

One Hundred Years of the Estonian Symphony

Rudolf TOBIAS (1873-1918)

Overture - *Julius Caesar* (1896) [10:02]

Heino ELLER (1887-1970)

Night Calls - Symphonic Poem [18:36]

Eduard TUBIN (1905-1982)

Symphony No. 2 *Legendary* (1937-38) [30:55]

Veljo TORMIS (1930-2017)

Overture No. 2 (1961) [11:15]

Arvo PÄRT (b.1935)

Symphony No. 3 (1971) [20:23]

Cantus - In Memoriam Benjamin Britten (1980) [7:58]

Lepo SUMERA (1950-2000)

Symphony No. 4 *Serena Borealis* (1992) [22:14]

Erkki-Sven TÜÜR (b.1959)

Exodus (1999) [14:37]

Heino ELLER

Homeland Melody [4:56] (mono)

Estonian National SO/Vello Pähn (Tobias); Arvo Volmer (Eller, Sumera); Peeter Lilje (Tubin); Nikolai Alekseyev (Tormis); Neeme Järvi (Pärt 3); Paul Mägi (Cantus); Paavo Järvi (Tüür); Heino Eller (Homeland Melody).

Estonian Radio Chamber Orchestra (Cantus)

rec. Estonian Radio Archives 1960s-2001. ADD/DDD

ESTONIAN RECORD PRODUCTIONS ERP 6004 [70:49 + 70:08]

This handily portable survey gives us a cross-section of Estonian orchestral music from the 1890s to the 1980s. The performances are sure-footed and all drawn from the sound archives of Estonian Radio. I rather hope that eventually there will be a second volume.

This may well have been intended as a musical ambassador for Estonia and an encyclopedia entry on Estonia's symphonic treasury. It certainly fits both those bills. However, for the serious collector there are some twinges of regret. The Pärt works already exist in easily accessible versions internationally and the same goes for the Tubin. I believe there have been recordings of some of the other works too. However, for most of us the collection is a stimulating and valuable introduction.

The set - which has been around for a while now - is contained in a three-way fold-out card sleeve with two pockets for the CDs and an insert compartment into which the booklet fits. The booklet and card sleeve are in a sepia-coloured rough-fibrous wood-grain effect with sombre red or dark brown characters. The helpful essay by Evi Arujärv is in both English and Estonian. The only drawback is that only some of the works included here are actually mentioned.

Rudolf Tobias's *Julius Caesar* is an attractive piece with some expectedly portentous passages. Otherwise it has the sort of heroic lightness of demeanour expected from a music that sounds as if it has been influenced by Mendelssohn's *Ruy Blas* on one side and Weber's *Euryanthe* on the other. The self-same overture appears, differently coupled, on another Estonian double on [Chandos](#) with the RSNO and Neeme Järvi.

Heino Eller also features on that Chandos duo; not to overlook a particularly generous [Antes Edition](#) CD and separate discs of his piano music on Toccata ([vol. 1](#) [vol. 2](#)). Out of the blue, earlier this year (2017), he commanded a whole orchestral programme on BBC Radio 3. His symphonic poem *Night Calls* has a foot in two centuries: late 19th romanticism and early 20th nationalism. Tchaikovskian passions and lyrical serenades from the woodwind and engaging delicate harp swirls. There's a colourful Rimskian aspect (14:00) to this writing. Parallels can also be drawn with the worlds

established in the very early Bax tone poems and by hothouse Scriabin (16:10). It's a lavish score. It's good to report that this does not duplicate the Chandos or the Antes collections.

The **Tubin**, written in the late 1930s, also looks backwards in a nationalistic way. It adds a fresher impressionistic layer to the composer's expression. The three movements are laid out here with the first two in one track and the third allotted a track of its own. This is an early work from a composer who was still writing [symphonies](#) in his seventies. His is not a Sibelian soundworld; at least not here. The music is tense, complex, gravely symphonic in its bearing, lush and always tonal-melodious. He is his own man but tributaries from Rimsky, Scriabin and early Stravinsky flow in to his palette and swirl the waters. The muted throb that underpins much of Tubin's music becomes more brazen in the gale-buffed Finale. This closes in a most contented sighing glow which sounds like the epilogue to Bax's Seventh Symphony (1939). Estonian Record Productions have not used existing commercial recordings but instead present the work in the hands of one of Estonia's finer but lesser known conductors, Peeter Lilje (1950-1993), who died young.

Tormis chose a rather impersonal title for the last item on CD 1. This overture is from Estonia's long Soviet years. At first it is shaken by a desperately potent urgency, heroic character and a touch of Shostakovich at his most propulsive and populist. The music then becomes more silvery and intimate before returning to the kinetic fury of the opening. I wish we could hear more orchestral Tormis (*Cloud over the Moon, Overture No. 1* and *Ocean*). For decades now the primary representation for this composer has been in choral music.

CD 2 starts with **Pärt's** Symphony No. 3 which is dedicated to Neeme Järvi. This single-movement construct is characterised by fanfares raw, gaunt and regal. These are coupled with searing strings, slowly spun and momentarily furious. That same fury can be felt in the accelerating drum cannonade at 12:10. The symphony is also influenced by music of the Orthodox church but closes on a savage strut cut short. It is followed by the single most travelled Estonian work (Pärt's *Cantus - In Memoriam Benjamin Britten*), completed four years after death of the composer it memorialises. Has any work written as an 'in memoriam' to Britten been as successful? In this performance it feels quick but then I looked at the Chandos Järvi set where the timing is almost two minutes shorter. My expectations were in fact shaped by a broadcast by Rozhdestvensky and the BBCSO at the 1979 Proms where a very slow pulse stretched the music out most movingly. I wonder what Pärt's preference was.

