. If one CD can be said to sum up Christmas, this is it: in its earlier incarnation on DG Masters 445572 it joins the select few that I always bring out of the recess, along with another DG recording, Paul McCreech and his team performing a Lutheran Christmas Mass in Roskilde Cathedral, with music mainly by Prætorius (now on 4791757 at mid-price).

This Eloquence reissue stems from a Golden Age of Simon Preston recordings for DG Archiv. One of these, a budget-price 2-CD set of Purcell's choral works with Christ Church Cathedral Choir, Oxford, is my prime recommendation for those unwilling to go the whole hog with the King's Consort's complete recording for Hyperion – and worth having even along with that complete set. (4594872). I'm pleased to see that Australian Eloquence have reissued several others alongside this Christmas collection, including *Simon Preston at Westminster Abbey*, a 2-CD organ recital on budget-price 4824933. Preston on the Westminster organ also features on *Romantic Organ Music* (4824941, two budget-price CDs), *Messiaen Organ Works* (4824917, two budget-price CDs) and *Evensong for the Translation of Saint Edward* (4802706, one mid-price CD).

I hope to cover some of these in forthcoming reviews, together with the recently reissued *Variations on America* on the Methuen Hall, Boston, organ (4828101), Stravinsky and Poulenc Choral Works with Christ Church Cathedral Choir (4828099), mid-price single-CD releases and another budget-price twofer *Twentieth Century Organ Music* on the organ of the Coulston Hall, Bristol (4824925).

If you were tasked with packing as many aspects of the music of Christmas – modern sentimental material excluded¹ – into a programme just under an hour, I doubt if you could do better than on this Westminster Abbey reissue. The music ranges in time from an arrangement of the Lutheran Advent hymn best known in English as *Sleepers wake*, a fine choice to open the proceedings, and the liturgical prose *Surge, illuminare* (Arise, shine, for thy light is come) to works by twentieth-century composers. Above all we are reminded of the ubiquity of Christmas music: the final track, *Good King Wenceslas*, seems thoroughly associated with the season until we remember that the Victorian hymn writer J.M. Neale invented a legend of the Bohemian royal saint and set it to what had been a medieval Springtime tune, set down in the collection *Piæ Cantiones*.

Arthur Oldham is by no means a household name but his setting of the traditional words *Remember O thou man* (15th or 16th century) has been recorded several times, never better than here. Like the best twentieth-century Christmas music it manages to capture the spirit of earlier settings, such as that by Thomas Ravenscroft, while sounding unmistakably of its time.

Two other twentieth-century settings also remind us that composers sometimes rather given to challenging angularity in their music tend to offer something more traditional for Christmas: Elizabeth Poston's *Jesus Christ the Apple Tree* and Peter Maxwell Davies's *Nowell* (1962), the latter still comparatively little known.

In my short review I chose Hammerschmidt's *Allelujah! Freuet euch, ihr Christen alle* as an example of the vigour of these performances but that vigour is everywhere to be found throughout the proceedings.

Not that there is a lack of more thoughtful music, though it's in a minority. I could have wished for a little more, something like Herbert Howells' *Here is the Little Door*, but that's on offer on another 2017 Christmas release, *The King's Singers Christmas Presence* (Signum SIGCD497 – [review](#)) or Peter Warlock's *Bethlehem Down*, recorded for Christmas 2016 by The Sixteen (COR16146 – [review](#)).

Charpentier's *Salve puerile* (Hail little child) certainly receives thoughtful treatment. Marc-Antoine Charpentier composed a number of Christmas works with the title *In Nativitatem Domini* (on the birth of the Lord) and the Westminster performance of a snippet from H414 should whet your appetite to explore this beautiful music further. If so, a good place to start would be with an Erato CD on which Les Arts Florissants and William Christie perform another such work, H416, with his better-known setting of the Midnight Mass for Christmas, H9 (8573858202). The CD is full price, but the [Amazon download](#) at £2.99 is only pence dearer than when I [recommended](#) it in 2008.