Sumera's Fourth Symphony is conducted by [Arvo Volmer](#) who has recorded all the [Tubin](#) and [Madetoja](#) symphonies for Alba and has done good work in Australia. The symphony is in four movements played *attacca* and here in a single track. This is a compressed piece only in its structure, for its moods and manner are epic and imposing. The second half of the symphony is in part an uproarious whooping jostle as if *Petrushka's* Easter Fair has been let off its leash to pursue its own feral devices. It finally runs out of sap and descends into a supernaturally cool Sibelian gleam - rather like a certain *Swan* but shorn of the cor anglais part. Sumera's six symphonies are on Bis: 1-3: CD660; 4: CD690; 5: CD770; 6: [CD1360](#).

The second disc ends with two works. There's **Tüür's** *Exodus* - a very different animal from the same-titled score by [Wojciech Kilar](#). The Tüür is a dissonant thrashing simoon of a piece for much of the time but ultimately finds a simple quietly shimmering peace. This has a religious feel and touches on Pärt's *Cantus*. We finish with **Eller's** short and heartfelt *Homeland Melody*, the Delian musings of a most gentle wight. It's a live performance conducted by the composer and it's the only track with applause.

This is a varied selection with the emphasis lying away from the avant-garde.

Rob Barnett

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Nature and The Soul - Latvian Choral Classics

Emīls DĀRZIŅŠ (1875-1910)

Long Ago [3:29]

Moonbeams [3:23]

The Broken Pines [3:12]

Emilis MELNGAILIS (1874-1954)

Nature and the Soul [3:53]

Latvian Requiem - Move Gently and Quietly [11:31]

Jānis ZĀLĪTIS (1884-1943)

The Goblet on the Isle of the Dead [4:46]

Jēkabs GRAUBIŅŠ (1886-1961)

Night Has Entered the Forest [3:01]

Jāzeps VĪTOLS (1863-1948)

The Day is Ending [1:40]

The Moon Lied [1:19]

The Enchanted Forest [3:43]

The Dwarves and the Old Man of the Forest [4:05]

The King and the Mushroom [2:32]

David Before Saul [8:05]

The Sun's Revelry [3:23]

Latvian Radio Choir/Kaspars Putniņš

rec. St John's Church, Riga, 2016

SKANI 054 [58:48]

Several weeks ago, as is my wont on a Saturday morning, I switched on BBC Radio 3 to listen into Record Review. The programme had already begun, and the angelic strains of a choir wafted across the room. I was completely enthralled by the purity of ensemble, clarity of diction, sensitivity and superb sense of phrasing. The piece, of timeless appeal, was unknown to me. At the end it was announced - *Biķeris miroņu salā* (*The Goblet on the Isle of the Dead*) by Jānis Zālītis.

I was so pleased to be given the opportunity to review this. It's been released in anticipation of the centenary celebrations of Latvia's independence in 2018. The title of the disc "Nature and the Soul" is taken from one of the songs by Emilis Melngailis, and it presents five native composers. Whilst the names may be unfamiliar to outsiders, for Latvian choirs most will be familiar. Emīls Dārziņš, the composer of the first three songs, identified two elements which lie at the heart of the Latvian choral tradition: nature, and the "various emotional states of the soul". For Kaspars Putniņš, the choir's director, the album is both a "love letter to Latvia" and a homecoming.

From the opening track of Emīls Dārziņš *Long Ago*, the choir's supreme control of dynamic gradients is breathtaking. In *Moonbeams*, the celestial luminosity is conveyed to perfection in their gentle diaphanous expression. Emilis Melngailis was one of the notable figures in the Latvian choral tradition, responsible for collecting around 220 native folk songs. *Nature and the Soul* is rather four-square and hymn-like. His *Latvian Requiem*, the most substantial piece on the disc, is in four parts, in effect four independent songs. The first three depict a funeral procession. In the first, Melngailis makes a pointed contrast between male and female voices, with the harmonic textures being rather pared down. In *Doomsday*, the final piece, punishment is meted out to those guilty of social injustice, translated into the more declamatory thrust of the music. Jānis Zālītis's *The Goblet on the Isle of the Dead* employs some bold and colourful harmonies, and is the highlight for me. Compelling is the choir's natural and effortless contouring of the music's ebb and flow.

Whereas Jēkabs Graubiņš is singly represented by the lyrically beguiling *Night Has Entered the Forest*, Jāzeps Vītols music takes up the lion's share of the disc with seven songs. His music is influenced

by German and Russian music as well as Latvian. *The Day is Ending* is subdued and restful as it ponders on the toils of the past day. The male voices have a wonderfully rich burnished quality in the opening measures of *The Enchanted Forest*, and in *The Dwarves and the Old Man of the Forest*, the crisp, incisive articulation is adeptly realized. *David Before Saul*, his masterpiece, is deeply reverential, and contrasts strikingly with *The Sun's Revelry*, lightly scored, genial and upbeat.

Everything about this release spells quality. The accompanying documentation in Latvian and English provides not only background and context to the music performed, but offers full texts and translations. The warm, intimate and sympathetic acoustic of St John's Church, Riga, provides clear, vivid and well-balanced sound. Dynamic range and detail have been expertly achieved by the engineers. Kaspars Putniņš inspirational conducting secures the very best from his singers.

What a wonderful way to celebrate a centenary. I cannot but echo the heartfelt sentiments of Putniņš, "On your one-hundredth birthday, I wish you many happy returns, dear Latvia".

Stephen Greenbank

Previous review: [Rob Barnett](#)

Jean SIBELIUS (1865-1957)

Kajanus conducts Sibelius – Volume 3

Symphony No. 3 in C major, Op. 52 [29:54]

Symphony No. 5 in E flat major, Op. 82 [29:39]

Finnish Jäger March, Op. 91, No. 1 [3:11]

London Symphony Orchestra/Robert Kajanus (symphonies); Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra/Robert Kajanus (March)

rec. EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London 21-22 June 1932 (3); 22-23 June 1932 (5); Berlin, 30 May 1928. ADD. mono

NAXOS HISTORICAL 8.111395 [62:44]

Première Recordings 1932-34

Symphony No. 4 in A minor, Op. 63 [32:11]

Symphony No. 6 in D minor, Op. 104 [26:13]

Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 105 [21:16]

Philadelphia Orchestra/Leopold Stokowski (4); Finnish National Orchestra/Georg Schnéevoigt (6);

BBC Symphony Orchestra/Serge Koussevitsky (7)

rec. Church Studio, Camden, New Jersey, 23 April 1932 (4); EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London, 3 June 1934 (6); live, 15 May 1933, Queen's Hall, London (7). ADD. mono

NAXOS HISTORICAL 8.111399 [79:40]

These renowned pioneering recordings from the first half of the 1930s have never sounded better. Mark Obert-Thorn has lavished upon those shellac surfaces connoisseur-pleasing audio-technical TLC. As for the source material, this is down to the generosity of collectors Richard A. Kaplan, Nathan Brown and Charles Niss. The Kajanus, Koussevitsky and Schnéevoigt material is included in the comparatively recent and appealingly priced 7-CD Sibelius box (*Historical Recordings and Rarities - 1928-1948*) from Warner but not the Stokowski version of the Fourth Symphony.

The first disc here completes Naxos' Kajanus Sibelius Society series, being the third volume in that line. The two previous volumes were addressed [here](#) and [here](#). Kajanus (1856-1933), who was to die within the year, goes forward an extremely exciting Third Symphony. It is up there in terms of urgency and tense music-making with that of [Oramo](#) in the Sixth. This is not all about adrenaline. The Third Symphony's green and statuesque dignity is also captured with attentive poise reflected in the handling of the woodwind writing at 5:33 in the middle movement. The whole thing has the indomitable power of a marching phalanx ... and it works. Only once does a weakening lethargy enter and that is momentarily in the finale at 5:40 where the proceedings begin to lumber for a moment.

The Third Symphony is something of a Cinderella alongside the enchantingly winged Sixth; not so the Fifth. This Kajanus reading is strong on propulsive emphasis and with the tension sustained as tight as a drum. At 3:19 Sibelius looks forward to the winds of *Tapiola* – and does so in Kajanus's hands in a way few have emphasised with such potency. Overall the second movement is very good and satisfying but has a looser grip than that apparent from the Kajanus Third. The second movement ends on a knife-edge fall into digital silence, which is a pity. The finale of No. 5 returns to form. Illustrations abound – try the quite supernatural and steely spectral ostinato at around 5:13.

We conclude with the *Finnish Jäger March*. It's 'old pals' oompah swing now strikes uncanny echoes with the Soviet army marches of the mid-1940s. The recording is somewhat boxy but Kajanus packs plenty of muscular chumminess.

The second disc, which forms part of Naxos' *Great Conductors* series, fills the gaps left by Kajanus's passing. If Kajanus omitted symphonies 4, 6 and 7 much as Karajan studiously side-stepped numbers 1 and 3, Beecham, Schnéevoigt and Koussevitsky filled the gaps, rather as Okko Kamu stepped into the breach for [DG's first cycle](#).

With one minor exception these recordings were all made during the first decade of a silence that was to continue until the composer's death a quarter century later. Strange to think that when they were issued the musical public and profession had high hopes that there would be more symphonies to come.

These three landmark premiere recordings have not appeared together before. While the Schnévoigt 6 and Koussevitsky 7 are familiar presences, the Stokowski Fourth is much less so. It has been issued before on [Biddulph](#) but that was back in 2002. It's a very impressive-sounding version even if it is played by a cut-down orchestra who compensate with a plenitude of pleasing new-minted detail. I 'learnt' the work from a DG cassette of Karajan and the BPO recorded in the 1960s. Stokowski is quite different. There is less of the gruffly impetuous in Stokowski and more of a glow – lit from within. He opts for glockenspiel and then tubular bells in the finale and this makes quite an impact when compared with the rest of the pack. The quicksilver cello solos near the finale's start are much less rapid yet things are held together unerringly. It's as if we are hearing the work afresh – re-imagined. Stokowski romanticises the symphony in a way that I find very satisfying. It makes for an intriguing listen, as is often the case with this conductor.

The Schnévoigt Sixth has been issued several times: by [Divine Art](#) in 2005 and by [Historic Recordings](#) in 2010. It's good to have it again and in such intriguing company. I had cause to comment in 2010 that this performance is "quite unsentimental but Schnévoigt's yielding steel and athletic urgency conveys a constant and exalting sense of pressing forward." Nothing has changed in that respect.

Koussevitsky's 'take' on the Seventh Symphony is well enough known. It's heavy-weight and radiant with concert atmosphere. That said, it lacks the studio power of the 1960s Ormandy, its concert hall ambience and ferocious energy ([review review](#)) never mind the white heat of [Mravinsky](#). It has been issued by Naxos before and reviewed [here](#) and [here](#). It can also be heard on this conductor's [GCOO duo](#). I had high hopes of Naxos's [other disc](#) of Koussevitsky in Symphonies 2 and 5 but the performances lack life and lustre.

This non-Kajanus disc is generously packed at close to 80 minutes. I wonder if that is the reason why each movement makes a sharply vertiginous fall into the uncanny silence around the digital process. That's my one criticism of this CD.

Both discs (only available separately) are fascinatingly supported by a detailed liner-essay by Colin Anderson and a technical note by Mark Obert-Thorn.