On an inexpensive Harmonia Mundi recording Les Arts Florissants perform H414, together with Charpentier's *Pastorale de Noël*, H483 (HMX2921082). The download from [eclassical.com](#) comes without booklet, as does the streamed version from Naxos Music Library and the CD costs little, if any, more at around £9.

I said that there was nothing over-sentimental here. The nearest thing is the performance of Sir David Willcocks' short arrangement of *Rocking*, which receives a suitably heart-warming treatment.

The Westminster Cathedral choir performs all this music with thorough professionalism and Simon Preston's direction is as persuasive as his Purcell. With Christopher Herrick, who has since offered us some very fine recordings, on the organ and a recording which stands the test of time, this reissue is strongly recommended: Christmas music very well covered in just under an hour.

¹ Not that there isn't a place for that, too, even though the supermarkets and stores drown us with too much of it. Another 2017 release, *The King's Singers Christmas Presence* (details below) offers a wide-ranging selection which does include some popular schmaltz in the form of Mel Tormé's *Chestnuts roasting on an open fire*.

Brian Wilson

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Traditional

Up! Awake! From Highest Steeple (*Wachet auf!*) (arr. **Jacob PRÆTORIUS (1586-1651)**) [1:20]

Arthur OLDHAM (1926-2003)

Remember O thou man [4:56]

Traditional

There Stood in Heaven a Linden Tree (arr. **G.H. PALMER**) [2:44]

Peter WISHART (1921-1984)

Alleluya! A New Work is Come on Hand [2:12]

Marc-Antoine CHARPENTIER (1643-1704)

In nativitate Domini nostri Jesu Christi canticum, Frigidæ noctis umbra, H414: *Salve puerule* (arr. **John RUTTER**) [4:28]

Traditional

The holly and the ivy (arr. **Henry Walford DAVIES**) [3:34]

Elizabeth POSTON (1905-1987)

Jesus Christ the Apple Tree [2:49]

Michael PRÆTORIUS (1571-1621)

Resonet in laudibus (arr. **Herbert BIRTNER**) [2:37]

Traditional

Ding Dong Merrily on High (arr. **Charles WOOD**) [1:57]

Sir Peter Maxwell DAVIES (1934-2016)

Nowell (Out of your sleep arise) [2:42]

Andreas HAMMERSCHMIDT (1611/12-1675)

Allelujah! Freuet euch, ihr Christen alle [3:37]

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Up! Good Christen Folk (arr. **G.R. WOODWARD**) [1:17]

Traditional

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Samuel SCHEIDT (1587-1654)

Puer natus in Bethlehem [0:41]

Anonymous

Rocking (arr. **Sir David WILLCOCKS**) [1:55]

John GARDNER (1917-2011)

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day, Op.75/2 [2:09]

Traditional

Responsorium Prolixum: Illuminare Jerusalem [3:29]

Benjamin BRITTEN (1913-1976)

A Shepherd's Carol [4:55]

Traditional

Good King Wenceslas [2:45]

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[Symphony No. 3](#), Op. 27 'Sinfonia espansiva' (1910-1911) [36:43]

[Symphony No. 4](#), Op. 29, 'The Inextinguishable' (1914-1916) [34:07]

Estelí Gomez (soprano), John Taylor Ward (baritone)

Seattle Symphony/Thomas Dausgaard

rec. live, 8, 9 & 10 June 2017 (3) and 12 & 14 November 2015 (4), Mark Taper Foundation

Auditorium, Benaroya Hall, Seattle

Reviewed as a 24/96 download from [eClassical](#)

Pdf booklet included

SEATTLE SYMPHONY MEDIA SSM1017 [70:50]