Rob Barnett

***Istanpitta* - Florentine Dances of the Fourteenth Century**

Istanpitta Tristano & Manfredina [6.30] ; *Istanpitta Ghaetta* [12.29]

Istanpitta In Pro [6.06] ; *Istanpitta Chanconetta Tedescha* [5.01];

Istanpitta Salterello [3.43]; *Istanpitta Salterello & Trotto* [7.02];

Istanpitta Isabella [6.34]; *Istanpitta Tre fonata* [5.06]; *Istanpitta Salterello in 6* [4.22]

Henri Agnel (Cistre, Cethera, Ud and arranger and director) with Michael Nick- (Quinton), Henri Tournier (Flute/Bansura), Diamchid Chemirani (Zarb) and Idriss Agnel (Udu)

rec. 2003, Chapelle de 'l'Hôpital Notre-Dame de Bon-Secours, Paris

ALPHA CLASSICS 336 [57.09]

The best known collection of medieval dances, almost entirely 'Estampies' or as here called 'Istanpittas', thirteen in number, can be found in the 13th Century 'Manuscrit du Roi' now to be seen in Paris. These have been recorded many times in the last sixty years on differing anthologies, not least by Jordi Savall who put them all on one CD (Alia Vox AVSA 9857). Less well known but almost as often recorded, normally just one or two at a time, are these Italian, largely Florentine 'Istampittas'.

It is generally said that instrumental musicians at the time of Landini [d.1397] were illiterate and improvised their music making, and it must be admitted that that is generally true. But some scribes thought it important to write some of these tunes down and preserve them in beautiful and lavish manuscripts. It must be remembered that only the melodies have been preserved so all we can do is to guess how they were played or on what they were played or even if the melodies were also performed by singers as has sometimes been suggested. As a result, modern performers are free to move around in the space of the 'Estampie' form as it were, at will and this as has been achieved vividly here.

The form of the Estampie is mostly, A, B, C, B, D, B, E, B etc. - it could of course go on. It can be seen that the repetition of the 'B' phrase would and does enable the instrumentalist to improvise around the melody quite freely. It is also generally considered that the pieces would have used percussion to aid the pulse for dancing and probably had an improvisatory introduction, setting the mode and establishing a few of the musical idioms. Improvisation, quite rightly plays an enormous part in the successful presentation of these dances.

The crusaders of the 12th and 13th Centuries would not only fight and pillage they would barter their trinkets for, its believed, items like musical instruments and take them or send them home. One such, represented on this CD is the 'Oud'. The French crusaders called it 'Le Oud' or L'oud hence the 'Lute' in English. Other instruments employed are the 'Zarb' - a leather covered drum which gives us the quite lengthy introduction to the 'Salterello and Trotto'; the 'Udu' is a metal, pot-shaped drum, the 'Quinton' is a long-necked violin, there is a cittern, a cithara and a bamboo side blown flute known a 'Bansura' and several are given an opportunity to shine in various of the dances. In the 'Istampitta Tristano' the opening prelude features the Bansura flute, the Quinton is featured in the 'Istampitta In Pro', the Zarb in the 'Salterello and Trotto' etcetera. The effect of all this is more middle eastern than western. As proof just listen to the prelude to the 'Istanpitta Salterello' for the solo flute.

On older recordings the influence of the soundworld of countries like Morocco and Turkey has only occasionally been a feature. One of the first to understand this was the German group 'Studio der Fruhen Musik' under Thomas Binkley in the 60's, indeed they recorded several of these pieces including the 'Istampitta Ghaetta'. David Munro 's approach was less clearly influenced by Arab music but he recognised its importance and often talked about it.

The performances are 'fun' and often exciting and colourful. Bringing together this collection of Italian dances is an excellent plan and complements Savall's recording mentioned above.

This CD, originally from 2003, has been reissued with a vaguely helpful booklet note by Henri Agnel, one of the performers, a coloured time chart from 1297 to 1385 placing the visual arts in the limelight

and illustrating for example a painting of Giotto and some ancient playing cards. Well worth investigating and very ear-catching.

Gary Higginson

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)

Concerto for horn no.2 in E flat major, K.417 [13:19]

Concerto for horn no.3 in E flat major, K.447 [14:15]

Concerto for horn no.4 in E flat major, K.495 [15:59]

Concerto for horn no.1 in D major, K.412 [8:13]

Rondo for horn in E flat major, K.371 [6:02]

Concerto for bassoon in B flat major, K191 [18:12]

Louis-Philippe Marsolais (horn)

Mathieu Lussier (bassoon)

Les Violins du Roy/Lussier

rec. Salle Raoul-Jobin du Palais Montcalm, Quebec, 2016

ATMA ACD22743 [76:34]

It took me a little while to warm to the sound quality of this disc. The opening was something of a shock, with a seemingly unflattering rendering of the violin tone of the Violins du Roy in Mozart's Horn Concerto no.2. However, I quickly got accustomed to it and realised the sound was nothing like as unfavourable as I at first thought. This is a fine ensemble of just fifteen strings plus the necessary wind players. And they play very stylishly despite being not helped, at least initially, by the recorded sound.

The two soloists, both closely associated with the orchestra, are fine executants, who give performances which are not only technically assured but warm and full of warmth, lyricism and humour.

The horn concertos themselves are a curious bunch; all written for Mozart's friend, the so-called 'Ignaz Leutgeb' (real name Joseph Leutgeb), who ran a cheese shop in Vienna, but had known Mozart in Salzburg. The second, third and fourth concertos were written from 1783 -86 in Vienna; but the so-called first concerto is in fact the last, belonging to 1791. It lacks a slow movement, which suggests, along with the many other missing details, that Mozart was unable to finish it before death intervened.

Marsolais plays these works with a beautifully smooth tone, and is brilliant in the occasional *bravura* passages. His tone is creamy – he is playing on a modern horn of course – and quite open, having none of the 'bottled up' quality we sometimes hear from American (US) players. His relaxed, flexible playing in the slow movements greatly enhances the impression they make. Marsolais has provided his own cadenzas, which are not too long and quite acceptable.

Mathieu Lussier, who directs the ensemble throughout as well as being the bassoon soloist, is an equally accomplished player. The bassoon concerto was Mozart's first for a wind instrument, and is a miraculously perfect piece, for which bassoonists have every reason to thank the heavens. Again, the soloist uses his own cadenzas, and plays with an easy virtuosity that is admirable (and enviable!). I could perhaps do with a slightly more expansive lyricism in the *Andante* – after all, this is a 'tenor aria' – but overall the performance is of a very high standard.

All of these works – especially the 3rd and 4th horn concertos and the bassoon concertos – are heavily represented on disc. But I can honestly recommend this CD confidently, despite the competition of hornists Dennis Brain (EMI), Barry Tuckwell (Decca), Gerd Seifert (DG) and Alan Civil (Philips), and bassoonists Klaus Thunemann (Philips), Kim Walker (Gallo) and the superb Martin Kuuskmann (ERP) – to name but a few! Unless, of course, you are after performances on the natural horn, in which Anthony Halstead (Decca), for my money, still reigns supreme.

Balance between soloists and ensemble is exemplary in all cases.

Gwyn Parry-Jones

Sergei PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

Violin Concerto No. 1, Op. 18 (1923) [22:55]

Violin Concerto No. 2, Op. 63 (1935) [26:53]

Rudolf Koelman (violin)

Musikkollegium Winterthur/Douglas Boyd

rec. 2016, Townhouse Winterthur, Switzerland

CHALLENGE RECORDS CC72736 SACD [49:50]

These are marked as live recordings, but you wouldn't know it from the silent environment from which the sound emerges, and there is no applause at the end of either concerto. With all of the players listed in the booklet, the Musikkollegium Winterthur is quite a substantial orchestra, though the impression is rather more intimate and chamber-music like than you might expect.

The *First Violin Concerto* was considered old-fashioned by its 1920s Paris audience at the premiere, and while Prokofiev's signature rhythms, melodic inspiration and sweet'n sour harmonies are well in evidence there is also a low-key subversive quality to go along with its neoclassical, or should that be post-romantic air. The ending of this concerto is quite magical in this recording. The inter-war *Second Violin Concerto* is alive with contrasts, with a distinctly romantic spirit throughout; hints at poignant reflection centering on the aria-like middle movement, and exploring some connections with folk music in its outer movements. Prokofiev's orchestration is cleverly colourful and transparent, always allowing the soloist plenty of space for clarity and virtuoso exhibition.

We have a Masterworks Index on [Prokofiev's two Violin Concertos](#) which gives an indication of their popularity and history on records. Of the more recent recordings I've found James Ehnes's collection on the Chandos label pretty hard to beat ([review](#)), and his versions are my main reference by way of comparison here. As mentioned before, Musikkollegium Winterthur creates quite a chamber-music perspective, through with good recording quality there is no shortage of bass depth, for instance with the drum in the *Second Concerto*. The BBC Philharmonic strings are a bit more symphonic in scale, but with Chandos's up-front balance for the soloist there is never any question of the violinist sinking beyond trace.

As far as choosing a preferred soloist I am once again finding myself without a clear champion. James Ehnes's expressive tone and accuracy are impeccable, but Rudolf Koelman makes more of seemingly minor features such as those vibrato/slide moments near the beginning of the first movement of the *First Concerto*, and those solo moments from 2:00 into the last movement of the *Second Concerto* also have a more 'parlando' quality. The edgy, 'live' nature of these recordings has more to offer the closer you listen. Vadim Gluzman with Neeme Järvi and the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra is another fine alternative on the BIS label ([review](#)), through the soloist tends to pop out too artificially in terms of balance. I want to hear Prokofiev's orchestration properly, and as the Winterthur forces have been wheeled in a little closer to the violin in this Challenge Classics recording they score a plus in that regard. Gluzman's punishing of his instrument's strings around 6 minutes into the first movement of the *First Concerto* is however characteristic of the greater extremes on offer in this performance, something not reached in the same way by Rudolf Koelman.

Basically, the only thing really missing from this recording of Prokofiev's *Violin Concertos* is a filler. If under 50 minutes seems a bit thin for a new CD then I would tend to agree, but on their own terms these performances are very fine indeed. If you already have a favourite version then I suspect you won't learn very much new from Koelman and Boyd, but as I say, the more you listen the better this gets.

Dominy Clements

Igor STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)

Violin Concerto in D major (1931) [21:36]

Claude ARRIEU (1903-1990)

Violin Concerto No.2 in D minor (1949) [23:04]

Jeanne Gautier (violin)

Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française/Jacques Pernoo (Stravinsky)/Eugène Bigot (Arrieu)

rec. July 1956 (Stravinsky) and December 1959 (Arrieu), Paris

FORGOTTEN RECORDS FR981 [44:20]

It's good that French violinist Jeanne Gautier's relatively slim commercial legacy has been expanded with off-air examples of her art. She represented the incisive, resinous school of French violin playing, as opposed to the muscularity and intensity of the younger Ginette Neveu or the sensuous suavity of the older Jacques Thibaud.

Two concertos demonstrate the continuing validity of restoring her broadcasts. The first is the Stravinsky, made in July 1956 with Jacques Pernoo (1921-2003) conducting the Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française. Once again, the typically boxy Parisian studio acoustic doesn't flatter proceedings and there's no cushioning for the strings, either for the soloist or the orchestral ranks. Nearing 60, she still plays with all her old biting incisiveness, and a sense of rapid characterisation through colour shading. Aria I is unusually lyric in her hands, its elegance enhanced by confiding slides, its introspective element more pronounced than usual. Her right-hand articulation here is superb. There are two very brief dropouts along the way. The melancholy expressive depth of Aria II increases the quotient of emotive richness in the performance. Indeed, there's something profoundly romantic-orientated about Gautier's reconciliation of the outer movements' abrasive qualities and the two Arias' more forlorn elements. This is a thought-provoking reading, both individual and strongly argued and well worth hearing even if – especially if – you think you know the highways and byways of the concerto.