Nielsen's 150th birthday celebrations spawned three complete symphony cycles, from Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic (Dacapo), John Storgårds and the BBC Phil ([Chandos](#)) and the Royal Stockholm PO under Sakari Oramo (BIS). I wrote off the first in the latter's series, which couples Nos. 4 and 5, only to find the follow-ups were simply magnificent. And while Gilbert's readings are not without merit, it was much harder to be positive about Storgårds'. All three face competition from stalwarts Ole Schmidt ([Regis](#)/Musical Concepts), Jukka Pekka Saraste (Warner, Finlandia), Michael Schönwandt (Dacapo/Naxos) and Herbert Blomstedt (EMI-Warner, Decca).

I've reviewed a number of Seattle Symphony releases, the earlier ones with Gerard Schwarz on Naxos, and, most recently, those with Ludovic Morlot (on the orchestra's own label). These SSM performances have ranged from run-of-the-mill [Saint-Saëns](#) and variable [Stravinsky](#) to catalogue-topping [Ives](#). And while Morlot's eclectic programmes are certainly challenging – he rejoices in the soubriquet 'Sir Mixalot' – they don't always work. It must have been fun to start with, but I did wonder when the novelty would wear off. As it happens, Morlot is stepping down as music director at the end of the 2018/19 season, and will be replaced by Thomas Dausgaard. The MD-in-waiting has already recorded a Deryck Cooke Mahler 10th with these players, an account much praised by [Ralph Moore](#).

Dausgaard hasn't given us much Nielsen, but his collection of orchestral excerpts (Dacapo 6.220518) and his [C Major](#) video of *Espansiva* – both with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra – have been well received. We never reviewed the first of these two releases, which I have on SACD and as a 24/96 download from [eClassical](#) (no booklet). Revisiting that album in preparation for this review, I soon realised why I hadn't listened to it in years; the playing is robust and the recording is excellent, but the performances don't engage me at all.

That doesn't detract from Dausgaard's ongoing commitment to the music of his homeland; the DNSO set of Rued Langgaard symphonies is invaluable ([Dacapo](#)).

Initial impressions of this Seattle Third are quite favourable. As I noticed in those excerpts, Dausgaard doesn't dawdle, although, in fairness, he doesn't overdrive the music either. His approach is Vesalian, the flesh flayed to reveal the muscle and bone beneath. Indeed, the combination of a no-nonsense reading and a very immediate recording reinforces that impression. And therein lies the rub: I have no problem with urgency and tautness, but I feel Dausgaard loses some of the work's humanity in the process. That said, his singers are fine and I really like his balances, the lower strings particularly audible. Indeed, there's something of the distinctive 'terracing' that makes Schmidt's readings so tactile.

One need only turn to Oramo's [Third](#), coupled with a First of striking shape and temperament, to realise just how much Dausgaard misses here. There's vigour, certainly, but there's also insight, engagement, and, in the 'meadow-haunting *vocalise*', real loveliness. As I elaborated in my review: 'Even the hint of a gathering storm *à la* Beethoven or Berlioz can't dispel the music's mood of contentment.' In this instance at least, Dausgaard simply doesn't convey that depth or contrast of feeling. Moreover, SSM's engineering, although good, isn't in the same class as BIS's. Given such a

raft of riches, it's no wonder I made the latter release a Recording of the Month. It's now my go-to version of both symphonies.

What of the Seattle Fourth? A troubled and troubling work – epitomised by those duelling timps – it's been well served on disc. In light of Dausgaard's forensic way with the Third, one might expect something rather special here. Alas, I just don't sense the architecture of the piece – its span rather than its individual joists – and while that makes for moments of excitement I'm not convinced by the reading as a whole. [Schönwandt](#) and Saraste are much more consistent and compelling, with all the conflict and drama the music demands. Their orchestras – the DNSO and the Finnish Radio SO respectively - play with great passion, and both albums are well recorded.

Muscular performances that fall short of the best; ditto the sound.

Dan Morgan