Claude Arrieu's Concerto No.2 was premiered by Gautier in January 1950 with André Cluytens conducting. She was still promoting it at the end of the decade and is captured here in December 1959 with Eugène Bigot on the rostrum. The recording quality is less razory than in the Stravinsky though there is also a rather recessive quality to the sound as well, so that the orchestra is not as forward in the mix as might be the case. Like his younger Czech contemporary Vladimir Sommer, Arrieu was clearly indebted to Prokofiev in the concerto, though the end of the opening movement summons up a brief Sibelian moment too – not something French composers often do. The athletic demands of the *Grave* movement, alternately austere and lissome, and the joyfully fresh and freewheeling Scherzo reveal a concerto full of contrast. The rather beautiful, almost Russo-filmic finale leads one to wonder why this concerto isn't better known.

It helps in no small way that Jeanne Gautier is one's guide and that the transfer has so successfully reproduced the two concerts.

Jonathan Woolf

Gundula Janowitz (soprano)

The Last Recital (In Memoriam Maria Callas)

Charles Spencer (piano)

rec. live, Herodes Atticus Odeon, Athens, 16 September, 1999

FIRST HAND FHR56 [82.40]

This recital has been issued almost 20 years after it was given to mark two things: the 40th anniversary of the death of Maria Callas and the 80th birthday of Gundula Janowitz. Janowitz' voice has always seemed to me to be one of the great voices of the second half of the 20th century. It had great purity, but not the milksop purity of many English sopranos whose sound is so described. There was a shimmer of vibrato which gave life and character to the purity and a metal centre to the voice which precluded any impression of "little me" girlishness. Although the timbre of the voice suggested that it would comfortably go well above the stave, in fact, like that of Victoria de los Angeles, it was not really at ease above B flat or B natural. Given her chosen repertoire, this was not any great problem; she stuck almost exclusively to German roles in opera and to Lieder, neither of which generally inhabit the vocal stratosphere. She was not an overtly passionate singer and was most successful in roles whose character had either a certain *hauteur* or simplicity; in *Fidelio* she was a Marzelline rather than a Leonore (though she did sing Leonore), and, for me, her greatest roles were the great ladies of Strauss - the Marschallin, Arabella, the Countess in *Capriccio* and Ariadne. Ariadne was the only role I saw her sing live, at Covent Garden in 1985 (though I made sure that went to all three performances she sang). By this stage she could no longer sing it with the perfection that she had in the 1969 Kempe recording, but there was still enough left to make it a treasured memory. She gave her last operatic performance, also as Ariadne, in Vienna in 1990 and final public appearance at the age of 62 in the recital contained on this CD.

Janowitz' Lieder singing was more in the style of the pre-War singers than her immediate predecessors'. You will not find the psychological probing of a Schwarzkopf or a Fischer-Dieskau in her Lieder, but rather the lovely line of an Elisabeth Schumann. This is not to say that her singing was characterless or insensitive, but she did not use what John Steane termed an "interventionist" approach. You will not find the detailed, specific colouring of individual words of Schwarzkopf, but neither will you find her sometimes "precious" over-interpretation and occasional vocal ungainliness. However it cannot be denied that Janowitz' Lieder can lack depth.

This recital begins with a group of Schubert songs. She nicely pays a little tribute to the venue of the recital by beginning with three songs with ancient Greek settings, but in so doing she draws attention to her deficiencies. Almost all the rest of the recital consists of songs whose emotional content is essentially simple and, so to speak, "one note", but these three songs demand greater drama and contrast than she gives. "Die Götter griechenlands" is well sung, and the instrumental precision of the intervals, for example at "Kehre wieder" in the first line, is wonderful. There is also a sensitive shading at "Schatten" in the last line, but the song really needs a greater sense of melancholy at the loss of the ancient gods. In "Iphigenia" more drama and anguish are needed; little is made of the "mighty waves Crashing against the cliffs". "An die Leier" is best, with some effective contrast between the first and second pairs of lines in each stanza. The lack of drama in the martial references is seen again the middle stanza of "Ellens Gesang 1"; greater use of the consonants would have helped a lot. The remaining five songs in this Schubert section are more emotionally straightforward and therefore more successful, with lovely tone and legato, though even here in "Der Lindenbaum" the minor key stanzas are insufficiently differentiated.

The Schumann section is more consistently good. There is more involvement in "Lied der Suleika" and some beautiful shading at the ends of the second lines of each stanza and the last line of stanza two, "Im Gewande der Poesie", is exquisitely phrased. "Lotosblume" is nicely moulded, but the last line's reference to love's pain is a little bland. In "Meine Rose", the first stanza should have a greater resonance when it is repeated at the end, but does not. However "Der Nussbaum" is a perfect vehicle for Janowitz and her performance is quite lovely.

The Strauss set is, to my mind, the most successful of all. Janowitz' voice has by now fully warmed up, and she uses a much wider dynamic range. "Das Rosenband" in very fine and we hear some real engagement in "Allerseelen"; the last line of stanza one has exactly the sense of ecstasy needed. "Morgen" and "Nachtgang" have a lovely legato, but "Befreit" is a little too slow for its own good and as a result lacks momentum. However, it does have real passion and a very wide dynamic range and in terms of pure singing is probably the most successful item in the recital. The encore is Schubert's "Die Forelle", which is lovely, but Janowitz is completely untroubled by the fate of the fish!

Charles Spencer's accompaniments are fine. They don't perhaps have the subtlety and perception of a Vignoles or a Martineau, but they are never less than musical.

The booklet tells us that as "the recital took place in an open air theatre, a significant amount of external noise was captured, including motor vehicles and passing planes... Most of the noises, some of which were very intrusive, have been removed, though at times the result is an unavoidable compromise of the quality of the remastered audio". Well, all I can say is that they must have done an exceptional job, because I was not troubled a single time by any untoward noise or noticed any compromised sound. The recording is, of course, not up to the highest standards (it was simply made as an archive document, with no intention of its being issued) and the upper frequencies are a little shrill at times with slight distortions on occasional climaxes, but I cannot believe anyone will find it in any way unacceptable.

Vocally, Janowitz was in remarkable fine fettle in this recital. Only in direct comparison with herself in her prime 20 years before would anyone feel that there was any deficiency. When Christa Ludwig retired at almost the same age, I asked her after her Wigmore Hall farewell recital why she was retiring when she still sang so wonderfully; she said "That is why I am retiring now". I am sure that Janowitz' reason was exactly the same. She may not have been the most profound of singers, but the delight that is to be found in the sound of her voice and its solid musicality is something cherishable, and still to be found in abundance in this final recital.

Paul Steinson

Previous review: [Ralph Moore](#)

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Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Die Götter Griechenlands; Iphigenia; An die Leier; Ellens Gesang I 'Raste, Krieger! Krieg ist aus'; Fischerweise; Der Fluß; Im Abendrot; Die Winterreise - D. 911 (Op. 89/5): V. Der Lindenbaum; Das Lied im Grünen; Die Forelle (encore)

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

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Regina coeli – A cappella Music from the Basilica Alte Kapelle in Regensburg

Francesco SORIANO (1549-1621)

Missae Nos autem gloriari oportet [19:10]

Gregor AICHINGER (1564-1628)

Assumpta est Maria [0:57]

Alleluia Assumpta est Maria [2:00]

Beata viscera [1:04]

Confirma hoc Deus [1:12]

Factus est repente [1:16]

Ave Regina coelorum [1:51]

Regina coeli [1:51]

Missae de Beata Virgine [15:44]

Michael HALLER (1840-1915)

Oculi omnium, op. 16,1 [1:45]

Sacerdotes Domini, op. 16,2 [1:28]

O sacrum convivium, op. 16,13 [1:53]

Ego sum panis vivus, op. 16,14 [1:21]

Coenantiibus, op. 16,16 [3:38]

Surrexit pastor bonus, op. 2,3 [2:18]

Missae undecima in honorem Santi Henrici Imperatoris Confessoris, op. 24: Credo [5:09]

Giovanni Pierluigi DA PALESTRINA (1525-1594)

Missae sine nomine: Credo [5:50]

Regensburger Vokalsolisten, Regensburger Motettenchor, Men's choir of former Regensburger Domspatzen/Josef Kohlhäufel

rec. 1998/2000, Dreifaltigkeitsbergkirche, Regensburg, Germany

Texts and translations included

TXYART TXA15058 [68:55]

As the subtitle suggests the present disc is mainly intended to document musical practice at the Alte Kapelle in Regensburg, an institution which is hardly known outside Germany. Its history goes back to the Middle Ages and is connected to Regensburg Cathedral and its boys' choir, today known as the Regensburger Domspatzen. One of the ensembles participating in the recording is a men's choir of former members of the latter. However, this disc is more than just a document of the Alte Kapelle's activities. Its programme includes music by three composers who are little known.

The exception is Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina who turns up at the very end of the programme. However, in fact, he is the thread of this recording, as all the composers represented were in one way or the other influenced by him. Palestrina was the main representative of post-Tridentine church music. The Council of Trent had laid down some of the principles of good liturgical music, partly as a reaction to criticism from the figureheads of the Reformation. Sacred music should be devoid of secular elements, such as chansons and madrigals being used as *cantus firmus* for masses. Composers should also care about the intelligibility of the text and therefore should avoid polyphony being too complicated; this resulted in composers turning more often to homophony. A third element was the avoidance of so-called *tropes*: the extension of the standard liturgical texts with new textual elements.

The earliest composer in the programme who adhered to these principles was Gregor Aichinger who was of German birth and was originally a Protestant. He was one of the first German composers who went to Venice to study with Giovanni Gabrieli. It is likely that this resulted in his conversion to the Catholic Church. In 1598 he was ordained as a priest. After his return to Germany he started work in Augsburg as a canon and cathedral choir vicar at St. Gertrud. His pretty large oeuvre shows a variety of styles. Some of his compositions are rather old-fashioned, but later in his career he published even pieces with a basso continuo part. The polychoral style he had become acquainted with in Venice also left its mark in his output. Some motets recorded here are taken from a collection of 1598, including pieces for three voices, a scoring which was uncommon at the time. Other pieces are from a collection

of almost ten years later and are more modern in style. Plainchant melodies often take a prominent place in his compositions. It is interesting that the Gloria from the *Missa de Beata Virgine* includes tropes, despite the Tridentine orders. However, the inclusion of tropes was in line with the rites of the Augsburg diocese. It shows that the impact of the liturgical reforms of the Council of Trent was limited.

Francesco Soriano (or Suriano) worked for most of his life in Rome, where he first sang as a choirboy and was later *maestro* in several churches, such as S Giovanni in Laterano and lastly in the Cappella Giulia. Stylistically he remained close to Palestrina; he reworked the latter's *Missa Papae Marcelli* for eight voices in two choirs. Influences of the fashions of his own time, such as the monodic style and the use of basso continuo, are absent from his oeuvre. He often made use of homophony in the interest of the intelligibility of the text. The *Missa Nos autem gloriari* is a specimen of a piece in which the composer cares for a maximum of clarity. The title refers to an antiphon for Holy Thursday.

The pieces by Aichinger and Soriano receive fine performances from the Regensburger Vokalsolisten, which comprises 25 voices. That is probably a bit larger than was common around 1600. However, because of the clarity of the voices and agility of the ensemble as a whole I didn't experience the ensemble's size as a problem. The attention given to the text is notable, as well as the dynamic differentiation. These performances are not as straightforward as so many others in this kind of repertoire are.

With Michael Haller we are in the late 19th century. However, his sacred works recorded here and the pieces by Aichinger and Soriano are not worlds apart. Haller was one of the great representatives in Germany of the Cecilian movement, which aimed for a reform of Catholic church music. According to Siegfried Gmeinwieser in *New Grove*, "the Cecilians sought to restore traditional religious feeling and the authority of the church. They regarded 'true, genuine church music' as being subservient to the liturgy, and intelligibility of words and music as more important than artistic individuality". For the Cecilians, the great model of church music was Palestrina, and Haller even earned the nickname of the 'Palestrina of the 19th century'. Regensburg was one of the centres of Cecilianism and Haller became musical director of the Alte Kapelle there in 1867. The largest part of his printed works was written during his period as choirmaster. His oeuvre was frequently performed in Catholic churches from his own time until well into the second half of the 20th century. His music is clearly different from what was the dominant style of this time - late Romanticism - and the influence of Palestrina is clearly noticeable. Even so, there are some romantic traits in his oeuvre, which can be noticed in his treatment of dynamics and the differentiation of tempi within one piece. If one were to listen to his motets without knowing who wrote them, one would never confuse them with music by the 'real' Palestrina. However, that is also due to the performance: the way the motets by Haller are sung here is probably not very different from the way Palestrina's music was performed in Haller's time. The Regensburger Motettenchor is much more a real choir, rather than a vocal ensemble. The booklet doesn't give details about its size, but I assume it is considerably larger than the ensemble. However, Josef Kohlhäufel has managed to avoid the sound becoming muddy and to make sure that the text is clearly intelligible.

This disc is more than a documentation of the Alte Kapelle's activities. It is also an interesting display of Palestrina's influence in his own time and shortly after his death as well as in the late 19th century. What adds to its value is the choice of music: Soriano and Aichinger are not household names and definitely deserve more attention. The level of the performances further contributes to this disc's being a worthwhile addition to the catalogue.

Johan van Veen

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Franz LISZT (1811-1886)

Scherzo and March [11:10]

Mephisto Waltz No. 1 [11:07]

Ave Maria 'The Bells of Rome' [05:30]

Harmonies poétiques et religieuses (no. 4, 7 & 9), S. 173 [35:12]

Mephisto Polka [06:38]

Nuages gris [03:26]

Valse oubliée No. 2 [05:45]

Sviatoslav Richter (piano)

rec. 9 May 1957 & 5 February 1958, Moscow; 11 September, 1982 Budapest; 10 March 1988 Cologne.

PRAGA PRD/DSD350 081 SACD [79:28]

This disc is entitled 'Liszt Recital II' of Praga Digital's Liszt Edition. A first volume (DSD350078) contained some of the more celebrated solo works by Liszt, namely the Sonata in B Minor and some of the *Études d'exécution transcendante*. This second volume opens with a relative rarity, the *Scherzo and March*, in a performance that suggests the piece should really be better known. The work is admired by specialists for the way the scherzo and the march sections are interwoven into a compelling single sonata form movement. But on first acquaintance it is more likely to strike the hearer, despite its neutral title, as a prime example of Liszt's demonic side. Certainly Richter's staggering performance has more than a whiff of sulphur about it. There used to be a later performance by him on an RCA disc from a 1998 Lübeck recital, which was how I first got to know the work. Terrific as that is, this 1957 Moscow account is still more remarkable, and the speed and attack of the hair-raising bravura sections account for the difference in timings, this performance taking nearly two minutes less than the RCA version.

With the *Mephisto Waltz No.1* we stay in the Devil's realm, but with a much more familiar piece of course. Familiar or not, there is nothing hackneyed about Richter's playing here, fully encompassing all the technical demands, such as the *leggiere molto* wide leaps in the 6/8 section, but always towards the goal of providing a compelling narrative. This is after all a symphonic poem, (though not so called by Liszt), which uses thematic transformation to follow the Faustian episode from Lenau's tale fairly closely. Richter here impresses both as master pianist and buttonholing storyteller. The placing next of the *Ave Maria*, a piece of religious impressionism (the subtitle is 'The Bells of Rome'), was a good piece of disc planning, for we are in need of a benediction after all the *diablerie*.

Half of the length of this generous disc is taken up by three big items from the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*. The first of these, 'Pensée des morts', is done with great poise, perfectly unhurried. There is a dream-like calm at the centre of this interpretation, which quite beguiles the listener. Timings for this work can vary widely. To take just two extremes from admired recent recordings of the whole cycle, Brigitte Engerer dashes through in 11:14, while François-Frédéric Guy is nearly becalmed at 17:25. Richter's 15:10 feels fairly broad for sure, but somehow just right. This is the work in the recital I have returned to most often. 'Funerailles' is one of the best known of the cycle, and has some of the same qualities of concentrated introspection at the outset, the bass growling in anger at the lives lost in the Hungarian uprising of 1848. The keening main theme is noble in its sorrow, and the middle section's ostinato left-hand thunders beneath a superbly controlled crescendo. After this the neglected 'Andante Lagrimoso' comes as sheer balm, and the three late pieces that close the recital are each hauntingly done.

This is an SACD, and the processing is quite effective given the age of the original tapes. Indeed the sound has come up better than many other Richter discs from this era. It's not modern exactly, but the quality of the playing and - in case it still needs to be said - of the music, is such that any limitations are soon forgotten. This is an outstanding recital by a very great artist. More's the pity then that the sketchy booklet notes are not really adequate given that not all the music is very familiar. If you want one volume to help you find your way around Liszt's vast output, you can go to Derek Watson's Master Musicians volume or even better "The Liszt Companion" from Greenwood Press, Edited by Ben Arnold in 2002.

Roy Westbrook